

'If You Don't Write Yourself, On What Grounds Can You Offer Advice About Writing to Others?' The Importance and Multiple Impacts of Publishing by Teachers of Academic Writing

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*How can we expect our (PhD) students to write well if we do not dwell on (writing)?
How can we write well if we do not think and talk about writing?
(Barnett 2017)*

Abstract

This paper highlights a rather overlooked area of academic writing: that of publication by teachers of academic writing. The research focuses on exploring UK teachers' views of the importance of publishing in terms of its impact on their practice, profession, and institution. Interviews were carried out with nine teachers of academic writing who worked within English for Academic Purposes at UK universities and were actively publishing. Data was collected in the form of their views and accounts of experiences of publishing, and the obstacles they had encountered. The study concludes that publishing by teachers of academic writing is considered a valuable parallel activity to their teaching, understanding and support of students with writing. It also seems that publishing could improve both the teachers' individual reputation in their institutions and the status of their profession. However, it was also noticeable that many barriers to publishing exist, including lack of time, support and mentoring, as well as a more serious problem of hostility from line managers. Networks, collaborative initiatives and more informal writing opportunities may encourage teachers of academic writing to publish more themselves.

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that publishing in journals is an extremely challenging activity which puts pressure on academic staff (Murray and Moore 2006, Tusting et al. 2017). A recent study of the impact of the *Research Excellence Framework* exercise (REF) on teachers in England by McCulloch (2017) demonstrates the importance of being considered REFable (having publications assessed as excellent) in order to be both employable and promotable. Indeed, some would also add that it is impossible to be an academic, or to be valued as one, without writing for publication; Hyland (2015: 1) declares that publishing is 'the measurement of an academic's professional competence' and therefore, the important role of publishing in any academic career cannot be ignored.

However, despite widespread agreement about the pressure and difficulty of publishing, there is a tendency to disregard the need for all writers to be supported in their writing development (French 2011). Those who are teaching writing also need to receive training and guidance to be able to write themselves (Tusting et al. 2017). There are many accounts in the literature of the need to support academic writing for publishing. For example, in a Hong Kong based study, a novice researcher writing for publication concludes 'this game is not easy to play' (Yuan 2017:

480). Continuing this metaphor, Murray (2013: 7) says that academic staff may feel 'ambivalent about joining what (they) see as a big 'game'. Thus, she notes there can also be scepticism about how publishing and promotion work in one's institution, which may create another barrier to writing.

Recent research has begun to examine the impact of teachers' engagement with writing themselves on their ability to support students within different disciplines. In the context of first year undergraduate teaching, French (2011) found that subject lecturers struggle to develop the academic writing of their students, and that the lecturers' own experience of writing for publication had an effect on their ability to teach and develop the writing of others. It appeared that lecturers could understand more about student problems with writing from their own engagement in writing. This view is further endorsed by Donnelly (2014), who notes nevertheless that there are relatively few studies that focus on teachers' own writing and how this influences their ability to teach writing. She based her study on a module taught to academics about writing and disseminating research as a means of supporting students' writing, and found that the teaching staff who write themselves can become positive role models for students, demystifying writing and having empathy with students. As indicated in the epigraph above, the importance of teachers writing to support their students' writing was emphasised in the keynote address at the EATAW Conference (2017) by Ronald Barnett, who made a rousing call for teachers to engage in their own writing and activities which promote writing.

In this discussion, it is important to consider the context of academic writing teaching both in terms of professional status and the role of those teaching academic writing. Of course, academic writing is being taught in many contexts, such as directly within disciplines or in centres of learning development. One context where teaching academic writing represents a core subject is *EAP* (English for Academic Purposes). This field is growing and adapting to many changes, and it can offer teachers a 'reflective and fruitful field of research and professional practice' (Hyland 2006: 5). Similarly, Wingate and Tribble (2012) report that *EAP* is becoming a more research-informed practice and is gaining more professional status. However, some, or perhaps the majority of teachers of *EAP* may be working on an academic-related or teaching-only contract (Fulcher 2009), which does not encourage, or even excludes, writing for publication. This creates a professional barrier to academic status and often to academic colleagues working in other disciplines. Given these factors, teachers in this context may try to publish purely from personal motivation because they are 'driven by (their) passion for the topic' (Dörnyei 2007: 17).

There is a growing body of recent literature investigating the experiences of publication by L2 writers (Armstrong 2015, Keranen, Barbosa-Trujillo and Encinas-Prudencio 2016, Lillis and Curry 2010, Luo and Hyland 2016, Yuan 2017). These studies highlight the difficulty of writing for publication in English, particularly for novice writers who have much to overcome to succeed, and need the help of others such as translators and language teachers. Important research into global publishing by Lillis and Curry (2010) drew attention to the role of the 'literacy broker', meaning anyone who has an effect on others' writing including the gatekeepers (editors and reviewers) as well as the managers and colleagues. Lillis and Curry (2010) also present the view that Anglophone scholars have a position of privilege in terms of publishing.

While it is undeniable that competence in English can assist writers aiming to be published in English medium journals, not all Anglophone scholars attempting to publish could be seen as privileged, as there can be other disadvantages in terms of levels of support and employment conditions. One possibly disadvantaged group that appears to have been overlooked is that of L1 English writers working as academic writing teachers in an Anglophone setting. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain insights into the perceptions of academic writing teachers in the UK of the impacts of publishing themselves, in terms of their teaching and credibility, and their perceptions of obstacles to publishing.

Research design and method

The theoretical approach for this study is interpretivist, in that I aimed to construct meaning from interpretation of content in a socially situated context (Crotty 1998). I designed the study as qualitative research into participant perspectives and experiences of publication. As an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioner in a UK university with an interest in publishing myself, I decided to explore perspectives on publishing among other EAP practitioners based in the UK. My starting point was that, based on my own experiences and reading, there are many strong motivations to publish, but at the same time, very serious challenges to publishing in our sector, particularly lack of support. My aim was therefore to gather personal reflective accounts from other practitioners in order to examine these motivations and difficulties in more depth.

I considered carefully where to recruit participants from in order to comment on a wider population; I realised recruiting only among colleagues at my own institution would be too limited. Thus, in order to find participants for this study, I firstly made a request on the *BALEAP*¹ forum (which reaches more than 1,000 members) for EAP practitioners to participate in a study about challenges in publishing research. Nine practitioners, all of whom were employed in EAP departments at different UK universities, responded to my request by email and agreed to participate in an interview. I realised that my sample excluded teachers of academic writing in other contexts, in particular writing centres; however, through this method, I was able to gather comparable data in terms of practitioners in similar contexts. I refer to my participants as 'teachers of academic writing', rather than EAP practitioners; this is because in this study, I focus only on the writing aspect of their teaching role, and their own writing for research within EAP. They were a self-selected sample as they chose to participate in the study. For ethical purposes, participants completed a consent form to authorise my use of anonymised quotations from the interviews. Table 1 below presents a profile of the participants, referred to as P1-P9, in terms of years of teaching, experience of PhD and publications.

Table 1: Profile of Participants

Participant	Years of EAP Teaching	PhD Experience	EAP Publications
P1	18	Completed PhD	<i>Journal of Academic Writing</i>
P2	8	About to start PhD	<i>English for Specific Purposes Journal</i> InForm
P3	18	-	<i>International Student Experience Journal</i>
P4	30	-	BALEAP Conference Proceedings East Asian Learner InForm Books Others
P5	30	Started PhD	System Computer Supported Education Journal
P6	7	About to finish PhD	<i>Journal of Studies in International Education</i>
P7	15	Completed PhD	BALEAP Conference Proceedings EATAW Conference Proceedings
P8	20	Completed PhD	BALEAP Conference Proceedings <i>English Language Teaching Journal</i> Book chapters Others

¹ BALEAP stands for the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes, now known as the Global Forum for EAP Professionals

P9	25	Completed PhD	BALEAP Conference Proceedings <i>English Language Teaching Journal</i> <i>Journal of Second Language Writing</i> Books Others
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From Table 1, it can be seen that those who chose to participate were largely very experienced at teaching EAP; seven of the participants had fifteen or more years of EAP experience. The majority also had PhD experience, including four who had already completed their doctorates, and three whose doctorates were currently in progress; only two respondents had no experience of doing a PhD. As Cargill and O'Connor (2006) suggest, doing a PhD involves achieving a certain research level, so that writers would then usually be in a better position to work towards publication. Other studies, for example Huang (2010), have pointed out that publication is a requirement for PhD, so anyone doing one would be pushed in that direction. Thus, the two factors of extensive EAP teaching experience and undertaking a PhD seem likely to have a positive impact on participants' interest in publishing.

Participants had published in a range of journals, including several prestigious journals, as well as conference proceedings. It is notable that participants tended to have more than one publication, which indicates their experience. It is also possible that participants had other publications on areas outside EAP, but the scope of this research was limited to the research publications most closely connected with their profession. The interviews were held via *Skype*, lasted approximately 30 minutes and consisted of six main questions (see appendix 1); the first two briefly established the participant profiles above, the following four focused in more depth on motivations and challenges. As the interviews were semi-structured, further probing questions were asked where appropriate. The interviews were then fully transcribed and analysed. I checked each one with the interviewee for accuracy and for ethical purposes, to ensure they were satisfied with how the interview had been reported, without any personal or identifiable details. For example, book titles were not recorded in transcripts and are consequently not shown in Table 1, as these would make participants identifiable.

Following the method of Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 207), the data were interpreted, to work out 'structures and relations of meaning not immediately apparent in a text'; in other words, I constructed meaning from interpreting participant experiences, using my own understanding of their context as a teacher of academic writing myself with my own experience of publishing. In this way, I could benefit from 'looking at events through the eyes of an insider' (Dörnyei 2007: 131). As an 'insider', I was able to draw informed conclusions from the participants' responses.

Findings and discussion

The findings and discussion section below is organised in two main sections: firstly impacts, and secondly, obstacles.

Impacts

Participants explained their motivations to publish in terms of the impacts of publishing in three areas: the impact on teaching writing, on the relationship with students, and on the credibility within and beyond the profession.

Impact on teaching writing

The first theme that emerged from the data was that writing for publication is necessary for professional ability, especially for those working with postgraduate students. Participant 1 (P1) makes a strong case for writing teachers to write themselves:

I think that people need to write because that is one of the things that EAP is about, and if you don't write yourself, I just wonder on what grounds you can offer advice to others. You wouldn't employ someone to teach you French who couldn't speak French. But you employ a writing teacher to teach you writing, who never writes, who wrote a

Master's dissertation 10, 15, 20 years ago and hasn't put pen to paper since. Personally I think that's obscene! (P1)

P1 expresses anger in this extract, apparently directed at those with responsibility for recruitment, who hire teachers of writing who are not engaged in writing themselves: 'I think that's obscene!' Based on these comments, P1 seems frustrated by the lack of writing undertaken by peers. Similar views were expressed by other participants, regarding their perception of the need for the parallel activities of writing and teaching writing:

I cannot imagine being able to help a Master's student with his or her research and writing up of a dissertation, if you haven't done any writing recently yourself. If you are going to keep helping people to write, you've got to keep writing yourself. (P4)

I think fundamentally as an EAP professional, you are teaching students to write, to make presentations, do research, and if you don't engage yourself in those things, you don't have much authority to do that. I think staff can perform better if they are engaged themselves in the academic process. (P9)

In addition to their agreement with P1's view of the necessity to write, P4 also emphasises the need to 'keep writing' and for writing to be 'recent'. P9's view is that teachers 'perform better' and also have more 'authority' to teach writing by doing it themselves.

Another participant focused on how research can directly inform teaching practice:

As soon as I start engaging in a piece of research, my classroom practice comes alive because I am directly linking reflections on issues with my teaching practice. So every time I do some research, it really has a profound impact on my practice, and I like that, just to think, why are you doing this? (P5)

This comment demonstrates a reflection on linking research and practice where research positively impacts on teaching. The participant can be seen as following the advice of Murray and Moore (2006) which is to manage the teaching-research tension by building more bridges between the two and writing more about practice. Another factor to consider here could be that as the participant is doing research by choice, and not institutional requirement, it may be easier to build these bridges, with more immediate benefits for teaching practice. This is different to the enormous institutional pressure to publish that can be highly detrimental to teaching (Hyland 2015).

Impacts on students

Another main source of motivation expressed by participants was that through writing for publication themselves they were more able to relate to students:

To have empathy with students, I need to struggle myself. I don't find writing easy, I actually hate it a lot of the time. I do think you need to feel the discomfort of writing, it's very easy to forget how uncomfortable it is, and I think many supervisors hide that story from students because they are in a research intensive environment where writing is so high stakes, no one wants to say, actually it is really difficult. I want students to understand that nobody finds writing easy. (P5)

P5's reflections convey many of the negative experiences and feelings students might also have about writing: 'struggle', 'hate it', 'feel the discomfort'. Having empathy and understanding student difficulties with academic writing is likely to result in more 'teacher immediacy' (Devet 2011: 251), where students feel more able to approach their writing tutor with their questions and difficulties, rather than being afraid their work is not good enough for the tutor. By attempting to write for publication, academic writing tutors are putting themselves in the position of students in trying to write at a higher level and are also following the recommendation from Biggs and Tang (2007) that teachers should be continuously involved in a process of improving their practice and adapting to students' needs through a 'transformational reflection'. This is a need to recognise where there are problems and where students struggle, and to do this more

in depth, it is helpful for tutors to put themselves in the position of their students. The importance of having empathy has been highlighted in studies of teacher-student relationships: Donnelly (2014) demonstrates how lecturers' struggles with writing could help them to understand their students' struggles, while Stojilković, Djigić and Zlatković (2012: 961) found that empathy from teachers enables students to 'feel pleasure, free, adopted and involved, respected and understood'. Clearly, when staff and students experience similar challenges with writing, there can be more understanding between them

Impacts on discipline

Participants expressed the view that they needed to publish to gain credibility and recognition in the workplace:

I haven't published enough. Giving presentations doesn't seem to count. I give a lot of presentations and I do quite a lot, but I think if I published more, it would have far more effect, I could talk to colleagues in other areas and increase my level of expertise. (P3)

Having this credibility to be able to 'talk to colleagues in other areas' was clearly seen as empowering by P3. As suggested by French (2011), if teachers of academic writing engage in writing themselves, they can join up more with subject lecturers; therefore, this would be an important means of establishing more links between writing teachers and subject specialists. Some participants saw publishing as more of a collective effort to improve the status of their profession:

We need to try to raise our profile as serious members of the academic community, rather than support staff with no academic credentials at all. (P2)

If you ever want any kind of promotion or recognition, you need to publish in university, otherwise you really do feel like the Cinderella of the university world. (P3)

The motivation of publishing for institutional recognition and individual career progression is widely accepted (Hyland 2015, Murray 2013). However, from these comments there is a call to action for the whole community of practice: 'we need to raise our profile', become 'serious members of the academic community, rather than support staff' and escape the 'Cinderella' scenario. Thus, the participants suggest that success in publishing could benefit the academic writing teaching community as a whole.

Obstacles

The comments below refer to the obstacles that participants described as hindering their publishing activity. These were all connected to their contractual status, in the form of lack of time, lack of support and hostility from managers.

Time

Not having time to research and publish, or no official time, was mentioned by many participants:

All of my research has been done in my spare time because it has never been an official part of my job. (P5)

I have no official research time, staff development time or scholarship time, but I make my own time, I do it in spite of my workload. (P8)

The problem of insufficient time for research and publication has been investigated in depth by Murray (2013: 24); in her study, she found that typical reasons given for not writing for publication were 'I don't have any time for writing' and 'my teaching comes first'. She concludes that when writers acquire more experience and become part of the publishing community, they may be able to fit time and space for writing into their lives, perhaps by attending a writing retreat, which could help them to disengage from other work. However, the reasons cited by the participants above are specific time constraints because of the nature of their work and status, as they are not given official research time. This theme appeared in other comments

about the year-round teaching in the profession (generally three semesters or four terms, in other words throughout the summer, as well as the rest of the year):

The vast majority of people in this profession focus on the teaching, the marking, and everything else connected with it, and the thing that has to slip is the research – the year round nature of EAP has a lot to do with it. (P2)

The main challenge is not having enough time because of teaching, we teach more weeks of the year. Now I am part-time, that is making it easier for me to find the time to read and write and get something that I hope will be of publishable standard. (P7)

It is striking that P7 feels more able to write for publication because of switching to working part time. Full-time teaching timetables typical on EAP contracts may make it completely impossible to undertake research. The demanding working conditions in EAP departments were investigated by Fulcher (2009: 124), who reported a case where 'research had no place in that unit [...] staff were expected to teach as many hours as could be fitted into the working week'. The participants in my research appeared to work in similar environments.

Lack of support

A lack of support for publishing was given as a major challenge by all of the participants, commenting on different aspects of the problem:

We don't have someone who could mentor. I think in most academic departments, there are mentors to help people, younger academics, so they nurture this kind of work, but we don't seem to have that. (P9)

The availability of mentors could impact positively on these writers. Yuan (2017: 476) suggests collaboration with 'more experienced and capable peers' is a useful strategy for novice teacher educators. The participants below commented further on networking opportunities:

It's very hard to find a network of people to work with, and I think that would make a difference to carrying out research and getting published. (P3)

It was part of my strategy to work collaboratively [...] I decided to have a sort of policy of having a research collaboration with various schools. (P5)

The best kind of help can be at conferences, meeting people, editors of journals, other researchers who publish, talking to them, I think that's very important. (P9)

While P3 displays some frustration at the difficulty of finding a network to work with, P5 appears to be highly strategic in working with researchers in other departments, and P9 recommends networking at conferences. Thus, the strategies of P5 and P9 seem to be consistent with the advice of Hyland (2015) to work with others as part of a team to survive tough interactions with gatekeepers. The comments by P3 and P9 suggest they have developed some coping strategies through their networks. Some publishing collaborations of a more informal nature also exist for writing tutors working together, for example the blog-like writing with photos and hyperlinks by Smith et al. (2016), which may be a means of empowering teachers to publish together via networks.

The comments below move on to problems with a lack of support for research and publication:

My line manager is the interim head of the department and she doesn't publish or do research, so she wouldn't be able to help me. (P2)

You need to be in a context that believes in research. Being with student services and things like that isn't conducive to research and publication. (P4)

I don't feel that our line manager has been very helpful. I think we've not been given sufficient professional development. Currently our line manager is an interim after our head of department's retirement. They see us as teaching staff only. (P7)

These three comments draw attention to the problems of their departmental context or with their line manager in terms of lack of support where they are seen as 'teaching staff only' and struggle to develop professionally. It is clear that if managers are not involved in publishing or research themselves, they are less likely to be interested in supporting those they manage with their efforts to publish. A further issue is the location of the department, as noted by P4. If the department does not sit within an academic school or faculty, the staff may be considered as outsiders to institutional research.

Hostility

The participants below described more serious opposition in the workplace:

I get better support from the HEA, than any EAP unit I have worked in. My unit did not want me to publish anything. They threw as many bricks in the way as they could. (P5)

Just trying to get any kind of recognition from my department is a real problem. I think having Language Centres that aren't considered to be academic, there is certainly an implication that you should not be engaged in research. (P6)

Once a manager tried to pull the plug out of my computer! I have encountered jealousy from certain managers, and have the feeling that management is sometimes unhappy about efforts to publish because it might undermine their authority, some people can be paranoid. Let's face it, if you're a manager and people you manage are more intelligent and academically active than you are, there's a threat and rivalry, augmented by research, so they may say 'well done' but wish they could do it. (P8)

The hostile reactions of managers or departments to teachers attempting to research and publish present serious barriers to staff brave enough to attempt to get through them. While it may be true that any academics should feel lucky if they actually get direct managerial support to pursue their own research interests for publishing (Murray 2013), it is still hard to imagine other disciplines where academic staff attempting to publish would be discouraged so forcefully. Research has tended to draw attention to the stress and pressure on academics to publish (Tusting et al. 2017), rather than the pressure from managers not to publish. The gatekeepers of other studies (Kwan 2010, Luo and Hyland 2016) are predominantly the editors and reviewers, but the comments above reveal that it can be the managers or senior staff who create very serious barriers to publishing by academic writing tutors, apparently blocking their participation in the wider academic community so that they remain 'teaching staff only'.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the views of writing teachers on the importance of writing for publication. The findings demonstrated their perspectives of its importance in terms of the impacts on teaching, their students, and on the profession. Participants explained that they thought it was important to write themselves in order to teach writing effectively, and that their own experiences of research and writing could feed into their classes. Empathy with the student experience of writing, especially the struggles with it, was valued highly by participants. They also commented on how publishing created connections with colleagues in the wider university, and improved their institutional recognition and the status of the profession. Thus, publishing seemed to offer them credibility in three areas: with their students, in their institution and in their field.

At the same time, participants described the significant obstacles they faced in their endeavours to publish. While lack of time was the most immediate problem, the lack of mentors and support were also common issues. More seriously, it seems several participants had faced hostility from managers, who had actually tried to prevent them from publishing. However, beyond the

constraints of some institutions, there are options for academic writing teachers to participate and collaborate in wider writing communities and global networks such as *EATAW*, and possibly explore new ways of publishing.

It is hoped this paper may promote further investigation of publishing by academic writing teachers, to build on this UK-based study. Further research should focus on other populations of writing teachers, in particular those in writing centres, and in a wider range of countries.

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Appendix

Interview questions to EAP practitioners:

1. Can you tell me briefly about your current position, EAP qualifications and teaching experience?
2. What have you published and where?
3. What is your motivation for publishing?
4. What specific challenges have you encountered with your publications?
5. How have you dealt with these challenges? E.g. Have you had any help to overcome these challenges from a colleague, mentor, line manager, editor, other?
6. What is your view of publishing in EAP?