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Passion and Politics

Academics reflect on writing for publication

Eileen Carnell, Jacqui MacDonald, Bet McCallum and Mary Scott

PASSION AND POLITICS

'This original volume offers insights and learning for all academic writers, whether experienced academics or apprentice students…. [It] is novel in drawing upon experienced writers and their reflections, looking at writing from the basis of a lifetime's engagement. The writers open themselves up to the personal and emotional, social and professional dimensions and not just the technical skills.'

Brian V. Street, Professor of Language in Education,
King's College London

'Passion and Politics: Academics reflect on writing for publication *is an engaging enquiry into the place of writing in the careers of 18 well-known writers in education. It is a work that adds to our knowledge of the craft and processes of (academic) writing, providing insights through interview of what goes into the making of published texts. As well as discussion of approaches to writing, an interesting strand that emerges is discussion of craft instruments and technologies and of the affective, as well as intellectual, relationship of these writers to the creative practices in which they engage. This is a useful and stimulating addition to the literature on academic and professional writing.'*

Fiona J. Doloughan, Lecturer in English,
University of Surrey

'By interviewing a number of scholars across disciplines, Passion and Politics *reveals to students and fellow academic staff alike the very real joys and pains of writing. As the authors state, this is about "the lived experience of writing but it is also about the hazards and blessings encountered on the journey to becoming a voice that is heard … to becoming published". Even so, the lessons in this book have broader*

ramifications as they speak to how research is undertaken and how even the questions they ask are shaped by the very real contexts and restrictions of the spaces in which they occur.

Students will delight in learning that scholars whose work they read undergo the same stress, anxiety and writing processes (including procrastination) that they do. Thus this book is an excellent learning tool for educators who work with students who write in any field. Aspiring and present academics will find comfort in reading how well-known scholars, like them, have had to work at their writing and yet still take pleasure in it. They, like students will gain strategies for and confidence in developing their own writing styles. Managerial staff will learn how they can set up support systems, communities of writers and a network that foster the very real conditions within which academics can productively succeed as researchers.

Demonstrating that writing is disciplinary and contextually situated, this collection encourages other higher education institutions to map their own local spaces – and provides a way for them to do so. Underscoring the creative, recursive, exploratory nature of writing, these scholars speak personally about how making sense of the world through their words impacts the world around them, and how students also can engage in reshaping their worlds through the very real work that language affords us.'

Joan Mullin, Chair of English Studies,
Illinois State University, USA

'[T]he book is exploring a vital and exciting topic that the academy needs to address. Academic identity, writing, the RAE, and staff and personal development in higher education are all issues that need to be addressed on a national scale and this book is certainly taking the right steps towards that end. I would recommend it to any academic or researcher who struggles with the writing process and seeks insight into how to get it write/right.

Jess Moriarty, Senior Lecturer, School of Language,
Literature and Communication, University of Brighton

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Introduction

This is a book about academic writing that focuses on writing for publication. It is based on interviews we carried out with 18 prominent academic writers on education or the social sciences from the Institute of Education, University of London. The writers surveyed their careers as published academic writers and provided close-up 'readings' of their own histories and experiences. Their memories, speculations and insights represent quite vividly the pain and pleasure, the challenges and the passion (Thaiss and Zawacki, 2006) in writing for publication.

And so the title *Passion and Politics: Academics reflect on writing for publication* encapsulates two of the strongest themes emerging from the interviews. 'Passion' was included because of the enthusiasm for and delight in writing that comes across in the writers' accounts; and also because of the loving way in which they describe the process and their poignant descriptions of the feelings and sensations associated with writing. We included 'Politics' in the title because of the academics' emphasis on their concern to use their writing to address social injustice, and because they illuminated the power of different groups, bodies and agendas to affect writing for publication. For example, they talk about the effects of the Research Assessment Exercise (see note, p. 47), the power of publishers, their readers and how gender can limit possibilities.

Academics reflect on writing for publication was added to the title to clarify that this is a book about *academic* writing. It is about the lived experience of writing, but it is also about the hazards and blessings encountered on the journey to becoming a voice that is heard … to becoming published.

Our reasons for collecting and examining such stories are first, to produce an analysis that will be interesting, useful and inspiring to staff both experienced and new to higher education and new to writing for publication. Second, we hope that the book will stir readers to think about their own writing – that they will constantly hold up these experiences against their own, learn from the comparison and be extended by the process. A further aim is to provide insight into becoming a published academic writer and so to help the Institute of Education and other universities and departments (and the individuals who work in them) to imagine a

productive future and to develop initiatives that will be most effective in supporting academic writing. Finally, we hope that our theoretical perspectives and suggestions for future research will be of benefit to teachers, researchers and students at the Institute of Education and elsewhere.

Our study's difference from other work in the field rests primarily on the kind of material that we gathered: interview transcripts in which the respondents took their cues from questions that allowed them to range widely. We quote extensively from the interview transcripts because we hope both to capture the felt experience, differences, personalities and insights of the writers and to do justice to their conscientious self-searching. We also publish the full transcripts to afford the reader a greater sense of the different writers, their backgrounds, interests and approaches.

The extracts and transcripts should raise a smile of warm recognition from writers and teachers in higher education, but the book aims to appeal to a wide-ranging audience, including researchers, academics who are novice writers, students at Masters and PhD level, senior managers in higher education as well as staff development departments in higher education. The extracts (and more so the full transcripts) allow the novice writer to empathise and understand that the hardships, experiences, feelings and frustrations described are faced by even the most eminent and prolific writers. Novice writers will be able to draw on the wealth of approaches, ways of thinking and advice in the transcripts, while students and researchers may take an added interest in the theory and references to current work in the field. Managers may well be attracted to the whole initiative, which could easily be replicated in other settings.

We summarise here what we consider to be the merits of the book and how it might benefit the reader. The book:

- provides a rare opportunity in the UK – and internationally – to hear about aspects of the experience of writing not evident in the final published product
- utilises theoretical concepts not previously used in studies of writing for publication and shows their illuminative potential
- focuses on the social aspect of writing without neglecting individual perspectives
- indicates the complexity and multifaceted nature of the writing process
- suggests ways in which the study can inform organisational initiatives to promote writing for publication
- suggests possibilities for further research.

To conclude this Introduction, we explain how we have organised our text. Part 1 is arranged in nine sections. In section 1 we tell the story of the research and describe its origins. We specify the methods of interview and analysis (with further details in the appendices). This is followed by section 2, in which we name the participants and their location within our organisation and, moving to a more abstract level, their location within a particular disciplinary space: education.

Our analyses follow in sections 3 to 8 and we rely as much as possible on the participants' words, weaving in concepts from a social practice view of writing where it is illuminative.

Section 3 is central to the emphasis contained in our interview schedule on the participants' stories about learning to write. The section is arranged in a narrative sequence with the participants' metaphor of a never-ending journey as a unifying thread.

The fourth section outlines the ways in which the writers go about writing: finding and managing their time and their general approach, whether planning or playing.

There is another kind of journey to which the participants refer and which is the focus of the fifth section: the journey towards a finished product, a publishable text in a particular genre. This led the participants to discuss the importance of considering the reader and also matters of language and style, always in relation to making meaning. They talk about ways of smoothing the progress of a piece of writing.

Engaging in the process of writing is described in section 6, not only the ways of thinking about writing that are productive – imagining similarities to writing a play, carving out a sculpture – but also the felt experience of struggling with half-formed ideas and being attached to different tools and materials.

The politics of writing is a theme we discerned in several forms: gender differences, the status of English as a world language, the power of publishers and, coming close to home, the effect of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). This comprises the seventh section.

In section 8 we consider the fact that writing is many things to the participants but that it is primarily – a dominant theme – a means of thinking and learning.

We end part 1 with a section in which we discuss how we might build on our research and in which we construct statements informed by our analysis of the writers' stories. These statements are intended to create dialogue to challenge assumptions and routine practices, while suggesting real possibilities for change. Finally, reflecting on our analyses, we augment our theoretical perspective and include possibilities for further research.

Part 2 of the book contains the transcripts of the interviews, which we felt strongly should be included in full.

Chris Watkins

I: How long have you been at the Institute?

CW: Thirty years. [*Laughs*] It's completely mad, isn't it? In various guises – I was a student, a part-time lecturer, a course leader, a senior tutor for INSET, a head of an academic group, another course leader, and now I'm a senior consultant.

I: Great. And I want to talk to you about writing, and I'd be very interested to hear your responses because I know of your writing and have written with you, which has been a great experience. But perhaps you could tell me if you've one piece of writing that you're particularly pleased with.

CW: That's difficult. I saw that question on your list and I didn't immediately alight on one. I suppose it's because I don't think of the writing in that kind of way. I think of various different sorts of pieces with pleasure and I remember different pleasures from a number of them. Like the ATL [Association of Teachers and Lecturers] one.

I: That's Learning: A sense-maker's guide *(2003)?*

CW: I got pleasure from that because it was concise and hit the mark at the right time. I've been pleased with the book *Classrooms as Learning Communities* (2005). Not because I really know what's in it any more – got no idea what's in that book – but just

because of how well people have responded to it, how much it sold. And now the Hong Kong government has put a copy into every school.

I: Right.

CW: And yet, I can remember getting pleasure from the book *School Discipline* (1987) that I wrote with my partner Patsy Wagner. The only bit of feedback we ever got from that was one person wrote a letter, she was a head of year in a school and she said that she kept the book by her bedside. And you think it's not what you do it for, but … So there's all sorts of different appreciations that you get from different things, I think. So I haven't got a best, no.

And then there's that piece about feedback between teachers, the one that you know people's reaction to often more than I do.

I: Yes, absolutely.

CW: Some of your students have said, what?

I: It's really made a difference to their lives. So, is that what pleases you most, the fact that people are reading it, taking note of it and that that is changing their practice?

CW: Yes. That sort of writing I do, that's the real reason for doing it. And that applies to all of those research reviews, the one we did on effective learning, it's exactly what one wants to have happen and it's happened so, you know, you can't ask for better than that I think.

I: OK, fine. Now we've put another question in here which is to do with anything you're not so pleased with.

CW: Feelings of displeasure arise not so much about my experience of writing as my experience of publishing. I mean, like the mentoring pack and the tutoring pack that I did with different people in the Nineties. They were bloody good, still great content, and they got nowhere because of the publishers. I'm sure if I did look over almost any of the texts I've created either alone or with somebody else, there would be bits of them that I'd think, 'Oh no, don't like that', but I haven't got a particular candidate at the moment. If I looked back at my writing of about 15 years ago, I'd think it was weak and I'd be a bit embarrassed and those sorts of things but then … it's all right.

I: It's 'cause you've moved on so much.

CW: Mmm.

I: So what was it about the publishers that made that situation difficult?

CW: They didn't market the book. There were delays and they just did nothing with it and then they gave up on them. I think that they sold about a hundred each, which is a bit sickening really.

I: OK. Perhaps we could move on to thinking about what's helped you with your writing?

CW: Just talking about it with colleagues, being angry about things, knowing that you want to communicate something and having the kind of links that we have through our course contacts to know that there are things that people want to know about. You've got already a bit of an idea that there's an audience out there, so if you've got something you want to say and a sense that there's an audience that would, might be interested if they came across it, that's the thing that helps me most. Then once you feel as sure as you can, which is never, from about 85 per cent, that that's the case, then the thing that helps is playing with it and seeing what happens when, seeing what emerges as, as you try. And getting feedback. I remember when I wrote a booklet on *Managing Classroom Behaviour* (1997) for the Association of Teachers and Lecturers and one thing that really really, really helped there I haven't ever had since. I sent a draft off to ATL and they sent the draft to the members of the Publications Committee for them to read and then got them all to have a conference call on the phone. They sent me a tape of their conference call. So without me being involved you could hear people talking about your draft and get a very, very good idea of what was working and what wasn't and

what could be improved and so on. That helps.

Talking with students about their writing helps. One of my doctoral students came up with a neat device, WIRMI. 'WIRMI' stands for 'What I Really Mean Is'. I had an example recently, while I was using the research review I wrote on classrooms as learning communities, and somebody said, 'I don't really understand what this bit's about.' And I looked at it and it was just an awful bit of writing, the paragraph needed a WIRMI.

Talking, thinking, having something to say, those are some of the main things that help my writing. I was also thinking of never having a particular kind of endpoint in mind and just trying to stretch.

I: Yes.

CW: You have to work at it, it doesn't emerge.

I: Yes. A number of times I've mentioned to you that what I like about your writing is that light touch. It's about engaging with the reader in a way that seems so fresh and conversational rather than something that's been written and has come about through a struggle, and I'm sure there are times when you do struggle, but it doesn't come out at all like that. It comes out as if you're just talking to somebody, which I think's really great. Do you notice that for yourself?

CW: Yes. I mean there are phrases that resonate with that. There's that Robin Fogarty phrase which is 'inking the thinking'. That's what writing is, it's inking the thinking. It's not the stuff I dislike, whether it's written or spoken, which is statement-making. And that's where, of course, I think we've mentioned this with each other before, I love some of Bruner's writing, where he's so explicit in the written form. That's what he's doing, he's taking an idea for a walk and wanting to do that with somebody. And I suppose to some readers that would come across as fresh or engaging. I don't imagine all, because there are some people who are frustrated with it, they want statement-like writing. It's probably Derrida that said there's no resident meaning in texts, there's only meaning in the act of writing and in the act of reading something.

I: Yeah, yes.

CW: And so I'm happy to try and be explicit about the meaning-making in the act of writing.

I: Yeah. I think that's important in what you say about some people wanting statements, which I suppose reflects their view of the learning process, whereas with you it's much more invitational, it's much more: 'Well, what do you think?' – you know, what does this idea do for you, which I guess reflects the co-constructive model where you're wanting to have that dialogue with someone in a way that you would have if you were in conversation with them.

CW: Yeah, I mean having conversations or running courses and those sorts of things, the thing that I am looking for is that people say, 'Oh, that was thought-provoking.' Lots of other things will follow as a result. And so I want the same pattern through writing. I want it to be thought-provoking and image-making and those sorts of things, therefore it's got to be constructivist. And what are the devices that we use to try and make one's writing engage the thinking of the reader? Yeah, those are the sorts of things that I like.

I: So do you have that consciously in your head as you're writing or is now that part of the writing that you do almost automatically?

CW: No, it's not automatic. I think of writing for the experience of the reader, right, and you think, 'Well what do I want to do with and for the reader through this? What do I want to take them through, in what order and how will it engage them?' So I can sometimes think about that at the start, but normally what happens is I'll pile into something and then have to check, just say, 'Hang on is this really thought-provoking?'

I: Right, yeah. So does that reflect the kind of shift from teaching to learning we've talked about such a lot? Is it to do with the shift from what the writer wants to say to what the experience for the reader might be?

CW: It's trying to work out how, if at all, you can get

them engaged in what you want to say. But not in a closed sense, but in an emergent sense.

I: Yeah, great.

CW: Some things I've written aren't like that, like that long version of the research review on classrooms as learning communities that came out in the *London Review of Education*. I thought I'd get a publication out of it.

I: That's for a different purpose?

CW: Yeah.

I: Yeah, OK. Now I know you have had huge teaching commitments, but I know that you have written a lot lately. So how do you manage to keep the writing going alongside all the other things you're involved in?

CW: With difficulty, really. I spend holidays on it and I try my best to work with colleagues so that they keep each other's mileposts for each other. I see writing more and more as a taken-for-granted thing about what I do. It's not an extra thing. And I can imagine, if I could think back 20 years ago, it would have been seen as an extra. 'Oh god I've got to write something.' It doesn't feel like that now.

I: When do you think that changed?

CW: About 15 years ago.

I: And was there any particular reason for that?

CW: I don't think so. It's getting to the point of feeling more the things that we've been saying in this conversation. Like feeling more (a) I've got something to say, and (b) I want to, I want to experiment with how to say it. Getting an Apple Mac to really, really work for you and all of those sorts of things.

I: At this point one or two other people who've talked with us have said something about the RAE. I wondered if you had any view about that, in terms of how it's helped or hindered your writing.

CW: I've tried not to let the RAE influence my writing, because I know that for me and probably for a lot of other people too, it would reduce the motivation rather than increase it. I mean, you can't write for another set of agendas. That would actually get in the way. And I can modify something, adapt something, turn it out so that it does fit more with the agendas that are going on in that, like recently when they said the criterion for inclusion in RAE is that you provide stuff for other researchers. So I thought, 'OK, I'll do that, I'll turn something into RAE. I've got a journal article in *BERJ*' – those sorts of things. But interestingly that was just making sure I didn't get driven by the RAE thing, but just say, 'OK, well, I'll play that game.'

I: Right.

CW: Because the *BERJ* article really fits what I've been saying about writing anyway. It's something I want to say, about schools and violence, and I think the right people wanted to read that. And funnily enough, on that RAE stuff, I found that the *Journal of the Learning Sciences* was absolutely top of the impact scores, right? So I thought, 'All right then, I'm going to write an article for them.' [*Laughs*] Just to kind of turn it on its head, you know.

I: Yeah, yeah.

CW: So I'm going to do a paper this summer on enhancing meta-cognition from a narrative perspective. I think, 'Well, all right, I'll try and get that in that journal then.' It won't be in this RAE, you know that, but that's OK.

I: That's great, thanks. Now I feel we've already touched on this next theme about satisfactions you get from writing, but is there anything else that you wanted to add on that specifically?

CW: I don't know whether it's a satisfaction, it's a sense of … continuing challenge. The writing, especially in the way that we've been talking about it, it's something where you're continually stretching your boundaries, and that's not a satisfaction in a major sense, but it is a motivation.

I: Yeah, yeah. And I know you've spoken a lot about how writing doesn't get any easier.

CW: Yeah, yeah. There are links to that.

I: About each time wanting something to challenge you in a different way or for …

CW: Or for a particular purpose, I mean a purpose has to emerge first. And then you realise, 'Oh blimey, I've set myself a purpose which is going to be difficult.' Which is fine, I like that.

I: Right, yeah.

CW: I suppose other feelings too. I had an interesting one the other day. I was in a meeting in Ealing and someone said, 'I'm going to quote from Chris's book, you know what …'. And it's just fascinating to hear. In a way that was not about me, it was obviously about her, why she'd just chosen a few sentences, which was about a phrase 'the devil's in the detail'. You know, we often say that, but in fact, by the same token, the dream is in the detail. And they got off on that. I thought, 'Wonderful, that felt great.' That sort of satisfaction, I mean you don't know it very much because you never get much feedback on books, but just getting a nice clear example there that somebody takes off on their own journey with something you just popped into a text. It's nice.

I: Yeah.

CW: And you get some sense of that sometimes with the written work from our Masters students, but they're doing it for assessment so it's a bit different.

I: Yeah. OK. I suppose the kinds of writing you most enjoy has been covered a bit earlier. Is there anything else you wanted to say about that?

CW: I suppose it has, although I don't know what the kind is in a way. It's stuff that's professionally relevant, that gives people a number of things, actually. A bit of a vision, a bit of evidence and a bit of a next step on the journey. Those three all together are the sorts of writing that I like the most. And I suppose if I thought about some of the bits of writing that I've done for other purposes, they may not have all of those three going so clearly in them.

I: And what about the next theme, which is to do with what your writing says about you?

CW: Ah. Nothing. [*Laughs*] I don't know. Well, it says that I'm somebody who's interested in teaching and classrooms and people and learning. It says I'm choosing to spend my time writing about those sorts of things. And I suppose it says something about my idea of knowledge, my idea of people and how those ideas might come through in a funny thing called a text. It doesn't say as clearly what I want it to say about an improvement or an improved situation. I remember Peter Mortimore giving me feedback on that Learning Enhances Performance research review. That was a bit of a catalogue in a way. I don't mind that too much, but he said, 'There's not enough of you in it.'

I: Oh, did he say that?

CW: Which is kind of the interesting thing.

I: And did you know what he meant by that?

CW: Not exactly, no, but I got the point. It was about the writing and it was a bit too late to change it in a major fashion because of the pressing deadline. But, yeah. So I think that that's interesting because your writing should say what your vision is, what your hopes are, what your aspirations for the world are, the small bit of the world that you're interested in. And when I come across writing that does that, I'm so glad that it does, I'm so much with it, whether I agree with the content or not doesn't matter.

I: Yeah. So do you think you're getting more explicit about making your vision known in the writing?

CW: A bit, yes. Yes, I'll probably carry on doing more of that. Yes, I'm starting to do that in the piece on narrative that I'm doing at the moment. In fact, we did it a little bit in the chapter that Patsy and I did on narrative work, because it was just saying this is not

just an arid idea, this is something that makes your world run in the way you want the world to run. So making that more explicit is a trend, a development.

I: OK. Now about the process of writing. How do you go about it?

CW: I read a lot. That's one of the things. And I don't know why that comes to mind first, but I know that the sorts of things I write don't get very far unless I'm also reading around at the same time. And then I'll get the jumble and I'll talk to somebody about it and the purpose will emerge first. Even if you're writing a chapter in a book, if I can get that clear for myself, but not as clear as a plan but a lived purpose. If I've got going from the completion of the sentence: 'The purpose of this chapter is' then I think, 'OK, how am I going to achieve it?'

And then I use all sorts of things. I go to my computer and look through a thousand files and see if I've got anything on it already. Then I'll get off the computer because it's basically a bad instrument for writing. So I go back to pieces of paper and scribble. And the thing will slowly take shape and change shape all the time. That's one of the things. I get a bit of a meta-structure. If I don't have that, then the structure will change quite a bit. I remember when … even writing with other people like the tutoring pack, which was completely restructured almost at the end. So I don't do this thing which you get in low-level advice about writing, which is [*pompous voice*] 'Start off with a structure and a plan' and that sort of stuff. You get put off writing, I think. Most of that sort of advice doesn't work. So … I'm just kind of stewing, I think. Creating a stew, yes.

I: [Laughs] Which brings us nicely to what you've learned. What have you learned about the process of writing?

CW: That reminds me of that lovely story about Harold Rosen, which you've no doubt heard me tell before, where I met him in the Lawton room one morning and he said he was having a dreadful morning because he sat in front of a blank piece of paper all morning. I thought, 'Great, a professor of literature can do that.' I can do it too! So I was very glad to learn that early on, I was very glad to learn reasonably early that perfection will ruin you and that, when Harold Heller said to me, if it's about 85 per cent right, then get it out there.

I: [Laughs]

CW: So those sorts of things have helped. In terms of the detail of the process, I don't think I see much detail in the process. So many things go on in the stewing: putting things together, trying out phrases, talking with people, letting it waltz all around, I think. Yeah. So I haven't got a very clear view of what the process of writing is actually. Because it's just another part of doing what I do. I don't have a routine or a regularity or those sorts of things.

I: And what have you learned about writing for publication?

CW: God. [*Laughs*] That it can be a big pain in the neck, but that it's the major purpose for doing it anyway. That publishers are a creaky set of funny organisations and academics attribute too much to them, talk about different publishers as though there is some coherence or sense about them and there's not. They are a bunch of people making money by shovelling paper. I remember that with my first book, the story of the Shelley Potteries (1980). When I went for the first time into a publisher's office I thought, 'Wow, this is a scrappy old set up.' [*Laughs*] They were in one of those Georgian terraces and all they had was a few photocopiers and that made me think, 'Of course, they haven't got any resource themselves. Writers are their resource.' They don't act as though that's the case. They act as if they're the powerful ones. And that's a great shame. Because it puts people off writing that should be writing. Just talk to some of our students, grown-up teachers about writing for publication – they'll tell you how mystical they think it must be.

Same with writing for publication in academic journals. People go and mystify that massively. Try and give each other advice on how to do it, to crack it, what is a random process. As you know very well, when you get feedback on a draft that you've sent, the quality of feedback is abysmal. And it's people

peddling their own little ideas. So to dress it up as it is dressed up in many of the ways is sad because it puts people off. So I suppose I've learned about, a bit about that. At the same time I've learned that if you are writing for publishers then you treat it as a game, but play the game well. I get a little bit of satisfaction about people like senior editors saying, 'Gosh, this is the best quality manuscript I've ever seen, you know, everything is in place.' Just to get them off your back really.

I: [Laughs]

CW: But it feels worth doing. Am I on the sort of theme that you were interested in?

I: Yes. One of the reasons for putting this publication together is to uncover what experienced writers have learned. These ideas are going to be extremely useful to those reading the publication – it's creaky, it's messy, it's random, but don't be put off and don't let other people put you off by the mystique. I think what you've said is going to be extremely helpful.

CW: Yes. And it's those things I've focused on which are potentially the disempowering bit in people's experience. That reminds me of something that I remember 25, 30 years ago, in one of Carl Rogers' books where he says to his graduate students, 'Well, look, if you're not going to write, who is?'

I: Yes.

CW: So that helps you think, 'Oh, yes, I am in one of these deeply privileged positions at university where you're meant to be doing some thinking, so if you don't do it, who can?'

I: Yeah. But it's interesting, it feels like there's so much in the structure that is set up to disempower.

CW: Yeah, the structure, the pressure and the culture, they'll disempower people and you see around us every day the results of that, which is deeply tedious writing. You put some of the writing that we might call 'academic' in front of professionals like teachers and they despair of it.

I: Yeah.

CW: And of course part of that is the very thing that you're interested to do, which is to have them examine texts that are coming from a different bit of a life, world. But at the same time some of it is badly written. [*Laughs*]

I: Yeah.

CW: That paper on conceptions of learning …

I: Yeah …

CW: … we really had a good discussion last time about the balance between the form of language and a language game that they were used to versus it being badly written. [*Laughs*]

I: Yeah. [Laughs]

CW: Happy days.

I: So would you be a writer if you weren't here? You mentioned the Shelley Potteries book; are there other things that you write?

CW: Yeah, I mean that was a very lucky break because, in terms of some of the things that I now understand about my writing and learning, that was a story of a factory and a company and its wares, and you knew people wanted to hear it. It didn't feel difficult. Nobody in my family had ever done those sorts of things.

And at the moment I'm playing with the idea of a book on reflections on learning how to ride (horse riding). Now that will include academic bits.

I don't particularly write a lot outside, no, if that's what your question is. But looking back at this question, if I wasn't at the Institute, do you think I would still write, yes. And I'd write academic stuff, too.

I: OK. Well, thank you very much, it's been absolutely fascinating.

CW: Thank you.