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While the term ‘early career’ researcher, is a familiar identity label within competitive Australian Research Council grant writing and bidding, it is a strange appellation in Australian Faculties of Education, where many early career academics have, in fact, carried out successful professional careers in education for 10-15 years before they embark on mid-career doctoral work. In this sense, they are more mid than early career. While they are not novices, however, they are often positioned as beginners with regard to accessing the journal, conference and other discourse communities of the academy. This paper explores the tensions and anxieties experienced by mid-career researchers in teacher education as they begin to publish from their dissertations and extend the audience for their doctoral work. It focuses on the writing of abstracts, which it is argued is a rich site for both text work and identity work and a practice which goes beyond technique to questions of identity and the promotional economies of academic work.

Getting abstracted: Teacher educators as research writers

Journal abstracts are written as a means of presenting a succinct snapshot of a piece of scholarly work, but they are also produced as bids for recognition and inclusion in conferences such as this year’s ICET Conference. Such abstracts must convince those on selection committees that the proposed paper and its writers have something to contribute that others will find of interest, something that potentially makes a contribution to the field. Many such abstracts are written from stable footings based in research that is well underway, if not completed. This is the pattern, for example, with many science/technology conferences where the emphasis is on reporting the findings of completed research. It is also the case where doctoral students publish from their theses or where full papers are submitted for refereeing before the conference commences.

It is the argument of this paper, however, that abstracts provide more than a representation of scholarly work. They are also representations the academic herself who is known for and by her corpus of writings. Writing an abstract can thus be understood as a kind of identity work. Like most academic writing,
writing is strongly tied to the formation and negotiation of a scholarly identity. As abstract writers, we are not only seducing others to buy our wares or bidding for inclusion, we are positioning ourselves as legitimate knowers and text producers within particular scholarly and institutional communities (Lee, 1998). We locate ourselves by virtue of the literature we note, the theorisations we mobilise and the places we call our ontological/epistemological homes (Kamler & Thomson, 2001). The writing we do, however, this text work, is not neutral; it is shaped by the genres and power relations of the academy which in turn shape us – the ‘academics’ we become and how we are read by others.

I have argued elsewhere with Pat Thomson (Kamler & Thomson, 2001) that much doctoral and research writing operates on an instrumentalist, skill-based notion of writing that ‘glosses over the profoundly textual nature of research’ (Lee, 1998) and pays too little attention to the kinds of persons formed through research writing. That tendency is remedied in this paper by considering abstract writing as a social practice which involves both text work and identity work (Kamler, 2001). A social practice approach takes into account the socio-cultural, disciplinary and institutional complexities of writing. It is closely aligned with the New Literacy Studies (Street 1984; Barton 1994; Baynham 1995) and a growing body of literature on academic literacies (e.g. Lea 1994, Street 1995, Lea & Street 1997; Lea and Stierer 2001) which examines literacy, identities and the institutions where literacy takes places as constituted in, and as sites of discourse and power.

This texting of scholarship appears to be little understood and rarely analysed in teacher education contexts. To illustrate something of the complexity involved, I focus in this paper on the text work and identity work engaged in by two early career researchers as they write abstracts for journal and conference inclusion. First, I present a preliminary text analysis based on a more comprehensive account (Kamler & Thomson 2002) which investigated patterns in the abstract genre. While the abstract is not a fixed form with transparent characteristics that are easily identified and tabulated, it is possible to explore some of the textual conventions used in education journals for representing both the researcher and the research. I then consider the identity work involved in writing an abstract as a bid for finding an authoritative speaking position, and asserting what one knows in a field of expert others. I analyse a number of abstracts written by two ‘early career’ researchers in teacher education as they negotiate a place for themselves by publishing out of their PhDs. Before I do this analysis, however, I need to say a bit about the context in which these abstracts were written and analysed.

The Context for Abstract Writing
My discussion here of abstract writing has two originating contexts. The first is an ongoing project with Pat Thomson, of the University of Nottingham, where we are developing a doctoral writing pedagogy for postgraduate students and their supervisors (Kamler & Thomson, in preparation). Our concern is to improve the quality of the doctoral experience by foregrounding writing. We take seriously the study of postgraduate failure by Torrance and Thomas (1994) who argued that most students who delay completion or fail to complete their dissertation do so because of writing-related issues. Our goal is to understand more about what it means to write a doctoral dissertation and develop research writing strategies that might better assist writers both during and after candidature.

The second context emerges from a recent Quality Learning Research initiative at Deakin University, which seeks to support early career researchers to publish from their PhDs and build track record more quickly than might otherwise occur. The initiative recognises that the PhD is an ideal text for mining multiple publications and building research quantum, because the research is already done and deserving of a wider readership. It also recognises that the workload of many early career researchers is intense and that the pressure to build a research track record and make themselves competitive should be supported in concrete ways by the Faculty.

To this end we have set up an innovative program where my role is one of writing-mentor-colleague to the early career researchers in our Faculty, in particular those who have recently completed their PhDs. While we refer to them as ‘early career’ researchers, a familiar identity label within competitive Australian Research Council grant writing and bidding, many have, in fact, carried out successful professional careers in education for 10-15 years before they embarked on mid-career doctoral work. In this sense, they are
more mid than early career, however they are positioned as beginners with regard to accessing the journal, conference and other discourse communities of the academy.

I am currently working with approximately ten colleagues, reading their doctoral dissertations and developing publishing plans with them, which involves disaggregating the thesis into 4-5 articles which we target for specific journals. The work to date suggests that the process is far more complex than anticipated. This complexity relates in part to the fact that the PhD dissertation may not, in fact, help graduates take up authoritative speaking positions in the various professional communities of academic publishing they seek to enter.

I see this work as part of developing a pedagogy for post-PhD writing and publication that moves beyond advice and financial incentive. It is not simply an editing or ‘remedial intervention’, but a substantial dialogic and strategic interaction about writing new and difficult academic genres. It involves explicit mentoring about research writing, working on actual texts with a mentor, who models and demonstrates strategies and creates workshop spaces for close readings of drafts and discussion of the politics of journal submission.. Writing and revising abstracts has been one of the strategies I have used to support these writers and I call on that experience in my discussion here. In relation to the argument I develop in this paper, these abstracts can be understood as involving both text work and identity work.

The Abstract as Text work
As there appears to be little substantive advice about writing abstracts, Pat Thomson and I surveyed fifteen different journals (see Kamler & Thomson 2002 for a more detailed genre analysis) to get a sense of how they work – both in terms of broad patterning as well as language features and conventions. To make the survey manageable, rather than exhaustive, we only analysed volumes published in 2001 and produced a sample of 120 abstracts. A first pass through the abstract data focused on the instructions given as advice to authors. What help was offered to academics and postgraduates to guide their composition? The answer was very little, as the following table indicates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal Name</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harvard Educational Review</td>
<td>Authors must submit three copies of the manuscript, including a one-page abstract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Curriculum Studies</td>
<td>Abstracts are required for all papers submitted and should precede the text of a paper. The length should be approximately 150 words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Education and Work</td>
<td>An abstract of 100-150 words should be included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Youth Studies</td>
<td>Each article should be accompanied by an abstract/summary of 100-150 words on a separate sheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Philosophy of Education</td>
<td>Contributors should include on a separate sheet a summary of 100 words or less, containing key words and phrases that could be used to index the article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Moral Education</td>
<td>Each article should be accompanied by an abstract of about 150 words typed on a separate sheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Education Policy</td>
<td>Abstracts of around 100 - 200 words are required for all papers submitted and should precede the text of a paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Early Childhood Literacy</td>
<td>No instructions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other than attention to word length, key words or procedures for blind review, the journals provided a consistent lack of guidance for writers. This absence constructs the abstract as something one just knows how to do, as a case of ‘secret academic business’. To make explicit to ourselves the kind of genre conventions that might be operating, we constructed a rubric for reading the abstracts, including attention to:

- the first line of each abstract.
- whether the abstract was a summary report or an argument or some kind of blend
- how the researcher was represented in the text
- how the research was located (or not) in a wider field of scholarship, practice, debates
While a number of patterns emerged, I highlight two that were apparent in our survey of journals specifically dedicated to educational research. These included the educational research journals published by research organisations in the US, UK and Australia: Australian Educational Researcher (Australia), Educational Researcher and the American Educational Research Journal (US) and the British Educational Research Journal (UK).

The first pattern concerned the representation of the researcher and whether there were any patterns by discipline and epistemology about how the researcher marked their presence or absence in the abstract (e.g. through use of first person or third person pronouns, use of passive verbs or by referring to ‘the research’). We found that in the majority of abstracts we surveyed, the researcher as an identified person (I) or persons (we) was absent. Instead, phrases such as ‘this paper’, ‘this article’, ‘this study’, ‘this research’ were frequently used. This syntax is one where agency is attributed to the research (article, paper etc) rather than to the researcher, as in the following abstract from the British Educational Research Journal (Harris 2001).

> This article focuses on secondary school departments and argues that the current approaches to school improvement do not adequately reflect or incorporate the department level. Drawing upon empirical evidence from two evaluative studies, the article highlights the processes that contribute to improved departmental performance and subsequently, to school and classroom improvement. The article concludes by suggesting that the department is an important ‘missing link’ in school improvement theory and practice.

Another strategy writers used for keeping the focus on the research, rather than the researcher, involved the use of passive verb forms (in italics), as in this abstract from the same issue of the British Educational Research Journal (Hargreaves 2001).

> A new theory of school effectiveness and improvement is outlined, based on the master concepts of intellectual capital, social capital and leverage, linked with the conventional concept of institutional outputs. Each master concept is defined in terms of two subsidiary concepts. Twelve specifically educational concepts are set within this framework to provide the theory. It is proposed that, through a simplified model, the range and fertility of the theory can be exemplified and tested in three specific cases - the changing nature of school effectiveness and improvement in knowledge economies, citizenship education and teacher effectiveness.

Here the researcher is not simply replaced by the research, but is entirely absent so that the scholarly actions have no source; a theory is outlined, a concept is defined but by none in particular. While there is often debate about whether the researcher should be represented as ‘I,’ its absence in this sample suggests this may be a widely accepted convention in educational research journals – or at least in the abstracts. It is instructive to look at one exception from the Australian Journal of Educational Research (Schultz 2001) where the researcher self (in italics) is made very prominent.

> Participatory research methods are often assumed to alter the roles, relationships and responsibilities of researchers and participants in research projects reframing research as collaborative inquiry. In my own research on urban schooling, whenever possible, I have attempted to craft research projects with and for the participants in the project, rather than conducting research on them. For instance, in order to document urban adolescents’ perspectives on their schooling, I asked high school students to join research projects as co-researchers. I learned that the core principles of participatory research become complicated and, at times, problematic when put into practice with adolescents. In this article, I describe three of the collaborative relationships I developed with high school students in a single research project. I use this work with adolescents to call for the reconsideration of conventional notions of collaboration, participation, action and representation in participatory research.

While this abstract begins by locating itself in the context of a larger discussion about research methods, the dominant use of I in every sentence except the opening has a number of possibly undesirable effects. The syntax certainly makes clear what the researcher has done (I have attempted, I asked, I learned, I
describe, I developed, I use), but it also narrows the possible significance of that scholarly work. The focus on self can be read as excessive self-promotion which ignores previous research. While reference to its own contribution is modest linguistically [call for the reconsideration of conventional notions of …] the abstract constructs a world where this research is the only or major effort at collaboration, possibly an unintended consequence of the overused first person pronoun I.

A second pattern of interest in the abstracts analysed concerned the nature and kind of locational work they accomplish, particularly in the first sentence of the abstract. Was the research contextualised in some way at the outset and did the writers work for some kind of attention grabbing opener? In other words, how writerly they had been?

Interestingly, one of the most common first sentence constructions used in many journals goes something like: “This paper aims to”, “The purpose of this article is to…”, “Using this method or data base, this article will…” “This study aims to…”, “This paper outlines…”, “This paper defines and discusses…” “This article reports…”. The benefit of beginning by stating what the article will accomplish and/or its point is that the reader knows at the outset what to expect. But knowing what you are going to get is not necessarily an enticement to read further.

Thomson and I (Kamler & Thomson 2002) have argued that other ways of beginning an abstract might not only be more attention getting, but might better contextualise the research at the same time. We found that when abstracts were not contextualised in any way, they appeared to operate in a kind of placeless, timeless vacuum and the question of significance was left in the air. When abstracts were highly contextualised, by contrast, they were both more engaging and effective in positioning the article and its writer(s) within a field, a debate, a dilemma, a policy shift. Given that researchers do not work alone and are part of a larger global research community where conversations and debates within and across disciplines and fields is the norm – shouldn’t all researchers be doing this locating work, not just those on the margins or those in policy contexts? Might it not be a good idea for postgraduate students or early career researchers to be encouraged to adopt this kind of approach to the abstract rather than use This paper This article as an opening line. At the very least, patterns such as these could productively become the subject of more explicit discussions about the text work involved in abstract writing.

The Abstract as Identity Work
Having considered some of the patterns and conventions found in education journal abstracts, I turn to consider the text work and identity work engaged in by two teacher education academics I have worked with recently, as they seek access to the journals and conferences of their profession. The first writer, who I will call Alice, had written an article for a literacy education journal, based on her doctoral dissertation and this was the first time she tried to convert some of that work for journal publication. I had read and assisted her revision of the article, but was surprised when she found the abstract so difficult to write. I later discovered this was not uncommon, because the abstract requires both clarity about and an authoritative stance towards the argument developed in the article, and this is not necessarily easy to achieve. The first draft of Alice’s abstract looked like this:

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Draft 1
In this article I argue that careful analysis of very young children’s use of ICT and other technologies suggests that both the dominance of print in emergent literacy education, and school expectations of the literacy achievements of children prior to formal schooling, may require review.
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What was particularly striking to me about this first draft were its omissions. The writer does not locate her study of young children and ICT in relation to any social or educational issue, previous research, or anything, really. There is no reference in the abstract to the fact that the article is reporting research – strangely, the term research is omitted, entirely. This lack of elaboration is evident in the fact that the text is short and consists of only one sentence. The personal pronoun I is used as is the verb argue, but a strong argument is not constructed. In fact, it is not clear what the argument is or indeed if there is one, despite the
use of the word ‘argue.’ While Alice’s use of ‘may review’ creates a cautious (rather than authoritative) stance, it is not clear what it is that may require reviewing.

As her mentor/colleague, I marked this draft with suggestions which we discussed and we also did some joint writing on the computer to explore how she might construct a different and more authoritative discursive stance in the abstract. Two further drafts of the abstract were written until it reached its final form. Something of the textual struggle Alice engaged in can be seen in the second draft.

**Draft 2**

In this paper I explore how three young boys in the period of pre-school transition use ICT and other technologies. I suggest that neither the dominance of print in emergent literacy education, nor school expectations of the literacy achievements of children prior to formal schooling, attend to the versatility with literacy technologies demonstrated by these very young children and that this failure could inhibit their continuing literacy development both in ICTs and print.

In this second draft, the abstract increases in length and now consists of two sentences. The personal pronoun I is still foregrounded in both sentences, and the verbs explore and suggest replace the earlier use of argue. Nonetheless, there is a stronger sense of argument beginning to emerge here. While the ‘three young boys’ are not named as participants in a research project, they are now more visible as part of a data set. The use of a neither/nor framing in the second sentence also creates a more critical stance towards literacy education than was evident in the first draft. And an implicit contrast is now being made between what children can do vs what school offers. There is, however, still no location work being done or sense of how this research relates to a wider field, although this finally emerges in the third draft.

**Draft 3**

Recent investigations of early and emergent literacy seriously underestimate young children’s capacity to use ICTs and other technologies in becoming literate, and print continues to be privileged as the dominant literacy for young children. In this article I examine how three young boys used ICT in the period of pre-school transition and highlight the complexity of their multimodal reading and writing practices. I argue that unless schools attend to young children’s versatility with literacy technologies, this failure could inhibit their continuing literacy development both in ICTs and print.

This last draft seems to me a far more successful bid for journal inclusion than the first because it adopts a more authoritative speaking position for the writer. Certainly there is greater elaboration of ideas, as evidenced by the increased number of sentences (3) and words (from 45 to 73 to 94 in the third draft). Also, the three sentences seem to correspond with three rhetorical moves. The first sentence locates the paper in relation to a body of research on early and emergent literacy and takes a strong evaluative stance on that work through the verb phrases seriously underestimate and continues to be privileged. The second sentence identifies the same data as draft two (the three young boys), but now a purpose for looking at the boys is stressed (highlight the complexity). The third sentence concludes by making an explicit argument, and uses strong evaluative terms (unless, failure, could inhibit) to assert the writer’s point of view.

To experienced academic writers, this struggle to become authoritative in such a ‘small text’ may be surprising, but I would argue that this kind of text work is not unusual – although some writers may be reluctant to admit it. It is, in fact, my observations of how difficult abstract writing can be for many writers, that causes me to ask a number of questions about what is going on here at the site of constructing the abstract. The difficulty emerges primarily, I’d argue, because of the identity work involved.

Graduated doctoral students are competent writers. They have experience in summarising and locating their research in relation to other work in the field. Presumably, they also know how to argue, because a thesis is, after all, an argument that has been carefully made and substantiated across 200+ pages of crafted text. Importantly, however, they have been discursively positioned for 3-8 years as learners and encouraged to write in a cautious manner that will be successfully assessed by critical examiners, external to their university. Through years of writing, they have been duly indoctrinated into the careful, highly-
substantiated thesis genre. In short, they are accomplished in taking up a deferential (and not always confident) academic speaking position.

It appears, in fact, that the identity work accomplished through thesis writing can shape tentative and sometimes highly anxious scholar identities – with less confidence at assertion than they may have begun with. To further explore this notion, I consider a second set of abstracts written by an early career researcher I will call Sybil. Sybil is a more experienced researcher than Alice and was employed for several years during and after candidature as a research assistant, as well as a lecturer. Here she is writing an abstract based on her doctoral research as well as subsequent scholarship. This first draft is a bid for inclusion in an international educational research conference.

**Draft 1**

*Why has the infusion of computer-based technology into schools not resulted in the radical transformation predicted by commentators? Some speculations about flawed speculations.*

Many have speculated that the diffusion of computer-based technologies into schools would have a transformative effect on schooling, fundamentally changing the nature of teaching and learning. However, wide-scale qualitative change in the directions of those predicted have failed to emerge, even in developed countries such as Australia where the ratio of computers to students in schools is now at 1:4. Even the most enthusiastic educational technologists would admit that, despite the presence of computers in schools, the full realisation of the potential of computer-based (and more recently, networked) technologies has not yet occurred.

In this paper, I explore three possible explanations. The first explanation starts with a sociological definition of technology and explores feminist accounts of interactions between technology and users, which suggest that users (in this case teachers) will use technologies to meet their own purposes to suit the conditions of their work environment. The second explanation draws on ideas from organisational change literature, which suggests that the institutionalised practices of schooling will prevail unless authentic links are made between the needs of teachers, technological design, and the symbolic and resource support provided by administrators and policy makers. The third explanation is provided by medium theory, specifically Marshall McLuhan’s concept of the *rear-view mirror*, which suggests that change will occur but only after a period in which the new technology is dominated by old ways of doing things.

Ideas from these three fields help to explain the interactions between new technologies and the institutionalised roles and structures of schooling, and they provide useful insight into the flaws in past reform efforts and how future change initiatives in schools might be more effectively implemented.

This draft is quite developed. It clearly describes a research dilemma and offers some speculations about what might be at stake in the failure of technology to have transformative effects on education. I was initially struck by the title, which seemed to me more unwieldy than engaging. The term *speculation* also struck me as tentative and non-committal, particularly given my observation of Sybil’s tendency, in previous interactions, for writing description rather than assertive argument. So our discussion focused on the title - on how it might be reduced to get at the central question she wanted to raise and adopt a more definitive speaking position from the outset.

We also did some minor revision work on the three explanations she offers. I suggested we might get rid of a bit of verbiage so the three explanations stand out more sharply in relation to one another. When I say ‘we’, I am operating from a pedagogical framework that treats writing as claywork (Kamler 2001), as something to be manipulated and co-constructed by writer and mentor. The approach is hands-on but importantly for Sybil, this work happened in her presence. She stated quite definitively that she preferred me to read and respond to her writing in her presence, so that she was part of the text work, rather than the object of it.

Most of our discussion of the abstract, however, focused on the last paragraph where Sybil fails to take a stand on the three explanations she offers. To tease out her position, I asked questions and jotted down some of the phrases she used. I was searching for an argument or a more authoritative stance and I was
looking for her words. What did she think? What might she argue rather than say ‘these ideas help to explain’. I wondered if she preferred one explanation or whether she found them all equally adequate? And I wondered about the context in which she was offering these explanations. Who was she arguing with? Were there more dominant explanations that she was implicitly rejecting? Following our discussion, she redrafted the following abstract, which she submitted to the conference.

**Draft 2**

**Why have computer-based technologies failed to radically transform schooling? Some alternative explanations**

Many have speculated that the diffusion of computer-based technologies into schools would have a transformative effect on schooling, fundamentally changing the nature of teaching and learning. However, wide-scale qualitative changes have failed to emerge, even in developed countries such as Australia where the ratio of computers to students in schools is now at 1:4. Even the most enthusiastic educational technologists would admit that, despite the presence of computers in schools, the full realisation of the potential of computer-based (and more recently, networked) technologies has not yet occurred.

In this paper, I explore three possible explanations. The first draws on sociological and feminist accounts of interactions between technology and users, which suggest that teachers will use technologies to meet their own purposes to suit the conditions of their work environment. The second explanation draws on ideas from organisational change literature, which suggests that the institutionalised practices of schooling will prevail unless authentic links are made between the needs of teachers, technological design, and the symbolic and resource support provided by administrators and policy makers. The third explanation comes from medium theory, specifically Marshall McLuhan’s concept of the rear-view mirror, which suggests that change will occur but only after a period in which the new technology is dominated by old ways of doing things.

I argue that these explanations offer more complex and more useful understandings of the resilience of traditional schooling than is offered by more dominant ‘blame the teacher’ and ‘blame the technology’ discourses. They also provide useful insight into the flaws in past reform efforts and how future change initiatives in schools might be more effectively implemented.

Not surprisingly, given my intervention, the major changes occur in the title and the last paragraph. The more definitive ‘explanation’ now replaces ‘speculation’ in the title and the question is framed as belonging to the writer, rather than in relation to some anonymous ‘commentators’. Greater authority is also noticeable in the final paragraph, where the term ‘argue’ is now used and a clearer stance is taken. The three explanations are offered as more adequate than dominant discourses, succinctly named as ‘blame the teacher’ and ‘blame the technology’ discourses. This provides a better contextualisation for the remainder of the paragraph, which is unchanged from the first draft, but can now speak with greater force.

From my point of view as a mentor this was a very successful interaction and one that resulted in a stronger bid for Sybils’ inclusion in the conference. While the quantity of text work is minor (compared to earlier versions of Alice’s abstracts) the identity work involved in and though this joint-texting was intense, with noticeable effects on both the writer and her text.

Such work suggests that early career (i.e mid-career) researchers in education are faced with a new set of identity challenges as they negotiate a place for themselves in the wider academic community. To meet these challenges they and we (their potential mentors) need a more explicit sense of both the text work and the identity work required to construct successful publications. I have analysed the abstract as a rich site for this work.

What is absent in many Faculties of Education are systematic structures for supporting the actual writing that researchers are encouraged to do – both to enhance their careers and the academic profile of the Faculty. I believe we need to support the writing that emerges from research as seriously as we support the
‘getting’ of research grants and the development of new research projects. This work on abstract writing suggests a pedagogical direction and an approach that others may also find productive.
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