



*BELFAST*  
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# Academics writing in the Digital University

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Academics Writing  
Dynamics of Knowledge Creation

# Academics Writing

The Dynamics of Knowledge Creation



Karin Tusting, Sharon McCulloch,  
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and David Barton

ROUTLEDGE  


# Broad context of the HE workplace [in England]

- Transformations in relationships with students
  - Massification
  - Consumerisation
  - Internationalisation
- Transformations in managerial practices
  - Funding mechanisms
  - League tables
  - Research assessment framework
  - Impact

# Transformations in tools and resources in the HE workplace

- Virtual learning environments (VLEs)
- File sharing and other tools for collaborative work
- Online library resources
- Smartphones and portable devices
- Social media, and everyday software

*Every aspect of academic practice is changing*

**How are digital communications  
technologies shaping academics'  
writing practices?**

# Data collected

3 disciplines - History, Marketing, Maths –  
in 3 universities

70 academics, HoDs, and admin staff led to  
121 interview transcripts

Plus 240 photographs: 7 screen capture videos  
and videologs: 22 sets of fieldnotes: Documents

# Data Analysed

- Everything transcribed
- Identified 100 “genres” including many new ones
- All data in Atlas.ti hermeneutic unit
- Analyzed against research questions using Atlas.ti coding
- Included sociolinguistic analyses, such as Metaphor Analysis, Analysis of Affect and Stance

# Email case study

“Everything is done by email now”

“I’m really rubbish with email”



“I answer emails everywhere, at the airport, everywhere”

**What devices do academics use for email?**

Desktops, laptops, tablets, phones

**Where / when do they deal with emails?**

Home, work, between home and work, at airports, on buses, in bed, over breakfast, at 5.30 am, at weekends, when on leave.

# HOW ACADEMICS TALK ABOUT EMAIL

Metaphors: “email is of course this **spectre** that looms over modern academic life”

# Controlling it

**... control of my inbox is almost like a symbolic proxy for control of my whole work life, crazy though that is, but I don't think I'm the only one.**

*Stephanie (professor and HoD)*

*Also: Cleaning, clearing up, tidying*

*Load: Overflow, explode  
bombardment*

# What's the problem?

- **Too many emails**
- **Too much variety**
- **Hard to escape**
- **Hard to write some emails**
- **Can be misunderstood**
- **Intrudes on other time**
- **Not as good as alternative media**

# What strategies do academics use to deal with email?

At the end of the day:

All in the inbox

v

None in the inbox

# More on the overload metaphor

“...which I think is the biggest bind, is the actual overload of emails.” (*Josh, senior lecturer*)

“I’m really rubbish with email”