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**Development of Writing for Research Purposes:
An Ecological Exploration of Writing Process in a
Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Class**

Stuart James MacMillan

A Thesis in the Department of Education

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Educational Technology)
at Concordia University
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Abstract

Development of Writing for Research Purposes: An Ecological Exploration of Writing Process in a Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Class

Stuart MacMillan, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2009

For graduate level students, achieving academic success at university requires learning to communicate results of research in complex written forms. Yet faculty members are consistently forced to counter the deficits in research writing abilities of a sizable percentage of their students. Challenges have been exacerbated in recent years by an influx of students for whom English is not a native language. With the aim of providing insights to improve the design of learning environments that support novice research writing, this study employs an *ecological systems* framework to explore how graduate level students from a range of cultural and language backgrounds regulate the research writing process in order to produce a common genre of scholarly interaction, specifically a proposal for a research project. By relying on qualitative research methodology comprising 1) classroom observation, 2) analysis of student writing, and 3) personal interviews about the writing process, it traces the influence of specific resources and tools on writing produced by eight students in a master's level research methodology course, and investigates how learner beliefs, past experience and affective factors have enabled and constrained the use of tools and resources in the service of research writing.

Results show that despite explicit guidance provided throughout the course, some students made non-conventional moves from a genre perspective in their proposal drafts. Significant challenges for study participants related to precision in research focus, conceptual challenges, and the organisation of content. Difficulties also emerged for students planning qualitative studies who had come from disciplines

that have traditionally encouraged forms of writing more conventional in the experimental sciences. For non-native English speakers, additional, but limited challenges related to uncertainties about lexicogrammatical form and word choice.

The study concludes with a discussion of how conditions and task demands may be altered such that effective use of intrapersonal resources is encouraged. It also suggests ways the affordances of external resources and tools might be made more apparent to students. Finally, novice research writing as activity within a broader social system is discussed, including suggestions on how bridges between methodology courses and research Communities of Practice might be established.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	xii
List of Tables	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Introduction	1
Toward a Systemic View of Support for Research Writing	6
Objectives of the Study	9
Rationale	10
Research Questions.....	14
Summary	14
Chapter 2: Background to Writing Research	16
Introduction	16
Cognitive and Socio-Cognitive Contributions to Writing Theory	17
Social-Constructionist Contributions to Writing Theory	28
Toward an Ecological Systems Framework for Research on Writing Development	34
Mapping Interaction in an Ecology	41
Supportive Resources and Tools at Hand.....	41
Communication Networks and Discursive Practices.....	44
Past Experiences, Motivations and Goals.....	50
Summary	54
Chapter 3: Methodology	56
Research Setting	57
Boundaries of the Microsystem Ecology	60
Gaining Access to the Class	62
Study Participants.....	63

Methodology	64
Recruiting Study Participants	66
Documenting Resources and Tools in the Ecology	66
Conducting Classroom Observation	67
Analyzing Student Writing	68
Conducting Interviews with Students in Introduction to Research in Education	71
Conducting Interviews with the Course Instructor	73
Interview Documentation and Analysis	74
Ensuring Methodological Rigour	75
Ethical Responsibilities	77
Summary	77
Chapter 4: The Cases	80
Introduction	80
About the Course Instructor	83
Rationale for Tool and Resource Selection	85
Instructor Views on Classroom Interaction and Dynamics	86
Perceived Key Challenges in Teaching the Course	87
General Retrospective Reflections	87
Case 1: Abassi	89
About the Participant	89
Study Proposed by the Student	90
The Proposal Development Process	90
Stylistic Concerns	93
Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process	93
Text Analysis	95

Case 2: Diana.....	104
About the Participant	104
Study Proposed by the Student.....	104
The Proposal Development Process	105
Stylistic Concerns	107
Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process.....	108
Text Analysis	110
Case 3: Esther	123
About the Participant	123
Study Proposed by the Student.....	124
The Proposal Development Process	125
Stylistic Concerns	126
Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process.....	127
Text Analysis	128
Case 4: Fugen	141
About the Participant	141
Study Proposed by the Student.....	142
The Proposal Development Process	142
Stylistic Concerns	144
Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process.....	145
Text Analysis	147
Case 5: Isolde	159
About the participant	159
Study proposed by the student.....	160
The Proposal Development Process	160

Stylistic Considerations.....	164
Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process.....	164
Text Analysis	166
Case 6: Kadake.....	175
About the Participant	175
Study Proposed by the Student.....	176
The Proposal Development Process	176
Stylistic Concerns	181
Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process.....	181
Text Analysis	183
Case 7: Maya.....	192
About the Participant	192
Study Proposed by the Participant.....	193
The Proposal Development Process	193
Stylistic Concerns	197
Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process.....	198
Text Analysis	200
Case 8: Sabine	210
About the Participant	210
Study Proposed by the Student.....	210
The Proposal Development Process	211
Stylistic Concerns	213
Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process.....	214
Text Analysis	215
Analysis of the Introductory Section	215

Chapter 5: Discussion	224
Introduction	224
Sources of Research Writing Support	226
The Role of Intrapersonal Resources	226
How Participants Exploited External Resources and Tools	234
Development of Audience Awareness and Genre Knowledge	241
Key Challenges in the Writing Process	247
Focal Precision	247
Conceptual Challenges	249
Organization of Content	251
Time Constraints	252
Challenges Specific to Non-Native English Speaking Participants	252
Chapter 6: Recommendations and Limitations	256
Introduction	256
Harnessing Intrapersonal Resources	257
Resources and Tools	262
Movement Toward Research Practice Communities of Learners	275
Conclusion	277
Limitations of the Study	278
Systemic Complexity	280
Data Recording Medium	281
Observation and Interview Process	284
Transferability and Scale	284
References	286
Appendix A - Course Outline	294

Appendix B - Proposal Outline	300
Appendix C - Qualitative and Quantitative Paradigms Slides.....	303
Appendix D – Interview 1 Protocol.....	304
Appendix E - Interview 2 Protocol.....	305
Appendix F- Interview 3 Protocol.....	306
Appendix G - Protocol for Classroom Observation	307
Appendix H – Ethical Consent.....	308
Appendix I – Personal Narrative.....	310

List of Figures

Figure 1. Flower and Hayes Cognitive Process Model	19
Figure 2. The research process	75
Figure 3. Diagram used to visualize the research problem.....	116
Figure 4. Table used to organize contributions from scholarly literature.....	178
Figure 5. Self-generated comments for revisions on draft.....	179
Figure 6. Comments on Maya's outline	197

List of Tables

Table 1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system levels.....	38
Table 2. Metafunctions of language	69
Table 3. Steps taken to ensure methodological rigour.....	77
Table 4. Presentation format for study findings.....	80
Table 5. List of research concepts	84
Table 6. Examples of lexicogrammatical changes following instructor feedback.....	92
Table 7. Examples of material and relational processes	113
Table 8. Examples of ideational imprecision.....	151
Table 9. Vagueness in methodological steps.....	156
Table 10. Lack of specificity in research questions.....	169
Table 11. Textual devices to ensure paragraph cohesion.....	202
Table 12. Imprecision in nominal groups	203
Table 13. The role of intrapersonal resources	234
Table 14. The role of external resources and tools.....	240
Table 15. Summary of key challenges.....	254

Chapter 1: Introduction

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922)

Introduction

Before the advent of writing, songs and story telling served the function of binding human communities together. However, over recent centuries, writing has become the primary medium through which the ingenuity and discoveries of previous generations have been carried forward. In many ways, writing is the fabric of the modern information age. Yet more than a complex information storage medium, writing, like song and storytelling before it, can and should be considered a “form of life” (Wittgenstein, 1969), an activity through which people participate in social communities (especially professional), and experience and forge their own realities. The potential of the written word to represent certain ideas and facets of human experience at the expense of others dictates the bounds of what is possible in human communication. In this sense, Wittgenstein’s (1922) assertion “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world” captures a timeless reality. In this dissertation, I explore one form of writing that binds and limits much of the scholarly world, namely the act of writing for research purposes.

For both traditional and non-traditional graduate level students, academic success at university requires learning to communicate results of research in complex written forms. Aspiring academics are usually familiar with the saying “publish or perish”, and for those planning to build careers in academia, ability to produce publishable research material is essential for career advancement or simply to find and keep a job. Yet, as Aitchison and Lee (2006) note, research writing instruction remains

“subordinate to the main work of thinking and of knowledge production” (p. 267) in most courses in university settings. Through systemic neglect or by default, academics at English language universities are consistently forced to counter the deficits in writing abilities of a large percentage of their students. This challenge to post secondary education has been exacerbated in recent years by an influx of considerable numbers of students for whom English is not a native language. Within the Canadian context, some of these students are native born Canadians. For example, in provinces like Quebec and New Brunswick, Francophone students constitute a sizable portion of the post-secondary student population, even in Anglophone universities. International students, too, have joined the ranks of universities here in increasing numbers. They bring with them unique schooling experiences and differing cultural assumptions that also influence writing abilities. Their contributions affect the ‘ecology’ of the university classroom, complexifying the nature of interactions that take place and, through sharing of ideas, allow a richer and expanded sense of reality, albeit at the expense of accuracy. The evolving multilingual and multicultural character of most Canadian universities obliges educators and curriculum designers to reconsider how to teach research writing effectively, while embracing difference as both a challenge to and opportunity for improvement in course and curricular design.

Unfortunately, there is still a misconception among students and certain faculty members that ability to write is a stable, transferable skill, and that good research writing relies on simple adherence to universal principles or best practices. Given the complexity of the research writing task, this assumption is no longer tenable. As accounts of graduate student writing process presented in this dissertation attest, the crafting of effective research writing is an inherently complex task, intricately bound with conceptual knowledge, and subject to the influence of a vast

array of biasing and constraining factors.

With this problem in mind, I introduce the central focus of this dissertation. In the pages that follow, I explore how graduate students (novice researchers at the master's level) from a range of cultural and language backgrounds regulate the writing process in order to produce a common genre of scholarly interaction, specifically a proposal for a research project. The study relies on a qualitative research methodology comprised of 1) classroom observation, 2) analysis of student writing, and 3) personal interviews about the writing process. It traces the influence of specific resources and tools on writing produced by eight students in a graduate research methodology course, and investigates how learner beliefs, past experience and affective factors have enabled and constrained the use of tools and resources in the service of writing.

Adding to the complexity of the research task, I have chosen to focus on a linguistically and culturally diverse group of students, typical of graduate classes in most urban Canadian universities. Research on learning in such authentic populations is invaluable as the demographics of Canadian universities continue to change.

Previous research experience brought me to this particular focus of inquiry. As part of the course work toward my own M.A. level studies in 2001, I had the opportunity to interview a Venezuelan non-native English speaker who had recently graduated from a master's program in mechanical engineering taught in English at a Canadian university. I will call him "Juan". In many ways, Juan represents the increasingly diverse face of the urban Canadian university, a mosaic comprised of many students from different cultural and language backgrounds. I believe the challenges he faced are not atypical.

Juan was an academic survivor. During our interview (which was my first

foray into the world of research on writing), he described his incessant struggle with grammar, spelling, content and flow in writing during his undergraduate years. He lamented the lack of support for writing provided to him in his *content courses* - courses not specifically focused on English as a second language or academic writing skills - during his Bachelor of Engineering program and the early part of his Master of Applied Science program. Writing seldom formed the focus of classroom discussion. "TAs didn't focus on grammar or style", he explained. "They just wanted to see the numbers."

Unfortunately for Juan, his writing challenges were compounded during graduate studies. Frustration continued when he was unable to decide which information to include in various sections of his master's thesis. "I lost sleep from it", he admitted. He recalled that a reviewer had once spent a gruelling hour discussing a single paragraph in the paper with him, giving explicit instruction as to what information was and wasn't appropriate to include. Sections of the same paper were returned numerous times, with comments stating that knowledge outlined was unnecessary because it was shared knowledge in the field. Although late in his master's program, Juan had received little explicit instruction in generic features of research writing. In his particular case, it seems instructors were either ill-equipped or disinclined to give a struggling student the explicit help needed until a major research project demanded it.

Recent research further underscores the specific problems non-native English speakers may face when producing various forms of academic writing. First, linguistic deficiencies and a lack of knowledge of the expectations of North American university audiences often make the academic writing process markedly more challenging for non-native English speaking students than for native English-speaking

students (Zamel, 1983; Silva, 1993; Beer, 2000). Non-native English speakers typically seek support with structure and grammar, lexical choices, and information flow (Bloch, 2002; Paulus, 1999). In a systematic review of 72 reports of empirical research comparing first and second language writing, Silva (1993) found that adult second language writing is “distinct from and simpler and less effective” (p. 668) than first language writing. Texts by second language writers tended to contain fewer words, more errors, and consistently received lower holistic scores when graded. In addition, second language discourse was characterized by “distinct patterns of exposition, argumentation, and narration” (p. 668). Silva (1992) also conducted a classroom-based study, in which he explored the perceptions of English second language graduate students regarding differences between writing in their native language and writing in English. Students expressed frustration about the following:

- Not being able to forget about grammar as they write
- Difficulties writing in an English style when their native language style interferes
- Difficulties with word connotation – subtle differences in meaning (example: the difference between *invoke*, *appeal to*, or *evoke*)
- Direct versus indirect approach – the question of audience assumptions (traditional scholarly writing from certain cultures shows patterns of argumentation distinct from those of English (see Kaplan, 1966).

The inherent complexity of research writing makes it likely these students are at a disadvantage compared to native English speakers. While they may face the same conceptual challenges as native English speakers, the added burden of linguistic shortcomings inhibits free production of text and drains limited cognitive resources.

So how should course or curriculum designers, instructors and applied researchers approach the problem of creating learning environments in which all students can develop effective research writing abilities? The first step may be in conceptualizing writing not as a solo act, but rather as activity within a broader system of action constraints. For both native and non-native English speaking

students, writing constraints may relate to the availability of support tools and resources, the nature of the communication ‘networks’ these students function within, and the cultural experiences, motivations and goals individuals bring to the writing environment. The effect of these constraints on writing need not be regarded as negative, but rather integral to the process of guiding and controlling the act of writing itself. In other words, developmental paths are always influenced by value systems, prior experiences, motivations, and a host of other factors. These factors, in conjunction with the material affordances of learning environments themselves, bias actions toward producing certain types of writing over others. As such, this dissertation is very much about harnessing the powers of writing constraints at all systemic levels, including the material, social and cognitive. The next section further details what I mean by approaching writing as constraint-based action within a writing ‘system’.

Toward a Systemic View of Support for Research Writing

Effective research writing is finely attuned to assumptions and conventions of the field in which it is produced. It would be unrealistic, for example, to expect research writing produced by academics in educational psychology to be fully appreciated or understood by physicists or historians. Put simply, individuals from different academic fields inhabit distinct, although partially overlapping, knowledge worlds. This makes it difficult for members of one academic domain to judge the relevance or acceptability of claims expressed through writing in another – an unfortunate, but unavoidable consequence of increasing specialization within the disciplines. So, to invoke a key notion elaborated by Wittgenstein (1969), all

knowledge claims expressed in writing are context bound – they are significant in some contexts and not in others. The value of research writing, both form and content, is determined by the extent to which it meets the needs and expectations of members within a given field of inquiry. Asserts Wittgenstein (1969):

All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already in a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life.

On Certainty (Sect.105)

Articulated in this way, Wittgenstein's conception of systems that engender all scientific knowledge production has much in common with earlier theory articulated by 18th-century German philosopher, Hegel. As Banathy (2004), writing on systems theory notes, for Hegel “the nature of the whole determines the nature of the parts, and the parts are dynamically interrelated and cannot be understood in isolation from the whole” (p. 41). So, to study the development of writing for research purposes, we need to first explore the systems of interaction and exchange that demand its use as a communicative tool. In graduate school settings, the systems that give life and form to student-crafted scholarly argument differ in important ways from those in which experienced researchers function. I will turn to the nature of those social networks and the complex interactions that constitute them in the Review of Literature (Chapter 2). However, to begin, I posit one key premise: Effective research writing, generated through the labour of individuals or collaborative groups, is the material evidence of interactions within larger, more complex systems within which all meaning and value of writing is established. This means that educators, instructional designers, and applied researchers need to explore interactions within these larger systems if they are to improve learning environments designed with the goal of developing student

research writing.

Context-bound or 'situated' frameworks that focus on learner-environment interaction within systems have become a mainstay of writing research only in recent decades, and tend to contrast earlier cognitive process models that downplay or ignore the importance of social interaction in context. Specifically, the notion that learning to write well relies heavily on contextual or systemic factors has been well supported in recent years by a rich and growing literature on situated cognition (see foundational work by Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989). Situated views of writing better account for language development and use in authentic situations (Scollon, 2002) by elucidating processes through which learners perceive and make use of various resources and tools available to them within specific learning environments. The use of those resources and tools, however, makes sense only within the framework of some larger scheme of knowledge production and consumption.

As testimony to this new 'contextual' awareness in writing research, theorists over the past 20 years have also made increasing use of Vygotskian inspired 'cultural-historical activity theory', or Activity Theory (AT) for short, as a powerful 'lens' for situating writing within complex systems of social interaction. Originally formulated by Alexander Romanovich Luria and Alexei Nikolaevich Leont'ev, and adapted and expanded by contemporary adherents (see Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1999; Wertsch, 1998 for foundational concepts; Russell, 1995, 1997 on academic and workplace writing; Kuutti, 1996; Nardi, 1996 on human-computer interaction), AT has provided a highly adaptable framework for exploring a range of systemic influences on writing.

Another relatively new research framework that shares many of core assumptions of situated learning and Activity Theory might be termed the *ecological systems* framework. It encourages exploration of both the supportive facets of learning

environments and the enabling beliefs and actions of learners (see foundational work of Gibson, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bateson, 1972; Neisser, 1987). In essence, the ecological systems framework attempts to explore learning and activity as interaction between an individual and his or her environment as these two entities interpenetrate. As a 'systems' framework, it eschews reductionism and the linear-causal paradigm of classical science (Bertalanffy, 1968), a paradigm that has long influenced research in the field of educational technology. Aligned with Bateson's "ecology of mind" perspective, it calls for fully contextualized inquiry in which interactions within the environment are not idealized or decomplexified for the purposes of generalization (Van Lier, 2004). Applied to writing research, the ecological metaphor "conceives of activities, actors, situations, and phenomena as interdependent, diverse, and fused through feedback" (Fleckenstein et al., 2008, p. 388). I describe this particular framework (the one I have chosen to adopt for this study) in greater depth in the review of literature (Chapter 2). However, I turn next to an account of the specific research objectives of this study.

Objectives of the Study

The following research project employs the ecological systems framework to explore how writing for research purposes might be more effectively supported within research methodology courses. Findings illuminate processes through which learners create a personally meaningful *writing space*, fashioned to scaffold learning and production processes, while responding to evolving demands of writing tasks. The term 'writing space', as I intend it here, can be understood as the sphere of physical and social influence in which a learner functions. The novice research writer is acted

on by elements of surrounding physical and social space, and in turn attempts to transform that space in accordance with personal beliefs and task related goals. The study takes into account cultural and textual resources at hand, institutional organization and its discursive practices, and the experiences, histories and communication networks of people (all facets that Doecke et al. (2004, p. 32) evoke in their description of writing space). Specifically, the study describes how one professor and a group of graduate students from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds have worked together with the goal of producing good writing for research purposes within a research methodology course.

In the accounts of research writing process provided here, episodes in which particular supportive facets of context were perceived and exploited in the process of text construction have been highlighted. The study also examines the influence of students' prior learning and experiences, as well as affective factors and beliefs that may have enabled or constrained the use of resources and tools. Finally, by comparing the composing process of students from a range of cultural and language backgrounds, it points to qualitative differences in the writing development process to which content instructors teaching linguistically diverse groups should be sensitive.

Rationale

A focus on the development of research writing abilities at the graduate level is useful because, as Aitchison and Lee (2006) note, there is a general absence of any systematic instruction for writing in most research degree programs. Moreover, writing support courses (often called service courses in writing, such as Basic Composition and Technical Writing) are rarely offered at the graduate level, and tend

to focus more broadly on academic writing skills rather than the specifics of research writing. It is often assumed that through the process of academic enculturation, graduate students are simply able to adjust to the writing demands of their field. This often leads to an over-reliance on interventions by language or writing advisers at the point of crisis. Faced with this perennial problem, there are a number of ways in which this study uniquely contributes to the literature in the fields of first and second language writing and educational technology.

First, although an extensive body of literature on non-native and native English speaker writing process already exists, much of this literature has focused on writing within the ESL or composition classroom and at the undergraduate level. There are relatively few studies that examine systemic influences on graduate student writing. Some examples include Casanave (1992), Prior (1991, 1994), Riazi (1997), Beer (2000), Berkenkotter et al. (1988, 1991), and Blakeslee (1997). Other studies such as Abasi et al. (2006) have examined graduate level writing development in content areas with a specific focus on inadvertent plagiarism. However, no studies that I am aware of have used the ecological systems framework to explore the emergence and shaping of a specific piece of research writing within a graduate-level content course.

Next, a growing literature explores how students learn to write in academic genres (see foundational work by Cope and Kalantzis, 1993, Swales, 1990; Freeman and Medway, 1994; Johns, 1997; Partridge, 1997). Academic genres are conventionalized or typified forms of writing that exhibit recognizable lexicogrammatical and discourse-level features because they respond to recurrent and objectified communication needs within academic communities. Common examples include the lab report, the research proposal or report, or the book review. From the

genre learning perspective, the study helps to fill what Tardy (2006) has referred to as a “critical gap” in the literature comparing genre learning of native and non-native English speakers in classroom settings (p. 80). In a review of sixty articles on genre learning, Tardy noted that none make explicit comparisons between native and non-native English speaking writers. In addition, there are few equivalent studies of native and non-native speaking writers functioning within similar contexts (p. 95).

Schleppegrell and Colombi (2002) also recognize a need for more research focusing on issues of development of advanced literacy as it relates to both first and second language writing (p.vii). The present study, which compares native English speaker and non-native English speaker writing process within a clearly defined micro-ecology (a graduate-level research methodology course), is useful because it allows comparison of the specific challenges faced by students from distinct language and cultural backgrounds. Actions that individual learners undertake to mediate the writing process are readily comparable because participants share the same ecology with its specific affordances for learning and genre knowledge development.

Although most studies on genre knowledge development include student texts as part of the collected data, this textual evidence is rarely used to support claims made in the research articles (Tardy, 2006, p. 85). In this study, artefact analysis traces influences on student writing back to source texts used to generate ideas and structure arguments. A study that directly explores mediation of writing process through the use of source texts, models and tools responds to Jones and Freeman’s (2003) urgent call for systematic research “to investigate the uses students make of model texts, and to evaluate more precisely the effects of available models, both appropriate and inappropriate, on student writing” (p. 182). Hirvela (2004) also notes that the ways students read source texts and choose to incorporate material from them into written

work will likely be an important area of non-native English speaker reading-writing connections research (p. 25).

The study should also be useful in further exploring the relationship between the use of digital resources and development of academic genre knowledge. Although word processing technologies have been around for over two decades, only in recent years has a vast quantity of academic source material been available online through databases, electronic communication and collaboration platforms, and the World Wide Web. An ecological exploration, in particular, more directly links effective writing actions with the affordances of resources and mediating technologies. There is a dearth of literature on this topic simply because these networking technologies are just now emerging as mainstays of infrastructure in North American institutions of higher education.

Finally, I see this study as an opportunity to break down barriers between the disciplines. An ecological approach is cross-disciplinary by nature. In the process of moving toward an understanding of writing activity in complex and authentic learning environments, the epistemological concerns of a number of fields of inquiry converge. This study draws from the fields of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, first and second language writing, learning psychology, cyber-systemics and educational technology to name several. This type of knowledge blending leads us closer to the ideal of 'consilience' as outlined by Wilson (1998). Wilson refers to consilience as "a 'jumping together' of knowledge by common groundwork of explanation" (p. 8). It also answers the call of researchers who, like Fritjof Capra (1996), have urged the advancement of knowledge beyond conventional disciplinary distinctions. The epistemological concerns and discourses of diverse fields of inquiry must come together if we are to describe the multileveled, complex fabric of reality. If results of

the proposed study are deemed useful and insightful by leading members of the disciplines from whose epistemological frameworks I have drawn, support for the use of ecological models for future inquiry may be more firmly established.

Research Questions

The following research questions have guided this exploration into how graduate students construct personal *writing spaces* in support of the research writing process:

- How do learners make use of the resources and tools in their learning environments to produce writing characteristic of the research proposal genre?
- How do students' evolving understanding of the research proposal genre and intended audience affect the writing process?
- How does the use of specific types of resources and tools affect students' evolving understanding of intended audience and the research proposal genre?
- What do graduate-level students perceive as the key challenges at various stages in the process of writing a research proposal?
- How do the perceptions of native and non-native speakers of English in the study differ in their perception of key challenges?

Summary

In this chapter, I have stressed that for both traditional and non-traditional graduate level students, success at university depends on learning to communicate results of academic research in complex written forms. At the same time, I have categorized research writing as an inherently complex endeavour, an activity that relies crucially on assumptions and conventions of the field in which it is produced. For considerable numbers of students for whom English is not a native language, and particularly for international students who may not share the same assumptions about what constitutes effective research writing, the writing process presents numerous

challenges.

The central focus of this dissertation, then, is on ways that graduate students (novice researchers at the master's level) from a range of cultural and language backgrounds self-regulate the writing process in order to produce a common genre of scholarly interaction, specifically a proposal for a research project. The study relies on a qualitative research methodology comprised of classroom observation, analysis of student writing, and personal interviews about the writing process. It traces the influence of specific resources and tools on writing produced by eight students in a graduate research methodology course, and investigates how learner beliefs, past experience and affective factors have enabled and constrained the use of tools and resources in the service of writing. This particular approach constitutes an ecological systems framework because it focuses on interaction between individuals and the surrounding ecology over time. Findings illuminate processes through which learners have created a personally meaningful *writing space*.

The focus on development of research writing skills at the graduate level is useful because there is a general absence of any systematic instruction in writing in most research degree programs. In addition, the study, which compares native English speaker and non-native English speaker writing process within a clearly defined learning ecology (a graduate-level research methodology course), is useful because it allows comparison of the specific challenges faced by students from distinct language and cultural backgrounds. The study also explores the relationship between the use of digital resources and development of academic genre knowledge. Finally, because of its cross-disciplinary nature, the study may help to break down barriers between the disciplines, simultaneously expanding knowledge in several fields of inquiry.

Chapter 2: Background to Writing Research

The more we study the major problems of our time, the more we come to realize that they cannot be understood in isolation.

Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life* (1996)

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline recent advances in writing theory. The first section begins with an overview of contributions of cognitive and socio-cognitive research into writing process. This line of research is crucial in understanding what individuals bring with them to the task of writing. It explores important questions about how writers regulate their own actions and behaviours in order to achieve writing goals. In this description, I emphasize the contributions of Flower and Hayes' (1980) and their influential Cognitive Process Model. I then move to a discussion of Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) "knowledge transforming" model. Cognitive strategies that writers employ in the act of writing are explored in association with Zimmerman and Risemberg's (1997) socio-cognitive model of self-regulation. The section concludes with a brief discussion of additional theoretical concerns in the study of self-regulation, specifically the important regulatory functions of feedback and emotional state cues in learning environments.

The second part of this chapter outlines social-constructionist perspectives on writing development. Drawing on social learning theories based on the work of Russian social psychologist Lev Vygotsky and linguist and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, these frameworks explore a movement toward writing proficiency as a process of social enculturation. In this description, I highlight the process of text appropriation, an action in which novice writers take the words of others and

transform them in the service of their own communicative intentions.

Finally, the third part of this chapter attempts to bring knowledge gleaned from the cognitive, socio-cognitive and social constructionist frameworks together in an overarching ecological systems framework. A systems framework such as the one adopted here has broad implications for how academic writing is taught and how instructors and researchers may conceptualize the writing process. Applied to descriptions of academic writing development, it challenges widely held, but I believe naïve beliefs about the nature of authorship, blurring boundaries of the influences on writing attributable to individual intentions as opposed to those attributable to constraints inherent in the physical and social environment in which writing takes place. In the description of the ecological systems framework, I highlight the work of James Gibson who is commonly regarded as the founder of the field of ecological psychology. I also discuss the influential work of developmental psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner, who presents a useful model to categorize systemic influences on human development, a model that has important implications in complex task learning. When discussing writing development processes specifically, the ecological systems framework demonstrates that writing potentials are always constrained by a range of material, cognitive and social factors that interact in complex and often difficult-to-predict ways.

Cognitive and Socio-Cognitive Contributions to Writing Theory

By the early 1980s, the Cognitive Revolution in learning theory had arguably reached its apex. A main premise of this movement was that advances in artificial intelligence and computer science now made possible the formulation of testable

inferences about human mental processes. Emerging largely from this paradigmatic assumption, the earliest cognitive models of writing process viewed the act of writing as a form of problem solving, a mental 'juggling act', in which the writer regulates processes according to perception of evolving task demands. Early work by Flower and Hayes (1981), which typifies this conception, outlines a Cognitive Process Model of writing based on four key points:

1. The process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes that writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing.
2. These processes have a hierarchical, highly embedded organization in which any given process can be embedded within any other.
3. The act of composing itself is a goal-directed thinking process, guided by the writer's own growing network of goals.
4. Writers create their own goals in two key ways: by generating both high-level goals and supporting sub-goals which embody the writer's developing sense of purpose, and then, at times, by changing major goals or even establishing entirely new ones based on what has been learned in the act of writing. (p. 367)

According to this conception, an individual writer, a solo agent, exercises executive control over a series of hierarchically embedded processes. The influence of the computing metaphor is clearly evidenced in the description involving a "network of goals" and organized process "hierarchies". Time sequencing is also central here, as the agent devotes attentional resources to writing activities in a spiralling movement. The process that guides this allocation of attentional resources (theorized as working memory) might be compared to the workings of a computer operating system. Executive control, which becomes problematic in later theorizing, is represented as the 'monitor' in the following diagram of the Cognitive Process Model.

Figure 1. Flower and Hayes Cognitive Process Model

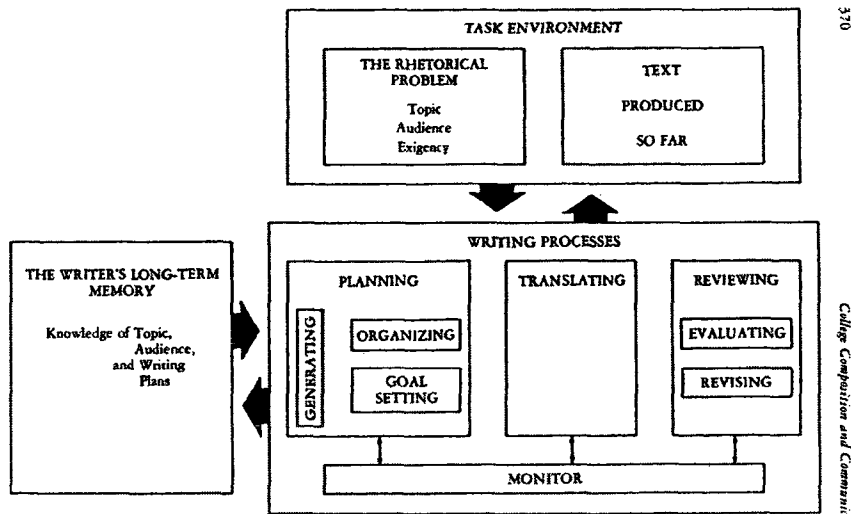


Figure 1. Structure of the writing model. (For an explanation of how to read a process model, please see Footnote 11, pages 386-387.)

Incomplete and flawed as it was, the Cognitive Process Model was a substantial improvement on previous conceptions of writing development, especially in its recognition that writers seldom move through a linear series of stages such as prewriting, writing, and revising. A crucial advance in researchers' understanding of writing process was that the rigid linear sequencing of earlier stage models was replaced by a more dynamic model in which perception of changing task demands called for movement between various process functions – specifically, planning, translating (converting images, sensations, and concepts not experienced as text into text), and reviewing in the Cognitive Process Model.

Although influential, the early Cognitive Process Model lacked the capacity to explain the development of more advanced writing abilities. With its emphasis on problem solving and executive control, the missing element for those interested in the learning process itself was a description of how writers come to represent problems to

solve in the first place. In essence, the original model describes an idealized end state to which novice writers may aspire, but does little to explain how learners learn to become good writers. For that, greater attention to contextual and individual learner factors was required.

Hayes (1996) revised the Cognitive Process Model to incorporate effects of contextual influences on writing. Task environment was expanded to include a “social” component. Specifically, the effects of perceived audience and the influence of other texts and writing collaborators were taken into account. The new model also more fully recognized the importance of resources and tools that enable the act of writing itself (e.g. text read so far, the writing medium). A motivational or affective component was also included. Specifically, Hayes (1996) suggests that affective factors such as goals, beliefs, predispositions, or attitudes influence the writing process. However, as with the original model, executive control over writing process remains a central construct, with working memory posited as the interface between cognitive processes, motivation / affect, and long term memory.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), in turn, proposed a slightly different interpretation of what learning to write effectively requires. In their model of expert writing, they refer to a developmental ideal referred to as “knowledge transforming”. Knowledge transforming in writing contrasts with “knowledge-telling” or “writing-by-pattern” (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987), processes through which writers simply reproduce what they remember, according to memory pattern. Knowledge that is “transformed” through writing has been guided and constrained by a deeper awareness of its potential effects on the reader. Simple “knowledge-telling”, on the other hand, is not constrained in this manner because awareness of audience assumptions, needs or expectations tends to be underdeveloped or simply ignored. As

Graham (2006), citing McCutchen (1988), suggests, novice writers who tend toward “knowledge telling” rather than “knowledge transforming”, in particular, may demonstrate limited cognitive control over planning and revising. The “retrieve-and-write process” functions more like “an automated and encapsulated program, operating largely without metacognitive control” (p. 104). The act of overriding habits and automatic patterns inherent in memory recall, then, requires additional cognitive control and energy.

The knowledge-transforming model also seems to align itself well with some other popular conceptions in educational psychology. “Knowledge telling”, for example, might be associated with lower levels of mental function on Bloom's taxonomy of intellectual behaviour (Bloom, 1956), specifically the “knowledge” and “understanding” levels. “Transforming” knowledge through writing, on the other hand, requires higher-level functions of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, with a keener awareness of the effects of specific forms of expression on the target audience. Although such distinctions may be somewhat forced, they are useful in explicating the knowledge transformation model, and present a starting point for discussing the development of authorial control, or agency, in writing.

Control in the act of knowledge transformation refers most explicitly to a writer's ability to constrain decisions regarding style and content of expression during both the writing and revision process. However, while the function of constraint placed on writing needs to be foregrounded in any expert writing model, the Bereiter and Scardamalia model also falls short in its potential to describe the writing development process itself. As Graham (2006) points out, the constraint-based, knowledge transforming model still demands development of a mental representation of the writing task before it is undertaken. In this sense, similar to the Cognitive

Process Model, it describes an ideal developmental state because it relies on an individual writer's previously acquired abilities to self-regulate the writing process. As such, a theory that better integrates the learning process itself is still needed.

A more recent model with instructional implications was developed by Zimmerman and Risemberg (1997). This model focuses on self-regulation processes in writing, and is purposefully bound by the theoretical assumptions of social-cognitive learning. An extensive review of research on self-regulation through social learning is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, I direct the reader to the work of Lev Vygotsky, Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger, and Albert Bandura whose contributions are discussed in the next section of this chapter in relation to social perspectives on writing development. As a social-cognitive model, Zimmerman and Risemberg's contribution bridges earlier cognitive conceptions of learning with more recent social conceptions.

According to Zimmerman and Risemberg, writers rely upon a series of habitual self-regulatory "strategies" that control writing actions, the writing environment, and development of the writer's internal thoughts. Examples of the types of self-regulatory strategies writers typically employ include the following:

- Restructuring of the writing environment
- Selecting models to emulate
- Monitoring of one's own performance
- Establishing self-consequences contingent on writing accomplishment
- Self-verbalization (personal articulation to enhance the process of writing)
- Time planning and management
- Specific goal setting
- Setting self-evaluative standards
- Use of cognitive strategies (rule-governed methods for organizing, producing, and transforming written text)
- Use of mental imagery (Zimmerman and Risemberg, 1997, p. 79)

To this list, one might add the strategy of 'entering into the shoes of the intended reader', a complex act of imagination that facilitates the process of 'knowledge

transforming' as discussed in relation to Bereiter and Scardemlia's contributions to theory.

By monitoring the success of specific self-regulatory strategies through feedback, writers are able to learn from the consequences of their actions, knowledge that subsequently influences whether specific strategies are enacted in the future. One useful feature of this model that allows strategy transfer is that it reduces emphasis on executive control over the act of writing itself, and instead allows greater focus on actions that individuals take to alter writing tasks and conditions in the writing environment itself.

Because human development entails adaptation to and active transformation of specific physical and social environments, the enactive feedback loops inherent in the Zimmerman and Risemberg model make it compatible, in certain ways, with the 'ecological' approach I outline later. Their theory allows for the possibility that maladaptive strategies (i.e. bad habits) may also be transferred to new writing tasks and environments. As a theory with potential to describe how learners alter the conditions of their own development, the Zimmerman and Risemberg model also has useful theoretical implications. However, as a model to base instructional decisions upon, it presents challenges simply because novice writers themselves are the ones who must ultimately choose to transfer effective writing strategies to new writing tasks. Future research might usefully maintain the central concept of enactive feedback loops, and explore in more detail how strategic behaviours are influenced by feedback in authentic learning environments.

When considering feedback loops during writing tasks, one area of inquiry that I believe needs to be incorporated to a greater extent in all writing process models relates to affective response mechanisms that influence self-regulatory actions.

Although I can't claim specialized knowledge of neuro-psychology, I do suggest that consideration of psychological response to feedback has important implications in learning theory related to writing. Recent scholarship exploring self-regulation has designated a far more important role to the influence of affective response in feedback-action loops. Neuroscientists Antonio Damasio and Hanna Damasio, for example, have gained considerable exposure through work on how decision-making in the human brain is subject to constant "biasing" due to the influence of feelings. According to Damasio (2003), the system "marks" behavioural options and their predicted outcomes with positive or negative signals (p. 148). This process constrains actions by making the decision process more automatic. Along this line, it is not hard to imagine how the experience of any of the main social emotions (e.g. embarrassment, shame, guilt, contempt, indignation, sympathy, compassion, awe/wonder, gratitude, pride) might encourage individuals to alter behaviours, leading to a subsequent reworking of their physical and social surroundings, ultimately affecting how and what they write.

So, more specifically, how might 'feeling' mechanisms affect the writing process? In simple terms, as learners receive feedback on their writing and learning either from external sources (e.g. instructor or peer comments) or internally (e.g. through reflective practice), a state of progress toward writing task related goals is signalled. The interaction between this perception of progress and the affective response that ensues is then key to understanding how and why apprentice writers may or may not do the things that potentially lead to the creation of successful end products. While avoiding overly deterministic conceptions of mental function (affective states 'bias', but do not predetermine behaviour), perception of progress toward writing goals may trigger positive or negative emotional responses at the

biological level. Writers likely rely on these cues in making decisions about how and where future effort should be expended. The experience of negative 'valence' emotions (e.g. frustration, shame) may signal to the learner that previously enacted writing strategies have been unsuccessful, and prompt the use of alternatives. Those unsuccessful strategies are thereafter negatively marked in emotional memory, effectively proscribing their use in the future. The experience of positive valence emotions (e.g. pleasure, pride) may signal that previously enacted strategies have been successful and, in some cases, signal that performance on a task is actually better than required. In this latter case, positive valence emotions release the individual from one task in order to move to other problems (Carver, 2004, p. 27). Finally, faced with efforts that seem futile, emotions like sadness or helplessness may accompany a reduction in effort (p. 29) as the learner attempts to conserve energy, rather than waste it on what he or she perceives to be a futile pursuit. Carver (2004) notes that these affective markers likely guide actions continuously throughout any attempt toward a goal.

Unfortunately, for researchers of writing process, the crucial regulatory function of emotions (or feelings in Damasio's terminology) is difficult to monitor or document accurately. In any case, if the experience of these states affects self-regulatory action through calls for reprioritization (Simon, 1967) of task goals, then attention in the design of learning environments needs to be paid to feedback mechanisms in particular, and to ways affective response can be effectively harnessed to ensure appropriate writing actions are undertaken.

A final challenge in the creation of new socio-cognitive process models for writing stems from the fact that over time and with increased experience, writing actions become automatized, and thus disappear from conscious awareness of

individual writers. Recent studies in cognitive science, too, place increasing importance on what occurs in the background of awareness (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; McCrone 1999; Nørretranders 1998). These studies demonstrate that despite the sensation that we are aware of everything going on in our immediate surroundings, most mental processes occur at levels below focal awareness. This is problematic if one considers the extent to which generic text patterns have been internalized an important factor in determining academic writing proficiency. A particular challenge for researchers, then, is mapping what eventually become non-conscious thought-processes; once these conventional text patterns are 'learned', reproduction is not necessarily experienced as conscious action.

Beyond the automaticity problem for researchers exist important considerations relating to what "control" (often labelled "executive control") over writing actually entails. In fact, a major problem with positing any form of conscious self-regulation or executive control as a key determiner of effective writing practice is that people often discover what they are doing in the process of doing it (Carver, 2004). A substantial portion of what researchers have traditionally deemed conscious self-regulation of the writing process may not be based on conscious thought or decision at all. If one takes into account the constant interaction with material objects, including other human subjects, in the environment (i.e. by fully integrating the individual with the physical and social context such that he or she becomes a 'node' in a living network), it becomes likely that people often stumble or drift into patterns of thought and action that they have not experienced before. Environmental contingency, rather than executive control, constrains many thought processes and behaviours. In fact, this 'chaotic', less predictable pattern of human development may underlie a great deal of what has traditionally been considered conscious learning.

Human development and learning occurs as individual and environment respond to one another, co-constitute one another, evolve together.

Crucial advances to researchers' understanding of the dynamics of writing process have been made possible by the research from a cognitive and socio-cognitive point of view. The work of Hayes and Flower, Bereiter and Scardamalia, and Zimmerman and Risemberg that I have chosen to highlight presents a starting point for the study of an increasingly complex picture of the writing process, and has been instrumental in opening new avenues for theoretical debate. As I have outlined, inquiry from a socio-cognitive perspective needs to continue to explore how the self-regulatory role of emotion or feelings and environmental contingency constrain writing development patterns. However, at this point, I turn to another body of scholarship, social-constructionist perspectives on writing development, that focuses mainly on social influence in the writing development process.

Social-Constructionist Contributions to Writing Theory

To learn to write effectively, novice writers must look outwards to the social world with an analytical eye; they must develop a deeper awareness of the social contexts in which writing is a “form of life” (Wittgenstein, 1969). The essence of this argument is captured to an extent in Wittgenstein’s description of “language games” in which he attempts to explain the acquisition of useful language (language appropriate in a pragmatic sense) as an increasingly complex understanding of the ‘rules’ of the communication game. These rules are socially constructed and evolve as members of the ‘game’ community engage in the exchange of information. In this section outlining social-constructionist contributions to writing theory, I explore mechanisms inherent in such instances of social learning.

For researchers interested in social perspectives on writing development, novice research writers are seen to encounter and use many writing forms before fully mastering the underlying concepts and functions these forms serve. This is a key premise in explicating social development mechanisms based on interactional theories of learning. Inspired largely by foundational work of Lev Vygotsky, social constructionists and adherents to Vygotskian cultural-historical theory view learning as a process in which individuals internalise and appropriate tools (such as writing) that pre-exist within the social sphere. Internalization of effective tool use has traditionally been associated with the movement of higher psychological function from an interpersonal to an intrapersonal plane through processes in which humans collaborate and interact (Wood, Bruner, and Ross, 1976).

When dealing specifically with language use and writing, this approach implies incessant tension between the communicative intentions of an individual and

the communicative potentials of the language system available for appropriation and use. Writing is one means through which the novice comes to understand activity of all sorts in the academic sphere. Essentially, learners are 'buttressed' into scholarly dialogue (and into a learning relationship with more capable community members) through the act of using 'scholarly-like' language. In support of this key concept, Pennycook (1996) states "the issue is not one of understanding the world and then mapping language onto it, but rather of acquiring language as texts as a precursor to mapping out textual realities" (p. 285). Stahl (2004), too, notes that the first stage of language development is often a mimicking of a 'mentors' speech (or writing) without full understanding of reference (p. 66). Fuller awareness of meaning potential is then developed through social interaction over time. Newly appropriated forms of expression are tested out in writing, and knowledge of their effects on academic audiences is developed as learners take into account reader response and feedback. However, only once deeper understanding of conventionalized meanings has been developed may writers participate in discourse in a truly agentive or personally empowering fashion.

So writing, in many ways, is a tension-filled struggle within a social system in which a writer's private intentions strive to find public and material expression through (and despite) conventions of language use. Writing and language are, again, public tools that allow people to engage in an act of "meaning potential" (Halliday, 1978). The tension between individual intention and the affordances for meaning-making that conventionalized language permits is inherent in all knowledge mediation through text. As an extension, development of what have traditionally been called 'writing skills' more accurately involves building a 'repertoire' of language tools whose effects on specific audiences writers increasingly come to appreciate

intuitively.

The key mechanism in the process of language development from a social development perspective is *text appropriation*. Novice members of the academic community can become full members only by copying, adapting and synthesizing the work of other members (Ivanic, 1998, p. 3). Appropriation of lexicogrammatical and discourse features requires focus on form in which learners notice how specific sequences of language function as semiotic tools to achieve valued rhetorical ends. For example, inexperienced research writers may over-generalize the importance of findings, or make controversial claims that they present as fact. One important function of academic discourse, then, includes affording ways to present research claims without understating or overstating the importance of findings. The hedging devices which experienced academicians use to mitigate claims in research come as second nature, but for novices, these forms need to be noticed and, in turn, incorporated into their own writing. The imitation (or perhaps emulation) that this process entails should be viewed as part of the natural learning process, “a first step toward the autonomous production of complex text-types that conform to and perpetuate unspoken sets of discipline-specific rules and values” (Jones and Freeman, 2003, p. 168). Again, the motivation to mitigate claims in research writing stems from a deeper understanding of what more seasoned researchers and academics already value through experience.

Another obvious example involves the use of field specific vocabulary, particularly when terms carry with them a rich cultural history of conventional usage. In educational research circles, commonly used terms like *skills*, *cognitive*, or *motivation* carry with them highly specific associations - the 'baggage' of decades of scholarly usage. Through dialogue over time, these terms have come to prompt

associations with particular styles of research and the work of specific individuals or groups of researchers. By choosing to include or not include such terms in their writing, novice writers advertently or inadvertently engage in a game of alliance-building and positioning, as well as alienating others within the arena of scholarly knowledge exchange.

Mikhail Bakhtin was one of the earliest theorists to explore how writers actively appropriate linguistic forms and meanings for use in future communication. Bakhtin (1986) characterizes the speech experience (both written and oral) as being shaped and developed in constant interaction with other voices. He coined the term *ventriloquation* to describe the process in which a previous speaker's (or writer's) words are taken over and transformed for use in a related, but new context. Effective writing practice in university settings very often depends on such dialogical response relationships with source materials and the scaffolding support (Vygotsky, 1978) of a complex array of other supportive tools and resources.

In academic environments, the 'templates' or 'blueprints' learners may choose to imitate are very often encountered in the act of reading. Hirvela (2004) has aptly termed this search for modelling potential an act of 'writerly' reading (p. 127). If researchers are to better understand academic writing development processes, it becomes crucial, then, to examine reading and writing relationships, specifically the way in which linguistic forms and meanings encountered in texts are noticed and transformed in the service of expressing new ideas. Discussing writing development processes of non-native English speakers in particular, Jabbour (2001) stresses that "writing is involved with expressing ideas by means of acceptable sets of patterns and models, and acquiring information about those patterns and models occurs through reading, specifically reading centred on grammar and vocabulary" (p. 293). In any

case, research and practice need to start with the premise that reading is an integral part of the composing process, and not a passive activity (Hirvela, 2004, p. 44).

For learning purposes, text appropriation is almost always an act of imitation at first. This imitation can involve reproduction of document format, particular text segments, vocabulary items or lexical chunks. Format-level reproduction might include imitation of APA referencing schemes or the typical *introduction–literature review–methodology–results–discussion* progression of many research articles. At first, learners may not be able to provide a sound rationale for their use of these conventionalized formats, but are able to participate in scholarly activity by virtue of imitating pre-existing patterns discernable in other texts. At the lexicogrammatical level as well, new academic terms and word sequences that the solo learner is not yet able to produce are imitated and, as such, allow participation in academic dialogue that in turn synchronizes, tunes or concretizes understandings of appropriate usage. Opportunities to imitate writing models constantly emerge in written and spoken dialogue in which patterns at both the lexicogrammatical and discourse level become available to learner perception and amenable to subsequent analysis and uptake.

As part of the social learning process, wordings from previously read texts often emerge in novice writing as students re-lexify these sources. Less proficient writers may weave larger chunks of source text together in a process called *calquing*. This process may, over time, lead to effective paraphrasing skill (Jones and Freeman, 2003), a crucial skill in rhetorical moves establishing authority by outlining and categorizing knowledge in the field (Martin, 1993). However, the educational benefit of this action relies on the depth of analysis learners are capable of as they borrow from and transform source texts. Clearly, it is unrealistic to assume there is automatic transfer of knowledge of writing gained from reading (Hirvela, 2004) or from

calquing.

The pitfalls of unreflective imitation are numerous. Besides opening students to potential accusations of plagiarism, text chunks cut unaltered from source material and pasted into student writing may carry meanings with them incongruous with rhetorical demands of the new context. For example, inappropriate use of modality and hedging devices may be interpreted as a lack of confidence or, conversely, overzealous conviction on behalf of the writer. Inappropriate use of referencing and cohesive devices may be interpreted as disorganized thinking or problems at the conceptual level (Schleppegrell, 2002).

In this section on social-constructionist perspectives on writing development, I have stressed the importance of text appropriation in the learning and writing development process. Social learning theory based on the work of Russian psychologists Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin adds a rich complexifying layer to researchers' understanding of the writing process. It acknowledges the fact that writing can invoke meanings for the audience not intended by the author, and that the experience of this tension, in conjunction with appropriate feedback, is a fundamental driver in the learning process. An eminently social act, academic writing means playing a role in a community of likeminded persons. The path toward proficiency in academic writing, accordingly, is a process of enculturation in which textual meanings are in a state of continual negotiation.

Toward an Ecological Systems Framework for Research on Writing Development

It's not so much what is inside the head that is important; it's what the head is inside of.

Anonymous

Up to this point, I have described the writing development process from two perspectives. The first emphasizes the decision-making role of the individual as he or she takes action to achieve writing goals. The second has de-emphasized the decision making role of the individuals and tends to explore writing development as symptomatic of social enculturation, a process through which synchronization of understandings and actions occurs within collective social groups – a synchronization process through which learners increasingly become of 'one mind' regarding assumptions and conventions in writing. Although debate has arisen in recent decades between proponents of these two epistemological camps, insights from each should not be considered mutually exclusive. Rather, what is needed is a research framework that readily integrates the valuable contributions of both. In essence, by exploring writing as activity within an ecology, a lens that explores behaviour as interaction between individual and environment, some of the concerns of cognitivists and social constructionists come together.

The *ecological systems* approach to writing research embraces the uniqueness of individuals and their life experiences, while at the same time, recognizing the centrality of environmental factors in constraining what is possible in writing. This concept is not new. Kurt Lewin, the father of social psychology, stressed in his description of *field theory* that human actions and motivations should be explored as instances of dynamic interaction between the individual and social context. This

psychological field of 'action potential', Lewin termed the *lifespace*. Action within the lifespace is constrained by physical locations, and all social identities, knowledge and roles available to the individual at a given point in time – in essence, “the totality of coexisting facts which are conceived of as mutually interdependent” (Lewin, 1951, p. 240).

The ecological systems approach, too, implies system-wide interactions that enable the writing process. Productive moments in writing emerge when abilities, understandings and motivations of learners mesh with the enabling potentials (affordances) of exterior resources and tools (e.g. a writer's decision to reuse a passage in a book that he or she recognizes as useful in supporting a certain rhetorical position). During the writing process, interaction with material resources in the learning environment brings about the creation of new material *artefacts* (e.g. outlines, drafts, reflective notes) that subsequently populate writing space and, in turn, are re-utilized, offering new affordances to be exploited. In this sense, the nature of subsequent writing is always constrained by interactions that have taken place before in a particular space and period of time; in other words, writing process is always constrained by a history of previous events. For researchers attempting to document the writing process, the greatest challenge stems from the complexity of interactions that take place. In many cases, the ultimate 'causes' of positive outcomes in writing remain elusive.

Foundational ideas upon which the concept of writing ecology is built owe much to work conducted in the field of *ecological psychology*. The work of James Gibson, in particular, is often cited. In his influential work “The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception” (1979), he outlines the foundations for a theory of *affordances*. According to Gibson, the affordances of an environment are what it offers a living,

perceiving creature, “what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (p. 127). The theory posits that cognitively advanced creatures, in the ‘direct ‘act of perception, simultaneously recognize the potentials of objects around them to achieve various task goals. Learning, within this framework, consists of developing awareness of invariance in and across objects in the physical environment such that these objects can be ‘trusted’ to support future actions, achieve future goals. As an example from the non-human animal world, a hungry sea otter, through sensitization of its perceptual systems, might come recognize the affordances of a specific shape and size of stone for cracking open the shells of oysters. A stone-age human, on the other hand, might perceive the potentials of the same stone according to its possible function as a weapon or, perhaps, a drawing tool, depending on the nature of goals enacted during that moment of perception. This view of affordance foregrounds the role of currently active levels of intention in the actions of all cognising living things, an idea with philosophical underpinnings dating back to the work of Husserl and the phenomenologists. It suggests instances of perception always entail experiencing elements of the external world in a personally meaningful, functional context. The fact that humans also draw heavily upon the knowledge and experience of others, mediated mainly through language, allows for the potential of affordance at extremely high levels of behavioural complexity (Gibson, 1979).

To draw this discussion more directly to the issue of research writing development, tools and resources available through a research methodology course (e.g. guidelines, heuristics, course readings, databases to access research articles) need to be perceived as useful in affording support for specific writing actions. Again, the perception of the usefulness of these tools and resources is constrained by currently enacted task-goals which, in turn, prime the perceptive capabilities of individuals (a

relationship Gibson termed *effectivity*).

Recent developments in ecological systems thinking also encourage researchers to think in terms of *affordance networks* rather than the affordances of single objects. For example, Barab and Roth (2006) define affordance networks as “functionally bound potentials extended in time that can be acted upon to realize particular goals” (p. 3). These networks, they argue, include “sets of perceptual and cognitive affordances that collectively come to form the network for particular goal sets” (p. 3). In undertaking a highly complex task (such as crafting a proposal for research), networks of tools (e.g. search engines, pencils, guiding concepts) and resources (e.g. research articles, diagrams, outlines) function integrally and interactively within the ‘theatre of passing time’ toward the satisfaction of outcomes and goals. In Barab and Roth’s (2006) words, “an affordance network is the collection of facts, concepts, tools, methods, practices, agendas, commitments, and even people, taken with respect to an individual, that are distributed across time and space and are viewed as necessary for the satisfaction of particular goal sets” (p. 5). Effective usage of this network of resources always relies on sets of *effectivities*, again, the specific perceptive attunements and behaviours that individuals are able to enact to make use of an affordance network.

Other important insights into the functioning of human ecological systems can be found in the work of Uri Bronfenbrenner. Bronfenbrenner (1993) presents a useful framework from which to explore systemic influences inherent in human ecologies:

The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger context in which the settings are embedded. (p. 7)

As a point of departure for exploring systemic influences on human development over

time, he posits a series of concentrically embedded contextual layers (which one might visualize as layers in a Russian doll). The parameters of these contextual layers are included in the following table:

Table 1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system levels

Level	Definition	Example
Microsystem	<p>“A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical and material features and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief.” (p. 148)</p> <p>Note: Interactions that occur within ‘cyberspace’ should also be included at this level. These interactions can also be considered ‘face-to-face’ in the sense that the human-computer interface is experienced as part of the immediate and local environment.</p>	<p>A classroom A library</p>
Mesosystem	<p>“The mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person... In other words, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems.” (p. 148)</p>	<p>relations between home and school, school and workplace</p>
Exosystem	<p>“The exosystem encompasses the linkage and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the developing person, but in which events occur that influence processes within the immediate setting that does contain that person.” (p. 148)</p>	<p>For a child, the relation between home and the parent’s workplace; for a parent, the relation between the school and the neighbourhood group</p>
Macrosystem	<p>“The macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other broader social context, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in each of these systems. The macrosystem may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broader social context.” (p. 150)</p>	<p>Western culture, national economy</p>

From the perspective of the individual, influences inherent within these systemic levels should not be regarded as strictly deterministic. The individual is an active

agent who contributes to and changes his or her own ecology. According to Bronfenbrenner (1992), personal characteristics can be distinguished in terms of “their potential to evoke response from, alter, or create the external environment, thereby influencing the subsequent course of the person’s psychological growth.” (p. 121). During the writing process, for example, this phenomenon is clearly evidenced as individuals manipulate the physical elements of their *writing space*, and thereby alter the affordances of it (e.g. creating a desktop shortcut to a trusted online thesaurus, organizing summaries of readings from previous classes into folders). Through the actions of individuals, the affordance network potentials of microsystems are altered, and sometimes the effects of these changes can reverberate outwards and, over time, alter conditions within other systems as well.

A critical challenge in ecological forms of inquiry is handling systemic complexity. Predictability and reliability of findings are not always reasonable criteria when dealing with very complex interactions. In addition, inquiry into the nature of systemic influence at different levels requires the use of various epistemological lenses whose interests and assumptions don’t always neatly mesh (Davis & Sumara, 2006). A specialized lexicon is required to describe interactions taking place at different ‘interpenetrating’ systemic levels. Although researchers in the field of education rarely deal with focal levels below that of microsystem (individuals and objects in a face-to-face relationship), there lie a host of biological interaction relationships (intra-individual interactions) that effect human behaviours in important ways. Descriptions of these require specialized knowledge and usage of the unique terminology of the biological sciences. At higher focal levels, a focus on national economy, for example, which can conceivably have repercussions throughout lower level systems, also requires enactment of specific knowledge assumptions and use of

observation methods and the specialized terminology of economics. In many ways, ecological inquiry, particularly when applied to human social systems, is an all-encompassing endeavour. Therein lie its greatest strengths and its most serious weaknesses. For reasons of practicality, most researchers are forced to explore interaction on one (at most two) specific planes of influence, while remaining cognizant of and open to exploring influences stemming from other levels as evidence emerges.

In conclusion, the inherently complex view of writing that I have outlined above inextricably binds the individual with his or her environment in co-constitutive construction. This fact obliges systems researchers interested in writing development processes to dig deeper, to explore the life stories, evolving identities, goals and motivations of the persons they study. At the same time, it necessitates precise and detailed observation of the physical environment in which writing takes place.

The ecological systems framework, like other approaches that embrace complexity, is a powerful tool for exploring how things work in specific settings over extended periods of time. Although it is an approach that is non-dogmatic in epistemology, researchers who employ this framework normally show a preference for observing interactions in authentic or 'real life' settings, as opposed to the laboratory. In the next section, I explore in more specific detail how various influences within a research writing ecology might be mapped and adequately categorized.

Mapping Interaction in an Ecology

A systemic exploration of writing development brings to light numerous factors that interact in the process of text production. As applied researchers and practitioners seek to improve the quality of learning environments, each of these factors needs to be examined. In the next three subsections, I discuss the influence of supportive resources and tools at hand, the effects of discursive practices and communication networks, and how the personal experiences, motivations and goals of individuals may all interact to affect the writing process. Although I describe these sources of influence separately, it is not my intention to suggest they are distinct or autonomous factors. Changes in the nature of one factor likely bring about changes in the nature of others. They are systemically interdependent.

Supportive Resources and Tools at Hand

Without...tools, whether symbolic or material, man is not a 'naked ape', but an empty abstraction.

Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (1996)

One research question in this study asked how learners make use of the resources and tools in their learning environments to produce writing characteristic of the research proposal genre. A reasonable starting point for this and similar research is then to search for evidence within the microsystem ecology that the writing process is indeed being constrained through the availability of specific resources and tools.

The combination of resources to work with and the affordance potentials of tools to transform those resources defines, to a large extent, the 'technology' of writing. However, some confusion may arise regarding the definitions of tool and resource. For example, while resources may include any number of source texts that

writers draw from and respond to, if these texts also serve as models for imitation, they serve as scaffolding tools as well. I do not want to dwell too much on this distinction. However, tools, in general, might be considered devices that one works with, while resources represent the brute material that is acted upon and ultimately transformed through writing. Other tools might include heuristics that aid the writer in structuring discourse and regulating the writing process itself, or the 'equipment' that allows production and manipulation of text (e.g. pencils, paper, keyboards, screens, word-processing software).

The fashion in which resources are collected, manipulated or stored depends on the affordances of technologies in use. Web and library search interfaces, for example, restrict access to certain source materials and, as such, can be said to offer specific search affordances; In the same way, word processors affect how text and images can be manipulated; Data analysis tools, too, guide the analysis process and provide output amenable to specific forms of presentation in learner texts.

From the ecological systems perspective, the ability to exploit resources and tools relies on *effectivity* relationships discussed in the previous section. In effect, people likely learn to think 'through' the use of various writing tools. Human learning, as such, is 'distributed' (i.e. the affordances of tools include built-in intelligences that writers can exploit to varying extents). Pea (1993) has described this phenomenon as a human / tool symbiosis, stressing the 'distributed' nature of intelligence in which learners 'off-load' elaborate and error-prone mental reasoning processes onto physical or symbolic environments that surround them. This is also a core premise of conceptions of situated cognition (Brown, Collins, and Duguid, 1989) and situated learning (Lave, 1988).

Cognitive offloading onto the surrounding environment is an essential strategy

employed in the creation of a personalized *writing space*. Writers who successfully self-regulate writing practices tend to better perceive the support potentials of the writing tools at their disposal, and, in turn, create an organized and readily accessible support system from which to draw on. For example, a successful writer might create an organized and electronically searchable folder containing quotes and summaries from reading material – a sort of surrogate, long-term memory. Other examples include effective reliance on heuristics or checklists designed to scaffold the structuring of argumentation or employing tools such as concept maps to externalize and record important associations in a personally meaningful way.

Poor self-regulators, on the other hand, may become overwhelmed by writing tasks as they continue to function in an essentially disorganized and chaotic support sphere. They may be unable to perceive how tools can potentially mediate the text construction process and will thus be unable to effectively self-regulate the writing process. A core responsibility of the course designer, then, is to maintain a Microsystem learning environment in which the affordances of supportive resources and tools remain salient to the largest extent possible.

Whether or not tools and resources have inherent or universal support properties, the notion of effectivity in an ecological view of scaffolding suggests that some learners harness the built-in intelligence potential of resources and tools in predictable ways, and others in not so predictable ways. As such, the dynamics of scaffolding in a learning ecology should always be examined from the perspective of both the instructional designer and the developing learner who, in constant interaction with the environment, actively chooses which facets of resources to attend to and which affordances of tools to exploit. A comparison of designer-intended uses of resources and tools and the ways learners actually make use of these resources and

tools likely goes some way in supporting a view of inherent chaos or unpredictability of interactions taking place in learning ecologies.

In conclusion, there is always a material layer of support that exists at the Microsystem level. In it exist a variety of objects that constrain what is possible during the writing process in essential ways. Again, it is within this realm that the ecology focused researcher might first look for evidence of 'enabling constraint' mechanisms.

Communication Networks and Discursive Practices

Beyond access to resources and tools, a systemic view of writing should take into account relationships of affiliation, interdependence and power between people. Ability to produce rhetorically effective academic writing, in particular, correlates naturally with higher levels of integration within scholarly communities. Since evidence points to the likelihood that collective knowledge of a field has an organic, networked structure (Davis and Sumara, 2006), the apprentice writer becomes a participant in the flow and exchange of important ideas within that field. In essence, he or she synchronizes thought patterns with those of other members of a 'living' network, and, ideally, develops deeper awareness of what constitutes shared and valued knowledge within that specific field of inquiry.

Given the crucial influence on writing of the expectations and demands of potential readers within social networks, one research question focused specifically on ways that understanding of the research proposal genre and awareness of the needs of intended audience impacted the writing process. A second question, a corollary to the first, focused on ways that specific resources and tools affected students' evolving understanding of intended audience and the research proposal genre. To answer these

questions, a conceptual framework is needed to establish the nature and boundaries of particular networks of social relations that novice producers of research function within.

The concept of *Community of Practice* (CoP) is often evoked to exhibit the social nature of cognition and learning, particularly as it relates to writing. Lave and Wenger (1991) present a Vygotskian inspired model of CoP, in which learning environments are viewed as sites for 'legitimate peripheral participation'. In academic communities specifically, movement within a CoP is characterized by increasingly adept manipulation of various knowledge-building tools, including academic language.

The concept of Community of Practice can prove problematic when one tries to delimit it in spatial and chronological terms. Textual artefacts (material evidence of the workings of scholarly CoPs) constitute some of the usable tools and resources referred to in the previous section, and might include articles, books, instances of email correspondence, content on web pages or on discussion boards. However, although this material evidence can be exploited and transformed because it exists in tangible, material form, the boundaries of the network itself (i.e. that which is defined by the flow of this information) can be nebulous, ill-defined and subject to evolution and change.

Can students enrolled in graduate-level content courses really be considered members of a research *Community of Practice*? Yes and no, I contend. Yes, to the extent that novice writers in content courses have access to authentic products of communication used by more seasoned members of the research community. With access to these resources, novice writers may model writing in accordance with conventions discernable in the texts of more experienced community members. They

may also vicariously gain understanding of the systems academic researchers function within. Considering availability and access to resources and tools as one defining characteristic of a community of practice, then, students in graduate courses may be classified as *members of a research CoP*.

But the answer is no if we take real networks of social relationships between members as a defining characteristic of community. In this case, members of a graduate class cannot be considered members of a research CoP. Communication networks in classrooms are largely self-contained, closed off from the larger community of disciplinary practice. In addition, classroom contexts are generally less able to emulate the social conditions and response relationships that define a research CoP. Barab and Duffy (2000) refer to the classroom as a “practice community”, and stress its inherent differences from communities of practice. Writing in classes is often undertaken solely as a learning exercise. Few students expect publication of class work in scholarly journals or the establishment of response relationships with members of the wider disciplinary community. The perceived audience for writing is often limited to the course instructor or person(s) responsible for giving grades.

Of course, classroom contexts do not have to be structured in this way. Barab and Duffy (2000) suggest making legitimate participation in communities an integral part of meeting educational goals (p. 35). The forging of links between the local classroom ecology and the wider research community may encourage a shift in perceived writing audience. Effective graduate-level writing may depend as much on student experience working in research teams, interacting with research supervisors, submitting articles for publication, or communicating with editors and reviewers as it does on formal training in content courses (Flowerdew 2000, p. 131). In reality, when we explore social interactions that take place during courses, we may see some

individuals actively creating and expanding the boundaries of their own support communities, regardless of instructor plans or intentions. By actively establishing new relationships with other players beyond the classroom, learners themselves redefine their own Microsystem boundaries related to a given writing task. In this sense, Microsystem, too, must always be considered a constantly evolving, changeable space.

Another framework through which writing researchers and theorists have been able to explore systemic interaction has been labelled Genre Theory. Genre Theory (see seminal work by Bazerman, 1994; Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995; Martin, 1993; Russell, 1995, 1997) provides a conceptual framework which links writing production directly to perceived demands of social context. Typical genres found in academia such as the research proposal, book review or journal article are recognizable as such largely because readers recognize the social functions that are enacted in each. According to Miller (1984), then, a genre is a “typified response” to an objectified social need. These social needs are often referred to as *exigencies* within the genre theory literature, and provide recognized motives for producing written or spoken responses. Flowerdew (2005) echoes this conception, suggesting genres themselves should be viewed as “dynamic, social texts”, part of “ongoing processes of discourse production and reception shaped and influenced by other related texts and utterances (intertextuality) of the sociocultural context” (p. 323).

Instances of academic genre themselves are usually constructed as complex arrangements of subordinate discourse functions, often termed ‘moves’ in the genre literature. For example, Swales (1990) studied introductions to research articles, and found that these typically comprise a series of recognizable, socially motivated moves (e.g. defining the community the research article is addressed to, establishing an

authoritative voice within that community, and shaping and situating the problem explored in the article).

The capacity to recognize the social demands for which to formulate persuasive moves in writing is another educational ideal (see Johns, 1997) that educators might wish to foster in their students. However, with regards to research writing, achieving proficiency in the formulation of genre moves likely requires lived or 'embodied' experience within research communities. That experience, in turn, leads to the development of 'frames' for approaching and envisioning research writing problems. As Bazerman (1997), echoing the language philosophy of Wittgenstein, suggests:

Genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action. They are environments for learning. They are locations within which meaning is constructed. Genres shape the thoughts we form and the communications by which we interact. Genres are the familiar places we go to create intelligible communication action with each other and the guideposts we use to explore the familiar. (p. 19)

Conceptualized this way, the value of all scholarly interaction depends on its finding material expression through some genre framework. For the novice researcher, proficiency producing genre moves comes about through the act of inhabiting a genre space or 'environment'. Through the meaningful structure for action that genre provides, novices receive crucial feedback that attunes their own assumptions, values and writing behaviours.

A parallel, but also potentially misleading construct that is often evoked to explain why forms of writing used within disciplinary communities show formal and functional similarities is that of *discourse community*. A discourse community is regarded by Swales as possessing the following shared characteristics:

- a broadly agreed upon set of public goals
- mechanisms of intercommunication between members
- participatory mechanisms to provide information and feedback

- genre use to communicatively further its aims
- specific lexis
- a threshold number of members with shared content and discursual expertise (Swales, 1990, pp. 24-27)

All of these conditions describe the practice of academic writing. The discourse actions of individual community members often tend to reflect conventions of the group, and it is the social reality of Swales' conditions that make this sense of sameness possible. However, there are dangers in adopting a 'naïve' conception of discourse community as the basis for systemic exploration of writing systems. As Bridwell-Bowles (1995) aptly points out, discourse communities are not nearly as uniform as many theorists and textbooks would have us believe (p. 58). Within specific academic disciplines, models of good writing held in esteem by professors vary greatly. There is often disagreement between practitioners and writing specialists regarding what constitutes good writing, and in reality, much of the clumsy, dense prose that appears in academic journals has little in common with the inviting, concise writing that many scholars aspire to.

Social communities, by nature, are arenas for the play of tensions and contestation. By contesting conventionalized forms, certain writers break with community tradition and remake texts to better respond to their unique goals. In fact, it is this space of contestation and opposition that critical theorists like Bridwell-Bowles (1995), Benesch (2001), Canagarajah (2002) or Freire (1972) have urged novice writers to inhabit. If power is construed symbolically through language (a point captured in Bordieu's definition of *habitus* and, to a large extent, in the deconstructionist writings of Derrida and Foucault), then should novice writers not be encouraged to resist reproduction of discourses if and when those forms are seen to oppress?

Whether within a CoP or a discourse community, the act of writing is always an expression of power within a social field. By adopting an evaluative stance that good writing is that which conforms timidly to the communicative norms of a discourse community, instructors may actually harm their students. This is particularly the case in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms that characterize most contemporary post-secondary institutions. As Bruner (1996) asserts, “education as cultural reproduction, risks stagnation, hegemony, and conventionalism, even if it holds out the promise of reducing uncertainty” (p. 67). This point leads to the final angle from which systemic influences on writing should be explored, namely from the perspective of individual writers, their personal experiences, motivations, and goals.

Past Experiences, Motivations and Goals

To understand why individuals do what they do when they write requires an exploration of the personal belief systems and prior learning that motivates actions. In other words, the final angle from which to explore writing space entails an exploration of what individuals bring to the process. This type of data allows researchers to construct evolving life portraits of their study participants. If and when patterns emerge, they can be used to relate specific sets of life experiences, motivations, or beliefs to specific writing challenges (the focus of the final two research questions). By gleaning insights into the life histories of learners, their future aspirations, and feelings about research writing, a clearer understanding of possible reasons behind their writing behaviours emerges. In this section, I discuss factors relating to the experiences, motivations or beliefs of individuals, with recognition that numerous other personal beliefs may influence the writing process as well.

One of the most important enablers of the writing process that individuals

contribute to writing space is conceptual knowledge constructed through years of life experience. Conceptual knowledge, applied to writing problems, functions as a crucial constraining device. Research concepts, in particular, become powerful enabling tools as complex configurations of associations come together in the service of tackling particular research writing problems. In fact, as Barab and Roth (2006) assert, concepts can be fully understood only through their application. In the service of the research writing endeavour, the extent to which these concepts are developed usually correlates highly with the extent to which individuals are integrated within networks of scholarly production discussed in the previous section.

Next, effective self-regulatory practices during research writing may be associated with the extent to which learners value their ability to communicate through academic discourse. In particular, the ways students picture themselves in the future may affect their motivation to develop deeper conceptual knowledge of the field and of ways communicative functions are realized in the transaction of that knowledge through academic genres. In the motivational science literature, Markus and Nurius (1986) and Markus and Wurf (1987) attempt to explain aspects of motivation through a focus on self-schemas or the construct of 'possible selves'. Expectancy theories such as that outlined in Vroom (1964) also suggest actions of individuals are impelled by perceptions that successful performance will lead to some valued outcome in the future.

In line with these expectancy theories, learners who do not plan to continue studies beyond the master's level and who do not plan to conduct academic research in the future might, for example, experience decreased motivation to improve their academic writing abilities. This phenomenon relates directly to developmental paths within communities of practice discussed earlier. Students engaged in legitimate

peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in research communities may not intend to participate more fully in the future, and may be thus less motivated to master discipline specific forms of discourse.

Of course motivation can also be maintained at a more direct, instrumental level. The value that a learner ascribes to a particular writing task, such as 'mock' or practice proposal writing, may also relate to fairly immediate goals and academic requirements. For example, many M.A. students produce a formal research proposal as part of their program of studies. For these students, strong instrumental motivation may accompany opportunities to create artefacts that contribute directly to the accomplishment of this task.

From the literature on motivation, sense of competency is another key element in predicting academic success, and can be related to development of effective writing practices. Along with autonomy and relatedness, sense of competency is one of the three basic motivating desires described in self-determination theory (see Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). People who feel competent expressing ideas through academic language are likely more motivated to learn and to achieve using such communicative forms. Determining competency beliefs may, therefore, be an important factor in creating a more holistic picture of how personal beliefs constrain and enable the writing task.

Competency is also a core feature of the construct of self-efficacy as outlined by Bandura (1997). According to Bandura, "self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). It is important to note that self-efficacy is not a direct reflection of ability, but rather a reflection of one's beliefs about ability to engage in specific tasks (Alderman, 2004). Underlining the importance of these beliefs is research described

in Wigfield and Eccles (2002), showing that performance, achievement, and persistence at academic tasks can be directly predicted by students' expectations for success.

A final set of motivational constructs that might help to explicate academic writing behaviours deal with what has been broadly termed attribution theory (see work by Weiner, 1985). Unlike self-efficacy theory, attribution theory involves an evaluation process in which learners consider feedback on previous learning and performance to formulate courses of action for future learning. 'Causes' of success or failure may be perceived as internal or external, stable or unstable, controllable or uncontrollable (Weiner, 1985, p. 30). Perception of personal control over the learning process normally creates mental conditions that most likely fuel motivation for achievement. As an integral part of a systemic approach to researching writing, then, researchers should explore instances of past feedback that learners have received on writing, and how learners relate perceptions of past conditions to present writing demands. Strategies and techniques that have led to success in the past will likely be transferred as long as enabling conditions are perceived as stable and controllable. These strategies and techniques may, at times, act in opposition to behaviours course instructors expect or wish to instil.

The personal belief and motivation constructs I have discussed above perhaps constitute the most challenging aspect for researchers to document as part of a systemic exploration of the academic writing process. They represent internal influences that can be unstable and unpredictable over time, and that learners may not accurately report to researchers. But they are important because they partly explain why learners may choose, or choose not to engage in more empowering or transformative writing practices.

Summary

In this chapter, I have attempted to map potential influences on the academic writing process. Factors outlined function interactively as a series of constraints on what is possible in writing. The first section focused on the availability of tools and resources, and explored how decisions to exploit these tools establish crucial constraints on writing by delimiting the potentials of the support sphere. Constraints imposed at this 'material' level directly relate to the affordances of technologies at a writer's disposal.

Next, I explored the factors relating to social networks that affect the writing development process, suggesting that increased integration within a domain specific community of knowledge producers and consumers often correlates with increasingly effective writing abilities. Social networks can be seen to comprise a system of paths and nodes through which textual information is volleyed about, responded to, appropriated, transformed, and sometimes simply copied in the academic 'language game'. In describing the nature of social relationships that guide writing development patterns, I evoked the concept of Community of Practice, suggesting that a graduate class might more aptly be described as a Practice Community rather than a Community of Practice. Finally, I evoked the concepts of discourse community and Genre as examples of how shared community values and needs necessitate increasing conventionalisation of text patterns.

The third section explored how personal belief systems and prior experience may motivate writing actions. First, I suggested that conceptual knowledge is crucial in determining success at research writing tasks. Next, effective self-regulatory practices during the writing process may be associated with the extent to which learners value their ability to communicate through academic discourse, and in ways

that students picture themselves in the future. I pointed to motivational research focusing on sense of competency as a key predictor of effective writing practice. Sense of competency I defined mainly in terms of Bandura's (1997) definition of self-efficacy ("belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments", p. 3). Finally, attribution theory, involving an evaluation process in which learners consider feedback on previous learning and performance to formulate future courses of action, was posited as an important factor in predicting success in writing. Taken together, the personal belief and motivation constructs discussed constitute complex and challenging factors when applied to systems research because the forces these constructs represent can be unstable and unpredictable over time.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The following chapter outlines the methodology I have used to document and analyze systemic influences on research writing in a graduate-level content course. The methodology is compatible with the core assumptions of the *ecological systems* framework (Gibson, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). By conceptualizing writing as interaction within the confines of an ecology, it encourages documentation of a complex array of factors that have guided socio-cognitive development and the writing process itself. With its focus on human agency, development and change over time within an evolving learning space, the ecological systems framework allows a description of writing process that is both spatially and temporally situated.

In outlining this methodology, I begin by describing the classroom setting that served as the micro-level ecology for the study and providing a rationale for its selection. I then describe attributes of my study participants, including cultural, educational, and linguistic backgrounds. Next, I outline a qualitative research methodology consisting of classroom observation sessions, text analysis and personal interviews that is suited to the ecological systems approach to research. Data triangulated from these three sources is used to present a systemic account of how participants enrolled in a graduate level research methods course regulate text production and learning practices to produce a research proposal. Finally, as part of this methodological account, I describe how credibility and trustworthiness of the data have been ensured.

Research Setting

In the conduct of ecological forms of inquiry, the potential to transfer findings depends largely on appropriate choice of research settings. An assumption of “ecological validity” is essential, a form of validity that Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes as “the extent to which the environment experienced by the subjects in a scientific investigation has the properties it is supposed or assumed to have by the investigator” (p. 29). In my choice of setting, I have attempted to directly address this concern.

Besides work toward dissertations required for graduation, graduate level research writing tasks are very often required within the framework of formal coursework. Among typical course offerings, methodology courses, in particular, are usually designed to teach students how to effectively document their research activities. Accordingly, to ensure ecological validity, I decided to explore interaction *within an authentic graduate-level research methodology course.*

Initially, I had the choice of four graduate-level methodology courses being offered during the winter 2007 term through the Faculty of Arts at the university where I was completing my Ph.D. studies. These included research methods courses in political science, sociological research, educational technology, and educational studies. I chose the last, a 1-term, 3-credit course offered during the winter 2007 session through the university’s Department of Education. Introduction to Research in Education, as the course was called, aimed to introduce students to a range of epistemological traditions and resources that guide development of research writing in the social sciences in general, and education in particular. This included qualitative, experimental and mixed methods studies. It was, therefore, a suitable ecology to

explore how learners interact within a sphere that, by nature, offers less formulaic types of modelling. A greater onus was placed on students to explore the potentials various epistemological lenses afford.

Most academic fields are similar in the value they place on systematic formulation of research questions, and rigour in data collection and analysis. This fact, I hope, increases the usefulness of this study because results may be of interest to instructors and researchers in many academic fields. At the same time, studying writing process within a social science class presents unique research opportunities. Instructors in the social sciences face challenges in creating and maintaining an environment conducive to the development of academic writing that instructors in 'hard' or 'natural science' disciplines may not. For one, learners must make choices based on a broader range of research traditions, including qualitative, experimental, and mixed method approaches. Within the qualitative research paradigm alone, epistemological traditions offer choices of ethnographic, phenomenological, grounded theory, case study, or action research, to name just a few. Because graduate students in the social sciences may freely draw on this range of epistemological traditions, it is harder for instructors to present prescriptive models of what ideal educational research writing should look like.

My decision to study Introduction to Research in Education also related, in part, to my personal background knowledge in the field of education. Although studying writing in a familiar field presents certain dangers (e.g. bias and familiarity with convention may blind a researcher to underlying process), I believe the benefits have far outweighed the disadvantages in this case. Because this study involves a key focus on instances of intertextuality and text transformation, specific knowledge of the field and, in particular, knowledge of typical referencing schemes in education

was invaluable in exploring how students transformed source texts to achieve their own rhetorical intentions. I might not have been as aware of nuances of both form and reference had I chosen a course in sociology or political science instead.

A considerable amount of shared background knowledge with my study participants also increased my sensitivity to non-paradigmatic forms of discourse. During interviews, this allowed me to more effectively probe reasons why students had chosen to outline certain facets of field knowledge in writing as opposed to others. At the same time, by choosing a course in educational studies rather than educational technology (my own domain), I avoided studying a setting with which I am too familiar.

When selecting Introduction to Research in Education as a research site, I also verified that writing for research purposes was a central requirement. According to the course description (see Appendix A), objectives were to provide:

- an overview and basic understanding of the commonly used research methods in education today;
- the knowledge required to read, understand and critique research articles in the education and other social science journals;
- awareness of whatever additional research methods course or courses students might need in order to conduct their master's thesis research or to continue on to complete a doctorate;
- experience in conceptualizing and writing a research-based (empirical) thesis proposal;
- experience in conceptualizing and writing a library-based comprehensive (non-empirical essay) proposal;
- understanding of ethical concerns in educational research
(Course description provided by the course instructor - January 2007)

Writing for research purposes was a central requirement according to these course objectives, and during the course, students produced a number of research-related text artefacts. The central piece was a 10- to 15-page 'mock' research proposal, in which students were required to define a research problem, formulate specific research

questions, craft a literature review, and outline a suggested research methodology. It was a 'mock' proposal in the sense that students did not actually conduct the study, an unfortunate impossibility given the four-month length of the course. It should also be noted that the recommended length of the research proposals (10-15 pages, double spaced) might be considered an unnatural constraint on the writing if the purpose of the task was to simulate the process of crafting a master's or doctoral level dissertation proposal. These are typically, but not always, much lengthier documents. Forty percent of the final grade relied on successful completion of the research proposal. However, in my experience, assignments of this sort are typical of master's level methodology courses.

In addition, students were required to produce a summary analysis of four research articles with a focus on "the structure and form of educational research as it becomes contained in and appears in" the articles.

Boundaries of the Microsystem Ecology

Analysis of writing process within the Introduction to Research in Education ecology can be categorized mainly as a Microsystem focus. Although systemic boundaries at the Microsystem level are not always easily identifiable, the system in this case could be loosely defined as the space within which activities undertaken with the end goal of completing the mock research proposal took place. As such, the ecology was bound by the physical space of the classroom, but also the corridors, student lounge, and the university library. It also included study spaces in student homes or offices with all tools and objects that contributed to the writing task. These 'mixed-use' areas of the ecology, spatial interstices, clearly encouraged an influx of information and task support from outside of the Microsystem itself. In addition,

'virtual' spaces as perceived and experienced by students on computers and through computer networks also constituted Microsystem space in so much as these spaces were explored in search of resources and tools to complete the writing tasks. Inclusion of 'virtual' space as part of the Microsystem is problematic from a research perspective because it is potentially boundless. For this reason, it is important to remember that components of the affordance network populating the Microsystem ecology are elements that individual learners have encountered in a face-to-face dynamic. Accordingly, individual web pages that students experience 'at the interface' (whether at school, work, or in the home) constitute Microsystem space, whereas unvisited sites on the World Wide Web obviously do not. This makes the dimension of time an important factor in defining Microsystem. Writing space expands and evolves as the immediate physical sphere of influence changes over time.

Students in Introduction to Research in Education had access to a rich array of tools and resources designed to facilitate research writing development. Examples of these available to all students included the following:

- Research methods textbooks:
 - Anderson, G. (1998). *Fundamentals of educational research*. London: Falmer.
 - McMillan, J.H. (2004). *Educational research*. Toronto: Pearson.
- Content of class lectures and whole class discussion
- Photocopied handouts
- PowerPoint presentations in class, later posted on FirstClass (a web-based communication and collaboration platform)
- Content of discussion boards on FirstClass
- Software for data analysis (e.g. SPSS, available through the graduate computer lab in the Department of Education)
- Substance of communications with the instructor and teaching assistant (in person, on the phone, or by email)
- Comments and feedback on writing from other students in the class

However, as an essentially open and unbounded system, other potential resources included the following:

- Resources of the university library, including access to publications available through electronic databases
- Material accessible through the World Wide Web (WWW)
- Supportive resources from other courses, past and present
- Past student writing that may act as an artefact for future production

Again, the affordances of the Microsystem evolved to the extent that students exploited resources newly available to them. The influence of factors from parallel activity systems (such as other courses) and from higher levels in the ecological hierarchy (such as cultural beliefs and expectations or awareness of university rules and regulations – notably on academic fraud and plagiarism) might have also impacted the experience of learning to write for research purposes. In my descriptions of writing process, I have tried to maintain a keen sensitivity to interaction with parallel activity systems and the effects of higher levels of social context through development of what Strauss and Corbin (1990) term ‘the conditional matrix’ that has prompted focus on broader aspects of contextual experience. However, for reasons of practicality, *my main focus has remained on interaction within a ‘shared core’ of the Introduction to Research in Education micro-level ecology.*

Gaining Access to the Class

The course professor granted me access to the course - Introduction to Research in Education. In my report of findings, I refer to her under the pseudonym Sophia. Following discussion about the purposes and methodology of the project, Sophia expressed enthusiasm and interest in participating. She acted as the main gatekeeper to the research site, and kindly agreed to provide me access to all supportive resources that students in the class were provided with.

Next, I obtained written consent to observe class sessions in person from all

students in the class. The attached Consent to Participate in Research form (see Appendix H) was used for this purpose.

Study Participants

All students in Introduction to Research in Education were invited to participate in the study. Although I had hoped for full participation from a class total of thirteen students, the writing experiences of eight have been documented in this study. The main requirement of sampling was that a diversity of language, writing, and cultural experiences be represented. In this aim, I believe I have been successful.

Participants can be classified roughly as follows:

- 1 non-native English speaker (NNES) international student who completed all bachelor-level studies abroad in a language other than English
- 1 non-native English speaker (NNES) international student who completed some bachelor-level studies abroad in English
- 1 non-native English speaker (NNES) student who immigrated to this country, has lived here for more than 20 years, and completed all bachelor-level studies in English.
- 2 non-native English speaker (NNES) students who grew up francophone regions of Canada and completed some, but not all bachelor-level studies in English
- 3 native English speaking (NES) students who have always lived in Canada and completed all bachelor-level studies in English

The range of language and cultural experience inherent in this sample avoids the simplistic dichotomy suggested by labels 'speaker of *English as a first language*' or 'speaker of *English as a second language*'. Some participants completed previous university studies in the English language while others did not. However, to participate in the course, all students were assumed to have advanced knowledge of English as evidenced by a required minimum score of 600 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or 250 on the computer-based TOEFL with a writing

score of at least 5.0. This was a requirement for entry into the M.A. in Educational Studies program for all non-native speakers of English who are not residents of the Province of Quebec.

I also interviewed the course professor for the winter 2007 session of Introduction to Research in Education. She was not informed which of her students were participating in the study.

Methodology

An ecological systems approach to exploring writing process is unique in that it demands conceptualizing writing as interaction with tools and resources within the confines of a specific learning ecology. A complex array of factors that guide socio-cognitive development and enable the writing process must be taken into account. Many of these factors relate to the life histories, evolving beliefs, motivations and perceptions of individuals, phenomena not easily captured in numerical terms. For this reason, qualitative methods were better suited to the task of exploring the 'hows' and 'whys' of interaction within the system. Specifically, classroom observations, text analysis, and personal interviews with students were used to explore these interactions. In addition, I conducted a series of interviews with the course instructor to identify her expectations regarding student writing and how she believed supporting artefacts she intentionally provided might have scaffolded the writing process. Data was collected on an ongoing basis over a period of roughly five months.

First, classroom observations allowed me to document the emergence of various forms of support for writing, along with instances of peer and instructor feedback that may have impacted the writing process. In conjunction with interviews,

data gathered through classroom observation was particularly useful in answering the first research question which asked how learners made use of the resources and tools in their learning environments to produce writing characteristic of the research proposal genre.

Next, text analysis of student-crafted proposals, notes and outlines was the most direct means of determining whether or not individuals produced writing typical of the research proposal genre. In conjunction with interviews, it provided evidence of the effects of given resources and tools on the student proposals. Answers to the following research questions were possible largely through findings from text analysis, triangulated with interview and classroom observation data:

- How do students' evolving understanding of the research proposal genre and intended audience affect the writing process?
- How does the use of specific types of resources and tools affect students' evolving understanding of intended audience and the research proposal genre?

Finally, student interviews were essential in answering certain aspects of each of the five research questions. First, they allowed participants the opportunity to describe in words how they made use of the resources and tools available in their learning environments. This included the opportunity to elaborate elements of their own life histories, evolving beliefs, and motivations that may also have constrained the writing process in important ways. During interviews, students could describe pivotal moments in which they felt their understanding of the research proposal genre and its intended audience evolved, including perceptions of how use of specific resources and tools affected that understanding. Students were also able to describe key challenges they faced at various stages in the process of writing their research proposals. Comparison of the challenges described by native and non-native speakers of English were useful in answering the final research question: "How do the

perceptions of native and non-native speakers of English in the study differ in their perception of key challenges?”

Recruiting Study Participants

The class professor agreed to give me time during one of the scheduled Introduction to Research in Education classes to introduce myself and the project to her students. This I did during the third week of the winter 2007 term. At that time, potential participants were presented with written consent forms (see Appendix H) outlining the purpose of the research project and requirements involved in participation. In reference to the consent form, I explained that participation would involve between one and three personal interviews, as well as voluntarily providing samples of article summaries, drafts and any notes used in the creation of the ‘mock’ research proposal.

In order to protect the identities of participants, I asked the course professor to leave the classroom during signing and returning of consent forms. Participants indicated their decision to participate in the study or not by ticking a checkbox and then signing the form. Consent to conduct the study was received by all students in the class.

Documenting Resources and Tools in the Ecology

Starting in January 2007, I began collecting copies of all text and multimedia resources and tools that potentially supported the proposal writing process in Introduction to Research in Education. These resources and tools were available to all students in the class, and included, among other things, model research articles (documenting philosophical, case study, experimental design type research), textbook

explanations, a proposal outline including guiding questions, and a variety of other support material posted on the class' communication and collaboration platform (FirstClass). The collection of these resources initiated in January 2007 continued throughout the winter 2007 term as new resources emerged and populated the Microsystem ecology.

As the sole researcher in this project, my aim was to maintain familiarity with all resources and tools intentionally provided to students by the course professor. To the best of my ability, I also maintained a record of any resources created or shared between students themselves. Documentation of this material support prepared me for interviews with my study participants in which specific reference to those resources and tools was made.

Conducting Classroom Observation

To examine instances of classroom interaction that may have affected research writing development, I attended all scheduled classes of Introduction to Research in Education from week 3 (17 January 2007) to week 13 (4 April 2007). During those sessions, I recorded, to the best of my ability, verbal and non-verbal interactions that took place during classes that I felt may have been symptomatic of a progressive synchronization of student and instructor-held expectations regarding form and content of the research proposals.

During those observation sessions, I aimed for a discrete presence within the classroom in a location that allowed me to view gestures and facial expressions of students and the professor without being intrusive. As it turns out, I was not fully successful in this regard because the professor at a certain point during the course moved out of my line of my vision, stating she felt more comfortable that way, and

less distracted by my presence.

During each scheduled class period, I took detailed field notes on a laptop computer. During presentation of the proposal for this study, I made clear my intention to categorize each of these verbal interactions according to type (specifically, whether the initiator was providing or requesting information or support), context of each interaction, including topic or theme, as well as the content of interactions (as either a direct written transcript or point form summary). However, due to the speed and complexity of the dynamics of spoken interaction that took place, this proved impossible. In most cases, I ended up with more general summaries of the content of interactions, along with notes about the general affective overtone as perceived by me (e.g. frustration, annoyance, fascination). Observational data relating to the affective disposition of students was useful when triangulated with information gathered in personal interviews in which students had the opportunity to describe evolving motivations, feelings, and self-efficacy beliefs. The Protocol for Classroom Observation is attached (see Appendix G).

Analyzing Student Writing

Where written consent from students permitted, I conducted an in-depth textual analysis of the research proposal, including notes and artefacts that supported the creation of the proposals. In the proposal drafts themselves, I attempted to identify and categorize various rhetorical moves achieved. Insights gleaned from text analysis were used to generate discussion during interviews that took place generally after specific pieces of writing had been submitted to me.

A Systemic Functional Grammar framework (proposed by Halliday, 1978) was used as a lens to explore how identifiable rhetorical moves were supported by text

structures at the lexicogrammatical and discourse levels. The descriptive affordances of such a framework allow for a greater social orientation than other approaches. The Hallidayan approach to analysis allows documentation of text function on three distinct levels, namely *ideational*, *interpersonal*, and *textual*. A descriptive summary of each of these ‘metafunctions’, as they are called, is provided by Bloor and Bloor (1995, p. 9) and has been included in the table that follows.

Table 2. Metafunctions of language

Metafunction	Description
Ideational	Language is used to organize, understand and express our perceptions of the world and of our own consciousness. This function is known as the ideational function. The ideational function can be classified into two subfunctions: the experiential and the logical. The experiential function is largely concerned with content or ideas. The logical function is concerned with the relationship between ideas.
Interpersonal	Language is used to enable us to participate in communicative acts with other people, to take on roles and to express and understand feelings, attitude and judgments. This function is known as the interpersonal function.
Textual	Language is used to relate what is said (or written) to the real world and to other linguistic events. This involves the use of language to organize the text itself. This is known as the textual function.

In the study of research writing, analysis at the ideational level involves, for example, examining which facets of field knowledge are profiled in writing, indicative of developing student awareness of the concerns and background knowledge of intended readers. Analysis of writing at the interpersonal level explores how power relationships between writer and reader are construed through discourse. This includes examining facets of writing that serve to position an individual in the power / status games that take place within research communities. Interpersonal concerns relate also to acts of hedging, often achieved through use of modal auxiliaries (words like “might”, “may”, “could” in verb finite position) or adverbs (e.g. “certainly”).

“definitely”, or “never”) to establish attitudes, certainty or doubt toward propositions. Finally, analysis of writing at the textual level explores use of structuring or framing devices that hold the text together as a cohesive whole. Selection of segments of student writing suitable for in-depth analysis relied on my perception of the writing sample’s usefulness for theory building.

A second part of the text analysis was intended to illuminate processes of knowledge mediation and text transformation by comparing emerging student texts with the support materials used in their construction. Source text most often included material from articles, books, and websites. Where appropriate citation existed, I traced text in student proposals to original source materials to examine the extent to which source text was transformed to achieve intended rhetorical functions. In some cases, I extracted specific passages that had been quoted directly, relexified, or summarized in student writing. Segments of student text were placed side-by-side with source text in tables in order to determine similarities. In my report, I have highlighted certain sequences that show significant structural and lexical similarity.

At intermediary stages in the proposal development process, support materials also included student notes, diagrams, outlines, and rough drafts, as these too were integrated and transformed in subsequent writing. Where possible, materials were collected in electronic format so that I could link ‘memos’ directly to sections of text they refer to by highlighting and using the comment function available in Microsoft Word™ (Word is a trademark of Microsoft Corporation). In all cases, source material represented a material history that constrained the writing process in important ways.

In accordance with ethical convention regarding the collection, storage and disposal of data, all writing samples collected and stored on paper or in digital format will be destroyed in 2010, two years following completion of this final report.

Original copies of student notes or drafts were returned to participants as soon as photocopies were made.

Conducting Interviews with Students in Introduction to Research in Education

A series of three interviews were conducted with each participant during the winter 2007 term in order to capture writing development changes over time. Each interview required approximately 30 minutes of the participant's time. In a few cases, interview sessions were extended with the consent of participants.

The first interview consisted of a semi-structured framing discussion. During the discussion, I explained the purposes of the research project. Next, I collected information about the cultural and language backgrounds of participants, as well as past experiences with academic writing tasks. In particular, I attempted to gather information about past challenges participants faced while writing academic texts, and about challenges they expected to face when writing proposals for Introduction to Research in Education. My intention in collecting information about language, culture, past experiences and beliefs was not to present participants in a series of "reified textual portraits" (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000, p. 299). Rather, documentation of participant identity was an ongoing accomplishment during the winter 2007 term, with recognition that facets of experience highlighted by participants in interviews were subject to change and evolution over time due to differing contexts of communication. Questions I asked of participants can be seen in the attached Interview 1 Protocol (Appendix D).

The second semi-structured interview was conducted after students had begun working on drafts of their mock research proposals. In these interviews, I shared insights gleaned from my analysis of student writing, and asked students to comment

on why they had chosen specific lexicogrammatical and discourse configurations in order to achieve their stated rhetorical aims. Participants recounted actions they had taken so far toward completion of the proposal drafts, stating specific challenges and describing how they had made use of various resources and tools. I asked non-native English speaking participants if they were aware of transferring stylistic or lexicogrammatical features from their native language into English. I had all participants describe how their motivations and sense of confidence related to the task was evolving. Questions I asked of participants can be seen in the attached Interview 2 Protocol (Appendix E).

The final interview took place at the end of winter 2007 term, after all scheduled classes had ended. During that interview, I sought to gather participants' general impressions of the course as a place to learn how to produce writing for research purposes. I asked them to describe the circumstances under which ideas about the content, structure or writing procedures became clear. To the best of my ability, I attempted to trace reasons for changes made to the proposal drafts, and had students describe specific challenges faced throughout the winter session. Questions I asked of participants are available in the attached Interview 3 Protocol (Appendix F).

Although participants were not able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p. 19), retrospective accounts gathered through interviews provided many useful insights into forms of interaction that guided the writing process. It should be noted that these retrospective accounts more likely represent understandings constructed at the time of interview, rather than those enacted during the writing process. However, more direct and intrusive forms of inquiry such as the think-aloud protocol were deemed impractical in the case of this study and too disruptive of authentic action within the ecology.

To explore affective dispositions toward writing particularly, constructs from the motivational research literature were used to guide questioning (e.g. self-efficacy and competency beliefs, attributions and control beliefs, intrinsic motivation, values, or goals). Although theory guided questioning, I avoided imposing a priori categorizations during the interviews that may have potentially limited inquiry (Fontana and Frey, 2000) or demonstrated a lack of emic sensitivity (Van Lier, 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

All interviews were conducted in classrooms on the university premises. In all cases, no other persons were present in the room so that confidentiality of responses could be assured.

Conducting Interviews with the Course Instructor

I interviewed the course professor on three occasions during the Winter 2007 session. During the first interview, at the beginning of February 2007, I asked her to comment on her expectations for the class, and to discuss which tools and resources she felt were most important in supporting the writing tasks. During the second interview in mid March of 2007, I asked her to discuss her perceptions of how well student proposal drafts were developing along with personal reactions to the writing. I also inquired into what specifically she was hoping to see in future revisions, and asked her how she intended to structure remaining lessons to respond to student writing needs that had emerged up to that point. The final interview took place in mid May of 2007, once students had completed all course requirements. I asked the course professor to provide closing impressions about the relative success of the course. Again, we discussed recurrent shortcomings in student work and how the dynamics of the ecology might have affected student work. Discussion, in all cases was informal

and open ended.

Interview Documentation and Analysis

All interviews were captured in digital audio format to ease subsequent coding and analysis. Audio files were stored on my laptop computer and reviewed only by me in order to protect participant confidentiality.

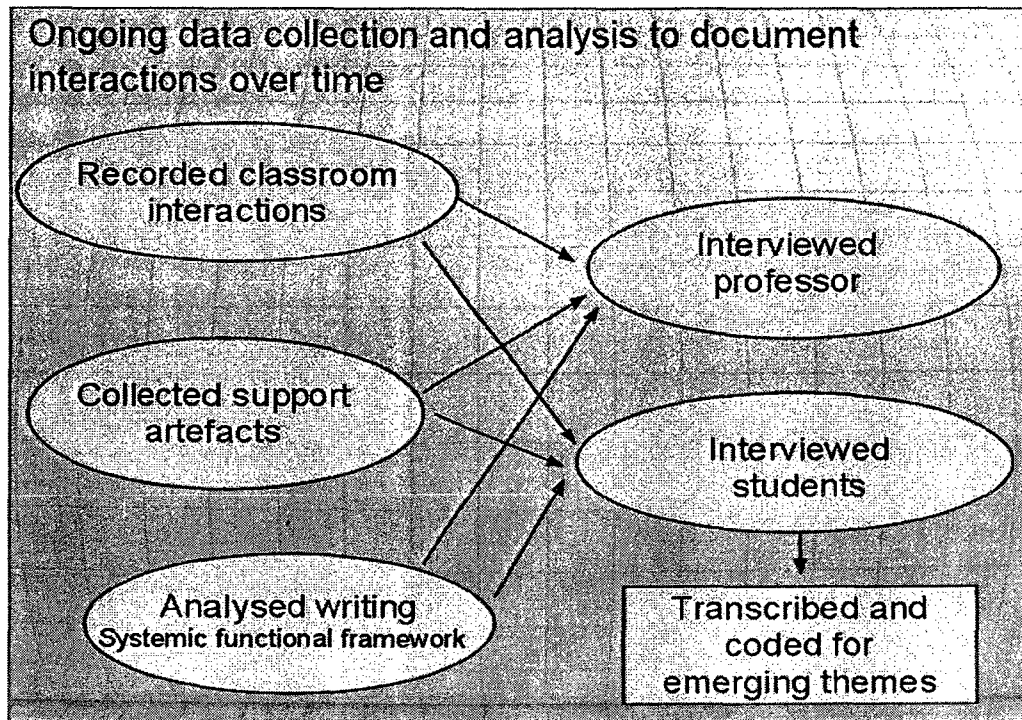
Following interviews, the content of audio files was transcribed into MS Word documents. Within a week of each interview, I sent a print transcript of the interview to the interviewee. This allowed participants the opportunity to read through the content of the interview to ensure accuracy of the information.

Written transcripts were then analyzed and coded to detect emerging themes. If and when recurrent themes emerged, these were used in subsequent interviews to generate further discussion. This approach is consistent with the tenets of Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

In accordance with ethical convention regarding the collection, storage and disposal of data, all audio and text data files will be destroyed by December of 2010, two years following completion of the final report of this study.

The following diagram summarizes the research process I have described.

Figure 2. The research process



Ensuring Methodological Rigour

Additional steps were taken to ensure the methodological rigour of the proposed study. These steps, which address concerns of researcher bias and the transferability, dependability, and confirmability of results, were chosen in accordance with guidelines outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2000).

First, because I, as researcher, brought with me pre-established understandings and value-laden interests, the research product I have produced may tend to profile certain facets of the observable world at the expense of others (see Vidich and Lyman, 2000, p. 40). In full recognition that the interpretive act of reporting and making sense of findings is always an “artistic and political act” (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p. 23). I have crafted a personal narrative that exposes many of my entering biases as a

researcher. The content of this narrative is attached in Appendix I.

Next, a 'thick' description (see Geertz, 1973) of the Introduction to Research in Education ecology has been provided, along with detailed information about the educational and cultural backgrounds of study participants. 'Thickness' of description is essential if findings are to have prescriptive value. Equipped with background information about me, my study participants and many of the material elements that make up the ecology studied, I hope readers will be able to make informed decisions regarding the usefulness and transferability of findings to other learning environments.

Third, to ensure the dependability of research methodology, three experienced auditors have analyzed subsequent drafts of the initial proposal for research and the report of findings to ensure adherence to rigorous research standards. Individuals acting as auditors include my dissertation supervisor and members of my dissertation committee. Detailed field notes on procedures have been taken to allow for retrospective analysis by these and other auditors.

Fourth, findings from classroom observation, artefact analysis and personal interviews have been triangulated to examine key constructs such as agency, knowledge mediation and text transformation from different angles. I believe the combination of findings from three different data sources focusing on the same phenomena have helped to establish the accuracy of information gathered from each data source.

Finally, findings have been linked with results from previous studies and theoretical literature in the field. Constant comparison of emerging findings with field literature took place during the roughly five months of data collection and afterwards, as I continued to document and make sense of the findings. This process of theoretical

comparison has ensured the confirmability of results.

The following table summarizes steps taken to ensure methodological rigour.

Table 3. Steps taken to ensure methodological rigour

Action	Rationale
Personal narrative	Establish bias or researcher subjectivity
Thick description	Allow transferability
Methodological audit	Ensure dependability
Triangulation	Establish accuracy
Link to literature	Allow confirmability

Ethical Responsibilities

It is possible that information included in this final report may reflect negatively on certain study participants. Although efforts have been made to protect the identities of individuals whose opinions and actions are described, it is still conceivable that certain readers may draw conclusions about the identities of participants. This was a particular concern for the course instructor whose actions and instructional approaches at times formed the focus of discussion with student participants. To avoid any unintentional harm to the reputation of the course instructor, I arranged that she read through and sign off on the final report.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined a qualitative research methodology designed to explore interaction within one graduate-level research methodology course. Writing

for research purposes was a central requirement of that course. In particular, students were required to write a 10- to 15-page 'mock' research proposal, defining a research problem, formulating specific research questions, crafting a literature review, and outlining a suggested research methodology.

I began by collecting copies of all text and multimedia resources and tools that potentially supported the proposal writing process. To document classroom interactions, I attended scheduled classes, taking notes on verbal and non-verbal interactions that took place on a laptop computer. I conducted in-depth textual analyses of the student research proposals, including notes and outlines that supported the creation of the proposals when these additional artefacts were available. In analysing student texts, a Systemic Functional framework (proposed by Halliday, 1978) was used to explore how rhetorical moves were supported by text structures. A second part of the text analysis explored processes of knowledge mediation and text transformation by comparing emerging student texts with support materials used in their construction. A series of three interviews were conducted with participants in order to capture writing development changes over time. I also interviewed the course professor regarding her instructional approach and evolving expectations. Content of the interviews was analyzed and coded to detect emerging themes.

A number of steps were taken to ensure methodological rigour. These included crafting a personal narrative to expose my entering biases as a researcher. 'Thick' description of the Introduction to Research in Education ecology has been provided to allow transferability of findings to other similar learning environments. The dependability of my research methodology has been examined by three experienced auditors who have analyzed the study proposal and drafts. Findings from classroom observation, artefact analysis and personal interviews were triangulated to examine

knowledge mediation and text transformation from different angles. Finally, findings have been linked with results from previous studies and the theoretical literature to ensure the confirmability of results.

Chapter 4: The Cases

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the viewpoints and experiences of my 9 study participants. The first case provides background information about the course professor. It establishes how perception of her role and the nature of the proposal-writing task impacted course design decisions in Introduction to Research in Education, including choices regarding specific resources and tools that were intended to support the research writing process. I have also outlined her views on the effectiveness of classroom interaction that took place over the duration of the course, along with specific challenges she faced.

Next, I present a series of eight case studies documenting the writing experiences of the graduate student participants. They are ordered alphabetically, according to participant pseudonym. Findings in each case are organised under a series of standard subheadings. The table below provides a brief description of the type of information the reader can expect under each:

Table 4. Presentation format for study findings

Part A - Subsection Heading	Description of Content
About the Participant	This section includes a brief description of the cultural and language background of the participant. It lays out past educational and work experience related to research writing and also indicates personal career or study goals that may have influenced motivation to improve research writing abilities.
Study Proposed by the Participant	This section provides a brief summary of the study proposed by the participant.

<p>Proposal Development Process</p>	<p>This section outlines steps in the procedure the participant followed in order to complete the 'mock proposal' writing assignment. I make specific reference to resources and tools used in the writing process. It should be noted, however, that resource and tool use was often iterative and, thus, not limited to clearly definable periods during the writing process. However, in the cases that follow, I have tried to document the influence of these tools within their principal contexts of usage.</p> <p>Content within this section generally relates to the following research question:</p> <p><i>How do learners make use of the resources and tools in their learning environments to produce writing characteristic of the research proposal genre?</i></p>
<p>Stylistic Concerns</p>	<p>This section provides rationales participants gave for stylistic decisions made in the construction of the proposal drafts.</p> <p>Content within this section generally relates to the following research questions:</p> <p><i>How do students' evolving understanding of the research proposal genre and intended audience affect the writing process?</i></p> <p><i>How does the use of specific types of resources and tools affect students' evolving understanding of intended audience and the research proposal genre?</i></p>
<p>Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process</p>	<p>This section describes what participants perceived to be key challenges during the proposal writing process. It should be emphasized that these are perceived challenges and do not reflect sources of difficulty of which participants themselves were not cognizant.</p> <p>Content within this section generally relates to the following research questions:</p> <p><i>What do graduate-level students perceive as the key challenges at various stages in the process of writing a research proposal?</i></p> <p><i>How do the perceptions of native and non-native</i></p>

Part B - Subsection Heading	Content
Text Analysis	<p><i>speakers of English in the study differ in their perception of key challenges?</i></p> <p>This section provides a description of salient features of the participants' final 'mock proposal' drafts. In the text descriptions, I have relied on the proposal subsections provided by the participants themselves to delimit sequences for analysis (e.g. Introduction, Background, Methodology, Limitations).</p> <p>Functional moves in the texts have been categorized on any of three distinct levels - <i>ideational, interpersonal, and textual</i> – based on a Systemic Functional Grammar framework.</p> <p>Content within this section can be used to corroborate data gathered through interviews with students regarding key challenges and stylistic decisions.</p> <p>Note: References appearing in text samples taken from study participants' research proposals are not included in the References section of this dissertation.</p>

In the report of findings, readers may recognize an emphasis on specific shortcomings and non-conventional moves in the research writing accounts I present. This tendency does not reflect an intention to be overly critical of the writing that study participants produced. Much of their writing was, after all, skilfully designed and elegantly crafted. However, by focusing on what I perceived as shortcomings, I have attempted to pinpoint specific areas of expression which instructors of research writing might usefully devote additional attention to, if and when they recognize similarities between their own classroom situations and that of the Introduction to Research in Education ecology described in this study.

About the Course Instructor

The course instructor for Introduction to Research in Education, who I refer to throughout this study under the pseudonym Sophia, was highly experienced in the craft of writing for research purposes. She was an associate professor with a research publication record spanning over two decades and had supervised over sixty master's level student theses and co-supervised several doctoral theses.

I asked Sophia how perception of her role and of the nature of the research writing task had impacted the design of Introduction to Research in Education. Stressing that Educational Studies is an interdisciplinary field, bringing together elements of anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy and psychology of education under one umbrella, she suggested an individualized approach to instruction in research methodology was necessary in order to nurture diverse student interests. "I don't want to indoctrinate them in one domain or another," she stated, but rather "find out what they need and [help them] connect with it."

Because of her individualized approach to instruction, Sophia tended not to be highly prescriptive regarding the form or content of student writing. "In this program, there are so many topics possible that I don't feel comfortable saying what the proposals should look like", she stated. "I think it constrains too much, and also leads them in the wrong direction". For Sophia, this sentiment had been reinforced over the years in her role as dissertation supervisor. "Topics ranged from soup to nuts... To me, you have to be versatile to direct students according to their interests. After all, it is not my research they are doing", she stressed.

Sophia's student-centred design precluded the possibility of a large lecture component to the course. Rather, a significant portion of time was devoted to small group feedback sessions in which students had the opportunity to discuss ideas

relating to their own proposed studies and to receive peer feedback on their developing proposal drafts.

Although students were encouraged to explore personal research interests, Sophia also expressed a desire to encourage “a basic awareness of other research methods”. She suggested that development of an understanding of key research concepts was a crucial aim of the course. Conceptual understanding and an ability to use the vocabulary of the field, she stressed, were important tools that would also help students achieve their research writing goals. For the benefit of the reader, the table that follows provides a list of key terms that reference research concepts the professor had hoped to address during the course. This list of concepts was presented on PowerPoint slides and later made available to students on FirstClass (the Department of Education’s online communication and collaboration platform).

Table 5. List of research concepts

Research Concepts
case study, content analysis, control group, culture, deductive, dependent/independent variables, emic / etic, empirical, epistemology, ethics, ethnography & critical ethnography, ethnology, ethno-methodology, evaluation research, experimental, generalize, grounded theory, hermeneutics, heuristic, historical research, holistic, hypothesis, inductive, narrative, objectivity, paradigm, participant observation, phenomenology, philosophical research, pilot study, positivism, post-colonial, post-modernism, post-structuralism, qualitative, quantitative, quasi-experimental, reflective practice, reliability, replication, research, researcher effect, sampling errors, science, scientific, semiotics, socio-cultural context, statistical significance, subjectivity, symbolic interaction, theory, triangulation, unit of analysis, unobtrusive measures, validity, variable

Regarding the depth of knowledge about research concepts she hoped students would develop, Sophia had the following to say: “When reading the literature, I want them to know what is going on in the field of research without going to a medium or high level at this point”. Beyond this, in her evaluation of student research writing, she suggested she was looking for “good writing, good thinking, clear mental

organization, understanding of what is expected regarding a plan for a study, and getting on with it - not being stuck in loose generalities.”

Rationale for Tool and Resource Selection

Sophia chose two textbooks for students to work with throughout the term: These were 1) Anderson, G. (1998). *Fundamentals of educational research*. London: Falmer. and 2) McMillan, J. H. (2004). *Educational research*. Toronto: Pearson. The Anderson text was Canadian authored, and she said she liked it for its narrative form and easier reading style. The MacMillan text she chose for its usefulness and practicality as a resource. In particular, she pointed to useful definitions of research concepts it provided in the page margins.

To familiarize students with the style and content of a range of research writing options, Sophia required them to “dissect” a series of sample articles using a list of questions to direct student attention to important elements of form and content. The activity was intended to help students “read literature in a different way, and not to get bogged down in details they may not need”. Through a movement that led from text to presuming context, they were encouraged “to reconstruct what the writer [had] done to come up with what he came up with in writing - to look at the article for the methodological structure, the research problem, and so on”. Questions that students were required to answer included the following (see Appendix A):

- What is the article about? (Where is this information – in the title, the abstract?)
- What is the problem statement?
- What is the main research question?
- How is the study contextualized in prior knowledge/research on the topic?
- What is the theoretical foundation of the study?
- What method or procedures were used to carry out the study?
- What justification is provided for the particular choice of research method?
- What are the main findings of the study?
- What are the implications of the results – for policy, practice or further research?

- Does the article communicate clearly? If not, indicate why.
- Do you have a question or critique of the article?

Beyond articles for dissection, and because she did not want to be overly prescriptive about the content and style of student proposals, Sophia chose not to provide sample or exemplary proposal texts that students could imitate or model their own writing on. “I want them to come up with their own models”, she suggested. However, to support the proposal writing process, she did provide them with an outline consisting of a series of heuristic style questions indicating, in broad terms, which details, from a conventional point of view, were important to include in each section of the proposal (see Appendix B).

Instructor Views on Classroom Interaction and Dynamics

Sophia expressed a preference for teaching groups of students that, like the Introduction to Research in Education class, could be characterized by language and cultural diversity. “I am glad I live in a society where that can be”, she told me.

With this particular class, interactions were generally open and informal during class discussion. However, tensions did arise at times. Sophia said the fact that three students were chronically late bothered her. She felt it was unfair to others that these late students would “come waltzing in, interrupt and start talking about things that had already been talked about”. This inappropriate behaviour disrupted the flow of ideas.

During class sessions, she purposefully attempted to alter power dynamics in the classroom by not always positioning herself at the head of the table. “I don’t like that position of authority”, she stated. “If I am going to be a facilitator rather than an

instructor, I have to put myself somewhere else. That is what I tried to do – be a facilitator more than a teacher”.

From her perspective as the course instructor, she believed my presence as observer also had a noticeable, but minimal effect of the dynamics of interaction in the classroom. The fact that she was being observed was more “present” in her mind than she had expected it to be. On certain occasions, she purposefully took herself out of my line of vision, after which she said she felt less distracted. In the end, however, she didn't believe my presence had much impact on her teaching.

Perceived Key Challenges in Teaching the Course

More than anything else, Sophia suggested that teaching the course had been challenging due to the wide range of competencies in the class:

This one, I am finding hard because a couple of the students in the class are nowhere near the same page. I find it very hard to work with them as a whole group, knowing that two or three of them are not there.

Facilitating small group work was also difficult in this particular course. Despite Sophia's belief that small group discussion in class can be helpful because it “usually relaxes things”, she noticed several students did not want to participate. At other times, she felt it took too much time for her to move between small groups to provide feedback. While she was working with one group, other groups stopped working on their peer review activities. In this sense, she felt they wasted valuable class time.

General Retrospective Reflections

Sophia said the course achieved what she had expected in terms of student research writing coming together toward the end of the term. As had been the case in previous years of teaching the course, she said she was both “surprised and pleased

with most people's work at the end", suggesting, "for all the feeling of struggle, they got it for the most part, and did well with their own uncertainty regarding how to proceed".

On the downside, a richer form of interaction and exchange of ideas that Sophia had wished would happen during class discussion simply didn't transpire in the end. "I would have liked more 'juice' in the class", she admitted. She conceded that her own level of "fatigue" may have played a role, but also recognized that the dynamics of classroom interaction are often unpredictable. Discussing those moments when the flow of ideas seemed to slow, she added "you don't know what sets it off - where the blank looks are coming from... It is very hard to break through that".

Case 1: Abassi

About the Participant

An international student from Nigeria, Abassi grew up speaking Ika, a minority dialect of Igbo, in the home. However, because English is the official language of Nigeria and is spoken widely in education and government agencies, he had considerable exposure to standard British English as well. He also claimed fluency in an 'Africanised' dialect of English used in non-formal, every-day communication, but not generally accepted in formal educational settings.

Abassi completed an undergraduate degree in sociology at a Nigerian university. However, because evaluation of learning in his courses was based largely on reading comprehension, he had little opportunity to practice writing in academic genres. A limited amount of writing was produced for 'tutorials' in which students prepared notes and presented on given topics for the benefit of other group members. Some collaborative writing was also required in which students gathered information on topics of relevance to their courses, and then compiled written group projects presenting that information.

As part of a system requiring graduates in the social sciences to serve for one year under the auspices of the National Youth Service Corps, Abassi was sent to work in a rural Nigerian school. This experience, he said, gave him valuable insight into the educational system in that country. In the years following this experience, he worked in the Nigerian public service, and at the time of this study, had spent over 10 years as a public servant.

Abassi said he valued the practice involved in crafting both the proposal and the summary dissections of articles in Introduction to Research in Education because

of “[his] view of [himself] in the future”. He believed ability to craft research writing would translate into better opportunities within the public service in Nigeria. This assumption was based on experience with previous projects in which he was asked to record the contents of meetings and write reports in English: “If you are not precise, you can’t solve problems”, he stressed. “You have to give a solution – and show that you have gone through some basic studies”. He also suggested that “as one gets older, this type of writing, if it is not practised, diminishes”. Now a middle-aged man, the experience in Introduction to Research in Education would help him “go back to [his] old days”, he said. He expressed no interest in pursuing a career in academia in the future.

Enrolled in the Certificate program in Educational Studies, Abassi planned to later gain entry into the master’s program, contingent upon successful completion of Introduction to Research in Education.

Study Proposed by the Student

Abassi proposed a study exploring how the attitudes of high school students affect dropout rates in Nigeria. In essence, however, the study was designed to explore a variety of factors that affect dropout behaviours. Qualitative in nature, it would rely on interviews with key educational stakeholders in one Nigerian high school. It would also detail, in retrospect, Abassi’s personal experiences in one school during his service year with the National Youth Service Corps.

The Proposal Development Process

During Abassi’s year of teaching in Nigeria with the National Youth Service Corps, he became aware that high school dropout rates were a serious problem in that

country. It was this experience that afforded him the focus of his proposed study.

To guide decisions about which content to include in the proposal, Abassi relied on the proposal guidelines handed out during the first week of class (see Appendix B). Class discussion also helped him to make sense of the proposal requirements laid out in the guidelines. He returned to these guidelines, later posted on FirstClass (the course's web-based communications and collaboration platform) for guidance throughout the proposal crafting process.

Before beginning to write, he set about defining, for himself, the meanings of a number of key concepts: "The first part was to define my concepts...The *attitude* of students – what does it mean? And *dropout* – I had to explain what dropout means." Once he had defined these key concepts, he was able to begin drafting the research problem section.

The focus of the study expanded over time and underwent some major changes. He had begun with a focus on "the attitude of students who are school dropouts". Yet peer review sessions, scheduled during regular class hours, were an influence on his decision to expand the focus of his study to include other factors that contribute to dropout behaviour:

In that process, some students were able to correct me and I really abided by those corrections... One said I should say that there are other variables that contribute to school dropouts, and I quite agreed with that... Group discussion is better because if you work alone, you think you know everything, but you come to the realization you don't know anything [gentle laugh]. I listened to my classmates, and had to make the corrections too – follow along their lines.

Feedback from the course professor, too, led him to a broader consideration of the causes of dropout. Her comments, written on the first draft of his proposal, suggested problems might also relate to factors within the school, namely its bureaucratic organization, irrelevance of the curriculum, an authoritarian climate or inappropriate

teaching methods. She also brought up the idea that the Nigerian school system itself may be elitist and encourage a paring down of successful student numbers. This new focus on numerous systemic factors affecting student retention rates prompted a subsequent search for literature to gather additional information for the background section of the proposal. The proposal text became populated with a preponderance of ideas from four books (three from the USA and one from Canada). Interestingly, literature focusing specifically on the causes of school dropout in Nigeria was omitted. When asked why this was the case, Abassi stated he had been unable to find any specific information in the university library. He also expressed the following view:

“The fact is that I know what is happening, and how a team of inspectors came to the school to examine the issue. I [felt] it is needless going for a literature review based on Nigerian content. And when I went to the [North American] content, [I saw] the behaviour of students is almost the same...”

In addition, he made no attempt to search for information about the causes of school dropout in Nigeria on the Internet. “It would have been there”, he later conceded in our final interview at the end of the course, “but I did not make any attempt”.

Other feedback focused more specifically on lexicogrammatical choices within the draft, and at times involved the professor rephrasing sections of text from his first draft. For example, the awkwardly structured relational clause defining “attitude of students” was completely reworked by the professor on the first draft paper.

Table 6. Examples of lexicogrammatical changes following instructor feedback

<p>Text from Abassi's first draft:</p> <p>Attitude of students is referred to [<i>sic</i>] delinquent behaviours such as nonchalant attitude towards their studies, lateness to school and non-entering into the classroom at the appropriate time, disobedience to teachers, absenteeism, non-compliance to school rules and regulations, trouble with the police and other related behaviours which could affect students' performance in school.</p>
<p>Text from Abassi's second draft text in which contributions of the professor were incorporated verbatim (professor suggestions shown in italics):</p>

Negative student attitudes may underlie several types of undesirable behaviour which in turn, seem linked to school dropout. These behaviours include: lateness, absenteeism, violation of school rules, trouble with the police, and other related behaviours which could affect students' performance in school.

Problems with sentence-level grammar and awkward word choice (e.g. “non-entering into the classroom at the appropriate time” instead of “absenteeism”) likely detracted from ease of expression in the original, and Abassi seems to have readily appropriated the suggestions of the professor.

Stylistic Concerns

From our interviews, it became clear that Abassi was basing many stylistic decisions on his own experience reading reports, research articles and textbooks. For example, when questioned why he changed instances of reference to himself in the first draft of the methodology section from the first person referent (“I”) to the third person referent (“the researcher”) in subsequent drafts, he claimed the decision was conscious, and that “there is no textbook or article written where they say ‘I will do this... They always say ‘the researcher’”.

Genre transfer from report writing also seems to have led to confusion about appropriate content for and purpose of the research proposal. Specifically, Abassi chose to include a list of recommendations within his proposal, seemingly not distinguishing the aims of the proposal from those of a report discussing study findings.

Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process

The task of locating relevant information on the topic of school dropout in Nigeria published in recent years was one stated challenge. Abassi felt his inability to

find recent examples of scholarship on this specific topic undermined his central argument in the proposal:

I was trying to find other examples. Really I know [about the situation in Nigeria], but how do I say I know what is happening? So I had to use other authors. That is what took my time. I was going for recent publications. That is an area where I had a bit of a problem. But even though the points are old, they are still up to date.

Beyond trouble locating appropriate literature to support his assertions, Abassi did not identify other specific challenges. At the same time, feedback from the instructor identified many elements in his writing in need of improvement and many of those issues are apparent in the text analysis that follows. In any case, Abassi felt the course professor was being unduly harsh in the grading of his writing in general. In addition, the experience of receiving feedback from professors in other courses added to negative sentiments in the early weeks of the course:

When I was in the university in Nigeria, I was OK. I didn't have any problem in the English language. If I had, I wouldn't have graduated. So now, I don't understand what's happening... I think they should understand that one comes from a different country... I explain to them that I am trying to catch up with things since I left school. [Some professors here] want you to succeed, but [others] want to 'kill you off' [gentle laugh]. I am afraid of them now...

By our second interview, midway through the course, Abassi's confidence in his writing abilities and his perceived capacity to grasp many of the inherent assumptions behind good research writing had improved.

Text Analysis

Proposal Title: “Student Attitudes and School Dropout in Nigeria”

Analysis of the Introduction

Abassi begins his proposal with an introductory section entitled “Student Attitudes and School Dropout in Nigeria”. In line with genre convention, this section serves mainly to define a number of key concepts. The concept of school dropout, for one, is classified through the following relational identifying clause based on the literature: “Dropout is[,] therefore, defined as leaving school before graduating for any reason other than death (Kronick & Harris, 1998)”. Other relational structures employed for the purpose of classification include “undesirable behaviour which...seems linked to dropout” (identified as “lateness, absenteeism, violation of school rules, trouble with the police...”) and reference the educational system in Nigeria which “seems to be elitist”.

Although key concepts and central ideas are elaborated in this introductory section, the section as a whole suffers from shortcomings in cohesion, and can be characterized by instances of thematic drift. These thematic problems may have arisen as Abassi attempted to weave the professor's suggestions for change of focus into his opening paragraphs. For example, in the section title (“Student Attitudes and School Dropout in Nigeria”) and in the topic sentence of the first paragraph in this section, “attitudes” appears as the topical Theme. However, in the body of the section, the focus on “attitudes” is abandoned in favour of discussion of undesirable behaviours and the state of the school system in Nigeria. As a second example, the definition of the key term “dropout” appears after, instead of before, a discussion of one of the factors affecting dropout rates (elitism in the Nigerian educational system).

The final paragraph in the introductory section shown below also shows shortcomings in paragraph level cohesion:

In most countries today, education beyond a minimum stage is a privilege for a small select group. For instance, in Canada, two-thirds of the students leave before graduating from high school (Dei et al., 1997). Nevertheless, an examination of student attitudes towards school dropout [*sic*], should involve education planners about [*sic*] ways to improve the quality and equity of the system.

In this concluding assertion, it is unclear why the thematic focus has shifted from Nigeria to Canada. The final sentence of the above quote, too, with its thematic focus on “attitudes” and the role of educational planners is also new information, and not a natural thematic extension of information that precedes it.

At the interpersonal level, a moderate degree of hedging through the use of modality mitigates against potential accusations of over-generalization or simplification of the problem: “Negative attitudes may underlie...” / “The problem may not be...” / “It may lie within...” / “The system seems to be...”. In this sense, the introductory section plays by the genre rules, allowing room for doubt about claims made.

Analysis of the “Problem Statement” Section

The Problem Statement section rightly establishes school dropout as a problem in Nigeria, and serves to identify the study’s purpose: “to show how student attitudes affect the school dropout per se at two secondary schools in Nigeria.” Unfortunately, the intention expressed here seems misaligned with another assertion in the problem statement section suggesting that a variety of factors, beyond student attitudes, will be explored. In this sense, the problem itself is not precisely or accurately defined. In fact, the nominal group “student attitudes” seems ideationally conflated with a range of other maladaptive behaviours and other factors predicting school dropout. Abassi’s

real focus as it is laid out is on a far larger number of phenomena than this statement of purpose explicitly identifies.

In passing, the only source material referenced in support of assertions in this section dates from 1964 (far too old to lend strength to Abassi's argument about the current state of affairs in the Nigerian school system).

Analysis of the “Research Questions” Section

This section contains a catalogue of research questions, bundled together within a single paragraph, and presented without an introductory topic sentence. According to genre convention, these questions should serve to delimit the parameters of inquiry. In this regard, the section suffers from a lack of precision and unnecessary conceptual overlap. It begins with three questions in which the nominal group “the attitude of students” is profiled:

To what extent does the attitude of students result in school dropout?
Does the attitude of students affect their dropout [*sic*]?
What is the relationship between the nonchalant attitude of students and dropping out of school?

These three questions could easily be condensed into one.

The broader focused research question that follows (“Are there other factors contributing to school dropout in this country?”), however, draws attention to a multitude of other factors that warrant consideration, and necessitates system-bound exploration of the problem. It is the lack of precise parameters of inquiry that militates against the creation of effective research questions here.

Next, a final two-line paragraph, focusing on the value of study, is not well placed within the document framework as a whole. The assertion that the study “will assist the policy makers in decision [*sic*] and solving the problem of school dropout in

Nigeria” would have been better placed in a section outlining the rationale for the study.

Analysis of the “Literature Review” Section

The literature review outlines a series of factors that contribute to school dropout rates generally. In accordance with generic convention, much of the information presented is projected via verbal processes introducing the ideas of field scholars:

Kronick & Hargis (1998) note...

Hahn (1987) as cited in Kronick & Hargis (1998) states...

Mann (1987) and Smink & Schargel (2004) note...

Karp (1988) states...

However, some notable gaps exist in Abassi's selection of literature to review. No space is devoted to the issue of the “attitudes of students”, emphasized as a key focus in the Research Questions section. Nor is there reference to literature that explores the issue of school dropout behaviour in Nigeria specifically. Sources cited report on studies conducted solely in the USA and Canada.

From a textual viewpoint, the Literature Review lacks an adequate introductory paragraph serving to locate ideas within a larger purposeful framework. Individual paragraphs, however, do, in general, show cohesion. Each serves to elaborate upon one specific factor that predicts dropout behaviour (e.g. delinquency, gender, ecological variables, poor academic performance, poverty and ethnicity, limited English proficiency, parents, urbanization). In some cases, unrelated themes appear in a single paragraph (e.g. academic performance, poverty and ethnicity factors). These could arguably be explored in greater detail within paragraphs dedicated specifically to these themes.

From an interpersonal perspective, attempts at hedging appear on occasion (e.g. “Another factor which *may* result in school dropouts among other things include [*sic*] structures and characteristics of individual students”[emphasis added]). The bulk of the information transaction is, however, conducted as a simple account of fact with no authorial comment and no use of modality indicating authorial positioning, agreement or doubt.

Analysis of the “Methodology and Data Collection” Section

In this section, Abassi outlines a proposed methodology for what he labels an “ethnographic, qualitative” form of research. Through a series of material processes, and with use of the generically conventional future tense, Abassi details some of the steps he will take in interviewing study participants, and then collecting documents for analysis.

A salient shortcoming in this section is that concepts are not sufficiently “unpacked” or supported through elaboration. Specifically, Abassi claims that “there is credibility, reliability, and triangulation involving participant observer [*sic*], interviews and analysis of existing documents of all data directed towards the school dropout [*sic*] ”, yet fails to elaborate in more precise terms how these important qualitative research concerns will be addressed.

At the ideational level, confusion about research terms also arises. He states the research is ethnographic to the extent that his personal experiences working with students and staff at two dropout-prone high schools in Nigeria will be incorporated. This may be partially true. Yet, it is not ethnographic simply because, as he claims, “it will be done in natural settings where the researcher *cannot manipulate the*

behaviours of the participants” [emphasis added]. Although, a researcher in such settings does not manipulate the behaviours of those studied in the way experimental or quasi-experimental designs demand, behaviours of study participants may be manipulated in unintended ways, nonetheless. This fact should be explicitly acknowledged. It is not.

The concept of “field note” is also stretched in its interpretation. Abassi proposes documenting, through recollection, his past experiences at two Nigerian high schools. Far from the “field” in time and place, and based on distant retrospect (10 years past), the term “field note” might be more accurately replaced with something like personal narrative or reflection since these notes are not really taken ‘in the field’ where accurate observations can be made.

Lexicogrammatical expression at times is at times awkward or stilted as evidenced in the following excerpt:

...students go to school with dangerous weapons like clubs and knives either to protect themselves or to harm their teachers who are there as a corrective measure in their academic activities. Some too, tend to claim their rights, thus making it difficult for the teachers to effect a correction in their academic performance.

This description of the state of the school system might also be more appropriately placed in the introduction or as part of the literature review.

From a textual perspective, steps are organized using various time markers (e.g. “the next stage...”, “the last stage...”, “finally”). However, the section as a whole would benefit from better organization of paragraph information. Following discussion of the final stage (“analysis of the data from observations, interviews and existing document analysis”), Abassi returns to a discussion of the interview protocol, a topic that has been elaborated at an earlier time. This is, in turn, followed by discussion of the specific content of interviews (again, a section which should have

appeared earlier in conjunction with his initial description of the interview methodology). Importantly, the interview protocol form he has included as an appendix to the proposal is not even referenced in the methodology section.

The final two and a half pages of text in the Methodology and Data Collection section are simply not suitable for inclusion in this section at all because they do not deal with methodological issues. Instead, Abassi outlines additional factors that predict dropout behaviour in schools, as exemplified in the following relational clauses that introduce these issues:

Another factor which may lead to the [*sic*] school dropout is [the] demographic nature of the school system.

The negative attitudes of some parents toward their children's education is of great importance...

Another contributing factor of school dropout is the nature of the school curriculum...

The method of [students] assessment is [a] contributory factor in school dropout...

...an important factor...is gender inequality in Nigerian society...

Analysis of the “Recommendations” Section

Inclusion of recommendations in a proposal before the study has actually been conducted is an unconventional move from a genre perspective. The majority of space in this section is devoted to presenting a catalogue of recommendations, some of which are provided below as examples:

The government, too, should reduce student enrollment...

Teachers should be encouraged with high pay...

Teachers should meet with their students on a regular basis...

The staff of departments should include counsellors and social workers...

The system of assessment should be structured...

Information is roughly organized into theme-based paragraphs (things teachers *should* do, things the education ministry *should* do by instituting a guidance counselling system, ways assessment *should* change, things parents *should* do, ways curricular relevancy *should* be established), evidencing a degree of internal paragraph cohesion.

However, many assertions are simply not adequately elaborated and become lost in a long catalogue of divergent ideas.

Interpersonally, the section involves a provision of information in the declarative mood. Abassi distances himself as author from the claims made through the use of passive structures masking agency (e.g. “The following recommendations are made...” / “The state ministry of education is advised to reassess its policy and funding...”). A distanced stance is also maintained through reference to himself in the third person as “he” or “the researcher” (e.g. “the researcher was an eyewitness...” / “the researcher was a participant observer” / “the researcher, too, will conduct...” / “He will establish a rapport with the subjects”). In general, Abassi has chosen a tone and lexicogrammatical feature set reminiscent of classical, experimental science. This is contrary to contemporary practice in qualitative research, but not uncommon in my experience of graduate-level student writing.

Analysis of the “References” Section

Seven references are provided here with minor APA presentation errors (e.g. missing periods, incorrect punctuation).

Analysis of Preliminary Questionnaire (Interview Protocol Form)

Three discrete point demographic questions, a list of seven open ended questions, and a list of eight closed ended questions with Strongly agreed / Agreed / Disagreed / Strongly Disagreed response options are included. No rationale for the use of these particular questions is provided in the body of the proposal. They do not seem targeted toward any particular participant group, but rather, constitute a

confused extension of Abassi's own research questions. Examples of the open-ended questions include the following:

- What is the relationship between student attitudes and school dropout?
- What are the effects of dropout on both students and society?
- What is the relationship between age and school dropout?
- How does the absence of guidance affect the school dropout?

Note on Punctuation

The proposal in general contains numerous punctuation errors. The following examples drawn from the text show continued misuse of the comma, in particular:

- I am interested in this study, because...
- Though, there are factors...
- ...an examination of student attitudes towards school dropout, should...
- In these schools the researcher, was...
- The researcher, taught in one of...
- ...analysis of the data, from observations, interviews...
- The researcher, will critically examine...

Case 2: Diana

About the Participant

Diana was an international student from Colombia. Prior to her arrival in Canada in 2005, all schooling, including her undergraduate degree in Educational Psychology, had been completed in Colombia in Spanish, her native language. An educational psychologist by profession, Diana had worked in the education field for over 20 years prior to entry into the M.A. in Educational Studies program. During her most recent decade of work experience, she had worked in the capacity of technical advisor for educational projects. Her job duties included managing projects in her home country, and conducting applied research in order to plan and evaluate educational programs.

Professional development needs motivated Diana to improve her research writing abilities in English. “I have worked for international organizations almost all my professional life”, she told me. “Because almost all the forums for social development in my country are from international organizations, I usually need to have my [writing] translated... Now, I can write my documents myself”. Through research, Diana expressed a desire to contribute to improvements in the education system in Colombia.

Study Proposed by the Student

Diana’s proposal was entitled “Challenges and Barriers in Making the School Friendly”. The need for her study was based on an assumption that the quality of education in Colombia’s poorest rural and urban areas suffers due to a ‘disconnect’ between the local culture and experience of learners on one hand, and the goals and

curricular guidelines of schools on the other. The study was designed to be conducted in a poor borough (Comuna I) in the city of Cali, Colombia, and would focus on teacher perceptions of the roles of students, parents and community cultural knowledge in schooling. Specifically, Diana intended to explore what teachers know about the local culture and customs of the community their students come from, along with their preconceptions of the value of that culture as lived by students. She also wished to explore how teachers manage differences between their perceptions of the goals of the school and curriculum, on one hand, and the particular culture and experiences of students on the other.

The Proposal Development Process

The idea for Diana's proposal emerged from years of experience in educational management and research in Colombia. Work experience and previous research she had been involved with suggested that a lack of parental involvement in schools was one of the biggest problems facing the educational system. "I worked in education and social development", she told me. "Parental involvement is very important...I think it is the most important thing". As such, the focus of the proposal for Introduction to Research in Education was a natural extension of a previously held belief based on experience in a familiar field.

The search for source material for the proposal began with a keyword search on the Internet and through library accessible electronic databases. Keywords for the search were collected, at first, from one key article on the topic of parental involvement in schools. From subsequent articles she collected and read, Diana recorded notes about the main ideas on paper (an action in contrast to her typical note taking procedure in Spanish in which information was usually recorded and stored

directly on the computer) and began gradually building up a bank of source material to draw from.

Next, she made use of peer discussion to refine the focus of her proposal and to help her establish a preliminary framework for the study. However, rather than providing her with a suitable framework, small group discussion in those early weeks provided a forum through which she was able to start proscribing away approaches she did not intend to follow. She recalled comments of one classmate in particular who suggested she compare high and low achieving classes, exploring the nature of parental involvement in each. Deciding that this was not, in fact, what she wanted to do at all, she discussed the approach with the course professor. The professor challenged this first methodological conception, leading Diana to more deeply consider alternative models upon which to base her inquiry.

A return to field literature, in the end, provided Diana with a framework she felt comfortable with. At first, she had assumed problems with parental involvement in poor neighbourhood schools stemmed from curriculum issues and a lack of teacher sensitivity to the cultural realities of students. The focus changed, however, in order to accommodate a more 'radical', Freirian inspired approach, one focused on the issue of cultural relevancy of schools themselves. In that process, Diana suggested two articles were crucial in helping her to grasp the new study framework. "I have read Paulo Freire before, but I never thought that it had something to do with this problem", she said. "When I read the article, I got it." This change in focus necessitated substantial changes to the literature review which had already been fully drafted. The change was not easy, she claimed, because of a bias that existed in much of the current research.

In further refining her focus, a useful generative strategy Diana employed involved the use of diagrams and charts. She first created a diagram depicting various

elements of her planned focus on paper. This diagram was later recreated in digital format, and imported into the proposal draft itself. She suggested this graphic was an effective planning tool that, in conjunction with writing the ideas out on paper, helped her to personally conceptualise the research problem.

In a similar manner, her research methodology was clearly laid out in a table that also found its way into the final proposal draft. This table helped her to effectively visualize her methodological steps. The research problem graphic and the methodology table represented an easy and natural way for Diana to communicate her thoughts. “I am very visual”, she said. “That is why I make those graphics. I need them.”

A final strategy Diana relied upon to improve the clarity of her ideas and writing was to let previously crafted sections of the proposal sit for an 'incubation' period before returning to them for revision. She waited two days between the creation of her first draft and her first attempt at editing:

I need to take this time. I do that in Spanish also. Wait one or two days. There are things that I had not seen, and they are clear when I take the distance. But it works...

For final review, Diana relied on a writing assistant to check the grammar on the first several pages of the proposal. Although it was impossible for the assistant to review the whole 20+ pages of the final draft, he was able to identify some specific grammar errors that Diana looked for and corrected in the remaining pages. Her husband also reviewed the grammar in the research problem section.

Stylistic Concerns

PowerPoint slides that the instructor had explained in class and later posted on FirstClass (the class communication and content management system) allowed Diana

to compare characteristics of writing typical of the qualitative and quantitative paradigms (see Appendix C). Newly aware of these differences, Diana searched out examples in which she was able to identify generic features of each, and develop a clearer understanding of audience assumptions about the qualitative style writing she intended to craft. Conscious of the possibility her writing could now conform to a new set of assumptions more aligned with qualitative forms of inquiry, she had the following to say:

It is totally different [from] all the things I was taught when I studied because a psychologist is very 'positivist'... [The writing] was very objective... Do not mix your feelings.... Never do it. Here, is a kind of opposite, what I have done. It is a challenge... [smile]

In particular, Diana suggested it was difficult “to mix feelings and thinking”. For this reason, explicit expression of personal bias or other instances of authorial reflexivity are far from pervasive in her writing. In addition, she said she believed qualitative research is “less systematic” compared to the quantitative research she had been involved with in the past. However, she said she employed the same “logic” used when writing for research purposes in Spanish.

Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process

For Diana, defining her research problem emerged as the most significant challenge during the writing process. Relying on previous knowledge, group discussion, and attempts at graphical representation, she felt this process also took the greatest amount of time. Despite this, it was important for her to establish a clear focus.

Grammatical issues also represented an ongoing concern. “I need to read what I write at least two or three times to be sure that it doesn't have grammar mistakes,” she said. “I also ask someone to read it before [I submit it].” Particularly, when tired

or fatigued, she suggested elements of Spanish creep into her English writing. Editing for grammar was also very time consuming, and she expressed the belief that she spent more time with the assignment than her native English speaking classmates because of this.

Another challenge involved working within a less familiar research paradigm (i.e. qualitative inquiry). During the writing process, she felt she was “clinging” to assumptions of “the dominant form of thinking” in the field of educational psychology in Latin America. New awareness about the potentials of qualitative research afforded new possibilities for her in writing. An ongoing challenge, then, was avoiding relapse into a series of familiar quantitative research assumptions. “I had to read more and be more careful”, she said. Unfortunately, identifying and documenting elements of her own experience that might bias study findings within the proposal text was something she was unable to comfortably achieve. “When I try to put feelings and thinking together, ...well, that is something I really don’t know how to do”, she asserted.

Finally, gaining an understanding of what professors in a North American academic context expect of students was a noted challenge. She experienced the gradual growth in awareness as a “kind of pressure”, she said, “something never experienced during university years in Latin America.

Text Analysis

Title: Challenges and Barriers in Making the School Friendly

Analysis of the Introductory Section: “Challenges and Barriers in Making the School Friendly”

In the introductory section, Diana introduces the issue of parental involvement in schools generally, and in Latin America specifically. As the basis of her introductory argument, a series of conceptual dichotomies are constructed. The first emerges from the discrepancy between what Diana calls, on the one hand, “[students'] real knowledge and beliefs”, and on the other, “the literacy skills, the formal knowledge, and vision of life that students and community are *supposed* to bring to the formal educational settings” [emphasis added]. She adeptly reinforces and expands this dichotomy, reconceptualizing it also as the difference between “codes and knowledge managed by parents and students belonging to working class socio-economic strata” (citing Durston, 1999; Collins, 1971) and the “codes and knowledge used by traditional pedagogy, based on middle class culture”.

The introductory section also profiles the key concept of “responsive pedagogy”, identified as “a fundamental shift in the appreciation of the problem”. Attributes of responsive pedagogy (in Diana's terms) include “recognition of and respect for different cultures and values, and the understanding of learners as active participants in their own schooling (Kats, 1999)”. In her writing, responsive pedagogy gains meaning through its semantic opposition to “mainstream” or “traditional” pedagogies that “tend to blame parents and students for having a cultural deficit and a lack of literacy skills”. Establishment of these dichotomies leads to a key generalization in the introductory section:

In sum, the transformation of the school is a key in bridging the gap between school and community (Kats, 1999). On the contrary, as Friedel (1999) establishes, when schooling represents a cultural invasion which does not recognize the local culture, parents tend to remain outside looking in.

In a generically expected move, Diana then moves to profile the current situation regarding parental involvement in Colombian schools. Evaluating the effects of educational reform initiatives instated in 1994, she notes that “some researchers suggest that parental involvement is still poor (Herrera, 2002), and varies from one school to another (citing Castillo, 2003).

A few stylistic issues arise in her construction of the introductory argument. In her lexicogrammatical choices, Diana shows preference, on occasion, for awkward, passive structures that mask agency. In these cases, active forms would arguably have been preferable for sake of clarity and also, in order to provide information about the provenance of ideas. Examples of passive structures that might easily be transformed into active structures are as follows:

It has been considered that the involvement of parents in educational activities would be a key to achieve school efficiency...

...it is expected that the construction of common goals between parents... and schools will result in better management of the schools...

...it has been demonstrated that there is a close relation between low academic achievement and socio-economic status

In each of these examples, important information regarding *who* “considered”, “expected”, or “demonstrated” is missing.

Textually, the introductory section coheres well. It follows an organized, thematic progression, with topic sentences effectively encapsulating thematic interests of their respective paragraphs. The final paragraph, outlining aims of the proposed research, also constitutes an effective move from a textual point of view in its function as a bridge to information to come.

At the interpersonal level, information is transacted exclusively in the declarative mood. Diana makes no attempt to position herself in relation to claims made. She has also avoided reference to personal experience in the account, a decision that may be questionable from a contemporary conception of what qualitative research writing should include.

Analysis of the “Background” Section

The background section is divided into three sections. It begins with a two paragraph introductory preamble. The first section introduces the problem and provides reasons for conducting the study. The other two sections lay out the knowledge foundations in support of the research proposal. As is generically conventional in moves to provide background information, academic studies themselves appear as key clausal constituents from whose independent clauses necessary background information is projected (e.g. Delgado-Gaitan (1991) explained... / Crozier (2001) indicates... / A recent study conducted by De Gaetano (2007) demonstrated... / Other authors (Friedel, 1999), based on Freire’s theories, explain...).

The second section, entitled “Cultural Responsive Pedagogy” presents problems stemming from the implementation of national and international standards. It then moves to the issue of teachers’ “negative assumptions about minority children” which tend to ignore the “wealth of prior traditional knowledge” non-mainstream students bring to the classroom. Three subsequent paragraphs are then devoted to explicating the concept of responsive educational approaches, relying largely on material clauses describing actions of such approaches, and relational clauses for the

purpose of definition:

Table 7. Examples of material and relational processes

Material Processes
Responsive education approaches have started to address questions about the impact of this kind of education in students' lives.
Culturally responsive education seeks to contextualize the teaching – learning process.
...a culturally responsive approach of education prepares teachers to be sensitive to the cultures of their students and to use their understandings about how culture influences their daily teaching activities...
[A culturally responsive approach] also considers teaching as a multidimensional task...
This conception of education creates an environment where the students' culture, community and context are part of the learning basis...
Relational Processes
...cultural or language difference can be seen as markers of identity that should be maintained rather than being barriers to overcome (Stoicovy, 2002).
The culturally responsive education proposed by this approach is then oriented to make a classroom culturally relevant...

These clauses outline class attributes that distinguish culturally responsive approaches to pedagogy from mainstream approaches characterized by standardization and a deficit model of learning. The move to elaborate this conceptual dichotomy is particularly achieved well.

The third section, entitled “Parental Involvement”, serves to integrate the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy with the issue of parental involvement in students' educational development. Again, a conceptual contrast between “traditional” approaches and newer, culturally responsive approaches is highlighted, this time with a focus on “parents” rather than on pedagogy:

Material processes:

- ...traditional strategies require parents to have a formal background and knowledge in order to act in appropriate ways
- ...parental involvement policies treat all parents as if they had the same needs and experiences

Relational processes:

...the frameworks followed by these programs are based on white, middle-class parents, not addressing ethnic diversity which is a form of unacknowledged structural racism.

One of the most important outcomes of the cultural approach to parental involvement in this research was the growing sense that parents became more aware and active about social issues that affected them.

Again the dichotomy between responsive and traditional perspectives is convincingly maintained.

Diana employs a number of devices that ensure cohesion within the background section. In the introduction to the background section, she provides a brief, but useful, overview paragraph of the themes elaborated:

This research will be oriented by a Cultural Responsive Pedagogy approach which has shed new light on the perspective of parental involvement analysis, as well as the focus of the education system as a whole. Other research about parental involvement based on Freire's theoretical contributions, and some references to Colombian experiences on parental involvement will also orient the study.

Individual paragraphs within the three subsections of the background section also cohere because each tends to elaborate upon a single explicit theme.

Analysis of the “The Problem” section (including Research Questions)

In her brief “Problem” section, Diana specifies the focus of the proposed research (i.e. to analyse “how the teachers’ perceptions of their students’ [customs] and knowledge plays out within the educational settings”) and provides a list of research questions further delimiting the scope of inquiry. Mental processes within some of the research questions focus specifically on the beliefs of teachers (i.e. how do teachers “perceive”, “know”, “interpret” facets of their educational situations). Other questions are marked by relational processes indicating attempts to classify and define (e.g. “How is the relationship between different actors...?” / “What is the role

of each actor in the school?”). Because the research setting and its participants are named in relatively specific terms, the focus of the research questions can be more precisely specified.

From a textual perspective, the re-emergence of key themes (“teachers”, “parents” and “parental involvement” in schools) detailed in previous sections means the reader is not faced with new background information, ensuring ideational continuity and referential cohesion.

From an interpersonal perspective, this section, like others, represents a straightforward provision of information. The research questions, expressed in interrogative form, provide information in a clear, uncluttered manner.

Analysis of the “Research Framework” Section

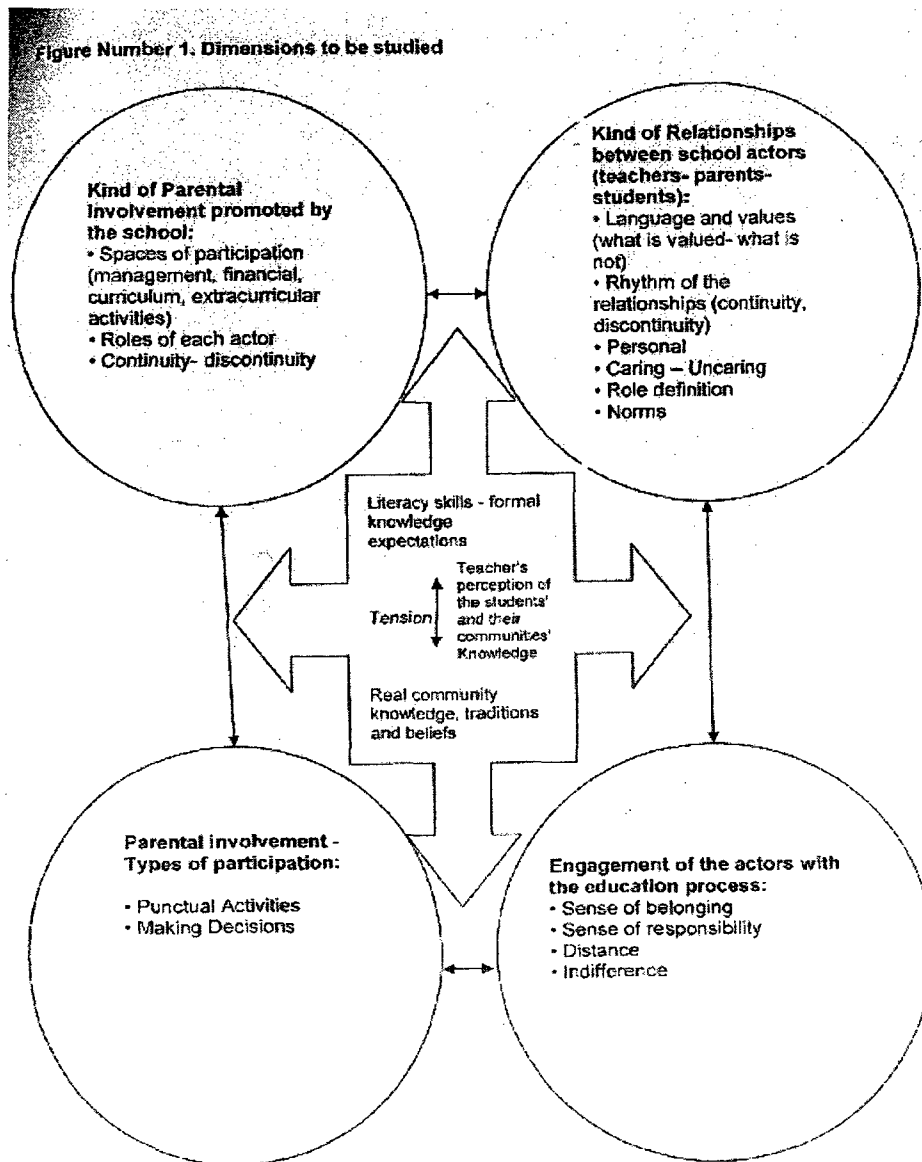
Relational processes predominated in this section designed to define and classify the research framework:

The core of the research will be the teachers' perceptions of [students'], [their parents'] and [community's] knowledge and culture.

The dimensions to be studied in relation to the aforementioned core, are the kind of relationships between the actors in the school; the kind of parental involvement promoted by the schools and the engagement of the actors with the educational process.

Of particular interest in this section is a full-page diagram that depicts various elements of the study focus in dynamic interrelation.

Figure 3. Diagram used to visualize the research problem



There is a direct correlation between nominal groups appearing in the text (e.g. “the kind of relationships between the actors in the school” / “the kind of parental involvement promoted by the schools” / “the engagement of the actors with the educational process”) and the labels that appear on this diagram. The only shortcoming to this otherwise well achieved move relates to the way the diagram is integrated with the text that surrounds it. Although labels on the diagram find parallels

in the surrounding text, missing are more precise, spatially orienting Circumstances that direct the reader's attention from the text to specific locations on the diagram (e.g. "in the upper left quadrant" / "at the centre of the diagram") in order to fully explicate it. The addition of these Circumstances of location would more fully bind diagram and text in their co-constitutive relationship of meaning making.

Analysis of "The Importance of the Problem" Section

Various features of the text function to establish the importance of the research problem. The first paragraph, for example, classifies the nominal group "parental involvement as a means of democratising education and improving its outcomes" as an issue of "international concern". The text then moves to establish that "there is still an enormous gap between school and communities". Although no background information is cited in support of this claim, its acceptance must be taken as given if the argument is to be upheld. This move might have been strengthened with reference to other studies that support the idea that a gap between school and community continues to exist.

The second paragraph reintroduces the concept of the "responsive pedagogy approach", and reiterates the assumption that "this problem is a consequence of the cultural invasion and disregard for local culture characteristic of the traditional school". Nominal group "Other studies" is profiled to support the argument that "a change in the teacher's perception about their student's, parent's, and community's cultures is a key in bridging that gap between school and community." Specific citations referencing these studies are not included here, but likely should have been.

Most importantly, the final paragraph of "The Importance of the Problem"

section functions to establish a knowledge gap in the Colombian educational context by suggesting that effects of the 1994 Reform Policy mandating increased parental involvement in schools have not been evaluated from the specific perspective of responsive pedagogy.

Analysis of the “Methodology” Section

In accordance with generic convention, this section serves to profile a series of steps in Diana's research methodology. She begins by labelling her study “qualitative”, and defends her choice of methodology in the following relational clause:

This approach is the most suitable given that the research will emphasize on [sic] the school processes, and because of the situational context analysis is very important in the problem to be studied. [sic]

Although grammatical errors and a lack of clarity of expression are evident, the statement serves to contextualize the methodological steps that follow.

Steps in the methodology are then profiled through a series of future tense declaratives (e.g. “Data will be collected...” / “I will choose 1 school...” / “It will be selected...” / “The sources of data collection will be...”). This is an entirely conventional move. Through it, Diana takes care to lay out the parameters of the study's focus in fairly specific detail through the use of Circumstance of location (e.g. one school “in the borough Comuna 1 in the city of Cali”) without going as far as to provide a school name. In order to provide a richer description of the research setting, space is also devoted to describing the Comuna 1 community and its typical residents:

This borough is an urban area inhabited by 65.700 people. It is made up of 23 neighbourhoods, and there are 28 elementary schools in the area (DPM, 2005). Almost all the people who live in the vicinity are poor and the rate of displaced population is high. The population started to arrive in this area 60 years ago, displaced from the countryside to the city by a violent social conflict. They have worked hard to

meet basic needs like having drinkable water, health centres and schools. Hence there is a strong sense of community, and the participation in community processes is a deep-rooted tradition in the district.

This detailed description is important in establishing why the research setting and its particular inhabitants are unique and worthy of study.

The section then moves to three subsections detailing her methodological approach entitled “Observation”, “Interviews”, and “Document Review” respectively. Again, in each of these sections, Diana relies on a series of material clauses in the future tense to outline specific steps (e.g. “The classrooms will be observed...” / “Teachers of the school will be interviewed...” / “Each interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed” / “The minutes of School Government meetings will also be analysed...”). Care is also taken to provide reasons for the methodological choices she has made, as the following clauses evidence:

The objective of these observations is to identify the kind of relationship established in those informal spaces.

The purpose of these interviews is to know the parents’ perception of the school and of their role in the formal educational process.

It is expected that those documents extend the understanding of the educational context and suggest avenues for the research.

The process of data collection is summarized in an easy-to-read table labelled “Dimensions to be Studied and Source of Data” under the subsection heading “Summary of Data Collection”. This table is very helpful for the reader.

A final subsection in the methodology section is devoted to Data Analysis.

This section also follows established generic convention in profiling steps:

Data analysis will be made both during the data collection process and after when all data is gathered. Field notes, transcripts of interviews and material from document analysis will be coded, summarized and interpreted according to the objective of the research.

Among her methodological descriptions, this section, in particular, is too brief and would have benefited from more specific detailing of analysis procedures. The reader

is left wondering which tools and what approach will be involved in coding and interpretation of the data. Also, there is no reference to methodology literature that might lend support and precision regarding how the analysis of the data should be conducted.

From a textual perspective, Diana's Methodology section is cohesive and well organized. She makes use of topic sentences to provide structure and order to paragraph-level presentation of information. Examples of sentences whose textual 'sign-posting' functions are notable include the following:

The sources of data will be observation, semi structured interviews and analysis of documents. Each of those is described below:

There will be observations of three kinds of spaces: observation of formal meetings between parents and school representatives, observation of the classrooms, and observation of informal encounters between parents and teachers.

In both cases, information in rheme position of these sentences becomes the theme of subsequent paragraphs, facilitating an ordered, logical progression of ideas.

Information following these sign-posting sentences is then presented in parallel order to that indicated.

When considering instances of intra-textual referencing (a concern of the textual metafunction), one possible shortcoming in the methodology section is Diana's failure to point the reader to the three interview protocol forms available as appendices to the proposal. These protocol forms, which provide a list of interview questions, constitute valuable supplementary information and readers should be explicitly directed to these in the proposal text body.

From an interpersonal perspective, the methodology section represents a direct transaction of information in the declarative mood. The use of the modal / tense marker "will" in the description of methodological steps construes a sense of directness and certainty regarding the appropriateness of her approach to the problem

at hand.

Analysis of the “Ethical Issues” Section

The final section of the proposal does not fully achieve what the title promises. It mainly employs a series of material clauses to profile methodological steps to be taken to obtain participant consent and ensure confidentiality. While consent and confidentiality are important facets of ethical research conduct, missing is any discussion or elaboration of potential dangers that might exist in conducting a study of this nature. What, if anything, is at stake? Diana has provided information about “what” she will do, but not “why” she will do it.

In passing, there is some conceptual confusion about research terminology inherent in the statement: “The name of the institution as well as the individual identity of the participants will remain anonymous in both data analysis and report.” Evidently, anonymity can be ensured in the report because steps will be taken to ensure readers cannot identify groups or individuals from information in the text. However, only confidentiality (rather than anonymity) can be ensured during data analysis because the researcher herself will have knowledge of the identity of individuals she interviews.

From a textual perspective, the ethical considerations lack a clear introductory statement to establish expectations regarding themes to be discussed. However, individual paragraphs in this section are cohesive and focus on specific thematic concerns:

- how consent will be obtained from teachers
- how consent will be obtained from parents
- anonymity regarding names in the report and analysis

From an Interpersonal perspective, this section represents a direct transaction of information in the declarative mood. The use of passive structures masking agency (“This research will be conducted...”/ “The participants [*sic*] consent will be asked...” maintains a tone typical of traditional scientific reports concerned with construing a sense of objectivity and the possibility of replicability (even though replicability is not a stated goal of this qualitative report).

Analysis of the “References” Section

All sources are ordered alphabetically and presented in APA format required by the course instructor.

Case 3: Esther

About the Participant

Esther was born and lived in Iran until the eighth grade. At that point, she moved with family to Toronto, Canada where she lived for the next twenty years. Although Farsi was the first language she spoke at home, years of living and schooling in Toronto made English the most comfortable mode of communication for her.

She attended high school in Toronto where she said she learned some of the foundations of academic writing. Immediately following high school, she began undergraduate studies in the sciences, enrolling in a number of courses in math and the social sciences as well. Because her desire was to work in languages, however, she changed fields part way through her undergraduate studies, and finished with an undergraduate degree in linguistics (specializing in French and Spanish). Instruction in her linguistics courses was conducted in English. Longer, academic style essays were rarely required.

Esther had never taken a research methodology course before, so many of the concepts that shape research writing were new to her. At the time of the study, she was completing the final required courses for the M.A. in Educational Studies program, and was undertaking the first steps in planning her M.A. dissertation. Work toward producing a proposal for Introduction to Research in Education was thus motivated, in part, by the need to create a more elaborate M.A. dissertation proposal in the near future. "I am passionate about the topic, which is going to be my thesis", she told me. She said she regarded the proposal for Introduction to Research in Education as a "trial run", and that in her M.A. thesis proposal, she would go into greater depth on

the same topic. Following completion of the M.A. program, she planned to continue research on a related topic in a Ph.D. program.

It should be noted that religion played a particularly important role in Esther's development. Raised as a Muslim, Esther converted to Christianity in 2004.

Study Proposed by the Student

Entitled "Building a Critical Interfaith Pedagogy", Esther proposed a study based on the presupposition that current educational systems in the world have been ideologically corrupted, and that their curricula are filled with overt and hidden messages of hatred towards peoples of other faith. The study was designed to establish to what degree this presupposition holds true. A first step would involve an in-depth review of current literature on how religious conflict manifests itself in school systems in predominantly Muslim, Christian or Jewish regions of the Middle East and South Asia. Next, the proposal called for interviews with 14-20 immigrant students who have recently attended schools in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Israel (regions in which religious conflict has been extreme in recent history). Interview questions would explore the personal views of students, and establish how the notion of "otherness", related to religion, has been portrayed in school systems in these countries. Findings emerging from the literature review and analysis of interview data would help to determine whether negative ideas about followers of other religions are conveyed directly through school curricula or indirectly during other opportunities for indoctrination during school hours. Esther suggested that if widespread intolerance is indeed perpetrated through school systems, then movement toward what she terms a "critical interfaith pedagogy" is warranted. A critical interfaith pedagogy would empower students (through the Freirian notion of

conscientization), by allowing them to form just and informed views about people of other faiths.

The Proposal Development Process

The idea for the proposal emerged directly from Esther's life experiences. She claimed she often thinks about issues of politics, religion and philosophy of life. Elements of her own complex and mixed religious and cultural identity led her to explore the particular topic of how faith "otherness" is portrayed in schools:

I come from a Muslim background and I converted [to Christianity]..So I do have some attachments to the Muslims, ...but I also identify with Christians and Jews. ...Because I am so attached to the source [of the issue], I feel so emotional about it. It is such an important issue for me.

Previous experience as a schoolgirl in the Middle East afforded the thematic basis for the study, years in which she was often forced to "burn the [US and Israeli] flag in the morning for celebrations". She described memorable experiences that provided the impetus for conducting her study:

Every day in our morning prayer we had to say "Death to Israel. Death to America." We couldn't not say that; We would be punished. So we had to participate in these death wishes and all that. So, that is what I want to know, to get more confirmation if that exists. And I have already talked to others...from Jordan and from other places in a casual way to see if this is something that rings true, and they said yes... yes...

In fact, Esther went on to suggest that the exploration of and struggle against hostile forms of indoctrination in schools has become a key aim in her life. Her choice of topic was thus highly constrained in an experiential and emotional sense. "This could be my life", she stated. "That is how strongly I feel about it".

To find material for the background section of her proposal, Esther relied largely on articles posted on Internet news sites and sites dedicated to issues of religion and spirituality. Articles that she perceived useful were printed out in their

entirety and read with an eye for information to include in the proposal. Notes relating to specific information in articles were recorded directly on the printed article pages. During reading, when Esther came across sections she believed were well-written and supportive of her planned arguments, she simply wrote 'good' beside them in the margin. She returned to these later to paraphrase ideas for the emerging proposal draft and in some cases, to transcribe them directly.

Production of the proposal draft was a gradual 'building up' process, but never a 'paring down' process. Throughout the term, she added new information to the background section. At no point, however, did she edit anything out during subsequent redrafting. This required her to continually prioritise in her own mind which information was necessary to include.

To ensure her methodology section was acceptable, Esther said she reread chapters in the textbooks and referred to material posted on FirstClass (in particular, the proposal outline available in Appendix B). Because she felt the textbook was so helpful, she took few notes in class regarding how to structure the proposal.

Stylistic Concerns

Esther said she tried to maintain a formal or objective tone throughout the proposal. This meant avoiding usage of first person "I". "All my life, I have felt if I use 'I', it doesn't sound academic", she said. "Even though [the instructor] is all right with that, ...I am still sticking to the old rules". In addition, she claimed she avoided infusing the proposal with personal views and elements of her own life story. This constraint may also have been based on awareness that her topic is politically sensitive, and even potentially harmful to herself if the writing should end up in the hands of religious radicals. In this sense, perceived audience clearly extended beyond

the university confines and acted as an important constraint on how content was presented.

Esther suggested she also opted for a more “structured” format. Comfort with highly structured writing came from previous scientific / lab style writing, she said, in which the writing process is more “like a simple recipe”. Beyond that, she said she preferred a structured format because it makes her feel secure: “I see things in black and white, so I have to go with a structure. When things are out of structure, I am shaky”.

Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process

A key challenge (based on the need to extend the class proposal into her formal M.A. thesis proposal) was to produce work that would less likely offend the sensibilities of those with more radical religious views. Aware from the start that she was broaching a politically sensitive topic, Esther said she was not sure how to go about it safely:

I don't know how to put it in a way that is not going to endanger me because in our countries [Middle Eastern Islamic nations], there is no freedom of speech, basically. There is a lot of punishment. So I don't know how to go about it safely... I don't want to compromise the truth for it either.

Next, time constraints proved an obstacle, perhaps more so than a specific challenge. Realizing that it would be impossible to incorporate all the literature required for her M.A. thesis proposal into the Introduction to Research in Education proposal, she simply resigned herself to the idea of including more in-depth information at a later date. “It was a mock proposal, after all”, she suggested. The formal thesis proposal would be expanded to look at Christian fundamentalist groups in the US and the school situation in India as well.

Text Analysis

Proposal Title: “Building a Critical Interfaith Pedagogy”

Analysis of the “Research Problem” Section

In constructing her research problem, Esther relied on a series of material and relational clauses describing the problematic state of affairs in schools in which religious indoctrination is most aggressively pursued:

[Children's] minds are...shaped about 'the other religious'

usually, the knowledge imparted to children in schools around the globe about people of other faiths is not a very positive or impartial one...

misguiding [*sic*] information...is conveyed in classrooms...

Children are manipulated and indoctrinated...

Educational systems around the globe are responsible to some degree for initiating and perpetuating this intergroup, or more specifically, “interfaith conflict”.

From the start, the premise that hatred and conflict are perpetuated through schools is firmly established. Lacking, however, is acceptable scholarly 'evidence' that this is, in fact, the case. First, Esther fails to include quotes or citations from other scholarly work in support of this idea. More importantly, perhaps, Esther has missed (or avoided) a valuable opportunity to include narrative elements from her own first-hand experience at an elementary school in Iran. A relational identifying clause complex at the end of the Research Problem section simply asserts the inadequately supported presupposition in explicit terms:

the theoretical foundation of the study is the presupposition that the current educational systems in the world [are] corrupted and that their curriculum [*sic*] is filled with hidden and overt messages of hatred towards people of 'the other faith'

A second ideational shortcoming of the Research Problem section is borne out by imprecision in nominal groups. For example, the following general labels appear:

“children's minds”, “the knowledge imparted to children in schools”, “education systems around the world”. The reader can only speculate which children, knowledge, and educational systems Esther is referring to due to the generality of these terms. Likewise, clauses profiling processes of manipulation and indoctrination are not qualified with specific Circumstances of location (time or space) or Manner. Again, the reader is left to speculate where and when this undesirable phenomenon is taking place.

In addition to conceptual imprecision and an unwarranted push toward generalization, agency is concealed through the use of passive projecting structures (“It is speculated that...” / “It is suggested that...” / “It is further argued that...”). The passive voice in these clauses further masks the identities of scholars or individuals who have “speculated”, “suggested” or “argued” in these cases. Nor are these assertions linked to specific references to the field literature, undermining the confirmability of her ideas. Evidence regarding the possible provenance of ideas appears only later in the Research Problem section with the following assertion: “this information is based on the personal experience of the researcher, her observations and deductions as a result of years of living in various parts of the globe, and being in contact with people of different religious backgrounds and cultures having conflicting and opposing faiths and ideologies”. However, even this assertion remains unacceptably vague (i.e. she states she has lived in “various parts of the globe” rather than naming specific regions).

From a textual point of the view, the section coheres due to its continued focus on only four clausal participants (children / educational systems / indoctrinating information / persons of 'other' religions). All of these ideational participants are profiled in the opening paragraph. They then reappear in subsequent paragraphs as

Themes in paragraph topic sentences (e.g. “Children...are manipulated and indoctrinated...”/ “Educational systems are responsible for initiating and perpetuating...interfaith conflict”). The final two paragraphs shift focus to the source of the information presented (Esther's experience) and to the theoretical foundation of the proposed study, linking back to and encapsulating assertions made in earlier paragraphs.

Certain sentences contain an overabundance of embedded dependent clauses, and are taxing on the reader. The following is an obvious example that needs to be broken into more manageable parts to improve readability:

It is suggested that misguiding information that is sometimes carefully and intentionally designed for the political agenda of the people in power that control the educational systems of these nations is conveyed in classrooms specifically created for prompting a 'hostile attitude' towards 'the other religious' which these power structures see as an indispensable means to start and perpetuate hostility, violence, and war against 'the other' in order to ensure their own sustenance [*sic*].

Formatting inconsistencies also arise in this section. Specifically, a number of nominal groups are presented in double quotation marks, presumably for emphasis. Examples are “the other religious [*sic*]”, “interfaith conflict”, “critical interfaith pedagogy”. Other elements are placed within single quotation marks, also signaling emphasis (e.g. 'hostile attitude', 'the other', 'the other religious', 'the other faith'). Consistency and adherence to APA (American Psychological Association) format is required.

Interpersonally, a single comment adjunct positions the author ideologically in relation to the ideas presented, revealing her attitude toward information provided (“the knowledge imparted...is *unfortunately* not a very positive or impartial one” [emphasis added]). As such, Esther likely expects that her audience shares in the negative view toward aggressive forms of indoctrination in Middle Eastern and South

Asian school systems, however seems hesitant to assert her own position too forcefully.

Analysis of the “Literature Review” Section

The Literature Review section conforms to research writing convention by profiling the ideas of various scholars in the field. It follows a pattern in which the findings are projected, largely through verbal processes (e.g. “Paul Watson (2005) reports...” / “He...continues...” / “He discusses....” / “Saigol (2004) (affirms) by pointing out...” / “...he observes...” / “...Meehan maintains... / “Stalinsky (2005) adds...” / Wagner (2007...observes...). The projected clauses, themselves, describe in some detail how curricula, textbooks, and school-based activities encourage hatred, mistrust or violence toward members of other religions:

Projected material clauses:

...that the curricula and textbooks in Pakistan encouraged prejudice, bigotry and discrimination, [and] incited militancy and violence.

...[that] Israeli school textbooks as well as children's storybooks portray Palestinians and Arabs as 'murderers', 'rioters', 'suspicious'...

...that children from a very early age are taught about jihad for the sake of Allah...

...that Iran's schools urge students to become martyrs in a global holy war...

Approximately 40 percent of the text in the Literature Review section (428 of 1057 words) consists of direct quotes from the literature. Arguably, this high proportion of unaltered source material suggests Esther should strive more to transform text through summary and paraphrase. However, as it stands, the patchwork of quotations flows adequately well.

Other sequences of text are salient because of a vocabulary usage uncharacteristic of Esther's writing style up to that point. Although not signaled as a

direct quote, the following sequence, for example, echoes the source text remarkably closely [emphasis added]:

Esther's text:

...It is aimed at combating hidden power structures that manipulate through creedal fanaticism, zealotry, and triumphalism leading to discrimination, conflict and violence.

Source text:

...people focus on the negative contributions that religions make to the world— fanaticism, zealotry, and triumphalism leading to discrimination, conflict and violence. (from Puett, T. *On Transforming our World: Critical Pedagogy for Interfaith Education*)

The bulk of the literature review is subsumed under the subsection title “A review of current public schools' educational programs”. There is, however, a clear mismatch in scope between this subsection title and the content of the literature review. Although it is true that subsequent paragraphs in the section focus on school curricula, activities, and the content of textbooks promoting religious division, information relates exclusively to educational resources and practices in Middle Eastern and South Asian countries, or in other words, countries that are currently embroiled in religious and political turmoil (Pakistan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran). The tendency toward generalizing from these specific instances to a broader global context is unwarranted without further evidence.

In general, although cohesion in the Literature Review section as a whole could be improved, individual paragraphs show sufficient internal cohesion. Each paragraph elaborates upon a Theme signaled in its respective topic sentence. The solid array of examples provided in support of claims leads the reader to one clear, albeit implicit, conclusion – that facets of the Pakistani, Israeli, Saudi Arabian, Iranian school systems can and do promote violence and hatred toward peoples of other religions. However, the literature review would have benefited from a concluding

paragraph, tying information presented in this section together and reinforcing the above conclusion more explicitly.

Analysis of the Research Questions Section

Two main research questions are presented in this section:

How otherness as is related to religion is viewed in public schools around the globe?
[sic]

Is this knowledge transmitted directly through school curriculum [sic], or is it indirectly conveyed through hidden curriculum [sic] (school field trips, indirect messages of fear and hostility)?

As is evident in other sections of the proposal, categorizations here are not specific enough to serve as focal points for effective inquiry. In the first question, passive structures obscure essential information, specifically, the identity of the persons whose 'views' will be documented. Circumstances of location ("in public schools" and "around the globe") are also inadequately specified, given that the school systems Esther will study are located simply in the Middle East and in South Asia. The second question is more precise, although a focus on the curricula and practices of a large number of different schools or school systems may prove an impossibly large undertaking for one novice researcher.

Esther has also included a list of questions that will be asked of study participants ("former students of the public school systems of the countries being studied") in the "Research Questions" section. Although these questions have been designed to reflect the research questions, they are seemingly misplaced in the Research Questions section. By convention, they might be better introduced as part of the proposed methodology, or better yet, referenced in the methodology section as interview protocol, and placed in an appendix.

Analysis of the “Rationale” Section

Esther establishes her rationale for conducting the proposed study through the following condition bound, relational process:

The rationale behind carrying [out] this research is that if school is to some degree responsible for promoting or perpetuating hatred towards people of the other faith and therefore justifying violence, then adapting [*sic*] a critical interfaith pedagogy that embraces difference, diversity, tolerance and respect will lead to global peace and reduce interfaith conflict.

From this assertion, the reader may conclude that the study is designed to provide evidence that more tolerant pedagogies are required to reduce hatred and violence. At the same time, this rationale appears to be a non-sequitur. Even if Esther's study establishes that certain school systems appear to perpetuate hatred and violence, those findings cannot in turn be used to support the idea that “critical interfaith pedagogy”, itself a social and political agenda, will lead to peace and understanding. Critical interfaith pedagogy is not being evaluated here at all, but rather, the level of hatred or mistrust that is perpetuated in school. Herein lies an ideational flaw that impacts coherence of the proposal as a whole.

Potential confusion also arises in her support for this rationale through reference to the work of Puett (2005): “There is a need to explore *interfaith education*’s role in public education, as education for life in global society” [emphasis added]. Interfaith education, as described by Puett (2005), has emerged from a movement with an activist agenda interested in developing deeper understanding between peoples of diverse religions. Esther's study has not been designed to explore instances of “interfaith education” described in these terms, but rather, “interfaith conflict”, the presumed status quo in treatment of other religions in schools in the Middle East and South Asia. Interfaith education is a solution and an ideal, in other words, and not an element in direct support of the rationale. Although the focus on

interfaith education links back to the proposal title (“Building a Critical Interfaith Pedagogy”) and to nominal groups in the literature review that include the term “interfaith” (e.g. “interfaith conflict” / “critical interfaith pedagogy” / “interfaith education”), from an ideational perspective, this continued focus is tangential to the rationale, not its essence.

In realizing the interpersonal metafunction, information in the “Rationale” section is transacted strictly in the declarative mood, without expression of authorial doubt or hedging (e.g. may, might, could). As such, there is a rhetorical forcefulness to the text in promoting one specific solution over others. No sense of doubt mitigates the claim that “Critical Interfaith Pedagogy” may remedy a problematic situation in the Middle East and South Asia. In Esther’s simple and direct terms, “critical interfaith pedagogy...will lead to global peace and reduce interfaith conflict”.

Analysis of the “Methodology” Section

In accordance with generic convention, Esther employs a series to material processes in the future tense to describe steps in her proposed methodology:

- ...the study will focus on...
- ...the study will be conducted...
- ...three distinct groups will be interviewed
- This method will be pretested...
- The sample will be chosen...
- Interviews will be conducted...
- These will be paraphrased and summarized...

The scope of the study is more clearly delineated in this section than in previous ones. The reader is told, for example, that “[to] narrow down the study, the study will focus on the schooling in [the] four countries of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Israel and how otherness in terms of religion is portrayed both in their regular and hidden

curriculum”. However, beyond this national level of focus, the section falls victim to much of the lack of precision existing in previous sections. In particular, the nature of some key nominal group constituents needs further elaboration. For example, the reader is told that the researcher “collects, reviews, describes and interprets the data using *a conceptual framework*” [emphasis added]. However, the nature of this “conceptual framework” is not laid out for the benefit of the reader.

Another salient ideational issue emerges in the use of clausal Circumstances to define scope of the proposed study. The reader is told that two methodologies will be used “in order to obtain a more complete and in-depth picture of the reality of current educational systems in the world”. In actuality, a global, in-depth picture of education systems is not realistically attainable. In this instance, Esther needs to narrow and more clearly delimit the parameters of her focus. The scope of the literature search, elaborated through a relational process, is also far too broad to be feasible for a single masters level researcher (i.e. the “20th century public school curriculum (from elementary to high school level)”).

Other clausal Circumstances functioning within descriptions of methodological steps also require increased precision. For example, the reader is told, “interviews will be conducted...in any place that is quiet”. Ethical review would likely force changes here. A “quiet” place could be an office or empty classroom. It could equally be a park at midnight or a respondent's apartment, raising ethical concerns and stumbling blocks for approval.

From a textual perspective, content of individual paragraphs is, in general, introduced and encapsulated by the topical Theme in respective topic sentences. There are, however, some instances of unwarranted thematic drift within paragraphs. For

example, within one paragraph that should be focusing specifically on the composition of interview groups (a question of population sampling), Esther introduces unrelated topical Themes (“a set of at least five [interview] questions” / “the tools”/ “ethical issues and confidentiality”). These themes should arguably be elaborated in their own separate paragraphs.

The section as a whole is constructed with a tone of seeming distanced objectivity. Of note is Esther's consistent reference to herself as “the researcher”. In addition, passive structures mask Esther's identity as Actor in all methodological steps (e.g. “the study will be conducted...” / “this method will be pretested...”). Qualitative convention might allow use greater use of first person reference (e.g. “I” rather than “the researcher”) and a movement away from conventions typical of quantitative scientific report.

Analysis of the “Data Analysis” Section

Esther has created a separate section describing data analysis procedures. In brief terms, she details how she will treat information she gathers. In line with generic convention, data analysis steps are introduced as material processes (e.g. “the researcher will look at”/ “a precoding system will be used” / “the results...will be shared...”). However, there is insufficient detail proffered regarding the specific coding and analysis regime that will be used, particularly in the case of data obtained from interviews. The reader is simply told, “a precoding system will be used in order to organize the data in an orderly fashion and focus the findings to reach at [*sic*] concrete conclusions”. In addition, no reference is made to research methodology literature that might guide the data analysis procedure.

The interpersonal metafunction in the “Data Analysis” section is realized in much the same manner as it is in the “Methodology” section preceding it. Information is transacted in the declarative mood. Again, passive structures mask Esther's identity as Actor in the analysis process, an approach not entirely in line with conventional qualitative procedure.

Analysis of the “Possible Sources of Bias / Limitations” Section

At the ideational level, concepts introduced in the opening paragraph of this section require disambiguation. Specifically, the reader is told that the researcher “will be looking at four different countries to gain a general understanding from different perspectives in order to reduce the possibility of bias”. First, it is not clear what the “general understanding” she hopes to achieve actually entails. Instead of accepting and actively embracing bias and subjectivity in participant comments as an integral element of her research (a mosaic or patchwork of individual voices), she seems to be striving for some external objective truth beyond what individuals say, a generalizable snapshot of reality. While convincing patterns may emerge from her research in specific locations and with specific groups of participants, this search for ‘unbiased’ and ‘generalizable’ truth runs contrary to the goals espoused by most experienced qualitative researchers. This holds true for the second paragraph as well, in which Esther expresses concern that journal articles used in her analysis of field literature “may naturally convey [the authors'] own [perceptions] of the situation and therefore be tainted by their political/religious affiliations and agendas”. Again, this assertion seemingly skirts the main issue, stressed in most qualitative research methodology literature, that all writing reflects the views and intentions of its creator, and that

consensus, rather than objective “truth”, is a more suitable goal in analyzing research data. In addition, discussing her interviews, Esther asserts “it is of utmost importance that [participants] can express their true feelings and facts”. Instead of focusing on the issue of “confirmability” of results (based solely on the weight of supporting evidence), the text focuses on means of documenting a general truth that may actually transcend the evidence itself.

Interpersonally, the transaction of information is achieved in the declarative mood. Attempts at hedging are clearly evidenced in the following relational clause: “A potential possible source of bias could be...”. The noun “source” is redundantly (and awkwardly) modified by two classifiers construing doubt (potential, possible). The copula is also modified by a modal auxiliary (“could”) construing doubt. Given the subjective nature of her focus, however, this approach to hedging assertions may be warranted.

Analysis of the “Recommendations for Further Research and Implications of the Study” Section

Contrary to convention, Esther has included a recommendations section before the study has actually been carried out. Evidenced in this section are the same ideational problems involving scope and focus described in relation to the Methodology section. Through a process of mental projection (e.g. “she believes...”), Esther profiles the following condition-bound relational clause, identifying “the next step” that should be undertaken:

[The researcher] believes that if the results and findings indicate that the current ‘interfaith pedagogy’ in the above countries is in fact biased and if these results could be to some degree representative of a general intolerant interfaith education at the global scale, then the next step would be to research methodologies by which a critical interfaith pedagogy could be implemented and incorporated in the curriculum of our schools.

The ideational schism inherent between content promised (a study proposal about “Building a Critical Interfaith Pedagogy”) and content delivered (a plan to explore interfaith conflict in contemporary Middle Eastern and South Asian schools) is directly evidenced here. The question of what the nominal group “interfaith pedagogy” refers to also arises because this concept has not been adequately defined in preceding sections. The same problematic issue of scope and transferability of results also re-emerges, with a stated desire to 'generalize' results to the global level (“if these results could be to some degree representative of a general intolerant interfaith education at the global scale”).

Finally, this section contains an assertion that might be more usefully contained in the “Rationale” section: “The results of this study could therefore be used for policy reform, curriculum modification and ultimately promoting interfaith peace.” Because the results of the study are not yet available, this seems a purpose or rationale, rather than a recommendation.

Case 4: Fugen

About the Participant

Born in Toronto, Canada to a French Canadian mother and Japanese immigrant father, Fugen grew up speaking English as a native language. His undergraduate studies were punctuated by a number of shifts in field. Starting in a bachelor of commerce program, he later switched to political science, and then to social psychology, before finally settling on and completing a degree in social anthropology. With a desire to explore potential topics for his M.A. thesis, Fugen also completed two graduate level courses at the University of Toronto as a part-time special student before entry into the M.A. Educational Studies program. At the time of this study, Fugen was enrolled in three courses in his first term of the program.

Although Fugen had little experience writing for research purposes before entry into the M.A. in Educational Studies program, he said he had had some training in research methodology, having spent one semester as a research assistant in studies related to learning theory. He had also taken a course on statistical research methods.

Although not certain about his future plans, Fugen said he was considering continuing his education at the Ph.D. level. Career-wise, he expressed interest in working for the government in educational policy planning. For this reason, he was interested specifically in policy research, expressing a desire to produce work that would be interesting to policy bodies in government, and perhaps more likely to draw future research grant funding. Work in Introduction to Research in Education he considered a contribution towards completion of his M.A. dissertation, which he hoped to prepare on a similar theme.

Study Proposed by the Student

The title of Fugen's proposal was "Citizenship education and democracy: Teachers constructing social capital" and was designed to answer the following questions:

What is the form and structure of dominant educational discourses when re-conceptualized in terms of social capital?

When applying the experience of England, how does the Ontario form of democratic participation reflect the pervasive adoption of Third Way policy as represented by the citizenship education curriculum in England?

In Fugen's words, the study would "explore the primary forces that shape the specific characteristics that are reproduced and reified by agents involved in educational practice (policy workers, administrators, teachers, parents and students)".

The Proposal Development Process

Fugen claimed he was familiar with much of the background knowledge required to construct his proposal because it relied on themes explored in previous course work. Specifically, he had studied the impact of *globalization* in a fourth year political science course. Undergraduate anthropology courses had contributed foundational knowledge relating to processes of *cultural reproduction*. Finally, an understanding of *citizenship theory* was carried over from other graduate level courses. These were all concepts he felt had an important bearing on the framework for his study. "Everything that has led me here supports my knowledge base for this", he claimed.

The writing process began with Fugen revisiting a book (*Hidden Knowledge: Organized Labour in the Information Age* (Livingstone et al., 2003)), co-written by a professor and personal mentor at the University of Toronto. Stating his belief that

Livingstone is “probably the number one theorist in the world today in sociology and work”, he felt it would be useful to examine chapter headings and make use of the sources cited in that particular book. This was the “safest place to start”, he said, because he was familiar with many of the core ideas presented in the book. Other resources collected for use in Fugen's proposal came from other graduate level classes. These consisted, for the most part, of notes and photocopied materials. Much of this material was stored in binders and organized by class and date, and was fairly easy to access.

To create the background section for the study, Fugen cut and pasted a number of segments from previous papers produced for a course called Citizenship, Pedagogy and School Community into his proposal draft. He insisted, however that this practice “wasn't straight copy and paste; it was definitely editing”, a process in which he attempted to alter pasted segments to ensure logical fit with the emerging flow of ideas in the proposal.

As the proposal came together, Fugen exploited peer-feedback sessions in class for advice on how to improve the writing. In particular, despite having amassed a significant amount of material for his background section, he remained unclear about his focus and specific research questions. In a sense, he felt lost in the literature. Class discussion helped him narrow his specific research problem:

The class discussion... that was really good. They asked “but what exactly, in a sentence, are you trying to argue?” ... That was a moment for me that helped me in my editing process [to realize] “OK, there is a specific thing in the research I am focusing on and the way I edit the rest of my paper can be based on this... I can refine it.”

Early peer review sessions also prompted an important shift in the focus of the study. “I was going to examine policy, and use education as an example,” he said. After receiving what he described as “a really bad reaction [laugh]” from the class, he

decided to change the focus to explore how teachers construct social capital, a topic more directly implicating educational issues. As such, peer review sessions pushed Fugen to define his terms more specifically, and revealed, for him, some important gaps in his conceptual understandings. Above all, he noted that peer feedback throughout the term made him realize his writing was “too abstract, too jargony”. For example, he recalled trying to elaborate on the abstract notion of “educational policy as a cultural tool”. Articulation in a group setting made him think, “maybe I don’t know what I am doing here”. The experience was pivotal in his development of a sense of audience for his writing, he believed.

Crafting of the methodology section also presented particular challenges for Fugen. At first he was unsure of which research tools to use, and how he would “measure” the objects of his inquiry. This experience prompted him to seek the assistance of the professor at a late stage in the term. In the end, however, he conceded that his methodology was underdeveloped and lacking in precision.

Stylistic Concerns

Fugen expressed a personal preference for a more complicated, abstract style of writing. This preference had developed, he believed, through contact with reading materials in previous courses, and particularly with readings in the field of social anthropology:

The material I've been interested in has been more challenging, more philosophical. I guess I look down [on writing] when it is too simple because all the stuff I was interested in in my undergrad was 'edgy' and 'new' and written in that style of language. When I read simple [accounts of what was done in a study], I roll my eyes.

He suggested that good writing in the field of anthropology, in particular, was by nature “abstract” and “jargony”, and it was that style of language he was intent on

reproducing. “These are the 'big ideas', and part of being in academia is always being part of what is new, popular...like fashion or music in a certain way”, he suggested. Evidently, for Fugen, writing well meant quickly adopting the lexical idiosyncrasies of the field. His own writing was “a dumbed down, less abstract version of what [respected scholars in the field] are doing”, he claimed.

Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process

Fugen admitted to initial confusion about writing expectations in Introduction to Research in Education, but said his understanding had developed progressively throughout the course. By reading proposals written by other people in the class and by engaging in conversations with other graduate students in the program who were completing their M.A. dissertation proposals, he felt he eventually came to a deeper understanding of the purpose of the proposal. This experience he referred to as a necessary 'informal' learning process that is part of being in a graduate program.

The first major challenge was simply deciding where to start. Despite content and ideas to work with from previous courses, Fugen conceded that little of it was concrete or specific enough to provide a useful framework for research. For this reason, the experience of choosing and explicating a research framework proved particularly daunting. “This is the first proposal I have ever written... I have never really been aware of different approaches to conducting research”, he stated. More than mid-way through the course, and after a brief period of illness that set him back further, little progress had been made in this regard.

Concrete examples in support of the abstract concepts and wordings he had imported from previous writing assignments also did not come easily. It was difficult “trying to be more concrete about it, bringing in ideas of social capital and pedagogy.

and real life examples of how this stuff is implemented in schools”, he stated.

Reorganizing ideas during the editing process presented problems.

“[Challenges go] back to the structure of the paper” he said. “I spent a week editing it, and after that, I wished I had more time - a fresh pair of eyes to look at things. I feel like I repeated a lot of what I said throughout the paper because I just don’t know how to organize it yet.”

In the end, time constraints forced Fugen to produce a final draft that he was not satisfied with. Specifically, confusion still existed as to what was appropriate to include in the methodology section of the study. In retrospect, he suggested an 'ego-centric' form of thinking might have prevented him from fully elaborating his methodology:

For me, method was more about 'me', how I was going to do it...[but] research is not just about you...even though it existed in your head for most of the time as abstract ideas.

A final problem he faced may have stemmed from his own expectations regarding the purpose of the proposal-writing task. From the beginning of the course, he had perceived the assignment as a form of mock trial, not the real thing: “I know in the back of my head I wasn't taking it as seriously... like playing pretend”, he stated. Actually having to carry through with the study, following its design, would have remedied this situation, he conceded.

Text Analysis

Title: “Citizenship Education and Democracy – Teachers Constructing Social Capital”

Analysis of the “Issues to Be Explored” Section

By convention, an introductory section to a research proposal should provide essential information regarding the nature and purpose of the proposed research.

Unfortunately, as the following sample evidences, this move is achieved in a language that is ambiguous, convoluted and lexically over-dense:

...my proposed research intends to dissect the educational discourse legitimizing the application of the concept of social capital as instrumental and explanatory in conceptualizing this current historical period.

First, the lack of Circumstances of location to delimit the bounds of research focus is evident. Crucial unanswered questions in this declaration of purpose include the following:

Which or whose discourse will be 'dissected'?
Where and how is the application of the concept of social capital evident?
What time period constitutes “this current historical period”?

Lack of specificity regarding time and place is a problem that continues to plague the final proposal draft from start to finish. Readability problems arise due to lexical density (a measure of the proportion of content or meaning bearing words over total words) and omission of key circumstantial information. In addition, nominal groups are marked by ambiguity because of a failure to adequately elaborate the underlying concepts they reference. Other sequences marked by this inherent ambiguity include the following:

Beneath this causal force is a plethora of social and political movements and newly emerging phenomenological constructs that confer the idiosyncratic nuances that give

contemporary globalization its specific qualities.

The educational aims and pre-dispositional traits of teachers as a group are stereotypically seen to converge in order to successfully implement the formally adhered to curricular objectives.

The reader might legitimately ask which “emerging phenomenological constructs” Fugen is referring to? And what of the “predispositional traits of teachers”? What, precisely, does he mean by these assertions? Again, he does not make effective use of the surrounding text through examples and elaboration to generate context for these assertions.

In certain text segments in the “Issues to Be Explored” section, the provenance of lexical choices is obvious. Take, for example, Fugen's definition of 'social capital', a key concept in the proposed study:

The version most readily reflective of western government adopted definitions view [*sic*] social capital as the creation of institutionalized and interconnected trusting social networks that take either the form of benign or vicious spirals of reinforcement.

A passage from the source text from which Fugen's assertion was drawn reads as follows:

Their connectedness may *take the form of benign spirals of reinforcement* of social capital resources, or become unravelled as *vicious circles* of deteriorating stocks of social capital and accompanying social disintegration. [emphasis added]

(Retrieved March 25, 2009:

http://WWW.see-educoop.net/education_in/pdf/soc_cap_and_educ_citi-oth-enl-t07.pdf)

A profusion of source text vocabulary, with its unique collocation patterns (e.g. social capital, benign spirals of reinforcement, vicious spirals [for vicious circles]) makes its way into Fugen's text. Although his lexicogrammatical choices may have been influenced by the dense form of academic prose in the source material, sequences within his writing lack the meaning making support that existed within surrounding

text in the original. Again, the transformed material is marked by ambiguity because so little space is devoted within the introductory section or elsewhere in the proposal to conceptually unpack assertions.

Fugen also moves to establish a need for the study in the introductory section:

There is a necessity for researchers to understand the political intentions and assumptions, and ideological and material base, which contextualize and drive the agenda of these programmes. Specifically, this agenda of democratic participation within a knowledge economy is primarily being driven by a process of democratic participation predicated on a citizenship education curriculum, which leads to construction of social capital: the made ingredient that is viewed as haphazardly fixing and elucidating the ills and problems of global society.

Given the abstract generality of Fugen's terms, it seems likely from the beginning that Fugen's study will run into problems regarding focus. Key actors, stakeholders, or proponents of the programs he refers to need to be introduced.

From a textual point of view, the "Issues to be Explored" section essentially attempts to tackle too many themes in too little space, leading to potential reader confusion. Thematic shifts from one paragraph to the next include a focus on the following nominal group constituents, all appearing over a space of approximately three pages:

- The emergence of transnational activity and institutions
- The manner that educational institutions respond to these global shifts
- Teachers' roles
- Concept of 'social capital.'
- The political utility for citizens [of] the concept of social capital
- The universality of the concept
- The political intentions and assumptions, and ideological and material base, which contextualize and drive the agenda of these programmes.

There is simply not enough space dedicated to each of these complex issues to provide sufficient and meaningful context for the reader. Thus, excessive thematic drift between paragraphs exacerbates what is already, in essence, an ideational-level quagmire.

Analysis of the “Background Research and Knowledge” Section

A number of important ideas appear in the background section that should have emerged first in the introductory section preceding it, but that did not. It becomes clear at this point that “the Ontario experience with social capital building” will be a core focus of the study. However, rather than establishing the background necessary to understand “the Ontario experience”, Fugen turns to discussion of what he labels “Third Way educational policy within England’s citizenship education curriculum”. This odd, yet intentional shift in focus is excused by Fugen in a relational attributive clause that defines the state of the social capital building literature: “The literature examining social capital building appears to be limited in conveying the Canadian experience”. The change in focus is also rationalized as follows:

“by generalizing the British experience of social capital building through education, one can come to an understanding of the potential issues that can arise when examining the Ontario educational experience.”

Lacking, unfortunately, are reasons why the Ontario experience is comparable with the British in the first place (although it may well be). By completely omitting information about the public school system in Ontario, Fugen has missed an important opportunity to justify his project.

A separate subsection in the “Background Research and Knowledge” section entitled “The British Experience” then profiles important clausal participants in Fugen’s subsequent arguments, namely “The Crick Report”, “The Third Way policy” and New Labour Party vision as articulated in a speech by then Prime Minister, Tony Blair. This section contains a large number of direct quotes from source materials. Unfortunately, the transformation of source materials has not been realized as effectively as it could have been. Again, the main problem stems from a lack of

elaboration that allows the reader to make sense of Fugen's main arguments. For example, the reader is confronted with the following assertion: “citizenship education cannot be understood in isolation from structural reform accomplished through the wider programme of ‘Second Wave Democratisation’ (2000: 561)”. The programme of ‘Second Wave Democratisation’ referenced here has not been explicated previously in the proposal, and no attempt is made to elaborate upon that particular programme's purposes or aims. In fact, the reader is barraged with a large number of other nominal group constituents whose ideational nature is not adequately elaborated. Other examples include “the issue of ‘taxonomic bite’”, “DfID”, and the Education Action Zone (EAZ) initiative in England. Even a reader highly knowledgeable in the field requires much more information than is provided.

Analysis of the “Main Question to be Explored” Section

In this section, Fugen establishes the focus of his proposed study. This move is achieved through a cluster of questions shown below:

The general question I intend to examine asks: What is the form and structure of dominant educational discourses when re-conceptualized in terms of social capital? More specifically, when applying the experience of England, how does the Ontario form of democratic participation reflect the pervasive adoption of Third Way policy as represented by the citizenship education curriculum in England?

At the ideational level, potential confusion again arises due to a general lack of precision. Areas of imprecision are noted in the table below:

Table 8. Examples of ideational imprecision

Research Question	Examples of Problems due to imprecision at the Clausal Level
What is the form and structure of dominant educational discourses when re-conceptualized in terms of social capital?	Discourses of which group more specifically? (teachers? policy makers? government? other?)

When applying the experience of England, how does the Ontario form of democratic participation reflect the pervasive adoption of Third Way policy as represented by the citizenship education curriculum in England?	n “the experience of England”, whose experience is being referred to here and during which time period specifically? What is meant by “the Ontario form of democratic participation”? Participation of who, where and in what capacity?
Will [sic] like to explore the primary forces that shape the specific characteristics that are reproduced and reified by agents involved in educational practice (policy workers, administrators, teachers, parents and students).	What are these “primary forces” specifically? What does “specific characteristics” refer to here? (e.g. forms of discourse / behaviours)

Next, Fugen moves to state a hypothesis (in a relational identifying clause) that is again presented in unacceptably abstract terms:

It is my hypothesis that a convergence of actions by these actors create a uniquely defined micro-cultural system. However, during this process, a politicization of associated spaces and structures materialize [sic], and subsequently, are [sic] reproduced. Thus, a dialectical relationship among culture, space and structure exists at the foundation of the aforementioned micro-cultural system.

Although the “actors” in Fugen's “micro-cultural system” are presumably the “agents involved in educational practice” referenced previously, the text leaves much to be desired regarding the nature and constitution of the Microsystem he is referring to. Again, the reader is ‘bombarde’d with highly abstract terminology, with little or no reference to specific places, people or periods of time.

Fugen also moves to discuss his research framework (supposedly based on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory). However, in a seemingly misplaced move from a genre perspective, he turns to methodological concerns construed through the following series of material processes:

This analysis will occur largely ethnographically [sic], with data being analyzed hermeneutically. Quantitative data will be used to evaluate [sic] the opinions of interviewees are reliable to ensure what they say reflects what they think. As well, quantitative data will be used as background knowledge of interviewees in order to augment [sic] future interviews.

At this point, serious conceptual misunderstandings emerge that relate directly to knowledge and experience with conventional research methodology. There is in fact no “ethnographic” component to the proposed methodology (i.e. Fugen does not intend to spend extensive time among educational actors in the UK or in Ontario documenting day to day activities). Fugen also needs to elaborate upon what he means when he says the data will be “analyzed hermeneutically” because hermeneutics is a highly varied interpretive ‘science’. It is also unclear how he (or anyone) can use “quantitative data” to ensure that “what interviewees say actually reflects what they think”. Finally, Fugen needs to elaborate more succinctly the role of quantitative data in analyzing the data gathered from interviewing. Again, all of these misplaced methodological concerns should be moved to the methodology section.

Next, a number of new 'questions' appear in a move to provide more information regarding the focus of the study. Unfortunately, the concerns presented broaden rather than narrow the scope of inquiry, and in so doing, confuse issues more:

How does [*sic*] democratic and citizenship education curricula models respond to structural constraints as bureaucratization guided by the ethos of New Public Management (NPM)?

How does institutionalization of ideas such as social capital or democracy manifest itself at the level of the school?

What is the discrepancy between democratic practice and mandated democratic learning and behaviour guided by policy and subsequent institutional constraints? (i.e. exoticizing, mythologizing, dehistoricizing of democracy)

Notable in these questions, too, is the characteristic lack of information identifying specific geographic regions, curricula, organizations or schools, as well as time periods. Symptomatic of the piece as a whole, Fugen's text is rife with high-level abstractions and references to inadequately explicated objects or concepts.

Analysis of the “Why this Enquiry is Important” Section

In this section, Fugen provides reasons why the proposed study is worth conducting. He begins with the following premise establishing the class attributes of his particular form inquiry:

This inquiry is important as it directly affects [*sic*] the way governments’ [*sic*] represent emerging global phenomena. This in turn provides insight into the politicalization [*sic*] of globalization.

Immediately notable are indiscretions expressed at the ideational and interpersonal levels. Ideationally, “governments” remains non-specific here. It is unclear which bodies of government the results relate to. Interpersonally, the claim that this report will “directly [affect] the way governments’ represent emerging global phenomena” needs moderation of assertiveness through modality (e.g. “may”, “could”, “might”). This form of inquiry *may*, after all, influence government positions and policies, but realistically there should be doubt expressed here (Note: It may be that Fugen meant “reflects” or “explores” rather than “affects” here).

The section suffers from many of the same shortcomings in focus and cohesion evidenced in other parts of the proposal. For example, there is a thematic shift from a focus on education to a discussion of “the politicalization [*sic*] of globalization”. This represents a step further toward a realm of imprecise abstraction, likely a remnant of earlier drafting attempts in which he focused more on political discourse generally, and less on political policy implications in education specifically.

Other assertions are problematic simply from a conceptual coherence point of view, the following being a case in point:

In analyzing the specific issues and debates included and excluded in citizenship education curricula [*sic*], we can garner a greater insight into the institutional mindset of political actors while reconfiguring the epistemological ramifications for such new representations of phenomena.

The first half of this assertion may mean to say, perhaps, that by analyzing debates 'surrounding' citizenship education curricula, we gain insights in the mindsets of political actors. The final line of this assertion (“while reconfiguring the epistemological ramifications for such new representations of phenomena”) is marked by vagueness, and attempting to unpack it, is draining on the reader.

Analysis of the “How is the Topic Going to be Explored? / Methodology” Section

In accordance with generic convention, this section outlines how data will be obtained and analyzed. Realized through a series of material processes, the text is too often imprecise in its terms of reference. In addition, conceptual flaws emerge. Take for example the following assertion: “I will conduct ethnographic work through the method of *reflexivity* that exists within social theory”[emphasis in the original]. He uses a quote from Nightingale and Cromby (1999) to define reflexivity:

...an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research.

By his own assertion, reflexivity is not a method, but rather adherence to forms of expression in which the writer's own contributions to the text become self-evident. Fugen seems to be confusing reflexivity as a text phenomenon (typical of most ethnographic writing) with ethnographic research methodology.

Next, ethnographic research requires the researcher be physically present and engaged with research participants over longer periods of time. This makes the following single, unqualified assertion problematic: “I will be conducting ethnographic work by observing students within formal settings.” To set the stage for an ethnographic study, specifics of time and place must be established. Fugen's

assertions represent non-specific generalities of time and place and are likely symptomatic of a deeper misunderstanding of the requirements of ethnographic inquiry.

Many methodological steps outlined in this section can also be characterized by an unacceptable degree of imprecision or vagueness as the following examples attest to:

Table 9. Vagueness in methodological steps

Methodological step	Problem with imprecision
I will be conducting ethnographic work by observing students within formal settings.	This assertion is not elaborated upon to include which students will be observed and where the ethnographic work will take place.
While synthesizing the collected data, I will begin interviews and provide inferences based on my observations.	It has not been made clear enough who Fugen will be interviewing or what, precisely he will be observing.
During this time, I will also introduce peripheral actors that I did not include or account for in my initial proposal.	It is not clear who these peripheral actors are and why they are not accounted for in the proposal.
I will start historically tracing the institutional, collective, and individual understanding of social capital.	No additional information is given about how he will proceed to trace understanding at the institutional, collective, or individual levels? What is meant by “understanding of social capital” in this case?
I will start analyzing qualitative data in more depth and begin to statistically evaluate quantitative data.	Which qualitative data will be analysed and through which means? Which quantitative data will be evaluated and through which means? This information is not precisely specified.

Clearly, many more details need to be included regarding specifics of methodological steps. However, due to apparent confusion regarding the purpose and focus of inquiry, such specifics are hard to come by.

At the textual level, information is organized chronologically using

Circumstances of time and location (e.g. “While synthesizing the collected data,...” / “During this stage,...” / “During this time,...” / “Following this stage,...”).

Analysis of the “Plan for Organizing and Analyzing the Data/Information” Section

A continuation of Fugen's methodology, this section states that data will be analyzed based on the adoption of a Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) framework. Although CHAT has evolved from a rich history of Vygotskian inspired social research, no further information is provided regarding what CHAT entails in this case other than “it accounts for the actions of various agents and institutions within distinct streams of influence” (Fugen's own terms).

The remainder of the section outlines a methodology reliant on the use of “three dominant modes of analyses: ethnographic, historical, and statistical”. Under his description of the ethnographic component, Fugen suggests his “descriptions will describe actions and group dynamics based on rational choice models to hermeneutic analysis of prevalent discourses.” This description contains little of what one would traditionally expect from an outline of ethnographic methodology. Beyond that, lacking is any elaboration of what such an approach would entail, including which actions or behaviours will be modelled and explained through “rational choice models”. In addition, no reason is provided as to why an assumption of “rationality” can be made in this context at all. Finally, lacking is any specific mention of whose interpretations of “prevalent discourses” are to be explored.

The description of his “historical” component likewise suffers from a lack specificity and elaboration. Take for example the step profiled in the following material process:

Historically I will be tracing the development of policy and educational discourses that shape the concepts of social capital within the context of education and school space.

Circumstances of manner or location that should delimit the scope of this endeavour do not appear (e.g. During which time period will samples of policy and educational discourses be drawn? Where will samples of policy and educational discourses come from?). Lacking, too, is reference to specific individuals or groups (e.g. Whose concept of social capital is being examined?).

Next, in the section detailing a statistical component of his study, the reader is told that “statistical analysis will be based on findings from questionnaires”. However, no specific instruments are referenced or included as appendices to the proposal. In addition, although he defends a “multilevel” approach to analysis, no specifics are given regarding which phenomena are being modelled or how constructs will be operationalized. Again, the text is characterized by ambiguity, and a lack of important elaborating detail.

Analysis of the References Section

References are provided in an appendix to the study instead of at the end of the main text body. This is not generically conventional. In addition, many references are presented in a format inconsistent with APA guidelines the professor explicitly required students to follow.

Case 5: Isolde

About the participant

Born of French speaking parents, Isolde grew up in the city of Montreal. Although French was her native language, she began speaking English from the young age of 4 or 5 years. During grade school years, her parents encouraged her to read books and magazines in English, and her father often helped her by reviewing her writing assignments in English. The foundations of her academic writing abilities in English, she believed, came from experience in her final years of high school, years in which she had a teacher / mentor who encouraged her and a small group of others in the class to write more than required.

Isolde went on to pre-university studies at a Francophone CEGEP (Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel) and then completed an undergraduate degree program in anthropology at a Francophone university in Montreal. In her undergraduate courses in anthropology, most of the course readings were in English, and for this reason, she decided it was better to write her papers in English as well. Her Francophone professors allowed this.

Following graduation with a B.A. in Anthropology, and uncertain of job prospects in that field, Isolde returned again to university. This time, she enrolled in a series of classes in psychology. In that same year, she began an undergraduate degree program in ESL teaching. Almost all classes, this time, were conducted in English with native speaking English professors. Papers, too, had to be written in English, a situation, she believed, that brought about a major improvement in the development of her academic writing abilities.

For Isolde, the purpose of completing her M.A. in Educational Studies was to

be able to teach at the CEGEP or university level, with a specific interest in restructuring teacher training programs, working on curriculum issues, and hopefully contributing to an improvement in ESL teaching in Quebec. She had taken research methodology classes previously at the CEGEP and undergraduate level. For this reason, many research concepts were familiar to her prior to entry into Introduction to Research in Education.

Study proposed by the student

Isolde proposed a study that would explore how teachers and students negotiate “their ideas of cultural identity and their attitudes with regards to cultural difference” in the foreign or second language classroom. The study was designed to document how different facets of cultural identity come into play in the classroom, examining particularly the role of teachers, policies and programs in promoting cross-cultural awareness and addressing issues of xenophobia, prejudice and stereotyping.

First, she proposed a formal review of the literature, undertaken to explore issues of language and identity relating to education. Next, a field investigation would involve focus group sessions with in-service language teachers, discussing how issues of language and identity play out in the classroom. Together, these two steps would lead to a better understanding of how identity, language and educational programs and policy interact.

The Proposal Development Process

The idea of exploring issues of cultural identity in the language classroom had come to Isolde at the start of the course. The theme related directly to personal experiences and concerns as an English language teacher in a culturally diverse

learning environment:

It was very intuitive...my impression of what the problem was.... I think I purposefully started with that because it gave me a direction... a direction in the sense that my intuition and the things that interest me in my classroom as a teacher give me a direction. I don't necessarily want my research project to be completely disconnected from what I do, and by putting it down that way, it was sort of the foundation, as if I were in a tunnel and that is where I want to go.

She went on to suggest that personal investment in the project was a necessary ingredient "in order to keep going". "I know that of myself", she stated. "It is my way of making sure I keep my interest". In this sense, choice of a personally meaningful topic was a writing strategy enacted to ensure the project was successful.

A significant amount of the background knowledge necessary for the proposal came from readings and notes from previous classes. She had kept readings from previous courses in folders organized by class number. Written directly onto the pages of photocopied articles, she had also recorded keywords and in many cases, a brief summary of what the article was about.

Other information was collected for the purpose of the proposal from library books and articles accessed mainly through electronic databases. In her search for additional information on the Internet, she began by searching for articles dealing specifically with issues of identity, language learning and education, and particularly, articles that combined these issues. Her hope was that continued reading would help her to more clearly define her research questions. The database search system used was also helpful in providing additional keywords, allowing her to widen the scope of her search by exploring associated domains of inquiry. At the same time, she was aware that associated keyword searches could lead her away from the core focus of her proposed study.

After locating articles in electronic format, she began by reading abstracts and, in some cases, the introduction and conclusion of articles. Articles with content

deemed useful for the proposal were printed out on paper because, according to her, reading on the screen was “dizzying”. On these printed articles, important passages were highlighted and notes were taken in the margins. “I always make notes in the margin because if I don’t write it, or see myself writing it, I just don’t remember”, she stated. “I need to do it on the particular text [so] it is linked to whatever is said in the paragraph next to it.”

To organize information and make it easily accessible to her for future use, quotes and notes from articles were transcribed onto a grid on a separate piece of paper. The proposal draft itself took form as sections of organized information from this grid were patched together in a coherent form.

Although Isolde said she was “disinclined to follow recipes” during the writing process, she made use of the PowerPoint slides provided by the instructor outlining conventional proposal content (see Appendix B). However, beyond responding to suggestions on the instructor-provided outline, she said she organized content in a way that made sense to her personally. Dividing the text into generic subsections was simply the easiest way to approach organizational issues, and made clear to her which sections needed further development. The subsection organization was “a bit like a checklist”, she conceded. “I can go over [each section] and say ‘that’s done, that’s done’”. In this sense, the experience of crafting the research proposal was quite different from other writing experiences she had had. With the proposal, a precise and ‘preconceived’ idea of what was needed guided the construction. This process was in contrast to previous academic essay writing in which she normally began by reading, taking notes, organizing information according to themes and similar ideas, and then putting information together in a coherent form - more of an emergent process in which final products sometimes took forms not necessarily expected or prescribed

from the beginning. With the proposal, expectations regarding content and style were established early on, and she made sure information presented was aligned with requirements outlined in the course syllabus.

The content of different sections of the proposal came together at different times during the course. The title (“The ties that bind: An investigation into the links adjoining identity, language and education”), for example, emerged late in the drafting process. The task of choosing a title had begun with the vision of a ‘tangled web’. In the end, however, she changed it because she felt “The ties that bind” better fits the picture of how identity, language, and culture fit together. The idea came to her quiet suddenly after writing it down on paper and her thinking “That’s it! That is the perfect title.”

The literature review section, too, took form later than other sections in the proposal draft. This was a conscious decision on Isolde’s part, affording her the possibility to continue reading to progressively develop “a global picture or impression” of what she wanted to say in that section.

From the classroom environment, Isolde exploited opportunities for peer feedback on her writing. She had the following to say about the experience:

I think that students together...well...it creates this great support system. And if people are really willing to listen to what you want to do and say, an idea can spark other ideas...it is an incredible resource.

Here, the key strategy is based on an awareness that interaction affords new ideas, a reality that Isolde was clearly prepared to take advantage of. In general, she believed small group work was more beneficial than whole class discussion. “If you don’t really know what you are going to do, or are not quite sure, it is probably a bit intimidating to go in front of your peers”, she suggested. Working with two or three classmates provided an “intimate setting” in which she could comfortably give

opinions and receive support.

A final important strategy that Isolde employed was purposefully letting her writing lie between subsequent attempts at drafting. She felt this was particularly useful in helping her to spot elements of French, her native language, that occasionally crept into her English writing. She also said she read sections of her paper out loud because, that way, she could more easily pick out elements that don't work. However, after a while, even that becomes repetition, she conceded.

Stylistic Considerations

Isolde expressed a preference for a more personal tone in her writing. This included weaving elements of her own life experience into her writing. "If it is not relevant to my life, what I do either professionally or personally, [it is] difficult for me to engage with it and be passionate about what I am saying", she claimed. She also believed that a personal tone was important in creating a sense of "personal contact" with the reader.

Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process

Crafting the literature review proved the most challenging task for Isolde. "I didn't know enough to really put it into words, and I felt I hadn't really gone over the entire spectrum of theoretical elements", she told me. She suggested discussing ideas that she didn't have "a real grasp of" even made her feel "sick" at times. For her, the literature review was a daunting task because she couldn't decide "what to take and what to let go of - which person is really relevant and which is not so relevant". It was an undertaking that was impossible without a large investment of time reading and

note-taking. "I think that was the weakest part of my paper because it wasn't complete in a sense", she conceded. "I would have kept on reading and finding other sources, and it would have made it even better, but I am pressed for time and I have a life after work and can't work on that 24 / 7."

Text Analysis

Proposal Title: “The ties that bind: An investigation into the links adjoining identity, language and education.”

Analysis of the Introductory Section

The introductory section of Isolde's proposal achieves a valued end in qualitative research by establishing the researcher's experience and background, an important move in helping the reader determine the nature of researcher bias. She begins with a narrative account, profiling events surrounding “the [first] teaching contract [she] had as an English second language (ESL) educator.” The move is achieved mainly through a series of material processes: “I walked (into a building)” / I had been dropped (into the world of multi-ethnic, underprivileged primary school education)” / “I would learn (to fall in love)”. In the description of her students, she employs a playful (but arguably stilted) language, evidenced in the following nominal group: “my students, an assembly of little beings hailing from forty-seven countries”. Other ideational elements construe a sense of challenge and risk associated with the narrative scene: “this first plunge...” / “I had been dropped...”.

Circumstances of location and accompaniment also set the scene for the account of Isolde's experience. The language here, too, is arguably clichéd, yet captures the reader's imagination:

Circumstance of location:

...on a lovely September morning...

...on that lovely September morning...

...into the world of multiethnic, underprivileged primary school education.

Circumstance of accompaniment:

...with this sometimes violent, sometimes caring, yet always interesting schooling environment.

Then, with the scene set, and continuing in narrative mode, the introductory section presents a 'complication': "For some unforeseen reason, I had a feeling then that things were not right". This move serves to lay the ground for establishing the research problem. The transition is achieved first through a series of mental processes that construe the researcher's internal state of mind:

I believed [my teaching task] involved more than simply transmitting...linguistic knowledge...

I felt...my mandate as an educator far exceeded [teaching] those linguistic competencies...

I recognized a great need...to include in my teaching...

From this point onward, Isolde is able to transition from a narrative account to more conventional scholarly discussion of the concept of identity and how cultural diversity might be adequately approached in the classroom. A series of relational clauses function to classify and construct conceptual contrasts regarding the treatment of culture in the language classroom. According to Isolde, an ideal state is classified as follows:

...the goal is to foster a real sense of openness toward the others...

...the goal is to foster an understanding and a genuine acceptance of cultural diversity.

What students need is to know that they are offered a safe place where discussion and consideration of what the nature of their cultural identity and other people's cultural identity implies.

Relational clauses with negative polarity or clauses employing the negative adverbial "no longer" construct the opposing perspective against which the author attempts to position the reader:

A collection of mundane facts about various targeted cultural groups is not what students need to take away...

No longer is it acceptable to teach the 4 Fs – food, fashion, folklore and festivals...

No longer is it acceptable to work with teaching material and [use] pedagogical approaches that support this reductive portrayal of other people and their culture.

Although Isolde does not provide specific examples citing when or where these reductive approaches to teaching about culture in the language classroom have been

evidenced, she does back up her assertions with a range of citations from field scholars (specifically – Ermenc, 2005; Knutson, 2006; Lindholm, 1994; Starkey, 2007), adding weight to her argument and acting in accordance with generic convention.

In general, the introductory section coheres well. At the textual level, cohesion within the narrative portion of the introduction is achieved through the repeated use of “I” as Actor and Subject in the majority of clauses (“I walked...”/ “I had been dropped...” / “I would learn...” / “I did not know...” / “I had a feeling...” / “I believed...” / “I recognized...” / “I have chosen....”). At the same time, this lack of structural variation might be considered a stylistic flaw due to repetitiveness.

In the discussion of approaches to embracing cultural diversity in the classroom, textual markers in Theme position adequately guide the reader through the text, establishing relationships between the ideas, and maintaining cohesion generally:

On the one hand... / On the other hand...
That being said...
Essentially,...
However,...
Here again,...

In addition, arguments follow a predicable and logical progression, typified by a claim, warrant, and example pattern.

The final paragraph of the introductory section functions as a textual “road map” for things to come. Isolde identifies the purpose and order of subsequent sections in the proposal:

The following is a short account of the questions that could be central to this hypothetical research project as well as an outline for a proposed methodology and a possible list of references.

Regarding the interpersonal metafunction, information exchange is transacted in the declarative mood. Use, on occasion, of the inclusive pronoun “we” (“Here

again *we* face the need for change...” / “if *we* agree that the goal is to foster an understanding and a genuine acceptance...” suggests the expectation of sympathetic alignment between writer and reader concerns and goals.

Analysis of the “Main Question” and “Secondary Questions” Sections

Isolde's research questions are organized under two subheadings – Main Question and Secondary Questions. A list of questions in both subsections is presented without introductory preamble or elaboration. The main question (“How do teachers and students negotiate between their ideas of cultural identity and their attitudes with regards to cultural differences in the context of foreign or second language classes?”) seems excessively broad upon first consideration. More precise qualification of nominal groups and Circumstances of location are needed. Specifically, no age range or level of study participants is provided. Nor are specific study locations mentioned. This is potentially problematic because there may, after all, be significant differences in student and teacher expectations and attitudes toward cultural difference from one geographic and cultural region to the next. This same lack of specificity is notable in certain Secondary Questions as well:

Table 10. Lack of specificity in research questions

Questions	Specificity Issue
Secondary Questions 1. How is cultural identity defined, in general terms and with regards to education?	Defined according to whom?
2. How do different concepts of identity come into play in the classroom? How does a teacher’s concept of her/his own identity play a part in teaching in the classroom? How do teachers support the development of their students’ sense of	At which educational levels? In which cultural / geographic locations?

<p>self-identity? What are the impacts of “identity in the classroom” in terms of citizenship education?</p>	
<p>3. In the particular context of language education, how and to what extent can a better understanding of cultural identity promote cross-cultural awareness and metacultural unity?</p> <p>What is real cross-cultural awareness? What does it imply for education? What is the role of language teachers with regards to the promotion of cross-cultural awareness and metacultural identity?</p> <p>Do policies and educational programs give language teachers the tools necessary to achieve real cultural awareness and truly address issues of xenophobia, prejudices and stereotypes as they occur in the classroom?</p>	<p>Which policies and educational programs specifically?</p>

If the proposed study was primarily an exercise in philosophical scholarship, based on secondary sources, these broader philosophical questions might be appropriate.

However, because the study involves a field investigation involving focus groups with in-service teachers in the province of Quebec, specificity in time and location is possible and warranted within these research questions. Then, if readers wish to transfer study findings to their own unique situations, that remains their prerogative.

In addition to a lack of specificity in time and location, a number of domain specific terms appear that have not been defined in the proposal up to this point. The term “Citizenship Education” (question 2 c), in particular, carries with it a rich history of scholarly inquiry, and needs explanation before it can be included explicitly within a research question.

From a textual perspective, a numbered list provides structure and order to the research questions. In addition, these questions, for the most part, reference ideas that

have been elaborated adequately in the introductory section, ensuring cross-document cohesion. As mentioned above, however, the introduction of previously unexplained concepts and terms (e.g. “citizenship education”, “metacultural identity”) tend to detract from the Research Question section's overall cohesiveness.

Analysis of the “Methodology and Data Collection” Section

In this section, Isolde outlines methodological steps as a series of hypotheticals shown in the following sample clauses (emphasis added):

A formal literature review *would be undertaken*...

...a possible [in-the-field] investigation using focus groups with in-service teachers *would be attempted*...

...the first part of the research project *would be undertaken* through two types of literature query...

A combination of research words *would be entered* in search fields...

The second part of the research project *would involve* focus groups with in-service second and foreign language teachers...

The use of the conditional (“would be undertaken”) rather than the future simple (“will undertake”) may construe a sense of tentativeness regarding the planned study. This decision is generically non-conventional, but achieves the purpose of outlining proposed steps nonetheless.

In general, steps outlined provide adequately specific details. For example, in discussion of her proposed literature search, Isolde includes the names of specific web-accessible databases and the search terms that will be used:

...the first part of the research project would be undertaken through two types of literature query: one that would involve a book search to be done mainly at the [redacted] library, and another that would entail an Internet search for articles on various databases such as EBSCO, ERIC and SAGE Full Texts Collections via the [redacted] University libraries website. A combination of research words would be entered in search fields, for instance: identity, language, education, teacher, teaching, language teaching, learning, bilingual education, and citizenship; those terms would be used by themselves and then in combination with each other to yield the best possible results.

Importantly, goals that warrant choices of constituent steps in the proposed methodology are also included. Following description of the focus group methodology involving in-service second and foreign language teachers, the following goals are profiled:

The first goal associated with using a focus group technique would be to obtain teacher's opinions as to how they feel cultural identity comes into play in their classrooms.

The ultimate goal would therefore be to collect opinions, feelings and impressions of teachers as they pertain to the particular topic of cultural identity and how it operates in the field of education.

As such, the rationale for employing each methodological step is clearly supported.

In other instances, the section arguably provides too much information. For instance, a list of questions that will guide focus group discussion is included within the body of the Methodology and Data Collection section. This list might better be included as a protocol form in an appendix to save space. That way, readers wishing to view these questions could be directed to the appendices section.

Another minor shortcoming in this otherwise well-crafted section relates to terminology use. From a lexical perspective, notable is the inclusion of certain terms more often applied to statistics-based forms of inquiry. For example, we find the following assertion:

this project could very well have the potential to have its findings *generalized*, extended to other situations or *populations*, therefore making it more relevant.

In qualitative studies, the verb "transfer" is normally preferable to "generalize". Also, use of the term "populations" rings of statistics-based inquiry. In passing, there seems to be a degree of contradiction regarding the possible uses of findings. Isolde's more 'humble' stated objective (i.e. to grasp the implications of interactions of identity, language and education to better understand her own classroom) stands in contrast to a desire to "generalize" findings to a variety of classrooms. Again, the notion of

transfer is more appropriate than generalizability in this context, and the possibility of transferring findings should be stated explicitly earlier within the document.

Terminological confusion appears with other terms as well. Isolde asserts “Confidentiality would be promised”. However, the reader is told in the same paragraph that focus group discussions would be taped using a tape-recorder rather than a video camera to ensure “anonymity”. Clearly, Isolde cannot promise “anonymity” to participants because she will be aware of the identity of her study participants. She was correct in her first assertion of “confidentiality”.

A large number of passive structures, masking agency, make their way into Isolde's description (e.g. “The focus group method is deemed best, for it is hoped that the group discussions” / “sessions of the various discussion groups would need to be recorded” / “notes would also need to be taken” / “ethical considerations would need to be addressed”). Many of these ideas could be presented in simpler active forms for more engaging reading. However, this is mainly a stylistic preference, and not necessarily a flaw in Isolde's text.

At the interpersonal level, all information is presented in the declarative mood. The section can be characterized by its construal of doubt through authorial comment and use of modal auxiliaries in the Mood blocks of certain clauses (e.g. “A *possible* [in-the-field] investigation using focus groups with in-service teachers would be attempted...” / “...this research project *could* very well have its findings generalized” [emphasis added]). These hedging attempts lessen the likelihood that readers will find issue with claims made therein. In addition, Isolde projects certain clauses through mental processes, further dampening the assertiveness of claims made, as shown in the following example: “I sincerely believe it would be worthwhile to also opt for a field investigation....”.

Analysis of the “References” Section

This section is both bibliography and reference section fused together. Although sources referenced in the proposal are included here, so too are other sources that Isolde has deemed useful for the proposed study, but which are not actually cited in the text body. In accordance with generic convention, she should have separated the reference section and bibliography.

All sources are listed in alphabetical order based on authors' last name and presented in proper APA format.

Case 6: Kadake

About the Participant

Daughter of a Bahamian immigrant mother and black Canadian father, Kadake identified herself as Canadian with Caribbean background. She grew up speaking English as her native language, attending English language public schools in the Montreal area.

Kadake had begun the Master's in Educational Studies program in the fall of 2004, sixteen months before the start of this study. At the time of our interviews, she was nearing the end of the program, planning to complete her final directed study over the summer months of 2007, with expected graduation in the fall of that same year. Concurrent to her master's level studies, she was working as a recruitment officer at the university.

Kadake had had little research writing experience prior to entry into the Master's in Educational Studies program. However, she was partially familiar with many of the expectations in academia because her father was a college / university professor. She suggested her parents' critique of her writing (her mother was a teacher as well) over the years helped her recognize when a piece of writing is well crafted.

Kadake was motivated to succeed in the mock proposal task in Introduction to Research in Education because she planned to focus her comprehensive directed study (a major paper required for graduation) on the same topic. She expressed a desire to complete the directed study as soon as possible, crafting the proposal for Introduction to Research in Education and her directed study proposal at the same time during the winter term of 2007. In particular, she believed the exercise of producing a proposal in class would be helpful in formulating her research questions for the larger directed

study proposal.

Study Proposed by the Student

Kadake's proposal was entitled "Exploring Cosmopolitanism and the 'World Citizen' Philosophy: Implications for Education in a Global Age". In it, she laid out a plan to review recent scholarship, organized under the following thematic categories:

- General citizenship theory
- Specific citizenship theory - cosmopolitanism
- Cosmopolitanism and globalization
- Difference, belonging and identity (and its link to cosmopolitanism)
- Cosmopolitanism and education
- Case studies/models of cosmopolitanism in the school
- Dealing with issues of citizenship post 9/11

The study was designed primarily to explore the issue of cosmopolitanism, and discuss its implications in education. In addition, she planned to address the following subsidiary questions:

- What does it mean to be a global or world citizen?
- How and why should today's students be educated to be global citizens?
- Can the adoption of the global citizen philosophy in education contribute towards increasing tolerance, compassion, and understanding amongst young people?
- What are the limitations or challenges of this philosophy?

The Proposal Development Process

The idea to broach the issue of cosmopolitanism in education seems to have been influenced by Kadake's experiences, years ago, in a multicultural, urban high school where students confronted issues of cultural identity on a daily basis in the classroom and the schoolyard. Since her high school days, she has found many of the public debates surrounding identity, and the related issue of citizenship, troubling. Because we live in an era in which people have increased contact with other cultures, she felt it was a timely theme for exploration. During our initial interview, Kadake

expressed the idea that so many conflict-ridden events lately are clearly bound with issues of identity. “Right now it is the issue of 'reasonable accommodation' in Quebec”, she suggested. “After September 11th, it was East versus West and secular versus religious. That all ties together with identity and who we are”.

The topic of cosmopolitanism, specifically, and its implications for education had been explored in other classes taken during her M.A. studies, and had been the focus of a course paper on cosmopolitanism and nationalism the semester before taking Introduction to Research in Education. That initial exploration had roused her interest to the point that cosmopolitanism and education became the focus of both her methodology class work and her more substantial directed study required for graduation. This meant that even before the start of the course, Kadake had begun formulating notes on a master outline that would be used in the Introduction to Research in Education assignment.

Nearing the end of her master's level studies, she was also privileged with a rich array of material artefacts to support the creation of her proposal. Her choice of topic and the content of the proposal for Introduction to Research in Education were purposefully constrained by the existence of resources that would also be used in the construction of the larger directed study proposal. Consequently, it is impossible to identify separate support spheres exploited during the creation of these two related documents.

Kadake began by collecting relevant articles and recording notes and keywords such as “globalization”, “citizenship”, “belonging” for use in her literature search. Many of these notes and keywords were drawn from discussion and readings from other classes.

Figure 4. Table used to organize contributions from scholarly literature

5

Summary of Literature to be reviewed

Contributions/Themes/Topic	Brief Descriptive Summary	Author, Date
Theories of cosmopolitanism & nationalism, citizenship, citizenship & postmodernity <i>↳ main distinction between</i>		Habermas, Nussbaum, Kant, Anderson, Taylor, de Groot, Bauman, Davies, Evans and Reid, Adams and Carfagna — new global citizenship
Debate on which ideological perspective (nationalism or cosmopolitanism) is better, researchers propose new ideologies altogether <i>↳ compare</i>		Bowdler-Harty & Murphy, Hoffman, Dover & Williams
Global & citizenship education, curricular focus and critiques, multinational education, Current and proposed models		Davies, Evans and Reid; Gobmohamad, Mathews and Sidhe, O'Ster and Starkey, Schweisfurth, Bauman, Adams and Carfagna
Meanings of globalization and internationalization for education <i>↳ Globalization: process of internationalization</i>		García-Gavilá, Rivzi, Torres
The role of globalization in this, how globalization affects/has affected education for multiculturalism		Mitchell
What it means to be a global citizen: transnational migration and citizenship of transnational students		Gobmohamad, Ji-Yeon, Nyiri
Self, identity, belonging, race, ethnicity, "the personal, the local, the national"		Gobmohamad, O'Ster and Starkey, Mathews & Sidhe, Rivzi, Harty & Murphy?, Bauman
The role of schooling		Nipp
Pedagogical issues: Dealing with patriotic and identity discourses post 9/11 in the classroom <i>↳ 3.10 Cate</i>		Rivzi, Torres, Apple, Davies, Davies, Evans & Reid, Giroux, Adams and Carfagna
<i>World citizenship: Adams & Carfagna (Ch 6) + 7</i>		
<i>World citizenship: Adams & Carfagna (Ch 6 + 7)</i>		

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Collection and organization of this material led to the creation of a rough outline on paper which Kadake progressively elaborated up to and during the early weeks of the course. In addition, she made use of her outline on paper to record directive notes to herself (e.g. “must make link here”, “see how far back this topic comes in the literature on Eric database”), acting as a surrogate form of memory and mainly documenting new avenues for the background literature search.

The transformation of the outline into a working draft of the proposal began after the start of the course. At this point, she began an exhaustive series of re-edits. Content was reorganized and details were progressively added. “To go from a ‘lump’ of four pages to a concise, divided, sectioned nine pages was the biggest part”, she confessed. “Sub-sectioning everything off according to what [the instructor] wanted.” The editing process typically involved printing a copy of the draft on paper, and then marking potential alterations on the paper with a system of arrows and self-directed

comments.

Figure 5. Self-generated comments for revisions on draft

② movements of capital as well as more political and economic interdependence between nations (Gacel-Ávila, 2005). As knowledge and capital regularly cross borders, so too do individuals; globalization has led to more cross-cultural exchanges between people as humans travel, emigrate and immigrate more than ever before. The world has indeed become a "global village," redefining concepts of identity, ~~identity and citizenship~~ and creating ^{new} different cultural relationships and spaces along the way.

① This new global era has subsequently given life to new sets of questions, concerns, and ^(identity a history) debates pertaining to citizenship as ideologies of cosmopolitanism and nationalism form the basis of these discussions. In addition, although it has been intensely examined in media and literature, it is difficult to exclude the role of the aftermath of the Sep. 11 events in these discussions. As such, notions of identity, loyalty and allegiance have also been brought into the discussion, all of which can be examined through citizenship and education lenses (Apple, 2002; Giroux, 2002; Adams & Carfagna, 2006). ^{by examining the current debate in education.} (With this ^{coming} wealth of new information and a drastically ^{changed world}), it is no surprise that citizenship education and global education have become not only buzzwords in educational planning and policy but also the subject of intense debate and

Handwritten notes:
②: high motivation to use words like this
①: define identity, define citizenship, why should we care, one problematic
In a new globalized world
What is the does it mean to be a citizen in a globalized world
identity how is identity affected
When which showed into critique is identity when there are one always else? These are only but a few part of the current debate...
why?
The implications of this topic on education is enormous.
why?
refer to 2012 paper

The document was then reworked on the computer once again. This editing cycle repeated itself several times, a typical strategy for Kadake:

I usually do many drafts before I finalize anything. I'm almost 'obsessive compulsive'. I need to print it out, redo it, print it out, redo it. I find it almost therapeutic. You can manually switch things around on the computer, but I just can't do it. My editing process is a lot longer than some other students. I just write a really rough draft and convert that into a final product eight drafts later.

During the redrafting period, class discussion and lecture also helped her to more precisely establish the research focus and framework. She suggested that peer feedback focused mainly on core concepts to include within the philosophical research framework. In particular, classmates had expressed concern about the depth required to tackle what they perceived as very "heavy concepts" - citizenship, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism. This lead Kadake to approach citizenship solely as

it relates to the 'world citizen' or 'global citizen'. Nationalism was dropped altogether. Cosmopolitanism, which had been excluded entirely at one point, was subsequently reintroduced as the core conceptual focus of the proposed study.

Contact with materials and concepts from another methodology course also prompted elaboration of the methodology section, encouraging Kadake to detail many of the assumptions that had not been adequately verbalized up to that point:

When it came to methodology, I wasn't elaborating enough at the beginning. I sort of had a 'dry-cut' feeling about it – the how and the what ... my other research class helped me... I had to do an in-depth analysis of a case study and I realized that it was quite detailed..."

Many of the choices Kadake made regarding content to include in the proposal were also influenced by perceived expectations of the professor. For example, in delimiting the scope of inquiry, Kadake made a number of decisions regarding which areas of scholarship to cover, and which scholarly names to reference. The philosophical works of Martha Nussbaum, Immanuel Kant and Jurgen Habermas, for example, are cited frequently in the literature on cosmopolitanism. For this reason, Kadake believed the course professor would question if these "big names" did not appear in her writing. At the same time, she admitted avoiding discussion of Communism or Marxism in her proposal because her directed study supervisor was a field expert in that particular body of scholarship. In the same vein, she also recalled questioning whether or not to include Martha Nussbaum's conception of citizenship because, again, she was aware of her supervisor's substantial knowledge on that subject. "I call it the social game... If the professor knows a lot about something, you don't want to get yourself into a hole", she commented. "Let's avoid conflict... because the teacher can make or break you".

In the end, responding to what Kadake perceived as distinct demands of two primary audiences (two different professors), she crafted two slightly different proposals on the same topic. For example, in her proposal for Introduction to Research in Education, she included search parameters (keywords for database search) because the course instructor had explicitly requested this information. However, she said this information would not be necessary for her directed study proposal, and that she had not included it there. This tension if anything supports the idea that genres themselves do not reflect static conceptualizations.

Stylistic Concerns

An important stylistic constraint that Kadake placed upon her writing related to the degree to which she wove personal reflections or comments into the fabric of the proposal. During our final interview, I asked her why she had avoided implicating herself and her own life story reflexively within the text. It was my impression that her own experiences and thoughts on identity as an English native-speaking Canadian with Caribbean roots growing in a majority French speaking province would have added richness to the discussion. After deliberation, she stated she had previously believed a subjective authorial presence was not required because she does not identify herself in the writing as belonging to any specific cultural or ideological group. Exposing elements of her own life experience that might point to potential biases in her study was simply not a move she considered necessary.

Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process

Kadake identified the process of allocating information to appropriate

subsections as a key challenge. She said it was difficult to separate the scope of inquiry from the problem statement and the literature review.

Tailoring the writing in response to perceived expectations of two different professors was also difficult. “Because I am working on this in tandem with my proposal for this program,.. it is double the work because I have to follow [the instructor's] guidelines, but I have to tailor it to my [advisor's expectations] as well”, she stated.

Text Analysis

Title: “Exploring Cosmopolitanism and the ‘World Citizen’ Philosophy: Implications for Education in a Global Age”.

Analysis of the “Introduction” Section

The first sub-section of Kadake’s proposal, entitled “Introduction”, briefly introduces key concepts that will be focused upon in the proposal. It consists of a single paragraph reproduced below in its entirety:

Introduction

The dizzying array of theories and interpretations of citizenship presents numerous possible dilemmas for schools and educators: How can these various meanings be reconciled in curricula and pedagogy? Should the purpose of education be the preparation of students to become active, responsible and “good” citizens of their community or of the world? How should concepts of citizenship guide or influence schooling processes?

Nominal groups in these clauses reference several central foci of Kadake's proposal, most importantly the focus on “the various meanings of citizenship” and how citizenship might relate to education (“curricula and pedagogy”, “preparation of students”, schooling processes”). Epithets “dizzying”, modifying “array of theories and interpretations of citizenship”, and “various”, modifying “meanings” suggest a unwieldy state of knowledge, lacking in consensus and clarity, and thus preparing the reader for the main purpose of the proposed study, namely conceptual consolidation. The exophoric reference (reference to information not contained within the body of the text itself) in the nominal group “*The dizzying array of theories and interpretations of citizenship*” assumes at least some shared theoretical knowledge between writer and reader which can be relied upon to ensure the logical coherence of the introductory paragraph (note: She does not state “There is a dizzying array...” or “There exists a dizzying array...” because this knowledge is assumed to be shared).

At the interpersonal level, the series of questions in the introduction function simply to offer information about the focus of the proposed study. The use of these interrogatives requires the reader's ability to ponder these rhetorical questions adequately, again assuming a certain amount of shared knowledge. Modal auxiliaries of possibility or suggestion (How *can* these various meanings be reconciled...? / *Should* the purpose of education be...?) functioning as finites in their respective clauses invoke a shared concern about the place of citizenship education in schools. However, no sense of urgency or obligation to act is construed, suggesting the introduction is designed to provoke thought, rather than demand action. This nicely sets the 'reasoned' philosophical tone of the rest of the proposal.

Analysis of the "Literature Review" Section

In support of this particular attempt at philosophical inquiry, a major portion of the literature review is devoted to defining and classifying terminology. Kadake first establishes conceptual boundaries of two key terms, "cosmopolitanism" and "globalization", and forges links between the two. As would be expected in any attempt at definition, a large percentage of the clauses in this section are relational in nature, establishing class membership (e.g. "...*cosmopolitanism*, which is citizenship in relation to the world; citizenship which transgresses the nation-state"). Numerous other clausal processes serving to define (e.g. "is identified with" / "means" / "is centered on" / or "can generally be understood as") also appear in this section, and function to establish conceptual boundaries.

Kadake also makes use of the literature review to frame perspectives on citizenship and cosmopolitanism within their respective historical contexts, drawing

briefly on philosophical works of the Cynics and Stoics of ancient Greece, late enlightenment period philosophy of Emmanuel Kant, and contemporary conceptions offered by German sociologist Jürgen Habermas and American philosopher Martha Nussbaum. In general, this section coheres very well. At the textual level, for example, she exploits a series of marked topical Themes (e.g. “With roots in classical liberal theory, ...”, “Since Laertius and the Stoics, ...”) to orient the reader and set chronological parameters to her discussion. Textual Themes (e.g. “On the other hand, ...”, “Although...”) set up appropriate logico-semantic relationships between clauses and the ideas they present. This means that when the reader reaches the marked topical Theme (“Considering these various perspectives,...”) referring back to the series of definitions of citizenship and cosmopolitanism outlined in this section, a coherent generalized picture presents itself to the reader. This leads to a supported and explicit conclusion that “defining or discussing citizenship solely in relation to membership to a civic community or distinct polity...is no longer sufficient”.

Oddly, the final paragraph of the literature review, introducing the concept of “lonely citizens”, and discussing “a crisis of meaning and belonging” (quoted directly from Carson, 2006, p. 25), seems to hang, rhetorically homeless, with only an implicit link within the overall structure of Kadake's argument, begging further elaboration.

Interpersonally, the Literature Review section can be characterized by its informative tone; it functions as a straightforward transaction of background information realized through a series of declaratives. No sense of doubt is construed about the veracity or acceptability of information provided. Nor is there any attempt to coerce the reader, or convince him or her of the acceptability of the claims. The perceived reading audience is simply assumed to be receptive to the arguments presented therein.

Analysis of the Research Questions Section

The Research Questions section is presented under two subheadings: “Main Research Question (Issue)” and “Subsidiary Research Questions”. It should be noted that, although related, these questions are not the same as those that inhabit the introductory paragraph described earlier (a point relating to issues of textual cohesion). The Main Research Question consists of a single relational identifying clause: “The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of cosmopolitanism and discuss its implications for education.” There is some ambiguity within this clause because, from an ideational perspective, it is unclear whose understanding the study has been designed to develop, the author's or the education field's more generally.

The “Subsidiary Research Questions” section is also short enough to be included below in its entirety and I include it here for the benefit of the reader. It consists of four interrogatives, presented in an ordered list:

- A. What does it mean to be a global or world citizen?
- B. How and why should today's students be educated to be global citizens?
- C. Can the adoption of the global citizen philosophy in education contribute towards increasing tolerance, compassion, and understanding amongst young people?
- D. What are the limitations or challenges of this philosophy?

At the textual level, the use of an ordered list effectively organizes the information. In addition, the ideational constituents profiled here (“a global or world citizen” / “global citizens”) echo concerns outlined in the Literature Review section. Other clausal constituents, relating to citizenship education, echo concerns raised in the introduction (e.g. “today's students” / “the adoption of the global citizen philosophy in education”). The reemergence of these core concerns strengthens the cohesiveness of the proposal as a whole because, generically, the reader has been primed for the reemergence of these ideas as foci of the research.

Analysis of the “Rationale” Section

Kadake begins the Rationale section with a direct and pertinent question: “Why is citizenship, or more specifically, cosmopolitanism, worth studying?” The rationale she presents relies on a series of clausal Circumstances that function to qualify a social and political climate of discord, a climate in which the adoption of a “world citizenship” view in education may be especially timely and beneficial. Specifically, she suggests that we live “in a global age”, “in an age of much discord”, and refers to “clashes” relating to issues of identity, qualified by Circumstances of location (“around the world” / “inside and outside the classroom”). Circumstances of matter (“over civic identity” / “[over] difference” / “[over] human rights” / “[over] belonging”) establish more specifically the ideas around which discord has emerged.

A second key paragraph in the Rationale section focuses on “flaws and limitations of cosmopolitan theory”, concluding, however, that useful elements “can be extracted and used in meaningful ways”. She chooses to profile flaws only in the theory of Martha Nussbaum, rather than discussing flaws in other conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism. The reader may sense an imbalance here because a number of other conceptualizations appear in the literature review (e.g. those of Kant and Habermas). Arguably, a more elaborate discussion of some of the flaws of these other conceptualizations of citizenship might have fruitfully appeared as part of the literature review. That way, they could be efficiently and easily referenced in this section without going into too much detail. However, this is not a serious organizational or stylistic flaw, but rather another way of approaching the rhetorical problem.

One notable omission from this section relates to conventional move of addressing a specific “gap” in the literature. For example, the section might be revised

to signal a paucity of literature focusing on ways to integrate cosmopolitanism theory in meaningful ways in education.

Analysis of the “Approach and Scope of Study” Section

As would be expected in a genre move delimiting approach and scope of proposed research, a series of relational clauses establish study focus. However, Kadake devotes most of this single paragraph subsection to describing what the scope and approach will 'not' entail. For example, following an assertion that “meanings of citizenship vary considerably by country, region and classroom” she states, “selecting educational institutions for participant observation would thus be difficult.” Because there has been no question of including participant observation as part of the study up to this point, this assertion seems unnecessary. She seems to be addressing perceived reader assumptions that may not in fact exist.

Kadake closes the “Approach and Scope of the Study” paragraph with a relational clause complex in which she at once proscribes and prescribes the focus of her research. Specifically, she states “the goal in this research is not to examine individuals’ perspectives, but to understand *foundational* concepts of cosmopolitan citizenship and explore how *educators and researchers* are debating and discussing the topic as it relates to education” [emphasis in original].

From a textual perspective, it seems unusual that the main ideational concerns of the study are placed at the end of the paragraph, rather than fore-fronted in a topic sentence at or near the beginning. By fore-fronting her chosen scope and approach, the process of also proscribing its boundaries by stating what it would not entail would have seemed more natural.

Analysis of the “Methodology” Section

Relying on a series of material processes, Kadake profiles steps she has taken and will take in order to conduct the study. Because the methodology relies on a literature search and analysis, electronic databases used to locate relevant literature are specifically mentioned, as are exact search term combinations used to locate articles. Kadake also identifies specific types of materials collected (e.g. “peer-reviewed articles”, “several books and chapters by specific authors in edited books”, or “works by notable 3rd and 18th century philosophers who are cited in almost all current literature on cosmopolitanism”). Specificity in this regard was encouraged by the course professor and has been achieved here.

The “Data Analysis” section of the methodology has been given its own subheading. In this subsection, Kadake describes “a preliminary categorization of the data (the literature)” that has already been completed, providing thematic categories under which materials have been and will be classed in the future:

1. General citizenship theory
2. Specific citizenship theory- cosmopolitanism
3. Cosmopolitanism and globalization
4. Difference, belonging and identity (and its link to cosmopolitanism)
5. Cosmopolitanism and education
 - a. Case studies/models of cosmopolitanism in the school
 - b. Dealing with issues of citizenship post 9/11

Issues of coding are, accordingly, addressed, although at a superficial level.

Unanswered is the question of how a specific framework will ensure findings are presented in a useful and coherent manner (i.e. how will emergent themes be tied together into a convincing ‘story’?). Generally, the section might have benefited from reference to literature focusing specifically on methodological issues in philosophical inquiry. This was not done.

At the textual level, a bulleted list presents the databases consulted. Similarly,

a numbered list presents preliminary categories that have emerged from previous reading and that will be used for organizing future content. Although it is unclear why she has chosen to associate thematic categories with numbers, the use of bulleted and numbered lists does present information in a visually accessible format.

Analysis of “Dissemination [of Results]” Section

The proposal includes a brief section on dissemination of results. More detail could have been provided in this section. Kadake simply states that “this study will be sent to any educational body or peer-reviewed journals seeking submissions of papers”. The mention of specific journals or at least areas of specialty that might be interested in the study would evidence Kadake's greater familiarity with field publications.

Analysis of “Ethics” Section

It is questionable whether this section is needed at all because only previously published materials are used as data. Accordingly, Kadake's main concern needs be the accurate representation of ideas contained in those source texts. As it stands, this single paragraph section focuses on considerations relating to potential misinterpretations of the concept of cosmopolitanism, a concept that she explicitly aligns herself with as a means to reduce cross-cultural tensions in education (“I take the position that cosmopolitanism is a good thing and can be beneficial when applied in an educational context”).

The paragraph coheres well due to its effective use of organizing textual markers (e.g. “As...”, “However, ...”, “For example...”, “Although...”) to establish

relationships between clauses and their ideas. It follows a conventional claim – warrant - example pattern of argumentation.

Analysis of the References Section

Kadake presents a four-page list of source material. However, what she labels “References” section can more aptly be described as a bibliography because it contains sources that have not been cited in the proposal itself. Subheadings within the list of sources map directly to categories Kadake plans to use to classify additional source material, ensuring an organizational parallelism within the document. The list of sources is alphabetically organized and all references are provided in APA format required by the course instructor.

Case 7: Maya

About the Participant

Maya was born in the Punjab region of India. With family, she moved to Toronto, Canada as a small child. Although Punjabi was spoken at home, Maya grew up speaking English as her first and dominant language. Her primary and secondary school education was completed entirely in the English language in Toronto, Ontario, as were undergraduate studies in English literature at the University of Toronto. At the time of this study, Maya was enrolled in her second year of the M.A. in Educational Studies program.

Writing for purposes other than research and academics was a vital part of her life outside the classroom. Journalistic and creative writing, in particular, had become passions in recent years. However, Maya had had little experience writing for research purposes before entry into the graduate program. Although previous academic writing during undergraduate studies had involved extensive reading and analysis of literature, she lacked formal instruction, in particular, on how to produce writing characteristic of the philosophical form of scholarship she felt drawn to. Core research methodology concepts and research vocabulary were also largely unfamiliar to her.

Maya said she recognized the usefulness of the proposal writing exercise in Introduction to Research in Education because she planned to eventually write her comprehensive exam (a major research paper required for graduation) or master's thesis on the same topic. The proposal writing process, she felt, would help her learn to write in a more concise, scholarly style. In addition, she expressed a desire to continue work in academia, although unsure precisely in which capacity this would be.

Study Proposed by the Participant

Maya's proposal ("IT Education and Female Empowerment in India: Does it make Dollars *and* Sense?") posed the question of whether information technology (IT) education in India, spurred by burgeoning demand for skilled computer workers, can act as a means for both economic growth in that country and the empowerment of its women. In Maya's words, the primary aim of the project was to "assess the impact of IT education on the status of women in India" and, in particular, to explore how policy aimed at improving access to IT education serves to empower or disempower Indian women. Her proposed research methodology involved conducting an in-depth literature search to assess "potential and actual efficacy of IT education initiatives in India as a means to female empowerment."

The Proposal Development Process

A desire to explore scholarship pertaining to gender disparity in India played an important role in Maya's selection of proposal topic. She had begun exploring the issue of gender disparity more generally in a previous class on neo-liberalism, and now wanted to expand her knowledge about the specific case in India. The topic of female empowerment through education in India was also important to Maya for personal reasons. Extended family still lived in that country. During one interview, she talked with concern about future opportunities for her younger female cousins living in rural India, noting that they are the ones whose lives would be affected by new educational policies. She also suggested her identity as a "transnational feminist" had a bearing on the focus of her inquiry, providing an impetus to do work based on feminist values.

To begin collecting information for inclusion in the proposal draft, Maya

turned first to material from work in previous courses. In particular, a significant portion of the literature for the background and rationale sections of Maya's proposal was recycled from notes and summaries produced for previous academic papers. These were transformed, and found new life in the proposal.

New material, collected specifically for use in the introduction and background section, came from electronic journals and articles on the World Wide Web. The process of collecting and documenting field literature was similar, in this case, to that undertaken for academic writing in previous courses. Maya told me that, in general, she recorded links or references to sources she believed useful. She then created short summaries of relevant ideas in electronic format. By emailing these summaries and notes to herself using her G-Mail account (G-Mail is a web-based e-mail service that allows text search of stored messages), she compiled an expanding 'text-searchable' bank of material. This mode of documentation and storage allowed her to conduct quick and easy searches of summaries and notes by entering keywords into the mail search field in G-Mail.

Not all proceeded smoothly for Maya in the early stages of the writing process. The problem of establishing a viable research framework as a lens to guide and focus her analysis was a concern from the early weeks in the course. For support and ideas in this regard, Maya first turned to a model article used as an example of philosophical inquiry for "dissection" as a class assignment (see Hyslop-Margison, 2002). In that exemplary case, the author had applied what he labelled an "Aristotelian intellectual virtue framework" as a means to ensure liberal education programs adequately incorporate career or work preparation. Maya hoped to emulate Hyslop-Margison's approach using a different framework. Unfortunately, the search

for a suitable framework for her own project proved elusive. She experienced this search as an ongoing struggle with the focus of the study. “I kept trying to figure out what my variable [*sic*] was. There was just nothing; it was so muddled”, she conceded.

Early peer feedback sessions during class time were also not as useful as Maya had hoped in the process of establishing an acceptable research framework for her proposal. During one of those feedback sessions, midway through the course, she communicated her intention to make use of two “discourses” (post-colonial and feminist), with their inherent ideological underpinnings, as theoretical lenses through which to approach the study. However, because the outline was not detailed enough at the time it was presented to classmates, the amount and quality of feedback she received was limited. Also, as a more experienced researcher would likely attest to, a ‘discourse’ (usually interpretable as a conventionalised set of ideological assumptions) does not transform easily or automatically into a specific framework for research.

If anything, Maya felt the physical act of writing down ideas to form an outline helped her most in organizing her ideas. The outline emerged through a series of drafts written with pen on paper. During the outlining process, she began by brainstorming possible content for specific subsections of her proposal. To ensure content was allocated to appropriate subsections, she made use of an organizational aid provided to all students in the first week of class (see Appendix B). However, examination of differences between successive drafts of the outline reveals the numerous changes in focus and content that the outline underwent. Features that appeared in the first outline were either removed or de-emphasized in later drafts. Specifically, an early focus on the effects of market-oriented education policies on rural Indian women was removed and replaced with a focus on the effects of IT

education policies on women more generally. Next, although an early outline suggested the study would “deconstruct” UN education policy documents and explore how interpretation of these documents affects the lives of Indian women, Maya subsequently broadened the scope to explore how IT education policy, more generally, serves to empower or disempower women. This purposeful broadening of scope made the topic less manageable in the end. In any case, from multiple revisions emerged a working outline (a partially organized series of notes under subsections *Title, Problem Statement, Background, Main Questions, Rationale, and Methodology*). This outline functioned as a key mediational artefact in the process, and once copied from paper into electronic format, was transformed directly into the first working draft of the proposal.

The content and organization of the ‘outline-cum-draft’ further evolved in interaction with the professor’s comments. Unfortunately, the feedback experience was emotionally unpleasant for Maya, and she reported a serious destabilization of her confidence as a result of the professor’s comments on her first electronic draft of the proposal. She believed the comments were “harsh” and “heavy-handed” and also felt upset that the instructor made little effort to focus on positive aspects of her writing. A section of the document in question is reproduced below with instructor comments preserved as ‘tracked changes’ and with Maya’s subsequent notes to herself written in green pen:

Figure 6. Comments on Maya's outline

usability → Huh? positive affects or risks?

Development and Female Empowerment:
Examining the development approach to female empowerment in Indian education
Problem Statement

The millennium development plan puts "human development" at the centre of development, and stresses global partnerships in order to attain this goal. The Mill. Dec. states that making globalization a positive force on all countries, including those countries that have historically been negatively affected by globalization (such as India) is one of its primary aims. It delineates this idea by centralizing the opportunity for economic and social "development" the main potential positive affect. It also identifies basic rights and freedoms of people within such states and member states' commitment to providing these rights to people, through development strategies, thereby empowering them, and making empowerment another central aim. This statement is tautological! You need to separate ideas into separate sentences for clarity's sake. It integrates both concepts as being dependent upon each other, but provides no real justification for doing so. Never the less, MD strategies are in full effect in member states, particularly affecting those states identified as being particularly negatively affected by globalization.

what is the aim of this project?

detail - what does this mean? All member states have

what is empowerment in this context?

This first paragraph needs to be unpacked. There are too many ideas in it. You need to say something about how some states are negatively affected by globalization.

You need to define empowerment - female and other.

Ironically, it was clarity in writing that Maya had originally prided herself on. During our first interview, she stated her belief that the proposal would be successful because, in her own words, she was a "succinct writer".

By the end of the course, however, Maya reported an improvement in confidence. Once the initial negative reaction to feedback had passed, she said she felt newly "challenged" by the task. This feeling also prompted her to search out the assistance of a classmate who provided additional advice. "Particularly, there were a lot of concepts that needed to be fleshed out" she conceded. "I just wanted to do so much".

Stylistic Concerns

An important constraint Maya placed upon her writing reflects an attempt to maintain a de-personalized scholarly stance. She admitted avoiding instances in which her own life story or personal reflections intruded too much within the text. This decision was made after conscious deliberation. Referring to competing tendencies

toward objective and subjective authorial stance, she explained:

Because I am a journalist, I feel there has to be some sort of hook, even to get me in as a writer. I had to decide whether to start it off with a story... me talking with my cousin in the summer in India... her talking about her goals and how much the place where I was from has changed... now there are skyscrapers where there used to be mud huts. But I went completely the other way. I feel that is a big problem with my academic writing at the master's level. I feel like I am not able to switch hats very well. When you are doing creative writing, or even journalism to some extent, you can let your subjectivity in. You can certainly let your subjectivity in academic writing too, but it [journalistic and creative writing] can be less organized, and you don't have to detail every single concept that you are talking about. So I didn't want to open the floodgates – to realize 'now I am writing just like I am writing a story...' That was difficult to do because that is how I enjoy writing and that is how I want my writing to be.

Maya expressed a desire to first write in what she felt was a more conventional academic style in order to “get the clarity down”. “I feel like the creative writing and journalistic writing I do lacks the clarity that I need to work on” she said. “I want to work on that first, and as I get better, I will be able to write in a more beautiful style.”

Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process

For Maya, the greatest challenge in the writing process involved narrowing the focus of her inquiry. This problem was most evident in her attempt to define her research problem in a problem statement: “I was constantly thinking about it, giving myself headaches, turning around in circles”, she told me. “That took a lot of my time”. Not wanting to oversimplify the research problem, she had decided to broaden her original problem statement “to solve all the UN's problems in one fell swoop” she admitted, jokingly. This also necessitated the challenge of defining some unwieldy key terms such as “female empowerment”, “globalisation”, and “social development”. Of her own making, she became caught in a web of abstraction with each successive reworking of her problem statement. Looking back at first draft attempts during our final interview she admitted: “It is so clear that I was confused when I was writing

this... It was just too much.”

Documenting the specifics of the methodology section also proved particularly challenging, despite her initial belief that this section would be straightforward to complete. “Once I figure out what I want to do, it is just a matter of adding what I am going to compare to what, or what I am going to apply to what”, she had told me during our first interview. At the end of the course, however, the methodology section was the one section with which Maya felt most dissatisfied. It was a section she had struggled to improve through successive drafting with little success. The day before the final draft of the proposal was due, she had been told by the professor in a personal meeting that the methodology section was still not specific enough. In that meeting, the professor had stressed that even in philosophical scholarship, you need to discuss what information you are looking for and what framework you are going to put that information into. Maya did not fully succeed in either endeavour.

Finally, poor time management likely contributed to many of the difficulties Maya faced. Recalling her lengthy struggle to collect and organize ideas, she suggested she often underestimates how long the “free-for-all stage” goes for her, a time period after which a chaotic array of ideas coalesces into some organized form on the written page.

Text Analysis

Proposal Title: “IT Education and Female Empowerment in India: Does it make Dollars and Sense?”

Analysis of the “Problem Statement” Section

The first section of Maya's proposal, entitled “Problem Statement”, functions to construct background conditions against which the proposal's main arguments are profiled. The reader is presented with an ideological division, one in which the assumptions of feminist and post-colonial discourses are contrasted with those of economic and market-centred worldviews. From this division emerge an in-group (with whose ideological presuppositions the reader is encouraged to align him or herself) and an out-group (from whose ideological presuppositions the reader is encouraged to distance him or herself).

As part of the out-group, Maya profiles Indian state governments (those of Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Haryana) that have developed education reform policies calling for increased corporate investment in education, specifically IT education. Reform sympathizers, consisting of “many Indians”, are also associated with this out-group, for they too, in Maya's words, are “not troubled by the way that these education reform policies conflate *potential* and *earning potential*” [emphasis added] and are “unconcerned by the way that such policies reduce human potential to dollars and cents”. Finally, global economic institutions, and specifically the World Bank, are implicated as key out-group participants in this ideological divide, for they have “encouraged India to look at gender disparity in education in *economic terms*” [emphasis added].

The construction of an ideological out-group allows for the next move in the

introduction, which is to profile an in-group that rejects economic growth as the sole criterion for and means toward female empowerment. The alignment of author with this in-group ideology is clearly marked with the choice of the inclusive pronoun “we” in the final clause complex of the Research Problem section:

If *we* are to assess the true value of IT education for Indian women, *we* must abandon the simplistic notion that greater accessibility to education is equal to empowering education. *We* must acknowledge the centrality of IT education in India's economic growth strategy, and examine whether or not IT education can both act as a means for economic growth and female empowerment. [emphasis added]

This is mainly a concern of the interpersonal metafunction in writing (the manner in which the writer-reader relationship is realized through lexical and structural choices). In this case, the inclusive Subject pronoun 'we' aligns the reader and writer in a presumed sympathetic relationship. At the same time, a sense of forceful urgency and communal obligation is construed through the choice of the repeated modal auxiliary form 'must' (“*we must* abandon...” / “*We must* acknowledge...”). Appearance of the first person plural as Subject in these two clause complexes marks a distinct shift in interpersonal tone. Before this point, the initial series of declaratives (19 independent clauses) laying out the context of the problem contain little evidence of authorial attitude or positioning with regards to the problem.

At the textual level, the Problem Statement coheres well as a whole, with the possible exception of the first paragraph. In these opening lines, the reader is confronted with a series of five new topical Themes. Specifically, it begins with a topical focus on India (which sees “Bangalore as its biggest economic success story”). However, subsequent topical Themes within the same paragraph show thematic drift, focusing on Bangalore, then “IT schools in India” more generally, actions of “some of the world's largest companies” (moving to India), and finally “a 2005 study” on IT industry revenues. At the same time, there are no textual cues in first-word sentence

position to link these associated, but disparate topical Themes.

The second, third, and fourth paragraphs of the Problem Statement, however, do not suffer from this lack of internal cohesion. Each elaborates upon a single topical Theme laid out in its respective topic sentence:

Table 11. Textual devices to ensure paragraph cohesion

Paragraph	Theme	Description	Function
2	"Today..."	topical Theme: Circumstance of location / time	Introduces a paragraph describing the present situation in India
3	"But many Indians..."	contrastive textual Theme introducing the topical Theme "many Indians"	Introduces a participant that will be identified through elaboration as belonging to an ideological out-group
4	"For the global economic community..."	topical Theme: Circumstance / angle.	Introduces a participant that will be identified through elaboration as belonging to an ideological out-group

Analysis of the "Research Questions" Section

Having identified a research problem, Maya moves next to a section entitled "Research Questions". At the functional core of this section is a relational clause identifying the primary focus of the proposed research ("It is the primary aim of this project to assess the impact of IT education on the status of women in India"). The focus of the project is further qualified with the question: "How does access to IT education policy serve to empower or disempower women?"

This section also establishes conceptual boundaries of two key nominal groups - "female empowerment" and "female empowerment education", an important move in determining the focus of inquiry:

For the purposes of this project, female empowerment will refer to a process aimed at "abolish[ing] the sexual division of labour, end[ing] male control of women's bodies

and generally establish[ing] political and social equity for women” (Patel, 1996, p. 90). Female empowerment education will then refer to all education strategies that represent a viable means to achieving the above stated goals.

Problems, however, arise within a list of secondary research questions. In these questions specifically, the conceptual categories employed are arguably too broad or are ill defined. Problematic nominal groups characterized by imprecise or unwieldy categorization include the following:

Table 12. Imprecision in nominal groups

Nominal groups shown in italics	Required information lacking due to imprecision in categorization:
<i>What is the true impact of greater female participation in the marketplace on the status of women in India?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •“True Impact” according to which criteria? •“Greater female participation in the marketplace” in which capacity and in which areas of the “marketplace”? •“Status” according to who or to which criteria?
<i>How does corporate involvement in education marginalize Indian women?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •“Corporate involvement” in which capacity? •Involvement at which educational level and in which institutions?
<i>Does IT education's apparent exclusion of indigenous identities in pedagogy present a significant impediment to female empowerment through education?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •IT education conducted in which regions / institutions? •Which facets of “indigenous identities” are being referred to here? •“Impediment to female empowerment” in what sense?

Through these secondary research questions, Maya sets up a focus demanding a general description of how IT education and a monolithic corporate agenda impact the lives of women. Given the complexity of the social, ecological or economic systems at play throughout India, such broad-stroke categorizations are bound to face criticism. Although this approach may prove useful to some in promoting “transnational-feminist” ideals, it is not conducive to precision or rigour in research practice.

Analysis of the Background Section

In the third section in Maya's proposal, entitled "Background", a series of background claims are made, supported by references to scholarly literature dating between 1995 and 2004. This is a conventional move in a generic sense. In it, Maya constructs an argument against the potential of IT education to empower women, suggesting it may, conversely, have a negative impact by perpetuating inequalities inherent in the existing labour market.

The "Background" section also functions to categorize key participants at the ideational level. First, the nature of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals is established through a relational clause, elaborated upon with a direct quote from a UN Millennium Project (2006) document:

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are goals established by the United Nations to combat extreme poverty by addressing, "income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion-while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability [and] basic human rights-the rights of each person on the planet to health, education, shelter, and security" (UN Millennium Project, 2006, NP) particularly in so-called "under-developed" nations like India.

Missing from the discussion, however, is an extension providing more specific information relating to educational goals. The UN label then, through the semantic process of holonymy, stands as Actor in the place of the specific individuals, programs and actions which have influenced the development of IT education initiatives in India:

The UN, spearheaded by the research [*sic*] of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has exerted continuous influence on politicians and policy-makers in India to combat poverty through economic development.

In this case, Maya's writing might benefit from greater specifics in her referencing practices, to move deeper from the upper layers of abstraction and generality in which

the writing generally dwells.

The World Bank, too, functions as a principal Actor in subsequent clauses, and like the UN, is construed, through the process of holonymy, as a single cognizant agent, responsible for the actions and policies of all of its constituent parts. Although she does later reference a specifically enacted business strategy (the World Bank's own "country assistance strategy for India"), here too, the proposal would have benefited from a more elaborate explication of this and other strategies that are influencing IT education policy development.

The final two paragraphs of the "Background" section compare "market education" (represented by IT education) with "alternatives to IT education". Again, in a relational clause attributing class membership, Maya construes alternatives to IT education as those that "reject IT education's logic of economic growth as the primary means for female empowerment, and instead posit female empowerment as both a means and the end of education." This definition is supported with an example drawn from the work of Indian scholar Samant (1995) describing experiences of women involved in a literacy program in a Bombay slum: "Literacy stopped being a goal; it became a means to an end: empowerment" (Samant, 1995, pg.1). Extension of the positive outcomes of this slum education initiative to her argument against market-focused IT education is implicit. However, the comparability of circumstances (market-excluded slum dwellers with market-integrated young IT students) is tenuous, and does little to add rhetorical force to Maya's argument.

At the textual level, the use of cohesive textual Theme ensuring cohesion *within* paragraphs is adequate, at times, graceful. What is seemingly lacking are topical and textual links *between* paragraphs. For example, the first two paragraphs

elaborate upon the idea that IT education does not necessarily empower women. They lead to the following explicitly stated conclusions:

Gender disparity in education in India is often explained as a function of the labour market's preferential treatment of men over women.

IT market education has the potential to simply reproduce and reinforces existing inequalities in education.

However, the subsequent paragraph (a brief discussion of UN Millennium Development Goals) is not explicitly linked (textually or ideationally) to these key ideas. No mention is made as to how specific development goals relate to the issue of gender disparity or how these goals might influence the status quo in India. Likewise, the gender disparity issue, which should be a key facet emphasized in UN Millennium Development Goals paragraph, is not explicitly reintroduced in subsequent paragraphs either. These final paragraphs simply discuss actions of state governments and the World Bank. The connection between UN goals and the way these are or are not implicated in the actions of real IT education stakeholders is thus not as clear as it could be.

Analysis of the “Rationale” Section

Similar to the “Problem Statement” and “Background” sections that precede it, relational clauses play a crucial role in the “Rationale” section. Maya constructs in-group and out-group categorizations, presenting, once again the dichotomy of worldviews that necessitates the proposed study in the first place. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are identified through relational structures as the “the primary sources of knowledge on the topic of IT education and female

empowerment in education”. This allows for the construction of a contrasting point of view within whose boundaries Maya, as researcher, can position herself. It is a perspective that counters the strictly market oriented view of empowerment through IT education in India.

In the fourth paragraph, Maya brings herself as author and researcher more fully into the discourse, identifying herself as one with “a strong personal interest in seeing the status of women rise in India”. This is an important move in qualitative research writing because it allows the reader to establish the extent of researcher bias, and how such biases might influence the results of the study. At the same time, emergence of Maya's identity is necessary to establish her suitability for the research task at hand - she is an independent, financially disinterested party, disposed to integrating feminist and post-colonial discourses into policy analysis. Identity and personal intention also directly emerge in the final line of the Rationale section: “Lastly, being of Indian decent [*sic*] myself, I have a strong personal interest in seeing the status of women rise [in] India, my home”.

Analysis of the “Methodology” Section

The methodology section consists of a series of material processes (“I will search...”, “I will consult...”, “I will look for...”, “I will use...”) in which Maya presents, in numbered point form, her intended methodological steps. This move follows generic convention. For the most part, the numbered steps describe parameters of her proposed literature search, delimiting the search by retrieval location (e.g. Proquest database, UN policy documents, The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2005). Key terms for use in the search of electronic

databases (e.g. “Information Technology”, “India”, “education”, “women”, “status” and “empowerment”) are also included. While this level of specificity is welcome, other search parameters are, however, not so clearly delineated. For example, the clause “I will consult *sources that I am already familiar with* that deal with the topic or *related topics*, such as Kimlechoe, Shiva and Stromquist...” [emphasis added] leaves considerable room for ambiguity of interpretation. There is no way the reader can know with certainty which sources Maya is already familiar with, and can only guess which “related topics” she is referring to. This is an example of overly writer-centred expression.

The final methodological step she profiles differs from others in that it describes what will be done with the material collected during the literature search and how it will be analysed. Unfortunately, the description leaves much to be desired. No developed, systematic plan for analysis of data is presented. At the ideational level, meanings in this step are highly ambiguous because the nominal groups that function as conceptual constituents of the clause are still largely undefined. For example, Maya states: “I [will] use *the previously stated philosophical discourses* to assess the potential and actual efficacy of IT education initiatives in India as a means to female empowerment” [emphasis added]. The use of a discourse as a lens for analysis is clearly not the same as the use of a clearly defined framework for research. At this point, the reader can only hazard to guess the nature of the discourses that will be used to explore the issue. What's more, no mention is given about how Maya might go about assessing either the “potential” or the “actual efficacy” of education initiatives for empowering women. Nor is reference to specific IT education initiatives or policy documents that might act as focal points for inquiry included here. The methodology section, from an ideational perspective, is the weakest within the

proposal simply because it lacks description of many of the core procedures to be undertaken.

At the textual level, the use of a numbered list ensures internal order of information in the Methodology section. However, the use of numbering is not a reflection of any real need to conduct the methodological steps in order, since eleven of the twelve steps are simply a description of the literature search parameters.

Analysis of the “Sources” Section

The final section, entitled “Sources”, was incomplete in the final draft submitted to me. The single source listed was not presented in APA format requested by the course instructor.

Case 8: Sabine

About the Participant

Daughter of French Canadian parents, Sabine spent the early years of her life in a francophone region of Acadia in New Brunswick, Canada. At the age of eight, she moved with family to a predominantly English speaking area in the same province.

Sabine's undergraduate studies in psychology and international development were conducted entirely in French in New Brunswick. Before entering the Master of Educational Studies program, she had taken only a few university level courses in English.

In life outside of academics, she had worked with community and non-governmental organizations developing educational materials. Pottery, music, yoga, and various outdoor activities were important in her life, and she expressed an ongoing interest in arts education.

Sabine had some experience presenting the results of quantitative analyses before beginning Introduction to Research in Education. She told me development of research writing abilities was important to her because, in the future, she planned to work for a government agency or non-government organization. She believed research writing abilities would transfer to requirements for writing reports as part of the job in such organizations.

Study Proposed by the Student

Sabine's proposed study, "Actively learning through the lens of a camera: A study of participatory photography as a research and pedagogical tool", has youths between 17 and 25 years of age venture into the streets of a Canadian city to take

photographs they personally associate with the theme of poverty. Study participants then write short narratives about their photographs and, through group discussion, reflect on the extent to which the 'participatory photography' methodology itself has allowed them to identify personal beliefs and assumptions about poverty, foster a deeper understanding of the issue, and subsequently, critically examine their own beliefs.

The Proposal Development Process

The thematic focus on participatory photography as a research and pedagogical tool was inspired by Sabine's previous experience in the arts. She expressed to me her longstanding passion for painting, pottery, and music. In addition, discussions she had had with teachers who have integrated various forms of artistic expression in the classroom (along with some who expressed reluctance to do so) led her to the idea of exploring the potential of photography as a research and pedagogical tool. Among the visual arts, photography as a form of artistic expression was the least familiar to her. However, she believed this lack of familiarity would actually be beneficial, leading to fewer potential biases and assumptions regarding outcomes of the project.

For several weeks at the start of the course, Sabine was unsure how to proceed with her proposal. "I was thinking about the 'art of education' and how artistic expression can contribute to constructing knowledge, and I was using photography as a methodology, but it wasn't clear in my mind how to go about it", she said.

I felt like if I want to study the methodology, obviously I need a topic to study. And then I didn't know if I had to do some more research on that topic. I used poverty and thought maybe my research project will be around the perceptions of poverty. Is that what I am studying? But no – I am studying the methodology, but I wasn't sure how to go about studying the actual methodology ...I was kind of lost.

The proposal actually came together in the later half of the course, an important

catalyst being an article Sabine had come across that described the participatory photography methodology. “I was looking into other resources, but I just fell upon it – and thought ‘oh, this is exactly what I want to do’ ”, she told me. Before achieving this sense of purpose and clarity, Sabine had been collecting information about *participatory photography and other forms of artistic expression as tools for research*. However, the moment of discovering this key article was described as a pivotal, a moment in which clarity regarding the content and structure of the proposal emerged out of many uncertain possibilities.

The approach taken in drafting the proposal was similar to that taken for other course papers. Notes were jotted on paper during the reading process. She relied on drawing, at times, to help her narrow and consolidate her ideas. Other notes were written directly onto the computer, a process that proved more practical, although less intuitive for her:

I still prefer jotting notes on a piece of paper. I am very visual usually, but that takes too much time to write the notes and then copy. So I found it is easier if I write the notes directly on the computer. Then I can find it more easily, and if there is a quote, I can copy and paste directly.

To organize material in support of arguments in her proposal, Sabine used a colour-coding method. Information was essentially disorganized for much of the early note-taking process. As she proceeded to reread the notes, however, she highlighted sections with colours according to theme or category, each colour representing support for a particular argument or move in her writing. Information was then grouped according to colour code and woven together into a complete text.

Peer review sessions during the course of the term were also useful for Sabine in the process of clarifying ideas for herself. “For me personally, I have a whole bunch of ideas in my head, and it is completely clear to me” she explained, “but if I

don't know how to express it, by talking about it, I realize this isn't as clear as I thought." Discussion with classmates and the instructor was useful in this regard. She also relied on her boyfriend's ear (a person completely unfamiliar with the field of education) to ensure that ideas were clearly and logically presented.

Stylistic Concerns

Sabine initially expressed uncertainty regarding reader expectations for this particular kind of qualitative inquiry. She sensed this type of project would afford her freedoms not normally associated with the quantitative form of research writing she was more familiar with, a style of writing she felt she had been "brainwashed" into through experiences in psychology. After reading a classmate's paper, she began to reconsider past stylistic constraints on her writing, and was inspired to write her own experience into the proposal to a much greater extent. This led to the incorporation of Sabine's personal experiences in relation to the "Picturing Poverty" project at a local school for girls.

Discussing the influence of past experiences writing in the field of psychology, Sabine stated "coming from a quantitative research background, I have always been told - don't use 'I' - 'nothing personal' - 'you can't put yourself into the whole picture' ". Accordingly, "personalizing" the proposal, allowing her own life experiences, stories and personal biases to imbue the writing, was something that Sabine found challenging at first – and this despite a perception that she writes better and has more to say when it comes from her own experience. However, as the proposal took form, she said she consciously tried to avoid the objective, impersonal tone characteristic of experimental studies in psychology, and allowed herself to approach the problem in a "more creative, less linear" fashion.

Perceived Key Challenges in the Writing Process

Sabine felt one of the most challenging facets of the proposal writing process was simply getting ideas down on paper (and on the computer screen) in an ordered fashion. This, she attributed more to her own learning style.

I am not a very linear thinker. I have a hard time following that kind of 'recipe' - I guess because I have a whole bunch of ideas all at once - kind of like building a puzzle - and I see the global picture, but piecing together the details can take a lot of time.

Choosing appropriate wordings was sometimes challenging. However, where specific terms did not come to mind immediately, she simply bracketed a substitute (often the French term) and returned to it later. This challenge, she felt, was not specifically related to language deficits, but rather to the process of getting ideas across in writing more generally.

Finally, referencing practices were challenging simply because Sabine was not familiar with APA conventions required. The reference section was the last part of the proposal to be completed, and ensuring all references were presented in correct APA took time because formats had to be correctly copied.

Text Analysis

Title: “Actively Learning Through the Lens of a Camera: A Study of Participatory Photography as Research and Pedagogical Tool”

Analysis of the Introductory Section

Sabine begins her proposal with an untitled introductory section. The opening move involves a narrative style description of an after-school photography project, along with procedural steps involved in the so-called “Picturing Poverty” project itself. A mix of active and passive structures are employed, with active structures generally referring to Sabine's personal experience (e.g. “I came upon a very interesting after-school project...”), and passive structures describing the process involved in the photography project itself (e.g. “The pictures were then exhibited at a local Montreal school...” / “Community organizations, the school community, friends and family were all invited to the ‘vernissage.’”). The process description, couched in personal narrative, is clearly written and functions as an effective hook to engage the reader.

The introductory section text is constructed in a manner suggesting the reading audience is knowledgeable of the aims and characteristics of conventional research, particularly those associated with the positivist paradigm. Additional background information is not provided to explain the nature of this 'conventional' research against which participatory research is conceptually contrasted. Conversely, Sabine carefully defines and establishes meanings related to the presumed less unfamiliar term, “participatory photography”. Relational and material structures serve to classify and delimit its nature:

...participatory photography – also referred to as ‘Photovoice’ (Wang & Burris, 1997)

and 'autophotography' (Armstrong, 2005)...

Participants in participatory photography are involved as co-researchers...

The methodology includes participants taking pictures related to a theme, reflecting on photographs and expressing their thoughts through short narratives, and then discussing the photos and reflections with other participants.

For the benefit of the reader unfamiliar with the participatory photography approach, she clearly defines her terms and, through reference to related methodologies ('Photovoice' and 'autophotography'), establishes participatory photography as a methodology worthy of study in its own right.

Next, relying on relational attributive structures establishing class membership, Sabine strengthens her argument for the need for the study by outlining the unique characteristics of art-based approaches to research. The sentences below, for example, differentiate art-based approaches from more conventional forms of research:

Arts-based approaches to research are fairly new in education.

While arts-based approaches are gaining interest and attention in education, they are still at the margins of more conventional forms of research and teaching (Eisner, 1997).

Classified as "new" and "at the margins", and accordingly largely non-validated to date, the need for research evaluating these approaches is supported. This progression effectively sets the stage for two key declaratives that explicitly present the research need. In both cases, "further research" functions as topical Theme of the clause:

Further research is still needed to analyze the possibilities for arts based approaches, particularly participatory ones, in educational research and practice.

Further research on arts-based participatory inquiry methods, such as participatory photography, can provide insight into the educational potential for such methodologies in non-formal educational settings as well as formal classrooms, to explore relevant issues such as bullying, gender based violence, sexuality, social justice issues, cross-cultural understanding or curriculum-relevant topics.

Textually, the introductory section coheres well. Sabine's ideas are presented in a logical progression which contextualizes the study with a real world example, defines the concept of participatory photography, differentiates it from more

conventional forms of research associated with the positivist paradigm, and then explicitly asserts the need for further research to evaluate and test this particular form of inquiry. Groups of ideas are appropriately framed within respective paragraphs.

Analysis of “The Context” Section

In this section, a series of relational processes elaborate the concept of “image-based methods of inquiry”, establishing associations and class membership. Sample sentences used in this move included the following:

The idea of using photographs to gather data is based on the concept of ‘photo elicitation’ (Harper, 2002).

Underlining this process is the feature of visual images, such as photographs, to elicit responses from research participants and to stimulate reflection.

The process is not researcher-centered or teacher-centered, but rather focused on the experience of the participant-researcher-learner.

...this form of methodology is deemed valuable in deconstructing complex educational issues such as schooling, democracy, inclusion...

As is conventional in academic texts establishing background knowledge, Sabine also presents the contributions of various field scholars, effectively achieving the rhetorical function of placing her own claims within an interplay of scholarly voices:

Kaplan, Lewis & Mumba (2007) recognize the potential for photographs to raise questions about what is considered as ‘truth’, evidence’, or ‘perspective’ ...

...some [studies] have recognized the potential of such approaches in helping students to make connections with what they learn in the classroom...

...most studies discuss participatory photography in a research context...

From a textual perspective, the “Context” section coheres well. Topical Themes appearing in frontal position in paragraph topic sentences (e.g. “Image based

methods of inquiry”, “Drawing from Freire’s educational philosophy”, “The process”, “Some studies”) encapsulate the key concerns of the respective paragraphs in which they are elaborated. Sabine also makes limited, but effective use of textual Theme (connectives such as “Consequently”, “However”) to facilitate the logical flow of ideas.

Analysis of “Main Question” and “Secondary Questions” Sections

The “Main Question” section consists of the following single sentence paragraph:

This study aims to examine and understand how the creative and participatory process involved in participatory photography play a pedagogical role in the participant’s exploration of the issue of poverty.

Framed as a material process rather than an interrogative, it delimits the boundaries of inquiry through use of Circumstances of location:

in participatory photography
in the participant’s exploration of the issue of poverty

Information in the “Secondary Questions” subsection is offered as a numbered list of seven questions, each with bulleted subcomponents as exemplified below:

1. Did the process of participatory photography:
 - help the participant to gain a better understanding the topic of poverty?
 - help the participant to identify his/her beliefs and assumptions about poverty?
 - foster critical reflection (e.g. engage the participant in examining and questioning his/her beliefs and assumptions) in regards to the topic of poverty?

From an ideational perspective, three of the seven secondary questions evidence some conceptual redundancy. In the first question, for example, the nominal group “the process of participatory photography” functions as Actor and Theme. Conceptual focus in the second question, which shares the same bulleted subcomponents (shown

above), is on “the creative and participatory processes involved in participatory photography”. “Creative and participatory processes” here is not adequately differentiated from “processes” in question 1. The seventh question profiles “the active involvement of the participant in the research process”. Again, there may be unnecessary conceptual overlap with constituent “the process of participatory photography” here. Greater precision of expression would prevent potential reader confusion about the specific nature of the focus in each question. On the other hand, the focus is adequately clear in questions 3,4,5,6 in which the clausal constituents functioning as Actor are conceptually distinct:

Research Question Number	Actor in the clause
3	the participant's beliefs and attitudes about the topic of poverty
4	taking picture's about the topic of poverty
5	writing narratives related to the pictures
6	the 'group discussion' related to the topic of poverty

Unlike questions 1,2, and 7, each nominal group profiles a distinct and specific activity in the photography research project whose effects are to be explored.

From the perspective of textual metafunction, presentation of information in a numbered list with bulleted subcomponents clearly organizes the content. In addition, topical Themes in each of the research questions have been profiled and described in the introductory section of the proposal in Sabine's description of the “Picturing Poverty” project she hopes to emulate. As such, no new information inhabits thematic position in the main question or any of the secondary questions.

Analysis of the “Methodology” Section

The methodology section of Sabine's proposal is laid out in four subsections: an introductory paragraph reiterating the topic, “The Participants and the Settings”, “Procedures”, and “Collecting and Analyzing Data”.

The introductory paragraph employs a mixture of relational and material processes to reiterate the aim of the study (specifically “to investigate the actual methodology of participatory photography”), and next, establish “the issue of poverty” as the focus of the picture-taking project that she is proposing.

The next sub-section, entitled “The Participants and the Settings”, presents specific details regarding who will take part in the study and where the study will take place. In following with convention, this section relies on material processes (e.g. “[the methodology] will be applied in...”, “participants will be recruited from...”) to outline methodological steps that will be undertaken in obtaining an appropriate sample of participants. A minimal amount of information is offered as Circumstance of accompaniment (e.g. “with three different groups of young participants aged between 17 and 25”) and Circumstance of location (“in three different settings”, “in the city of Montreal”, “in a non-formal educational youth program”). These Circumstances, in fact, leave substantial leeway to the researcher regarding who exactly will be solicited for participation in the project. The first group of participants, for example, who we are told “will be recruited from an after-school program led by a local organization or school”, could come from any number of organizations.

“Procedures” is the next subsection that appears in the Methodology. In “Procedures”, material processes construed as future action lay out methodological steps (e.g. “the researcher will meet...”, “Participants will... be given...”, “Participants will be asked...”. “Participants will...write...”, “each group will meet...”, “groups will

discuss...”). Relational processes are interspersed among these action clauses as points of elaboration:

Some of these questions are borrowed from Photovoice and other participatory photography methodologies.

The last part consists of a group discussion.

The latter is simply a means to stimulate dialogue.

The “Procedures” section largely follows convention. However, in an arguably non-conventional move, Sabine includes all guiding questions to facilitate participant field-note taking, construction of written narratives about photographs, and questions to guide focus group discussion within the body of her “procedures” section. Presentation of the eight focus group questions, in particular, require 27 lines of text within the “Procedures” body. Such information could and likely should have been placed in a protocol form in the appendix, accessible to readers who actually require this extra detail.

The final subsection in the methodology, entitled “Collecting and Analyzing Data”, requires more detailed procedural information. Conspicuously absent from this description are specific details of the media that will be used to capture and store data, and the tools or specific techniques that will be used to code, analyze, and generate emergent findings. In addition, no reference is made to specific qualitative methodology literature that might be used to guide the data collection and analysis process. Describing analysis procedures, the reader is provide with only the following vague assertion: “Once all the data is gathered, I will proceed to assess if any themes emerge and then organize the data according to these themes, always keeping in mind the research questions.”

From a textual perspective, each subsection in the methodology sections

coheres adequately. For example, in the “Participants and the Settings” subsection, the topic sentence of the first paragraph establishes that the methodology will be applied with three separate groups of participants. Description of the research process is then thematically organized by reference to each of these three groups (“A first group of students...”, “The second group...”, “The third group...”).

The “Procedures” subsection relies on time markers for internal organization of information. These time markers appear as adverbial groups (“First...”, “then...”) or, in one case, a marked subordinate clause functioning as a time marker (“Once the films are collected from participants and all pictures are processed and handed back to them..”). Chronological ordering is conventional in this case.

In the “Collecting and Analyzing Data” section, information is also ordered in chronological steps (in this case, with a single Circumstance of location (time) in marked topical Theme position - “Once all the data is gathered,...”).

Interpersonally, the transaction of information in this section as a whole is realized in the declarative mood. Consistent use of “will” as verb finite (a modal denoting certainty of future action) construes the author's intention to follow these particular methodological steps. In general, there is no textual evidence suggesting uncertainty about how these steps will be undertaken. Nor is there evidence of any attempt to persuade or coerce the reader into accepting the course of action outlined.

Analysis of the “Ethical Considerations” Section

In general, provision of information in the “Ethical Considerations” section follows a logical pattern in which an ethical issue is first identified, and then in which actions to avoid or mitigate related unethical conduct are presented. The following is

included as a case in point:

Issue:

Although participants will clearly be informed about the topic and procedures involved in the study, the topic itself can bring about emotional reactions.

Action to mitigate threats or problems:

It is therefore important to discuss and establish with participants, some guidelines for the group discussions that foster a respectful, safe and non-judgmental environment. This can be discussed during the first meeting.

In general, a conscientious use of topical Theme markers appearing in front position in topic sentences establishes a cohesive framework. For example, the topic sentence of the second paragraph suitably profiles “The methodology of participatory photography” as topical Theme. The paragraph then goes on to discuss issues of ethics related to this particular topical Theme. Only the fourth and final paragraph seems to break with this useful practice. A paragraph with topical Theme “Participants' identity and information provided throughout the study...” also contains information on communication and dissemination of study results, a theme that should really inhabit its own distinct paragraph.

Analysis of “Preliminary References” Section

Sabine provides a one and a half page reference section at the end of her proposal. All items are presented in APA format requested by the instructor, and are listed in alphabetical order according to author's last name. There may, however, be some confusion here with regards to conventional purposes of a references section. Sabine states that she has included “a list of references used in this proposal as well as some other books and articles that will most likely be used in this study”. The section should, in fact, contain only items that have been explicitly referenced within the proposal. Non-referenced texts might better be placed in a separate bibliography.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

By exploring individual-environment interaction surrounding a 'mock proposal' writing task, I have attempted to provide what I believe is a more holistic picture of the research writing process. In the discussion that follows, I suggest that a complex series of constraints inherent in the ecology enabled student writing in important ways. In line with the ecological perspective on writing development, this observation suggests that writing process can and should be explored as a series of 'adaptive' behaviours in response to external feedback, undertaken to meet specific writing goals. The actions and enacted strategies of participants brought about a constant refashioning of 'writing space' and new affordances for support emerged over time.

In accordance with the core tenets of ecological systems research, I make no claims to having established direct causal relationships between ecological influences, student actions, and successful writing outcomes. Establishment of such relationships runs contrary to the aims of human systems research generally, and ecology-based research specifically. Rather, because the proposal writing task took place in an open system (i.e. the influx of ideas and information that filled writing spaces came largely from without), end products were, by nature, not entirely predictable in form or content.

In this final chapter, I first discuss some of the emergent patterns I observed in the experiences and actions of my participants. While avoiding assertions of direct causality, I do provide some probable ecology-focused explanations for many of the challenges students faced during the writing process. The discussion begins with a

description of intrapersonal influences on the writing process. I then consider the influence of external resources and tools, and how interaction with these shaped the writing in significant ways. To this end, the study reveals the considerable complexity of interactions that took place as students undertook to write about research. It also demonstrates how highly individualized and varied the constraints that students work within can be, even though these persons inhabited the same classroom 'space' from a nominal and physical point of view.

The second section explores the proposal development process as it relates to development of audience awareness and genre knowledge. A number of interesting findings emerged in this regard. First, despite fairly explicit guidance provided throughout the course, some students made non-conventional moves from a genre perspective in their final proposal drafts. Other challenges emerged for students who had come to Educational Studies from disciplines that have traditionally encouraged a style of writing more conventional in the experimental sciences. These students, in particular, seemed uncomfortable with many of the unique possibilities that writing in qualitative research genres affords.

The final section outlines significant challenges that a number of students faced during the research writing process. Key challenges related to focal precision, or the ability to hone in on a fruitful, unexplored area of inquiry. Others faced conceptual challenges as they attempted to elaborate many of the complicated abstractions that appear in their writing, and ground these abstractions in real world examples. For some, it was the organization of content, the purposeful allocation of information to various subsections of their proposals, that proved most challenging. Finally, for non-native English speakers, additional, but limited challenges related to uncertainties about lexicogrammatical form and word choice.

Sources of Research Writing Support

A central research question guiding this inquiry asked the question “how do learners make use of the resources and tools in their learning environments to produce writing characteristic of the research proposal genre?” This question may now be partially answered by exploring interactions in writing space from two distinct, but interlinked perspectives. First, I explore how internal (or intrapersonal) resources were exploited during the writing process. By internal resources, I mean the prior learning and experience of study participants, their attitudes and beliefs, and motivations and goals, among other things. I then shift focus to ways that external resources and tools afforded movement toward writing goals. However, in the process of explicating the dynamics of individual-environment interaction within this particular learning ecology, it is crucial to keep in mind that sources of internal and external writing support are functionally interdependent. In other words, specific mental or psychological conditions needed to be met before students were able to effectively exploit external sources of support. Conversely, interaction with external sources of support likely brought about developmental changes on the intrapersonal plane.

The Role of Intrapersonal Resources

The graduate students who took part in this study brought with them a rich repertoire of ‘intrapersonal’ resources in the form of knowledge, past experiences, interests, imagination, creativity, and affective dispositions to name a few. These internal resources were harnessed during the writing process, and functioned as important constraints on how individuals related to the writing task itself and how they made use of resources and tools available to them in the external support sphere.

As might be expected, all students maximized intrapersonal resource potential by gravitating toward areas of scholarship with which they had previous knowledge or life experience. Take, for example, ways in which personal identity and experience guided Maya's writing. With her Indian roots and self-defined identity as a "transnational feminist", her choice to explore the issue of gender disparity related to IT education in India was hardly surprising. Sabine, too, with a long-standing passion for the arts chose to focus on participatory photography as a research and pedagogical tool. Isolde, a francophone teaching English as second language, decided to focus on issues pertinent to her own teaching, namely the question of how to approach issues of cultural identity in the classroom. The draw to this particular topic she described as a tunnel with a clear and obvious direction in which to move. Esther, witness to instances of religious conflict in the country of her birth, Iran, decided to focus on ways that schools inculcate mistrust and hatred toward people of other faiths. Diana, educational psychologist by training and international student from Colombia, chose to focus on the issue of parental involvement in schools in that country. Abassi, also, with his experience of the educational system in Nigeria, focused his proposed study on the issue of high dropout rates in that country's schools.

Some students came to the proposal writing task with more research experience than others, and this may have been a factor that influenced the effectiveness of their writing. A general pattern emerged in which experience with research practice accompanied more precise forms of research writing. This was the case regardless of native language, cultural background or age. Diana, for example, with her experience conducting applied research to evaluate educational programs in her home country, Colombia, was able to put together an organized, well researched and presented proposal. Kadake, too, the daughter of a college professor, and nearing

the end of her master's program with a clear vision of how her formal M.A. thesis proposal would evolve, was able to craft an eloquent and thoughtful proposal for philosophical inquiry. Sabine, with some experience writing quantitative research reports, was able to express her ideas in a reasonably concise, organised form in the proposal.

Those with the least prior experience with research seemed to face the greatest challenges specifying the focus of their studies. Fugen, a first year student in the M.A. program, with little prior experience with research or research writing, only came to understand the purpose of the proposal in a rather dramatic 'eureka' moment in the classroom, already weeks into the course. Over the term, he struggled to create an adequate research framework with a workable methodology, but this never materialized fully in the end.

Although Abassi had some experience with report writing, he had had little exposure to research practice in his home country, Nigeria. With an undergraduate degree that had required next to no academic writing, he struggled with the proposal-writing task. Although his efforts were likely in earnest, he did not seem to have an adequate grasp of the demands of research writing in general, and in particular the ideational precision this form of writing demands.

In exploiting past experience, participants also came to the writing task with solidly entrenched networks of beliefs and attitudes. This included biased worldviews with, in some cases, explicit political agendas. These belief systems may have acted as counterproductive influences on writing in some cases. Although present in the writing of all participants, ideational bias emerged most forcibly in the work of Maya and Esther. Maya, a self-declared "transnational feminist", constructed an argument based on a series of dichotomous categorizations that, on a surface level, seemed to

reduce the complexity of the research problem. This included profiling an ‘out-group’ including Indian state governments, reform sympathizers, and global economic institutions like the World Bank who have encouraged India “to look at gender disparity in education in *economic terms*” alone, ultimately conflating the potential of women with their earning potential. Conversely, an ‘in-group’, with which Maya aligns herself, rejects economic growth as the sole criterion for and means toward female empowerment. Although politically expedient, these coarse forms of categorization are easily deconstructed, and are perhaps not fully supported in reality. At the very least, there is insufficient evidence provided within the proposal text itself to suggest that state governments, international organizations, and the individuals who constitute them see the problem in so overtly dichotomous terms. In this case, Maya’s political worldview may have negatively affected the strength of her argument by forcing certain categorizations that don’t necessarily stand up under scrutiny or, at the very least, require much more elaboration based on documentation and observed evidenced.

Esther’s proposal, too, suffers similar shortcomings as she works to promote a specific agenda - a push for adoption of what she terms “a critical interfaith pedagogy” in schools around the world. She explicitly states her presupposition that current educational systems in the world are corrupted and that their curricula are “filled with hidden and overt messages of hatred towards people of ‘the other faith’”. Whether this presupposition represents an actual state of affairs is up for debate. She certainly provides some convincing evidence that in Pakistan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, at least, systemic encouragement of mistrust and hatred toward other religious groups and foreign nations may exist within the school system. However, like Maya’s broad categorical brushstrokes, Esther’s generalizations to the global level cannot be

backed by sufficient evidence because the scope of her research problem is impossibly large. The example that both Maya's and Esther's writing provides suggests an inherent danger in approaching research problems with strong expectations based on personal beliefs.

Personal study and career goals might also be classed as intrapersonal resources of a motivational sort. These were harnessed by study participants to varying degrees, and likely affected how writing space itself was elaborated and refashioned. Many students, for example, considered the mock proposal writing task an opportunity to contribute ideas and source material to their M.A. dissertation proposals. Students like Kadake and Isolde, nearing the end of their M.A. studies, were particularly responsive to exigencies of their required M.A. dissertation proposals. As such, they were already deeply engaged in a process of note taking, creating charts, and generally organizing a large amount of support material. The material support (which I will discuss in detail in the next section) that was transferred to and evolved within the micro-ecology of Introduction to Research in Education was clearly designed to support work beyond that particular course. These demands undoubtedly attuned participants' attention to additional affordances that work in Introduction to Research in Education could provide.

Again, while avoiding the assertion of direct causal links, I suggest a lack of immediate and pressing exigencies from outside of the Introduction to Research in Education course may have accompanied corresponding forms of inaction on the part of other course members. For example, the 'richly' evolved support spheres of Kadake and Isolde (second year M.A. students) contrast with the relatively impoverished support sphere within which Abassi was forced to work. Admitted into the Certificate program rather than the M.A. program in Educational Studies, the

exigencies of a looming and very real research project required for graduation were not necessarily felt by him. As the course progressed, he did not seem to be purposefully creating a solid base for future research work. For example, notes taken on paper during the writing process were discarded once the final draft was completed. Nothing remained for future use except the proposal draft itself. Through his actions (and inactions), he may have missed opportunities to refine a more personally meaningful support sphere for future projects.

Certain forms of awareness or beliefs about effective writing practice might also be viewed as intrapersonal resources. Some clearly intuited how their own thought processes would evolve during various facets of the writing task. A strategy most likely associated with this type of awareness involved the purposeful manipulation of time dimensions of the task. At least three participants explicitly referred to planned incubation periods as a means of improving the clarity and flow of their writing. This was particularly the case for some of the non-native English speakers in the class. Diana, for one, said she always lets her work sit for a couple of days before redrafting. With distance, lexicogrammatical errors that were previously invisible to her tended to emerge. Isolde, too, remarked that it was necessary to let her writing lie in order to see occasional errors that creep into it from French, her native language.

Beyond improving lexicogrammatical accuracy and flow, manipulating time dimensions also seemed pivotal for some in the process of organizing content. Maya, for instance, referred to the chaotic “free for all stage” that she passed through before her writing coalesced into an organized whole. The passing of time itself was a recognized ingredient in overcoming the textual chaos she faced. Kadake, too, was content to draft her proposal multiple times (an act she characterized as “obsessive-

compulsive” behaviour), recognizing that with subsequent redrafting, separated in time, greater order and precision would emerge.

Participants also may have recognized that there are times when strict conscious control over the writing process needs to be relinquished in order for more creative aspects of cognition to come into play. For example, such was the case with the title of Isolde's proposal (“The ties that bind: An investigation into the links adjoining identity, language and education”). She had originally conceived of the structuring metaphor as a “web” conjoining identity, language and education. However, rather than resign herself to this metaphor at the beginning of the writing process, she let her final choice emerge over many weeks, as she engaged more deeply with the content. With time, the more active image of the “ties that bind” emerged and replaced the more passive image of the “web”.

Why do purposeful incubation periods often improve the quality of writing? I don't purport to have an answer to this complex issue with biological implications. However, human brains, when confronted with complex tasks, seemingly do much of the work “behind the scenes”, even as one sleeps suggests Csikszentmihalyi (1996). In his systems-based exploration into creativity, Csikszentmihalyi stresses that the “mysterious quality” of incubation is sometimes considered the most creative part of the thinking process, noting that many cognitive scientists believe that ideas, when deprived of conscious direction, freely form new associations, combine randomly, “although seemingly irrelevant associations between ideas may occur as a result of prior connection” (p. 101).

In the review of literature, I also suggested that affective response to feedback might influence how individuals respond to writing tasks and how they elaborate their own writing support spheres. As such, feelings might also be categorized as internal

resources. In fact, a full dissertation might be devoted to this single issue.

Unfortunately, given time constraints and the limitations of my approach, I was only able to gather limited evidence of such effects. For example, the initial feedback that Maya received on her writing disconcerted her. The experience of negative feelings that ensued may have encouraged a form of productive 'defiance' in her. She said the experience made her feel newly challenged and in the end, influenced her to seek the assistance of a classmate along with more feedback from the course professor in order to respond to shortcomings in her writing.

In other cases, negative feelings were clearly at play, but the effects of these were not readily recognizable as productive. For example, Abassi seemed more inclined to construe critical comments on his writing as personal attacks. Discouraged after receiving feedback on his first draft, he stated his belief that it was the duty of the course instructor to be more understanding of his personal situation, to realize that he had come to the task with less academic writing experience than others in the class. In the end, these negative feelings seemed to contribute to a generalized sense of unease about the Educational Studies program, with him stating at one point that certain instructors were attempting to "kill off" foreign students like him in the program.

Others reported high levels of confidence in their abilities to succeed in the proposal writing task from the start. In the cases of Kadake and Isolde, feedback from the professor on their writing tended to reinforce this positive sentiment. Of course, it is impossible to speculate on how the experience of other types of feelings or affective responses might have affected writing outcomes.

The following table summarizes key elements from the findings focused on intrapersonal sources of support for research writing.

Table 13. The role of intrapersonal resources

Resource	Signature Example	Comment
Familiarity and personal identification with topics	Maya's Indian roots and roots identity as a "transnational feminist"	All students relied on this resource.
Research experience	Diana's educational research in Colombia	Research experience accompanied more precise forms of writing.
Entrenched beliefs and attitudes	Maya's identification of an out-group and membership in an in-group	Counterproductive in producing evidence for assertions
Current involvement in research writing activity	Kadake's engagement in M.A. dissertation research	A strong influence on the writing of those already engaged in research
Awareness of the writing process	Diana's planned 'incubation' period	Improved accuracy and clarity
Affective response to feedback	Maya's defiant response, leading to productive action	Mixed usefulness / Hard for instructors to predict or control

How Participants Exploited External Resources and Tools

As the previous section on internal resources for writing suggests, certain students seemed better prepared than others to exploit the affordances of external resources and tools within the ecology. Without doubt, those who most successfully established research problems and crafted the most effective literature reviews were those who had engaged in a more systematic process of coding and documenting of textual resources over longer periods of time. Artefacts from participants' 'banks' of support either enabled the writing process as organizational tools or directly constituted the proposals as elements of these were transformed in support of the proposals' main rhetorical arguments. In this sense, they can be considered 'mediational' artefacts. In many cases, source material that was transformed came from past readings, notes and summaries created for other courses. As such, the boundaries of the Introduction to Research in Education ecology were highly porous.

and opened naturally to an influx of information and ideas from other courses and the more expansive 'lifeworlds' of participants.

Isolde, for one, whose writing was succinct and well organized, was able to draw from a well-ordered and extensive set of notes, many of which had been produced for other courses. This bank of material, which likely also acted as a form of surrogate long-term memory, included neatly crafted charts documenting the contributions of a variety of field scholars.

Kadake, too, relied on a rich repertoire of material support from previous courses in the M.A. program, and drew heavily upon a simultaneously evolving support sphere that emerged as she worked toward completion of her formal dissertation proposal for graduation. For her, additional external support also came in the form of written and spoken feedback from her M.A. dissertation supervisor. So Isolde and Kadake in particular, and other students to varying degrees, had created fairly elaborate systems of support prior to entry into the course, systems they continued to refashion and expand as Introduction to Research in Education progressed.

Other students, like first-term entrants Abassi and Fugen, were forced to work within more chaotic, less richly populated support spheres simply because these had not evolved and developed to the same extent over previous terms. Fugen, who had recently graduated with a degree in social anthropology, was at least able to transfer some notes and articles from his undergraduate studies, along with notes from courses taken as a special student at the graduate level. Abassi, unfortunately, had not gathered as much material from past study. Having worked in government service in Nigeria for over ten years before entry into the Certificate program, he brought little in terms of useable scholarly material from his past university studies. Clearly, there

were significant, inherent inequalities between students regarding what they were able to transfer to the new writing task.

Beyond transfer of material support to the proposal writing task, students were also responsible for expanding and evolving a material support sphere over the four months in which they were enrolled in the Introduction to Research in Education course. All students continued to populate their respective writing environments with notes, comments, outlines, keywords and references to source material. For the most part, these artefacts were stored in a readily accessible form, either on paper (e.g. Sabine's colour coded notes) or electronically (e.g. Maya's notes stored in her Gmail account which acted as a searchable, personalized repository of information). As one would expect, the bulk of text within these intermediary artefacts was devoted to summaries of and notes from source materials.

Other affordances of these artefacts were exploited as well. Maya and Kadake, for example, used their outlines and drafts to record directive messages to themselves in order to guide future writing behaviours (e.g. indicating new avenues for their literature searches or ideas about how to reorganize proposal content). Maya even used her proposal outline to record messages of encouragement to herself (e.g. "good work Maya...Keep it up!").

As one would expect, library books, journal articles, and websites all figured as central sources of external support. Unfortunately, in certain cases, some participants chose not to exploit the full potential of the resource base available to them. As an example, Abassi's proposal on school dropout in Nigeria lacked information about the current situation in Nigerian schools, his home country. Up-to-date information relevant to his argument almost certainly would have been available

on the Internet. Simply entering the search terms 'Nigeria', 'dropout', 'education', and 'school' in various combinations into any popular search engine returns a substantial amount of information published by government and non-government sources. By not exploiting the affordances of an Internet search, Abassi missed an important opportunity to include fundamental, up-to-date information about his research problem. In the end, it is not clear why he did not choose to do this. It may have been a question of age. As a middle-aged man, he may have been less familiar with Internet search techniques than his younger counterparts in the class. A lack of awareness of the value of currency in scholarly literature may also have played a role. However, ultimate reasons remain elusive.

Beyond exploiting source texts for their information affordances, a number of students also searched for texts with which they could model the style, content or layout of their own writing. Maya, for one, made use of the Hyslop-Margison (2002) article for ideas about how to construct an effective framework for philosophical inquiry. Fugen's writing relied on texts he was familiar with from the fields of anthropology and political science to model a style of writing he perceived as more complex and abstract, and thus better, in his eyes. Diana and Sabine, too, modelled key facets of their research frameworks and methodologies on exemplary articles they encountered.

In order to take advantage of source materials for either informational or modelling purposes, the writing process involved manipulating external conditions in such a manner that instances of support could emerge. Although the course professor was instrumental in guiding students towards resources that would ultimately influence the style and content of their proposal drafts, serendipity, too, played an important role in affording the emergence of writing support. Interestingly, much of

the interaction between individuals and source materials that brought about significant changes in writing might be regarded a series of purposefully orchestrated 'accidents', or 'chance encounters'.

From a phenomenological perspective, the emergence of new ideas that served as a basis to structure writing was often experienced as a sudden moment of insight. Some participants talked of decisive turning points in which steps to create the overarching frameworks for their arguments came into sharp and meaningful focus for them. These moments of elucidation probably came about after a complex series of preconditions had been established, requiring simply a catalyst that the student's mind was already primed to notice and exploit. As an example, Sabine's research methodology came together after coming into contact with an article on participatory photography (also described as photo voice) that she "stumbled" upon during her literature search. This moment of emergent clarity had followed several weeks of uncertainty, struggle and indecision. Diana's research framework, too, clearly emerged following reading of two articles in which researchers had employed Freirian conceptual frameworks relating to the issue of cultural relevancy in schools. Interestingly, Diana said she was well aware of Freire's work before reading these articles, but had not thought to apply that framework to her specific research problem until she came across the first of those two articles. The reading experience seems to have helped her to associate a network of previous knowledge with her particular research problem.

Might some of these students have made significantly different decisions regarding how they framed their studies had they encountered other inspiring models to emulate or ideas to incorporate during the writing process? Perhaps. What I would like to stress, however, is that there is very often a chance element at work in the

writing process that requires only that the preconditions for the emergence of support be pre-established. Complexity thinking attunes researchers' attention to these moments of interaction just partially under the control of individuals.

Next, peer review sessions that focused on outlines and emerging drafts also represented important opportunities to gather external support for the proposals. Comments and suggestions from peers, whether written on drafts or expressed verbally, had notable effects on the content and style of the proposals. Three students, Abassi, Fugen and Kadake, made significant changes in the focus and content of their proposals following peer review. Other participants also recognized the usefulness of these sessions, particularly to improve the clarity of their ideas.

From a systemic point of view, peer review also presented opportunities for participants to expand the bounds of their knowledge, allowing them to 'plug into' additional information that potentially supported their arguments. In other words, by pooling knowledge of several individuals, these sessions opened new avenues for exploration. Isolde, for example, explicitly stated that interaction with classmates 'sparked' new ideas, and that she was willing to exploit class discussion mainly for this reason.

Perhaps more than any other facet of the writing process, ability to profit from peer review was reliant on synchrony of student needs at a given point in time and the available support that other students could provide at that time. Evidently, students who lagged behind in the writing process missed important opportunities that emerged in peer review. For instance, for Maya and for Fugen, delays in producing outlines and drafts left them ill-prepared to take full advantage of this valuable social resource. They both noted this problem with regret during our interviews.

For the purpose of reviewing their writing, participants also made use of

individuals who were not part of the course. Fugen, for one, discussed writing practices with other students in the department who were at a more advanced stage in the M.A. dissertation process. Other participants relied on the comments and editing of people completely outside of the university community. Sabine, for example, consulted with her boyfriend precisely because he did not have an educational studies background. As such, he was able to point out forms of expression that were not clear to an educated 'lay' audience. Diana, too, relied on her husband for feedback, mainly to ensure flow and check for lexicogrammatical errors.

The following table summarizes some of the key findings relating to how participants made use of external resources and tools.

Table 14. The role of external resources and tools

Resources or tools	Signature Example	Comments
Maintenance of an organized 'bank' of support material from past courses	Isolde's well organized system of notes in tables	Materials used to organize content or transformed to constitute the proposal itself. Writing of students with less extensive support 'banks' faced greater challenges with content and organization
library books, journal articles, and websites	Abassi's failure to conduct an effective internet search	Not obvious for all students how to search for and evaluate external sources of information
Texts to model style, content or layout	Diana's use of two articles employing Freirian conceptual frameworks as models to elaborate her own methodology.	Poor or inappropriate models impact negatively on the writing process.
Peer review	Abassi, Fugen and Kadake made significant changes in the focus and content of their proposals following peer review.	Reliant on synchrony of student needs and available support that other students can provide / Members outside the course also provided support

Development of Audience Awareness and Genre Knowledge

Two research questions focused specifically on issues of development of audience awareness and genre knowledge:

- How does students' evolving understanding of audience awareness and the research proposal genre impact the writing process?
- How does the use of specific types of resources and tools affect students' evolving understanding of intended audience and the research proposal genre?

I have attempted to provide partial answers to these questions in this section.

Development of audience awareness as a productive constraint on writing is a perennial concern for educators striving to improve the quality of research writing produced by their students. Audience awareness in this case relates to the extent to which students were able to synchronize their understandings and expectations with those of more experienced research community members (most notably, the course professor). Clearly, knowledge of what a specific reading audience already knows or believes determines the fashion in which claims are presented, and helps writers decide which elements of background and methodology should be stated in explicit terms and which can be omitted because they are presumed to be shared knowledge. In this case, development of audience awareness likely corresponds with development of genre awareness more generally, although one has to be careful not to automatically conflate the two concepts, as I will discuss in further detail in this section.

Within the participant group, development of audience and genre awareness was not a straightforward phenomenon to document, and not easy for participants themselves to articulate. This is because, in general, writers may find it difficult to provide reasons for decisions they have made during the writing process because

many influences function below the level of conscious awareness.

It is probably safe to assume that all students came to Introduction to Research in Education with at least some preconceived notions about what a proposal for research might look like. The sometimes “fuzzy” intuitions (Johns, 1997) about the form and style of research genres are likely consolidated through contact with research texts over the years. It is the repeated experience, across texts, of invariant, stylistic features that allows the comfortable predictability of genre, after all.

Although there was latitude for variation in the style and content of proposals, the course professor expected to see a number of generic features in student writing. Many of these were explicitly referenced in the proposal outline (see Appendix B) that each student received at the beginning of the course. It should be noted, however, that this document was provided more as a guide rather than a list of strict requirements. All participants referred to the outline during the writing process, and most exploited its function as heuristic, guiding decisions about which content to include in various sections of their proposals.

Despite fairly explicit guidance, however, some students still made poorly conceived moves in their writing. For example, Abassi and Esther both included “Recommendations” sections in their proposals. These are generally not possible until after the study has been conducted. In these cases, students seemed to confuse the form and function of the research report genre with that of the proposal for research.

For many, the course professor represented the primary reading audience for the proposal, and, as the most 'powerful' individual within the Microsystem ecology, her feedback clearly had a strong influence on the style and content of writing. Her written and spoken feedback throughout the writing process afforded numerous possibilities for students to realign their previously held genre assumptions, to bring

them more closely in concert with the professor's own expert assumptions. All participants also expressed readiness to alter their proposals based on feedback received from the course professor, deferring to her expertise. This observation is not surprising given the important role that grades play in graduate students' lives, especially when these people plan to apply for scholarships, funding or admission to studies at higher educational levels. As Kadake put it, "the teacher can make or break you".

Whether students gained enough experience to transfer generic features of proposal writing to future writing tasks is unanswerable with the type of evidence I have collected during this study. What is clear, however, is that the goal of developing audience awareness and that of genre knowledge should not be uncritically conflated. For some students, realignment of genre assumptions was also a question of pragmatics in a game of immediate academic survival. This phenomenon emerged most saliently in instances where the course professor did not represent the sole perceived audience for student writing. Kadake, for example, explicitly stated she was writing her proposal in response to demands from two academic authority figures, the first being the professor in Introduction to Research in Education, and the second, her major directed study supervisor. This led to instances of tension as she attempted to respond to what she perceived as conflicting demands (e.g. she believed search parameter details needed to be more precise in the proposal for Introduction to Research in Education than for her directed study proposal). She also made decisions about which information to include in the background section based on awareness of individual professors' own fields of expertise. Although the two writing tasks were mutually supportive, the fact she perceived that the two professors' demands were slightly different precluded the possibility of crafting a single proposal for both tasks.

Thus, perceived expectations of her direct reading audiences were a more influential force in guiding some aspects of her proposal than adherence to a simpler sense of generic convention. Kadake described this inherent tension as a key challenge in the writing process.

Esther, too, considered the mock proposal project a useful opportunity to develop her M.A. dissertation proposal. However, the potential for response from audiences beyond the professor and classmates acted as a significant constraint on the form and content of her writing, and may have moved the text in directions away from generic conventions now popular in qualitative literature. With the idea that sequences from the mock proposal might eventually find their way into her M.A. dissertation, fear of possible negative reactions to content from religious groups both inside and outside of the university community encouraged a more distanced stance in the writing, one in which she purposefully avoided weaving elements of her own life story into the proposal. For Esther, like Kadake, dealing with the incommensurability between a more personalised style of writing and a style that was less likely to offend religious zealots was experienced as a key challenge. Yet inclusion of personal details is precisely what is required to establish the nature of authorial subjectivity so valued in post-modern qualitative work. Esther's writing evidences an unfortunate move away from this convention. What is more, after having listened to fascinating stories of her life experiences in Iran as a schoolgirl, I believe inclusion of these details would have led to a more engaging and persuasive style of writing.

Some of the most interesting challenges from a genre development perspective emerged when student held assumptions came into conflict with new, previously unconsidered writing possibilities that were discussed in class. The most salient examples of this emerged in the case of students who had chosen to detail essentially

qualitative projects, but who had come to Educational Studies from other disciplines that have traditionally encouraged a style of writing conventional in the experimental sciences. In these cases, student proposals were tension filled spaces in which the generic assumptions of certain domains directly contradicted those of others.

For some, the possibility of integrating personal life experiences through reflection and narrative into their research writing was novel. Even the possibility of the use of the personal pronoun “I” in their texts seemed alien to these students at first, never mind response to demands for authorial reflexivity. For example, having gained new insights, Diana compared what she labelled the dominant “positivist” and “objectivist” practices of educational psychology (her previous field) with the new potentials for authorial reflexivity that qualitative research both affords and demands. Because positivist approaches to research have traditionally relied on models that aim to capture objective facts or truths in the physical and social worlds, report of such studies tends to proceed with as little authorial intrusion as possible. The central conflict, for Diana, then, was mixing what she perceived as “feelings” with “thinking”. She felt that by including elements of her own life story and outlining issues of personal bias, she would undermine the force and persuasiveness of her arguments. Postmodernist prescriptions for conducting research, conversely, recognize two important ideas that conflict with this positivist assumption, namely 1) that values guide the inquiry process (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p. 169) and 2) that knowledge can never be objective if constructed through socially embedded meaning-making mechanisms (p. 176). Although Diana seemed to accept this premise in principle, she was still unable to factor herself into the description of her planned project in a satisfactory way.

Esther, too, coming from an undergraduate background in the sciences, said

she tried to maintain a formal or objective tone throughout the proposal, and avoided interweaving elements of her own life story into the proposal simply because she felt that would not “sound academic”. Again, assumptions garnered from the experimental sciences intruded upon an essentially qualitative endeavour, constraining possibilities in what may have been a negative way.

Fugen's stylistic choices were particular from an academic discourse perspective, and are worthy of mention here. He claimed he was modelling his writing style on the work of scholars familiar to him in the fields of political science and social anthropology. In our interview, he drew what he believed were interdisciplinary distinctions between writing typical of the education field generally, and that of social anthropology specifically. He wished to transfer what he perceived as the conventions of good writing in “social anthropology” to the cross-disciplinary field of Educational Studies. For Fugen, then, his stylistic choices likely represented an attempt to maintain the identity of “social anthropologist”. This observation supports Aitchison and Lee's (2006) assertion that “for students, the problems of knowledge production, text production and self formation are complexly intertwined at the point of articulation” (p. 267). However, the desire to achieve a more complex writing style through abundant use of abstract terminology left him in a conceptual quagmire, as he had neither the time or space to fully explicate the ideas he referenced. Had he explored the full implications of even the research concepts he invoked (like ethnography and hermeneutics), inconsistencies in his study plan certainly would have emerged for him. So even more so than in the cases of Diana and Esther, the generic models Fugen turned to actively undermined the clarity and effectiveness of his writing.

Key Challenges in the Writing Process

Another two research questions focused on key challenges faced by study participants during the proposal writing process. The first asked “what do graduate-level students perceive as the key challenges at various stages in the process of writing a research proposal?” and the second, “how do the perceptions of native and non-native speakers of English in the study differ in this regard?” Significant challenges that more than one participant faced related to focal precision, conceptual knowledge, organization of content, and time constraints. For non-native English speakers, additional, but limited challenges related to uncertainties about lexicogrammatical form and word choice. I discuss each of these issues in turn.

Focal Precision

Although life experience and personal identity made the choice of general topic area straightforward for most participants, narrowing the focus of study, and identifying a specific, observable phenomenon worthy of study was a pervasive challenge identified by study participants. In the end, only half were able to identify ‘workable’, unexplored research opportunities by ‘proscribing’ away the myriad possibilities that an overly general focus allows. To illustrate this point, consider the challenges faced by Maya, Esther, Fugen and Abassi.

First, Maya’s research objective (to assess the impact of IT education on the status of women in India) was likely not constraining enough in ideational terms. The broad focus prevented her from laying out in specific terms how the “impact of IT education on the status of women in India” might be evaluated or assessed. The meanings of key terms such as “female empowerment” and “social development” also

remained in higher realms of abstraction. She was unable, in this instance, to ground her focus in specific temporal and spatial terms, to focus on real IT education initiatives and the specific policy documents that have influenced the development of such initiatives.

Esther's objective (to establish to what degree curricula in school systems in predominantly Muslim, Christian or Jewish regions of the Middle East and South Asia are filled with overt and hidden messages of hatred towards peoples of other faith) was also too general. High levels of focal abstraction precluded attention to necessary detail in her methodology. Starting with the premise that contemporary educational systems around the world have been ideologically corrupted, and focusing on the education systems of Muslim, Christian or Jewish regions of the Middle East and South Asia, a focus on the details of specific curricula, schools, and school systems became impossible to achieve simply because such a wide range of possibilities existed. No specific schools, levels or curricula could form the basis of her inquiry because attention to one would have forcibly excluded attention to others under the broad umbrella of her focus.

Fugen's question "What is the form and structure of dominant educational discourses when re-conceptualised in terms of social capital?" lacked focus and was also conceptually confusing. In his proposal, he profiles "the form and structure of dominant educational discourses", yet offers little specificity with regards to which instances of educational discourse are to be referred to. He refers broadly to "the experience of England", yet provides no additional information about who has done the 'experiencing' in question. Lack of specifics makes construction of a workable methodology nearly impossible. Compounding the problem of abstraction are conceptual errors that detract from his methodology as well.

Abassi started with a workable idea, but ended with a flawed study by expanding his objectives into something less manageable. In his writing, the discrepancy between his intention to focus on student attitudes (as his title “Student Attitudes and School Drop-out in Nigeria” suggests) and the wide range of other factors that predict school dropout is glaring. Reading his proposal, one gets the sense that the text is ‘half-metamorphosed’, a movement from a too narrowly conceived focus on attitudes alone to a more complex, systemic exploration of the problem of school drop-out not fully achieved. The lack of a specific research site also makes the research methodology more difficult to specify.

Conceptual Challenges

As a corollary to focal problems, a range of related conceptual challenges manifested themselves, perhaps most notably as study participants attempted to establish background information against which to frame their proposed studies. To use Maya’s proposal as an example, terms like “female empowerment”, “globalisation” and “social development” were essential to her argument. Yet she was not fully successful in connecting these concepts on a more concrete level through provision of specific examples in the context of IT education in India. Similarly, Fugen struggled as he attempted to supply concrete examples in support of the numerous abstractions his study background introduces (e.g. “dominant educational discourses” / “social capital” / “the experience of England” / “the Ontario form of democratic participation” / “the citizenship education curriculum in England”). The lack of specific examples through which to ground abstractions clearly had an impact on the persuasiveness of arguments put forth.

Struggle with another specific group of concepts had an even more forceful

impact from a genre perspective. Here, I refer to research concepts themselves. In our initial interview, the course professor had stressed to me her hope that students would come to an understanding of a number of key research concepts, and that these would function as conceptual tools that would help them conduct better research and craft better research writing. This is a central tenet of the situative perspective of learning that demands concepts themselves be regarded as tools rather than self-contained 'entities' within the mind. As Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) and later theorists such as Barab and Roth (2006) stress, concepts can only be fully understood through use.

Concepts like "ethnography" or "grounded theory", in particular, have crucial implications in proposal writing because the assumptions that constitute these concepts demand that research writing be laid out in distinctive ways. In this sense, they are among the most important organizational tools in research writing, embodying specific assumptions about research writing that more experienced researchers possess through experience. A major challenge for students, then, related to their coming to an understanding of these assumptions such that this understanding could function as an effective constraint during subsequent stages of the writing process.

Ethnography (the form of research Fugen claimed to be conducting), for example, requires precise detailing of the daily lives of participants along with the physical and social contexts in which participant actions have meaning. A proposal for ethnographic study, accordingly, needs to set up clear expectations about a specific research site worthy of study. Fugen did not provide precise details about his research site, so, in this sense, he may have failed to perceive the affordances that the concept of ethnography as guiding and structuring tool offers.

Abassi's seemingly weaker grasp of research concepts affected the nature of his proposal as well. For example, the concept of "field note" is stretched in its interpretation. Abassi proposes documenting, through recollection, his past experiences at two Nigerian high schools. Far from the "field" in time and place, and based on distant retrospect (10 years past), the term "field note" might be more accurately replaced with something like narrative or reflection since these notes are not really taken 'in the field'.

Misunderstandings regarding the purpose of interview protocol may also have caused problems in his proposal. Questions in his interview protocol form did not seem targeted toward any particular participant group, but rather, constituted a confused extension of previously stated research questions. A decision not to purposefully tailor these questions may be symptomatic of a more general confusion regarding the focus of the study, and possibly, more specific confusion regarding the purpose of the interview protocol.

Organization of Content

Organization of content emerged as another challenge shared by several study participants. Kadake, for one, suggested allocating information to appropriate subsections of her proposal was a complicated and time-consuming process. Fugen said that reorganizing ideas during the editing process presented problems. In particular, he was uncertain which information to use to establish the general framework for his research and which should appear in the methodology section. Organizational issues also presented challenges for Sabine and Isolde, particularly with regards to deciding which information to include in the literature review.

Text analysis also revealed several instances in which content was inappropriately allocated to proposal subsections. Examples include Esther's inclusion of a list of interview questions in the "Research Questions" section rather than in the methodology section or referenced in an appendix. Abassi also included a large amount of information in his Methodology and Data Collection section that was not related to methodological issues at all.

Time Constraints

Time constraints presented challenges for at least four of the study participants. Most believed they could have crafted better writing had they been given more time. Esther, for example, said she would have liked extra time to research and include background information on Christian schools in the U.S.A., Native American schooling, and the school system in India. Isolde lamented not "knowing enough" to confidently frame her literature review, and not having the time to cover a broader spectrum of theoretical elements. With additional time, she believed she could have gathered more relevant information. Fugen also believed that with more time he would have been able to craft a better methodology section, the one area of his text with which he felt the least satisfaction. Maya also conceded that she ran out of time, and felt rushed as the due date for submission of the final draft drew near.

Challenges Specific to Non-Native English Speaking Participants

As expected, non-native English speakers in the class experienced some writing challenges not faced by native English speakers. In line with Silva's (1992) research on the writing of second language graduate students, certain non-native English

speakers in the participant group reported difficulty with grammar and word choice.

Lexicogrammatical shortcomings in particular manifested themselves at the clausal level. For the most part, these were minor structural errors – noticeable, but in general not significant in disrupting the flow of ideas. Perhaps one reason that few grammatical errors crept into final products of non-English native speakers was the compensatory strategies that these students undertook during the editing process. Diana, for one, brought sections of her writing to a writing assistant who looked over the first few pages and corrected grammar mistakes. Many of the same errors indicated by the writing assistant appeared in other sections of the 20+ page draft proposal, but Diana was able to correct these herself once she was aware of the proper form. She also asked her husband to look over the first section of the proposal to catch errors. Obviously, this editing for grammar took additional time, and Diana expressed the belief that because of this, the writing process took markedly more time for her to complete than for her classmates.

Awkward word choices and some grammatical errors also affected the flow of Abassi's proposal. In feedback on his first draft, the course professor offered some alternative forms of expression, suggestions that Abassi readily incorporated in subsequent redrafting. In his case, a number of errors also related to improper use of punctuation. Misplaced commas, particularly, appeared in a number of places within his writing.

Sabine's level of conversational English was very advanced, with what might be termed native speaker fluency. Most problems she encountered related to word choice. As was her typical writing strategy during the academic writing process, she simply [bracketed] problem words or wrote French equivalents in order to return to them later to make changes. She had used the same bracketing procedure when

writing in French, so this may not be an issue relating specifically to language shortcomings.

Esther's spoken English was highly advanced as well, and only a few grammatical errors appeared in her writing. She may have avoided some mistakes in word choice by closely reproducing terminology available in her source material. Large sections of her study background, for example, were compiled using direct quotes from sources in an interwoven patchwork (a process called calquing). According to Jones and Freeman (2003), this is a common coping strategy among both native and non-native English speakers. However, I do not have data to determine to what extent this strategy use was symptomatic of a lack of confidence in her non-native English writing abilities.

Key challenges during the proposal writing process are summarized in the table that follows.

Table 15. Summary of key challenges

Challenge	Signature Example	Comment
Focal precision	Esther's overly broad focus on education systems of Muslim, Christian or Jewish regions of the Middle East and South Asia	Conditions for detailing effective methodologies heavily reliant on focal precision
Conceptual knowledge 1 Background knowledge 2 Research concepts	Fugen's struggle to provide concrete examples in support of numerous abstractions Abassi's apparent misunderstanding of the purpose of an interview protocol	Often a corollary to problems of focal precision. Insufficiently developed backgrounds undermined need for studies. Research concepts necessary as constraints on form and content of writing

Organization of content	Fugen's uncertainty regarding which information to use to establish his framework and which to use to outline his methodology	Half of participants noted organization as a particularly time consuming process
Time constraints	For Esther, the impossibility to explore background information on Christian schools in the U.S.A., Native American schooling, and the school system in India.	Some participants felt arguments would have been strengthened with inclusion of more background information
Lexicogrammatical form and word choice	Grammatical errors found by a writing tutor in the introduction to Diana's proposal	Consistent with Silva's (1992) research on writing challenges of English second language graduate students

Chapter 6: Recommendations and Limitations

Introduction

First and foremost, this study reinforces the notion that the crafting of research writing is a complex task, one not easily achievable through simple adherence to a series of 'best practice' rules or prescriptions. To create an environment conducive to effective writing practice at the graduate level, attention must be devoted to a range of enabling factors. This study has explored some of the crucial conditions for a functional research writing space, and within that space, there clearly exists room for manipulation of conditions by instructors and administrators in university settings. If an educator's responsibilities lie in 'occasioning' the conditions of learning rather than 'prescribing' learning itself, as Davis and Sumara (2006) note on learning within complex systems, a focus on environments that support writing tasks well is essential in order to improve graduate student research writing practice.

I begin this section with a discussion of how conditions or task demands may be altered such that effective use of intrapersonal resources is encouraged. Next, I explore how the affordances of external resources and tools might be made more apparent to students. Finally, I discuss novice research writing as activity within a larger social system and offer suggestions on how bridges between courses like Introduction to Research in Education course might be created to larger research Communities of Practice of which many graduate students may eventually become active members.

Harnessing Intrapersonal Resources

In this study, a number of intrapersonal factors that affect the writing process emerged. Factors on this level included elements that individuals contributed to the writing task, including prior knowledge and experience, beliefs about effective writing practice and strategies, motivations and goals, interests, and creativity to name a few. I begin with a discussion of how the effects of some of these constraints can be usefully and productively controlled by faculty and curricular or course designers.

First, it is useful and desirable that students draw upon a rich repertoire of personal knowledge, interests and experience during academic writing tasks. However, as this study suggests, reliance on personal knowledge systems, particularly when those systems are strongly associated with a sense of personal identity, leads to potential pitfalls. Most notably, students who harbor political or social ‘agendas’ may tend toward conceptual dichotomization in their writing as a rhetorical strategy. Unfortunately, these conceptual categorizations, if they are not well supported in evidence are easily deconstructed or refuted under scrutiny. As a possible remedy to this situation, I believe the question of researcher bias should be acknowledged explicitly in the classroom as an encouragement to more robust, critical forms of argumentation. One instructional approach, among many, might include having students write personal narratives outlining past experiences of, and beliefs and feelings towards the objects of their inquiry. They might also be encouraged to keep journals in which they explore how their own assumptions and expectations evolve as they undertake the research planning process. Under these conditions, students may come to recognize unacknowledged biases that they, as primary instruments of research, inevitably hold. Where appropriate, students could incorporate elements of these personal narratives or journals within their own research writing. This likely

brings students closer to the ideal of reflexivity in writing, a process described as critical reflection on “the self as researcher” and “the human as instrument” of research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Within the Introduction to Research in Education participant group, the challenge of appropriately incorporating authorial voice within qualitative research writing also seemed particularly daunting for students with more experience reading and producing writing with ‘positivist’ leanings, in other words, writing which aims to create the illusion of authoritative objectivity through avoidance of such instances of reflexivity and extensive use of passive structures which mask agency in order to enlist belief or agreement. It is not surprising that participants with math or psychology backgrounds, for example, found researcher reflexivity a difficult ideal to achieve. Such subjective intrusions sounded ‘non-academic’ to these students, given the nature of models for research writing they had likely encountered in the past. Again, for the benefit of all students, it may be worthwhile devoting at least some instructional time to detailing ways that researcher subjectivity and bias can be made explicit in qualitative research writing. Instructional approaches might be based on the analysis of authentic model texts, either research proposals or articles in which information about the authorial perspective has been explicitly incorporated within the fabric of the text.

Next, open and frank discussion during class, online or in after-class ‘writing groups’ about student beliefs surrounding the nature of effective writing practice might be useful for certain students. This type of discussion, designed to encourage reflection on the writing process, might afford new insights for some, and provide reasons why writing practices or strategies have or have not been successful in the past. Many of the self-regulatory writing strategies listed by Zimmerman and

Risemberg (1997) that enable effective writing practice might emerge as topics of discussion. If anything, externalising this sort of knowledge encourages what I believe is a healthier view of the academic writing process, one that assumes good writing involves adaptive response to conditions in the writing environment rather than simple adherence to a monolithic skill set or series of predetermined steps. The numerous writing strategies employed by students and the novel ways these people made use of tools and resources within the ecology are testimony enough to the idea that individual-environment interaction lies at the heart of effective writing practice.

In the case of the Introduction to Research in Education class, there was significant talk of the ideas and content of student writing during class time. However, there seems to have been less talk about how students came up with their ideas and various writing artefacts in the first place. Time limitations were likely a factor here. However, in an ideal situation, more talk about the writing process along with discussion about the content of writing products might be a useful step in promoting an appreciation of the underlying complexity of the task itself, and help students move toward a deeper understanding of the system in which the task takes place (a philosophical implication for good design of complex learning tasks noted by Spector, 2001).

Manipulation of student motivations and goals represents a more challenging facet in the design of instruction focused on research writing. First, from a task design perspective, allowing students to work alone and to choose their own research topics may increase motivation in certain cases because it encourages feelings of personal autonomy (see Deci & Ryan, 1985 and Ryan & Deci, 2000 on Self-Determination Theory). Next, if students choose topics with which they already have considerable background knowledge or experience, the task allows students to tap motivation that a

sense of competence brings (see Bandura, 1997 on Self-Efficacy). In this sense, it is not surprising that all students in the Introduction to Research in Education course were drawn to research problems they had prior knowledge of or experience with, perhaps partly in order to protect this valued sense of competence. Finally, allowing masters-level students the freedom to choose topics and make research design decisions for themselves endows the task with inherent instrumental value, if and when students perceive its potential to contribute something toward their formal dissertation proposals and dissertations required for graduation (a question of expectancy value (Vroom, 1967)). Would these students have learned more by taking on subjects outside of their 'comfort zones'? Perhaps. However, given the important influence of motivation on the writing process, requiring students to take on unfamiliar topics in their mock proposals might have had counterproductive effects. The wide range of topics that students tackled at least afforded opportunities for classroom discussion on a wider range of methodological approaches, albeit still on a fairly superficial level.

One useful implication of the findings is a rather common sense notion in the end; instructors should be aware that future goals and aspirations of students have a real influence on how learners refashion the writing spaces they function within. As was likely the case with Kadake and Isolde, for example, demands of a real, upcoming master's level dissertation altered their writing behaviours in Introduction to Research in Education, and prompted them to search out additional opportunities to amass source materials, organise content, and receive feedback on their writing. This sort of opportunity seizing can be encouraged and harnessed, if and where it exists.

Where such motivations do not exist, they might be generated. First year masters level students who have not devoted much thought to final dissertation topics

or research projects could be encouraged to use writing tasks as an avenue to explore a potential topic, and thus begin to develop the search, collect and organize behaviours that transcend individual course and degree requirements and that are necessary in creating a functional research writing space. The motivational issue becomes more complicated for students who, for whatever reason, are not required to produce a proposal or final research project as a condition for graduation.

Learning about student aspirations and goals is not necessarily a problem in relatively small classes like Introduction to Research in Education, and knowing where students are in their overall movement toward graduation is important in coming to grips with their individual motivations. In the course I observed, the professor seemed familiar with the expectations and goals of most of her students and this was clearly a positive force. However, having students produce online profiles in which they outline their current research interests, life-guiding philosophies and short and long-term educational and career goals might be useful in externalising such aspirations.

And finally, what of the role of creativity in research writing? This is surely an intrapersonal resource that might be activated within some learners. Yet I pose this question with awareness that creativity, contrary to popular belief, is not something an individual simply possesses by nature. As Csikszentmihalyi (1996) notes, creativity also has systemic dimensions (often brought about by the intermixing of expertise in distinct domains). Because cross-disciplinary domains like Educational Studies bring contributions from disparate fields together, graduate courses like Introduction to Research in Education should have the potential to act as arenas for the development of creative forms of thinking and writing. To what extent did the Introduction to Research in Education ecology invite a creative intermixing of ideas and writing

forms? I unfortunately do not have definitive answers to this question. Such phenomena are difficult to document or even qualify. Given the diversity of languages, cultural experiences and academic backgrounds that participants brought with them to the ecology, some creative ideas may have been sparked. At the same time, the course professor's assertion that class discussion sometimes lacked "juice" suggests that still richer forms of interaction were possible. Also of interest is the question whether language backgrounds affected capacities to think and write creatively. I simply do not have a convincing answer to this pertinent question either.

Resources and Tools

Other sources of influence on writing that emerged during this study relate to tools and resources that students exploited within the ecology. These resources and tools included artefacts that students either searched for and collected or, on the other hand, created by themselves. In many cases, these material 'artefacts' mediated the writing task in important ways. For example, journal articles, web pages and books provided information that was transformed by students and found new life in their proposal writing. Exemplary pieces of writing also served as models for developing form and content in the proposal drafts. Notes, outlines, charts and diagrams were also resources that students themselves created and then relied upon for framing their subsequent arguments.

Among the most important tools for students in Introduction to Research in Education was the heuristic-style proposal outline used to facilitate decisions regarding which content to incorporate in various subsections of their proposals (see Appendix B). I believe the course professor was justified in providing this outline of

conventional research proposal features. The majority of students made use of the outline, at the very least, as a checklist, to ensure essential information was included within their drafts. With limited time available in a single session course, I believe a fast track approach to ensuring that the most common generic expectations in research writing are met is warranted. Even if students cannot yet provide reasons why certain information should be included in the proposal, the process likely ‘bootstraps’ them into a position in which they might receive the type of feedback required to develop this deeper awareness.

In the process of selecting or designing scaffolding tools, such as the heuristic style proposal outline, for affordance, much can be learned from traditional instructional design practice. First, designing for affordance requires a solid understanding of specific task requirements and the evolving support needs of individual learners. Preparing students to use conceptual tools in particular (e.g. key research concepts) to guide their writing requires clear presentation of ideas in material form. Carliner (2000) notes that design of information for learning may require consideration on three levels – physical, cognitive, and affective (although the later two may represent a false dichotomy). Learners must be able to easily locate information when needed (physical level). They must be able to understand the information (cognitive level). Finally, they should feel comfortable with the presentation of the information (affective level). These levels, adapted from the three levels instructional designers typically consider when designing courses (see Dick & Carey, 1990), likely all contribute to the affordance potentials of information.

In all cases, the form and content of student proposals was traceable through a series of ‘mediational’ artefacts, material evidence of steps taken in the writing process. As the study has shown, those students who took a more systematic approach

to generating and organizing these support materials finished the course with more effective proposals. This suggests that a large part of effective writing practice involves effective information management (i.e. organized storage and retrieval). Consequently, I believe a sound instructional prescription involves emphasizing to students the importance of maintaining an organized and easily accessible resource base from which to draw. The precise means that students use to collect and organize information is likely less important than the fact that each discover a means that works well for him or her personally. I make this suggestion with full recognition of the dangers of ineffective or maladaptive strategy transfer, an implication noted by *Graham & Harris (1997)*.

As stated previously in relation to student held beliefs about the writing process and writing strategies, students might be encouraged to share information about the ways that support materials were accessed, copied, produced or stored. For example, many students might not think of the benefits of e-mailing summary notes to themselves so that this information becomes web accessible and text searchable (depending on the e-mail service used). This was a technique that one student (Maya) found useful, and others might recognize benefits of it. Another example might be the use of diagramming or concept maps (see Novak, 1984) as tools to generate ideas and to clarify research scope and procedures. In the end, however, it is the students themselves that choose or choose not to try out or engage in these regulatory strategies and behaviours.

A focus on how source materials are obtained also brings to the fore the importance of training in search techniques. Clearly, instructors cannot assume that all graduate students know where and how to search for the information most valuable for their needs. Such was clearly the case with Abassi, who failed to make use of an

Internet search to collect up-to-date information about the problem of school dropout in Nigeria. Particularly during the past decade, with access to databases such as Academic Search Premier (EBSCO) or ERIC, cyberspace has become an integral resource gathering zone for graduate student research writing. Yet even as students make increased use of Internet accessible databases and websites, the amount of information available to them expands exponentially. Search and evaluative procedures required during the writing process have become ever more complex, and instructors should not take for granted that students, even at the graduate level, are capable of first, effectively navigating cyberspace, and next, evaluating the appropriateness of source materials they come across. Academic departments and libraries often offer workshops on effective search techniques, and these workshops certainly provide valuable opportunities for students. However, if and when time is available during class, discussion of search techniques might prove a useful curricular addition.

Another ongoing feature of the support sphere for writing, and likely the most important, involved student interaction with a stream of written and verbal feedback. In the provision of feedback, student needs at various stages of the writing development process should be prioritized. For example, near the beginning of the research proposal writing process, feedback might be devoted to helping students determine which information is most useful in framing their research problems. Early feedback might also encourage students to strive for precision in their research focus, a notion that draws support from the findings of this study. Problems emerged in student texts when these writers failed to ground abstractions in observable specifics. This led to further problems when the time to craft their research methodologies

arrived. Feedback from the course professor and from peers was crucial in remedying this situation.

Why is feedback on research scope in particular so important early on in the research writing and planning process? For one, establishing constraints on research problems and study objectives is key in harnessing the potential of what Davis and Sumara (2006) refers to as “complex emergence”. This means that there is a fruitful zone of focus that researchers should attempt to hone in on. To illustrate this point, Davis and Sumara provide the following examples of research objectives that are either too specific or too general in focus:

Too specific: Through this study, we will use Sleeman’s protocol to determine the relative importance of key factors that contribute to success in young learners capacities to read – where reading is understood in terms of capabilities to accurately decode age appropriate texts.

Not specific enough: In this study, we will investigate early literacy.

Davis and Sumara (2006) note that, in their experience, minor modifications in statements of purpose are often all that is needed to establish an effective research focus supported by such “enabling constraints” (p. 149). By narrowing the research scope to the readily observable, students can save themselves confusion (and likely many hours of frustration). Timely feedback, early on in the writing process, is crucial in achieving this ideal.

Feedback from the instructor or peers might also strive to point learners toward additional supportive tools or sources of information. This type of interaction may lead learners to engage with sources of information that they had not previously considered (e.g. journals from a different field, Internet sites of various government and non-government organizations). As was mentioned in the previous segment on information search, explicit directive feedback on how and where to find additional

information might have helped Abassi find supporting information on the subject of school dropout in Nigeria on the Internet.

There might also be some benefit in students themselves contributing to a shared repository of source material that deals specifically with issues of research methodology. These sources (electronic copies of whole texts or simple references to these) might be works that individuals have found helpful or enlightening in the process of crafting their own proposals, and could be added to a list of key articles and book chapters already provided by the course professor. I mention this possibility because a lack of reference to appropriate research methodology literature was a pervasive shortcoming in most student proposals. During feedback, students could be directed to specific methodology texts available in whole or at least referenced in the repository. At the same time, I claim no easy answers to this problem because the remedy entails students' reading large amounts of additional methodology literature, an activity they may or may not realistically have time to do over the course of one term.

Other feedback should be provided on an "as needed" basis to best respond to the unique challenges that novice research writers inevitably face. Through which means should that constant stream of feedback and response be maintained throughout the duration of the course? The professor, as research writing expert, certainly needs to guide students throughout the writing process. In this sense, the best of traditional approaches to classroom instruction still apply. However, given the inherent time limitations of scheduled classes and office hours, and given the considerable workload to which most professors must attend, I believe computer-supported collaboration offers unique benefits (see, in particular, Srijbos, Kirschner, & Martens, 2004). Communication and collaboration software like FirstClass,

TextWeaver, Knowledge Forum, or Course Management Systems like BlackBoard, WebCT or Moodle allow for the easy creation and management of discussion boards, chat rooms, wikis and a host of other collaborative online tools. These tools, each with their unique communication affordances, provide a means through which students can share essential information about the writing process, ask questions when conceptual problems arise, and discuss solutions to perceived challenges. Depending on the motivation level of the group and expectations that have been established at the beginning of the course, feedback provided through many of these means might actually provide more timely support than reliance solely on instructor-centered feedback through e-mail or during office hours.

So what might computer supported collaborative learning look like in a course like Introduction to Research in Education, given the challenges that emerged over the term? An understanding of research concepts, for one, was a crucial enabling constraint on the writing process. Time was devoted during class periods to exploring foundational ideas that appeared in the required textbook reading (see the course outline – Appendix A). At one point, students were required to complete a take-home quiz in which they elaborated a number of these concepts and provided personally meaningful examples. The course professor was the intended audience for the take-home quiz and she provided written feedback to students on the paper copies they submitted. However, given suitable computer-based support, I believe the burden of negotiating meanings of many of these core research concepts could have been placed more firmly on collaborative student groups. For example, using online forums or perhaps more promisingly, wikis (web pages that can be collaboratively developed and changed over time), student groups of three or four could have been given the task of coming up with and negotiating definitions, descriptions and examples of

research concepts (and perhaps also discriminating between related concepts). In continuing dialogical response to the textbook and supplementary materials available on and offline, groups could be held responsible for co-constructing responses acceptable to all group members. With a critical mass of student knowledge and opinion based on experience and on the course readings, consensus could likely be achieved in most cases without excessive input from the instructor. In the consensus generating process, group knowledge is leveraged and valuable learning hopefully takes place. This type of learning activity aligns itself well with the concept of knowledge building (Bereiter, 2002), which Lipponin, Hakkarainen, & Paavola (2004), citing the work of Bereiter, refer to as the collective advancement and elaboration of conceptual artifacts, such as theories or models, or other “communally constructed conceptual artifacts” (p. 35). In fact, only in cases where groups are caught in irreconcilable disagreement would the course instructor need to intervene with expert opinions. I believe that this type of collaborative learning could likely be sustained more easily throughout the term, without exhausting the instructor with demands to provide adequate feedback to each student on numerous occasions.

Another real benefit of such an approach is that limited and valuable instructor time during class or in personal correspondence can be devoted to resolving the most complex issues that emerge - issues that collaborative groups are not capable of dealing with amongst themselves. This approach, of course, shifts attention heavily toward instructional materials as the core artefacts that enable learning activity, and away from the course professor in his or her traditional role of main purveyor of knowledge in the learning community.

This study also provided evidence that certain students naturally searched out support from peers outside of class time as part of the writing process, and I believe

that if technology can improve access to the valuable resource of peer review, instructors should plan for the maintenance of spaces that afford peer review online. Study outlines, sections of drafts or entire drafts can easily be attached to or integrated within discussion board posts. The editing and comment functions on Microsoft Word or Open Source alternatives are all that are normally required to provide inline feedback directly on drafts. As another alternative, and to avoid file compatibility issues, new web-based environments such as Google Docs also allow users to upload writing from their desktops, edit from any time or any place with Internet access, allow classmates or others to access documents and even share changes in real time if so desired. Equipped with carefully designed heuristic or scaffolding tools to guide the review process, students should be required to provide feedback to a number of their peers over the course of the term. Time consuming, but invaluable process steps like peer review should likely be shifted to the greatest extent possible to online environments, leaving class time for the important functions of knowledge elaboration, synthesis and review (e.g. group discussion based on unresolved questions about textbook material) or, for economy, activities which require group or class attention to be focused upon shared learning resources or tools (e.g. the modelling of a technique such as concept mapping, presentations relying on projected PowerPoint slides or external websites to stimulate whole class discussion). The instructor would need to stress that, given limited time available for peer review of writing during class time, online collaboration is an integral part of the expectations for the course. This includes an understanding that individuals should remain roughly synchronized with their classmates in task progress.

Beyond receiving feedback and comments on writing, online forums might also be spaces where answers to other student questions might be sought. The goal

would again be to leverage the combined knowledge of the group to the largest extent possible. As one example, it might be beneficial if the threads of a writing support forum were organized according to specific challenges that have emerged during student writing in the past. The experiences of the particular class I have studied in this project could set the stage for threads designed to deal with conceptual questions or questions about the organization of information. Additional threads might deal with less predictable problems that inevitably arise. Text search of previous posts might reveal responses to current questions students have and serendipitous reading of posts could also afford new insights. Having these pre-established categories for threads based on evidence of past difficulties might facilitate the search for answers and also go some way to assuring students that it is acceptable and expected that they should ask such questions. As part of the course requirements, it could become the responsibility of the entire group to respond to questions that emerge on discussion boards and to negotiate appropriate responses. This process already works well in out-of-school settings on support forums for software or games, particularly within the Open Source community which by nature is less hierarchical in its information flows. The course instructor or a TA would need to contribute strategically, arbitrating between disagreements, resolving ongoing misconceptions, being careful not to dominate the conversation. This last point is essential because, although the instructor or TA needs to maintain an online presence, interaction online can be motivated to a large extent through interdependence between students themselves.

A final recommendation relates to problems arising in the writing of non-native speakers of English. In this study, lexicogrammatical errors manifested themselves at the clausal level in the proposals of all non-native English speakers in the participant group. At least three members of the group also faced challenges in

appropriate word choice. To address these issues, corpus-based activities may have some value. For those unfamiliar with the concept, a corpus is a collection of texts, sometimes from a specific source or field (e.g., medical, literary, British-spoken) in the form of a single computer readable file or database (De Szendeffy, 2005). Using a special piece of software called a concordancer, users can view key words in context (an option in which a search term appears in the centre of a line, in coloured or bold text, with surrounding sentence context to both the right and left of it). Corpus-based approaches recognize that knowledge of grammar and vocabulary in isolation is not sufficient in developing natural sounding communication. As Nation (1990) suggests, effective use of academic vocabulary demands building a complex web of associations. In writing, these associations relate to meaning, written form, grammatical behaviour, collocations, register, associations, and relative frequency (i.e. how often these words appear in conventional writing).

Because writing from each academic field contains its own higher frequency terms, 'word chunks' and lexicogrammatical patterns, there might be some benefit in having students collect model texts from their own particular fields of interest for corpus-based study. These could then be concatenated (i.e. linked together into a larger individual text file to form a corpus), and then used as resources to answer students' unique questions about conventionalized word usage, frequency, collocation and so on. The writing of one non-native English speaker in the group (Abassi) also evidenced numerous punctuation errors. Punctuation, too, can be entered into a concordancer in order to return multiple examples of conventional usage. During peer or instructor review of writing, the error correction process might simply involve indicating where grammatical or word usage errors have occurred, and then having students search their own corpora for correct forms of expression. The literature on

second language error correction also suggests that indirect feedback (indicating errors, but not providing corrections) is usually more effective because it leads to greater cognitive involvement (see especially Ferris, 2003).

In general, findings from this study support the idea that course and classroom, with their strict spatial and temporal delimitations, represent an incomplete or inadequate framework when discussing sources of material support for writing. Effective research writing demands connections that extend outwards to numerous other sources of information and support. The fact that graduate students in this study relied on a rich repertoire of resources collected over a period of years from other courses suggests that writing space, too, should be considered in its broadest terms. After all, the ways that students collected, documented, organized and stored information and resources for writing in other classes had crucial implications in their ability to create the proposals for Introduction to Research in Education.

As has been shown, effective research writing (and most forms of academic writing) demands effective use of artefacts created for other courses (and even from work). It is advisable to encourage students to start elaborating a functional and personalized writing space early by implementing a cross-curricular system of support for research writing. This has certainly been attempted at the undergraduate level. In many colleges and universities in the United States, for example, there is a movement labelled Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). It denotes a set of principles and practices that call for college-wide adoption of writing as a core component of all content courses (i.e. courses not specifically focused on academic writing skills, including college composition run by English departments). The types of writing abilities that this approach fosters are not specifically directed toward research

production. However, could a similar approach, adopted at the graduate level, be designed and implemented that is more research oriented? If anything, a movement toward research writing across the curriculum might demand of students a more critical, reflective reading process in which both form and stylistic features of writing become objects of study along with content knowledge.

Unfortunately, a lack of systemic research on this possibility (one which explores its potentials from the perspectives of all stakeholders, and taking into consideration all physical and technological constraints) makes likelihood of successful implementation uncertain. Even if there is consensus at the departmental level that additional research writing support is required, and if most faculty members become proponents of such a change, the essential fact remains that effective writing practice entails the use of adaptive self-regulatory strategies on the part of students themselves, within unique information environments. From an ecological perspective, ability to produce good research writing is intricately bound up with awareness of the affordance potentials of ideas and their expression in specific informational contexts. In other words, although effective writing practice entails access to a repertoire of transferable strategies, it also requires familiarity with the layout of the ideational or knowledge landscape within specific fields of inquiry, something that cannot readily be transferred from one situation to the next. Faculty members might feel limited to explicitly teaching their graduate students a series of best research writing practices, including some transferable research writing strategies. However, this research has shown that this may not be enough to effect significant changes. For that, students likely need experience as novice members of authentic research Communities of Practice. I turn to that issue briefly in the next section.

Movement Toward Research Practice Communities of Learners

As I emphasized in the review of literature, the concept of *Community of Practice* (see Lave and Wenger, 1991) can be evoked to describe dynamics within the social systemic network within which research writing takes place. I suggested many of the same textual artefacts (e.g. books, journal articles, scholarly association web pages) that experienced researchers rely upon when they craft research writing are available to novice writers in graduate classes as well. However, because novice writers in graduate level courses do not normally function within the same social networks as experienced researchers, the classroom space might more aptly be termed a “practice community”, a term applied by Barab and Duffy (2000). In a research practice community, writing is normally undertaken as a learning exercise, a means to prepare for communication within authentic research communities in the future. The student ‘mock research’ proposals, the focus of this study, for example, were not crafted for audiences beyond the classroom or with the intention of securing grant money (an important function of proposals produced by professional researchers). In any case, instructors in such situations might strive to form bridges between the limited practice community of the classroom and larger research communities of practice.

Citing Flowerdew (2000), I suggested effective graduate-level writing may depend as much on student experience working in research teams, interacting with research supervisors, submitting articles for publication, or communicating with editors and reviewers as it does on formal training in content courses like Introduction to Research in Education. Yet there are other things that can be done in content courses themselves that simulate forms of communication in larger research networks. When dealing with research proposals, students might be asked to craft their work in

specific response to guidelines of external funding agencies posted on the Internet. The funding agencies could be selected according to students' specific research interests. Even 'mock application' to governmental funding bodies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) in Canada would likely expand students' sense of audience demands and start to build knowledge of the channels of communication that seasoned researchers often function within.

Although the proposed studies were not actually carried out and reported on in *Introduction to Research in Education*, authentic publisher's guidelines for submission of research articles might also function as useful constraints on student writing, and also help to build bridges between the classroom and the external research world. As a particularly pertinent example for students in the education field, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) publishes standards that students can take into consideration as they plan and document their novice research activities. The AERA guidelines present criteria to encourage rigour in research, categorized under the following section headings:

- Problem Formulation
 - Design And Logic
 - Sources Of Evidence
 - Measurement And Classification
 - Analysis And Interpretation
 - Generalization
 - Ethics In Reporting
 - Title, Abstract, And Headings
- (retrieved on March 23, 2009 from:
http://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Opportunities/StandardsforReportingEmpiricalSocialScience_PDF.pdf)

These guidelines lay out the specific expectations of reviewers associated with AERA's research journal, and students would be well advised to adhere to many of these prescriptions for rigour.

Another activity that can be encouraged or even demanded as a part of

research training courses could involve students joining scholarly associations or organizations, particularly those that have a well developed web presence. Students can “lurk” (explore, read, but not contribute) in newsgroups and discussion forums through which more seasoned researchers communicate ideas. This experience likely attunes student attention to the types of questions worth asking in specific fields (an aid in achieving focal precision in their own writing) and the forms of discourse that experienced researchers working in those fields regularly engage in. Through peripheral participation online, novices may slowly begin to contribute to the broader dialogues taking place, dialogues of which understanding is essential in the process of framing research questions valued by those specific research communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the “business as normal” stance is no longer sufficient if graduate programs want, in earnest, to improve the research writing abilities of their students. Unfortunately, development of and attendance to department wide research writing goals may face resistance on a variety of fronts relating to organizational workload, time management, institutional policy and planning (Aitchison and Lee, 2006). Yet educators who insist on staying within the present boundaries of the institutional system are naturally locked into its prevailing practices, and thus limit the writing potentials of their students.

Limitations of the Study

In the introduction to this study, I suggested that, in recent decades, a new awareness of the influence of 'contextual' factors on writing had encouraged theorists to rely more heavily on systemic or situated perspectives in their research. Vygotskian inspired Activity Theory (AT), for example, has provided a means to observe and categorize many of these contextual factors, taking into account how the enacted goals of individuals and social groups affect interactions and flows of information within uniquely bounded writing spaces. Situated frameworks, relying on theory elaborated by Brown, Collins & Duguid (1989), Lave & Wenger (1991) and other adherents to the situative perspective have also been popular.

The ecological systems framework holds much in common with these more common contextualized approaches. Indeed, ecological psychology, formulated in the late 1970s and early 1980s was likely an important influence on much of the subsequent situative research. However, there are some substantive differences relating to scope and limitations of this approach that should be addressed at this point. First, if the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) is taken as a core representation of what ecological inquiry should involve, then there seems to be a stronger demand for emphasis on the experiences of individuals across their lifespans. Although other approaches certainly take life experiences of individuals into account, the ecological approach, in particular, seems to encourage researchers to dig very deeply, such that personal experiential factors that influence day-to-day interactions clearly emerge. To further clarify these differences, while emphasis in Activity Theory is normally on 'tool mediated' collaboration and interaction between group members to achieve valued work goals, the ecological approach seems to further complicate the

research process with a wealth of additional information about the life histories of individuals. This encourages a type of study in which participant groups are normally small. To tackle influences across the lifespans of large numbers of individuals through qualitative research is often not feasible with regards to time, money or researcher and participant engagement. This might, in fact, be considered a major limitation of the ecological approach. It is doubtful whether I have achieved the ecological ideal in this study of accounting for even most of the influences within various 'life embracing' systemic layers elaborated by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Rather, in line with assertions by Fleckenstein et al. (2008) regarding the typical nature of ecological inquiry, I have provided a modest, but hopefully convincing, 'story' about interactions involving a limited group of actors, engaged in one specific activity (proposal writing), within a temporally and spatially bound learning arena. The findings from this study should be considered preliminary due to many inherent limitations of the approach.

In this final section, I discuss features of the research that have introduced uncertainty regarding the strength of findings, and suggest ways in which future studies might overcome some of these limitations. The points outlined below might be of particular interest to graduate students in the social sciences who are interested in undertaking ecological systems research. They provide a commentary on what can realistically be achieved by a single student researcher, given limited financial resources and within a time framework typical of many master's or doctoral level dissertation projects in the field of education.

Systemic Complexity

In this particular study, significant challenges related to the process of gathering enough data to piece together a 'story' of how the many interactions that constitute the writing process have unfolded over time. As Fleckenstein et al. (2008) note, researchers of writing ecologies must argue for a systematic account of reality in ways that others find persuasive and useful, yet remain sensitive to the inherent "incompleteness and distortions" of any single account (p. 388). So the overarching problem in all forms of ecological inquiry is, in fact, the issue of how to appropriately and effectively document complex interactions. This has included the manner in which individuals exploited the affordances of various tools and resources available to them within the ecology, taking into account various personal attributes such as beliefs, identity, and past experiences that enabled these interactions. The dynamics are even further complicated if researchers are to take Barab and Roth's (2006) description of affordance networks seriously. To reiterate, Barab and Roth suggest that an affordance network is "the collection of facts, concepts, tools, methods, practices, agendas, commitments, and even people, taken with respect to an individual, that are distributed across time and space and are viewed as necessary for the satisfaction of particular goal sets" (p. 5). Taking into account these numerous, co-supportive and conflicting interactions that take place during the writing process, elucidating the dynamics of the ecology becomes a daunting undertaking, and one that cannot be trusted to generate findings with high levels of certainty.

In this study, I attempted to explore the dynamics of interaction from the perspective of nine different study participants. In retrospect, even a focus on the

actions of one or two individuals would have provided sufficient data for a doctoral length dissertation.

Further complicating the issue was reliance on the concept of the “proposal genre” itself. As I established in the review of literature, genre is a social construct; the value or acceptability of a given form of writing is established by members of a social group who use it as a communicative tool. This notion has been supported by genre theorists I have invoked, including Bazerman (1994), Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), Miller (1984), and Russell (1995, 1997). In an interdisciplinary field like educational studies, this adds another level of complexity to the process. If subtle differences exist between the genre writing in associated fields of anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy and psychology of education, for example, how does a researcher adequately determine the influences of these diverse fields without being an expert in all of them? At the very least, this requires substantial reading and interaction with field experts.

Regardless of this challenge, some notion of genre is necessary to gauge movement toward writing objectives in a class like Introduction to Research in Education. Since students chose topics from such a broad range of possibilities, and despite my own background as an academic writing instructor, I have concerns whether my own sensibilities as evaluator of these cross-disciplinary influences have been adequate to the task.

Data Recording Medium

One potential limitation of this study involved my decision not to videotape class sessions. Video recordings would have been useful in order to view scheduled

classes after the fact in order to examine verbal and non-verbal interaction in the classroom. Instead, I chose to take notes on a laptop computer, and only at times when I felt interactions *might impact the proposal writing process*. I believed the presence of a video camera in the classroom (particularly one positioned to capture gestures and facial expressions of study participants) would have made certain students feel uncomfortable, and might have affected the type of interactions that took place. For example, some students might have felt inhibited during class discussion in front of the camera. Others, conversely, may have behaved in more vocal ways than they would have under normal circumstances. The same could be said of audio recording, although likely to a much lesser degree.

Because of my reliance on a series of field notes alone, some useful data may have been lost. First, the potential for data loss was exacerbated by the speed and complexity of classroom interaction. It was simply impossible to capture all potentially significant details by typing notes onto a laptop computer. In addition, non-verbal communication was neglected although this was undoubtedly an important component to classroom interaction. Non-verbal communication was particularly difficult to document in writing. Had I at least the luxury of a video record, memos could have at been associated with specific frame sequences during replay.

The greater problem with the field note approach, however, related to the high level of researcher subjectivity this implies. In effect, field notes related to instances of interaction that I personally thought were significant. Of course, other details that I missed may have been significant. To help mitigate this problem, it might have been useful to have two observers in the classroom. Accordingly, notes could have been taken and compared in retrospect. A more complete account would then likely have emerged. The course professor might also have been asked to provide

comments following each class session on specific moments of interaction that might have affected writing outcomes. Conscious of demands on the course professor's time, I opted for three longer interviews, more distanced in time and space from the events we discussed. A series of shorter interviews with her directly after each class (13 in all) might have been beneficial in gathering a greater amount of pertinent information.

Reliance on Retrospective Accounts

My decision to rely on retrospective accounts of writing process through scheduled interviews represents another important limitation. In more intrusive forms of inquiry, a researcher might have sat with participants in the act of writing, and then questioned them to determine why resources and tools were used in specific ways. That researcher, for example, might also have made use of 'think aloud' protocols (approaches in which participants think "out loud" as they perform a set of specified writing tasks). In the case of ecological study, such approaches likely demand an unacceptable amount of researcher intrusion, significantly altering the dynamics of the ecology. As a result, ecological validity - the premise that the setting, tasks, and materials of the study should approximate, to the greatest degree possible, the real life situation under investigation - suffers. What is more, I had neither the time, nor the ethical prerogative to intrude so fully in the daily lives of my participants. By attempting to interview participants within roughly a one or two week period after the writing in question was produced, I believe I have been able to mitigate some of the concerns of validity that retrospective accounts evoke.

Observation and Interview Process

It is possible that the ecological validity of the study (“the extent to which the environment experienced by the subjects in a scientific investigation has the properties it is supposed or assumed to have by the investigator” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), p. 28) was compromised by the observation and interview process. Interviews, in particular, may have altered participant behaviours by introducing new ideas and affording opportunities for reflection. Although I never purposefully or directly offered advice to students following analysis of writing samples, interviews were clearly an intrusion on and alteration of writing space at the micro-ecology level that may have affected task outcomes.

Transferability and Scale

Results from this study may be transferable to other settings where task demands and the conditions under which writing tasks have taken place approximate those described in Chapter 3 (Methodology) of this dissertation. However, it is important to remember that aspects of the writing task itself acted as important constraints on the quality and nature of the writing produced. For example, the recommended length of proposals (10-15 page double spaced) may have encouraged students to provide less background information for their studies than they might have done otherwise. Other sections in student proposals (e.g. introductions or methodology) might also have been curtailed to meet demands for recommended length. The timeline from inception to finished product was also relatively short (three months or less in most cases). It is important to keep these task related constraints in mind when making comparisons. Master’s or doctoral level dissertation proposals, in particular, do not normally function under such tight constraints regarding document

size and completion timeline, so it is possible that writing challenges may differ in these types of comparison cases.

The scale of this study also represents an important limitation. Although I have endeavoured to create a rich description of the Introduction to Research in Education ecology that may allow transfer of findings to other settings, these findings must only be considered preliminary and not “generalizable” to all methodology courses. To increase potential for transferable results, it would be useful to compare results of this study with those of comparable studies conducted in other graduate-level research methods courses. This might make for an interesting future project.

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Appendix A - Course Outline

██████████ Winter 2007 -- INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH IN
EDUCATION

Instructor: ██████████ e-mail: ██████████
Office: ██████████

Tel: ██████████ Location: ██████████ Time: Wednesdays 3:45-6:00

p.m.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed as an introduction to research in education. The objectives are to provide:

- an overview and basic understanding of the commonly used research methods in education today;
- the knowledge required to understand, summarize and critique research articles in the education and other social science journals;
- awareness of whatever additional research methods course or courses students might need in order to conduct their master's thesis research or to continue on to complete a doctorate;
- experience in conceptualizing and writing a research-based (empirical) thesis proposal;
- experience in conceptualizing and writing a library-based comprehensive (non-empirical essay) proposal;
- understanding of ethical concerns in educational research.

Some of the topics that the course will cover include:

- the nature of educational research
- types of research
- the differences between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms
- the research process – from conceptualization to writing up the study
- defining a research problem
- locating and summarizing related literature
- developing research questions
- identifying and designing a methodology that 'fits' the research problem and questions
- types of data collection
- field trial of one or more data collection procedures
- sources of validity, reliability, credibility and bias
- managing and analyzing data
- knowledge of research ethics

Students will be expected to:

- **complete short assignments** on articles that demonstrate different types of educational research;
- **share assignments with their peers** through informal presentations and

discussion in class;

- **come to class prepared** to ask questions and to discuss the content of the assigned readings;
- **produce drafts and then finalize a mock research proposal.** Time will be given in class for peer collaboration;
- **develop and try out data gathering tools and techniques** (e.g. questionnaires, observation protocols, other), then revise the tool or procedure according to experience;
- **use the APA system** in all written assignments. See [redacted] University Libraries Citation and Style guides - <http://library.concordia.ca/services/citations.html>

REQUIRED TEXTS (May be purchased in the bookstore. Copies on reserve in [redacted] and in the Library)

Anderson, G. (1998). *Fundamentals of educational research*. London: Falmer.

McMillan, J.H. (2004). *Educational research*. Toronto: Pearson.

OTHER SOURCES – in the file for this course in the [redacted] Centre and/or on reserve in the library

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

1	Dissection of 4 articles. 2-3 pages, double spaced + in-class discussion	DUE Class 4, 6, 8, 10	40%
2	Define a research problem- 2-3 pages, double spaced.	DUE Class 5	N.G. ¹
3	Short take-home quiz on key terms for weeks 1 – 5	DUE Class 7	10%
4	Revised research problem statement with literature review, research questions and suggested methodology, data gathering instruments	DUE Class 9	N.G.
5	Revised data gathering tool / instrument / procedures	DUE Class 12	10%
6	Mock research proposal 10 – 15 pages, double spaced	DUE Class 13	40%

DISSECTION OF FOUR (4) RESEARCH ARTICLES

The purpose of this exercise is to alert students to the structure and form of educational research as it appears in published academic articles. Prior to a course in research methods, students have been taught to read primarily for content (for example, the literature review required for a term paper).

The articles to be used for these assignments must come from print journals or from academic, peer reviewed on-line journals. Some articles that have been published in print journals may also be found on-line. In this case, all the usual referencing information including page numbers must be provided. **A copy of the article used for each of these assignments MUST be handed in with the summary analysis**, preferably showing your dissection notes in the margins. The following questions provide a general guideline for completing these assignments.

¹ **FEEDBACK WILL BE CONSTRUCTIVE. THE CONTENT OF THIS ASSIGNMENT WILL BE REVISED CONTINUALLY AS THE COURSE MOVES ALONG.**

- What is the article about? (Where is this information – in the title, the abstract?)
- What is the problem statement?
- What is the main research question?
- How is the study contextualized in prior knowledge/research on the topic?
- What is the theoretical foundation of the study?
- What method or procedures were used to carry out the study?
- What justification is provided for the particular choice of research method?
- What are the main findings of the study?
- What are the implications of the results – for policy, practice or further research?
- Does the article communicate clearly? If not, indicate why.
- Do you have a question or critique of the article?

MOCK RESEARCH PROPOSALS

This assignment is to be completed in stages throughout the course. Topics may be selected from the fields of educational studies, child study, adult education, applied linguistics, educational technology or a combination.

You are to:

- 1.define and articulate a research problem;
- 2.summarize the main literature that would be reviewed fully for the study proper;
- 3.develop the research question(s);
- 4.describe the methodological approach and data collection techniques that would be most suitable for addressing the research questions, saying why the method is the most suitable;
- 5.in line with #4, develop a preliminary questionnaire, observation protocol, or other procedure that you believe would be suitable;
- 6.try out your data gathering tool or instrument and then revise it based on that experience;
- 7.provide a rationale for the study;
- 8.address ethical considerations. For this you must familiarize yourself with the principles of ethical research and with the details of the Education Department ethics form (called the Summary Protocol Form).

TAKE HOME QUIZ

This assignment seeks evidence of understanding of key terms and concepts in educational research, using 3 to 5 sentences to do so. For each term or concept you are asked to provide a definition, an elaboration and an example, using your own words, or, use the term or concept correctly in a short paragraph.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Class 1 -- Jan. 3	Introduction to the course: key terms and concepts Required Reading for class #2: Anderson Ch. 1; McMillan Ch. 1
Class 2 -- Jan. 10	Topic: Quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. Types of research. Required reading for class #3: Anderson Ch. 3, 4, 9, 15; McMillan Ch. 2, 11
Class 3 -- Jan. 17	Topic: Research problems, variables and hypotheses In-class group brainstorming: What is a research problem? How does one talk about it? How does one write about it? What is a research question? <i>Required reading for class #4: Anderson Ch. 5, 6 & 8 and</i>

	<p><i>Appendix 8.1 and 8.2; McMillan Ch. 3 & 4</i></p> <p>Assignment for next week - article analysis #1: Dissection of an article that reports on a case study using qualitative or quantitative or mixed research methods.</p>
<p>Class 4 – Jan. 24</p> <p>DUE: Article analysis #1: case study</p>	<p>Topic: Problems with conceptualizing a research problem. Locating literature related to the research problem; Refining the research problem; thinking about research question(s).</p> <p>Required reading for class # 5: Anderson p. 48, 147, 163; p. 87, 97, 105, 109, 123-4,164-6,180-1,191, 202. McMillan Ch. 5</p> <p>Assignment for next week: Define a research problem (use up to 2 pages)</p>
<p>Class 5 – Jan. 31</p> <p>DUE: 1st draft of a research problem</p>	<p>Topic: Deciding on ‘subjects’ or participants; Sampling: who (what), where, how, why</p> <p>Take home quiz on terms and concepts of course content through Class 5 to be handed out</p> <p>Required reading for class # 6: selectively from Anderson Ch. 9 - 15. McMillan Ch. 11</p> <p>Assignment for next week – article analysis #2: Dissection of an article that reports an historical or philosophical study in education.</p>
<p>Class 6 – Feb. 7</p> <p>DUE Article analysis #2: historical or philosophical study</p>	<p><i>Topic: Selecting an appropriate methodology: Qualitative, experimental, mixed method? Ethnographic, phenomenological, grounded theory, case study, action research?</i></p> <p><i>Required reading for class # 7: Selectively from Anderson Ch. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and relevant appendices; McMillan Ch. 11 and chapters as per your chosen type of study.</i></p>
<p>Class 7 – Feb. 14</p> <p>DUE: Take home quiz</p>	<p>Topic: Data collection: Questionnaire construction; interview protocols; Observational methods; Focus groups</p> <p>Required reading for class # 8: Anderson Ch. 12; McMillan Ch. 6,7, 8, 9, 10</p> <p><i>In-class work on mock research proposals: Moving ahead with the research problem to the literature review, research questions, methodology to developing data gathering instruments</i></p> <p><i>Assignment for next class – article analysis #3: Dissection of an article that reports a study using a qualitative design and methodology (be sure to identify which kind of qualitative - ethnographic, narrative,.....other)</i></p>
No class Feb. 21	Reading Week

<p>Class 8 – Feb. 28</p> <p>DUE Article analysis #3: qualitative study</p> <p>Guest instructor: Gretchen Lowerison</p> <p>Understanding statistical concepts in the education research literature</p>	<p>Topic: Key concepts in quantitative educational research. Measurement; understanding statistical inferences.</p> <p>Required reading for class # 9: Anderson – see Index for validity, reliability and credibility; McMillan Ch. 6</p> <p>Draft proposals will be worked on in class. They are to include a revised problem statement, research questions, abstract of literature review, drafts of data gathering tools</p>
<p>Class 9- March 7</p> <p>DUE Draft of proposal</p>	<p>Topic: Validity, reliability, credibility</p> <p>Managing and analyzing data; planning a study that is do-able; managing time</p> <p>Required reading for class # 10: Anderson Ch. 2; Education Department Summary Protocol Form as well as relevant information on Concordia’s website for the Office of Research Services.</p> <p>Assignment for next week – Article analysis #4: Dissection of an article that reports on a study using quantitative methods – correlation /experimental or quasi-experimental design.</p>
<p>Class 10- March 14</p> <p>DUE Summary analysis #4: experimental / quantitative study</p> <p>In-class small group/whole class discussion</p>	<p>Topic: Ethical issues in educational research</p> <p>Require reading for class #11: Anderson Ch. 7 & Appendices; McMillan Ch.13</p> <p>Assignment (for class 12): Try out your instruments / procedures (see class 11)</p>
<p>Class 11- March 21</p>	<p>Topic: Putting it all together</p> <p>Informal presentations of mock proposals</p>
<p>Class 12– March 28</p> <p>DUE Revised research tool Course evaluation (attendance expected)</p>	<p>Topic: Continued informal presentations of mock proposals; sharing of lingering problems</p>

Class 13 – April 4	Where do we go from here?
DUE: Mock proposals	

A NOTE ABOUT GRADES

Letter	GPA	Definition of quality of work
A+	4.3	exceptional work – flawless - well beyond expectations for a masters level
A	4.0	exceptional work – almost flawless
A-	3.7	excellent work, very satisfactory
B+	3.3	satisfactory – a few areas for improvement are identified
B	3.0	satisfactory but some improvement needed
B-	2.7	borderline – much improvement needed – student advised to meet with instructor for help
C	2.0	unsatisfactory – student is urgently advised to meet with instructor for help
F	0.0	fail

PLEASE NOTE:

- Absence from more than two classes without a good excuse may result in a reduction of the final grade.
- The four short assignments on research articles **MUST** be handed in on the due date. Your work on these assignments and their content forms the backbone of class discussions.
- Written assignments are to be submitted in hard copy (no email attachments please), stapled in the upper left hand corner. Please number each assignment and retain an electronic or hard copy for your own files.

Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S. (2003). *Qualitative research for education. An introduction to theories and methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.) (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Drew, C. J., Hardman, M.L. & Hart, A.W. (1996). *Designing and conducting research (2nd ed.)*.

Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon.

Locke, L. F., Silverman, S.J. & Spirduso, W.W. (1998). *Reading and understanding research*. London: Sage.

Wolcott, H. F. (1999). *Ethnography: A way of seeing*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

Appendix B - Proposal Outline

- Title
- Topic / issue to be explored (the problem statement)
- Background, link to previous research / knowledge
- Main question to be explored
- Why this enquiry is important?
- How is the topic going to be explored?
- Plan for organizing and analyzing the data / information
- Ethical issues
- Writing the thesis

Title

A title communicates, giving the reader a hint as to what the proposal is about.

Topic / issue to be explored (the problem statement) (2-3 pages)

- This is a general, introductory statement, usually 2 -3 pages long. The length will vary depending on the nature of the problem.
- It outlines the topic, issue, problem, concept or set of ideas to be explored.
- It locates the 'problem' within a body of knowledge or larger set of issues.
- It may point to what is NOT known.
- It ends with specific of the particular problem that you want to explore, showing how it fits within the broader framework you have just described.

Background, link to previous research or knowledge (5-10 pages)

- This may include a brief account of why YOU selected this issue to study.
- Refer to what is already known about the issue. At this stage just refer to the main sources of existing knowledge, outlining briefly the main ideas.
- Talk about the theoretical context of the problem.
- Is there a bias in the existing literature? Does this open up an area in need of study? (This does not have to be your own conclusion, you can refer to a recent author's suggestion which you find interesting.)
- Be sure to consider that there is nothing more to be found out about the issue or problem in question. (e.g. is there any rationale in doing such a study?)

Main question to be explored (Research Question) (2-3 pages)

- This section emerges from #3, both theoretically and practically.
- The question or questions should be expressed succinctly, starting with the

- general and moving to the particular (main question, subsidiary questions).
- These may take the form of formal hypotheses, or an informal hunch.
 - An hypothesis is a statement of expected findings, expressed as a 'null hypothesis' in experimentally designed studies.
- This section suggests or implies a rationale for conducting the study.

Why the study is important (rationale) (about 1/2 page)

- There has to be a reason for exploring a problem, issue, set of ideas etc.
- Curiosity alone is not enough.
- An entirely personal issue is not enough (or not a very good basis for a study).
- The rationale should be clear from the preceding sections of the proposal. It simply needs to be stated clearly here.

Methodology (2-3 pages)

- What procedures will be used to gather data on the issue/problem you have described?
- Why are these procedures suitable?
- What kind of data will be gathered (test scores, archival data?)
- What is the setting of the study? (The setting could be a period in history, or a school classroom.)
- What data gathering instruments or strategy will be used (the researcher can be the main instrument).

Methodology cont'd

- The proposed method must be logically linked to the definition of the problem, the background, the research questions.
- Some 'problems' demand an experimental approach. Others demand a qualitative approach.
- Describe the methodological approach you will use and why. Within that approach what method will be used? (case study, ethnographic?)
- Describe the population to be studied (if this is a library based study, what time period for example will be chosen?)
 - Where is the population located? How many will be involved? What are the demographics?
 - Describe the setting of the study.

Plan for organizing and analyzing the data (1-2 pages)

- How will you organize the data/information as it comes in?
- What sort of categories of analysis do you anticipate?
- How will you sift the data?
- How will you make sense of it?
- What will you do with unexpected or additional findings?

Ethical Issues!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

REMEMBER:

- A proposal is a working document.
- It is subject to change.
- Its purpose is to act as a guide for your study.
- It is wise to keep track of and record shifts as they occur. They will need to be explained in the thesis.

Appendix C - Qualitative and Quantitative Paradigms Slides

<p>Qualitative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigator chooses a topic/issue to study • Task is to discover, hypotheses emerge • Topic or issue determines the people or site to be studied 	<p>Quantitative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigator delimits study, selects variables • Hypotheses stated • Task is to predict, verify, refute • Sample size is determined by statistical power -- large N preferred.
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<p>Qualitative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigator is main 'instrument' of data collection • Investigator is aware of own biases; seeks to capture subjective reality of participants • Research intrudes as little as possible on natural events • Participants (subjects) may not be aware of research 	<p>Quantitative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data are gathered via an intermediary - tests, questionnaires etc • Investigator is anonymous, neutral, assumes unbiased stance, objectivity critical • Intrusion may be extreme, laboratory simulation • Subjects normally aware of being part of an experiment
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<p>Qualitative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of context important for interpretation of events • Focus of study may shift as categories and theory (new questions) emerge from the data • Report uses narrative format - a story with episodes • Study can last months 	<p>Quantitative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context may be seen as contaminating by introducing extraneous factors • Focus never shifts • Report is expository, a series of interlocking arguments to support or refute hypothesis • Study lasts a short time -- hours, a few days
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Appendix D – Interview 1 Protocol

Interview 1 – Exploring Student Writing Histories and Affective Dispositions

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

1	How do you identify yourself, culturally?
2	What is the language you first spoke at home?
3	Where and how did you learn to write academic English? Describe your educational background.
4	How have you attempted to improve your academic writing in the past?
5	Do you enjoy writing academic English? Why or why not?
6	How did past experiences writing in academic English make you feel?
7	How will ability to write in academic English help you in your future?
8	What do you need to do in order to succeed in the writing tasks in Introduction to Research in Education?
9	How do you feel about having to produce summaries and a proposal for Introduction to Research in Education? Why do you think you feel that way?
10	Which aspects of writing dissection / summaries and a research proposal for Introduction to Research in Education seem most challenging for you?
11	Which aspects of writing dissection / summaries and a research proposal for Introduction to Research in Education seem least challenging for you?
12	Other comments:

Appendix E - Interview 2 Protocol

Interviewee:

Interviewer:

Time:

Date:

Location:

Research concepts test

1	Was it challenging for you to explain the research concepts in the test?
2	Which concepts were you already familiar with and from where?
3	Which concepts were new to you?
4	Other comments:

The developing proposal draft

1	What stage are you at for the proposal draft?
2	How would you describe your proposed study? What framework does it rely on?
3	Tell me about the writing process.
4	What has been challenging in the process up to now?
5	What resources have you relied on to craft what you have written so far? What other resources do you plan on using?
6	Have you used resources posted on FirstClass? How?
7	How useful have the in-class group work sessions been for developing your proposal?
8	How do you think previous writing experience (writing done at work or in other courses) is influencing the writing process?
9	[For NNS] Are you conscious of transferring stylistic, grammatical or vocabulary features from your native language in the process of writing the proposal?
10	How confident do you feel that you can do a good job on the proposal? Why do you feel that way?
11	Other comments:

Appendix F- Interview 3 Protocol

Interviewee:

Interviewer:

Time:

Date:

Location:

1	What is your general impression of the course as a place to learn how to produce writing for research purposes? How could the course be improved?
2	How has your confidence in your ability to produce writing for research purposes evolved during the course?
3	Can you remember any moments when certain ideas about the content, structure or approach to writing the proposal became very clear? What do you think brought about those moments? Describe the circumstances if you can.
4	What helped you constrain your problem statement and research questions?
5	What caused changes made in the final draft?
6	Did the course itself provide anything that could not simply have been provided by discussion and / or feedback from the professor?
7	Do you have a personal interest in or care about your topic? Why / why not?
8	Did admiration of another person's writing style or ideas affect what you have written?
9	Were you aware of consciously avoiding anything in your writing (either content, structure, or regulation of writing process)?
10	What element/s of the writing process did you devote the most time to?
11	Which section/s of the proposal was the most challenging to complete? Why?
12	What helped you to narrowing down your research problem and questions?
13	Did someone else read your writing and offer comments / advice before you submitted it?
14	Tell me about the draft editing process.
15	In what way do you believe you have written yourself into this proposal?
16	Other comments:

Appendix G - Protocol for Classroom Observation

Class: _____

Date: _____

Time observed: _____ to _____

Observer name: _____

No.	Time	Names of participants involved in interaction	Type of interaction from point of view of initiator: Providing (P) or requesting (R) information or support	Focal artefact, topic or theme	Content of verbal interaction (transcription)	Affective overtone of interaction (e.g. frustration, annoyance, fascination)

Appendix H – Ethical Consent

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Study title: Development of writing for research purposes: An ecological exploration of the writing process for graduate-level, native and non-native English speaking students

I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Stuart MacMillan, Ph.D. student in the Department of Education of Concordia University.

Researcher contact information:

Email: stua_mac@education.concordia.ca

Home phone: (514) 448-2468

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to explore how graduate level students from a range of language and cultural backgrounds regulate their own learning and use of resources and tools to produce writing for research purposes.

B. PROCEDURES

Classroom observation: Verbal and non-verbal interactions taking place within the Introduction to Research in Education (ESTU 615) classroom will be documented by the researcher in writing on a laptop computer. **No time commitment** is required of study participants.

Analysis of student writing: Summary analyses and mock research proposals prepared by the participants will be examined to determine the influence of various supporting resources. Optionally, participants may provide the researcher with notes, outlines or previous drafts of writing. Sections of participants' texts will undergo in-depth analysis to explore how arguments are supported through the use of specific wordings and grammatical structures. **No time commitment** is required of participants, once writing samples have been provided to the researcher.

Interviews: Interviews will be conducted with individual participants and will last **approximately 25-30 minutes**. Ideally, three interviews may take place with each participant during the winter 2007 term. However, participation in fewer is also welcomed and greatly appreciated. Interviews will normally take place at the university, but may take place in other locations if more convenient for the participant. In the first interview, the researcher will ask participants to describe their cultural, educational, and language backgrounds, as well as past experiences with academic writing. Subsequent interviews will explore specific challenges faced when completing writing tasks for ESTU 615. Reference will be made to participant writing samples when appropriate.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study. Since participation

is strictly CONFIDENTIAL, the course instructor will not have access to data collected. In the final research report, names of all participants will be changed to protect identities.

Benefits of participation include the chance to discuss and reflect on your writing development as the course progresses. Participation will also help the researcher advocate for students from differing cultural or language backgrounds that may find the task of writing in academic English particularly challenging. The final report may sensitize instructors in the future to unique support needs of students in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL (the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity).
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.

I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY BY:

allowing the researcher to observe and document interactions in the ESTU 615 class during the winter 2007 term with the understanding that interactions I am personally involved in **may not be used** in the final report.

allowing the researcher to observe and document interactions in the ESTU 615 class during the winter 2007 term with the understanding that interactions I am personally involved in **may be used** in the final report.

allowing the researcher to analyze samples of my written work.

allowing the researcher to interview me about my writing.

Check all boxes that apply.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 x7481 or by email at areid@alcor.concordia.ca.

Appendix I – Personal Narrative

The following document, presented in the form of a personal narrative, documents events and life experiences that may have influenced my own assumptions about the research problem and, accordingly, biased study findings. I include a description of events that likely constrained the focus of inquiry to the particular topic of novice research writing process. I also outline past work and study experience that may have influenced my views and understandings of the phenomena in question.

As an English language instructor by vocation, I have been interested in issues of language usage and learning for many years. That interest led me to pursue a graduate degree in applied language studies starting in the year 2000. Mainly through course work, and due to the influence of particular faculty members I worked with in the program, I found my own knowledge base becoming increasingly specialized in the domain of research on writing. I believe that the scholarly work begun during my master's degree program heavily influenced my decision to focus on graduate student research writing as a doctoral level research project.

One experience in particular influenced the course of my future research activities. As part of the course work for my M.A. studies in 2001, I had the opportunity to interview a Venezuelan non-native English speaker who had recently graduated from a master's program in mechanical engineering taught in English at the university I was attending. In many ways, I believe that student is representative of the increasingly diverse face of the urban Canadian university, a mosaic comprised of many people from different cultural and language backgrounds. During our interviews, he described his recurrent struggle with grammar, spelling, content and flow in writing during his undergraduate years. He lamented the lack of support for

writing provided to him in his *content courses* - courses not specifically focused on English as a second language or academic writing skills - during his Bachelor of Engineering program and the early part of his Master of Applied Science program. For him, challenges were compounded during graduate studies when he found himself unable to decide which information to include in various sections of his master's thesis. He recalled that a reviewer had once spent a grueling hour discussing a single paragraph in the paper with him, giving explicit instruction as to what information was and wasn't appropriate to include. Sections of the same research paper were returned numerous times with comments stating that knowledge outlined was unnecessary because it was shared knowledge in the field. Although late in his master's program, he had received little explicit instruction in generic features of research writing.

Conversations with this student sparked a period of reflection for me. As a language instructor with the intention of teaching writing courses in the future, I began to think more about the issue of research writing specifically. In which ways was research writing as an activity distinct from other forms of academic writing? I wondered. And how might instruction in research writing be more explicitly incorporated within university curricula if such instruction was not, in fact, being adequately provided in content courses? These questions remained in mind for over five years, resurfacing finally as central elements of the present doctoral level project.

Following my masters level studies in 2001, I began my first job as a college instructor at a private university in Nagoya, Japan. As a junior member of the faculty, I was asked on several occasions to teach courses in academic writing, mainly to first and second year undergraduate students. Although courses did not focus on research writing in particular, the experience afforded me further insights into how Japanese

students (these ones non-native speakers of English) typically approach the task of scholarly writing. The students I taught in Japan were not fluent in English and most struggled with the academic writing tasks. Yet, as non-native English speakers abroad, they were, unlike my study participant in Canada, given explicit instruction in academic writing form. As is typically the case in many Japanese universities, all instructors were asked to adhere to a common and fairly rigid academic writing curriculum focusing predominantly on best practices and rules of good writing form. At each level of the undergraduate program, we worked with required textbooks. All students in the same year took the same final writing exam at the end of the term. Scores were based mainly on students' ability to adhere to the best practices and rules presented in the course textbooks.

Regardless of our teaching practices, I noticed that students relied on a number of personalized writing strategies in order to complete the writing tasks assigned to them. For example, although students were asked to use their own wordings and present their own ideas within their texts, it became evident that many were relying heavily on the structure and wordings of source materials to complete the writing tasks. In a few cases, students were blatantly copying and pasting material collected on the Internet directly into their own writing. These plagiarizers were usually quickly exposed. Yet there were other students who were evidently making an effort to transform source texts (unfortunately still at times without proper acknowledgement of original authors), modeling their own writing on those texts, and making use of less familiar vocabulary and language structures they encountered in reading. In these situations, I saw considerable potential for language development to occur. This meant that from an instructional perspective, I felt caught in an awkward balancing act. On one hand, as an ethical prerogative, I endeavored to prevent instances of

plagiarism in student writing. On the other, I saw considerable benefits in the students' attempts to rework, reconfigure and experiment with the language substance of the source materials they relied so heavily upon. If anything, the experience strengthened my conviction that academic reading must be incorporated fully and integrally within the writing process. For non-native English speakers who lack both the linguistic repertoire and prowess to skillfully craft writing based on their current language abilities, this notion appeared particularly pertinent to me.

Memory of personal struggles with academic writing tasks over the years also proved a valuable source of ideas and direction for this project, and has undoubtedly contributed to development of my personal understanding of the research problem. For example, it occurred to me in the early stages of this project that most of the difficulties I have faced during writing tasks have revolved around effective management and reuse of information. During the first year of the master's program in applied language studies, I realized that approaches I had relied upon during undergraduate studies were no-longer sufficient for writing tasks at the graduate level. I believe this was mainly the case because scholarly work at the graduate level requires students to situate their own ideas and voices within a history of scholarly dialogue to a greater extent than is required during undergraduate studies. Starting essentially at the master's level, I realized that my own brain was simply incapable of reproducing and synthesizing in writing the details from so many past readings. I was forced to find ways to buttress and support my own memory by creating a system through which I could effectively store information, including quotes and ideas from readings and course lectures in a readily accessible form. For the first time, I began saving copies of summaries and notes in searchable folders on my laptop computer along with detailed bibliographic information in APA format as required for all

writing produced within the department. I have since found myself heavily reliant on this growing bank of accessible and personalized information for all academic writing tasks. As this bank of information has grown and has been reorganized over the years, I have also had to devote increasing attention to its 'searchability'. With hundreds of pages of notes, it has become more difficult to locate specific information quickly. Extrapolating from my own experience then, an entering assumption for this study was that graduate student participants would face similar challenges relating to storage and organization of information resources, and would have, accordingly, devised personalized systems to catalogue, store and access those resources - systems that I would attempt to elucidate through qualitative inquiry.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the requirement placed on me to complete a proposal for a doctoral level dissertation may have influenced my view of the research problem. This requirement forced me to examine my own writing process critically as I undertook a task very similar in nature to that being demanded of the study participants themselves. This experience prior to the study inevitably sensitized me to many of the challenges that study participants faced as they attempted to craft a proposal for research. Memory of my own experiences likely re-emerged, too, as I generated ideas and formulated questions for discussion during interviews with study participants. At the same time, my own experience crafting a proposal for a major research project may have allowed certain assumptions I hold about the writing process to go unexamined. Memory of my personal experience may have, in fact, unduly constrained the content of discussion with study participants in unintended ways.