# Learning how to work with instructors of international EAL graduate students to better support their students' development of academic writing skills

by

Laurie Waye
M.Ed., Temple University, 2001
B.A., University of Victoria, 1993

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

PHD

in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

# Supervisory Committee

Learning how to work with instructors of international EAL graduate students to better support their students' development of academic writing skills

by

Laurie Waye
M.Ed., Temple University, 2001
B.A., University of Victoria, 1993

**Supervisory Committee**

Dr. Kathy Sanford, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
**Supervisor**

Dr. Valia Spiliotopoulos, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
**Departmental Member**

Dr. Hossein Nassaji, Department of Linguistics
**Outside Member**

# Abstract

**Supervisory Committee**
Dr. Kathy Sanford, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
**Supervisor**
Dr. Valia Spiliotopoulos, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
**Departmental Member**
Dr. Hossein Nassaji, Department of Linguistics
**Outside Member**

As more students enter Canadian universities from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, supporting the development and transition of their academic writing skills through assignment and feedback design has become very important. Many of these students and their instructors identify academic writing as one of the students' biggest problems in a Western university or college (Robertson, Line, Jones & Thomas, 2000; Yang, 1994; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). Yet there is little support available for the instructors who work with these students (Dedrick & Watson, 2002). This study focuses on my interactions with three instructors in graduate programs that have a high proportion of international students who use English as an additional language (EAL). By weaving together action research and case study research, three themes became apparent: the instructors saw no clear distinction between the needs of EAL students and those who have English as a first language; the instructors were unclear about how to teach writing in their discipline; and, the instructors felt frustrated and overburdened by their workload.

I also learned how I, as a researcher and an educational developer, can better interact with instructors to ensure support at the level of assignment and feedback design. The first lesson is when interacting with others it is necessary to identify the lens that represents one's institutional and cultural lens. Because I did not adequately identify and

interrogate my lens, I gave in to my colonial impulse to direct the study and the participants. The second lesson is the space in which we two instructors – the person from a given discipline and the person who is an educational developer – come together as a kind of "contact zone" (Pratt, 1998). I had hoped that the instructors and I would come together as a kind of Venn diagram, with our knowledge overlapping in a neutral and fruitful way, but I learned that the space where we come together is fraught and vulnerable for both the participants and the researcher. The third lesson is that relationships, which traditionally are not highly valued in our workplace in higher education, are extremely important in order to foster dialogue, continue conversations, and allow for the necessary revisiting and development of our work together. The main recommendation stemming from this study is workplace training for administrative staff who are in educational development positions.

This study is important because there is little previous research in this area. As more Learning and Teaching Centres emerge at Canadian institutions, we must learn how to work effectively with instructors to affect curricular and assignment change. We must also question whether the kind of support a member of a Learning and Teaching Centre can provide is enough to affect this change, or whether other models, such as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and faculty mentoring, are essential in the development of the understanding of how to better support the development of the academic writing skills of international EAL students.

# Table of Contents

## List of Tables

# Acknowledgments

There are so many people involved in the process of conducting research and writing a dissertation. I would like to thank Dr. Kathy Sanford for her guidance, suggestions, and patience. I could not have finished my program without you showing me the way. I would also like to thank Dr. Valia Spiliotopoulos and Dr. Hossein Nassaji for their support, comments, and questions. Thanks are also due to Dr. Alister Cumming, who agreed to be the external examiner of this dissertation; his expertise was invaluable.

I'd like to extend a special thanks to the three participants who agreed to be in my study. Many people said "no" because they were too busy; you three said "yes" *even though* you were too busy. Without you I could not have learned as much as I did.

I would also like to thank Teresa Dawson, Director of the Learning and Teaching Centre and Dr. Dahlia Beck of Ben-Guiron University for serving as my cheerleaders along the way.

# Dedication

I dedicate the completion of my dissertation to:

- my parents, Les and Jean Waye, for listening, advising, and babysitting,
- my sister, Dr. Heather Waye, and brother-in-law, Dr. Peter Dolan, for their sympathy and inspiration,
- my son, Luke Shimizu, for making me take time out to play,
- to my partner, Mark Gordon, for cheering me on, and,
- to my Gutierrez-Gordon stepchildren – Monica, Tyberius, Meika, and Xyrina – for making my life a party.

Without all of your support, I would have given up.

# Chapter 1: Going Back

I have spent a great deal of time abroad; I lived in Japan for eleven years. While there I taught adults in many educational settings, but the one that was most influential to my pedagogy and philosophy of educational ethics was at Temple University, Tokyo Campus. I saw there how programs from the main campus in Philadelphia had been adapted to a student body that for the most part did not have English as a first language, and many who were far from home, from places like Russia, the Middle East and Africa. I was educated to teach first-year composition to these students to help them prepare for their work as undergraduate students at an American, English-medium university.

But before I started teaching at Temple University, I was a graduate student there, completing my Master's degree in Education. Not only did I learn a great deal about working with adults who are learning English as an additional language, I was also classmates with many students who themselves were learning in their second language. Awed by this, I paid attention to how they supported their learning in class, and how the instructors structured activities to allow for varying degrees of proficiency in and comfort with English. I often felt that at the end of their studies, these students should receive two degrees rather than one: one for the content, and one for the ability to have mastered that content in a language other than their native tongue.

After my time in Japan I returned to Canada to pursue my PhD at the University of Victoria (UVic). While there were many pleasant surprises for me here at UVic, I was dismayed by stories I heard and things I witnessed as a student here. Particularly, how was it that a university could accept international graduate students, but not firmly

support their learning? Was it not important that these students had different needs? For a long while I felt culture shock in the classroom; it was stressful, not just because there were many things to do, but because the classroom represented a different set of often-undeclared expectations in terms of interaction and written assignments. If this is how I felt as someone who has English as my first language, I could hardly imagine how those who did not might be suffering.

And suffer they did. We – a handful of international graduate students with English as an additional language, and me, an honourary "international" student – had quiet conversations, sharing thoughts on which instructors allowed for the differences in experience and interests of the international students. Clearly both differences and conformity had their places in the Canadian classroom, but the rules governing these locations were not clear. Despite this sharing, we were making guesses, struggling, and feeling very stressed. Sometimes our conclusions were wrong, and sometimes sharing made the burden more, not less, as we could easily sink beneath our inability to support each other. Now I have been at UVic for six years and I know I could have, and should have, approached instructors for more guidance. But in the first year of my studies here, I felt misunderstood, different, and adrift in a set of expectations that I did not understand. I had little time to put toward learning how to write for this place, but plenty of practice at floundering at it.

I was confounded by this irony of welcoming and yet not welcoming international students. I feel that at the heart of this practice of accepting international students but not explicitly addressing their needs as newcomers to this academic home is a practice that is unethical. And yet, the perpetrator is ambiguous. Instructors are often overburdened with

their workload and large classes. The institution, as I now know through my work in it at UVic, can be clumsy and slow. Rather than focus on whom or what to blame, I turned my thoughts to what changes would help this set – my set – of students. I started to research what was at the heart of these issues, and how other English-medium universities were addressing them.

Not long after, a classmate suggested to me that I apply to present at the conference for the Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE). There I shared my experience and research with representatives from Canadian postsecondary institutions, many of whom had questions and concerns about their own university's practices. The room was abuzz with talk of supporting change and supporting students. Out of this electric atmosphere the local educator who was appointed to chair my session, Dr. Jim Anglin, also of UVic, turned to me and said: "Be my research assistant. Let's do this."

After a year of research, meetings, and the assembling of the English Language Proficiency Working Group (a task force assigned to look at these very issues, both in undergraduate and graduate education at UVic), I became the Coordinator of the newly revamped Writing Centre. In this role I teach graduate students to work with other students, many of whom are from abroad and many of whom have English as an additional language (EAL), to support the development of their writing skills. Because the Writing Centre at UVic is run by the Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC), I also work with instructors to help them develop writing assignments and assessment tools that are friendlier to EAL students. By doing so I help the LTC fulfill its mandate to provide instructor support to develop curriculum instructional methods, and technology

application in courses. Since then UVic has published its Strategic Plan (2007), which includes as its goals the recruitment and retention of international students and graduate students.

Another example of recent internationalization efforts can be seen in the Faculty of Business. Thanks to an agreement with the Chinese government, UVic will be receiving many more international graduate students from China ("Agreement links UVic," 2007). While this agreement and the Strategic Plan can be seen to foster a sense of internationalization, it also raises questions of how international students transition from their previous studies into the academic and cultural environment here at UVic. Of the multiple issues facing these students, many students and instructors identify academic writing as one of their biggest problems in a Western university or college (Robertson, Line, Jones & Thomas, 2000; Yang, 1994; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). As the university has pledged to increase the number of graduate students in the coming years, and undoubtedly will be looking overseas to fill some of these spots, the problems international graduate students may face when writing in their additional language need to be addressed in a manner more explicit than has been done until now.

In my role as coordinator of the Writing Centre, I have met with a number of faculty members who teach graduate students and are frustrated with their students' lack of writing skills and their own ability to support these students in their courses. Through these experiences I have come to see that writing support for international students can come from a variety of sources, and can be not only direct, but indirect as well. My intention is to support international students through supporting their instructors. From working in the Writing Centre and its parent, the Learning and Teaching Centre, I know

that attendees at our workshops and those who book appointments for consultations with us represent a dedicated group of instructors who regularly call on our services. I was curious about those who infrequently call on our services. Could I take my services to them, rather than having them come to me? In this outreach situation, I developed this research question:

> *How can I work with instructors of international EAL graduate students to better support the students' development of academic writing skills?*

To help answer this question, I had two secondary questions:

> *How do instructors at the graduate level define "good" academic writing?*
>
> *How do instructors view these students' writing skills and their own ability to support these students' writing development?*

In this dissertation, "international student" refers to students who come to Canada from a different country to study in English and who have EAL. I recognize that this is a false division of students in many ways, particularly in that not all international students have EAL, and that many domestic students in Canadian university and college classrooms are EAL students as well. However, the goal of my research is to look at how to indirectly support the academic writing skills of graduate EAL students, and who may have different, culturally-specific concepts of audience, appropriate evidence, plagiarism, and so on.

# Chapter 2: International EAL Students and academic writing

Academic writing, while not monolithic (Hyland, 2004), has certain characteristics. Academic writing builds on the ideas and research of others; the words and thoughts of others are referred to through citations. The first and second person ("I" and "you") and informal language, such as contractions and colloquialisms, are not used in academic writing (Swales & Feak, 2000). In order to facilitate students' success in this particular genre of writing, support is needed from services like the Writing Centre. In addition, support can include the kind of written assignments given, the feedback given on those assignments, and an awareness of the different ways of thinking, knowing and writing that these students can represent.

While many students would benefit from such support, students from abroad need at least some support that is specific to their needs. According to Silva (1997), in his call for a code of ethics in working with EAL students, institutions and instructors need to understand how these students' skills and understandings are different, and accommodate for these differences, because "to do less is to work against the retention and success of non-native speakers of English in institutions of higher learning" (p. 362). Yet there is little support available for the instructors who work with these students. For instance, Dedrick and Watson (2002), in their literature review of twenty-two top-selling guides for supervisors, found that these guides "rarely identified" (p. 275) the unique needs of graduate students who are female, minority, and/or international students, leading them to believe that "faculty have little written material to advise them of a number of needs

central to successful mentoring" of these students, "as well as the extent and number of barriers such students face in acquiring academic and professional socialization" (p. 286).

This academic and professional socialization enables students to engage in good graduate writing, which contains a number of markers. Good graduate writing is built on the writing and ideas of others with proper attribution; it displays "citation and intertextuality" (Hyland, 2004, p. 20). Within this intertextuality, the writer must assert her own idea or evidence in a way that displays her individuality (Shen, 2008), and that is "argumentative" but not "polemical" (Li, 2008, p. 48). The new evidence is used to "problematize, complicate, extend, reinterpret, or, in times of paradigm shift, challenge or even reject the existing knowledge wholesale" (p. 48). The way in which the new evidence is discussed demonstrates facility with the Western logic structure that favours a topic sentence followed by support, not support leading to the topic sentence, which Shen calls "the bush-clearing" approach (2008, p. 129). The voice in which the new evidence is discussed is authoritative (Blanton, 1998), and the writer "imagines" (Ong, 2003) the reader to be another insider in the intertextuality that marks the specific disciplinary discourse (Blanton, 1998; Hyland, 2004). Of course, good graduate writing differs based on the discipline (Elbow, 1998; Hyland, 2004; Swales, 1990), and it also differs based on the cultural and linguistic contexts in which that writing is produced. Therefore, culture and language play paramount roles in how international students writing in English as an additional language compose texts.

## Linguistic influences

EAL students may produce texts that display a limited vocabulary and simple sentence patterns (Wang & Bakken, 2003), and/or contain errors and exhibit

developmental patterns (Silva, Leki & Carson, 1997). While some instructors may believe that "students' language ought to be addressed and fixed by courses and programs before students take on what is assumed to be the real work of the academy" (Zamel, 1995a, ¶ 2; also see Zhu, 2004), these students will still be in that class and writing the assignments set for it. The reality is that it takes years to develop proficiency in a second language (CCCC, 2001; Matsuda, 1999), especially at a level required for graduate study. In essence, as language is the means of transferring knowledge, instructors are language teachers as well as teachers of the course content. They are language teachers whether or not they recognize and accept this as part of their teaching role. However, many instructors are not equipped to act as language teachers. They may not have the meta-language needed to discuss the hallmarks of academic writing in their discipline, they may not know how to frame to newcomers the conversations and culture of their discipline, and they may not be able to explain grammatical rules. Added to the length of time that it can take to master an additional language, some students may not be in writing-heavy disciplines, so that their writing difficulties remain unnoticed until they write their theses or dissertations (Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). Naturally, international students who write better do better in their programs of study (Ying, 2003).

### Cultural influences

In addition to linguistic influences, international students bring to their writing assignments a set of assumptions about what good writing is, how to write an academic paper, and other cultural notions that influence how and what they write. One example of this is rhetorical differences. These rhetorical differences reflect different notions of what constitutes proof and logical sequence of thought in various cultures (Kaplan, 1966; Leki,

1992). For example, a culture may prefer a paragraph to guide readers to the topic sentence, which comes at the end of the paragraph, or an essay, which guides the reader to the thesis statement in the conclusion. Hinds (1987) gives the example of the Japanese *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu* essay, which begins with the argument, then develops it, turns to a connected sub-theme, then brings it all together in the conclusion (p. 147). As Kaplan notes, "the foreign-student paper is out of focus because the foreign student is employing a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native reader" (1966, p. 4). For example, in a Japanese student's essay, the sub-theme may make the essay seem out of focus for the native speaker of English. Another example comes from writers who have Arabic as their first language, as Arabic rhetoric encourages repetition and linguistic skill "to find another way to say the same thing" (Leki, 1992, p. 100).

Another rhetorical difference is that of audience. As Ong (2003) notes, the audience is always fictitious. The writer must guess what is common knowledge to the reader, and "this knowledge is one of the things that separates the beginning graduate student … from the mature scholar" (p. 72). An international student would have a more difficult time correctly assessing what to assume of the reader, and to determine whether the writer or the reader has the responsibility to provide meaning in the text (Leki, 1992). If the writer has the responsibility to provide all the information, then she or he will not assume much shared background information and will feel the need to make the links of logic explicit. However, if the reader has the responsibility to fill in the blanks, then the writer does not guide the reader through his or her thought development or metaphors as explicitly (Hinds, 1987).

Yet another example is epistemological. One culture uses writing to display knowledge, emphasizing the preservation of knowledge, while another uses writing to expand knowledge, emphasizing the building on previous writings and ideas (Silva, Leki & Carson, 1997). What constitutes proof is also a cultural matter: "while we value authority and statistics, writers from other cultures may value personal experience or teachings from religious texts" (Pfingstang, 2004, p. 211). There are also different expectations of appropriate voice, register and tone, which can cause trouble for international students (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). In fact, Zhu and Flaitz (2005) found in their survey of international graduate students at the University of Florida that these writers felt inexperienced at composing longer papers, organizing them, and using the discipline-specific format.

Very much related to issues of rhetoric is academic discourse. Academic discourse is the discipline-specific "ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 4). For many students, initiation into the "secret talk, on the shared concepts and catchphrases of Western liberal learning" (Rose, 1989, p. 194) can be a frustrating and isolating experience (Northedge, 2003). For international students it can add an extra layer of language learning. As Gee (2001) argues, everyone gets one discourse "for free," but all secondary discourses must be learned, so in order to learn alternate discourses, international students need direct instruction and practice, and instructors' understanding that one is bound to make mistakes when learning a new discourse (Bartholomae, 1986; Brinkman, 2004; Rose, 1989; Spellmeyer, 1989).

Another cultural issue is how plagiarism is perceived. How and what an international student perceives as plagiarism may not match Western expectations, and this difference in perception can be clouded by "a discourse about academic dishonesty" (Valentine, 2006, p. 89). Students, from "cultures of memory and text" (Pennycook, 1996, p. 220) or not, will have trouble understanding at what point one receives more help on an assignment than is allowed, or, when the use of another's ideas transgresses the rules of what is acceptable. Rose (1989) states that students may find themselves writing amidst a set of conventions that they don't fully understand. For example, paraphrasing is a particularly difficult skill for international students, as it requires them to maintain the same idea of a sentence while changing the wording (Bouman, 2004). How much of the wording to change, and which of the words to change, is often not explicitly taught.

Indeed, "some plagiarism is simply the result of ignorance [and] explaining what plagiarism is and indicating why it is a *serious* offence not only may prevent the naïve student from plagiarizing but also may deter the intentional plagiarist" (McKeachie, 2002, p.100). Of course, students who fall behind in their coursework due to overextending themselves, or due to a lack of the required linguistic ability to keep up, may resort to using writing that is not theirs rather than admit their trouble to the instructor (Zobel & Hamilton, 2002). In another scenario, a student may feel pressured by students from the same culture of origin to "help out" more than they should with a written assignment. Other common scenarios are purchasing personalized essays on the Internet, and patchwriting, a transitional stage into the mastery of incorporating other's words and ideas into one's own writing (Howard, 1995; Pecorari, 2003), from various

online sources, which according to plagiarism surveys are not unusual among college students (Colvin, 2007, p. 151), international or other. While Colvin's study was conducted on American students generally, it should be assumed that the same opportunities are tempting to international students, especially given the added pressure of working in a second language.

Clearly, supporting students with English as an additional language involves "more than 'celebrating' cultural differences. Addressing the needs of these students will demand carefully planned pedagogical solutions based on an understanding of their unique characteristics" (Valdes, 1992, p. 86). To create these "carefully planned pedagogical solutions," instructors need guidance to underpin the content of their discipline with knowledge from the field of second language writing research. Instructors can learn how to structure written assignments to better ensure international student success, how to provide useful and meaningful feedback, and how to understand the kinds of cultural differences that appear through a student's writing.

While an instructor may feel that teaching writing is not part of his or her teaching responsibilities, in fact, most university instructors teach writing by default. This instruction tends to be implicit as opposed to explicit. While a strategy of teaching language through content is a valid way of teaching writing to EAL students (Lyster, 2007; Mohan, 1986), I am using the word "implicit" to mean unplanned and unconscious, as opposed to the educated and planned approach to teaching that consciously reflects a pedagogy of teaching writing skills through content. If an instructor were following the ideas in Mohan's (1986) and Lyster's (2007) books, s/he would introduce students to the expectations of style and format through readings and assignments, and students would

learn from these examples what is discipline-appropriate. However, as many university instructors are not taught to teach the writing as well as the content of their discipline, instruction in this skill may reflect how they themselves were taught writing: in an implicit but unconscious manner. However, even if an instructor has been taught to teach writing, s/he may focus on the product rather than the process of writing (Murray, 2003). Focusing on the product can lead to overlooking the deeper, more structural issues in a student's writing (and thinking, as writing reflects our thinking) in favour of commenting on the superficial errors, such as grammatical mistakes (Rose, 1998).

Another challenge in teaching writing is to make the writing done for assignments and other class work low-stakes. According to Hairston (2003), students learn best how to write when the environment is supportive of students taking chances with their writing. Taking chances provides students with the opportunity to test aspects of the rhetoric common in the discipline, to move from a less knowledgeable writer of papers to having an academic voice of authority (Rose, 1998). Teaching writing, then, means explicitly introducing students to the discourse of a discipline, and providing opportunities to learn as writers through supportive assignments and helpful feedback.

There is a metaphor I use to describe learning to write in graduate school, which builds on Burke's (1967) metaphor. Burke describes discipline-specific academic discourse as a party: you enter, listen to the conversation, add your thoughts, someone else adds to those thoughts, you agree with someone, and someone disagrees with you. Eventually you leave the party and others arrive. I extend this metaphor to graduate writing so it encompasses the experience of learning to add your voice and thoughts to the conversation that is happening in your discipline. You enter a party, late. You do not

know anyone, but they are engaged in a heated debate. You cannot enter the discussion until you have listened long enough to know who has said what, and who is agreeing or disagreeing with whom. The issues become clearer the more you listen, and you learn the names of the people that most of the party-goers are listening to. Eventually you build up enough contextual and background knowledge to add your own ideas to the conversation, but not before you understand how to appropriately add your ideas. Burke's version focuses on the graduate student adding his or her voice to a written conversation; my version focuses on the graduate student's experience of *waiting* to add his or her thoughts until the context and form of the thoughts are appropriate. As a result, teaching writing involves introducing graduate students to the discourses in the discipline and how to add their voices to the conversations that have been going on long before they arrived. For international students, they are attending the party in a language other than their first one, and how they add to the conversation will involve also learning about the cultural and linguistic contexts of how the conversations develop as they do. In order to support instructors to better understand these and other writing issues that international students often face, I believe that a two-pronged approach is needed.

## Assignment and feedback design

The first prong of this two-prong approach is supporting assignment redesign, although it could also be termed as reconstruction. The second prong is supporting instructors to give timely, effective feedback, which I call "designing" feedback. If designed, or planned, the kind of feedback can be determined in advance and purposefully given to direct the student to certain areas that can be improved, rather than commenting on many different aspects of the writing without attention to the importance

of some issues over others. In my opinion, the kind and amount of feedback should be planned as part of each assignment. As assignments are one of the most common means of assessment at the graduate level, and the feedback on assignments can provide information to students on how to do better on the following assignment, assignments and their feedback are topics that I can use with instructors to enter into the discussion of writing, cultural and linguistic issues international students can experience. As well, more informed assignment and feedback design can, I argue, support the development of academic writing skills of students who have English as an additional language and who are from another culture of writing.

Both the strategies of assignment and feedback design provide opportunities for formative assessment, as opposed to summative assessment. Formative assessment "forms" the student's work by giving them feedback and direction on their work before the work receives a final grade. Summative assessment "summarizes" how a student does on an assignment, and signals the end of the development of that assignment. For example, a rubric used only to grade, and not shared with the students ahead of time, is a form of summative assessment. A rubric used to guide students through the development of an assignment is a type of formative assessment (Montgomery, 2002). Brookhart, Moss and Long (2008) describe formative assessment as

> all about sharing information. Teacher-to-student communication – teachers showing students where teachers believe learning should be headed and what students need to do to get there – is important (p. 52).

While summative assessment also has a role to play in supporting student learning, it is not the focus of this study as it is the more common mode of providing feedback on written work.

Through her corpus review of formative assessment, Shute (2008) suggested that it should be "nonevaluative, supportive, timely, and specific" (p. 153). She also discerned three cognitive reasons for formative feedback: "it can signal a gap between a current level of performance and some desired level of performance or goal;" "it can effectively reduce the cognitive load of a learner;" and, "it can provide information that may be useful for correcting … misconceptions" (p 157). In fact, Shute states that "formative feedback might be likened to 'a good murder' in that effective and useful feedback depends on three things: (a) *motive* (the student needs it), (b) *opportunity* (the student receives it in time to use it, and (c) *means* (the student is able and willing to use it)" (p. 175).

Formative assessment aligns well with adult education, also called "andragogy," which is the concept that adult learners are different from younger students (Knowles, 1980). According to the literature in this field (Cranton, 1992; Kerwin, 1981; Knowles, 1980), adults want to understand the connection between the assignment and the course and its content; they want to know why they are doing what they are doing, and want to see the value in it. As well, adults are "self-directing;" "have many and varied experiences;" and, "prefer problem-centered or performance-centered learning" (Cranton, 1992, pp.14-15). Perhaps most relevant is the concept that adults bring to their studies a rich history; for graduate students, there can be a rich history with the style and expectations of academic writing in their respective disciplines and cultures. While

experience with academic writing can be beneficial to a graduate student, it cannot be assumed that it does not also create obstacles. When starting a new educational experience, an adult must

> [transform] knowledge and skills derived from past experience. This process requires more energy and more time than learning based on formation of new knowledge. It also requires that past experience be raised to consciousness, and that new behaviours be tested in safe and trusted environments (Mackeracher, 1996, p. 41).

The instructor and student have a different relationship in the adult education-oriented classroom. It allows space for learners to self-direct and for the instructor to serve as facilitator of student learning (Cranton, 1992). Together the instructor and student, with their different sets of experience and knowledge, "work together in a learning process which includes change as part of the process, with an outcome of changed thinking, values, behaviours, and actions" (p. 20). Feedback is paramount so that adult learners can evaluate their own progress and motivation.

Instructors may "react to andragogy by saying that it may be appropriate for continuing education programs but not for curriculum programs" (Kerwin, 1981, p. 12). It may be true that undergraduate education is often delivered to students who are making the transition from teenage-hood to adulthood, but, graduate students usually have four years of post-secondary education, plus time in the workforce. So, if we are to view graduate students as adults – which they most certainly are – then the field of adult education has much to teach us about our students. Assignment and feedback design are just two of the ways that instructors of international graduate students can honour what

students bring to class while providing ongoing opportunities to provide a kind of assessment – formative assessment – that can guide the student to being more successful writers.

### Feedback design

In a review of first-language research done on the effects of different kinds of teacher feedback on writing, Leki (1990) states that none has a significant impact on student improvement in writing (p. 61). Most second language (L2) research done on written feedback concerns the marking of errors, which often results in surface errors being treated while deeper, more fundamental errors are being missed. And, in a review of native speaker reaction to written feedback, Leki argues that students often do not read it, and if they do read feedback, they may not understand the comments or the principles behind them (see also Zamel, 1982). The irony is that teachers take between twenty and forty minutes to write comments on each essay (Zamel, 1985) – comments that students may not read, and, even if they do, the feedback may not be easily applied to their next piece of writing. Yet, feedback is necessary for student learning (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998). Traditional forms of feedback on written assignments do not seem to have the desired impact on the writer, nor do they seem particularly time efficient for the instructor. Therefore, instructors may want to reconsider their feedback design.

When looking at an assignment that an EAL graduate student has handed in, the instructor may feel distracted and frustrated due to the grammatical errors and differences in rhetorical structure that the text exhibits (Matsuda & Cox, 2004). While it is tempting to circle all with a red pen, paying much attention to grammatical mistakes does little to help a student to acquire the correct structures (Leki, 1990; Silva et al., 1997; Zamel,

1985). As Robb, Ross and Shortreed (1986) found in their quantitative study of four different forms of error correction on EAL students' writing, "while well-intentioned teachers may provide elaborate forms of corrective feedback, time might be more profitably spent in responding to more important aspects of student writing," (p. 91), as "content and organization are of primary importance" (Zamel, 1982, p. 205). In fact, Robb et al. (1986) found evidence against direct correction of error. As well, focusing too much on what the student did wrong may teach students not to take linguistic, rhetorical, and intellectual risks in their writing (Elbow, 1998), and it does not allow for developmental errors and necessary practice in learning how to write (Holt, 1997; Rose, 1989).

This is not to say, however, that feedback is not important. The issue here is not whether feedback is important or not – it is – but that some approaches may be better than others in terms of student learning. In order to produce the best kind of corrective feedback, the feedback that is given must be focused, informed and deliberate. One thorough source on this subject is Straub's (2000) book, which is a collection of strategies for responding to student writing, urges postsecondary instructors to see each assignment in terms of the role the feedback you are going to give plays within the course as a whole. The feedback for each written assignment in a course can differ, depending on what the instructor wants the students to learn. Straub also notes that the feedback should be connected with the learning outcomes of the assignment; the content of the assignment is more important than the style in which it is written. The instructor's comments "instantiate what we really value in student writing. They offer an opportunity

to make the key concepts of the class more meaningful to students" (p. 245). So what should instructors write? Straub's advice is to

> give students sincere, well-designed comments, comments that give them thoughtful feedback about what they have to say (not just how they say it or whether it's correct) and how they might work on their writing. … and they will read the comments, appreciate them, and get something out of them – if not on the next draft, then on the next paper or the one after that, or perhaps when they write again next semester (p. 246).

As to more specific information regarding what to write, Straub (2000) suggests turning "the comments into a conversation with the student," writing comments in clear and simple language the students will understand, keeping the next assignment in mind, and not overwhelming the student with the amount of feedback (p. 247). Especially, the instructor should focus on two or three concerns for each assignment, as "students do best when they can work on a couple areas of writing at a time" (p. 248). In this way, all teachers can also be writing teachers. Like in a master-apprentice relationship, an instructor can guide students into the kinds of writing favoured in his or her discipline.

If grammar distracts the reader, though, because the errors "significantly and consistently interfere with understanding so that you cannot determine the meaning of sentences throughout the paper," then that is an indication the student needs to be referred to services such as the university's Writing Centre (Holt, 1997, p. 70). Many students may be unaware of how serious their writing problems are (Straub, 2000; Wang & Bakken, 2003). Giving students that feedback early enough for the student to access campus support services is, then, very important.

In addition to the type of feedback, the timing of the feedback is important. Providing effective feedback in time to apply it to the next part of the assignment, or even the next assignment, allows students the opportunity to use the comments and guidance of the instructor to develop their writing skills (Koffolt & Holt, 1997). Students need to have the time and the opportunity to incorporate instructor feedback into their texts (Zamel, 1985). Providing ample opportunity to practice writing over time can result in gradual improvement in students' writing, according to Robb et al. (1986). This may be because students who are still learning English "can assimilate only a small proportion of corrective feedback into their current grammatical system, especially when the corrections are not detailed enough to be applied to the more complex and problematic aspects of word order and syntax" (pp. 88-89). As well, Wang and Bakken (2003), in their study of international graduate students who want to publish their work, found that "adequate time is needed for ESL researchers to develop successful writing skills" (p. 226) and to use campus writing support services, such as workshops and tutors.

While it is easy to imagine that multiple assignments means more time spent providing feedback, my idea is that providing feedback strategically in terms of how much and what, when, will not increase instructor workload. It is simply a matter of rethinking and re-educating oneself:

> The teacher must learn to (1) focus primarily on content; (2) isolate and explain the most significant of errors first; and (3) limit the number and types of corrections per paper (Holt, 1997, p. 73).

This can be done by focusing on one or two paragraphs (Holt, 1997), which puts the onus back on the student for finding other instances of the error throughout the paper. This

could be used for grammatical mistakes as well as stylistic ones, such as misuse of APA or MLA. While the effort of the instructor is focused on the content of the work, this does not mean that style and grammar do not count for much. In fact, taking off points for errors in these areas sends a strong message to students, especially if notice of this is given before the assignment is due, as this puts the responsibility on the students. We can make this expectation clear by asking students to pay attention to *both* form and content.

However, it is important to be aware that "if we encourage students to rethink what they have written, to be willing to take risks both intellectual and linguistic, then backsliding is perhaps inevitable" (Leki, 1990, p.58). This backsliding, a part of the learning process, occurs because writers need to be taught that "perfect essays in one sitting" are not possible and as a result "certain features of composing are focused on before others" (Zamel, 1982, p. 205). This helps reinforce the idea that content and organization are of primary importance and that editing comes later in the writing process (see also Straub, 2000). By breaking the writing of assignments into two parts – the writing and the editing – students will learn to pay attention to different aspects of their writing at different stages of the writing process. Indeed, "an understanding of assessment as part of teaching will lead to the design of opportunities for students to make mistakes and advance their understanding through making these mistakes" (Ramsden, 1992, p. 195).

As previously stated, providing feedback and the opportunity to use it frame the student/teacher or student/supervisor relationship as one of apprentice/master-craftsperson, with the craft being a well-written, discipline-specific text. Ramanathan and Kaplan (1996) give the example of law students learning over the course of their studies

the ability to write legal English through reading, motivation, and from "the teacher's repeated modeling of legal texts" (p. 23). Taking apart Ramanathan and Kaplan's example we can see both the writing process and formative assessment at work. *Repeated* means that students have multiple occasions to learn from their assignments; feedback on their assignments can focus them on how to be more successful in their next writing assignment, known as formative assessment – it forms the next text, as opposed to summative assessment, which summarizes the performance on the just-written text. *Reading* means that they are seeing example text and learning to notice what makes it a good piece of writing in that discipline. This is helped by the teacher's *modeling*, which helps students notice the significant aspects of how a text is written. *Motivation* is also part of the formative assessment process because students are given feedback that they can apply to their next assignment, and will feel supported in their learning about writing legal texts because the writing is being focused on. This formative feedback will likely support students' own particular learning goals, which can further foster motivation (Cumming, 2003, 1986). Learning how to write legal texts is not an implicit outcome of the students' and teacher's work together – it is one of the goals, along with legal knowledge. The writing process is iterative, and requires reflection, rethinking, revising, and ongoing practice. For many, the model of writing an "A" level essay the night before the due date that may have worked in undergraduate studies no longer works in graduate school. Addressing this learning curve of learning how to write in an explicit, guided, and supported manner allows students to add their voices to those of the discipline through their ongoing writing. Moreover, they may find joy in writing in English that they did not

feel before, which increases learner motivation as they reach their own goals for developing their writing skills (Cumming, 2003).

### Assignment design

While providing effective, timely feedback is a very important part of supporting international graduate students in the development of their academic writing skills, there is another method of providing support that is equally important: assignment design. As mentioned previously, most EAL students are still acquiring English, even at the graduate level (CCCC Statement, 2001). In a study of the support that graduate students needed at an Australian university, Brinkman (2004) found that support is not simply a remedial matter, but involves "assisting students to grapple with the huge differences in academic rhetoric conventions, learning expectations and teaching styles" (p. 1). She also found that graduate students from another first language and culture lacked confidence in their know-how of English academic writing, leading Brinkman to recommend "explicit instruction in academic discourse conventions," "use of the process approach" to develop proofreading skills, and peer review opportunities (p. 8).

Brinkman's suggestions are echoed in a study done by Pardue and Haas (2003) that looked at how to better serve international nursing students at an American university. They found that students were more successful if the course assignments had been revisited and evaluated for clarity of language and cultural expectations (p. 72). Often, "the traditional approach to giving writing assignments … makes no provisions for international students and others" who do not have strong writing skills and strategies, and do not have much exposure to discipline-specific writing (Koffolt & Holt, 1997, p. 54). Rose and McClafferty (2001), in their discussion of supporting graduate students'

writing development, state that in graduate school "there is little professional discussion of what we can do to help our students write more effectively" (p. 27), even though it is easy to see that good writing skills are necessary for the students, both in their studies and in the job market or academia afterwards. Even if departments and instructors do not want to address writing development explicitly, they can, through revisiting their curriculum and assessment methods, determine how to foster the improvement of these skills. Assignment design and redesign allow the quality of writing to be both addressed and supported without singling out students or expecting them to seek remediation on their own. It also relieves some of the pressure on instructors to serve additionally as language teachers.

To begin the assignment redesign process, the instructor views the writing assignments of the course with clarity and skill development in mind. There are three aspects I consider here: clarity of assignment directions, clarity of assignment guidance, and multi-stage assignments.

While students at the graduate level are most likely familiar with common assignment directions, such as "discuss" or "compare," other assignment directions may be less clear. Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) found in their case study of international graduate students that the students were unfamiliar with the style guide for their respective disciplines, e.g. APA, and in fact were unsure of what the instructors were referring to, or how to find out more information on these styles. As well, students are often unable to predict accurately what criteria assignments will be marked on (Holt, 1997; Angelova & Riazantseva; Straub, 2000; Wang & Bakken, 2003). To address these issues, providing clear information about what style guide is to be used, what it looks like

and where to find it, and about the rubric by which the assignment is to be marked, can better ensure student success with the assignment.

Guidance during the writing process can take many forms, and is one aspect of assignment design. One approach is to see the students' writing before the final draft is due so that directive feedback can be given and then incorporated by the student in the next stage, step or draft of that assignment. As Straub (2000) notes, not all writing needs to be graded, nor does feedback always need to be extensive. Sometimes it is enough to indicate that a student is headed in the right, or wrong, direction on an assignment. Again, other students can provide guidance in the form of peer reviews once they are taught how to do so and feel confident that they have something to contribute to their classmates' writing (Nelson, 1997; Straub, 2000; Wang & Bakken, 2003). Peer review strategies will be discussed more fully in the following chapter. Feedback is a part of assignment design when it is planned, intentional, and focused. Just as the assignment is planned in advance, so is the feedback; knowing what learning outcomes will be met through the assignment is as important as knowing how those learning outcomes will be assessed.

Much can be gained by providing readings that serve as examples of the expectations of discipline-specific writing, especially if aspects of the writing are explicitly discussed (Accardi & Davila, 2007; Leki, 1992). Borrowing from Minett (2004), who writes about writing tutors acting as "cultural informants" to students from other rhetorical backgrounds, instructors in many disciplines can also serve as cultural informants. The culture of a discipline includes the kind of writing favoured as well as the broader Western tradition of audience expectations, the acceptability of digressions, and adequate evidence (Hayward, 2004). According to Hayward, cultural differences can

appear in the paper's organization, sentence style, register, cohesion, and "the amount or type of information included" (p. 8). Given that there are many wrong turns that a student can take, explicitly addressing the kind of writing expected gives international students the information they need to be more successful in their written assignments.

Another aspect of assignment redesign is to evaluate whether the assignment can be deconstructed into its elements and spread out over a longer period of time. To illustrate, instead of a one-shot essay due the last week of a course, the instructor can divide that assignment into its elements, with each element becoming a step or stage of the assignment. The steps are then arranged to make a logical sequence. The first step might be an annotated bibliography, followed by a one-page statement of essay intent that the instructor checks for direction and gives general guidance on, followed by a first draft for peer review, followed by the final assignment. Another way of structuring it is to have the students conduct all the research and writing that they would do for a final paper, but to spread it out into a number of smaller assignments, due throughout the semester. Either way allows for students to incorporate feedback and know what their weak areas are in their content knowledge and writing skills. As well, multi-stage assignments allow students to know how they are doing, and in doing so underlines that it is the responsibility of the student to improve their skills and knowledge. This kind of assignment also makes student work more manageable and less daunting, which is particularly important to those who are working in a new academic culture and in their second or third language.

Dividing written assignments into smaller chunks that students write piece-by-piece allows for greater support of the development of academic writing skills. EAL

students need "multiple opportunities to use language" (Zamel, 1995b, p. 518) and to learn to write discipline-appropriate texts through repeated encounters, because "the process of acquisition is slow-paced and continues to evolve with exposure, immersion, and involvement" (p. 517). In Robertson et al.'s (2000) in-depth look at how writing skills are perceived by faculty, staff, and international students at an Australian university, one of the conclusions they arrived at is the importance of instructors reviewing drafts before submission. While this also speaks to the use of effective, timely feedback, it also means that assignments should be developed so that students are writing it over a period of time, and are given feedback and guidance when it is usable and immediately applicable.

In fact, the benefits of breaking down assignments into smaller chunks over time are numerous. Straub (2000) states that having multiple assignments frees the instructor "from having to address a range of concerns on every paper, across every page" (p. 255). In addition to allowing the instructor to provide less but more focused feedback, the instructor can know earlier in the semester which students have weaker writing skills. Providing feedback and guidance to these writers is of particular concern as some students are unaware of the extent of their writing troubles (Straub, 2000). If students can know earlier in the first semester of their graduate studies which areas of writing skills need their attention, they are more likely to be successful writers in their programs and to feel more supported (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999). Wang and Bakken (2003) also note that as an instructor, it is important to know what are reasonable goals for that student in terms of their ability to complete the course's writing assignments. As Leki (1992) states, students writing in their additional language take longer to write a draft

than do their native English-speaking classmates, which is correlated to less time spent on revision. In a study of the writing process of students with English as an additional language, Raimes (1985) found that these students put more effort into their first drafts than their native-English speaking counterparts. Leki (1992) theorizes this is because students needed more time to find the words and ideas for that first draft. Overall, students who are not working in their first language need more time and more opportunities to write.

Spreading out the broken-down assignments is one way of providing more time for these students to engage in the many stages of the writing process. Breaking down and spreading out the assignments can be considered a "process" approach to writing assignments. The process approach is seen as the opposite of the product approach, which is exemplified by one-shot writing that students do not have the opportunity to rewrite, and that does not build in the step of receiving feedback prior to submission. According to Koffolt and Holt (1997), employing the process approach through divided up and spread out assignments encourages students to start writing earlier in the semester, provides feedback before students become overly invested in their drafts, and encourages the implementation of this feedback on both this and the next writing assignment or draft. As opposed to one-shot, product-focused writing, students may feel more relaxed and more able to seek help from the instructor or other writing supports (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999; Koffolt & Holt, 1997; Wang & Bakken, 2003). As well, the process approach as exemplified here encourages the development of student self-editing and proofreading skills (Brinkman, 2004), as well as self-assessment. Ideally, the assignments would build on each other, so that by the end of the course students have met the course

requirements for learning outcomes, have written something that extends their writing skills and facility with academic discourse, and are more able to tackle future writing assignments.

By taking this multi-stage approach to assignment design, which refers to the breaking down and spreading out of assignments, instructors are in a better position to help students develop a fuller schema of academic writing. Schemata are "patterns of stored knowledge" (Leki, 1992, p. 93) which are drawn upon when interacting with information presented in written text or verbal discourse. Schema theory (Carrell, 1983) posits that a reader of a text interacts with its words to comprehend it. Therefore, the meaning is not in the text itself, but in the reader's interpretation of it. The reader's interpretation is based on his or her knowledge of the subject and of the rhetoric the author has employed. There are also cultural aspects to consider. To illustrate, a Chinese international student may write a paper in his second language, English, but does not employ the rhetorical style appropriate to Western academic discourse. One instructor who reads it is also from the Chinese culture and aware of how thoughts are expressed in Mandarin rhetoric. This instructor understands what the student has expressed in the text because she has the schema appropriate to understanding the student's intended meaning. Another instructor, who does not know Mandarin or how rhetoric is used in that language, is confused by how the student has organized the paper, why certain examples were used, and so on. The second instructor did not have the schema to understand the meaning of the paper as the author intended it. Leki points out, "If a text can draw upon a reader's knowledge and experience, it is much more likely to be understood regardless of the linguistic difficulty of the text (including surface level error)" (p. 93). Knowing who

the audience is, and what its needs and expectations are, is key to having the reader understand a text.

It is also important to note that such an approach to assignment design makes intentional plagiarism much more difficult, in that students are required to write frequently. The instructor can easily gain a sense of a writer's style and voice, students may be more engaged in their writing, and it would be prohibitively expensive to buy each assignment from the kind of internet site that offers tailor-made assignments. In comparison to plagiarism detection strategies, such as turnitin.com or mydropbox.com, plagiarism prevention is preferable. If an instructor suspects that a student has plagiarized an assignment, the administrative process and detection work required can be time consuming. In her description of how she has dealt with students who plagiarized in her courses, Colvin (2007) writes, "the problems of plagiarism in the digital age continue to challenge the teacher/student relationship and may require more aggressive teaching strategies and student/teacher dialogue" (p. 149). In this context, Colvin's "aggressive" strategies and dialogue refer to explicit and clear discussion and addressing of plagiarism. Rebuilt, sequenced assignments are examples of how instructors and students can interact through feedback and guidance. Such interaction will likely lead to increased student interest in and engagement with the written assignments (Procter, n.d.). It should be noted that many of these strategies and concepts apply equally well to students who are not from a different country and do not have EAL. These are simply sound teaching techniques, and therefore can serve many instructors and students well.

Increased student engagement in the writing process and reduced incidents of plagiarism are strong arguments for assignment redesign. In addition, Pardue and Haas

(2003) found in their study of assignments redesigned for international students that "faculty expressed satisfaction that the adjustments made … provided for greater clarity and maximized the opportunity for success for the international student" (p. 76). In addition to increased student success, revisited assignment and feedback design may maximize the time spent providing feedback and minimize the time spent reading plagiarized or other kinds of inappropriate work. Clearly, assignment and feedback design are advantageous to both instructor and student. I decided to focus on three tools as the main means of suggesting assignment and feedback change as they can be easy to implement and do not require a drastic reworking of the course syllabus. These three are rubrics, peer review, and models.

## Rubrics

Rubrics are outlines, usually visually represented, of the criteria that an assignment will be graded on, and a system of scoring a student's work based on those criteria. They can make more transparent both the grading process and the criteria of an assignment. It can also give students and instructors a common language for discussing the criteria and assessment. An example can be found in Appendix B.

Rubrics are most often written about in the literature in regards to evaluation. Examples include the assessment of an information literacy program through the evaluation of students who take the program (see Diller & Phelps, 2008), or, the use of rubrics in order to systematize and regulate grading. For instance, Stellmack, Konheim-Kalkstein, Manor, Massey and Schmitz (2009) tested the inter-rater and intra-rater reliability of rubrics on APA-style introductions in psychology classes. This use of rubrics emphasizes uniformity of criteria and is intended to increase the objectivity of the

marking process. Multiple graders were taught to use the rubric, but as is shown in this study, objectively evaluating writing is problematic, and in fact these researchers found their rubric "displayed unexpectedly low inter-rater and intra-rater agreement (which) will lead us to reconsider the way in which student writing is scored" (p. 106).

Reiterating this finding is the literature review done on rubric reliability and validity by Jonsson and Svingby (2007). In the 75 studies they looked at, they found that generally "rubrics do not facilitate valid judgment of performance assignments per se" (p. 130). It is possible that rubrics attempt to classify what is too complex and interrelated to subdivide (Penrod, 2005). In fact, there is strong criticism against using rubrics in large classes with multiple graders when less subjective grading is the goal of using this tool (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Stellmack et al, 2009Jonsson). As well, the research done on the use and efficacy of rubrics has not been based on the needs of EAL students or how these specific needs may or may not be met. These criticisms do not mean, however, that rubrics cannot have other, more useful applications at the graduate level for international students.

One such application is to enhance student performance. The Jonsson and Svingby (2007) literature review found that "rubrics seem to have the potential of promoting learning" (p. 130). This may be partly because rubrics can help "adult learners identify critical components of an assignment by indicating why something is important and setting the initial framework for problem-solving" (Bolton, 2006, p. 5). In Bolton's (2006) study of more than 150 graduate and undergraduate students, students were graded with the use of a rubric that they received when the assignment was set. In a

follow-up questionnaire and focus group, all but three of the 150-plus students indicated that they liked rubrics. In particular, they liked

> the use of rubrics as a guide for performance, the use of rubrics in establishing expectations and standards of performance, the value of rubrics in identifying critical issues, and the value of rubrics in providing feedback on weaknesses (p. 6).

The one complaint that a few students had regarding the use of rubrics was "the potential for rubrics to limit student creativity" (p. 6). For more artistic academic endeavours, this criticism may be true. As well, some students may feel that their approach to an assignment is constrained by the guidelines being clear and detailed. Unfortunately, teaching, assessment, and curriculum design are rarely a one-size-fits-all proposition. However, in the circumstances of instructors not knowing if students know the required quality and style of writing, rubrics can offer much to graduate students regarding the clarity of assignment expectations.

Given this limitation of the rubric, I want to clarify why I believed a rubric would be a good discussion topic with the instructors. First, creating a rubric means clarifying to oneself what the learning outcomes of the assignment are before the assignment is graded. Rubrics make an instructor think carefully about the expectations he or she has of students' work and how to explain them. Planned in tandem with the assignment itself, the rubric can clarify to the instructor, and in turn to the students, what the assignment is designed to achieve in regards to student learning and content mastery (Bolton, 2006). Secondly, if students receive the rubric in advance it is clearer what aspects of the assignment are important, the quality that is expected, and what constitutes good writing.

Thirdly, a rubric is something tangible that is easily discussed by instructors and students, and can serve as a starting point into a discussion of the writing support of international students.

Use of a rubric can come down to what Arter (2006) calls the question of what we want rubrics to do for us as instructors, and what we want it to do for our students. She argues that if rubrics are used to help student performance, then instructors need to decide what exactly the relationship is between the assignment and the learning outcomes of the course. She also suggests the rubric is best used with examples and discussion to explain what the criteria listed actually look like in a finished piece of work. Specifying criteria of an assignment has a

> positive impact on instruction. Establishing criteria before the instruction focuses the instructor on the critical components of the curriculum and increases the likelihood that such components will be emphasized. Thus, there is an integration and alignment of curriculum content, instruction, and assessment that allows instructors and students to engage in meaningful learning (Montgomery, 2002, p. 36).

And, at a level that supersedes the course, a department could agree upon a rubric that defines good writing in that particular discipline at the graduate level. A rubric like this is general, e.g. it does not describe learning outcomes specifically or the numerical weight of each column, but it clearly articulates what the writing expectations are. This kind of rubric provides students with information early on regarding the quality and quantity of writing required, so that they can act in an autonomous and proactive manner regarding the development of their writing skills. For example, they could seek

remediation early on and regularly, apply themselves to learning the style guide or software they will obviously need to learn, and they can track their development and set their own goals. Such a rubric would also provide the language for students to talk to instructors about their writing (Martins, 2008). Abstract concepts like voice can be discussed early on, as could more cultural notions like plagiarism and appropriate tone.

In addition to knowing what good writing is for a particular assignment and course, the students would know what good writing is in their discipline, and could carry that meta-knowledge with them from course to course, and beyond. A well thought-out rubric can indicate what kind of writing is commonly expected in that discipline, and its presence can express to students the importance of writing, as almost all disciplines require their graduate students to communicate their ideas and research clearly in written texts. Highlighting the importance of writing would help students understand that writing is a skill to which they must pay attention for their present and their future.

Therefore, rubrics are not only as a method of assessment, but also a method of communicating information about the assignment and good graduate writing to the students. As Martins (2008) points out, rubrics should not be used to judge writing if they take the place of instructor comments and direction. He calls on instructors who use rubrics to consider "what responsibilities we are delegating to those tools and what behaviours they are inscribing on both us, as teachers, and on students in return" (p. 128). Using the rubric as one tool to provide feedback means that the use of this "technology" (p. 128) is in harmony with the other suggestions about feedback on student writing. In fact, Jonsson and Svingby (2007) suggest that the use of rubrics can improve instruction

because of the clarity of expectations and criteria that are required in their creation, "which also facilitates feedback and self-assessment" (p. 130).

Because the grading of writing is in its essence subjective, and research as described above indicates that inter-rater reliability is lower than one would expect, it makes sense to use a rubric that is informational and instructive as opposed to being mainly grades-oriented. The rubric asks the instructors to identify what is important in the completion of the written assignment, to discern the priority of those criteria, and then present the criteria in a way that uses language students can understand. It allows for instructor directions on each criterion, which can explain for the students exactly what the paper needs to do that it is not doing, or, how the student excelled at achieving that particular criteria. As well, the development of such a rubric asks the instructor to identify how the feedback he or she is giving will feed into the next written assignment. Rather than "feeding back," it is an opportunity to "feed forward."

This alteration brings "rubric" away from its original Latin meaning, "red ochre", which we can assume means to mark with red - a summative form of assessment. According to a current definition in the Oxford English Dictionary, "rubric" is not in fact a grading scheme, but headings in a document or a set of instructions (Hawker & Waite, 2007). This kind of rubric provides the headings in the form of identified criteria, with additional description of those criteria, which serve as the set of instructions. This form of rubric aligns well with Huba and Freed's (2000) lengthy list of how rubrics can be used to educate. It reveals to students the quality of writing that is expected and "opens channels of communication between us and our students" (p. 171). Common language, in-time information, and a chance to communicate about the criteria are all parts of

formative feedback, which has at its heart the forming of a better piece of writing and a deeper understanding of how to achieve that. After all, through sound and considered means of assessment "we not only monitor learning, but we also promote learning" (Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 8).

### Peer review

There are many forms of peer interaction in the literature. Two very common ones are peer assessment or evaluation, where students assign a grade to and feedback on each other's work, and peer review, where students provide feedback to each other. One form of peer review that is a good fit with my research is when students use it to give each other feedback at a time when it can be applied to the next draft. In this way the feedback is formative: it forms the piece of writing to be better or more appropriate before the "final" version is handed in.

One example of peer review for formative feedback can be found in the publishing of academic journals. The "blind" review, which is actually better named the "blind and silent" peer review, affords the writer feedback in a situation where the reviewer and writer are not known to each other, and do not communicate and negotiate the feedback. I do not recommend this style of peer review, as it can allow reviewers to become "bullies" (Graue, 2006, p. 38). Under the cloak of anonymity it may be tempting to put less effort into polite and constructive criticism, which defeats the purpose of feedback being helpful. Moreover, anonymous feedback does not capitalize on one of the main advantages of peer review, which is that it allows a reader to tell the writer what parts of the text were difficult to understand or were not well explained. The writer can then negotiate with the reader a way to make that piece of text clearer. This conversation

is what can improve a text, because it helps the writer know what an actual member of the audience thinks of it while the writer is still crafting it. The next version can be clearer and stronger because of that conversation and the larger framework of the peer review.

Peer review can be conducted in class, with instructor guidance to provide feedback to each writer before the final draft is due. For example, an instructor may use the assignment guidelines to focus students on the criteria they will read their partner's paper for, and then ask the students to swap papers with a partner. Partners then read silently, either in class or outside of class, and make notes on the paper to ask questions regarding the structure of the paper, the use of examples, and so on. At the end of class or in the next class, students share their feedback with their partners and help craft better, stronger writing. While students will need to be taught to do peer review (perhaps with a rubric to guide their comments), time taken to teach them yields a number of advantages. One is that it provides an opportunity for feedback at a time when it can be applied to the next draft. This makes the feedback meaningful and useful. The feedback that partners have for each other should be shared in class, which deepens the sense of responsibility to one's partner and adds even more learning depth to the activity: "such talk leading to negotiated meaning implies that education does not always have to be based on a banking model" (Devet, Orr, Blythman, Bishop & Peering, 2006, p. 198). The banking model comes from the writing of Freire (2004), and describes the philosophy of education that perceives students as empty before being filled with instruction and content. Students, drawing on years of postsecondary education, will likely have much to suggest to their peers regarding what was good and what was difficult to understand, and to figure out

ways to keep the good parts while improving the weaker ones. As well, in Falchikov's (2002) description of how she used peer review in her fourth-year Biology classes, she found that in comparison to her own feedback, the students "provided more positive feedback" and "a greater number of prompts and suggestions" (p. 75).

A second advantage is that students can begin to develop a critical eye for writing. Even if they are not responsible for editing the other student's work, they can practice reading writing in order to form constructive criticism. When directed to look for specific criteria, such as with a rubric or by referring to the assignment guidelines, students practice looking at a piece of writing at a level beneath the content. They are given the opportunity to analyze how a piece of writing works, and how it communicates effectively. With practice, the skills of noticing what writing works, and what does not, can be transferred to the student's own writing.

A third advantage is that peer review implies to students that revising is an important part of completing an assignment, and that handing in a first draft as a last draft is not acceptable. Writing cannot be, and should not be, a one-shot affair, so that improvement is possible. The difficulty students experience with writing "is eased through habitual practice" (Catt & Gregory, 2006, p. 21), and even though graduate students may have had significant experience writing, it does not mean that it is easy for the student or of such quality that it cannot be improved upon. "The opportunity to self-correct and try again is essential to self-improvement and the development of lifelong learning skills; this is the underlying premise of continuous improvement" (Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 47). Even in a situation like an in-class essay exam, leaving time for revision is important to check that the writing answers the assignment question, includes

supporting ideas and/or evidence, and does not contain grammatical mistakes that would normally be caught upon rereading. Revision, then, is an important step in the writing process, regardless of deadlines.

### Models

International students, as well as the other students in the class, would likely find it useful to see models provided by the instructor regarding what the pages should look like, how the argument is developed, and what the length looks like, in advance of the assignment being due (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999). While instructors may feel that providing a model gives away the answers to students, or restricts student creativity, by setting the standard early on students can know within what framework they need to work, and to what level they need to write in terms of length, content, and format. As Catt and Gregory (2006, p. 26) note, "While the danger in using exemplars of slavish imitation of an apparently preferred model is inherent, the advantages in making criteria explicit *through application* are overwhelming." In addition, instructors would be able to spend less time in giving feedback regarding basic issues of the conventions of academic writing by addressing these issues beforehand.

Models can also help instructors demonstrate what can be difficult to explain, such as voice, critical analysis, or engagement with the material. In the aptly named, "Ah! … So *That's* Quality!" Sadler (2002) describes his experience with a student who complained about the grade her paper received. He asked for two clean copies of the paper, and remarked one, and had a trusted colleague grade the other. The two instructors had similar feedback and grades for the student. Both found that the assignment, though well written on the surface level, was without analysis and critical thought. The student

was still not clear on what her writing was lacking. In order to better explicate, the instructor asked two students who produced outstanding answers to the assignment to share their work. By seeing these models, the student who complained quickly and thoroughly understood the difference in quality of thought expressed in the writing, even though the surface-level quality of the writing was the same. Another student overheard this exchange between the student and the instructor about the models and asked to see the example papers as well. The next class he reported to the instructor that he had not known that that was what the instructor was after, and that he felt capable of producing the same kind of work now that the criteria was clearer to him. Of this experience, Sadler states

> The old adage: 'I cannot really describe what quality is, but I know it when I see it' has more than a grain of truth to it. If quality has to be *recognized* rather than defined, my practices had to be modified accordingly. The only way to recognize something is to 'experience' it in some way (p. 135).

To provide students with the opportunity to experience this high quality writing in assignments for his class, Sadler began to use models. With the model the instructor can point out the aspects that make it "good" writing for the discipline or for the course. Providing these models, Sadler argues, is another way of illustrating what the instructor is trying to convey to students as important for the assignment, much like an instructor would use "concrete examples, illustrations, stories, case studies and metaphors" (p. 136) to convey course content. An example of how to use models and how to annotate them for students can be found at the University of Toronto in Procter's "iWRITE" system (http://iwrite.utoronto.ca/). This program shows students example essays and papers at

different levels of writing, along with notes about the strengths and weaknesses of each paper. The sample texts and annotations are designed to support student learning about the expectations of university writing in general and discipline-specific writing in particular.

Like peer review, providing models of well-written assignments shows students writing that is better in some ways than their own, yet closer to their own level than a published piece of writing. One framework through which to see the use of models in writing is Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), although "the notion of the ZPD remains something of a mysterious idealized entity" (Nassaji & Cumming, 2000, p. 96). In the theory of the ZPD, mediation is important. An adult, or a language teacher, serves as a filter "who selects, frames, modifies and imposes order on the stimuli" (Poehner & Lantolf, 2006, pp. 240-241) to ensure that stimuli, or incoming language information, will be experienced in a way that the adult deems appropriate. The mediation is carried out through scaffolding between what the learner is currently capable of doing on his/her own, and what the learning goals are.

Vygotsky's ideas focus on moving the student from where they are currently at to where they need to go. In the writing class, I would see this as assisting a student to the next level. The teacher is in the role of supporter, who provides what the student needs to be able to do more and more on his or her own. Students would be able to identify, digest, and apply new skills and knowledge to their writing and would become better, more self-sufficient writers. Therefore, models of good writing that are similar to their own in some ways, and better in others, can guide students to notice what can make their

own writing better. The input is controlled to be at a level that is accessible to the student, and because it is accessible, it provides guidance.

Because models are accessible and provide guidance, they can serve as learning objects in ways that other forms of academic writing, like published academic articles, book chapters and textbooks, cannot. When reading a journal article, for example, students may find it difficult to compare it to their own writing because they are so different from each other. This is especially true for graduate students who are at the early stages of their graduate studies. There could be many things that are different, including the voice, the use of the passive, the lack of the first person, the use of headings, and how the audience is addressed. While some students may already have meta-knowledge about good writing, others may not be able to identify the differences between their writing and that in the journal article. The presence of so many differences and the lack of knowledge of the concepts of good writing can confuse students who are hoping to find concrete steps to improve their writing. The presence of a few differences can help students form steps to improve their writing. Having easily discernable steps at an appropriate time allows them to grasp some key concepts, apply them, and then look for more. By guiding the student to notice the differences in their writing and that of others' allows the gap between the two texts to narrow. Feeding forward through models, peer review and the judicial use of rubrics supports the development of student writing skills in a way that summative feedback alone cannot. In fact, modeling, peer review and certain rubrics can enhance student understanding of what good writing in their discipline is by providing opportunities to identify a few ways in which they can move their text from the level it is currently at to the next level.

Bringing together what is known about working with adult learners and learners with EAL in the higher education setting allows us to focus on supporting the linguistic and cultural socialization of international graduate students. Adding to this what is known about assignment and feedback design for these graduate students supports their academic and professional socialization. With such support these students will have an easier entry into the academic discourse of their field. Drawing from these four areas – adult education, EAL education, assignment design, and feedback design – can provide a much more planned and effective system of supporting the development of students' writing skills at the graduate level. Therefore, it is essential to guide instructors in how to support these students' cultural, linguistic, academic and professional socializations through the writing assignments they set and how (and when) they give feedback on those assignments. The question remains, though, *how* to work with instructors to support them in their efforts to support their international graduate students.

# Chapter 3: My Research

In my job, the enthusiasm instructors have shown regarding assignment and feedback design is invigorating. I feel like I am supporting students, especially students with EAL, by supporting their instructors. My success with instructors who sought out my help led me to wonder how to work with instructors outside of my office. In order to find answers, I worked with three instructors in a collective case study, with each case being an action research project.

To find the names of potential participants, I studied the university's timetable to find out who was teaching graduate-level courses, and focused on departments that I knew to have a significant population of international students. The list I developed had about thirty names on it. My intention was to recruit four to six participants, but of those people I called (see Appendix A for the telephone script), only three were eligible and interested. All three I had met in the past through my work in the Writing Centre or as a member of the LTC. Initially, I did not want to work with instructors I had already met, even though I knew that they were very interested in supporting student learning. I felt that it was somehow blurring the boundaries of my professional and student lives. However, I proceeded with these three participants. The names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms, and the specific names of the departments have been omitted. Instead, the names of faculties have been included. These actions were taken in an attempt to protect the privacy of the participants. The first instructor I began working with was Helena, who teaches a writing and presentation course to new graduate students in the Faculty of Science. The second instructor was Aaron, who teaches a graduate course in

the Faculty of Humanities. This class also occurs in the first semester for new graduate students. The third instructor was Kate, who team-teaches with two other instructors in a professional faculty. The course she was teaching the semester of our research was in the second and final year of the program. With these three participants I engaged in the action research projects within the individual case studies.

## Action Research

Action research comes in many forms, but at the heart of most versions it leads to the improvement of practice by linking together action and understanding (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982). This move toward improvement through research occurs through developing a plan of action, the implementation of it, the observation of its effects, and a reflection on those effects (p. 7). Action research is "often motivated by theoretical standpoints as well as grounded in participatory practice" (Drummond & Themessl-Huber, 2007). This combination of collaboration, change and theory resonated with me since I wanted to work with the instructors in regards to their assignment and feedback design because I felt that students – all students, but especially those who come from other countries and with other first languages – would benefit from redesigned writing assignments and feedback on those assignments. Discussing assignment and feedback design would create an opportunity to discuss good graduate writing and the obstacles students often encounter when writing.

I planned to work with instructors throughout their fall course. My intention was to meet with the instructor multiple times, with the first meeting to be an interview to find out their needs, thoughts about the writing needs of international graduate students, and to determine our course of action. There would be a final meeting to assess our work

together, and more meetings in between to develop that work. One of those meetings was intended to be focused on sharing with the instructors' ideas I had based on our first meetings. My expectation was that the instructor and I would collaborate in equal partnership to explore issues, apply ideas, and evaluate outcomes, with the instructor serving as the knowledgeable insider and me as the knowledgeable outsider (Chisolm & Elden, 1993).

As in most action research projects, my own was to have looped feedback in the form of revisiting with instructors and the work we create together in progressive cycles. Chandler and Torbert's (2003) "triple-loop feedback" promotes the movement of research at the project level through intending/attending – to thinking, to acting, to effecting/perceiving. This loop of action research is bolstered by a second loop of conversation – which in my case would be with the participants – that includes the reframing and illustration of the issues inherent in my study. A third loop is the discussion of the first two loops through re-visioning and assessing the research that I have done, thereby linking it to the future and the intention of the study.

I knew that I might not be able to see much change in the short cycle of this action research. However, I read about the implications for future change in Chandler and Torbert's (2003) article. They expand the action research spectrum to include future-oriented research that focuses on "timely action" for "future possibilities" (p. 135). I could imagine my study as being future-oriented because I did not think that the learning and knowing would end when the cycle of action research ended. The instructors would know more about how to support the writing of their students, and could apply this knowledge to future courses, and I could know more from reflections on my research.

This, of course, was the intention of my research, but there were aspects of action research that affected the implementation of my planned methods, and the intended and expected outcomes.

To start, action research is messy and unpredictable. Radford (2007) states that the variables are nonlinear and difficult to predict, and that "educational events" (p. 263) are even less predictable than studying other phenomena. Interestingly, action research is based on the notion that instructors and practitioners can directly and quickly affect change (p. 263). Change is problematic in that it is difficult to know if and how one action causes a specific reaction. When reflecting on change it is clear that "very minor remarks or behaviours can have a major impact on others, that events can come together in quite unpredictable ways and can foil our best attempts to plan or organize for particular outcomes" (p. 274).

In addition, the context of an action research project is paramount to its implementation and outcome, and can be difficult to know in advance of entering the field (Chisolm & Elden, 1993). Drummond and Themessl-Huber (2007) add that the context can influence the balance of theory and practice in a study, despite the intention of the researcher. As well, the people who are involved as participants may be willing to change or influence change to varying degrees, and this too cannot be fully known in advance. Furthermore, all the participants, including the researcher, need to have a similar agenda. Perhaps for action research the most difficult contextual obstacle is time: to do the three loops of action research is challenging in a time-restricted situation (Bates, 2008; Grant, 2007; Spronken-Smith & Harland, 2009). It can also be difficult to implement or later identify the cycles and loops (Drummond & Themessl-Huber, 2007).

The results of these cycles, loops and change may not become apparent in the time the researcher has to report the findings.

Action research can also be difficult to assess. In her study of the course she teaches for experienced postsecondary instructors, Dall'Alba (2005) writes that the knowledge and skills she can help instructors develop does not ensure skilful practice. In addition, she argues that knowledge and knowing are created, which means that the transfer of ideas from one person to another can be problematic and complex, and is not a linear process. After all, it can take time to learn, drawing on repeated encounters and different kinds of educational encounters. Warrican (2006) adds that the underlying epistemological assumptions of the instructors can create conflict in the action research process. Resistance or defensiveness may be the result if an instructor is challenged to make change for which they are not ready (Dall'Alba, 2005; see also Chisolm & Elden, 1993).

Moreover, action research can be considered a process of research, unpredictable and living, rather than a research method composed of discrete stages (Drummond & Themessl-Huber, 2007). This is very unlike the kind of action research methodology I learned about in my first graduate degree. At that time, Nunan's (1990) form of action research was popular in second language acquisition studies; in this style of action research the teacher identified a problem, planned a possible solution, carried out this possible solution, and assessed the results. The style of action research in education is quite different. For one, the participants may well determine the outcome (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006). It is also by nature emergent (Warrican, 2006). The results of such an emergent research project may mean that results may only be such general concepts as

increased understanding of the issues involved by the researcher and/or the participants (Chisolm & Elden, 1993). In short, because this form of research is done on and by people, and involves the past, present and future (Chandler & Torbert, 2003), it is bound to be messy, from the implementation stage through to the analysis and reporting of the data. This messiness means that the researcher needs to respond quickly and flexibly to the research context (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006).

## Case Study research

While "the case study has long been (and continues to be) stereotyped as a weak sibling among social science methods" (Yin, 2003, p. xii), and can be viewed as an easy way to do research (Hays, 2004), it has the benefits of allowing for in-depth and highly personal analysis, by asking 'how' or 'why' questions (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). These are usually "issue questions" (Stake, 1995) that focus on contemporary events (Hays, 2004; Yin, 2003). In my study, the issue is how to support international students' academic writing development through their instructors. In each bounded case, the research questions that I had identified were framed by issues the instructor identified. For one instructor this was a group of international students, for another it was supporting a particular international student, and for the third it was underlining the importance of good writing to the students. I did not attempt a "pure" case study because I wanted to be more than an observer of a phenomenon – hence some of the challenges in the research I wanted to do. I wanted to work with the instructors so that we could create something based on our knowledge. However, I have relied extensively on case study analysis protocols to understand the data, as described later in this chapter.

There are various kinds of case study methodologies; specifically, my case study was to be collective and instrumental. A collective case study is "the study of multiple individuals, each defined as a case and considered a collective study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 114). This sort of cross-case analysis is useful as the themes and issues that arise in the data are more important than any one person's experience. "Instrumental" means that the case study helps to accomplish something other than understanding the particular situation of the instructors (Stake, 1995). The case study remained collective because I have a collection of three cases, but because of this relatively small number, it is difficult to generalize understandings that are beyond this particular set of instructors. However, all three participants teach in very different disciplines and programs, and represent three very different ways of perceiving writing instruction within their university courses, leading to diversity in the three cases.

As already mentioned, the timeframe of the case study was the Fall 2008 semester. During this time I gathered as much as possible "the widest array of data collection as the researcher attempts to build an in-depth picture of the case" (Creswell, 1998, p. 123), validity was constructed through the triangulation of multiple data sources by combining "dissimilar methods such as interviews, observations, and physical evidence to study the same unit" (Merriam, 1988, p. 69). I collected interviews, documents and physical artefacts.

Initially, I interviewed the instructors regarding what they consider good graduate writing to be, how well their international EAL students were meeting these benchmarks, and how able they felt to support students in meeting them. These interviews were semi-structured. As Merriam (1998, p. 74) notes, this kind of interview format "allows the

researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic". To develop my ability to interview well, I followed Kvale's (1996) seven stages of developing an interview investigation, and his instructions on how to develop clear interview questions (see Appendix B). I followed his recommendations that the questions of "why" and "what" should be asked before "how" ones, and that the questions be descriptive and simple.

While all the interviews I had with the participants followed this format of prepared questions in a semi-structured format, they were also unlike traditional interviews in which the interviewee is drawing information out of the participant. The second interview could be better termed an "interaction", as I provided information to the instructors in an in-time, in-context manner based on what they had told me in our initial interview. For example, if the instructor mentioned that her students do not revise their drafts before handing them in for grading, I would mention strategies to fold revision in to the design of the assignment. These conversations provided me with the opportunity to explain to the instructor what the writing issues and processes of the students are, and other ways to support them in their written work. I felt comfortable with this style of interaction because I believed that the instructors were interested in learning this information and being aware of different approaches to assignment and feedback design. This belief was based on the instructors' initial enthusiasm to be a part of the study.

## Data analysis

Generally speaking, data analysis in qualitative research asks the researcher to "step back and form larger meanings of what is going on in the situations or sites" (Creswell, 1998, p. 145). To recognize these larger meanings the researcher "capitalizes

on ordinary ways of making sense" (Stake, 1995, p. 72). However, to get to the bigger picture, so to speak, I drew from a number of authors to guide my data analysis through the lenses of case study, interview, and textual analysis. I also drew data from my own reflective notes and thoughts from my research journal.

Data analysis in case study is, as Yin (2003) states, "especially difficult because the strategies and techniques have not been well defined" (p. 109). Instead, there is a collection of suggested strategies, which means "data analysis is not off-the-shelf; rather it is custom-built [and] revised" (Creswell, 1998, p. 145). Yin (2003) suggests "a general analytic strategy" (p. 109), which is set before the data is collected; for me this meant deciding I would approach analysis of the interviews, documents and texts by working from suggestions, described in this chapter, from Creswell, (1998; 2003), Yin (2003), Kvale (1996), Stake (1995; 2005), Hays (2004), Fontana and Frey (2005), and Peraklya (2005). By following their suggestions I took apart the data and put it back together after sorting and focusing it so that my research questions could be addressed (Hays, 2004). The key to analyzing the data, says Stake (2005), is to be reflective. This mirrors the necessity of reflection in action research. Throughout the data collection and analysis I reflected on how, where, and why the research was going as it was, and the fit of my questions to my data. As such, my "custom-built [and] revised" (Creswell, 1998, p. 145) data analysis strategies were developed.

### Interview analysis

The first type of data I collected was semi-structured interviews. This interview style allowed me to address the same topics with each interviewee, while giving me the freedom to respond to where each participant wanted the conversation to go (Fontana &

Fey, 2005). The interviews allowed me to learn what the instructors thought "good writing" consists of at the graduate level in their respective disciplines. In addition, the interviews were more like conversations, because the conversations were a way for me to learn about the context, course and discipline the instructor is working in, and to discern a starting point for the development of assignment and feedback design. I collected the data through two methods: one was to record the conversation with Audacity software and then transcribe the conversations word-by-word afterwards (Creswell, 1998, 2003); the second was to not record the conversations, but keep notes during the session and later write a detailed interview log (Stake, 1995, 2005; Kvale, 1996).

The interviews were analyzed according to the guidance of Creswell (1998; 2003), Stake (1995), Hays (2004), Yin (2003), Fontana and Fey (2005), and Kvale (1996). Of these authors the two who influenced my interview data collection and analysis the most are Creswell and Kvale. Creswell (1998; 2003) advises the new researcher to start with a general review of the interview data, being sure to pay attention to the words used by the participants. From this the researcher can reduce the data by determining codes or categories that much of the data fits into (which Kvale calls "meaning condensation"). As well, frequency counts of themes, instances, codes and categories can be used. Kvale adds to Creswell's directions that the data can be analyzed by narrative structuring, which means highlighting stories that the interviewees tell during the conversations. Kvale's "ad hoc" approach resonated with me because it seemed to suit the eclectic set of data that I had: interviews that were conversations, email communication, and so on. His ad hoc approach uses "a variety of commonsense approaches to the interview text" in order to "bring out the meaning of different parts of

the material" (1996, p. 193). He writes that this is likely the most common form of interview analysis because it allows for the selective use of approaches to draw out the most meaning.

While rereading the transcripts and interview notes and logs, as well as my own research journal and reflections, I developed a coding system that allowed me to mark both repeated instances that later formed codes, and unusual occurrences that required further study. I used the codes to reduce the data, focus it around my research questions, and provide meaning in the multiple instances (Stake, 1995). The unusual occurrences were analyzed by direct interpretation – drawing meaning from a single instance (Stake, 1995). Both are important, say Stake (1995) and Hays (2004). From direct interpretation and meaning condensation, I began to find answers to my research questions, and to build explanations as to why those were the answers (Yin, 2003). These explanations and answers were tested by the cross-case synthesis, which follows the data description chapters that come next. Above all, through analyzing the interview data and writing about it I developed more reflexivity. I needed to think about my initial interpretations and ask myself if other interpretations were possible. I also asked myself if other options had been available in the interactions I had with the instructors. This reflexivity helped me understand not only the content of the conversations, interpret the data and organize the finding, but come to understand myself as researcher and the role I played in the interviews (Fontana & Fey, 2005).

### Document analysis

I intended to collect a variety of documents from all three participants. I had hoped that these documents would demonstrate to me the kinds of assignments students

were being asked to write, or reflect the criteria the assignments would be graded on. As Melzer (2009, p. 240) states, "writing assignments are revealing classroom artefacts" because the assignments "say a great deal about [the instructors'] goals and values, as well as the goals and values of their discipline." Indeed, the documents shared with me reflected what was said in our conversations. I collected from Helena her checklist for her students' major paper, and from Kate I collected the syllabus and the outlines for two written assignments. These documents shed interesting light on how they communicated their expectations in written form to their students. In Aaron's course there were no written documents: the syllabus and assignments were discussed in class. This absence of documents most likely reflects the small size of his class – just three students – and the students' frequent use of his office hours.

In order to analyze the documents I again followed Creswell's (1998) suggestion of reading through the documents and making notes of what seemed significant and/or repeated. From there Stake (1995) directed that I analyze "for frequencies or contingencies" (p. 68). This involved not only looking at the document itself, but looking at it in light of what was said in our conversations, which Stake (1995) calls 'correspondence.' This correspondence was further analyzed according to Perakyla's (2005) instructions to discern the themes and then "to draw a picture of the presuppositions and meanings that constitute the cultural world of which the textual material is a specimen" (2005, p. 870). Indeed, the documents reflected a certain assumption of how the students would approach the assignment or the information. For example, the absence of specific criteria might indicate that students are expected to already know the criteria, and then this theory could be confirmed by analyzing the

interview data. The data from my document analysis is laid out in the next chapters, with the analysis built into the case description.

### Physical artefact analysis

Among other kinds of physical artefacts, I intended to collect the feedback the instructors gave to their students. However, two instructors did not provide me with this information in a textual form; rather, they summarized the feedback they gave in our conversations. Therefore, I could not analyze the feedback they gave to the students, only what they said they gave. This may have been a miscommunication, or the instructors may not have felt comfortable sharing their feedback on the students' writings.

The other instructor, though, photocopied the student papers with the name removed from the writing to preserve the student's anonymity. When preparing to analyze whatever physical artefact I would receive, I noticed that there is an absence in the data analysis literature of how to treat physical artefacts. As the physical artefacts I received were written text, I decided to analyze them as I would documents. This aligns well with the suggestions of Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) to use the physical artefacts to support the meaning that is generated in the case study. Interestingly, while analyzing the feedback Aaron wrote on the student papers, it became apparent that frequency of comments was important. I made a table, which is shown in the second case study, that describes what kind of comments he made and how often, and on which student's paper. This was a clear way to see the alignment of what he said he did and what he did in fact do when giving feedback. Again, the data is analyzed and interpreted within the chapter itself.

## Validity and generalizability

One standard of qualitative research is generalizability. In my study, one kind of generalizability that is demonstrated is naturalistic generalizations. According to Stake (1995), naturalistic generalizations occur when the researcher analyzes the data to make generalizations that readers carry with them after reading the case. These are "conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves" (p. 85). I have attempted to create these generalizations through providing a narrative of my research journey. Data, after all, does not need to prove causal relationships, but to "describe instead the sequence and coincidence of events, interrelated and contextually bound, purposive but questionably determinative" (2005, p. 449). Another kind of generalization that Stake describes and fits my research well is a petite generalization (1995), found in small cases.

Building on Stake's naturalistic and petite generalizations is Kvale's analytical generalizability, which "involves a reasoned judgment about the extent to which the findings from one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation. It is based on an analysis of the similarities and differences of the two situations" (1996, p. 233). In order to know what those similarities are, the reader needs to know what data led the researcher to his or her conclusions, and what the research context was. For this reason I have included examples and my analysis, so that you, the reader, can know if you would have reached the same conclusions, or, if you were to embark on a similar study, if you could expect the same sort of conclusions. Revealing what ground was covered, and what successes and failures were a part of this particular journey, allows the reader to know not only what might be expected, but how to better design such a study.

Another standard in the qualitative research process is to design the study so that it demonstrates validity. Creswell (2003, pp. 195-196) describes validity as "determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researchers, the participants, or the reader." Just like quantitative research, which is held to the standard of reliability of its findings, qualitative data should be based on good data collection, sound analysis and interpretation of the data, and a clear and full description of the situation in which the data is located, e.g. the case. For this study I have focused on the triangulation of data; thick, rich description of the case; and, Kvale's (1996) idea of research craftsmanship – not focusing "on the methods but on the task" (p. 107) of interviewing and analyzing the meaning of the resulting data.

It is common in case study research to gather as many data sources as the researcher can; this forms a methodological triangulation (Stake, 1995). From these multiple data sources the researcher can generate meaning and analysis. Creswell (2003) adds that in addition to triangulating data within a study, analyzing the data across case studies is another way to triangulate. While more data would have been better and would have likely added to the richness of my analysis, the cases triangulate with each other. Cross-case synthesis allows for this amalgamation of data, so that common themes and issues can be discerned and instances that are extraordinary can be very visible. Fontana and Fey (2005, p. 722) add that "using a multi-method approach to achieve broader and often better results" is becoming more common and accepted as a way to carry out qualitative research.

Another method through which I triangulated the data was to encourage the participants to read over our conversations so that they could add to the ideas, comment

on them, or reframe them (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Hays, 2004; Stake, 1995). As Stake (1995) notes in his book on how to carry out a case study, in the process of member-checking he rarely hears back from a participant, but it is still worth offering the opportunity for further input: when he has heard back from a participant, it has added to his understanding and analysis of the case, and when he has not, he knows that at least he has provided the opportunity for the participants to judge the accuracy of the data. Member-checking is therefore an important part of the process of ensuring validity. Like Stake, I did not hear back from any of the three participants, but I know that creating the file to send them gave me an added opportunity to review the data and my analysis. Just as more data would have been beneficial in the collection stage of this research project, reflections of the participants would have increased the richness of my study. However, I now understand that one can set out to collect certain kinds and amounts of data, but that intent does not necessarily equal outcome.

In addition to member-checking, I used ongoing reflection. Stake (2005, p. 449) argues that when undertaking a case study, "the brainwork ostensibly is observational, but more critically, it is reflective." For this reason I engaged in much analysis and self-analysis in this research process. After all, I was studying my own interactions. Fontana and Frey (2005) recommend using narrative to analyze interviews in order to understand ourselves through learning about the participants and what they say to us. This is similar to Kvale's (1996, p. 201) narrative finder/creator: when writing about the data, one looks for the narratives contained in the interviews (such as the stories of good practice that I was told), but also creates narratives by sharing with the reader how the "many different happenings" form into their own stories.

This storytelling is a part of validity and generalizability in case study research. Weaving together the data and analysis into a story provides the reader with a way to see the data, understand how the researcher reached his or her conclusions, and decide to what extent the reader agrees with those conclusions. This "thick description" (Stake, 1995, p. 39) displays the data in a way that the reader can easily digest (Creswell, 2003). I have provided this "rich, detailed description" (p. 133) by showing the reader how I understand the data I collected, and the data I did not collect – absence occasionally having as much meaning as presence. My story includes my developing understandings of my research questions by reflecting on the stories told by the participants and those that were created by our interactions.

Overall, I have been guided most in validity development by Kvale. His notions of how to create good research were inspirational, particularly his concept of good research as quality craftsmanship. To validate, according to Kvale, is to check, to question, and to theorize: "validation comes to depend on the quality of craftsmanship during investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings" (1996, p. 236). To achieve this level of quality in the crafting of the research project, Kvale has outlined seven stages at which validity occurs (p. 237).

Kvale's first stage is thematizing, or reflecting on how the theory, perspective, and so on that you have as a researcher is aligned with your research questions. My questions arose from what I experienced as a student and as the coordinator of the university's writing centre. I have a belief in supporting international graduate student success. I have experience in working with instructors to apply that belief to assignment and feedback design, and have anecdotal evidence that suggests students are helped

through the help I give instructors. I wanted to know how I could effectively work with instructors in an outreach-type of situation.

The second stage is ensuring "adequacy of design and methods used for the subject matter and purpose of the study" (p. 237), resulting in "beneficence:" "producing knowledge beneficial to the human situation while minimizing harmful consequences" (p. 237). In order to answer my research questions, I decided to work with a few different participants, each from a different discipline. I drew heavily on case study research writing to frame what I had planned as an action research project. Despite the change in the action research piece, I still have a study that has triangulated data, rich description, and findings that can improve my understanding of how I can better help in the university setting.

The third stage is following an interview protocol. I crafted my questions by referring to Kvale (1996), and followed suggested methods for note-taking and research journaling. The fourth stage is making an effort to transcribe these interviews well. As I did my Master's degree in ESL teaching, I have ample experience transcribing conversations. For this study, I transcribed each interview very soon after the conversation occurred. First I listened to the conversation, next I carefully typed it, then I checked the transcript against the audio version and/or interview log.

The fifth stage is analyzing "whether the logic of the interpretations is sound" (p. 237). I believe that my interpretations are sound because the coding, categories and themes that I used originated in the data itself. I paid careful attention to the words the participants used, and shared their stories with the reader. I have tried to make clear what the data were without providing it in its raw form, and how I understood the data.

The sixth stage is considering how to have the study as a whole be valid. I used the cross-case analysis step to further deepen my understanding of the themes and interest that would help me answer my research questions. This helped the data become richer through the similarities and differences that emerged. The seventh, and final, stage is reporting, by asking myself: "Is it a valid account of the main findings of a study?" (p. 237). In my reporting I have tried to tell the reader honestly and simply what I thought, what I wanted to know, and how I went about finding out what I wanted to know.

## Difficulties encountered

### 1. The methodology did not unfold as I thought it would

I had carefully laid-out plans of how my research was to proceed, but I had to "acquiesce to outcomes as they emerged" (Grant, 2007, p. 268). The methodology – meaning, what my interaction was with the participants, and what data I collected – was different than what I had expected and intended. I soon learned that I can ask my carefully crafted questions, but it does not mean I will get the data that I want to answer them. My combined methods became fluid in order to match what was happening with my participants, and with myself. This led to my study pulling from action research and case study methodologies, but ultimately resembling neither. As Bates (2008) found in her action research that was encased in a case study of her curriculum, what grows by being a flexible and reflective researcher in the moment is one's own methodology; in her case it was the "responsive case study" (p. 99). I needed to be "exploratory, interactive and reflectively analytical" (Radford, 2007, p. 276), but because I was acting in the field and in the moment, some of my decisions were in hindsight not the best ones I could have made. These will be discussed in detail in later chapters. In addition, I thought I would have a large amount of written data in the form of syllabi, assignment guidelines, and

instructor feedback. Fortunately, the few documents and physical artefacts that I analyzed added to the study and served as verification for my analysis of the interviews and conversations.

### 2. The collaboration with instructors did not go as I thought it would

Not only did I not collect the data I had planned on, but the interactions with the participants did not go as planned. When I planned my action research, I drew heavily from Warrican's (2006) description of how he acted as a change agent through collaboration. However, it soon became clear to me that the kind of partnership that I had in mind was not in sync with what the instructors had in mind. The instructors seemed to be interested in the concepts I brought to our conversations, but were not active collaborators. As well, we did not meet as often as I had planned. In my attempt to "work together" – as I defined it – I overstepped the boundaries of collaboration by inserting myself too much into the collaboration.

In the end, I had only three conversations with each participant. The first was finding out what they thought were the needs of the international EAL students, and how they felt they were meeting those needs. To those interviews I added some ideas and information about those needs. The second conversation was a reflection of the thinking I had done on the first conversation and the ideas I had about how to provide assignments and feedback that better matched the needs of international students. Upon reflection, I can see that this is where the study began to break down. In this conversation I inadvertently played the role of educational developer more than a sharer of information, which may have made the instructors uncomfortable. It may have challenged them for too much change. It may have made them feel badly about what their current assignments

and feedback looked like. It definitely did not encourage them to participate more in the study. The third interaction was the instructor recapping the semester for me, which made me rethink if the strategies I was using were effective.

It is now apparent that rather than acting as an equal participant in the process, I was acting as the instructor. It is here, at this second conversation, where my research methodology became what I wanted it to be, rather than what it should have been – a method of interacting that was more respectful, more encouraging, and more supportive. This other, better method would have involved me listening more and paying closer attention to the location of the instructor in our research process. Instead, I blended interviews with the action research model. The first and last conversations were more in the style of interviews, with some of my input. The intermediate interaction was intended to be a conversation in which I was sharing ideas and working with the instructors to determine if and how the ideas fit with their curriculum and pedagogy. As noted previously, this method was not planned and blurred the lines between interview and conversation.

Overall, there was no real collaboration; instead there was a pattern of me listening with a bit of input; the instructor listening to my ideas and responding to them; and, the instructor reflecting on the semester. With the benefit of hindsight I now see that the instructors were not invested in this project the way that the instructors were with whom I had previously worked. This is likely because the instructors with whom I work with as part of my job see me in the role of instructor from the beginning of our interaction. In my research, I approached the instructors as a graduate student, and then switched hats partway through our relationship. Their participation – at first eager and

then waning – was educative to me as a researcher interested in knowing how and how not to provide support to instructors.

# Chapter 4: Helena

I first met Helena in the spring of 2008, in the bustling university café; she had asked to meet me to share her frustration with the low level of academic writing skills with which students were entering the graduate program . She teaches an annual fall course to twenty students on writing and presenting in the Faculty of Science. I had gone to her class to talk about the importance of writing and the kinds of support services that are available to students. A year later I asked her to be a participant in my research, to which she eagerly agreed.

## The beginning of the semester

I met with Helena to ask her my original interview questions (see Appendix B) regarding good graduate writing in her field, and to learn the design of her course' assignments and her feedback for those assignments. Helena and I ended up having an intense conversation, after which I realized that I was not so much asking questions to answer my research questions as I was asking her to open the door to her teaching. She gave me access to her teaching philosophy, her course design, and her feelings about her role as a mentor, researcher, and writer.

### Writing in the Sciences

In order to understand why Helena designed assignments and feedback as she did, I asked what writing in the sciences is like and what roles it plays in the graduate student program. According to Helena, the writing is being used "to explain, so it should be clear and concise," "grammatically correct," and the symbols should work grammatically with the sentence, as "the symbols are short for words." The language of is "simple," she said.

The verb tenses are generally restricted to the present and simple past tenses; it has a "fairly simple structure" which is "all they need to know, really."

However, there is a substantial gap between what the writing should be like, and what it is like, according to Helena. This affects the writing in journals, and in the theses for which she is asked to be an external examiner. In journals, the writing is "atrocious" and displays an attitude of "anything goes as long as you can figure out what the heck it is." She pointed out that this relaxation of standards is the result of journals printing articles as-is, without a revision or proofreading process. This lack of revision has not affected the quality of the research itself, but has affected the attention given to the writing used to explain it, including a lack of proofreading and "clumsy notation." Only the "really top, really expensive journals by big publishing companies" pay attention to the quality of writing, she says. As a referee for journals, Helena experienced this lack of quality writing firsthand. Instead of allowing the mistakes or correcting them herself, she sends the paper back with a comment like: "this paper is probably good, but I am up to this point, now I don't know what it is, I'm not going to read the rest of the paper and figure out what they mean until they fix it properly and resubmit it." Here, "fix it properly" refers to revising the paper to improve its grammar, and better citation of sources.

This perceived lowering of standards at the higher level either reflects relaxation at the levels feeding up to it, or is evidence of the relaxation of standards in the schooling preceding the level of journal article writing, or both. Regardless of the cause, Helena perceived a lessening of the responsibility in higher education for well-written theses and other academic writing. Instead of supervisors asking their students for grammatical

revisions, “they make the corrections and give it to the students.” She felt that “it’s the student’s responsibility and after that it’s the supervisor’s responsibility to tell the student: ‘I’m not accepting that, go fix that before I read it.’” She thought this is because “people just accept their work,” so students are not pushed to self-correct their writing. In her role as an external examiner, she wanted to comment: “this thesis is wonderful but why not get someone to fix the spelling errors, proofreading errors; it would have been much more wonderful.”

### Student attitudes

Helena asks her students to pay attention to their writing, but some students did not “even know why I am bothered about it,” Helena said. She added that there is an attitude that in the Sciences, writing isn’t important. A word that was repeated in different forms in our conversation multiple times – thirteen, in fact– was “care.” Carelessness in work, Helena stated, affected not only in-class class work, but extended to other academic writing, such as grant applications. Careless errors that could be caught using a spellchecker and by proofreading might make the difference, she felt, between getting an NSERC grant or not. She turned around and drew a scale on the whiteboard, and drew a circle about two-thirds the way up the scale. Pointing to that circle, she said:

> There’s a cut-off point, and a whole bunch of proposals clustered around the cut-off point, your top is here and your bottom is there, and there is a sort of cluster, and the slightest thing can put people off, right? If yours is the best or worst it makes no difference, but….

Good writing could get you the grant, she felt, because for an interdisciplinary audience, a careful attitude toward writing and presenting your ideas may be key.

### Student writing ability

Following our conversation about the attitude of carelessness in writing, I asked about the ability of her students to write well. She felt that overall, very few students could write well in English, whether it was their first or additional language. If the grammatical problems in a paper were the result of not knowing, as opposed to carelessness, she blamed this on their prior schooling. The students did not "know the difference between something that's a full sentence, they don't know about punctuation," because they did not write "little paragraphs when they were in Grade 2, bigger paragraphs when they were later, and essay after essay after essay. Maybe these days they don't really write essays in their language classes." In addition, she referred to the importance in her own schooling of having learned Latin, as it helped her understand how verb tenses are used and reflected in both her own language and her additional languages. According to Helena, students are not being taught effectively in their language or language arts classes, which includes not enough practice with writing and not enough explicit instruction with the components of grammar and punctuation. She felt that her own education, which included both ongoing and increasing practice with writing in her first language, and the analysis of a second language, provided her with a solid foundation for writing well in English. The students in her classes nowadays do not have such a solid foundation to build upon in their writing.

When asked about the writing ability of EAL students, Helena did not perceive that carelessness plays as much of a role in the quality of their writing. Instead, she reckoned it varies "person to person … from place to place." In her experience, people coming from most of Europe had been taught very well how to write in their own language, which transfers to the care they take when writing in English. As for students

coming from Asian countries, she noted that they "do have a problem," not with carelessness, but with writing in English. To summarize Helena's thoughts, a student's prior schooling affects how much attention they pay to writing well, and a student's prior schooling depends on where they were educated. She did not offer a solution to the students who come from Asia, but she did note that their "problem" was not due to carelessness.

I was surprised by Helena's lack of distinction between writers with English as a first or additional language. I thought this might be because Helena uses English as an additional language herself, and if she can master English – as demonstrated through her professorship, her scholarship, and her publications – then the students can, too. This theory is supported by Helena's assertion that if students work hard and pay attention to the details of their writing, they will write well.

Knowing that her graduate seminar included a large presentation component, I wanted to explore the connection between writing well and speaking well. I asked her if the students were better speakers than they are writers. Her answer was, "A lot of them are just terrible." Her reasoning was that if someone does not write well, she/he often does not present well, because the thoughts are not well ordered. Ordered thoughts make a good speaker, but not a great speaker – that, she stated, comes from having a rapport with the audience. While some students could write fairly well but could not communicate well with a live audience, "if you can't write, you wouldn't be able to talk, to speak science in a sensible way." Her methods or practices for supporting the development of the skills needed to communicate science were not clear.

In sum, Helena defined good writing as being simple and clear, having ordered thoughts, and demonstrating care. Helena was unsure if her students knew how below standard she thought they were in their writing skills. Again, I was not clear if Helena had planned a means of addressing this possible gap in student understanding.

### Assignment design

What Helena defined as good writing, and her belief that students need to learn to pay attention to their writing, order their thoughts, and demonstrate care, were in some respects reflected in the design of the large written assignment. The assignment was to rewrite a previously published article in students' own words using the discipline-specific coding system, which is a system that allows the writer to use both English and scientific notation in the same piece of text. While some students were already familiar with the system, others have avoided learning it because it involves a substantial commitment to master the system. It is like other computer software in that it takes time, effort and practice to figure out how to write in it. Learning how to write in this software adds to the workload of students, and as a result, some students put off learning how to use it until they absolutely have to.

Her assignment is not explained on a sheet of paper. Instead, in class she told them that the paper has to be in "the style of a paper to be submitted to a journal covering the material to be presented in the colloquium." The 'colloquium' was the students' 35-minute oral presentation, on the same paper. She suggested a limit of around eight pages. This assignment would give students practice in what are possibly their weak areas – writing, use of the software – and provided them with a deeper understanding of an article that they are to use for a presentation at their mock colloquium.

Helena told them “stories about the layout, how do you describe the research, don’t just start with a bunch of old definitions, and then a bunch of old theorems, write it in a way that makes it as readable as possible, that kind of stuff.” In short, “it should be publishable.” After that, she handed out a checklist that outlined what she is marking for in the paper. The checklist (Appendix C) listed what the sections of the paper should have included. Her checklist was fairly clear, in my opinion, but it is up to the students to understand and apply the information to their paper, and it felt to me like a shopping list of things to do and not do. How to do the things was not explicitly explained. Her approach of handing out a checklist might reflect how she was taught to write in English and in her discipline. It may be that Helena was able to learn from this style, or that she learned from it in conjunction with support services. Either way, it seems clear that it is the student’s responsibility to understand and seek clarification.

### Feedback design

In response to what kind of feedback she gave to students regarding their writing, she indicated that almost all of it happens after the paper has been handed in. For grammatical errors, she provided a correction and the suggestion that the students find and correct other instances of that same error in the rest of the paper. She did not simply indicate that a sentence was wrong, because that would be “just not instructive enough for them.” If the student had another Western language as his or her first language, and she could figure out why the student had made the grammatical mistake, she would explain, for example, “in English we use this word order.”

Interestingly, Helena admitted she was “not sure” if she gave them “the right kind of feedback.” She felt she was limited to providing a correction because she was “not a

trained language teacher" and therefore could not fully explain the grammatical rules of English. It is noteworthy that she thought that explaining the grammatical rules is part of her role as instructor. I think Helena sensed that students needed linguistic support to improve their writing, and she wanted to provide that support. However, she was unable to provide the degree of support she felt the students needed. In this way, Helena intuited that she needs to be a language teacher as well as an instructor, and she recognized that she did not have enough knowledge to give the kind of writing instruction that some of her students needed.

As a result, Helena encouraged students to seek help outside of her feedback and the class. If the quality of writing was "awful", and if the student had EAL, Helena would "tell them to go learn the English." In fact, she encouraged students to use the Writing Centre and to have someone correct their English errors. Learning to write well in English is important for Helena, because "essentially they should learn English because we are training them to be professors" at English-medium universities. This kind of feedback – to seek help outside of class – was given throughout the course.

### How Helena feels

One of my original research questions was how Helena feels about her ability to support her students' development of writing skills. As stated above, she felt unsure of her ability to provide the most useful grammatical feedback. Through our conversation, though, I realized that Helena had some strong feelings stemming from her position of instructor in a discipline with relaxed standards of writing.

The first feeling was annoyance. Helena's annoyance stemmed from her firm belief that as a writer you should "try to do the best you can." Of her role as an external

referee on a thesis or a submitted journal article, she said, “I’m a bloody proof-reader.” She felt there is no excuse for not using a spellchecker or for not proofreading a document before handing it in. The rules are simple and obvious, and she felt that “it’s got to be right; it’s got to be the best it can be, within your own limitations.” As someone who writes regularly in her second language, she stated: “if your English isn’t perfect, that’s fine but work towards making it better, for nobody has perfect English. And when I write, I would like it to be better.” Given her own high standards, she felt that receiving writing of poor quality is a “waste of time” and “annoying.”

The second feeling was isolation. When writing articles for the top-tier journals, she was “drive(n) up the wall” when her English spellings were changed to American ones. Helena then corrected those changes and sent them back with “a note on it.” While often her spellings weren’t changed, “as soon as there is a new person (at the journal) I have to start again.” Instead of feeling frustrated, Helena wondered if she should just give in, but then asked herself, “Why should I?” Helena was determined to not relax her standards for herself or for her students, with the unintended result of isolation: “When people care, people think they’re odd.” She perceived that she was alone in the department in her passion for good quality writing, and was isolated because of this passion. Regardless, she refused to give in to what she felt was a relaxed standard of writing. Isolation and annoyance, then, were preferable to writing that she saw as incorrect and unclear.

### Stories of good practice

In our conversation Helena shared stories of good practice, both of her own as an instructor and of two graduate students. One was of the student “who’s good, very

good." This student wrote well, even though she was not at the top of her class for her research. Helena recalled the student's NSERC proposal as follows: "The competition is horrific, and the way she writes, you think even if the research she's proposing to do is not good, they're going to like what she's done because of the way she's written it."

Another story of good practice was about the "American little kid," who had a flair for writing and presenting. "He's great at writing, he's a great presenter, and he's a great speaker. He stands there and he just talks, and that can't be taught. It can be improved, but that kind of immediate rapport you have with the audience, it's like acting." Both stories exemplify Helena's belief that these students had their skills prior to entering her class, and through applying them to the new material they were learning, achieved success. These two students also demonstrate the ethics of hard work and care that Helena valued highly in her class, which is partly why she liked their writing. However, both students also display communication skills that Helena felt were not easily taught. It may be that she perceived the ability to communicate well, and to take care in one's communication, is a gift or a trait, rather than a skill set. It is also worth noting that both of the students in the success stories have English as their first language. Perhaps this is because the EAL students had much more to do in their language skill development in order to stand out as a success story.

Her third story again demonstrates this attention to detail, and the level of care she expects from – but does not have the skill or knowledge to teach – her students. This story is about her process of writing and revising. She told me about her writing process:

> When I write, I would like it (my English) to be better, so I'm orator for the university, which means that when there is an honorary graduate, I write the

> oration, and then deliver it at the convocation. Once I've written it, and proofread it, and thought about it again, and again and again, I send it to the guy from English, but he's retired, Anthony Jenkins. And he takes it and tears it apart, but then when he's done that, I try to see why that is, and really sometimes I argue with him because he changes the meaning of something. But sometimes I can see: "Oh yeah, if I think back I remember I learned you're not supposed to do it like that," and I try to remember that, and carry it over to my other writing as well.

This story typifies what she considered to be a good writing process: write, proofread, think again, get feedback, think about the feedback, and apply the feedback to not only that piece of writing but to other pieces, as well. This process is in opposition to the process she perceived many of the students in her class engage in. In addition, Helena represented what a "good" second language learner does: pursues knowledge, acknowledges error, and applies newly learned or remembered rules to subsequent pieces of writing. As an instructor who speaks impeccable English, and publishes and instructs in her second language, Helena serves as a role model of what success as a student can look like in both her discipline and in language learning. There is not, however, the same evidence of her success in teaching writing to EAL students. It did not seem apparent to me that Helena explicitly guided her students through this process, perhaps because she expects the students to fully understand how to write with the feedback and opportunities she provides them with.

### The middle of the semester

After my first interview with Helena, I was curious about her perception of graduate students as being unprepared writers. She suggested that many of the students

were unprepared as writers whether they had English as a first language or not, even though the writing in the Sciences is fairly straightforward – simple grammar, with an emphasis on concision and clarity. While Helena believed that the relaxed standards were the new norm, she still felt that it is worth pushing students to write well by keeping her expectations high, even if she felt the students did not value this educational opportunity.

With my new knowledge of Helena's approach to assignment and feedback design, I developed a plan regarding how I would approach these topics with her. The idea was to introduce a different approach, one that favours assignments and feedback that are focused on supporting the development of writing skills. I prepared for our next conversation by taking Helena's "Checklist for Papers" and putting those criteria of good writing into a rubric (see Appendix D). I created the new rubric to introduce to Helena another approach to marking, and to suggest that she distribute it to the students ahead of the assignment deadline. This was to ensure that students know how exactly their assignments are graded, and to focus instructor feedback.

In addition to the rubric I decided that I would suggest to Helena that she incorporate peer review into one of the classes prior to the November 8$^{th}$ assignment deadline. I planned to suggest that she have them swap assignments and to ask the students to go through their partner's paper with the grading rubric in hand to identify weak spots. As an alternate form of peer review, I intended to mention the technique I learned from Dr. Rosemary Ommer, who gives informational sessions on grants-crafting at UVic. To do this, partners mark up each other's paper with lines under which sentences don't make sense at first reading. This activity indicates to students where they need to focus in the revision process.

In developing this plan and the rubric, I was attempting to be an active participant in our work together. In doing so, I overstepped the boundaries of good research methodology; I acted in the role of my professional, not as that of researcher. Upon reflection I can see that it was very difficult for me to draw a firm line between how I interacted with the participants *as* participants, not as colleagues. I met these instructors in a work setting, where I was an expert, and then when I engaged in research with them, I maintained my position as subject expert. I also think that I presented the ideas to Helena as a basket of options from which she could pick the one or ones that appealed to her. I know now that I should have collaborated with her to develop these options, rather than offering them to her. I likely gave too much information, which made it easy to dismiss an idea, or accept it without adaptation. It may have also caused her to be less likely to engage in deep, systemic change of the writing component of the curriculum.

As a result of these factors, in our second meeting, Helena loved the rubric, the concept of handing it out ahead of time, and assigning marks to categories, but received other ideas less enthusiastically. Peer review was less-well received than the rubric, possibly because she already asked the students to do an informal swap of their papers outside of class, and possibly because she did not feel she had the class time to give to this activity. As I did with my first conversation with Helena, I analyzed the interview data according to themes, categories, and stories through an ad hoc approach, with the goals of meaning condensation and narrative analysis, to draw out the most enlightening information, given the direction of my action research.

### Rubrics

When explaining the rubric to Helena, I indicated to her how useful it is for students to have it ahead of the assignment due date. I wanted to impress on her how important it is to give students the information at a time when they can use it. I also mentioned that it might cut down on her marking time, and that it would be interesting to look at how the rubric works for her and the students that semester.

Helena sat silent for most of my explanation then responded enthusiastically. Five separate times she commented on how great she thought the rubric was. In fact, she followed up by saying she liked it as I had mocked it up, and asked me to email it to her, so she could distribute it electronically to her students. She said she "never thought of breaking it up in all these little bits but it makes sense when you see it" and that it is "really helpful." On the one hand, I think that because I simply took her chart and made it into a more understandable form, the natural consequence was to not modify the rubric. On the other hand, I think that sending out the rubric without adjusting it represents superficial curricular change. There was no collaboration or consultation, just acceptance. The acceptance can be linked to my blurring of my researcher and colleague roles; I was the expert with my basket of tips and tricks.

### Peer review

In explaining peer review, I gave Helena two examples of how to have her students do it. The first was to have the students bring their drafts to class, swap papers, and use the rubric to give each other feedback. I highlighted how important it is for students to have feedback on their writing ahead of the due date, and how useful it is for students to practice editing another's paper. I also mentioned how it would set a higher standard of writing by asking students to produce a first draft well in advance of the

actual deadline and by providing students with feedback to prompt them into revision. Helena's reaction was less enthusiastic. She said she will "probably ask them to do that informally because I haven't planned it far enough in advance that there won't be time enough in class for this. But I'll use this next time." I responded that peer review does not need to occur in class, but it should be explained in class as a good writing tool.

I then introduced Helena to the other peer review idea, which is to have students exchange papers and underline the sentences they cannot understand when reading through it quickly. I mentioned that I learned this technique from Dr. Ommer. Helena's reaction was to ask me if I liked Rosemary's workshop. She then thought of asking Rosemary to speak to the Math students about grant-writing next fall, and made the decision to contact her shortly because "she's so busy close to the time, that's it's probably impossible to get her, if I write later than now, for next year. That's a great idea." It seemed that peer review would be relegated to outside class work without the support to make it the most effective learning tool it can be.

### Reflections

After my conversation with Helena, I was disheartened at how quickly she dismissed peer review. On the other hand, I was surprised at how thrilled Helena was with the rubric I had mocked up. The mocked-up rubric was meant to start a conversation around what elements would make a successful writing rubric for the students; I did not craft it as a final draft. I started thinking about my two suggestions to Helena – the rubric and peer review – as integral units of the action research that I perceived we were engaged in. Perhaps only a certain amount of change to a course could occur this particular semester, and the change in assignment and feedback design philosophy would

come later. This mirrored the spiral of action research as the present extends into the future (Titchen & Manley, 2006). Or, if I had started working with the instructor earlier in the year, before her course began, maybe I could have affected more change in assignment and feedback design and philosophy in the current semester. The information I gave to Helena aligned with what I asked her to give her students: timely, focused feedback. It was unintentional, but this first spiral of the action research did not address assignment design as much as it did feedback design. Perhaps assignment design would stem from this first step for a subsequent semester. Or, perhaps I had derailed my intended action research by owning too much of the process in my drive to make change.

Change is the intention of action research, according to Drummond and Thermessl-Huber (2007). I know from my studies and experience that there is sound writing pedagogy available. I also know that students working in EAL have specific informational and developmental needs to improve their writing. This knowledge, when applied to assignment and feedback design, would better support the development of the writing skills of international graduate students. However, I needed to reflect on how to bring that knowledge to course instructors. As well, I needed to remain open to what she might suggest upon reflecting on our conversation. Action research is not a clear process, and as Grant (2007) states, the emergent and reflective nature of it is also frustrating and vague. Continuous reflection is what is required, as opposed to continuous action.

I decided that, given Helena's enthusiasm for the rubric, I would follow up on the concept of peer review. I found a great article from a similar-sized Canadian university – always a plus as it deters arguments of cultural and institutional difference – that is short, clearly written and gives a number of examples of how and why peer review should be

used at the graduate level. The article was Rieber's "Using Peer Review to Improve Student Writing in Business Courses" (2006). Given Helena's liking for "teaching tips" that are directly and easily usable, I decided that the article might serve as a reminder of peer review; perhaps this reminder would lead to us having another conversation about it to discuss how it could implemented in her course. I sent it off to her with a note regarding how useful I thought it would be. Following that, I sent an email to Helena at the due date for the written assignment in hopes that I could get some insight into what kind of feedback she usually gives and if or how she would use the rubric. I did not hear back from her. I suspected that she was very busy, and that I had possibly put her off of being involved in this research process with me.

In the meantime I thought about being able to suggest to Helena the use of models for assignments. As she was using an online support for her course, BlackBoard, I thought it would be easy for her to post annotated examples of what constitutes good writing. Providing models at least when the assignment is introduced would allow students to see what good writing looks like, and the annotations would direct the students as to why Helena thinks they are good examples. In the composition classes I have taught, the strategic use of models was the tipping point between mediocre writing and good writing, but it was difficult to find much published research into such a pragmatic teaching tool, especially outside of lower-level second-language classrooms.

After much searching, I thought that *models* and *examples* and *heuristics* might be referred to in the literature as *scaffolding*. Using this term led me to revisit my understanding of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), which so influenced my teaching of writing in previous years. While Vygotsky focused on the learning

processes of children, ZPD has been both generalized and applied outside this realm. For example, the discipline of second language acquisition liberally borrows his notion of ZPD to refer to three stages: the one where the learner cannot do something or does not know something; a middle stage, which is mediated by a more knowledgeable person or source; and a final stage, which follows a decreasing of the middle stage, to where the learner is able to do something, or know something, on his or her own. The article by Alajaafreh and Lantolf (1994) is a good example of researching effective error correction in the speech of second language learners, using the ZPD as that middle ground when learners are exposed to doing something differently when they are ready to learn it.

In another study, Wennergren and Ronnerman (2006) applied the concept of ZPD to adults in their research of the development of teacher practice in Swedish schools. They acknowledged that while Vygotsky's theories about the ZPD concern children, learning "can at all ages and stages be assisted by others, while naturally involving all aspects of the learning (e.g. acting, thinking and feeling)" (p. 552). One of the forms of mediated learning, they state, is scaffolding, which can be "structures within the ZPD to bridge the 'gap'. … These structures can be provided by colleagues or an outsider" (p. 555). By extension, scaffolding in assignment design provides annotated supports that build student success in the development of their academic writing, and, scaffolding in my study provides explained supports to the instructor that builds her success in the development of her understanding of assignment and feedback design. Scaffolding is temporary, focused, and explained; it allows the learner to move from one set of knowledge to another, or one set of skills to another. While my original study hinged upon me being able to scaffold and support instructor learning, and assignment and

feedback design, based on the ZPD model, in retrospect I think that I need to reflect on my ability to scaffold. I may have moved too fast or introduced too much, or was inaccurate in my understanding of what and how to scaffold; it may have been how or when I introduced the information.

### The end of the semester

I sent two messages to Helena but heard nothing. Fearing that Helena may quit the study if she felt pestered, I waited until the end of the semester to follow up with her. I met with Helena on the first of December. I attempted to engage her in talk about assignment design, and in doing so I found out that Helena's feedback design included grading the large paper, then allowing the students to resubmit it with changes for a small increase in the letter grade. This year, like every year, all her students revised their papers for the small increase in the final grade. Also, I was surprised to learn that there is another assignment in the course that involves writing: the lesson critique. In this assignment students attend a lecture in their discipline and write a critique of what worked well and what worked less well in the class. Even though the students were provided with a "layout" of "what worked, what didn't work well, things like that," Helena complained that students seem hesitant to write negatively about a colleague or instructor. I suggested that she provide a model critique to students. This model would demonstrate how to write about what worked less well in a class by focusing on its educative aspects, and would alleviate some student concern regarding what was expected in terms of content and style. Helena really liked this idea and thought that she would mock one up herself based on a presentation that she would attend at an upcoming conference. As she said, "I teach it again next year, so …" which seemed to suggest why

it is important to improve one's approach to writing assignments: if one is going to teach a course every year, the amount of time and effort is worth it to make the course the best educational experience it can be.

### Rubrics

Helena used the rubric as a grading tool, which "made it easier for me to give marks, and it made it easier for them to understand why I gave the mark that I gave, because it was broken down." She still gave feedback on the paper itself, and used the rubric as a supplement, so it did not cut down on the time it took to mark the papers. As well, she reported that students did not complain about their marks, as they have in the past, because "now they can see" the reason behind the mark Helena gave. Helena noted that in the Sciences the subjectivity inherent in grading written work caused her and the students some difficulty. She stated, "It's unusual for scientists to have to give a sort of non-exact mark, like airy-fairy." The rubric helped bring the grading, she felt, into the kind of exactness usual for the discipline. Instead of "going on feeling," using the rubric made it "far easier." Whether the rubric improved the quality of student writing is not known. It did, however, provide clarity to the instructor and the students regarding what was being asked of the student, and how much each criterion was worth. This clarity can guide the student to know what to focus on and what is important to the instructor in the assignment.

### Peer review

She recommended that the students do peer review outside of class, but did not suggest that they use the rubric to do so. Instead, she told them, "If you trust your friend, let them read it and let them comment on it, if there is anything they don't get." She then

followed up by saying that two EAL students swapped papers for peer review, and as they were both in a particular area of research, "they understand each other's work as well." Helena then went on to tell me that "otherwise, the difference between their areas of specialty is big enough that often nobody can actually read and comment on it except their supervisors." I was surprised by this, and explored just how different these areas are. While the graduate students in Helena's class understand "a bit of each other's work" because of their earlier, more general undergraduate work, by the time they are in the first year of graduate school, they have specialized enough to find reading a paper from another stream challenging. In fact, "there would be some whose work nobody else in the class could have read … they could have read the sentences but not understand the work." This made me wonder who the intended audience of these papers is, and if this is an issue throughout the Sciences.

Despite differences in content, it is possible for students to be taught to do peer review by focusing on the organization and clarity of the writing, much as the writing tutors do in the Writing Centre. This would take instruction and practice on behalf of the instructor, or bringing in an outsider, such as myself. Peer review is a powerful tool that encourages students to develop their ability to focus on the construction of writing rather than the ideas presented in writing, and as these students could focus on the content of each others' papers, teaching them to focus on the writing of them would not be overly difficult. It would be the same kind of instruction and practice I give my new writing tutors, who work with writers from a variety of disciplines.

As well, Helena did not mention that the students would not be able to understand each other's work in regards to the presentations, so I assume that the presenter was

expected to walk the class through the problem in their paper. However, writing is similar because it should explain the problem, much as speaking does. Students could learn to watch presentations to learn how to do them better, and students could read each others' writing to learn how to write better. One idea for the future is to have the presentations and the writing include peer review. I decided to suggest this to Helena at a future date.

### Stories of good practice

Again, the instructor used stories of good practice to indicate what she thinks represents effort on the students' behalf. In this conversation there were two such stories. One was about a French-Canadian student "who came here to learn English, and he certainly has learned English in a hurry." He was "hesitant" to use English at first, but then he "had to" learn English, and did. This story can be held in juxtaposition to those students in the class who did not learn English as quickly. The instructor believed that learning English is a matter of effort, and if one makes the effort, then one learns English. This reflects Helena's story about herself learning English. However, this explanation overlooks the fact that the ease of learning a language can be attributed to individual traits (such as being able to pick up languages easily) and to the differences between the first and the additional languages. For instance, it is substantially more difficult to learn an alphabetic language, such as English, if your first language is pictographic, such as Mandarin. There can also be a large number of cultural differences between certain languages, such as whether the writer needs to make the text as clear as possible, or what the norm is for textual organization in academic writing.

The second story was of a student who is not an "A" level student in her academics, but the paper she handed in was "amazing" because "she took everything

extremely seriously, she prepared well and she did a great job." This was in comparison to the "A+ student who won't even get a B+ because he couldn't be bothered." These stories of good practice highlighted the role of effort Helena believed is integral in writing well and learning English. However, there appears to be a conflation of the quality of writing and the effort of writing, leading to an assessment issue of awarding points for effort rather than the final product. Both of these students speak English as their first language.

Not just in the stories of good practice did the theme of effort occur. In describing the students' work in the papers and in their presentations, Helena divided the students according to effort. She suspected "most of them took (the paper) very seriously and did really good work" and found that "some really surprised me by giving much better talks." However, some of the "good students thought they were too good and didn't pay much attention" to the writing assignment guidelines. All students revised their papers, "even the ones who already had an A+." As well, more students did better presentations than they had previously. Overall, Helena felt most of the students tried hard.

If the role of students was to exert effort, then the instructor's role, according to Helena, was to be fair to her students. Her way of being fair was to encourage students to seek help outside of class with their writing. For example, she indicated the availability of help for their writing by suggesting a visit to the Writing Centre prior to handing in their papers. Another example is how she marked the revised version of the papers. She said, "I can't just mark the final version, because that's not fair to the ones who gave me a good preliminary version." She wanted to reward those students who try hard, because "it's up to them to make what they could." However, intention does not always equal

outcome in writing, and this may be especially true for students new to a graduate program and to studying in English. She was also determined to provide students with an understanding of how to write proposals because "these science students are always on the short end of that kind of stuff, because their stuff is always harder for a non-scientist to understand."

There was also an aspect of sensitivity to the instructor's fairness. She reflected on the issue of directly telling students to seek out the help they need in writing in English:

> You know, it's hard to say: "You, I think you should go get help." But maybe I should. They all have to write their theses, and many of them don't have an English-as-a-first-language supervisor, so how is that going to come out? The supervisor isn't going to be able to fix it.

Helena touched on two issues here. One is the difficulty we have as instructors of directly giving advice on a possibly sensitive topic. The other issue is that supervisors can be placed in the role of writing instructor or editor, but may not have the skills or ability to carry out that function. They also likely do not have knowledge about the process of learning to write. Even though they would have gone through this process themselves, they may not be conscious of it, and they may not have gone through it in a second language.

Helena's perception of EAL students was situated in her own position of being a second-language speaker and writer. Of course, she epitomizes a "successful" language learner, as she teaches and writes at the university level in her second language. She was able to attain this level of mastery through her effort and her willingness to seek help.

When I stated that some students might not admit to going to the Writing Centre when asked in class, she was surprised. Our conversation revealed her perceptions of how a student with EAL should be:

163 I: They might not admit to going.

164 H: I've not learned all the English I should know. Nobody's ever learned enough of it, so
165 you have to tell them there's nothing wrong with it, nobody's perfect, nobody knows
166 everything, nobody knows even half of the words in the dictionary. If I had to count the
167 percentage of words in the dictionary I *do* know, it would be pretty small, really.

168 I: We've tried to move past the remedial model, so that no matter what level you are at,
169 we can help you to the next level higher. But some people will still feel a stigma attached
170 to getting help.

171 H: I don't.

172 I: Yes, but some people do.

173 H: If you don't get help, you're not going to improve, are you?

This excerpt shows that the instructor believed that students should approach learning English as she does, with effort and without embarrassment. To Helena, effort and fairness created the balanced teacher-student relationship, and to demonstrate effort, a student must learn English by putting aside negative emotions and exerting effort.

### Reflections

There are three very compelling ideas I gained from this participant's feedback. One, she believes that students will develop their writing skills according to how hard they are willing to work. This work is to occur outside of the classroom and with the aid of her written feedback. Two, her standard for writing is not based on the fact that the students are new graduate students; instead, her standard is closer to publishable quality.

Three, she does not see a clear distinction between students who have English as a first language and those who do not. Instead, she sees a distinction between those who know how to write well, and those who do not. The assumption may be that students are required to hurry up and learn how to write. Beyond recognizing that some students are unprepared to write at the graduate level in English, she does not firmly build in supports in her curriculum besides giving writing practice and feedback on that writing. While students can rewrite, the feedback on which they can build a better piece of writing comes after the majority of the grade is given.

I also learned much about myself. I had hoped that the work the participant and I did together would be like a Venn diagram: I would come with my knowledge, she would come with hers, and we would see what was in that overlapping area where writing instruction and writing in the Sciences intersects. I see now how simplistic my thinking was. I played the role of the expert, and so of course I was seen, and saw myself, as an outside consultant. We had different ideas of how to work together, so rather than the two circles of the Venn diagram coming together, I tried to add to her circle by suggesting change. It is clear that change became the goal, rather than maintaining the goal of understanding how I can better work with instructors. The focus shifted from me to what the instructor was, and was not, doing.

# Chapter Five: Aaron

I met Aaron a few years ago when I was facilitating a weeklong curriculum redesign workshop at the LTC. He was there with two colleagues to revamp a number of undergraduate courses for their department, which is in the Faculty of Humanities. About a year after that I was asked by the Chair of his department to speak to a gathering of instructors regarding the design of writing assignments. On both occasions I talked about providing more feedback earlier on in the semester, then less as it progresses, with the feedback always intended for the future, not for the past. I also talked about the importance of early assignments to identify students whose writing is not at an acceptable level at a time when interventions and recommendations are feasible. While initially I was unsure about approaching someone I already knew to become a participant in my study, Aaron was excited to hear about my project, and eager to participate in it.

## The beginning of the semester

When I met with Aaron he told me that in the literature stream of his department's graduate program, there are three students. One is from Ontario and has English as a first language, and two are international students, one each from Russia and Japan. As I did with Helena, I met with Aaron to ask my original interview questions regarding good graduate writing, and to learn the design of his written assignments and feedback. Our hour-long conversation generated a number of insights; I have extracted the most essential information below.

**"Her language is an issue"**

The Japanese international student in Aaron's class was provisionally accepted into the program because she had not yet taken the TOEFL examination. Because Aaron is both fluent in Japanese and her instructor in an English-medium course, he could comment on this student's ability to express her ideas in her first language and her inability to express these same ideas in her second language. She was moved into the literature stream because she "found the material that she was working on in another class to be vastly more difficult than she was ready for." The department was "quite worried" about her "English ability, not intellectual ability." In his class the material was not easier, but the instructor was willing to let his students choose the topics on which they write.

However, there were readings in Aaron's class that are difficult to decode and understand. While international students could struggle with such a text – he used a 40-page chapter by Barthes on structuralism as an example – he thought that

> she's going to spend a lot of time simply deciphering the text before she can actually read it. And then once she starts reading it, then we can say something about it, assuming that she has the language ability to actually express her reactions to it. That's an issue.

The issue, according to Aaron, was that the student would require a great deal of time to read, think about, and then write about, a piece of text. Then, in order to write about that text, a certain competency in written English would be required. This requirement of time and competency had until now not been a problem for Aaron as an instructor, as he had yet to encounter a piece of student writing that was "so problematic that I thought the language was a huge barrier." However, because of this provisional student, he felt "this

term might be different." Aaron then noted that this one student's issues were in some regards every graduate student's issues. Aaron talked at length about these issues of reading, thinking, and writing at the graduate level.

### Reading

For some students, the text can be too complex to read and digest. In his story about the 40-page chapter on structuralism by Barthes, he said that

> It was Roland Barthes, speaking about structuralism, so the ideas were reasonably complex, but the one thing about Barthes and most other theoretical writing, the writing is far more complex than the ideas the text contains. It's a lovely game some academics play.

Using this example, the instructor indicated that students who have English as a first language may have difficulty with it due to a prior lack of exposure to the ideas, vocabulary, and structure of the text, but students working in their second language "have a whole other language they have to deal with." The vocabulary and complex grammatical constructions can cause difficulty. Moreover, the Barthes text is "fairly intricate in the original French. Going from one intricate text to a translation of that kind of text can be problematic." Even though for many students it is like learning a new language or way of communicating, the international student reading this text has "an extra layer of difficulty that a native speaker doesn't have." Before she or he is able to engage with the ideas of the text, "they have a linguistic process that a native speaker probably doesn't have." A metaphor that Aaron used to describe the difficulty with reading complex academic texts is one of seeing the individual tiles instead of the mosaic those tiles create. Students must decipher each tile, or sentence, and "the student who is

not comfortable with English is going to see the tiles and not the mosaic." While that has happened with native speakers of English as well, he noted, "it happens more with international students."

Aaron exemplified his understanding of reading in a second language with an example of his process and challenges of reading text in Japanese:

> I have to be aware of the text on a couple of levels. The first level is simply what does the text look like, what's in it, am I going to have to use my dictionary, or can I get through without it? If I have to use my dictionary, is that going to be an easy character to find, or is it an obscure one? Is it going to take me a minute to understand the sentence, or five? And if it takes me five minutes to get through one sentence, and the text has *x* number of thousands of sentences, then I'm going to be kind of busy. And then once I'm through the reading, I can ask myself if the text is logical, does it have a good argument, is it clear what the author is trying to say in relation to the particular idea. So getting to that stage, yeah, there is a preliminary step a second language student will have to go through that a first language student may not have to. I say 'may not' because if I am reading a text in English that is full of Latin derivatives and so on then it's going to be a bit of a challenge, too. … There may be a preliminary step the student goes through before they can really engage the material fully.

The "lovely game" of complex academic writing may slow down the student, depending on previous exposure to the vocabulary and structure of the text. After understanding the tiles, the student must focus on the mosaic, which is when the thinking about the ideas of the text can happen.

### Thinking

Students who are newer to graduate-level study often lack "intellectual confidence" and "intellectual comfort" when working with ideas. Intellectual confidence or comfort is

> the ability to take an idea, or take an issue, and be logically thorough in investigating that idea and expressing the results of that logical investigation. So that is a language issue as well, that's true. But beyond that, it's the ability to rapidly and comfortably assimilate a new idea and then apply it to a particular project. … To admit that something is new, you have to do reading to get through it, you have to deal with a kind of constellation of issues around a particular idea, and to take time to go through the range of ideas related to that central issue.

Even a background in literary analysis may not prepare a student adequately in this regard, as Aaron has found that "the process of analyzing the text, how you take a text apart, is handled very differently" at the undergraduate level than at the graduate level. Aaron acknowledged that many students arrive without the "intellectual comfort" and experience that are required of graduate work in his discipline, "but skills are teachable, skills are learnable … and familiarity comes over time." In fact, Aaron noted that a "good grad student" who is "bright," "keen," "very eager," and "open-minded and willing to learn stuff" is "a lot more valuable than having a particular kind of background or skill set when they arrive." The connection to writing, I think, is that a student needs to be willing and able to develop his or her writing skills. The willingness comes from the openness and eagerness to learning new things, and the ability comes from the intelligence required to pick up these writing skills. Aaron expects that student need to learn how to write when they arrive in his graduate course.

Toward the end of their MA degree, it is expected that students display this "intellectual confidence" by doing, for example, independent research, critiques, deconstructing a text, and "using that analytical process to develop an interpretation." Aaron developed the writing assignments to help his students increase their confidence. All of this is related to language use and comfort, because the thinking piece is a part of the reading-writing process. The student reading an intricate text in English as his or her additional language will have to trust their interpretation of the text in order to move to the stage of grappling with the ideas that interpretation opens up to them. The thinking stage involves not only seeing the mosaic the tiles create, but being able to interpret and apply those ideas to another text, whether it be visual, written, auditory, and so on. Reading Barthes is one skill, interpreting his ideas another, and applying them to something else, such as a film, yet another. Then there is the writing that is involved to communicate these ideas. All of these skills are connected to language use because facility with the English language allows the reader to focus on the ideas of a text, whether those ideas are those they are interpreting from a text, or explaining in their own text.

### Writing

I asked Aaron what for him constitutes good writing in his discipline:

> The quality of the writing should be polished, the English should be beautiful, if possible, and the research is very important, enough background material, enough supporting material, enough resources to support the logic to demonstrate the soundness, the appropriateness, the applicability of the argument the student is trying to make.

Although the writing should be beautiful – which it should be noted, is a very personal thing – he stated that when it comes to grammar, he is "flexible," unless he "can't understand the idea the student is trying to get across, then grammar has gotten in the way." Aaron noted that this occurs for both native and non-native speakers of English. For papers early in the semester, he expected them to be submitted on time but he does not expect them "to be polished, glow-in-the-dark perfect." This standard is quite different compared to Helena's belief that the papers should be of near-publishable quality.

### Assignment and feedback design

Aaron's writing assignments were broad in scope but specific in nature. He did not hand out a set of guidelines or assignment questions; instead, he reviewed in class what he expects in the papers. He felt the writing assignment "has to be flexible, it has to be based on the projects the students are doing, because the one thing that I am really concerned about is making the assignment relevant to the student's project." When asked if he would consider providing more structure for the students in the design of the assignment, he said he would not change his "approach to the assignment, not in a grad class." Despite his support of student projects and understanding of the obstacles students face – especially students with EAL – he told me that students would "sink or swim. And if they're really sinking, then of course I'll throw them a line, but they have to try it on their own. It's a grad class, after all." To me, the pedagogical power of sinking is questionable: some students may learn how to swim, while others expend great amounts of energy and time, but still sink. Yet, he seems confident that the students will indeed swim. If they sink, he noted, he will provide more help. While Aaron seems comfortable

providing more structure at the undergraduate level, he does not provide it at the graduate level. This creates a gap between undergraduate students who need clarity and explicitness, and the beginning graduate student who is not expected to have the requisite writing skills but is expected to pick them up without clear and explicit instruction.

In his years of teaching graduate classes he had not found that students misunderstand the broad-scoped assignment, but that "they may not have executed it the way I would hope." I wondered if having more explicit and written guidelines would aid students in their assignment execution. To Aaron, this mis-execution was due to students being less familiar and comfortable with textual analysis at the graduate level. Aaron said

> the grad class I teach is textual analysis, how to approach a text and discover not necessarily its meaning, but the components of that text that you can look at and say, "because of this particular arrangement I can interpret the text this particular way." So I'm not asking them necessarily to interpret but to look at the components and discover their relationships. And so students are generally clear that that's what I want, but very often in the first assignment, I find students jumping straight in to the interpretation and not necessarily being really sensitive to the kinds of structural features of the text that allow that interpretation to be possible. And so, that's the issue.

Essentially, Aaron wanted his students to explain how they were able to interpret as they did, then explain the interpretation; this would make their writing clear. To prepare students for this written assignment, he had them practice textual analysis in his class. There they were able to do it verbally, he stated, but to do it later in writing "seems a bit of a challenge." This lack of transfer is common in student writing, in my experience. As

Brooks (2008, p. 220) notes, "the most common difficulty for student writers is paying attention to their writing. Because of this, student papers seldom reflect their writers' full capabilities." I would add to Brooks' comment that student papers seldom reflect their writers' full thought processes and the logic of how they came to their ideas.

However, Aaron was confident that the students would become successful because "they just need practice in getting to that point." After all, "that's why it's an assignment, so they can learn" the skills and gain the comfort in executing written textual analysis. Another issue was that students can "quote-unquote 'know' what their paper says, but they don't actually know what it really says." Again, this is a common problem for students because they have not mastered the skill of writing with clarity nor of revising for clarity. Closing the gaps between what the student wants the paper to say to the reader, and between the text and its analysis, are part of the process of learning the skills needed for graduate writing in this discipline, according to Aaron. To me there is a gap between being able to do something verbally in class, and being able to do that same thing in a text later on one's own. This gap is evident, for example, in a Writing Centre tutorial, where a student can verbally summarize what his/her paper is about, but when I read the paper, it does not communicate what the student thinks it does. Another possible cause of this gap is when a student includes long quotations from the original text but does not include a thorough analysis of these chunks of text. I decided to keep in mind this gap in order to bring it up in subsequent conversations.

Most of the instructor's feedback seemed focused on clarifying passages of students' final drafts. He said

> (I) always give feedback on my papers, and I'll mark a passage where I'm not clear what a student is getting at, I'll give my summary of what I think the student was trying to say, I'll underline grammatical issues and I'll frequently pencil in what might be a correction.

His feedback was focused on the past: on this finished paper, rather than on this particular writer. In addition to providing this kind of feedback, Aaron recommended students visit the Writing Centre and encouraged the students to use an editor.

Aaron readily acknowledged that, while he believed in what he usually does in terms of assignment and feedback design, he was not sure that it constitutes best practice:

> But I don't know how, other than giving a student an assignment, especially at the grad level, I mean I don't want to give an exam or a fill-in-the-blank thing, I want them to sink or swim. … I don't know, maybe it's unfair to say it that way.

Again there is mention of the "sink or swim" approach. Pedagogically this approach means that the student must figure out what needs to be done and do it. This is akin to the method of teaching swimming by throwing someone in the water, which is where the phrase originates. For the graduate student, sinking or swimming refers to being overwhelmed by how to be successful in graduate school, particularly in writing. This method asks students to catch up outside of class and figure out how to write well for their discipline. It is true that under pressure some are capable of figuring things out in a hurry, but is this pressure necessary? Stressful situations cannot be avoided, but we as instructors can avoid creating unnecessary ones. As already mentioned, however, Aaron seemed confident that in the end, the students would swim.

Referring again to the above quote, there was a slight gap between Aaron's support for the provisional student, and his approach to assignment design. While the outcome of the assignment would be useful to the student, the process of creating the product felt unsupported to me. However, his hesitation and doubt arose through his next words:

> If I were to say anything else at all, I mean, I honestly don't know if what I am doing as a graduate instructor is effective. I mean, I really don't know it. I get feedback from students, I get feedback in class, and I get their papers and their papers do improve. But I really don't know, necessarily, if there's a best or a better way of approaching graduate teaching, other than allowing the student the opportunity to experiment and discover stuff. So frankly I'm looking forward to what you're going to tell me later on, an idea for this or an idea for that, I think that would be very helpful.

Aaron's assignment design was guided by what he thought constitutes sound pedagogical practices, but he recognized that there may be better ways of facilitating the student results that he wants. The essay seemed to be a *de facto* choice, as it is one of the most common learning activities in the Humanities, and what the instructor experienced himself as a graduate student. And yet, Aaron admits that he is unsure of his practice. This lack of certainty probably stems from being trained as a content teacher and researcher in the field as opposed to a content teacher who is trained to teaching discipline-specific writing.

The instructor's faith in my expertise is based on his experience at the weeklong Curriculum Redesign Workshop. As a facilitator in that workshop I spoke to the

participants about assignment and feedback design, and showed them what different kinds of assignments and feedback could look like. What resonated with Aaron at that time was to break down the traditional end-of-term essay into chunks that are spread out over the semester. Aaron applied that concept to the undergraduate class he is often assigned to teach. In our interview he said

> I used to give a term paper at the end and then students be damned, but now I've broken that into a couple of smaller components. They do a bibliography first, then they do an outline, and then they do the paper. … I've just gone through the annotated bibliography, I gave it back on Monday, and I was quite pleased with the work

As Aaron had already applied the concept of assignment design for learning support in an undergraduate course, the question was whether he would see the value of applying it in his graduate-level course, and whether his design for feedback was influenced. It is interesting to note how he saw differences in the needs of undergraduate and graduate students. This distinction may derive from the idea that graduate students must be held to a higher standard from the beginning of their programs.

### The role of the instructor and the students

Although Aaron used to be an ESL teacher, he avoided drawing on that background when working with his graduate students. He said, "if I'm spending my time supporting their language, then I'm taking time away from other things that I actually have to do with them, for them." When setting an assignment he assumed a certain level of linguistic competence. Again, students were expected to support their language learning outside of class: he encouraged them to use the university's Writing Centre or to

use an editor. In class he supported students' understanding of difficult texts by discussing with students unfamiliar vocabulary and problematic passages as well as "the intellectual content that makes the essay worthwhile." According to Aaron, the development of these skills – untangling passages and discussing the intellectual content of them once revealed – can help students become better writers. He assumed that "a good writer is a good reader," although he did not explain how he felt those two skills sets are interdependent. Support for the writing process was less apparent.

Aaron perceived the role of instructor as regulating the flow of information for the students through the readings he gave. It can slow down the process of learning English if students are assigned too much reading for a course:

> If the student isn't getting through the reading, that doesn't help English at all. In fact, it frustrates the student, creates a barrier, creates a resistance, and really slows things down. Too much work is worse than not enough, sometimes. … I found that even at undergrad classes, if I really want students to be really effectively engaged in the reading I give them, I have to give them less than I think is probably what they should be getting. … So I do the same with international students.

Students needed to understand the course readings, so it follows that Aaron lessened the number of pages and encouraged discussion and dismantling of the texts in class. How Aaron taught reading matched his students, given that two out of the three have EAL. His comprehension of how reading could overwhelm a student influenced the structure of his course.

In addition to being keen to learn and willing to take intellectual risks, as the previous description of a "good graduate student" stated, graduate students who have English as an additional language had an added task: to make "the effort 100%" to improve their English. This included a student's downtime, when associating with people who speak one's native language was often preferable to speaking in English. The instructor acknowledged that generally this is very difficult, but that "every minute speaking Japanese or Russian or Czech or French or whatever is a minute away from English, and that's the unfortunate side of it. There's no easy solution." Aaron argued that the process of learning English could be hampered by spending out-of-class time in one's native language, and by having too much reading to do for a course. While the amount of reading was in Aaron's control, he felt that it is the student's responsibility to stay abreast in the course. Other human factors, such as culture shock and learning styles, were not addressed in our conversation, but this absence can be interpreted in more than one way.

If a student does not stay abreast in the course, she or he can cause "an awful lot of trouble" and "a lot of frustrated instructors." He felt that that the department is suffering from a "political numbers issue" because the budget "is tied to increasing our enrolment, and you know, quality be damned." Aaron did not blame the student for entering the program, but did expect her to try her hardest to catch up through out-of-class work. However, it is doubtful if she would have free time, given how much longer the class reading and writing would probably take her. As well, this was not the only class the student was taking.

### The middle of the semester

A few weeks later Aaron and I met again for another conversation. This time I was interested in exploring what his current methods of feedback were. He told me he commented throughout a student's paper, with a special emphasis on the introduction and a block of final comments at the end. This block of final comments had already been affected by a previous session I had with Aaron and his colleagues in his department: he flipped around the usual "positive + negative" comment, e.g. "Your conclusion is very strong, but more research would have made a more persuasive paper," to a "negative + positive" comment, e.g. "More research would have made a more persuasive paper, but your conclusion is very strong." This is more motivating, according to Straub's (2000) book on providing feedback on student writing, because it breaks the pattern of good news followed by bad, in which the good news is provided as a kind of padding for the bad. In the traditional "good news followed by bad news" pattern, students may ignore the positive comment if they interpret it as padding. Also, when the bad news is at the end, it may be what stays in the students' minds (Straub, 2000). Finishing on a positive note is, in fact, more positive, and means that the good news – in this case, the praise for the strengths in the piece of writing – is interpreted as honest and meaningful, according to Straub.

As well, from the in-department session I gave on assignment and feedback design, Aaron had applied the idea of giving more feedback on earlier assignments and less feedback as the semester progresses. He said

> I've really taken the point that I should be loading comments and having cumulative assignments at the beginning of term so that students can benefit from

> them, so that ideally when it comes time to write the term paper that'll help them, and ideally in the next courses, too.

He felt better "doing it that way. I feel I am able to end them off on a relatively positive note." However, he still found that he was unsure of what kind of feedback was most appropriate, and was concerned about balancing "the numerical grade with the comments while being constructive and supportive when overall it really is kind of a weak paper – that's an issue." Overall, the approach to writing support here is focused on the assessment of writing, as opposed to the teaching of it.

When giving feedback on assignments, Aaron felt that it was inappropriate for him to be paying attention to the grammar of a paper. This point was raised in reference to the "provisional student." Instead of focusing on the grammar of her paper, he wanted to "give her space where she can actually write," which means he provided the student with multiple opportunities to write without fearing failure or judgment. When she visited him during office hours after handing in her first paper, he told her, "I know there will be problems, and you know there will be problems, so let's forget about the problems." Aaron fully expected that her paper would have grammatical problems that give him "pause now and then. That's fine, I'll look at what she's trying to say and deal with it." What she was trying to express was more important, he said, and while it was unfortunate he could not pay attention to the grammar, he could not be "a grammar checker for her." For that, he said, there is the Writing Centre. Interestingly, in my role of the coordinator of the Writing Centre, I can say that this is not our role; our role is to support the development of student writing skills. The Writing Centre is not a 'grammar garage' where papers can be left, or students sent, so that their 'problems' can be fixed. These

opposing perspectives on the role of a writing support reflect the different perspectives on how to support writing: by fixing, or by teaching.

By not looking at the grammar of the paper, Aaron found he was free to comment on a different aspect of the learning and writing process, the literary analysis. In class he tried to lead them through this analysis, to

> effectively guide them from looking at the work as a whole to looking at the smaller scenes or chapters or smaller paragraphs or episodes themselves. If it's a piece of literature, looking at how the sentences are constructed, if it's a particular word given its particular weight, and so on. In the class I am trying to do that. And when I get their papers, if I see they are overlooking some of those steps, then depending on what the step is, then I'll say, "This is fine, but what about looking at this." So I guess I am doing it in the way that I have always done this sort of thing: look at what's missing in that particular paper itself.

Aaron here demonstrated that he was most concerned with the articulation in writing of the steps required in literary analysis. He focused on the argument and analysis of a paper, rather than on its grammar, though he pointed out these errors to the student. Aaron saw his role as the teacher of the genre of literary analysis, but not of other aspects of writing well at the graduate level, as demonstrated by the focus on what he wants and expects in a piece of writing. He was comfortable with the kind of feedback he gives, but showed interest in hearing other ideas. He specifically asked about was the use of peer review or peer evaluation at the graduate level.

### Peer review

In this conversation, Aaron asked me about peer review, and I told Aaron that students need to be taught to do it, and if it is done well, there are two specific benefits. One, the text of a colleague is closer to their own than is a published article or text, and from that similar text, students are more able to identify what is done better or not as well in that text. The things that are done better can serve as an example of what the peer reviewer can incorporate into her own writing next time or next draft. It can, for example, show a student an alternate way of concluding a paper, or a better way of supporting an argument. Two, the peer reviewer is taught to comment on what does not work about the colleague's writing. This opportunity can help the student develop a keener eye for editing, because students get more practice with this skill of identification. Editing is something not often taught to students, and it requires students to put on a different "lens" when they read. With one lens they focus on grammar, and with another, on the development of the argument. Over time, practice with using these lenses to read will help students be able to be able to discern what makes writing clear and persuasive. This knowledge of writing can then be transferred to their own writing when they are at the stage of revising their drafts. By breaking down the art of writing into the aspects of its crafting, students can learn how to manipulate the rules and expectations of writing to best express their ideas. Aaron indicated that he felt he could incorporate peer review into the grad class he was teaching that semester as there were still two written assignments not yet due.

### Clear, future-oriented, focused feedback

Other ideas I suggested to Aaron ranged from how to focus feedback to the philosophy behind specific comments to legibility. I told him that students sometimes do

not understand what instructors write on their papers. This may be a handwriting issue, which resonated with Aaron because he felt his "own handwriting is appalling." I suggested he try collecting his feedback in a Word document, or adding it through the Track Changes feature of the Microsoft Word Program. As well, I informed him that students are sometimes flummoxed by the meaning of the feedback they receive, and this can be especially so for EAL students. For example, the comment "be more concise" means little to the student if the student thinks that his or her writing is, in fact, concise.

In addition, choosing a few aspects to focus on when reading an assignment allows the instructor to provide meaningful feedback on key elements of the writing, rather than a scatter-shot approach. If an instructor comments on a number of elements, the student is then left to decipher the hierarchy of the relative importance of those remarks. As well, making the comments useful for the next writing assignment gives students a reason to read them, and an opportunity to apply them. Focused feedback may also better explain to students the reasons for a grade that is poorer than expected.

### Rubrics

The discussion of different kinds of feedback led us to talk about the clarity of assignment expectations. I introduced to him the concept of a rubric that describes discipline-specific learning objectives, and given to students early in the term. He liked this idea, and we agreed that I would forward him a sample rubric (Appendix E). I think that the concept of clarity in assignment expectations resonated for Aaron because of an experience he had as a graduate student:

> I remember when I was doing my MA at UBC, and there was a fellow I was taking a class with and he was teaching a class on literary criticism. And he had a

> class of students from some Nordic country, and they were used to doing biographical criticism. And so he said, "No, in Canada we do things differently, so this is what I'm looking for." They went away, they did it, so they all got A+ because they did what they were supposed to do. So if students know what they are supposed to do, and they've had it explained to them, and they do it, they can't do badly.

While a rubric that allows students to write what is helpful for them to learn about while stating clear criteria is ideal, giving students guidance as to what is expected and why is still very helpful.

### Post-outlines

The final idea I suggested to Aaron was a post-outline. A post-outline is created from a draft. By picking out the thesis statement, main sections and evidence used to support the thesis statement, it is possible to encapsulate the ideas presented in a paper. This activity is useful to determine if the paper's structure, evidence, and argument in fact match the writer's intentions. Aaron thought that a post-outline to check the paper's arguments might be a useful tool to introduce to his students; he mused, "that's something I can incorporate."

### Reflections

In the interview the instructor demonstrated a desire to know other forms of feedback, and a feeling of not knowing "what's best" for students in terms of how to help students through feedback. He expressed frustration that academic writing can be "really opaque. You just can't get through it." Despite his feelings of uncertainty and frustration, he ended our interview as follows:

> You've given me a lot to go on. It's all really good material. I really like the idea, at the graduate level, of involving the students in the work of their colleagues, because that also builds an *esprit de corps* as well. And that's something the department really needs. We've got such a small program that we can do it. And the idea of a post-outline is very helpful, too.

As a follow-up to our second conversation, I sent Aaron the article I found on incorporating peer review in the classroom and the sample rubric. While I did not hear from Aaron regarding his reaction to these two items, I received an email describing his reactions to two essays he had received from his graduate students. The assignment was to analyze the components of a scene from an Asian movie. I read through the two essays, and then his comments. His comments were not addressed to the authors of the papers, but to me, about the papers. Because of this, his comments were not feedback, but explanation of how well the papers succeeded in the areas he previously indicated as important, such as language, argument, and introduction.

The first paper Aaron wrote about was clearly from the student he was concerned about. He noted that the paper, contrary to his expectations, begins "*in media res*:" there is no "overview of objectives, processes or parameters." The language, he stated, was "stiff, conservative, and awkward" with clear use of a dictionary for certain expressions. Secondary sources reviewed in class were not included, nor was the greater historical context that the film clip resides in. That said, he thought the paper showed a sound understanding of the parameters of academic style – for example, the language is not casual and has avoided the use of the first person – and a comfort with logical argumentation. He concluded his analysis of the first paper with:

> In sum, this paper is *approaching* what I would hope from a first assignment for a first-year MA student, but suffers from problems of expression, familiarity with an appropriate presentation style, research context, and analytical precision.

The second paper was from the other international, EAL student. He noted that this paper had a solid introduction that framed the paper in the secondary readings done in class, named the text and outlined the paper. The paper had a good overall structure, but the weakness was that instead of being narrowed to the one scene that the assignment dictated, the paper is on the entire film, which "diffuses the focus of the paper." "Nonetheless," he wrote, "the approach to the film's structure as a whole is quite good and demonstrates a comfort with seeing a text as composed of pieces which the artist has arranged according to a particular plan." He noted that the language of this paper was "quite acceptable for a first-year MA student writing academically for the first time in English." The problems were more stylistic than grammatical: "the English was just 'rusty' rather than 'wrong.'" The sentence structure and vocabulary were "ambitious and for the most part appropriate." The language use in the paper did not seem to worry Aaron, and he wrote that the paper indicated to him "the precise areas of the student's logical progress which will benefit from guidance and practice … (that) stem from a relative lack of experience of textual analysis."

In comparing the two papers, Aaron wrote that he was less worried about the first student's writing than he was about the writing of the second, because she exhibits an "overall higher level of English ability:"

> Student A demonstrates a good mind with a good, logical thought process, but is hampered by poor expressive skills. Student B demonstrates a complexity of

> thought, with a complexity of expression that approaches a 'good match' for what she is trying to do.

Overall, Aaron mainly commented on the linguistic level of the papers. Differing cultural styles of writing may have been at work, but were not explicitly addressed. The third student, whose first language is English, did not submit his or her paper on time due to a crisis of dedication to the program (Aaron, personal communication, October 15, 2008).

In addition to the summary of the papers' strengths and weaknesses, I received a set of student papers with his comments on them. The feedback on the first paper included six written comments plus a longer end-comment and six grammatical corrections. These comments were about how to improve the introduction, grammar and word choice, and four recommendations to better use supporting sources. His end comment was

> We need to be more careful with our research to help us avoid some generalizations here. Also, we could use secondary sources to provide a historical or ideological context – especially in the case of Shinto or some of the literary traditions you have mentioned here. Your argument is subtle and nicely personal – logical and persuasive.

In addition, Aaron made six in-text grammatical corrections on the first three pages of the paper, but then did not indicate other grammatical problems.

The second paper had many more comments on it: 29 plus the end-comment and 14 grammatical and word form corrections. The number of comments did not indicate a paper of poorer quality. In fact, most of the comments focused on four elements. First, Aaron asked in seven places for clarification, such as asking for how the author would

define a word. Second, there were five calls for precision in the writer's text; four times the instructor wanted a more explicit explanation of a theory that was being used and "the parameters of the argument" (page 13). The third category of comments was those directing the writer how to improve his or her way of writing academic papers. For example, Aaron reminded the writer to follow the path laid out in the introduction, encouraged the writer to be confident in his/her analysis, and wrote probing questions to encourage deeper analysis. There were seven of these sorts of comments. The last category was praise: three times the instructor wrote a version of "good point" and once he wrote "good reading of plot elements and their possible interpretations" (page 9).

In addition to the shorter comments, in-text corrections covered word choice and grammatical suggestions throughout the paper, including subject/verb agreement and word forms. There were fourteen of these corrections, and they occurred on almost all pages of the paper. The end-comment was as follows:

> Be careful to avoid unsupported generalizations about historical issues or contemporary social conditions – these can weaken your presentation considerably. Many of the points you raise are ones for which you could find supporting evidence relatively easily. Your treatment of the text is subtle and persuasive – you write compellingly and logically. Be a bit more precise in your intro and state the process and parameters of your argument, but overall quite well done (page 13).

The third, and strongest, paper received seven shorter comments, plus the end-comment and three in-text grammatical and word form corrections. The comments were intended to increase the writer's understanding of how to structure an academic text more

appropriately, praised the writer's text, or asked for clarification in terms of more detail and contextualization (page 3). The end comment was short and focused: "We need a bit more precision in how we define terms and set the parameters of plot but overall this is a solid, logical, and persuasive presentation" (page 11).

In total there are five categories that Aaron's shorter comments can be grouped into: comments that praise, comments that direct a student to how to better write an academic paper, requests for more precision, requests for clarification, and recommendations for supporting citations. Table I indicates the number of occurrences of each category.

**Table 1: Feedback Category Count**

| **Name of category** | **Number of Occurrences** |
|---|---|
| Comments that praise | 7 |
| Comments that direct | 13 |
| Requests for more precision | 6 |
| Requests for clarification | 7 |
| Recommendations for supporting citations | 9 |
| Total number of counts | 44 |

Of the 44 comments, the majority are those intended to provide information to the writer in regards to better forming an academic paper. The second most common comment was to ask for more supporting evidence from secondary sources. This distribution mirrors what Aaron said in our first and second conversations about good writing: he felt he was to guide students to write better papers about literary texts. For the most part, his

feedback does what he intended it to do – inform the writer – but this information could be more useful if provided on a draft of paper, as opposed to the "final" version. The topics of the end comments mirror what the instructor said he values in good academic writing in his discipline: the treatment of the text, the provision of context, the development of the argument, the use of precision and the avoidance of generalizations, and the use of research and secondary sources to support claims and interpretations.

The feedback on the first paper seems focused and designed to support the main aspects the writer needs to improve upon: supporting the argument with research, how to write a more effective introduction, and to continue paying attention to the development of grammar and word choice. Compared to how many comments he gave on Paper Two, he seemed to be giving this student the "space to write" and to allow her to develop confidence in her writing. The feedback on Paper Two indicated to me that Aaron felt this student was ready for more feedback. The feedback on Paper Three praised the strong points of the argument, and prodded the writer into mastering the next step in the development of even better academic writing.

In our conversation that was directly prior to the grading of these essays, I had talked with Aaron about the three hallmarks of effective feedback: that it be focused, future-oriented, and clear. I think the feedback Aaron gave was very focused as it centred on the issues that made the paper weaker than it could have been. Indeed, the five categories on comments, plus a brief end-comment and some in-text corrections are focused. As well, the feedback directed the writers to feel good about their writing, and how to improve it. Because the feedback was focused on general concepts of good

graduate writing, it is in nature future-oriented: the writers could apply the concepts to the next piece of writing that they do for Aaron's class.

Whether the feedback was clear or not is a different matter, as only the students could indicate how clear they found it. It is interesting that in his end-comments for each paper, Aaron used "we," as in "we need to be more careful with our research," "I think we can develop this," and "we need more precision in how we define terms" (November 8, 2008). I find this use of "we" to be warm, as it generates a feeling of "we're all in this academic boat together." However, I wondered if the students who hail from different linguistic and rhetorical traditions view this use of the plural, inclusive pronoun the same way. Is it confusing or condescending to these writers? As well, I agreed with Aaron: his handwriting could be easier to read. It was legible but it did slow down my reading time.

### The end of the semester

While waiting to hear from Aaron for another chance to meet, a rather sticky situation emerged. The student of Aaron's who was causing him and his department such consternation emailed me directly. She contacted me in my role as Coordinator of the Writing Centre, but the contents of her email strongly suggested to me that Aaron recommended that she contact me. This of course put me in an ethical bind. To meet with this student would yield fascinating insights, especially into how clear the instructor's feedback was to her. However, that would be an unethical course of action, so I recommended to this student that she book an appointment with a Writing Centre tutor or that she find an editor. I did not hear back from her, nor did she book an appointment. As an aside, this student is now a regular tutee at the Writing Centre.

When I next heard from Aaron, he agreed to respond to my questions, but by email. This may have been because I had overstepped the boundaries of a researcher in our last meeting by offering too many teaching ideas and information about how to support international students in their writing. He may have become less interested in our work together, or, because he felt overwhelmed by the suggestions I had made. However, Aaron agreed to share his insights with me by email. The questions I asked Aaron pointed out "something that I think I'm coming to realize – in many ways grad students need the same sorts of basic parameters and guidelines that undergrads do." The issues that required addressing at both levels include "assumed knowledge," use of sources, and absorption of an idea or concept so that the student neglects quoting it directly. As well, he realized graduate students need reminding of how to employ rhetoric and explain logic. While Aaron gave students in his undergraduate classes a "guided tour through the rhetorical process," he had worked on the assumption that graduate students would not be in need of such guidance. Overall, the instructor seemed to reconsider his belief that graduate students need and should be provided with less guidance in the writing process and the construction of discipline-specific texts than their undergraduate counterparts.

Overall he felt that the students improved their writing ability, "even the most 'shaky' student." While the provisional student was still hampered by language issues, he "could see a greater comfort and confidence in her treatment of the material of her writing." However, she did not pass the TOEFL exam, and was therefore out of the graduate program for the following semester. The other two students also improved, and their writing became "a bit more polished." He noted that this might be due to time and practice.

These insights lead to a number of ideas Aaron detailed in his email that he would like to use with graduate students. One was to "refresh their memories as to what proper engagement with their text/sources looks like" early on in the semester. He also noted that it would be useful to devote class time to a "guided tour of the rhetorical process." To assume that graduate students would not benefit from it would be "indulging in wishful thinking;" that, he said, "is not being the best guide I could be, after all." Another activity that he developed for future semesters was

> taking an undergraduate paper that exhibits substantial issues with structure, referencing, and logic, and have the grads critique and 'correct' it – anonymously, of course! And since most grad students at some point will be TAs and will have to read plenty of so-so writing, it wouldn't be a bad introduction to what they can expect to see. … We *do* critique 'good' academic writing, but sometimes it's easier to see what to do by looking at work that doesn't succeed.

He also considered using peer review, and "more explicitly 'instructive' exercises in order to concentrate on rhetoric and the idea of precision."

While the instructor had previously noted that graduate students go through a process of learning how to read, write and think at this level, this email indicates that he had realized that the starting point of these students was similar to the end point for undergraduate students. There is also a sense that students have different starting and ending points. As well, this new starting point facilitated the understanding that some of his comments, especially that of "be more precise," may have less meaning than he had thought. The ideas that Aaron had for the next time he teaches this course reflect these new understandings, although understandings do not necessarily lead to different

practices. Reading that Aaron was considering the teaching of writing that the graduate students themselves might be doing in their role as TAs demonstrated his understanding that while time and practice may play a large role in the development of academic writing skills, instructors need to "accelerate this process as best" they can. Regarding the ideas I shared with him, he wrote, they "helped (him) quite a bit." In the end, Aaron developed some activities to better support students' understanding of how to be better writers. These teaching activities demonstrate a fuller understanding of what support can look like, and yet, the specific needs of international graduate students with EAL were not explicitly addressed besides giving students the "space" to write and comments on their papers.

This space to write and patience with their struggle to use academic English reflects Aaron's understanding that learning another language takes time and practice. However, more explicit instruction about the moves done in academic discourse or models of how student writing can look would likely support students' development of their academic writing skills. From this case study I now understand that instructors need to be aware of just how explicit writing instruction has to be for international EAL graduate students – or any graduate students. While I had originally thought that EAL graduate students who would need more support, I now think that most graduate students would benefit from more support in the development of their academic writing skills. I have also learned that I can be more effective in my work with instructors if I suggest ideas in a slower, more collaborative way, rather than try to instruct them on how they should be redesigning their assignments and feedback. I need to listen as well as suggest,

because their insights and their questions are important to know how better to support them as instructors.

# Chapter 6: Kate

When I first arrived back at UVic, I worked as the writing tutor for a professional program. Its yearly intake includes about 50% international students. Through that job I met Kate, who was starting a teaching position as I was leaving that department. I knew her to be friendly, supportive of her students, and focused on student success. I sent her an email asking if she remembered me, which she did. In a phone call, Kate agreed to be a participant in the study. The class she wanted to talk about she was team-teaching with a number of other instructors. Obviously, team-teaching added a different dimension to this case, as did the professional, rather than academic, nature of the professional program. While both academic and professional writing incorporate citations, clearly structured arguments, and so on, professional writing differs in that it is to be brief and easy to understand.

Again, I had qualms about approaching a participant who I knew previously. This meant all three of my participants would be people with whom I had prior contact. Not only did I have prior contact with them, but they knew me in my professional role as writing tutor or Writing Centre coordinator. The prior contact, then, might have unduly influenced these people to participate in my study, as it is more difficult to refuse an acquaintance than a stranger. As well, I cannot be sure that the participants felt that if they did not participate, it would reflect badly on them professionally, as we would undoubtedly have future contact in the professional realm. Moreover, I work for the LTC, and while I have no influence in my job, this is not something that the instructors could know for sure. It is also possible that these instructors felt they could not say no to me

because of what that might suggest about their dedication to teaching and learning, given my professional role. If the instructors participated because they felt professionally obligated, then this is an issue that affects my research.

For these reasons, it was not my intention when I set out to recruit participants to recruit those that I had had prior contact with. However, out of the long list of potential participants that I contacted or attempted to contact, these three were the ones who agreed. Perhaps this is *because* of my prior contact with them. Had I not conducted the research with people I knew, I might not have been successful in recruiting participants. Cultivating acquaintanceships and developing some credibility as a dedicated, professional worker at the university is not something I could have fast-tracked. I believe now that all the participants were very quickly open and honest with me because of my prior interactions with them.

### The beginning of the semester

Knowing that Kate is a deliverables-oriented person, in preparation for our conversation I printed off the rubric (Appendix E) to offer as something she could add to her portion of the class. Kate was the third instructor I met with, and as I was feeling confident in my interviewing ability, I decided to follow the advice of Kvale (1996) and Stake (1995), who had warned against audio recording unless necessary. Both of these researchers feel that audio recordings place the exact wording of the participant above the researcher's immediate interpretation of the conversation. Because the exact words were less important than general concepts, I took notes of Kate's answers in my research journal, and I wrote an interview log immediately following the interview. I continued this method of interviewing throughout the case. The research process was somewhat

changed by this different interview method. For example, I felt very involved in the conversations, and I felt more aware of the ideas and information Kate shared rather than the words she used to describe them. The downside, I think, is that I became too involved in the conversation and likely directed it more than a researcher should. When I was analyzing the data, I found that the interview log allowed me to spend less time confirming what I had heard, and more time reflecting on it. Another result of this style of interview recording is fewer quotations to draw on for the data description and analysis section of this dissertation. However, I feel confident that the main points have been faithfully reproduced. What follows is a combination of the notes I took during the initial interview, and directly afterwards; again, I have drawn out the main themes and instances.

### "A bizarre cultural thing"

By the time I was able to arrange an initial interview, Kate's class was already underway. The students had so far done one written assignment. It was a blueprint of services that a local attraction could add to increase what it offers to customers. In our interview Kate indicated that she thinks of this program as a way to get tools in the students' toolbox, and the blueprint was something she considered very important for students to be able to do. The two questions in the assignment asked students to provide suggestions as to how the company could be more competitive following its blueprint, and what features the student would add to make the business more competitive.

She said the grades ranged from a C+ to an A+, with many assignments scoring B, B+, and A-. While looking at the grades for this assignment, she noted that the student whose paper earned a C+ was from China, and that "he didn't get it." She said that the

recommendations presented in that service blueprint were “a bizarre cultural thing:” the student wrote that the attraction should add a shoe polish station for men and a manicure station for the women. Kate suggested that while these services might make a business more competitive in China, in the West we think of those services existing in an airport, or another location where people have time to fill. He did not “get” the assignment because the features he would add to the business were not culturally appropriate and were not in keeping with the service model the attraction was currently using. However, this was most likely not due to misunderstanding the assignment, but due to the cultural lens through which he viewed the assignment.

### Good graduate writing

When asked about what constitutes good graduate writing, Kate responded that there should be headings and formatting, such as spacing between paragraphs, including graphs and charts, to guide the reader. A supervisor should be able to read through it quickly, understand it completely, and then be motivated to use the recommendations. Or, the supervisor should be able to go into a meeting and be able to speak to the content of the report. Simple language, a clear structure, and a logical flow create good writing, according to Kate.

In response to my question about how, if at all, the international students experience difficulty with achieving this standard of good graduate writing, she said that other than a use of complex sentences and occasional differences in cultural assumptions, the papers of international EAL graduate students were marked by split infinitives, mistakes with articles and grammar, and problematic word choice. As well, the international graduate EAL students had a tendency to try to make sentences very

complex. Or, she noted, they had difficulty making it simple, or believing that she wanted their writing to be simple. To address this, she said that she repeated to these students that she preferred simple, direct writing. From our conversation I understood that Kate did not see a significant difference in the writing of EAL students and those who have English as a first language.

As an example of the importance of the clear writing, she pulled up on her computer an email from one applicant to the PhD program, and read aloud a sentence from an article abstract that was sent as part of the application. It was full of jargon and was unclear in its intent. She said, "What does it mean?" and that she would have given it a letter grade of "C." Kate said good writing is the ability to communicate. As an aside, Kate told me her husband hires policy experts and often it comes down to whether they can write clearly or not.

**"Team China"**

When asked how she felt about her ability to support these students' writing in English, she said she guided by correction and encouraged them to use the tutor that the department provides. She then changed the topic away from writing support to combining international students and domestic students in the class. In the past there were cultural and linguistic issues in "mixed" classes, so that semester the department was experimenting with allowing the students to form their own groups, rather than restricting how the groups were formed. This resulted in the creation of the self-named "Team China," which was composed of all international students from China. Kate thought that this plan could have worked, but the leader of this group was "not the most open to learning." Some of the students in the group checked in halfway, and she debriefed the

students when she handed back the marked service blueprints, as a group, with both the positives and the negatives highlighted.

Kate asked me if I thought Team China was a good idea. I told her that because that particular semester the "team" had an elder, it would have been hard for the group to disagree with him. Then I asked her what *she* thought. She said ethically it was problematic but no student had complained – or maybe they culturally could not do so. For these students it was their final semester so they may have felt that there was little value in complaining, and that it would be better to continue with the situation as it was. I raised the point that because Team China works in Chinese, it might detract from their opportunity to improve their spoken English. The instructor replied that they would still have classes in English nine hours a day, and it was up to them to seek out that practice.

The concept of grouping international, EAL students together was, in Kate's opinion, marginalizing, and put them together in a "sink or swim" situation. In "mixed" classes, historically there has been a focus on grades – Canadian students did not want to help international students if it meant more work for them and a possible drop in their grades. The professional classroom is, of course, a competitive place. We talked about in what ways the options available to the department and the students would mirror the workplace. If a worker whose first language was English was working with someone with more limited English which hampered her ability to write, would the first worker help and coach the second? Avoid working with the person? Take on the project himself/herself and do it alone? Is there more time than there is in school for someone to give help to a co-worker? We noted that the comparison would not work because in the work world your work is not graded (although possibly judged), and you have more time.

We both commented that in *our* work worlds, we felt graded and had no time. This gave us both pause. If the work world and the classroom are similar in this way, what does this mean for the role of the instructor? Perhaps international students in this program are marginalized in this regard, and it is a matter of degree when working in mono-cultural and multicultural groups. The instructor must then be skilled at helping groups work together to recognize each other's strengths, and the value that comes from working with people from other places. After all, the program purports to educate its students for the global workplace, and this includes the skills of working with others.

It is important to note that Kate did not fully answer the question regarding how she felt about her ability to support international students' writing skill development. From our conversation I felt that by providing the right classroom environment (i.e., groups with both domestic and international students) and by providing correction on assignments and general guidance on assignments in class, she felt she was fulfilling her role of supporting students.

### Feedback, rubrics, and models

Kate had been focusing on extensive feedback on student papers, followed by a class-wide debriefing of common issues and follow-up one-on-one verbal comments. I talked to Kate about providing extensive comments early in the semester, and then decreasing the amount over the semester, as the expectation that they will apply the feedback grows. I also talked to her about providing the feedback in a way that students can use it more effectively: before an assignment is due. This may be done through posting examples of past well-written papers on a similar assignment, on the Blackboard site.

In addition, I introduced the MPA rubric and told her that she could hand out something like that ahead of time so that the students are aware of what they will be marked for. She said, “That’s fair - more fair than what I do now.” I also suggested using the rubric for peer feedback. I asked if she would like me to mock one up for her, to which she replied that she would do it herself. This reply could be interpreted as Kate wanting to tailor it to her students or a particular assignment, which could be faster to do on her own; that she was interested in the idea but needed to think about it further; or, that she wanted some ownership of these ideas.

At the end of the interview, Kate added me to the Blackboard session for her class, and she asked me to notify her if I saw anything “untoward.” I was surprised and confused by her use of this word. After looking at the Blackboard site, I thought that the ideas I shared with her were, in my opinion, possible to add to her course, some immediately, and some in a subsequent semester. While Kate may have had little control over assignment design, she had control over the kind of feedback she gives, and when it is given.

### The middle of the semester

Next I analyzed the documents Kate made available to me. While it would have been interesting to review these documents with her, I also thought it would be valuable to analyze them to enrich the data for the case study. Knowing how the documents are written and what they expect of the intended audience provided a window into how the instructors communicate with their students.

The syllabus for the course was a lengthy eleven pages. As well, it had a number of instructors, guest speakers, and liaisons with outside organizations. One of the first

aspects of the syllabus that struck me was the tone of the document. Throughout its eleven pages, the tone was encouraging and engaging to students. The course itself was described as follows:

> After years of offering the program we are quite certain that this specialization will change your life. We hope it is for the better! You will become more passionate about great service and also more critical of poor service. … The program is driven by the class. We provide frameworks, insights into key aspects of managing services, guest speakers who share their real world insights, assignments from companies looking to implement your solutions, field trips and social events. You provide the energy, intellectual curiosity and determination to deliver your best work (Course syllabus, p. 2).

In this paragraph, there is a feeling of students being "sold" on the course "experience." As well, the paragraph included a clear outline of responsibilities: the instructors provided the course, but the students made the course the learning experience it could be. The clear expectations, statement of course content, lightness of tone, and the sales pitch all work together to create an encouraging, engaging written introduction to the course. However, again there is the sense that the course is set by the instructors, and the students are responsible for being successful in it. There is no mention of how the students could help themselves in the course or outside of the course. Following this paragraph there is the usual list of SWBATs: "Students Will Be Able to" accomplish certain tasks by the end of the course. There were seven of them, and the list included "enhance both oral and written communication skills through presentations and papers" (p. 2). The use of

language here is interesting, because it frames writing as a communication tool. This mirrored how Kate described good graduate writing: successful at conveying an idea in a small amount of space and time. This perspective of writing differs from that of the other two participants: Aaron saw writing as a skill that is included in literary analysis, and Helena saw writing as a skill to be learned and mastered. Kate saw writing as one of main means of communicating information to the reader. In Kate's view, successful transmission of the intended message is the hallmark of good writing.

In addition, there was almost a full page dedicated to the topic of academic integrity. While the write-up was for the most part very standard, it included some interesting phrases. For example, the first sentence under the heading of "academic integrity" states that, "As a program which helps to create business and government leaders, the program has an obligation to ensure academic integrity is of the highest standards" (p. 6). This statement framed the list of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism by introducing why it is important in a context broader than that of the university. As well, the sentence expressed to the student that these were not rules concocted by the instructor, but that they had been discussed and agreed upon by all the instructors in the faculty. In my own experience as a reviewer of statements of plagiarism and academic integrity from across the UVic campus in my professional role, I find this framing statement to put academic integrity in the larger context and in a more positive light by informing the student of its importance, rather than its negative connotations. Avoiding plagiarism is important for students to learn about, especially students who come schooled with other cultural concepts of what constitutes plagiarism. Students must write analyses and research papers that discuss the thoughts and findings of others

without accidentally plagiarizing. While the cultural aspect of plagiarism is important, so are the writing skills needed to include in one's writing the words of others through quotations and paraphrases. Setting an educational tone, as opposed to a threatening tone, is critical to allow education about plagiarism to happen.

However, there was no mention of the cultural concept of plagiarism, nor were there referrals to additional sources to allow students to self-assess their understanding of academic integrity. How students are supported in their development of writing skills is not addressed, just as it was not clearly addressed in my initial interview with Kate. It felt to me that students were expected to do "their part," and what this "part" was in the minds of the syllabus writers very clear. Yet, it is not enough to point out that academic integrity is important, or that writing should be clear. I think that almost all graduate students from whatever culture would agree with those two ideals. But *how* one uses the words and ideas of others, and *how* one explains his or her ideas can be very different depending on the culture of the student. Instruction on what academic integrity and clear writing look like in the Western, English-medium classroom would be helpful, I think, as would addressing these as cultural differences.

In addition to the syllabus, through Blackboard I was able to access two lesson plans/writing assignments for the course. The first assignment was the analysis of the local attraction. The second was a "gap analysis" activity that looked at the gaps in services on a business' website. These were the two individually-done assignments. Both documents began with an explanation of the purpose of the assignment, followed by a brief description of why it was important. For example, in the first lesson students were informed that

> the purpose of this class is to learn to use the blueprinting tool to analyze service within an organization. This is a tool you can use to design a new operation, or control and make changes to an existing organization (p. 1).

This was followed by a numbered list of learning objectives, and information about the article to be read for the class. The objectives were laid out for the students, as were the expectations of pre-class and pre-assignment preparation. The topic, reason, background, and objectives were followed by the assignment description.

The written assignment was also explained as an objective with clear, concise instructions. The length for both assignments was less than two pages; this length is standard for written work in the business world, and reflects the professional nature of the program. A basic outline of the paper could be extrapolated from the instructions, and the steps students were expected to follow explained. The reason for the writing was also defined: in the services blueprint assignment, students were to offer suggestions to the owners for adding value to their business, while in the analysis in service gaps project they were to use their one-page paper as a talking points memo in the following class.

In this way both assignments situated the reason for writing in terms of audience and purpose. As well, the reasons why the students were asked to do the assignment were likely clear: these were new tools for the skill "toolbox," and students needed to be able to use them. As well, exactly the content of what to write was explained, so it was the student's ideas, and the expression of those ideas, that was important. Writing was therefore an integral part of the learning process in these assignments. Why the students are writing, and what, and to whom, were explained – if not the cultural context of these assignments. There was an assumption that the student would write situated in local

culture and knowledge. No explicit information as to the culture of the reader or audience were outlined. As well, how the writing fit into the learning process, the expectations regarding the quality and quantity of writing, and the position of the writer (e.g., his or her location, or what strengths and knowledge the student brings to the analysis) were fairly clear, but not well detailed. Otherwise, to me both lesson plan papers were concisely and clearly written, but may have not been clear to the student. If they were in fact clear, then they may have served as an example for the students to emulate. I also noted that the simple language, listed objectives, and repeated use of the lesson plan format might make the assignment more easily accessible to international EAL students. In fact, the assignments reflected the kind of writing valued in this program.

In terms of assignment design, they did not allow for formative feedback, nor did they encourage revision or an opportunity to see models through peer review. They did, however, provide an answer to the five questions of who, what, when, where and why a document should be created – if the student could decode that from the assignment guidelines. Reworking the current assignments to be cumulative in some regard would be an improvement over the current series of discrete assignments, in my opinion, and would give students even more incentive to meet the demands of good writing in this discipline. It would also provide opportunities for more meaningful, future-focused feedback. Using a rubric that is discipline-specific to indicate exactly what is expected in terms of the fundamentals of writing in the program would be further support the development of students' writing skills. I mentioned these ideas to Kate, and she seemed to agree that they would be helpful to students.

### The end of the semester

I had trouble connecting with Kate for our next conversation. I could see a pattern emerging. When I gave too much information and therefore moved from being a researcher to being an instructor, I likely dissuaded the instructor from engagement in this process. In late November I sent Kate an email asking how her semester was going, and if we could discuss her class either in person or by email. I included in that email a couple of questions to indicate the direction of the interview topics: "I'm particularly interested in how the Team China experiment worked out (would you do it again?). Also, have you had any more thoughts about models and rubrics to guide students' writing?" (personal communication, November 26, 2008). I was curious to know if she had used any of the ideas we discussed, and to know how she was feeling about Team China. I felt that there was something deeper in Kate's perturbation over allowing the students from China to work together. I received a quick reply that she was taking the students out of town for a field trip that week, and could we meet for coffee the following week. The last line of the email stated: "And no, I wouldn't do Team China again – multiple reasons!" (November 26, 2008). I was interested in her strong response to the Team China question, and her lack of reply to the other one.

The first week of December, Kate and I met for just over an hour in a café on campus. She brought along her laptop to show me two PowerPoint slide sets that Team China had created. The first set of slides was in response to another instructor's assignment to design a car showroom that would appeal to a specific audience. She said that Team China's presentation was professional-looking, with good design, captured the core concepts, and overall was "better than most." However, there were small grammatical errors in the slides. While subtle, she noted that their language issues

affected their presentation, but not significantly. In all, Team China was able to "catch up" to the other groups; their content was on par or higher. Having a native speaker of English to serve as an editor for their slides would have made Team China's grammar better – but only in its slides. Still, I felt that this group missed some educational opportunities for cross-language and cross-cultural learning.

The second PowerPoint presentation Kate showed me was a case for the registrar's office. The registrar's office asked for focus groups to make a welcome centre for the university. Team China students got off track because of the leader's strength; his ideas were off-topic. But, Kate said, it was a great-looking PowerPoint presentation. While the content missed the mark, the people from the registrar's office utilized the opportunity to talk to international students and ask them about their own experience, which the students loved. It ended up being a "win-win-win" situation, Kate stated, because the client, the students, and the instructor were happy.

In this interview it became apparent that Team China included not only the international students from China, but also one exchange student from China. Kate told me that this particular student could not present alone. Because of this, and other instances, she did not know if this student "really speaks English," even though the course was almost finished. The group got along well, but his ability to communicate in English was "marginal." She gave the example of the class visit to Vancouver. He had not understood that it was his responsibility to inform the instructor that he would attend, and to book his accommodations. In the lobby of the hotel where Kate was staying, he asked her, "Where are you living?" which she understood to mean, "Where are you staying?" While this is a common mistake for beginners of English, there is a general

assumption when an exchange student is taken into the graduate program, she or he has a more advanced set of English skills. This speaks to the gap between the level of English language proficiency expected of international students by a graduate school instructor, and the reality of that level of English language proficiency, and the ability of the instructor to help. As in the other cases, the student seems to be the one who is asked to make the adjustments and take on the extra work in an already very busy program to bridge that gap. This mirrors the expectation in the writing assignments that students will be very familiar with Canadian culture while those crafting the assignments know that half of the students reading the assignment guidelines are new to Canada. Instruction in the necessary writing and speaking skills seem to be the responsibilities of the student requiring this instruction more than they seem to be the responsibilities of the instructor in any explicit manner. Students either enter with these skills, or need to gain them quickly with no help from their instructors, who do not know them themselves. This leads to larger questions that will be explored in Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

In all, Team China did not work well from the instructor's point of view because of the dominant leader and the shadow such a leader can create. In addition, participation was a problem. She noted that now she understood that allowing such a group to form meant one person could lead the group, and if he or she got it wrong, the whole group would go astray. As well, the instructor was not able to know if people were participating equally or even at all. Of course, this is a common issue in group work. The instructor felt that in this group at least one person was "carried" – and she believed this was not the exchange student. Kate noted that in another group the other members would have

refused to carry her; they would have complained to one of the instructors. At no point did Team China complain about carrying group members.

Team China dominated our conversations both in October and in December. In our initial conversation the instructor expressed hesitation and concern about Team China. These worries were borne out, not in the quality of their work, but in the issues that arose. These issues are not specific to the Chinese culture, and can occur when a group of students is from one culture and that culture is different from the one they are studying in. A group of international students may not be able to help each other with the rules of academic writing in North America, nor would they be able to explain to each other how a Canadian university views plagiarism. In my opinion, fewer opportunities to learn about how to succeed in academic writing are available in this kind of grouping.

A cultural leader emerged and dictated the way each assignment was approached. As well, the group may have been less likely to report members who are not contributing because of cultural norms such as "protect one's own" or "respect your elders." A member with weaker English skills may not be required to demonstrate or improve those skills, as long as the course and assignments do not require that the student demonstrate oral or written proficiency in the English language. Kate was concerned at first because of the ethical problems such a culturally-based and linguistically-based grouping could produce; while this may not happen every semester, it did this semester, with the results of hiding one student who was not working, another whose English was very weak, and allowing one student to control the direction of the projects. Team China may not have failed, but learning opportunities were likely missed. Moreover, these students may have been in a "sink or swim" situation because there was no local insider informing them of

the appropriate cultural context. As well, other students may have missed out by the segregation of people into domestic or international groups because a valuable intercultural learning opportunity was lost. It takes scaffolding and support from the instructors and the curriculum.

I then turned the conversation to the assignment and feedback design principles that I had introduced to Kate, as I was interested in knowing if she had implemented any of them, or planned to do so in the future. In response she said she had not had a chance to use the rubric, and anyway, she thought it was hard to use in a group-teaching situation. She felt that some instructors might feel that the rubric signified "too much guidance" for students, but she thought that attitude might be changing. More than anything else, she wanted the students to come talk to her – that is much better than email, she felt. Students did not utilize her office hours nearly enough, and to remedy this, she has planned to do a field trip to her office the following semester, and has arranged to have sign-up sheets on her door for projects and assignments.

In addition to wanting students to approach her more, Kate noted one case that she wished had gone differently. Of the case studies that served as the backbone of the course, all the clients were proactive with the exception of the first set. This client is located in Vancouver, and in addition to the problems that distance can create, the assignments were formed to save "a bad 596 experience." (596 is the program' thesis project. A client pays a group of students to research an issue the company is having, identify possible solutions, and make recommendations to the company in both written form and in a presentation). The main issues that semester were that the assignment was not "concrete," and because of the distance, the slides were given over the phone instead

of in person. The slides were based on a written report that the students compiled for the client.

The topic of this assignment was "diversity," which Kate thought would be very engaging; she called it a "cool topic." However, this topic may have been challenging for some students, and there was no choice built in to the assignment. The client wanted the case to target two audiences: persons with a disability and people who are of First Nations heritage. The Vancouver-based credit union was looking to increase both populations in the clients it serves and in the workers it hires. The students needed to develop a general strategy to address these two groups, but other than that statement, the assignment was not concrete in its demands. Kate felt that students were not engaged in the assignment; for example, they did not cite the readings she provided. The timeline may have been too short for the assignment or there may have been too much information provided in the course. Overall, clear instructions and criteria worked for this group, Kate noted, and this case was open to interpretation and creativity. It was also the first case of the term, so students did not have a template to follow, or a history of success to bolster them. To alleviate problems with abstract cases, I suggested a general rubric for "good writing" to use from the first day of class, and to put an abstract case fourth rather than first so that students would have the time to develop their skills and confidence. I also suggested that the instructor could firm up the assignment if the client's question was too vague.

I also talked to Kate about breaking down difficult assignments into their components and frequent practice for writing, like using an outline or having a first draft. Kate thought it might "take the wind out of their sails" because they are graduate students

and she thought they might feel that they are already good writers. Writing, then, seems like a secondary skill set when the instructor is concerned that informing students of their need for improvement with this set will injure their self-esteem. However, the feedback Kate gives on assignments, and the general feedback sessions on assignments when she hands them back in class, contradicts this statement. Kate very much values good writing, but it is unclear how far she will go to let students know that there is room for improvement in their writing skills. Anyway, if an assignment is written, then writing skills are important. In their assignments, it seems like students' writing skills are being tested rather than developed because the assignments do not build on each other, and the writing skills needed to successfully complete an assignment are not explicitly taught. This is a similar way of viewing writing that the other two participants had.

Instead of requiring revisions and drafts, the instructors set questions that are not graded but required. She thought maybe they could have one written assignment added each week or a journal to hand in about a directed experience or as a learning journal. Overall, Kate thought that the writing ability of this class, like their thinking, is "good to excellent." They exhibited sophisticated thinking, and they were better writers than presenters, as they were under-rehearsed.

This was surprising, and echoed my previous concerns; why did this instructor join my study if she felt the international students with EAL were writing very well? It may indicate that she initially was concerned about some of the students' writing ability, but those concerns were alleviated during the semester. Or, Kate may have agreed to be part of the study in order to help me; even though we did not have a prior working relationship, we knew each other. A prior acquaintanceship may have made her more

likely to participate in the study, but made her less likely to actively participate. It is difficult to know if this is the case or not. After all, she appeared eager at the start of the study. What seemed like a good idea in September may have appeared less so in October, and even less appealing in November and December. Perhaps this changed because she became busy, and in addition, because the ideas I was suggesting to her were overwhelming and unwelcome. Perhaps she thought I was suggesting that her methods of teaching were not satisfactory. I also think she was eager to participate because of her concerns about Team China; once her concerns about Team China abated, her interest in my study may have waned.

### Reflections

Kate did not seem to find most of the suggestions I gave her regarding assignment and feedback design overly useful. Kate might have felt hampered by being one of a number of instructors teaching the course. As some of these instructors she co-taught with outrank her in seniority, perhaps she did not feel that she could affect or adjust their shared course.

It may be, of course, that Kate wanted to help me, but I sought her out at a time when she did not or could not have the mental or physical time for change, or perhaps she disagreed with my ideas. I wonder if approaching Kate in the summer before the course was set would have made a difference. It may be that in her department change takes a long time, and needs to involve a number of people. I have to question, though, in such a tightly woven course, where there is so much content to cover and the information is seen as tools rather than ideas and constructs, if writing skills are not valued as highly as the speedy acquisition of knowledge. This theme is common in all three participants: there is

a curriculum to cover, and the curriculum consists of content, as opposed to learning outcomes that combine skills and knowledge.

And yet, when assignments require a student to write, it tests the student's writing ability. It does not develop writing ability simply by requiring the student to write. Assignments designed with attention paid to how it can develop the required writing skills, and the feedback to support that long-term development, are assignments that teach writing. After the research period with Kate, I believe that, generally speaking, writing instruction is rarely explicit and developmental, but often tested through the existing assignment and feedback design.

Such assignment and feedback design suggests the underlying belief of the instructors and course developers that students are expected to write at a certain level when they enter the program. If they cannot write at this level, then it is up to the students to seek help at office hours and through the departmental writing tutor (whose background is creative writing). Students must also determine how to apply the feedback they are given to the next assignment. Support exists in a limited way within the assignment and feedback design, and the student, who is already incredibly busy in this competitive program of study, must make up for the writing skills that she or he lacks.

From this case I learned that in order to have an effective connection with instructors, I need to work with an interested instructor with a more long-term and bigger-picture approach in mind. By making the instructor feel supported, rather than taught, we can collaborate to make assignment and feedback design changes. Supporting an instructor through such change requires a longer period of time, I think, and must acknowledge the larger program of which the course is just one part. While each course

can better support the learning needs of international graduate EAL students, ideally the courses could work together to incorporate this support rather than add it on.

As for lessons regarding myself, in order to learn how to better support instructors, I need to learn how to better work with them. Through this case more than the other two I found myself stymied. I wanted to connect with Kate and to offer her suggestions that she would find useful, but in attempting to be useful I likely put her off deeper engagement in my research. Her initial eagerness conflicted with the constricted situation in which she taught, and I did not know how to support her when she had little control over the course and the syllabus. Third, I came to realize that when I work with instructors as a researcher or through my work, I cannot dismiss the ramifications – real or imagined – that the instructors face. Receiving feedback on one's teaching can be uncomfortable. Feeling vulnerable in front of another member of the university community is also uncomfortable. Not participating in this study may have been perceived as unkind to a well-respected director of the Learning and Teaching Centre. While my intentions were pure, I did not recognize what a fraught environment supporting instructors exists within.

# Chapter 7: Themes, Lessons and New Areas

*This morning I received an email from one of my tutors. Over the weekend a graduate student, new to Canada, came to see her at the Writing Centre. Apparently this student cried and cried; she was overwhelmed by being asked to learn, participate, and demonstrate knowledge in ways so different from what she is used to. The expectation is that she will "catch up" by taking extra courses; her graduate advisor told me that she must have "slipped through" the admissions process, even though this student won an entrance award from the department* (Research Journal entry, September 21, 2009).

In my job I receive emails like this often. When giving talks to various units around campus, I hear about 'the ESL problem' as if it is a wrong to be righted. Hearing and reading this negative talk about students who come to Canada to study in their second language feeds my passion to research how to support these students in their writing skills development, and to support their instructors to better support these students. This passion led me to ask how I could better support these instructors. To provide insight and possible answers, I conducted these three case studies. Now that I have detailed each case study, I can synthesize the three in a cross-case analysis. According to Yin (2003) and Stake (1995), cross-case synthesis and analysis is a process of finding themes across the cases that can help me, the researcher, understand how to work with instructors. This chapter covers these themes and the lessons learned from them that address the context in which I work with instructors. It also includes two areas of research that I was unfamiliar with until I was writing this dissertation; these two areas are discussed to discern how they may have altered my research.

### There is an unclear differentiation of EAL and non-EAL students.

The instructors to some degree recognized the unique challenges that international students with EAL face, but the amount of writing instruction explicitly included in the curriculum was sparse. They thought this amount of instruction was sufficient because they thought it would be supplemented by the work students were expected to do outside of class on their own. This outside work was to improve their written English on their own, and to seek out an editor or student services such as the Writing Centre. Students were expected to identify themselves as needing assistance, and to seek out help in the construction of their assignments. Reminding students of what help is available and when they should access it (i.e., early on in the semester) gave students the responsibility for the development of their writing skills. However, Angelova and Riasantseva (1999) found in their case study of international graduate students that the students were usually unaware of the quality and quantity of writing that a graduate program in North America would entail. Therefore, does telling students to seek help before an assignment is due support the graduate student? Does it teach them how to write 'better?' Possibly, but not as well as ongoing support from course instructors. Referring students to outside services in part defers the responsibility of writing instruction onto other units on campus and onto the students. While these supports exist to help students with their writing skills, they are not meant to take the place of discipline-specific writing instruction from professors. This issue needs to be addressed through work with instructors, which is, of course, the reason for my research. I need to learn how to better work with instructors so that there can be more writing support built in to the curriculum.

If more writing support is not added to the curriculum, and students are expected to seek outside assistance, then the curriculum model is one of addition, not

accommodation. In this model students are expected to do outside of class what is necessary to be at the level they are supposed to be at. As well as engaging fully with the content of the course, international students are expected to cope with the additional layer of language. Aaron perceived that this layer meant the international students would spend more time reading a text before being able to engage in its ideas and analyze its arguments. Given that the texts the students engaged in for his class were often English translations of complex pieces of writing in other languages, the international students were doubly disadvantaged. Reading such a text requires knowing what each sentence means, but also knowing how the text is constructed. This led to what Aaron described as the issue of not seeing the mosaic for the tiles. While he believed that this is not necessarily just an issue for international EAL students, these students were more likely to have this issue than the students he has taught who have English as a first language. Therefore, students who do not have English as a first language need to apply themselves to learning the English they needed for their graduate degree, in addition to the other requirements. Like Aaron, Kate and Helena expected the students to seek outside help in order to improve their writing skills.

There are two reasons why the "addition" model is used, I think. First, the three instructors believed that there were not significant differences in the needs and understandings of international graduate students writing in their second language. Aaron noted that grammar is a problem for both native and non-native students. The one difference that non-native speakers have, he felt, was that they have an additional translation step to engage in. Like Aaron, Helena did not distinguish between the two groups of students in terms of the quality of writing. What she distinguished, though, is

the reason for grammatical mistakes. For students who have English as a first language, she perceived that errors occur because of carelessness. For students who do not have English as a first language, she thought carelessness plays less of a role, and that the reason would depend on the person and how they were educated, especially in terms of language teaching. Kate, however, thought her students are for the most part good writers, but the international students had a more difficult time producing grammatically correct and clear texts that are constructed of simple sentences. While she made the distinction between native and non-native speakers of English, she indicated that this distinction was within the students' ability to overcome. She also stated that while the slides that Team China created were grammatically flawed, the mistakes were small and did not interfere with meaning, yet they seemed to be problematic to her. The content, though, occasionally missed the mark due to culturally-bound assignments and the students' interpretations of them. Overall, the three instructors did not perceive international graduate students as having such different needs to support their development of their academic writing skills beyond grammar correction and a tolerance of grammatical mistakes. Because these needs were not determined to be specific and severe, they may have been considered as less important than other student needs. The main point was that these students were expected to catch up, but there seemed to be little understanding of how or what that looked like. The remediation these students were expected to go through was on top of the heavy cognitive load that their courses demand.

The lack of distinction between native and non-native writers is a minimization of the differences that do in fact exist. Because the extra work required of the international student was considered separate from what goes on in the course and in the class, it was

not seen by the other students, and might have been invisible to the instructor. One result of not identifying this student set of distinct needs is that these students were not integrated from where they were at when they entered the course, nor were their differences recognized and accommodated. The support the students received was one-to-one with the instructor, outside of class, or with a tutor. It was not a part of the learning that happened in the course with fellow students. This separation creates a poignant loss as learning to work with others across cultural assumptions and with different skill sets and knowledge can be a deep learning experience for all. Providing students with a framework for interaction and co-support gives them extra opportunities to learn. Facilitating international students' integration into the classroom, curriculum, and writing can also prepare domestic students to work in "the real world," whether that is with international students in their own classes, or with coworkers from different backgrounds. When difference is minimized, the opportunity to learn from it is also minimized. If more of the work that international students were expected to do outside of the parameters of their coursework and program were actually a part of the coursework and program, then this amount of work could be more easily recognized and accommodated by the instructors and fellow students.

### There is a lack of knowledge of how to teach writing.

A second reason for not separating out the needs of international graduate students may have been that the instructors are not trained how to teach writing to their students, and as a result, the support that these particular students needed in the development of their writing skills was not explicitly, specifically addressed. I was surprised to find out how little written material was handed out to students. One

instructor had no official course syllabus, despite the university's requirement that there be one for every course. Instead, he gave the instructions for the writing assignments verbally. Another had lists of what she wanted students to know. The third instructor had most of her course online, so there were some documents available. This small amount of documents informed me that instructors might be unaware of how the syllabus or assignment descriptions can serve as support mechanisms for students. Being able to revisit the assignment guidelines throughout their work allows them multiple interactions with the guidelines and the opportunity to check their final assignment against these guidelines. It also gives students the option to take that assignment paper to, for instance, the Writing Centre, to work with a tutor to ensure that the student understands the assignment, or that his/her paper fulfills the criteria.

It seemed to me that the instructors taught writing in an ad hoc or even post hoc way, through feedback on finished drafts or by addressing common errors in the class. In none of the conversations that I had with the instructors did I sense that they are knowledgeable of the students' writing process in general, although Aaron and Helena are aware of their own second-language writing processes. While writing is one of the few methods that students use to demonstrate mastery of course content in the university setting, development of this skill is not specifically addressed in these graduate courses. Because it is not specifically addressed, instructors may feel that the explicit writing instruction that they do in fact provide is a bonus to the course content, rather than a part of the course content. Writing skill, then, is assumed to be secondary to the course content, although it is the means through which students often demonstrate their knowledge. While it may seem surprising that instructors do not teach writing given its

integral nature to graduate work, it fits well with how universities have traditionally operated. The qualifications for teaching a subject are often simply knowledge of the subject and research skills in the area, not the ability to and experience in teaching the subject (Huber, 2004). The positioning of instructional skills in the shadow of research skills and publications further relegates writing instruction into an even lower position. As these traditions are changing, it is integral that I know how to better support instructors in the development of their course material, so that writing supports for international graduate students are inherent in the course itself.

There is an interesting point to add to this analysis: the differences between how Aaron and Helena saw themselves in their role of instructor. Aaron had a long-term view of student writing skill development, while Helena felt pressed to have students write very well by the end of the first semester of graduate school. Helena might argue that as she was the only instructor who demanded good writing from the cohort, it was unethical to lower her standards. From this perspective, Aaron had the luxury of allowing students to develop at their own pace, knowing that other faculty members would continue supporting their writing development as they move through their courses.

However, Aaron's long-term perspective might also be based on his experience as an ESL teacher in his early teaching career. While Helena and he can both draw on their experiences as successful second-language learners, Aaron had experience teaching the grammar, rhetoric and conventions of the English language. He was a trained language teacher, he may have been aware of the relative importance of different kinds of errors. As a result, he may have felt more confident not marking every error and giving the provisional student "space to write." Aaron's long-term approach and Helena's desire

to teach students now what they need to know for the rest of their studies both speak to the issue of responsibility. There is recognition that someone need to be responsible for these students' writing development.

### Instructors feel frustrated.

All three participants indicated to me how frustrated they felt. Kate was frustrated that students did not seem to readily accept that clear and concise is the preferred writing style. She was also frustrated that students were given permission by other instructors to form their own groups, which allowed for student self-segregation. For Aaron, his frustration was clear in his discussion of the provisional student. He has to design the course and its assignments with some assumptions, and the department admitted a student that, as provisional, had not yet demonstrated a level of English that would allow her to succeed in his course.

Helena felt frustrated with the general state of writing in the Sciences, and of writing education. She felt that before students come to her class, they do not take courses in writing that emphasize the need for care and correctness. In the Master's program, only her course focuses on the importance of writing, and as her course falls in the graduate student's first semester, there is a long break between that course and the time when the students begin to write their theses. As well, a number of the Math students have EAL, and their supervisors have EAL, and Helena worried that this means the theses will not be in correct English. Worse, except for the top few journals in the field, articles are published as they are received rather than going through an editorial process first. According to Helena, this sets a standard for sloppy writing and citation. In

an environment of frustration, it is very difficult to have the energy and enthusiasm required for revisiting one's teaching and making changes.

These themes are important because they inform my future work with instructors. I know now that instructors may recognize that there is a difference between students who have English as a first language and those who have EAL, but they may not have support for their difference built in to their course. They may not even feel that those supports are necessary. This will influence how I approach assignment and feedback design with instructors who may feel that students should catch up on their own time. The lack of knowledge of how to teach writing is interesting to me because it tells me that instructors use writing to have students demonstrate knowledge, but they are not teaching the means through which the knowledge is demonstrated. This is not just a curriculum issue, but an instructional issue, because it signals a gap between the course's learning outcomes and instructional methods. Rather than point out why writing instruction is necessary to the student, I can focus instead on gently pointing out how their assignments are testing something they are not teaching. Knowledge of the last theme, instructor frustration, informs me of the context in which I work with instructors. I will have to listen to the tensions and frustrations of instructors before we can talk about assignment and feedback design. These three themes have informed the following chapter, which answers my research question about how I can better support instructors to develop writing supports for students.

## Two areas new to me

In addition to these three themes, though, I can see now that my study needed to hinge on an understanding of two areas I did not know really know about before I started writing about my research: faculty development and the parameters of dual-role research.

### Faculty development

I had thought that faculty development was about instructional design, not about curriculum and assignment design. Now, however, I understand how important it is to comprehending the answers to my research questions. Not knowing this field of literature well is a major limitation of my study, both in the research and the discussion stages. What I can gather from a superficial analysis is that because teaching has been under-valued in higher education, teachers may not be used to talking about it, researching it, and reflecting on it (Brookfield, 1995; Edington & Hunt, 1996; Huber, 2005). Because of this lack of discussion and focus on teaching, what constitutes "good teaching" (Biggs, 2003) may not be based on sound pedagogical knowledge and theories of learning; it is an "implicit theory of teaching" (p. 7) that can remain unanalyzed and unchallenged despite the changing and diversifying student body.

One reason why this implicit pedagogy can remain unchallenged is because teaching is something done alone and in silence (Brookfield, 1995). While teaching is not a solitary activity as it occurs in the presence of students, it is solitary in that one practices it alone. While this practice may be highly valued by the students, it is not highly valued by the institution in which the teaching takes place. Teaching is not the main point of discussion at departmental meetings in a way that encourages a sharing of and reflection on one's teaching practice. As a result, faculty members who have taught

for a while without having been explicitly taught how to teach are not used to discussing their teaching. In particular, instructors may feel uncomfortable discussing their practice with educational developers. While Leuze (1996, p. 2) notes that one-on-one discussions with faculty are a useful way to communicate with instructors because of their face-to-face interaction and individualized attention, exactly how helpful these sessions are is as yet unknown. It may be that these one-on-one consultations are more effective when held with a peer – not an LTC professional who is in the role of "expert," but a faculty member from one's own department.

In addition to building a teaching community in one's own department, an instructor can engage in an analysis of their teaching called the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). By bringing teaching into the realm of research, the SoTL movement aims to ameliorate the value of teaching in a research-oriented institution (Bender, 2005). Moreover, the publication of the findings of their research on teaching may help place teaching more prominently in the list of criteria on which faculty are judged. However, in some institutions, departments and fields, SoTL is new enough to be thought of sceptically, leading to the idea that "work *on* teaching should count *as* teaching" (Huber, 2004).

Whether an instructor is supported by a community in his or her discipline, or through engaging in SoTL, or both, the instructor can feel more confident in engaging in reflective practice. This reflective practice, whether framed as a conversation with a mentor or as a research project, is one of the necessary conditions for change. In turn, change can mean better teaching by addresses the diverse needs of a diverse student body. In order for this shift to good teaching to take place, there need to be departmental

and institutional changes (Biggs, 2003). Teaching needs to be rewarded in ways other than simple teaching awards, so that the "resources and rewards … flow to those individuals and departments that continually strive to improve their teaching" (p. 274). When good teaching is valued in real ways, instructors and departments will seek ways to improve the instruction they provide. When good teaching is provided, more students learn more. This includes those students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

I gained another understanding from this field of faculty development: critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995) and reflective teaching (Biggs, 2003) are seldom rewarded with tenure and promotion. In fact, Brookfield (1995) argues that how teaching is evaluated and rewarded is often at odds with faculty development. Being focused on one's teaching takes time away from research and other professorial responsibilities. Because of this tension, it is important to give faculty other reasons to be reflective and critical of their teaching. One reason can be investigation and publication regarding one's own teaching practice, as typified by the SoTL movement. Another is for educational developers to encourage faculty by informing them of the direct benefits of their teaching reflection. Some of these benefits are an alignment between one's teaching philosophy and teaching practice; a renewed interest and engagement with one's teaching; and, the knowledge that those who teach well change the world (Brookfield, 1995). After a look at the literature in this field, I see that there are two avenues LTCs and the educational developers within them can follow: develop a community or bestow information. It may be that both avenues are the right road to take, but in order to be one who bestows

knowledge, it is essential to know *how* to bestow it. This in particular is what I can learn from the field of faculty development.

### Dual-role research

I have mentioned in this dissertation that the participants may have felt that they had to participate in this study because of my professional role at the LTC, even though I was clear from the outset that I was acting in my role of graduate-student researcher. In reading again about dual-role research as I write this chapter, I know that if I already have a relationship with the participants through my work, then I can be assumed to have a power-over relationship. Moreover, this dual-role relationship is deepened by the use of the research results in publications such as a thesis (Human Research Ethics Office, 2008). To me, there was no power-over relationship because instructors are seen to outrank administrative staff and because I assumed that very few people other than the members of my committee would read my dissertation. However, to the participants, there may have been a power-over relationship either because of my role in the LTC or because of the possible publication of my dissertation.

In reading more about dual-role research, I see that there is a human element to the action research project (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006). Human relationships are a part of action research, a part of being a member of a medium-size university, and a part of living in a medium-sized city on an island. Avoiding unintentional coercion is difficult, but the researcher can be aware of his or her power (real or not) and can reflect throughout the action research cycle "to examine these relationships and the potential for coercion" (p. 125). While I am newly aware of the dual-role researcher conundrum, it certainly helps me understand my blurred role in my research, why the participants may

have joined the study, and that I might have been more vigilant in my role of reflective researcher.

# Chapter 8: How Can I Work With Instructors?

## Working as me

In addition to learning from the three themes and the field of faculty development and the topic of dual-role research, I learned a great deal about myself. Learning about myself was the reason why I chose to engage in an action research project; by reflecting on my practice, I could answer my research question of how to more effectively work with instructors. I wanted to know better how to bring together what I know as an educational developer and what the instructor knows as a subject specialist, researcher, and as a teacher. The hope was that such an extended collaboration would produce a deeper understanding for both of us of how the writing assignments could look in that curriculum. However, our collaboration somewhat crumbled. Through this experience, I have learned three very important lessons about how I need to collaborate successfully in this environment. The first lesson is the importance of reflecting on and having an awareness of my lens. This lens represents the culture I come from, institutionally and pedagogically. The second lesson is the space in which we two instructors – the person from a given discipline and the person who is an educational developer – come together as a kind of "contact zone" (Pratt, 1998). The third lesson is that relationships, which traditionally are not highly valued in our workplace in higher education, are extremely important in order to foster dialogue, continue conversations, and allow for the necessary revisiting and development of our work together.

While the hermeneutic philosopher, Gadamer, would argue that removing one's lens is impossible, knowing one's lens is not. A person's lens is shaped by one's history and culture, and because we are people born into a culture and are therefore acculturated,

"we can never shed our prejudices, and our lens is ever-present" (Coe, 2009, p. 924). Knowing the lens then means understanding how one sees based on who one is, and being aware of that when interacting with others. By critically analyzing my lens, I learned that I approach people with a naivety. At the beginning of the study I thought that it would be simple to work with someone on curricular changes. Once I shared with instructors how assignment and feedback redesign would foster the development of academic writing skills in their students, I thought it would be clear how integral they are to include in a curriculum. For example, I showed them how to focus their feedback on written assignments (Leki, 1990; Straub, 2000; Zhu, 2004) and how to use rubrics to clarify expectations (Arter, 2006; Bolton, 2006; Diller & Phelps, 2008; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). It would be like creating a Venn diagram, I thought, with my knowledge and the knowledge of the other instructor overlapping to create ground from which great curriculum would grow. I see now that I had confused my roles of researcher and professional. The participants had not actually asked for my knowledge. The nature of our relationship was likely different in my eyes and in the eyes of the participants. We started out with different ideas of what would happen in our relationship, and because I conflated my roles – which the participants may have done as well – I think the experience has taught me that a simple Venn diagram was not possible.

The failing of this Venn diagram I was attempting to co-produce led to serious self-scrutiny. Through self-reflection I learned that another aspect of my lens involves my belief that I know how to design assignments better than the other instructors for their students; I assumed dominance of my knowledge over theirs. Because it is difficult to listen when talking, I did not collaborate as much as I directed. Directing is linked to the

colonial impulse. The colonial impulse stems from the belief that I am right, and with this position as the one who is right comes an "assumed dominance" (Donahue, 2009). Without careful analysis of and constant attention to my lens, I was guilty of being colonial to my supposed "co"-participants. Identifying the lens and acknowledging its potential role in my interactions with the instructors I worked with could have led to a wonderful creation of something new in terms of the curriculum, our relationship, and my understanding of the instructor's discipline.

Once my colonial impulse became apparent to me, so did an embarrassing streak of faux liberalism. Faux liberalism combines an appearance of being open-minded to and accepting of the ideas of others, with an inner rigidity stemming from the belief that you are, in fact, right, and by extension, the others are wrong or at a minimum, uninformed. For me this falseness is well demonstrated by the phrase, "I can't stand intolerance," and even better by the Hebrew "Ma'vett la' kana'ïm," which can be translated as "Death to the zealots!" By being so sure that I was right about how to help international graduate students, I overshadowed the participants. As the phrase "I can't stand intolerance" implies, in my rush to help some, I may have hurt, or at the minimum, put off, others. And as the other phrase cheekily implies, by proclaiming "death to the zealots," I showed my lens for what it is: colonial, with an assumed dominance and rightness, and opaque to no one but myself.

However, more important than simply avoiding colonizing behaviour is identifying and acknowledging it. Donahue (2009) warns "if we tell ourselves to be careful not to colonize, we must be seeing ourselves as the dominant group" (p. 228). So, rather than worry about my tendency to colonize when it comes to assignment design, I

can deconstruct and then learn from this experience. I can also share my experience and turn this critical self-scrutiny into a critical conversation. Sharing such an uncomfortable experience allows for what can be termed a "messy conversation" (Johnsen, Pacht, van Slyck & Tsao, 2009, p. 121)) about why things went wrong. Much writing about teaching focuses on the success stories, as evidenced in journal sections such as "What Worked for Me" in *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, and if a teaching "mess" is shared, it is quickly followed with a "solution." This lack of focus on messes "hinders our whole-hearted engagement in the SoTL [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning] movement despite its value for the college and students" (p. 121). Best practices can of course be a description of a mess followed by a way to prevent it from happening again, but best practices can also be examples of what can go wrong, followed by an analysis of why it went wrong. Such a post-mortem allows us as the tellers and as those engaged in dialogue to deconstruct the messy situation in a critical and meaningful way, recasting the mess as a teachable moment.

The second lesson I learned is that when going forward with more work with more instructors, I need to not only keep an eye on my lens, but to think of the space in which I do this work as a "contact zone." Pratt (1998, p. 173) uses this term "to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other." While Pratt's original discussion was about cultures coming together through texts and their readers in the composition classroom, it has been applied to other situations where two or more cultures meet. Applying the concept of a contact zone instead of a Venn diagram opens up the space between the instructor and me from a mere overlap to a space that is sometimes contested, heated, and fraught. It is fraught because talking about how you

teach and why reveals your deeper values and beliefs about whom we teach and who we are as teachers. Such analysis can be uncomfortable for both parties.

The contact zone is also where educational cultures come together. The university itself is one culture, made up of a patchwork of subcultures. Working together in the contact zone creates an unknown; instead of being part my culture, part your culture, it will be a hybrid in ways we cannot predict or even control (Bhabha, 1990). Such a space invites one to acknowledge that the process of creation – in this case, curricular creation – will require soft steps and ongoing reflection. The tension must be eased and egos soothed if we are to collaborate and build consensus.

This soothing is possible when we trust in our relationships, so in our contact zone the focus therefore must be on fostering and maintaining a good relationship with one another. A good relationship in this context requires ongoing contact; this is the third lesson I learned. The amount of contact will be more frequent than infrequent, and the development of curricular or instructional changes will be slow. A slow and soft approach allows for follow-up, and a revisiting of words said and ideas shared. We can create something, try it out, and then rework it, knowing that we were simply experimenting to try to create more and better learning. The results will be gradual and cumulative, because of the nature of this long, slow relationship with its ongoing assessment of changes made. Messy conversations will be a natural part of the contact zone, leading to discomfort and critical scrutiny of self and one's practices in the classroom, the office, and the relationships. This discomfort should not be avoided, but explored, because of the growth that it can yield.

### My perception of research

I have also learned that doing research is not straightforward. The first example of this I noticed is that it was difficult for me to maintain my role of researcher in this study. My professional and researcher roles kept blurring for me, and likely blurred for the participants as well, because they first met me through my work, not through my studies. When doing research in the future I will put in place measures that help keep these two roles separate, such as recruiting participants from a different institution. At a medium-sized institution in a small city it may be almost impossible to keep the two roles separate in the eyes of the participants. And, as I have a richer history as a worker in a support role than I do as a researcher, it seems almost my default position to become fully involved in a situation.

In fact, how much to participate in the research was another issue for me. I planned on interacting with the participants so we could collaborate and work together, and as mentioned throughout these last few chapters, I inserted myself too much in the research process, which made it a teaching process. However, my intention embarking on this research was not to observe, collect and then analyze the data; my intention was to be actively involved with the participants. The fuzzy line of how much to interact with the participants and how much to guide the research process is confusing and frustrating to me, but not unusual for action research which often involves dual roles. Even now I am unsure by how much I crossed the line, and how to recognize that point in my future interactions with instructors. Instead, I have the knowledge of the lessons described in the above section of paying attention to my lens, my colonial impulse, and the importance of relationships to guide me.

### Interacting with instructors

Through this research project I have learned that there needs to be more in place for significant change to assignment and feedback design to occur. For example, the instructors did not view international students with EAL as having very different needs than their native English-speaking domestic colleagues. My assumption starting this research was that the deficit model of EAL learners, as so aptly described by Zamel (1995b), which views students to be less ready and fully responsible for catching up, would not be an issue to overcome. Yet, the instructors indicated to me that international students need to catch up outside of class. This belief underlies the pedagogical choices instructors make. If an instructor does not believe it is his or her role to accommodate such a difference – if in fact these students are seen as having difference – then the instructor and I are coming at the issue of support from very different places. These different places underscore the importance of my research question: how could I have better supported these instructors? Their waning interest informed me that what I did, did not work well. Working with instructors at a different institution is not part of my job, so I need to look at what I could have done differently that can be done in my job. One idea is that rather than ongoing but occasional discussions, I could have provided an intensive session. Originally I decided upon the "ongoing approach" as I believed I was more likely to influence change if contact was repeated and pleasant. Perhaps an end-of-semester follow-up to the short intensive session would have been a more successful strategy. Definitely listening more and responding to what I understood of the instructors' needs would have been a more successful strategy for researching and interacting.

Before the semester may have been better timing, as could have post-course. In my job I work with instructors who have self-selected themselves to improve their

assignment and feedback design. I feel that in this situation – self-selected participants with an acknowledged need for support and at a time more convenient to them – my research would have been more successful. However, my intent with this research project was to figure out how to offer support to those who have not yet sought it, and achieve some success in this sort of educational outreach venture. Whether instructors seek me out or not, this study has helped me compile a list of rules that will guide my future interactions with instructors when we are discussing assignment and feedback design.

**1. I need to be aware of timing.**

If I had approached the instructors well before the semester start, when they were digging out the course syllabus from the previous year, I may have been more successful in instigating change at the assignment and feedback design level. This would have allowed the instructor a chance to implement major change, allow for changes in the scheduling of assignments that might be needed, and to design new assignments, a rubric, and so on.

Alternatively, more change might have occurred if I worked with the instructor directly after the course finished. In my job, instructors often approach me for change support either directly before a course, or directly after. It is tempting to think I should have known better than to work with an instructor during a course, but I thought it would be interesting to support change *in situ,* with a particular cohort in mind. Working with instructors while they are teaching the course would create, I thought, multiple and ongoing opportunities to discuss assignment and feedback design as they arose. As well, in my job working with the instructor just before or just after the course is often a

singular occurrence, and I had thought that multiple occurrence would be an improvement.

Both are useful concepts for education, but it was my belief that in-time was more important than in-context. I felt that this was more Vygotskian because it mimics the concept of the assistant helping the learner with the task at hand. Providing help before or after the course divorces the help from the particular cohort of students and their issues, but, as I now realize, it may be the way instructors prefer to be helped. As well, it may indicate that the instructors want only a certain amount of information, or to make a limited amount of change. Learner preferences must be taken into consideration when planning educational activities. These preferences seem to be fairly clear: they want it before or after the course or in different ways. Reasons for this preference may include an increased cognitive load for the instructor when the course is mid-stream – as opposed to focusing on assignment and feedback design when it is more of an abstract proposition. Another reason may be that instructors may want only one-time help. I can follow-up on one-time help in order to further build relationships to allow for future interaction.

Another aspect is openness to learning, both the participants' and mine. You can show someone how to change something, they can believe that that change is good, but it does not necessarily follow that the person will create that change. This will be an interesting experiment to monitor in myself. I have learned much about how to more effectively interact with instructors around course design, and I believe that being more effective is a good thing. Will it follow that I will change how I interact with instructors? I certainly hope so and therefore it is something I will be watching for in my future interactions. Change is not as easy as I had made it out to be. As well, how open a person

is to a particular kind of change probably fluctuates during the semester, and is affected by how much energy and time they have available to put toward making that change; this leads back to the issue of timing.

**2. I need to be aware of context.**

My research shows that it is important to introduce change in the context of the instructor's course and discipline. There are three contexts to be aware of: if the instructors had had repeated encounters with the ideas I presented to them; the amount of autonomy the instructor feels she or he has in the course; and, how easily the suggested tools fit into the course as it currently exists.

Aaron was able to readily accept the tool of peer review and its philosophy of how deconstructing a text of a level similar to the students' is more helpful in a number of ways than if the students were to deconstruct a published, professionally edited, and/or translated text. I believe this was because Aaron had been exposed to this idea previously in a talk I gave to his department on assignment design, and possibly in other circumstances, so the seed of this idea had already been planted. That talk was one year prior to when I conducted my research. I remember feeling somewhat uncomfortable about it because of the lecture-style format; I prefer to introduce an idea about assignment design when the instructor has an assignment in front of him or her, so that it can be readily apparent what that assignment will look like when redesigned. Otherwise, too much talk can seem like a lot of theory, and can be easily dismissed as not applicable to the instructor's assignment. It was *he* who raised the topic of peer review at the start of our second conversation, and he wanted my support to figure out how best to implement it in his graduate class. Another reason why Aaron seemed open to implementing this

change was because he had already made other changes in previous semesters, such as paying attention to his feedback, which made this change easy to accept. However, Aaron was not ready to make that change in that particular semester. Perhaps he needed more time to figure out exactly how it would fit into his course, or, he liked the idea, accepted that it would be a good addition to his course, but did not wish to add it to the curriculum that particular semester. It is possible that Kate was less able to readily apply the suggestions because our encounters began that semester, whereas I first began talking to Aaron more than a year prior to this particular semester. As well, I had talked to Aaron's department in my role as member of the Learning and Teaching Centre, so it is possible that I had more credibility with him than I did with Kate.

As well, Kate may have been unable to as easily accept suggestions to assignment design because her course was shared. In hindsight I do not think that she had even that much control over the course. It is possible the course was designed by someone else and she was to step in and teach her assigned component. To make changes to it might insult the course designer. Or, it may be possible that any change to the course had to be agreed upon by all the instructors. As well, Kate was a newer instructor to the department, and she may have been hesitant to make changes that would draw negative attention to her. I thought that by making suggestions by explaining the tool plus the reasons to use it, instead of the philosophy and then one possible tool built on the philosophy, Kate might be more likely to implement it. However, I wonder if Kate thought that by being involved in the research with me that I would show her tricks of assignment and feedback design that did not alter the course in a significant way, and did not challenge the pedagogy behind the existing assignments and methods of feedback.

Compared to the other two instructors, Kate's situation looks far more constrained. Aaron's course was *his* course, so he may have felt more able to change it. Helena also was able to make immediate changes: in this course, she sent her students the rubric I mocked up for her. Both Aaron and Helena are professors at UVic (as opposed to Kate, who is a senior instructor) and as a result may feel more comfortable with course and instructional experimentation.

In all, the ideas and tools that were presented to the instructors were more likely to be successful if the instructor perceived himself or herself to be autonomous as the course instructor, and if the tools and ideas were suitable for where the instructor was "at" in terms of being ready and open to accept ideas for change. For Kate, change may have been easier if I had worked instead with the instructional team or the department. Even if she agreed with the instructional changes, both in technique and philosophy, she may have been frustrated in her attempts to make change occur at the classroom and curricular levels, even in her own component of the course. Overall, I approached instructors as if they were able to make changes, which they should be able to do, given that they are the ones who know the students and their needs each semester. For Aaron and Helena, approaching them as such may have bolstered their confidence to make changes, but for Kate, it may have reminded her that although she was the instructor of her section of the course, she had little actual control over how she taught it. Teaching a course that you do not feel able to adapt to your students and your personal philosophies of teaching and learning can be uncomfortable. Doing so semester after semester may dull that feeling, but perhaps my conversations with Kate reminded her of that discomfort.

**3. I must remember that the tool needs to fit the course; the philosophy can follow.**

While Aaron was able to adapt the tool of peer review to suit a need of his students I had not thought of – practice at taking apart undergraduate papers in their TA positions – this is likely because the tool fit very nicely into his course and his discipline. The students had to write a great deal, and they will mark a great deal of writing. As well, he saw peer review as creating a sense of community that he felt was lacking in the department; this is another benefit of peer review that I had not mentioned to him. This tool fit his course, and satisfied a number of graduate-student needs. As a result, he was open to tweaking the activity to better suit his course and students.

Likewise, Helena was able to easily apply the rubric, partly because it filled a need she had to quantify her grading. While the philosophy of this rubric, which is to provide students with a clear understanding of how their paper will be marked and how important certain qualities of it are, is not employed here, its tool is, and perhaps that is better than not using it at all. It may be that successfully using the tool as a marking device for one or two semesters will lead to Helena handing it out to students before the assignment is due. Another possibility is that Helena will show her colleagues the rubric during a departmental meeting to start a conversation about the importance of consistency in standards of good writing. Providing her with a tool that she could slip right into her course meant that she was more likely to use it that semester.

**4. I must remember that movement is small and slow.**

One phrase I heard from all the instructors was "I'll try that next semester." There are two thoughts that I have about this phrase. One, I think it signals the polite turning down of an idea. A second way of interpreting the phrase is as resistance, even though

they now know that their current methods do not fully meet the needs of international students in need of writing skill support. However, as this interpretation assumes a negative stance, I must give the participants the benefit of the doubt. Another way to interpret the phrase is to think of it as a delay mechanism. The instructor may need more time and thought on the matter of change. The ideas may have caused a perturbation in the instructor's philosophies of teaching and learning, and the instructor would like time to think through this. Or, the instructor may not be sure he or she wants to use a particular idea, or how it could work in the existing curriculum. It may in fact mean exactly what the words say: next semester, the given idea will be tried.

I was naïve in my assumption that I could create change quickly and on a large scale. I have learned to be happy that a rubric is now being used in a course, even if it is not being used to its full capacity to support student writing. Talking through with an instructor the concept of peer review, and having him be excited to use it in his next course, did not give me the kind of data I was hoping for, but I know now that this was movement, not immediate, but not small, either. I also assumed that qualitative research is as straightforward as asking the questions and getting the answers. As it turns out, my questions were neither clearly nor directly answered, most likely because they invoked discomfort about what the instructors had been doing up until that point, and further discomfort about continuing with those same assignments and methods of feedback now that they have been questioned about them. Moreover, the questions that the participants had were not answered. I had hoped that my approach, marked by its intensity in interaction and frequency, would be a good way to interact with instructors. As it turns out, my approach did not support the instructors as well as I had initially intended.

Kate spoke to me very little about assignment design, but I believe that she was thankful to have an outside ear to express her concerns about the issues inherent in allowing students to self-segregate. Looking back I see that my expectations were too great. I am now content with smaller and slower movements. In one semester it may have been very difficult to create change. I was used to significant, measurable change in my work with the instructors who sought my help, but clearly this is not to be expected when instructors are approached rather than approaching me. Introducing one idea or concept may have been a more comfortable pace of change for these instructors. If I take a long-term view, I can be settled with the pace and kind of change. As well, I now wonder who, in my professional role, I should focus on: those who come to me for support, or those who do not. And, if I focus on those who do not, how do I know who I should seek out? After my research experience, I am more aware of how change happens. I am also more aware of how learning happens: it happens when someone is ready to learn. This is true for me; it took me a long while to understand why my research did not go as I had planned. This research project has helped me understand who I am as a researcher, and how to more effectively interact with instructors in the future.

**5. I need to pay attention to the tensions.**

In order to make appropriate suggestions to these instructors, I had to listen to their frustrations. Helena was frustrated because she felt she was alone in her attempts to have students understand the professional importance of good writing skills. Aaron was frustrated because the department accepted a provisional student without the requisite TOEFL score. Kate was frustrated because she felt a partner university, which her department sought out, had sent an exchange student with minimal English skills. She

was also frustrated with the decision to allow students to form their own working groups. She felt that she had minimal control over the teaching situation, and she foresaw that problems would occur. Their frustrations taught me what parameters they were working within and how to approach the concepts of assignment and feedback design within them.

Sometimes the frustrations arose from the tensions that instructors work within. As Aaron pointed out, there is a numbers game that can be at work that puts students in a class before they have the skills to be able to succeed in it. Another tension is that to plan a course you assume a set of skills and base knowledge that the students have. What do you do when some of the students, particularly international students and/or students with EAL, are not at that level? This tension affects the classroom, the planning and marking of assignments, and can present different challenges each semester. Accommodating such differences can be difficult, especially when the course is under way. For graduate students in the Sciences, finding someone who can understand their paper can be a challenge, and there is a departmental culture that tells students that a writing centre tutor would be unable to help, as the reader must be able to understand the content (which is not so). While Helena might recommend that students go to TWC, she is the one voice that tells them that an outsider can help them with their writing, and that writing is important. Graduate students in the Faculty of Business are encouraged to use the writing tutor the program provides, but the tutor is scheduled to work just eight hours a week for more than forty students, all of them having papers due at the same time, and classes an average of nine hours a day.

Another tension resides within the instructors. This is the tension of how much instructors think it is their responsibility to support students in the development of their

writing skills. For example, one instructor might think that he or she can and should make changes to the assignment and feedback design in his or her course so that the students are better supported. Another instructor might think that as long as students are told what remediation is available outside the class, students are supported in their writing development. Yet another might feel that teaching writing is already inherent in the course, and that the presence of writing signals the presence of writing instruction. All of these instructors feel comfortable with their perspectives on writing instruction and support, but many of them bemoan their students' writing abilities. The responsibility is, in great part, shifted onto the student. The student, however, may be unaware of his or her writing issues, or if aware, unsure of how to improve them in the quickest manner. The result is a gap between what the instructors want and are willing to do, and what the students know about writing and are capable of improving on their own, outside of class. That gap will continue to exist until writing is taught through assignment and feedback design, and yet making that sort of pedagogical and curricular change seems beyond what some instructors are capable of undertaking. This then is the ultimate tension: there will be no movement, until there is movement, but movement seems very difficult when it requires so much from the instructors.

# Chapter 9: Going Forward

*"I want to share an incident with you that you might find interesting. Do you remember we were talking about how teaching is very personal, and that might be a reason (the reason?) why the participants became less eager over the semester? So today I was giving a one-hour very casual talk, at the request of Ed Ishiguro, to the participants in the LTC's Curriculum Design Workshop. I was talking about assignment design. This one instructor became very angry and accused me of a) lying about having taught a full course load and b) trying to make her feel bad about her teaching practices. … So here's this woman, at a weeklong retreat to redesign some curriculum, voluntarily, who is getting overwhelmed by suggestions. What's the most interesting, though, is that I was coming at it from a "here's this method, and it's based on this principle" approach, and she stopped me and said, "I just want tricks to get through it." I'm starting to think that teaching is not only very personal and where we are vulnerable, it's also so totally raw if we suspect we're not doing the best job we could be doing. Maybe saying that Assignment Design A, for example, is more accommodating to students who have English as an additional language, can be interpreted by an instructor as "you as a person are not accommodating and are therefore less liberal-minded than you think".* – excerpt from an email I sent my supervisor, Dr. Kathy Sanford, December 10, 2009.

Teaching at the university level is an interesting proposition because often the credentials for being hired have little to do with one's ability and experience in teaching. An academic who is not taught how to teach but is interested in being a good instructor will likely use a method of teaching developed through trial and error and asking

colleagues questions as they arise. Such an approach can create a pedagogy that allows the instructor to teach, but the pedagogy is not necessarily his or her own, nor is it likely to be an informed and thought-out approach. Therefore, we can be confident in our teaching if we figure out a way to do it, but when we are presented with what our teaching reflects about us as educators, it can be uncomfortable. What lies beneath the surface of our teaching can show us to be less than well-trained educators.

We may see that how we teach and what we believe about learners and learning are at odds with one another. As we learn about and are given time to reflect on new ideas in instruction and accommodation of student needs, our previous ways of teaching, creating assignments and providing feedback on those assignments may need adjustment. Realizing that our educational responsibilities might be different than we had once thought, or that our methods do not match our true pedagogy, can be surprising. Once we become aware that the way in which we teach neither fully meets the needs of the students nor matches our own educational philosophies, we become aware of the discrepancies between how we do our jobs and how we think we should be doing our jobs. Awareness of this juxtaposition can lead to discomfort with one's current practices. This leads to a 'catch 22' of discomfort: to continue on as before is uncomfortable, and to make change is uncomfortable and requires effort. This is true for me as well, in my role as researcher and as an educational developer.

One reaction to this 'catch 22' is resistance. My own resistance was to seeing my way of interacting as inappropriate, and the result was that I continued on interacting according to what I thought was right. If I had not resisted, I could have adjusted my style of interaction to better meet the needs of the instructors. As well, the instructors in my

research came to demonstrate a kind of resistance toward our work together, by becoming increasingly difficult to contact. Resistance or defensiveness may be the result if an instructor is challenged to make change (Dall'Alba, 2005; Warrican, 2006; see also Chisolm & Elden, 1993). This resistance can also take the form of anger, as demonstrated in the incident included at the beginning of this chapter. It was also demonstrated by me, the PhD student, to my supervisor, when I was having a difficult time accepting my colonial role in the research process.

Another form of resistance is to ignore the opposing methods of instruction and learning philosophies and rely on "tricks" or other superficial change to ease one's mind. Anger, resistance, and superficial change are all bona fide reactions to the suggestion that deep change is not only recommended, but necessary if students' diverse needs are to be accommodated. The suggestion of being less sensitive to student needs and less responsive to learner difference could be interpreted as a negative judgment on an instructor's teaching methods, or worse, the instructor himself or herself. Given that teaching is a very personal thing, it may be almost impossible to separate oneself fully from one's teaching practices. This is so even if one has never been trained into the profession, or has had the time and guidance to review one's practices to ensure identification of and alignment with one's teaching philosophy.

This lack of education and time to review teaching practices may indicate that instructors work in environments that do not highly value good teaching. Instructors are also often overworked by a heavy teaching load in addition to research and service responsibilities. In addition to more responsibilities and more classes, instructors are teaching a very different student body than they did ten or twenty years ago due to an

increased awareness of diversity and the democratization of education (Biggs, 2003; Maher & Tetreault, 2007). In many institutions, including the University of Victoria, there are more students with EAL, international students, non-traditional students, and millennial students. Each of these groups of students comes to class with their own set of experiences and expectations of how a graduate class should be. Without time for discussion of the changes to the student body and training with new philosophies of teaching, some instructors are understandably frustrated and tired. As well, the job of instructor may now place a higher value on good teaching than was common in previous years. This change in job description and expectations without the necessary education available can be vexing for instructors. Each semester can be exhausting, and when one is exhausted, there is little time or energy available to make changes that go beyond the surface level.

In this environment of exhaustion, when do instructors find out about changes they can make to better suit the needs of their students? This is an important question because teaching cannot and should not be seen as a static set of practices. Teaching, like learning to write, is developmental, and there is no one who has reached such a state of perfection that there is not more to learn. Changes in the student body are inevitable, as is new research on how to be the best instructors we can be. Yet in the current postsecondary environment, one's teaching is deemed to be good or in need of improvement, not as a growing, changing and organic part of ourselves as instructors and scholars. If teaching is seen as a static skill, then instructors are not rewarded for reflecting on it and improving it on an ongoing basis. As reflection in isolation is challenging, and teaching is done mainly in isolation, then the creation of communities of

those interested in exploring their teaching is needed. These communities of practice can foster organized evaluation of teaching and learning, such as those in the SoTL movement, or they can serve as a safe place to discuss the difficulties of teaching. In addition, the development of graduate student instructional courses, departmental teaching awards, and vibrant Learning and Teaching Centres on many Canadian campuses are reasons to hope and expect that this acceptance of unchanging and undervalued teaching will be challenged.

Such a positive educational environment can allow the importance of writing instruction to emerge. If writing is absent from the subject matter of the course, then it is absent from the course curriculum. If it is absent from the curriculum then the department's overall curriculum for a graduate program should be scrutinized for where exactly writing is being taught. If writing in the discipline is absent in the graduate program then the question is whether writing is in fact important to that field. This is a rhetorical question, though, because writing as a skill and as a form of communication is necessary in almost all fields. Engineers need to write proposals and project updates. Mathematicians need to write patent applications. In fact, most jobs that require an education require writing skills, even if just for email communication. Moreover, many jobs that require an education require a well-written cover letter in order for candidates to be interviewed. Much as Ying (2003) found in his analysis of Taiwanese graduate students studying in the U.S., writing skills matter. They matter in graduate school success, success in the academy, and career success. Given the relative importance of writing in our studies and beyond, why do some graduate programs not provide explicit instruction in this integral skill?

The answer lies in the history of the university itself. Universities have traditionally been the location of scholarship of the few. As more universities and colleges have encouraged non-traditional students and students from various backgrounds to attend, the student body has changed (Biggs, 2003: Maher & Tetreault, 2007). While the educational philosophy of teaching the elite to be professors may have worked before, it no longer matches the student body. The method no longer matches the job market, either. According to Golde and Dore's (2001) survey of over 27 U.S. doctoral programs and their 4,000-plus students, at most 50% of doctoral students are hired into faculty positions. Even for the 50% who work in academia, the survey found that overall doctoral programs do not prepare students for the role of professor, which includes teaching. For the 50% who go into non-academic jobs, the skills that they bring with them are what can make them attractive to potential employers. Communication is one skill needed in many careers. So, whether students pursue a job inside or outside of the academy, being able to write well in English would serve them well.

It is clear that graduate students need to know how to write well, and that this instruction is often missing from their studies. One implication of this unmet need is that the curriculum of a program should include a writing-in-the-discipline component, and that component should be interwoven throughout the curriculum of the program as writing skills take time to improve. At the class, course, and program level, writing instruction needs to be included. Instructors and departments are both involved in this change. As well, universities need to support the inclusion of writing instruction in programs. While providing services, like a campus writing centre, can help students improve their writing, these outside services are only part of the solution. Writing tutors

cannot take the place of instructors who have extensive experience writing in a given discipline, nor should they. Both have a role to play. These are bigger issues than any one unit or level on campus, and it is the responsibility of many to support the development of student writing skills.

I, too, have a role to play. In my work with instructors who come to me for assignment and feedback design support, and with those who have not, I have learned how to be more successful. Repeated encounters, follow-up, strong relationships, and awareness of how everyone sees things differently will help me. I need to ensure that I do not dominate our discussions and that I am aware of the exhaustion and frustration that many of them may feel. Building a strong relationship with these instructors is the starting point of working together in a respectful and positive manner. In addition to my work with instructors, I can attempt to work with departments to encourage them to encourage instructors to learn how to teaching writing in their courses. The work that we do will be different, though, because the relationship-building stage will last a long time.

The role that I play can also be enhanced by drawing on concepts from other professions. Instead of thinking of myself as a knowledgeable person with ideas to share, I can reshape that role as a helper. I may have ideas and knowledge to share, but if I reframe my role to one of helping, then I can draw on the rich field of helping to guide how I give support to instructors. Helping is client-focused, listening-based, and promotes movement and self-challenge (Brammer, 1993; Egan, 1994).Because the movement and self-challenge aspects can threaten a client's esteem, integrity and independence (Carkhuff, 1987), it is important to proceed in a manner that is most supportive for the client. To do this the helper must closely attend to what the helpee is

saying both verbally and non-verbally, and must recognize that a lack of change action is the result of inertia – that what someone is doing now is easier than making a change (Egan, 1994). This idea connects to my earlier statements about the ultimate tension of recognizing that change is needed, but being too overwhelmed or exhausted to make that change.

To overcome this sense of being overwhelmed or exhausted, Egan suggests challenging clients to own their opportunities to learn. He also suggests challenging strengths rather than weaknesses, and linking challenge to action. This approach is opposite to what I have done previously in my work with instructors. Before I have noted gaps in curriculum and instruction rather than focusing on the existing strengths. I am excited to frame my approach from a "asset" stance rather than a "deficit" stance. The clients should choose what help they get, and what action they take, based on those benefits and how to capitalize on them. By attending to what the helpee communicates and allowing for action to come from the helpee rather than the helper, the helpee will become more involved in the process of change. The focus is on the client, not on the helper, but that is because of the helper's role of holding the spotlight on the client.

In order to hold this spotlight on the client and not become overly engaged in the changing, helping process, the helper needs to be engaged in a reading program, receiving regular feedback, and working on personal development (Brammar, 1993). In the past I have worked with instructors on my own, without consultation with other Learning and Teaching Centre consultants. To bolster my understanding of how to better help I can join with other consultants on campus who are engaged in supporting and helping roles. Engaging with other helpers, rather than with the client, regarding the

change process fosters detachment from one's own feelings and agenda, and should help me develop a stronger ability to be patient. As Brammar (1993) notes, the shape and timing of help should be defined by the helpee; in this way it is voluntary rather than imposed. "This voluntary quality of the helping process is a crucial point since many persons wanting to help others have their own helping agenda and seek to meet their own unrecognized needs" (p. 5). He also writes that help can have an arrogant quality, much like my help was unintentionally colonial, which obviously should be avoided. By joining, or forming if necessary, a community of other people engaged in similar work, I can dodge these dangers inherent in helping work; my agenda and arrogance will be better held in check.

In all, the field of helping has much to teach those who are engaged in support roles: we avoid over-insertion into a client-helper relationship by following the parameters set by the helping literature. We keep the spotlight not on our relationship or on our ideas, but on the client and his or her situation. In working with an instructor who comes to me, this means I listen intently and support the change process by bringing my knowledge and ideas to that process, but I do not guide that process. Instead, I accept the outcome of working together may not be to my satisfaction. The instructor may not improve his or her support for the development of academic writing skills for the international students with EAL in his or her class, or there may be just some improvement. With a sound relationship in place, and a long-term view in mind, I can see my work with instructors as ongoing and gradual. As Brammar notes, the first phase of the helping process is relationship-building, and the second phase is facilitating positive action. But while "essentially, all helping is aimed toward action outcomes of some

kind" (1993, p. 127), it may take a while to get to the action stage. The speed and outcome of that change is not the goal; rather, a relationship that fosters movement in an informed, warm and knowledge-based manner is the goal. For those in the helping profession, which has many parallels to the work I do with instructors, there is a "shadow side" (Egan, 1994, p. 17), which is the professional's "bias toward action" (p. 67).

In my role I occasionally work with an instructor who was referred to me by his or her departmental chair. This kind of referral is akin to a student being "sent" to the writing centre. For working with an instructor who does not seek me out of his or her own accord, I will proceed in the same way, except for a key difference. The difference is that there is no voluntary quality of the change because the instructor has not sought me out. There is no change process to support. The first phase, relationship-building, is the only phase that is possible until help is asked for. This limits my role to ongoing contact and the creation of awareness of the kind of help I could provide. Ongoing contact could be through my involvement in other LTC events, where I meet instructors and perhaps have a brief introduction as to my role at the university. Being involved in workshops that do not have to do with assignment and feedback design would provide increased contact with instructors, as would involvement on various committees. When I become known to instructors, I can develop my relationship with them by offering to do workshops for their classes, for example. Over time this repeated contact will lead to a relationship. The relationship may in time lead to engagement in the change process, but it may not. So, my question about how to take educational support out to instructors rather than waiting for them to seek me out is answered. I cannot take my educational support to them, but I can make them aware of what help I can provide, and I can make myself known.

It is worth noting that I entered not only my research, but my job at the university in a helping role without knowing how, in fact, to help. It turns out that not only are many instructors not trained to teach, I too am not trained to help. Like instructors, I have much subject knowledge, but no real training in how to transfer that knowledge to others in a way that is more than superficial, temporary and colonial. From this study I am left humbled by how unprepared I am to do my job well, and I feel a deep sense of irony that those who are put in the roles of teachers, myself included, have such an important role to play but may not be sufficiently trained to carry out this role. Furthering this irony is the common complaint by instructors and support staff like myself in higher education listservs bemoaning how under-prepared students are for their university studies.

This study has also made me very aware of the messiness of teaching, learning and research. The messiness does not muddle what I have learned, though, which is how to better support instructors. As people we come to knowledge when we are ready for it, and that timing is hard to influence externally. Rather, in my role as a supporter of instructors, I can make my presence known and make the possibilities of support known. For those who choose to engage in the change process with me, I can draw on my knowledge of assignment and feedback design in such a way as to keep the focus on the instructor, not on our relationship, me, or on the change that is possible. Slowly, gradually, and with trust, great things are possible when the helper is self-reflective and aware of the boundary of her agenda versus the agenda of the client. I am excited to employ the lessons I have learned through this study in my work. By employing them I will be able to, over time and in increments, improve the learning supports built into curriculum for international graduate EAL students.

# Bibliography

Accardi, S. & Davila, B. (2007). Too many cooks in the kitchen: A multifield approach for today's composition students. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College, 35*(1), 54-61.

Agreement links UVic with Chinese universities. (2007, May 9). *The Times-Colonist,* p. A7.

Aljaafreh, A. & Lantolf, J. P. (1994). Negative feedback as regulation and second language learning in the zone of proximal development. *The Modern Language Journal, 78*(iv), 465-483.

Angelova, M. & Riazantseva, A. (1999). "If you don't tell me, how can I know?" A case study of four international students learning to write the U.S. way. *Written Communication, 16*(4), 491-525.

Arter, J. (2006). What do we want rubrics to do for us and our students? *Orbit, 36*(2), 39-40.

Bartholomae, D. (1986). Inventing the university. *Journal of Basic Writing, 5*(1), 4 – 23.

Bates, M. (2008). The responsive case study: Action research and action learning in short courses. *Educational Action Research, 16*(1), 97-108.

Bender, E. T. (2005). CASTLs in the air: The SOTL "movement" in mid-flight. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 37*(5), p. 40.

Bhabha, H. (1990). Introduction: Narrating the nation. In H. K. Bhabha, (Ed.), *Nation and Narration* (pp. 1-7). New York, NY: Routledge.

Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for quality learning at university, 2nd ed.* New York, NY: Open University Press.

Blanton, L. L. (1998). Discourse, artefacts, and the Ozarks: Understanding academic literacy. In V. Zamel & R. Spack, (Eds.), *Negotiating academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures* (pp.219 -236). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Bolton, F. C. (2006). Rubrics and adult learners: Andragogy and assessment. *Assessment Update, 18*(3), 5-6.

Bouman, K. (2004). Raising questions about plagiarism. In S. B. Bruce & B. Raforth (Eds.), *ESL writers* (pp. 105 – 116). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Brammer, L. M. (1993). *The helping relationship: Process and skills, 5th ed.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Brettler, M. (n.d.). *Grading rubric: Marc Brettler*. Retrieved December 14, 2009, from Brandeis University website: http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/davisgrant/davisrubrics.html

Brinkman, K. (2004). Discovering the key components of an effective academic support group for international ESL students. *2nd Annual Cognition, Language & Special Education Conference.* December 3-5, Griffith University, Australia.

Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Brookhart, S., Moss, C., & Long, B. (2008). Formative assessment. *Educational Leadership*, November, 52-57.

Brooks, J. (2008). Minimalist tutoring: Making the student do all the work. In R. W. Barnett & J. S. Blummer (Eds.), *The Longman guide to writing center theory and practice* (pp. 219 - 224). New York, NY: Pearson Education, Inc.

Brydon-Miller, M. & Greenwood, D. (2006). A re-examination of the relationship between action research and human subjects review processes. *Action Research, 4*(1), 117-128.

Burke, K. (1967). *The philosophy of literary form: Studies in symbolic action,* 2nd ed. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press.

Carkhuff, R. R. (1987). *The art of helping, 6th ed.* Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press, Inc.

Carrell, P. (1983). The effects of rhetorical organization on ESL readers. *TESOL Quarterly, 18,* 183-205.

Catt, R. & Gregory, G. (2006). The point of writing: Is student writing in higher education developed or merely assessed? In L. Ganobcsik-Williams (Ed.), *Teaching academic writing in UK higher education: Theories, practices and models* (pp. 16-29). NY, NY: Palgrave, Macmillan.

CCCC statement on second-language writing and writers. (2001). *College Composition and Communication, 52*(4), 669 – 674.

Chandler, D. & Torbert, B. (2003). Transforming inquiry and action: Interweaving 27 flavors of action research. *Action Research, 1*(2), 133-152.

Chisholm, R. F. & Elden, M. (1993). Features of emerging action research. *Human Relations, 46*(2), 275-298.

Coe, C. D. (2009). Strangers and natives: Gadamer, colonial discourse and the politics of understanding. *Philosophy and Social Criticism, 35*(8), 921-933.

Colvin, B. B. (2007). Another look at plagiarism in the digital age: Is it time to turn in my badge? *Teaching English in the Two-Year College, 35*(2), 149-158.

Cranton, P. (1982). *Working with adult learners.* Toronto, Ontario: Wall & Emerson.

Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Cumming, A. (2003). Assessing L2 writing: Alternative constructs and ethical dilemmas? *Assessing Writing, 8*(2), 73-83.

Dall'Alba, G. (2005). Improving teaching: Enhancing ways of being university teachers. *Higher Education Research & Development, 24*(4), 361-372.

Dedrick, R. F. & Watson, F. (2002). Mentoring needs of female, minority, and international graduate students: A content analysis of academic research guides and related print material. *Mentoring & Tutoring, 10*(3), 275-289.

Department of Biology. (n.d.). Master of science degree requirements. Retrieved December 14, 2009, from University of California, Fresno, website: http://www.csufresno.edu/biology/Graduate/G_masterC_new.htm

Devet, B., Orr, S., Blythman, M & Bishop, C. (2006). Peering across the pond: The role of students in developing other students' writing in the US and UK. In L. Ganobcsik-Williams (Ed.), *Teaching academic writing in UK higher education: theories, practices and models* (pp. 196-211). New York, NY: Palgrave, Macmillan.

Diller, K. R. & Phelps, S. F. (2008). Learning outcomes, portfolios, and rubrics, oh my! Authentic assessment of on information literacy program. *Libraries and the Academy, 8*(1), 75-89.

Donahue, C. (2009). "Internationalization" and composition studies: Reorienting the discourse. *College Composition and Communication, 61*(2), 212-243.

Drummond, J. S. & Themessl-Huber, M. (2007). The cyclical process of action research. *Action Research, 5*(4), 430-448.

Duvall, L. (1994). *Respecting our differences: A guide to getting along in a changing world.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

Egan, G. (1994). *The skilled helper, 5th ed.* Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Elbow, P. (1998). Reflections on academic discourse: How it relates to freshmen and colleagues. In V. Zamel & R. Spack (Eds.), *Negotiating academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures* (pp. 145-170). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Elbow, P. (1998). *Writing with power: Techniques for mastering the writing process* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Falchikov, N. (2002). 'Unpacking' peer assessment. In P. Schwartz & G. Webb (Eds.), *Assessment: Case studies, experience and practice from higher education* (pp. 70-77). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing Inc.

Fontana, A. & Frey, J. H. (2005). The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research,* 3rd ed. (pp. 695-728).

Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York, NY: Continuum International.

Gee, J. P. (2001). What is literacy? In P. Shannon (Ed.), *Becoming political, too: New readings and writings on the politics of literacy education* (pp. 1 – 9). New York: Heineman.

Golde, C.M. & Dore, T.M. (2001). *At cross-purposes: What the experiences of today's doctoral students reveal about doctoral education.* Philadelphia, PA: Pew Charitable Trusts.

Grant, S. (2007). Learning through 'being' and 'doing.' *Action Research, 5*(3), 265-274.

Graue, B. (2006). The transformative power of reviewing. *Educational Researcher, 35*, 36-41.

Hairston, M. (2003). Diversity, ideology, and teaching writing. In V. Villaneuva (Ed.) *Cross-talk in comp theory,* 2nd ed, pp. 697-714. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Hawker, S. & Waite, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Oxford paperback dictionary and thesaurus,* 2nd ed. Toronto, Ontario: Oxford University Press.

Hays, P. (2004). Case study research. In K. deMarrais & S. Lapan (Eds.), *Foundations for research: Methods of inquiry in education and the social sciences*, pp.217-234. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Hayward, N. (2004). Insights into cultural divides. In *ESL writers: A guide for writing center tutors* (pp. 1-15). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishes, Heinemann.

Hinds, J. (1987). Reader versus writer responsibility: A new typology. In U. Connor & R. B. Kaplan (Eds.), *Writing across languages: Analysis of L2 text* (pp. 141 – 152). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Holt, S. L. (1997). Responding to grammar errors. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, *70,* 69 – 76.

Howard, R. M. (1995). Plagiarism, authorships, and the academic death penalty. *College English, 57*(7), 788-806.

Huba, M. E. & Freed, J. E. (2000). *Learner-centered assessment on college campuses: Shifting gocus from teaching to learning.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Huber, M. T. (2004). *Balancing acts: The scholarship of teaching and learning in academic careers.* Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Human Research Ethics Office. 92008). *Guidelines for ethics in dual-role research for teachers and other practitioners.* Retrieved July 11, 2010, from University of Victoria, Office of Research Services Web Site: http://www.research.uvic.ca/ethics/ethicsmain.htm

Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing.* Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Johnsen, H. L., Pacht, M., van Slyck, P. & Tsao, T. (2009). The messy teaching conversation: Toward a model of collegial reflection, exchange and scholarship on classroom practices. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College, 37*(2), 118-135.

Jonsson, A. & Svingby, G. (2007). The use of scoring rubrics: Reliability, validity and educational consequences. *Educational Research Review*, 2, 130–144.

Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in inter-cultural education. *Language Learning*, *26,* 1 – 20.

Kelly, K. (n.d.). *Scoring of programming assignments.* Retrieved December 14, 2009, from the Lexington High School, Department of Mathematics website: http://lhs.lexingtonma.org/Teachers/Kelly/cpp/scoring.html

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (1982). *The action research planner.* Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press.

Kerwin, M. (1981). Andragogy in the community college. *Community College Review, 9*, 12-14.

Kivel, P. (2004). The culture of power. In F. W. Hale, Jr. (Ed.), *What makes racial diversity work in higher education* (pp. 25-31). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Knowles, M.S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy.* Chicago, IL: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Koffolt, K. & Holt, S. L. (1997). Using the "writing process" with non-native users of English. *New Directions in Teaching and Learning, 70*, 53-60.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Leki, I. (1990). Coaching from the margins: Issues in written response. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom* (pp. 57 68). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Leki, I. (1992). *Understanding ESL writers: A guide for teachers.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Heinemann.

Leuze, L. F. (1996). Instruction development: What works? *NEA Update, 2*(4), 1-4.

Li, X. (2008). Learning to write a thesis with an argumentative edge. In X. Li & C.P. Casanave (Eds.), *Learning the literacy practices of graduate school: Insiders' reflections on academic enculturation* (pp. 46-57). Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Lyster, R. (2007). *Learning and teaching through content: A counterbalanced approach.* Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins North America.

Matsuda, P. K. (1999). Composition studies and ESL writing: A disciplinary division of labor. *College Composition and Communication, 50*(4), 699 – 721.

Matsuda, P. K., & Cox, M. (2004). Reading an ESL writer's text. In S. B. Bruce & B. Rafoth (Eds.), *ESL writers.* (pp. 39 – 47). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Martins, D. (2008). Scoring rubrics and the material conditions of our relations with students. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College, 36*(2), 123-137.

Mackeracher, D. (1996). *Making sense of adult education.* Toronto, Canada: Culture Concepts Inc.

Maher, F. A. & Tetreault, M. K. T. (2007). *Privilege and diversity in the academy.* New

York, NY: Routledge.

McKeachie, W. J. (2002). What to do about cheating. In *Teaching tips* (11th ed.). (pp. 97-102). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Melzer, D. (2009). Writing assignments across the curriculum: A national study of college writing. *College Composition and Communication, 61*(2), 240-261.

Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in dducation: A qualitative approach.* San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Minett, A. J. (2004). "Earth aches by midnight": Helping ESL writers clarify their intended meaning. In S. Bruce & B. Raforth (Eds.), *ESL writers: A guide for writing center tutors*. (pp. 60 – 70). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Heinemann.

Mohan, B. A. (1986). *Language and content.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Montgomery, K. (2002). Authentic tasks and rubrics: Going beyond traditional assessments in college teaching. *College Teaching, 50*(1), 34-39.

Moskal, B. M. (2000). Scoring rubrics: What, when and how? *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation.* Retrieved July 1, 2009, from http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=3

Murray, D. (2003). Teaching writing as a process not product. In V. Villaneuva (Ed.) *Cross-talk in comp theory,* 2nd ed, pp. 3-6. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Nassaji, H. & Cumming, A. (2000). What's in a ZPD? A case study of a young ESL student and teacher interacting through dialogue journals. *Language Teaching Research, 4*(2), 95-121.

Nelson, G. L. (1997). How cultural differences affect written and oral communication: The case of peer response groups. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 70*, 77-84.

Northedge, A. (2003). Enabling participation in academic discourse. *Teaching in Higher Education, 8*(2), 169 – 180.

Nunan, D. (1990). Action research in the language classroom. In J. Richards & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Second language teacher education*, pp. 62-76. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Ong, W. J. (2003). The writer's audience is always a fiction. In V. Villanueva (Ed.),

*Cross-talk in comp theory: A reader* (2nd ed., pp. 55 – 76). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Pardue, K. T. & Haas, B. (2003). Curriculum considerations for enhancing baccalaureate learning for international students. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, *34*(2), 72-77.

Pecorari, D. (2003). Good and original: Plagiarism and patchwriting in academic second-language writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *12*(4), 317-345.

Pennycook, A. (1996). Borrowing others' words: Text, ownership, memory and plagiarism. *TESOL Quarterly*, *30*(2), 201 – 230.

Penrod, D. (2005). *Composition in convergence: The impact of new media on writing assessment.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc..

Peräkylä, A. (2005). Analyzing talk and text. In Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, 3rd ed. (pp. 869 - 886).

Pfingstang, N. (2004). Newcomers in first-year composition: Teaching writing to ESL students. In R. F. Lunsford & B. Bridges (Eds.), *The Longwood guide to writing* (3rd ed., pp. 259-265). New York, NY: Longman.

Poehner, M. E. & Lantolf, J. P. (2005). Dynamic assessment in the language classroom. *Language Teaching Research*, *9*(3), 233-265.

Pratt, M. L. (1998). The arts of the contact zone. In V. Zamel & R. Spack (Eds.), *Negotiating academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures* (pp. 171-186). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Procter, M. (n.d.). *How not to plagiarize*. Retrieved July 11, 2010, from University of Toronto, Writing Support Web site: http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize.

Radford, M. (2007). Action research and the challenge of complexity. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *37*(2), 263-278.

Raimes, A. (1985). What unskilled ESL students do as they write: A classroom study of composing. *TESOL Quarterly*, *19*(2), 229 – 258.

Ramanathan, V., & Kaplan, R. (1996). Audience and voice in current L1 composition texts: Some implications for ESL student writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *5*(1), 21 – 34.

Ramsden, P. (1992). Assessing for understanding. In *Learning to teach in higher education* (pp. 181-213). New York, NY: Routledge.

Rieber, L. J. (2006). Using peer review to improve student writing in business courses. *Journal of Education for Business, 81*(6), 322-326.

Robb, R., Ross, S., & Shortreed, I. (1986). Salience of feedback on error and its effect on EFL writing quality. *TESOL Quarterly, 20*(1), 83 – 93.

Robertson, M., Line, M., Jones, S., & Thomas, S. (2000). International students, learning environments, and perceptions: A case study using the Delphi method. *Higher Education Research & Development, 19*(1), 89 – 102.

Rocco, S. (2007). Online assessment and evaluation. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 113,* 75-86.

Rose, M. (1989). *Lives on the boundary: A moving account of the struggles and achievements of America's educationally underprepared.* New York, NY: Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

Rose, M. (1998). The language of exclusion: Writing instruction at the university. In V. Zamel & R. Spack (Eds.), *Negotiating academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures,* pp. 9-30. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Rose, M. & McClafferty, K. A. (2001). A call for the teaching of writing in graduate education. *Educational Researcher, 30*(2), 27 – 33.

Rowe, M. P. (1990). Barriers to equality: The power of subtle discrimination to maintain unequal opportunity. *Employee Responsibilities and Right Journal, 3*(2), 153-163.

Sadler, D. R. (2002). Ah! … So *that's* quality. In P. Schwartz & G. Webb (Eds.), *Assessment: Case studies, experience and practice from higher education* (pp. 130-136). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing Inc.

Schmidt, R. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics, 11,* 129-158.

Shen, F. (1998). The classroom and the wider culture: Identity as a key to learning English composition. In V. Zamel & R. Spack, (Eds.), *Negotiating academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures* (pp.123-134). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Shute, V. J. (2008). Focus on formative feedback. *Review of Educational Research, 78*(1), 153-189.

Silva, T. (1997). On the ethical treatment of ESL writers. *TESOL Quarterly, 31*(2), 359 – 363.

Silva, T., Leki, I., & Carson, J. (1997). Broadening the perspective of mainstream composition studies: Some thoughts from the disciplinary margins. *Written Communication, 14*(3), 398-428.

Spellmeyer, K. (1989). A common ground: The essay in the academy. *College English, 51*(3), 262 – 276.

Spronken-Smith, R. & Harland, T. (2009). Learning to teach with problem-based learning. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 10*(2), 138-153.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Stellmack, M.A., Konheim-Kalkstein, Y.L., Manor, J.E., Massey, A. R. and Schmitz, J. A. P. (2009). An assessment of reliability and validity of a rubric for grading APA-style introductions. *Teaching of Psychology, 36,* 102-107.

Straub, R. (2000). *The practice of response: Strategies for commenting on student writing.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.

Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Swales, J.M. & Feak, C.B. (2000). *English is today's research world.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Titchen, A. & Manley, K. (2006). Spiralling towards transformational action research: Philosophical and practical journeys. *Educational Action Research, 14*(3), 333-356.

University of Victoria. (2007). *A vision for the future – building on strength: A strategic plan for the University of Victoria.* Retrieved October 7, 2009, from http://web.uvic.ca/strategicplan/pdf/strategicplan.pdf

Valdes, G. (1992). Bilingual minorities and language issues in writing. *Written Communication, 9*(1), 85-136.

Valentine, K. (2006). Plagiarism as literacy practice: Recognizing and rethinking ethical binaries. *College Composition and Communication, 58*(1), 89 – 109.

Walvoord, B. E. & Anderson, J. (1998). *Effect grading: A tool for learning and assessment.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Wang, M. F., & Bakken, L. L. (2003, October). *An academic writing needs assessment of clinical investigators who have English as their second language.* Paper presented

at the Midwest Research-to-Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing and Community Education, Columbus, OH.

Warrican, S. J. (2006). Action research: A viable option for effecting change. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 38*(1), 1-14.

Wennergren, A-C. & Ronnerman, K. (2006). The relation between tools used in action research and the zone of proximal development. *Educational Action Research, 14*(4), 547-568.

Yang, K.J. (1994). *The tension and growth Taiwanese students experience as non-native writers of English in a university writing program for international students.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Arizona, Arizona. Retrieved March 28, 2005, from Digital Dissertations database.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and method, 3rd ed.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Ying, Y. W. (2003). Academic achievement and quality of overseas study among Taiwanese students in the United States. *College Student Journal, 37*(3), 1-9.

Zamel, V. (1982). Writing: The process of discovering meaning. *TESOL Quarterly, 16*(2), 195 – 209.

Zamel, V. (1985). Responding to student writing. *TESOL Quarterly, 19*(1), 79 – 101.

Zamel, V. (1995a, July). *Transcending boundaries: Toward a more complicated understanding of language* [Electronic version]. Retrieved January 15, 2005, from New York University, Steinhardt School of Education web site: http://www.education.nyu.edu/teachlearn/ifte/zamel.htm

Zamel, V. (1995b). Strangers in academia: The experiences of faculty and ESL students across the curriculum. *College Composition and Communication, 46*(4), 506 – 521.

Zhu, W. (2004). Faculty views on the importance of writing, the nature of academic writing, and teaching and responding to writing in the disciplines. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 13,* 29 – 48.

Zhu, W. & Flaitz, J. (2005). Using focus group methodology to understand international students' academic language needs: A comparison of perspectives [Electronic version]. *TESL-EJ, 8*(4).

Zobel, J., & Hamilton, M. (2002). Managing student plagiarism in large academic departments. *Australian University Review, 45*(2), 23 – 30.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Telephone script for contacting participants

I understand that you are teaching a graduate course this fall, (name of course), in which you will have a substantial number of international students. I am in the process of recruiting participants for a research project for my doctoral work; I am looking for instructors such as yourself to join my study. Participation is entirely voluntary. I would like to see how working with instructors on the design of their written assignments and on the feedback they provide to students about their writing can make the instructor feel more able to support his or her students' writing skills development.

I think participation in this study will be of interest to you as it provides the participants with a number of benefits, including a reworking of the course's writing assignments, guidance to more effective and more efficient feedback on those assignments, and an understanding of how to support your students in developing their academic writing skills. I assure you that this study will take approximately 5-8 hours of your time, and for your participation, you will receive guidance to develop your writing assignments and focus your feedback on student writing.

If you would like to hear more about what this study entails, and what your participation would consist of, I would be happy to meet with you. I can be reached by email at lauriews@uvic.ca, or by phone at 884-0439.

Appendix B: Dr. Lindsay Tedds' Rubric
(Used with author permission)

| **APA citations & references** | **Structure** | **Scientific writing** |
|---|---|---|
| • Use of other people's ideas and work properly acknowledged<br>• APA citation style followed<br>• Includes an APA formatted reference list<br>• Title page (incl. honour statement), running head, and page numbers used<br>• Double spaced, 12 point TNR font, 1 inch margins, and title used<br>• APA formatted tables and graphs<br>• Proper use of italics and abbreviations<br>• Numbers properly expressed<br>• Use of the oxford comma<br>• Limited use of hyphens<br>• -ize spelling (not –ise spelling) of words<br>• Quotations used, formatted, and sourced appropriately | • Confirms, defines, and details the problem under consideration.<br>• Basic structure that includes an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.<br>• The introduction is convincing and highlights the topic at hand, its policy relevance, and importance.<br>• Strong, deliberate ending that reinforces or clarifies the material in the body.<br>• Good use of headings<br>• Sentences and paragraphs flow<br>• No **obvious** spelling or grammar mistakes<br>• Orderly presentation of ideas<br>• Neither overly general nor specific<br>• Footnotes supplement or amplifying substantive information in the text<br>• Appendices used where relevant<br>• Evidence of revision | • A clear objective approach to the topic<br>• Statements are based on facts that are supported by data or references<br>• Does not make any philosophical, moral, or normative appeals<br>• No informal or chatting language<br>• Does not use biased or inflammatory language<br>• Avoids use of the first person<br>• No contractions, buzz words, and jargon<br>• Careful use of verb tenses<br>• Writing exhibits precision<br>• Clarity in writing |
| **Weight:**<br><br>**Grade:**<br><br>**Comment:** | **Weight:**<br><br>**Grade:**<br><br>**Comment:** | **Weight:**<br><br>**Grade:**<br><br>**Comment:** |

**Content:**

- Demonstrates understanding of key economic concepts
- Properly presents the problem using an economic perspective, using both words and graphs as applicable
- Sufficiently applies economic concepts to case study
- Displays information-seeking skills
- Properly uses and synthesizes research sources
- Evidence of critical analysis of research sources
- Supplements research with own ideas
- Links research back to the readings and case study
- Reasonable solution based on application of knowledge and skills deemed necessary to address the issue
- Appropriate level of detail
- Identifies the policy challenge
- Recommend a solution that is based on the analysis
- Identify the challenges solution will face, if implemented

**Weight:**

**Grade:**

**Comment:**

**Final Grade on Paper:**

**Looking forward:**

# Appendix C: Questions for the initial semi-structured interviews

Question 1:

Tell me about what good graduate writing is like.

Question 2:

Tell me in what ways international graduate students who have English as an additional language aren't producing this level of writing for your course.

Question 3:

How do you consider your ability to support the learning needs of these students in regards to their development of academic writing skills? Can you explain? Give examples?

Appendix D: Helena's Checklist

# Checklist for Papers

## 1 Checklist for Paper

### 1.1 Front Matter

Title
Date
Acknowledgements
Abstract
Key words
AMS subject index

### 1.2 Organisation

#### 1.2.1 Introduction

Clear and to the point
Explain what the paper is about
Explain the organisation of the paper
Definitions and notation clearly stated

#### 1.2.2 Body

Organised properly
Displayed scientific notation
Numbering of equations and other notation: no point in numbering equations if numbers not used

#### 1.2.3 Conclusion

(Usually a good idea but not always necessary)
Not just a summary of the paper
For example mention future work

### 1.3 References

Alphabetical
Same style throughout

## 1.4 Software

Correct automatic numbering of theorems
Correct cross referencing
Correct citations
Correct science mode
Displayed research

## 1.5 Grammar

Capitalisation correct – common nouns versus proper nouns
Same tense throughout
Avoid use of modal auxiliary verbs whenever possible
Punctuation, especially after math
Spelling
General use of language
No starting of sentences with symbols

## 1.6 Technical Aspects

Paragraph indentation: always (except after section headings) or never, in which case there should be a vertical space between paragraphs
Either always a space between paragraphs or never
Not large unnecessary spaces
No page breaks at awkward places (e.g. only one line of a theorem, only a section/subsection heading, etc.)
Proofreading
Use spellchecker (but be aware of pitfalls)

Appendix E: Helena's Rubric

| **Front Matter** | **Grammar** | **Technical Aspects** |
|---|---|---|
| Title is present<br><br>Date is present<br><br>Acknowledgments are present and well written<br><br>Abstract is clear and concise<br><br>Key words are indicated<br><br>AMS Subject Index is indicated | Correct capitalisation of common nouns versus proper nouns<br><br>Same tense used throughout<br><br>Avoid use of modal auxiliary verbs whenever possible<br><br>Correct punctuation, especially after math<br><br>Correct spelling<br><br>Good use of language throughout the paper<br><br>Sentences don't start with a symbol | Paragraphs should be indented either always (except after section headings) or never, in which case there should be a vertical space between paragraphs<br><br>Either always a space between paragraphs or never<br><br>No larger unnecessary spaces<br><br>No page breaks at awkward places (e.g. only one line of theorem, only a section/subsection heading, etc.)<br><br>Evidence of thorough proofreading<br><br>Evidence of use of spellchecker (but be aware of pitfalls, such as form/from, that/hat, which don't show up in spellcheckers) |
| Value: 15 points<br>Comments: | Value: 15 points<br>Comments: | Value: 15 points<br>Comments: |

| **Software** | **References** | **Organisation** |
|---|---|---|
| Correct automatic numbering of theorems<br><br>Correct cross referencing<br><br>Correct citations<br><br>Correct code<br><br>Displayed research | Alphabetically listed<br><br>Same style is used throughout | Introduction is clear and to the point; explains what the paper is about, explains the organization of the paper, and clearly states the definitions and notations<br><br>The body of the paper is properly organized, displays the research, numbers the equations and other math objects (no point in numbering equations if numbers not used) |
| Value: 25 points<br>Comments: | Value: 10 points<br>Comments: | Value: 20 points<br>Comments: |

**Comments on the content of the paper/other comments:**