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**THE WRITING OF ASSIGNMENTS IN A PRE-SERVICE PRIMARY
EDUCATION PROGRAMME: STUDENT AND STAFF PERSPECTIVES**

A thesis

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ABSTRACT

The writing of assignments by tertiary students is an area that merits exploration due to the high stakes involved for students, staff and institutions. Generally, in order for students to pass courses, they need to write assignments at a level, and in a manner, deemed appropriate by the staff members marking the assignments.

I found the *community of practice* lens useful for this study, since I viewed learning as a socially situated activity which occurred through participation. While staff and students were engaged in textual practices, they were also functioning as members of discourse communities. Because I was interested in academic writing induction, I adopted a sociocultural view of academic literacy; a purely cognitive view would have been too narrow. In addition, I adopted a rhetorical view of academic writing, since I regarded the context (including audience and purpose) as having a major influence on decision-making in respect of textual features.

Several gaps emerged when I conducted an exploration of existing studies. There was a scarcity of research focusing on the academic literacy learning experiences of distance students. I found there was a limited number of studies, especially in respect of those that had domestic students as participants that had investigated staff and students' understandings of some aspects of academic writing (e.g., voice). I also discovered a paucity of research in which students and staff had been asked to reflect on what they considered to be helpful and unhelpful for students' academic writing induction. Therefore, an in-depth study of academic writing induction (which included staff and students' understandings of academic writing) was warranted.

This qualitative, interpretive, ethnographic case study explored student and staff understandings of academic writing induction. There were two cohorts of students, both enrolled in a pre-service primary education programme at a New Zealand university: those who were enrolled in the on-campus programme and those who studied via distance. Ethnography was used both as a methodology and as a method. The methodology both guided the process of collecting evidence and the style of the writing of my thesis. Methods of evidence collection included observation, unstructured in-depth interviews and documentary evidence (course outlines and students' written assignments). I also set up a Facebook closed group as a means

for enabling students to engage in an asynchronous online focus group, where they could discuss and reflect on aspects of, or the process of, academic writing they were engaged in. In short, the research design enabled me to conduct an in-depth study of student and staff perspectives and understandings of academic writing induction.

I found there were a number of similarities and differences in the academic writing learning experiences of students, where one cohort predominantly attended class on campus, and the other cohort were distance students. Both cohorts had lectures, prescribed readings, and access to university services, such as the library. One contrast between the two cohorts was that on-campus students took part on a regular basis in tutorial discussion, which occurred face-to-face, whereas distance students took part in asynchronous online discussions. It appeared staff attempted to provide a similar course and similar services to both cohorts, via the two modes of delivery.

There were a number of divergences and convergences between staff and student understandings of academic writing. In the first year, both staff and students, tended to have a bigger focus on word- and sentence-level aspects of writing than on social or macro-level categories. A very significant divergence was that a number of staff in interviews remarked that an aspect of a well-written assignment was that it contained an argument. In contrast, students, unprompted, did not comment on argumentation. Overall, it appeared that divergences in understanding between students and staff lessened in the second year.

The study found that students and staff reported more helpful than unhelpful practices in respect of students writing assignments. Almost all first- and second-year students commented that writing instruction in tutorials was helpful. Staff, especially in the first year, also identified a number of practices as helpful. Many of these practices took place in tutorials. Staff tended to identify practices as helpful that involved academic staff input, rather than that of students' peers, family members and friends. Students identified practices that took place both within and outside of the institution.

A surprising find was the Facebook sites set up and facilitated entirely by students. This appears to be an area that warrants further ethnographic investigation.

Based on the findings generated, I conclude that it would be beneficial for students if writing instruction were embedded into their courses. In order to reduce student confusion and possible misunderstandings about what is expected from teachers, explicit instruction on components of writing would also be beneficial. Employing both a rhetorical and academic literacies approach to teaching students writing and about writing is warranted. For this to occur, staff will need assistance and/or professional development on aspects of academic writing pedagogy. Finally, for staff to incorporate academic writing instruction effectively into their practice, I would recommend a faculty-wide approach to writing.

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As my thesis demonstrates, writing takes place within a community of practice, with students deriving support from those around them. I experienced the same phenomenon with my doctoral study. Therefore, I would like to thank the many people who supported and encouraged me throughout my journey.

This study was possible because I had student participants. I thank them for their support by allowing me to observe them in class, to interview them and for sharing their assignments and written feedback with me. I appreciated their honesty and openness in interviews. In addition, I acknowledge their time commitment to my study, which would have added another challenge to their already busy lives.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My interest in academic writing¹ began approximately 20 years ago, when I enrolled in a university as an adult student in a bachelor's degree majoring in English. By academic writing I mean writing produced. My first assignment was an analysis of a poem. The grade I received was B-. I was devastated by this result as I had always done well academically in high school, especially in English. The student I sat beside in lectures, who had a master's in history, received an A. She explained to me some of the expectations when writing at university, including the importance of researching what others had said and referencing their ideas. I followed her advice. For the next assignment, I received an A+. I thought I had cracked the code and would excel from then on. However, at times, according to grades received, I had possibly misunderstood assignment criteria, and perhaps not written at the expected level or in an acceptable manner. This resulted in my experiencing feelings of confusion and frustration. I witnessed my course peers experiencing the same feelings.

While studying, I was employed by a university to teach English as an Additional Language (EAL) to students wanting to gain entry to undergraduate and postgraduate university courses. As I was teaching higher-level EAL students, who would soon enter university classes, I saw my teaching as having two objectives. My first objective was to assist students to improve their English competency, and the second was to prepare them for studying in a New Zealand university. Even after suggesting strategies to my students for coping in the tertiary environment, after they had begun their university-level courses, some would return to visit me. They would describe various difficulties they were experiencing, such as reading journal articles in order to write assignments, understanding assignment requirements, producing texts that adhered to academic conventions, coping with

¹ I use the term "academic writing" throughout this thesis to mean writing produced by tertiary level students, which complies with academic conventions, for example, acknowledging source texts.

the range of assignment tasks, and inconsistencies in the preferences of individual teaching staff members.

Students finding academic writing challenging took on more of a focus for me when I was employed in 2009 as a tertiary academic learning advisor² at a student learning centre. In this position, I assisted students with their academic development, with particular emphasis on academic writing. I worked with both domestic and EAL students at all levels of tertiary study and in most discipline areas. Again, I observed that students were challenged by aspects of academic practice, such as the variable nature of academic writing practices and conventions. At times, I also witnessed students not knowing or understanding that there were certain generic writing conventions, such as a relatively standard structure that could be used for writing introductions.

In this role, I also had interactions with academic staff³. At times staff appeared puzzled by students finding academic writing tasks challenging and having difficulty interpreting assignment instructions. After approximately three years, I moved to another tertiary institution. I experienced the same phenomena. I realised that the mismatches at times between students and staff expectations and understandings of academic writing were not confined to one tertiary institution. I felt that if I could find out what staff and students understood about academic writing and what they considered helpful and unhelpful for academic writing, I could make a contribution to improving teaching and learning practices in respect to academic writing in tertiary settings.

1.1 Thesis research objectives and questions

The primary aim of my study was to explore student and staff understandings of tertiary students' academic writing induction in a pre-service primary education programme. I use the term *understandings* throughout this thesis to mean knowledge, perceptions and mastery. I use the term *induct* throughout this thesis with both a passive and active focus. Students were *being* inducted into academic

² Hereinafter referred to as learning advisor

³ I have used the terms "academic staff" or "academic staff member/s" throughout this thesis to refer to staff that are employed on an academic contract, who are usually involved with the teaching of students e.g., in lectures and/or tutorials and/or the planning of the content in the programmes.

writing conventions, in that they were *being* introduced *to* the knowledge, beliefs, practices and ideas that a particular group, and individuals, had in light of academic writing conventions and expectations (passive). In addition, students *actively sought out* knowledge and support from those around them (active).

To achieve this aim, there were six research objectives:

- To investigate participating academic staff and students’ understanding of academic writing.
- To provide a rich account of students’ experiences of academic writing practices;
- To identify the academic writing learning practices that students deemed to be helpful/unhelpful;
- To investigate the kinds of academic writing learning practices that participating staff⁴ perceived as valuable for their students and explore how they incorporated these into their teaching;
- To investigate the extent to which there was a divergence or convergence between student participants’ and staff participants’ understandings of academic writing learning practices; and
- To identify and explore similarities and differences in the academic literacies experiences of students for two delivery modes where one was predominantly face-to-face and the other was predominantly online.

The questions below guided the study:

1. What understandings of academic writing do participating students and staff have⁵?
2. What practices do participating students identify as helpful/unhelpful in respect of writing assignments?
3. What practices do participating staff identify as helpful/unhelpful in respect of students writing assignments and how do they build these into their teaching?

⁴ “participating students and staff” were those who participated in my research by, for example, taking part in interviews, and allowing me to observe them in-class and/or online.

4. To what extent is there a divergence or convergence between participating student and staff understandings of academic writing learning practices?
5. What are the similarities and differences that occur between the academic literacies learning experiences of students in two delivery modes, where one is predominantly face-to-face and the other is predominantly online?

This study involved both on-campus and distance students from a pre-service primary education programme in their first two years of study. It also included staff involved in the teaching of the papers⁶ that the study was conducted in. It employed an interpretive qualitative research paradigm employing ethnographic methods (observation, interviews, informal focus group and documentary evidence⁷). It was hoped that this research would inform teaching and learning practices in tertiary level academic writing induction and go some way towards addressing gaps identified in previous studies, as will be discussed briefly in the next section.

1.2 Significance of study

My research contributes to present studies on academic writing as outlined below.

First, there have been a number of studies that have indicated that pre-service students can be challenged by the demands of academic writing (Devereux, Macken-Horarik, Trimmingham-Jack, & Wilson, 2006; Hill, Locke, & Dix, 2004; Macken-Horarik, Devereux, Trimmingham-Jack, & Wilson, 2006; Taylor, 2010). All these studies took place in Australia, except Hill et al.'s study (2004), which was conducted in New Zealand and was relatively small-scale. My study investigates pre-service primary students engaging in academic writing within a New Zealand tertiary institution.

Second, there were studies which explored student and/or staff understandings of aspects of academic writing. For example, Andrews, Robinson, et al. (2006), Davies (2008) and Wingate (2012) investigated students and/or staff understanding of written argumentation. However, I was unable to find a study which took a more comprehensive view of student and staff understandings of academic writing by

⁶ A course within a programme of study

⁷ In this thesis documentary evidence refers to evidence which comprised of documents e.g. course outlines

considering what aspects (e.g., *audience, voice, referencing*) students and/or staff emphasised, or minimalised, when considering students' written assignments. My study considered these aspects as a way of comprehending student and staff understandings of academic writing.

Third, there are many aspects of academic writing that have been explored through research. For example, there are a number of studies which considered *voice* in tertiary level writing instruction (Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Macalister, 2012; Stapleton, 2002; Zhao & Llosa, 2008). However, these studies consider writing instruction in respect of EAL students. A consistent finding throughout my exploration of literature was that there were a limited number of studies conducted (in the areas that this study was interested in) with domestic students. My study involved domestic students.

Fourth, I drew on Locke's (2015) framework (see Figure 1) in respect to a rhetorical view of textual production. Employing this framework enhanced my comprehension of student and staff understandings of academic writing induction. No study had previously employed or adapted Locke (2015) to provide a framework for analysing and interpreting participants' understanding of academic writing.

Fifth, I was unable to locate studies in which tertiary level students and staff had been asked to identify what they found helpful and unhelpful overall for students' academic writing development. I did locate one study (Devereux et al., 2006) which asked students to identify what they found "hindered and assisted them in the development of their writing skills at university" (p. 2). My study builds on the aforementioned, by providing more in-depth information about what staff and students considered helpful and unhelpful for student writing. In addition, my study also concerned itself with what academic writing learning practices staff perceived as helpful and unhelpful for their students and how they built these into their teaching.

Sixth, there was a paucity of research on a number of aspects of academic writing. For example, I was unable to find studies that investigated whether providing students with information about the intended audience (e.g., in the assignment instructions) impacted on students' writing process. My study reported on this phenomenon.

Seventh, my study appears unique in that it explored the academic writing experiences and understandings of pre-service primary education students in two delivery modes, where one was predominantly face-to-face and where one was predominantly online. I was unable to find a study which had explored academic writing from this perspective.

Eighth, I was unable to locate any studies which investigated students setting up and facilitating their own Facebook sites (or other online sites) in order to assist each other with their study. My study found students had set-up Facebook sites and used these to assist each other with aspects of their written assignment. My study appears unique since it reports findings related to this phenomenon.

Finally, my study adds to the research conducted on the pre-service primary education programme at the site of my study. There have been previous studies (e.g., Campbell, 1997; Donaghy & McGee, 2003; Donaghy, McGee, Ussher & Yates, 2003; Forbes, 2012) which all explored aspects of online teaching and learning. No study conducted at the site of my research had explored the convergences and divergences of academic literacy learning experiences of students studying predominantly online and face-to-face. In addition, no study has explored the understandings of academic writing that pre-service primary education students and staff have at the site of my study. Finally, no study conducted at the site of my research explored convergences and divergences in what staff and students considered helpful and unhelpful for students writing assignments.

To summarise, my research addresses a number of gaps and contributes to topics that have been characterised previously by a limited number of studies. These are outlined and discussed throughout Chapter 3.

The structure of my thesis is outlined below.

1.3 Thesis structure

In **Chapter 1**, I explained the development of my interest in the topic area, listed the research objectives and questions, and described some key areas in which my research contributes to existing studies on academic writing. Here I outline the structure of the chapters of this thesis.

In **Chapter 2**, I review a range of literature on the concepts that underpin my study, for example, communities of practice, discourse communities, literacy as a sociocultural practice, and writing as a rhetorical activity. I argue that the perspective taken for this thesis was that of academic writing taking place in communities of practice. In doing the aforementioned in this chapter, I introduce key scholars important to my study (e.g., Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000b; Gee, 1990, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lea & Street, 1998; Locke, 2015; Street, 1984, 2003, 2005, 2006; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). In this chapter I explicate the value of these theorists to my study.

In **Chapter 3**, I review studies on academic writing. I briefly review studies which explore distance students' academic literacy learning experiences and discuss studies which investigate aspects of staff and students' understandings of academic writing. I also review studies in which tertiary students and/or staff have identified practices seen as helpful and/or unhelpful, in respect to students writing assignments. In this chapter I highlight a number of gaps in the research and outline the contributions my study makes to the research literature.

In **Chapter 4**, I describe and justify the research design employed for this study. I demonstrate the appropriateness of the research design choices made in response to the research questions and, in particular, justify the use of a qualitative, interpretive, social constructionist, ethnographic study. I argue that the exploratory nature of the research questions and the focus on participants' understandings and experiences of academic writing induction suits a qualitative study employing ethnographic tools. I explain that because of the exploratory nature of my research questions and the ethnographic nature of my methods, an inductive approach to analysis was suitable for my study. I also provide an account of a number of ethical considerations of significance to my study. I conclude by outlining some limitations of the study.

In **Chapters 5, 6 and 7**, I report on the findings that emerged from a reading of the evidence in relation to the research questions. As will be seen, there were many convergences and divergences between staff and students' understandings of academic writing induction practices.

In **Chapter 8**, I discuss findings to the research questions and draw on literature from Chapters 2 and 3 to shed light on some of the findings. I outline a number of implications and provide recommendations arising from this study. I also supply some limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and share a few concluding reflections.

CHAPTER 2: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I indicated that in order to explore participants' academic writing understandings and induction experiences, a broad view of literacy was needed. In this chapter, I review a range of literature relevant to the concepts that underpin my study. In Sections 2.2 and 2.3, I discuss literature on the concepts of *communities of practice* and *discourse communities*, respectively. In Section 2.4, I draw on the literature that frames literacy as a sociocultural practice. In Section 2.5, I call on some texts which construct literacy, and writing in particular, as a rhetorical activity. I conclude this chapter by explaining the value of these theories to this project.

2.2 Communities of practice

Beginning in the late 1970s, social learning theory, or learning as a social process, began to achieve considerable prominence. Social learning theorists (Barton et al., 2000b; Gee, 1990, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Street, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978a; Wenger, 1998) hold the view that learning is a “collective participatory process of active knowledge construction emphasizing context, interaction, and situatedness” (Salomon & Perkins, 1998, p. 2). Vygotsky (1978a) produced seminal writings in this area with his sociocultural cognitive theory (also known as cultural-historical theory). He emphasised the influence that culture and social interaction have on cognitive development (Santrock, 2014).

Wertsch (1985) stated that three themes were at the core of Vygotsky's theoretical framework. The first he termed “a reliance on a genetic or developmental method” (p. 14). Vygotsky (1978b) argued that in order to understand cognitive development, the process by which it is established needs to be considered. Wertsch (1998) described this as the study of “how and where” (p. 17) learning has taken place.

The second theme concerned his “claim that higher mental processes in the individual have their origin in social processes” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 14). Well-known for his concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*, Vygotsky (1978a) defined it as “the distance between the actual developmental level ... and the level of potential development ... under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). In other words, the ZPD is the difference between what a child (or learner) can achieve without assistance or guidance as compared to what s/he can achieve when working with an adult or more capable peer. It is through interaction with more capable peers that children become more adept at using the tools of their culture and therefore more successful in their culture (Santrock, 2014).

The third theme Wertsch (1985) identified was that “mental processes can be understood only if we understand the tools [or objects] and signs [or symbols] that mediate them” (p. 15). Westberry (2009) gives examples of tools: “physical tools (for example, pencils and books), mental tools (for example, strategies and models), virtual tools (for example, software and websites), and conceptual tools (for example, theories)” (p. 19). She states that they “play a key role in shaping thought” (p. 19). Language can be considered both a sign and a tool and it assists people to comprehend or “make sense of” (p. 19) their environment. Vygotsky (1978) argued that a child’s speech played an important role in helping them “master their surroundings” (p. 25). In addition, when children are adept at using the tools of their culture, this aids them to be successful in it (Santrock, 2014).

Vygotsky’s (1978a) theory placed considerable emphasis on children’s interactions with “more capable peers” (p. 86). As will be discussed below, the concept of a *community of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) took a broader approach to learning.

The *community of practice* concept (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002), which has been drawn on heavily in this thesis, focuses on learning taking place through “participation in the world” (Wenger, 1998, p. 3). Lave and Wenger (1991) “[drew] upon Vygotsky in order to develop an understanding of learning” (Lea, 2005, p. 183). In this concept there is a focus on the situated nature of learning and the practices that people engage in. Central to the concept of *community of practice* is the notion of *apprenticeship* taking place between less

experienced and skilled participants and more expert members of the community. I found this concept the most helpful and pertinent to my study because it provided me with a useful heuristic for viewing academic writing induction; hence it will be discussed at some length.

Lave and Wenger (1991) first coined the phrase *community of practice*, which they defined as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (p. 98). This definition focuses on the relationships between people and the activities they take part in. In this early text, they acknowledged that the concept of *community of practice* needed further development.

Wenger (1998) elaborated considerably on the concept of a community of practice. He connects activity (human enterprises) to learning which, he writes, reflects the development of community practices:

Being alive as human beings means that we are constantly engaged in the pursuit of enterprises of all kinds, from ensuring our physical survival to seeking the most lofty pleasures. As we define these enterprises and engage in their pursuit together, we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words we learn. (p. 45)

Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of communities *communities of practice*. (p. 45)

In his text, he explored the concepts *learning*, *meaning* and *identity* in light of communities of practice.

Wenger, McDermott and Synder (2002) state that “communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). They argued that not all communities are communities of practice and that in order for an entity to be considered a *community of practice* it must contain:

- “a *domain* of knowledge, which defines a set of issues” [italics in original]; (p. 27)
- “a *community* of people who care about the domain” [italics in original]; (p. 27)
- “and the shared *practice* that they are developing to be effective in their domain” (p. 27) [italics in original].

I found the conceptualisation of these three aspects of a community of practice particularly useful in my study, as this encouraged my thinking about the way staff and students (the community) developed a shared practice for students’ academic assignments (the domain).

Central to the notion of *community of practice* is *situated learning*. Lave and Wenger (1991) used the phrase “situated learning” in the title of their book *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. According to these two authors, learning is viewed as a situated activity since it occurs as a function of an activity which is located in time and place. Social interaction is crucial. As learners interact, they become enculturated into the practices of the community they are participants of. The notion “situated learning” was relevant to this study because the academic writing practices staff and students engaged in needed to be viewed in the context in which they took place. The situated nature of learning is explored further in Section 2.4.

A key concept for Lave and Wenger (1991) is *legitimate peripheral participation* (LPP). They explain that the learner, who is less skilled and experienced than old-timers, takes on the role of apprentice as s/he moves from the “periphery” of a context or community to a more central position. In other words, initially the learner (or newcomer) takes part in the activity but only “to a limited degree and with limited responsibility for the ultimate product as a whole” (Hanks, 1991, p. 14). When they become more experienced and skilled (as experts or “old timers”), they become full, adept participants in the practices of the community. Lave and Wenger (1991) explain that the peripheral position of the newcomer is subject to relations of power. As the learner moves towards more intensive participation, this peripheral position can be experienced as one of empowerment or disempowerment depending on whether the newcomer is granted or denied participation in the community of

practice. Lea (2005) uses the example of learners engaging (or not) in online learning. She argues that in an online learning environment, students may choose not to engage. In other words, they make the decision to remain on the periphery. She argues that when students choose not to engage, it is one way “students retain power, and maintain their own sense of identity, in the learning process” (p. 190).

A phenomenon not explored explicitly in either Lave and Wenger (1991) or Wenger (1998) is that sometimes a newcomer is expected to produce artefacts as soon as they enter the community, sometimes supervised, and sometimes relatively independently. In relation to my study, assignments given to first-year students would be less complex and demanding than a research article written with the aim of scholarly publication. However, there are grades attached to assignments (and tests and examinations). It is the students’ responsibility to produce written assignments that meet criteria and there are consequences attached to the submitted assignment, such as a passing or failing grade. In other words, students are expected to engage in the textual practices of the community of practice, and these practices can be reflective of what is valued in the community. Not all expectations may be made explicitly clear to students. In addition, there may be differences in staff expectations.

The concept of LPP was helpful for my study because it provided me with a way of thinking about and describing the process of teaching and learning, which involved both newcomers and old-timers participating in a tertiary, academic community. It provided a way to “speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29), the resources they used, the knowledge brought to the specific activities, and the events and practices newcomers and old-timers shared.

Lave and Wenger (1991) produced a seminal text on situated learning and LPP. They conceded, as mentioned earlier, that the concept *community of practice* was “left largely as an intuitive notion” (p. 42), and therefore needed further analysis, particularly the idea of “unequal relations of power” (p. 42). Surprisingly, power relations also were not explored comprehensively in Wenger’s (1998) text. In fact, Barton and Tusting (2005) argue that “theories of language, literacy, discourse and *power* [which] are central to understanding of the dynamics of communities of

practice ... are not brought out in Wenger's formulations" (p. 6) [my emphasis]. Wenger (1998) acknowledges this limitation, when he explains that his focus is "community, meaning, and identity" (p. 189) and that his intention is "not to deny the importance of broader political and economic issues" (p. 189).

Barton and Tusting (2005) go some way to addressing communities of practice and power in their text "*Beyond Communities of Practice: Language, Power and Social Context*." It would have been beneficial had either text included a chapter or section addressing the power dynamics among newcomers, old-timers and institutions, exploring, perhaps, the marginalisation of newcomers and the impact this has on their learning. This might have enhanced readers' understanding of the situated nature of activities and the complexities of engaging in communities of practice, particularly for newcomers. In my study, I do consider some of these complexities.

For this study, the communities of practice framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) provided a vocabulary and way of thinking about the social nature of academic writing induction that my participants experienced. I found myself favouring Lave and Wenger (1991) over the more recent Wenger (1998) text. My reason for doing this is explained by Lea (2005), who states that Lave and Wenger (1991) provide two useful heuristics, communities of practice and LPP. These heuristics help the reader understand "a social model of learning as participation in practice" (p. 183). These heuristics were useful for my study. Lea states that Wenger (1998) does develop "the concept of communities of practice further" (p. 184) but that that he was moving away from presenting the concept of community of practice as a heuristic (as in Lave & Wenger, 1991) and more towards "the idea of an educational model" (p. 185). Lea argued Wenger's (1998) primary concern was "ways of enabling formal schooling to take on more of the character of informal learning in communities of practice" (p. 185). This was not my focus. In addition, Wenger (1998) states that he gives the concepts of community of practice and identity "center stage" (p. 12) in his text. Exploring identity in respect of academic writing in any depth was outside the scope of my thesis.

I acknowledge that using Lave and Wenger's (1991), Wenger's (1998) and Wenger et al.'s, (2002) concept of community of practice has limitations. By taking a somewhat more critical approach to the concept of communities of practice as approached by these authors (for example, considering power relations among participants), I attempted to create a more nuanced picture of the academic writing induction experiences of my study participants.

2.3 Discourse communities

In this section, I argue that because staff and students in my study were engaging in textual practices, they could be viewed as members of discourse communities.

The term *discourse communities* can be traced back to Geertz (1983) who used the term "discoursing" (p. 157) to describe how various disciplines used shared vocabularies to "talk about themselves to themselves" (p. 157). These vocabularies he viewed as a "way of gaining access to the sorts of mentalities at work in them" (p. 157). Thus, from Geertz's (1983) perspective, at the centre of a *discourse community* is a shared vocabulary which is representative of its thinking in terms of "aims, judgements and justifications" (p. 158).

Swales (1990), provided an oft-cited definition of a discourse community in his book on genre analysis, where he offered an approach for the "teaching of academic and research English" (p. 1). He presented six characteristics of a discourse community stating that it:

- "has a broadly agreed set of common public goals" (p. 24);
- "has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members" (p. 25);
- "uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback" (p. 26);
- "utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims" (p. 26);
- "has acquired some specific lexis" (p. 26); and
- has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursal expertise.

Since the preceding definition was his initial response to the concept, Swales (1998) revisited the concept of the discourse community. In doing so, he reviewed how many scholars approached the concept of discourse community and argued that Porter (1992) and Killingsworth and Gilbertson (1988) provided the two most important discussions. Porter's (1992) definition will be explored here because of its relevance to my study. Swales (1998) asserts that Porter's definition is from a Foucaultian perspective. He states it is a "fairly broad" (p. 200) definition. I argue there is more of a focus on power than was visible in his (Swales) 1990 definition:

A discourse community is a local and temporary constraining system, defined by a body of texts (or more generally, practices) that are unified by a common focus. A discourse community is a textual system with stated and unstated conventions, a vital history, *mechanisms for wielding power, institutional hierarchies, vested interests*, [my emphasis added] and so on. Thus, a *discourse* [italics in original] community cuts across sociological or institutional boundaries (Porter, 1992, p. 106, as cited in Swales, 1998, p. 200).

For Swales (1998), the notion of discourse community "offers a way of studying how language plays a key role in "situated learning" theories" (p. 20). In calling on Porter (1992), he argues that a discourse community should be seen as "constituted of and constituting various kinds of principles and practices, linguistic, rhetorical, methodological, and ethical" (p. 199). He quotes Porter (1992), who offers four advantages for such a perspective:

- . (1) it focuses directly on texts in terms of rhetorical principles of operation (and is, thus, closely allied to rhetoric as a discipline); (p. 88)
- (2) it allows us, because of its rhetorical orientation, to tolerate, even welcome, a high degree of instability and ambiguity; (p. 88)
- (3) it takes a broad historical view of communities and examines both the changes within and between communities and the relationship of these communities to "general culture"; (p. 88) and
- (4) it provides insight into the operation of communities, which are *not* nice neat packages but which are messy, ill-defined, and unstable. [Original emphasis] (p. 88)

According to Swales (1998), Porter “offered a nuanced heuristic” (p. 200) in arguing that the concept of the *discourse community* is useful for “discoursal or rhetorical analysis” (p. 200). However, in the case of my thesis, I generally use the term *community of practice* in preference to the term discourse community, even though I did undertake a rhetorical analysis of aspects of academic writing induction. The reason for using the term *community of practice* throughout this thesis is that Lave and Wenger (1991) provide a framework, a language (for example, peripheral participation), and a way of thinking about how a *community of practice* operates, which was both useful and pertinent for my study since I was interested in the *practice*-based nature of academic writing. Implicit in my use of the community of practice concept is my understanding that my participants were also members of discourse communities.

2.4 Literacy as a sociocultural practice

A sociocultural approach to literacy began to emerge around the 1980s, as theorists began to reject a traditional view of literacy which saw it as mainly a set of cognitive processes and skills. Gee (2008) explained cognitive ability as a “set of abilities or skills residing inside people’s heads” (p. 2). Street (2003) stated:

What has come to be termed the “New Literacy Studies” ... represents a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice. (p. 77)

Gee (2008) gave a typical argument, from a New Literacies Studies (NLS) perspective, when he stated that the traditional view of literacy was limited, since it viewed literacy as a technical skill undertaken by individuals and did not take into account the context and the impact that the context had on literacy activity. In other words, NLS theorists argue that in order to understand literacy its social nature needs to be considered. Barton and Hamilton (2012) declared: “literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people” (p. 3). Gee (2008) argued that “to appreciate language in its social context ... Discourses” [capital D in original] (p. 2) should be considered. He used capital “D” to emphasise the ideological embedding of language usage in social practices:

A Discourse with a capital “D” is composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading *coupled* [italics in original] with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities. (p. 155)

Another short-coming of a purely cognitive view of literacy is that it does not take into account the way literacy and literacy practices involve issues of power. Street (1984), well known for his critical approach to literacy (see e.g., Street, 1995, 2003), argued that access to literacy, texts, and literacy practices are always “rooted in a particular world-view” (Street, 2005, p. 418). Therefore, from the perspective of NLS theorists, particular literacy practices can marginalise some and assist others in their exercise of or access to power (Street, 2006).

In short, a traditional approach to literacy would have been too narrow for my research, since I was interested in the literacy practices participants engaged in, which involved interactions with others. This meant that it was beneficial for me to use the lens of literacy as a sociocultural practice for my practice-focused study. In the sections below, the authors I drew on are theorists from a NLS perspective. Considering academic writing from this perspective enabled me, in my study, to take a critical view of literacy practices. Concepts discussed are: events and practices, literacy as situated, literacies (plural), and literacy and power. These concepts are intertwined, but will be treated separately below.

2.4.1 Literacy consists of events and practices

Underpinning literacy as social practice theorising, is the argument that activities can be conceptualised as events (Heath, 1982) and practices (Street, 1984). This argument will be explored below.

The concept of *literacy event*, according to Barton (1994a), had its beginnings with the “sociolinguistic idea of speech events” (p. 36), which he argued can be traced back to Dell Hymes (1962). He stated that the concept of literacy events was initially used by Anderson, Teale, and Estrada (1980), who studied twelve children (aged two to four years), both within and outside of their environments with the aim of understanding their literacy development in context. The unit of analysis was a

literacy event, such as a child attempting to read a “story or a sign” (p. 314). Anderson et al. (1980) defined a literacy event as any occasion “when an individual alone or in interaction attempts to comprehend or produce graphic signs” (p. 314). Heath (1982) further developed the concept of *event*. She defined “event” as an occasion “in which written language is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (p. 50).

Barton et al. (2000b) further developed the concept of “events,” arguing that literacy events are often “regular, repeated activities” (Barton et al., 2000a, p. 9) where “reading and writing have a role” (Barton, 1994b, p. viii); generally, written texts are central to the activity (Barton et al., 2000a). Barton (1994a) argued that in order to understand literacy in context, it is important to begin by examining particular situations, or single events, before moving to generalisations. He argued for research methodologies, such as ethnography, as a means of attempting to understand literacy, since researchers begin by looking at the particular before attempting to make generalities. My study employed ethnographic methods since I was interested in participants’ unique experiences and understandings of academic writing induction, from which I could derive patterns and themes.

Practices are at a higher conceptual level than events. Scribner and Cole (1981) described a practice as “a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge” (p. 236). In respect to literacy, this means not only reading a text but also considering the purpose and the context. Street (1984) had a key role in the development of the concept of *literacy practices*, arguing for an ideological model of literacy. Street (1984) called on the work of Graff (1979), when he argued that literacy “forms and practices ... are bound up with an ideology, with the construction and dissemination of conceptions as to what literacy is in relation to the interests of different classes and groups” (p. 105).

In any social context, therefore, some literacy practices are valued over others. The position I adopted was that both literacy events and practices can be viewed in terms of the ideological nature of literacy, since both take place within contexts, and involve interactions among participants and power relations. Ivanic (1998) gives the example of academics spending their time publishing in highly valued journals

as a way of gaining “status in the academic community” (p. 66). She argues that by their taking part in this practice, they reinforce, reproduce and align themselves with “the dominant values, beliefs and structures of a culture” (p. 66). This brings us back to Street’s (1995a) argument, that literacy is not autonomous since it is not “neutral and value free” (p. 151), which is why “all models of literacy” (p. 151) should be “understood within an ideological framework” (p. 151).

One difference between events and practices is that practices are not solely observable. As Gee (1990) puts it, practices involve “ways of talking, interacting, thinking, valuing, and believing” (p. 43). Therefore, practices refer to “both behaviour and the social and cultural conceptualizations that give meaning to the users of reading and/or writing” (Street, 1995, p. 2). Barton et al. (2000a) make a connection between *events* and *practices* by stating that literacy events “are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them” (p. 8). This means that literacy events do not occur in isolation but are based on the repertoire of literacy practices available to participants in any situation. This was the position adopted in this thesis.

Of particular importance to my study was the culturally situated and ideological nature of literacy events and practices. The study used the notions of events and practices to assist with observing, analysing and understanding the observations, interviews and documents that constituted my evidence. I was particularly interested in the meanings of these events and practices to which my participants subscribed.

2.4.2 Literacy as situated

Authors from a sociocultural perspective argue that literacy is situated in time and place (e.g., Barton, et al., 2000a, 2000b; Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 1984). Barton et al. (2000a) capture both the situated and plural nature of literacies with their statement that “Literacies are situated. All uses of written language can be seen as located in particular times and places” (p. 1). They make the point that by examining specific instances of literacy activity, understanding is gained as to “ways in which literacy practices are part of broader social processes” (p. 1).

As mentioned previously, Street (1984) is well known for his work on the situated nature of literacy. His work had its origins in fieldwork (that he described as anthropological) in Iran during the 1970s, and from a course he was teaching on the anthropology of literacy. He explored a sociocultural view of literacy with reference to a variety of literacy practices across different cultures. He examined The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) literacy programmes in countries which included Tanzania and Iran. These studies demonstrated that a sociocultural view of literacy, rather than an autonomous model, gave a more complete picture of literacy as experienced by people, since literacy practices are influenced by the context or environment these practices occur in. As my study was interested in academic writing practices the situated nature of these was a consideration of prime importance, which is one reason why I supplemented participant interviews with my observations of lectures and tutorials⁸.

2.4.3 Literacies: plural

Central to New Literacy Studies theorists (Barton, 1994b; Gee, 1990; Street, 1984) is the contention that literacy is multiple. This can be demonstrated by numerous titles of key New Literacy Studies works: *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context* (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000), *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (Gee, 1990) and *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography and Education* (Street, 1995).

New Literacy Studies theories argue that there are two aspects to the multiple nature of literacy. First, in any given society more than one literacy exists, for example, school literacy and work-based literacy. Therefore, people take part in more than one literacy. There are different repertoires of practices associated with these different literacies (Barton et al., 2000a). Barton et al. (2000b) argue that this means that people take part in different discourse communities in different areas of their life.

⁸ A tutorial class is generally more interactive than a lecture. In this study lectures had up to 160 students and the lecturer spoke the majority of the time. The tutorial classes had up to 30 students and there was a range of interaction patterns e.g., student-to-student.

Second, within any context, there are multiple ways of approaching and presenting texts, since texts are “located in particular times and places” (Barton et al., 2000a, p. 1). Lea and Street (1998), with their three-tiered model of academic literacies, acknowledge that various types of literacy, or multiple literacies, are required in various settings or communities. They argue that students need to know when and how to switch “writing styles and genres” (p. 160) according to the setting. Their academic literacies approach will be explained and critiqued in the next section.

2.4.4 Literacy and power

In theorising literacy as a social practice NLS theorists (e.g., Barton et al., 2000b; Gee, 1990; Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 1984) take a critical view of literacy. Each author subscribes to the view that literacy practices shape and are shaped by power relations. Street (1984) argued that literacy is not value free but is always embedded in social practices and in a particular world-view. Hegemonic literacies reflect the practices of dominant cultures and marginalise others. Street (2006) has continued to conceptualise literacy as “an ideological practice, implicated in power relations” (p. 1). He argues that literacy is embedded in “socially constructed epistemological principles” (p. 2) since the way people read and write is always “rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, being” (p. 2).

Lea and Street (1998) developed an “academic literacies” model, which will be explored in some detail below because of its relevance to this study. Their approach was an attempt to address “issues of student writing” (p. 158) in higher education from the perspectives of students and staff. Lea and Street (1998) argued that other academic writing models had not adequately taken into account “important issues of identity and the institutional relationships of power and authority that surround, and are embedded within, diverse student writing practices across the university” (p. 157). They conceptualised student writing in higher education in terms of three main perspectives or models: *study skills*, *academic socialisation*, and *academic literacies*. Lea and Street’s (1998) three models enable us to consider not only the complexity of the academic literacy induction processes that students participate in, but also provide a way of analysing academic literacy practices in a specific site.

Their first model, study skills, views academic literacy as a set of discrete skills to be learnt by students, and which are believed to be transferrable from one context to another. This model focuses attention on surface features, such as language and spelling. The emphasis is on fixing the problems in students' writing, which is viewed as characterised by certain deficits (Lea & Street, 1998). This model is limited because there is much more to writing than grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Their second model, the socialisation model, is concerned with the process of students becoming members of a community of practice by becoming enculturated by tutors/advisers into the discourses and genres of particular disciplines. A limitation of this approach is that it regards the discourses and genres of disciplines as relatively stable and the academic environment as a "homogeneous culture, whose norms and practices have simply to be learnt to provide access to the whole institution" (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158).

Third, the academic literacies model, which transcends but goes beyond both the socialisation and study skills models, emphasises that writing is not just concerned with skills and grammar (surface features), and induction into the discourses and genres of particular disciplines. Rather it draws attention to issues of epistemology (knowledge creation and legitimation). It is concerned with what is considered knowledge and who has "authority over it" (Zhang, 2011, p. 42). In other words, it is regarding valued practices and how these practices came to be valued. This suggests that the relationship of students to the dominant literacy practices they are invited to engage in is complex, since "students are active participants in the process of meaning-making in the academy, and central to this process are issues concerned with language, identity and the contested nature of knowledge" (Lea, 2004, p. 742).

Lea and Street's (1998) model has been taken up by many researchers, which is testimony itself to its usefulness and merits. A strength of the academic literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998) is an acknowledgement that students' enculturation into dominant literacy practices and discourses of tertiary institutions is complex (Lea, 2004). Lea (2004) identifies a limitation of the application of the academic literacies model, namely its lack of attention to pedagogy, which she attempts to address in the text "*Academic literacies: A pedagogy for course design*" (Lea,

2004). Another limitation identified by Lea (2004) is that research conceptualised in terms of this approach has tended to focus on non-traditional students and academic writing, where non-traditional students are, for instance, black minority students and adult students. These limitations identified by Lea (2004) were focused on the relatively narrow scope of the model's application in research studies.

For my own research, Lea and Street's (1998) three-tiered model provided a way of conceptualising academic writing at three distinct levels: skills (study skills model); academic literacy induction (academic socialisation model); and valued practices (academic literacies model). One way I employed this framework was to consider the way my participants conceptualised academic writing. In other words, did my participants consider academic writing at the level of surface features (such as punctuation and spelling), at the level of seamless induction into the conventions of academic writing, or did they have some understanding of the complex, socially embedded nature of academic writing?

2.5 A rhetorical approach to literacy

The rhetorical approach to literacy adopted for this thesis, regards the context (including audience and purpose) as the prime determinant of the decision-making of textual features at whole-text and micro-textual levels, particularly in respect of writing (or textual production in general). This means that writers consider their audience and the purpose for writing (or speaking) when making choices as to what they present and how they present it. Rhetorically oriented writers such as Bakhtin (1986), Andrews (1992) and Locke (2015) were all drawn upon as I established the conceptual framework for this study.

Bakhtin (1986) is a seminal thinker in the field of rhetoric, [even though he did not identify himself as a rhetorician (Murphy, 2001)], since he drew attention to the impact the intended audience has on the shape of an utterance. He distinguished an utterance from a sentence and defined an utterance "as a unit of speech communication" (Bakhtin, p. 73) whereas a sentence was viewed as "a unit of language" (p. 73), which is often a "relatively complete thought" (p. 73). A sentence can be contained within an utterance, since the boundary of an utterance is determined by a "change of speakers" (p. 71).

He also argued that in creating an utterance the speaker or writer in creating an utterance does so in response to both previous and anticipated utterances. These utterances reflect the “conditions and goals” of the activity which is achieved through the “content, style, and compositional structure” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 60) of the communication. The implication of this is that the content, structure and style of utterances are influenced by both the intended purpose of the text and the envisaged audience. Bakhtin stated that there are “relatively stable types of ... utterances” (p. 60) which he defined as “speech genres” (p. 60). He argued that the choice of “linguistic means and speech genre” (p. 84) was determined by the “plan” (p. 84) or goal of the author. He suggested that utterances “can reflect the individuality of the speaker” (or writer) (p. 63), but that some types of documents are more “conducive to reflecting the individuality” (p. 63) of the author than others. He remarked that “artistic literature” was most conducive to self-expression and genres that “require a standard form” include documents such as military commands, and types of business documents.

I would argue that for tertiary students writing assignments, there can be both freedom and the requirement of conformity, since for some assignments students are given the licence to develop a topic choosing their own argumentative stance (and at times they can choose their own topic within certain constraints), within the confines of a specific genre, such as an essay. While writing within this genre, students must conform to academic expectations. For example, sourced information must be acknowledged.

Writing from a New Rhetoric perspective, Andrews (1992) drew on Bakhtin and others in arguing for a rhetorical approach to literacy from an educationist’s point of view. He posited that if rhetoric takes into account “context as well as text, then the educational contexts in which language operates ... will be a natural part of the network to be studied” (p. 3). Andrews argued that it is only by considering the context that textual production occurs, in that the choices made by the author can be understood. In addition, he commented on power relations (just as New Literacy Studies theorists do), when he remarked that “literary study needs to take on a rhetorical dimension so that the political and aesthetic context can be explored” (p. 6), since texts and the writing of texts are subject to power relations.

In line with the New Rhetoric, Locke (2015) takes the position that all texts are written with the intended audience in mind and are produced with the aim of achieving a particular purpose. The writer or speaker employs language in order to serve that purpose. Therefore, the function or functions of the text are always socially determined. Locke (2015), drawing in part on the work of Halliday and Hasan (1985), distinguishes four descending levels (orientation categories) in a rhetorical approach to the writing process: context of culture, context of situation, macro features and micro features. He schematises these in a figure which situates the aspects of academic writing under each of the aforementioned levels (Figure 1.0). Thus, Locke describes his model as a “top-down” approach to writing, “where the function of language features at the micro level are explained by the relationship of the text to its context” (p. 64). He argues for the utility of these levels, since they “suggest both an instructional sequence and also a sequence that individual writers can follow when undertaking a writing task” (p. 165). For my study, drawing on Locke’s (2015) rhetorical process complemented Lea and Street’s (1998) academic literacy framework, since it drew attention to aspects of academic writing not made explicit in Lea and Street’s (1998) framework such as audience and voice. It also required me to consider the rhetorical nature of writing, in that texts are produced in order to achieve an aim, generally with a reader or audience in mind. The four descending levels encouraged me to consider those aspects of writing practice that staff were aiming their instruction at, and what staff and students tended to focus on.

SOCIAL FACTORS

Context of culture

(The broad cultural milieu in which the text is produced)

Context of situation

(The immediate environment of textual production: What is happening?

What is driving the act of textual production?

What kind of intertextual dialogue is this text participating in?

For what kinds of purpose?

Using what strategies, representational resources and media?)

MACRO FEATURES

Intended audience

Purpose(s)

Language function(s)

Typical content

MICRO FEATURES

Layout

Structure, composition, architecture

Diction (aspects of word/image choice)

Syntax, juxtaposition, relationship of elements

Spelling, punctuation, inflection

Figure 1: Locke (2015, p. 63)

Below is my adaptation of Locke (2015), used for analysing academic writing.

SOCIAL FACTORS

Context of Culture

The sociocultural environment in which the text is produced, i.e., the institution and wider environment

Context of situation

The immediate environment of textual production i.e., the aspects of writing influenced by the context the writing occurs in.

- Audience
- Purpose/language functions
- Genre
- Voice

MACRO FEATURES

The aspects of academic writing at whole-text level

- Content
- Coherence

MICRO FEATURES

The aspects of academic writing at word- and sentence level

- Layout
- Structure
- Referencing
- Cohesion
- Word choice
- Punctuation, grammar, syntax

Figure 2: My adaptation of Locke (2015, p. 63)

Drawing on Locke's (2015) scheme, particularly in the second year of evidence collection, resulted in my considering aspects of academic writing that were barely visible or were omissions in the first year of evidence collection. This practice aligns with the approach of Charmaz (1983), who describes a coding process which involves taking note of participants' emphases as well as what they "lack, gloss over, or ignore" (p. 114). My employment of Charmaz (1983) is discussed more fully in Chapter 4.6. The manner in which I have adapted Locke's rhetorical view of textual production has its limitations. Locke's view has considered the

environment in which the text is produced, for example, the institution. As mentioned earlier (e.g. Andrews, 1992) the context needs to be considered in order to take account of power relations. I do not use Locke to comment on power relations but draw on other theorists (e.g., Gee, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lea, 2005; Swales, 1998).

Below, I briefly explore the perspective taken in my study in relation to some aspects of academic writing mentioned in Locke's (2015) table above. I do not explain all aspects in my adaptation of his table, since some aspects (e.g., content, syntax, grammar and punctuation) I considered straightforward and not requiring elucidation.

2.5.1 Social/contextual category

Audience

Porter (1992), who writes from a rhetorical perspective, defines *audience* as the “person or persons who receive the message and who are persuaded, entertained or informed (or not, as the case may be) by the message” (p. x). He explained that the person/s reading the text can be real and singular (such as the marker of an assignment) or imagined and plural (such as an academic audience). In a rhetorical approach to writing, audience is of prime importance as it can influence the purpose of the text, the textual functions, the genre chosen, the content, and the linguistic choices made (e.g., word choice, syntax).

Language functions/purpose

In a rhetorical approach to literacy, texts are viewed as produced in order to achieve a purpose. Derewianka (1990), writing out of a functional approach to literacy, explained that texts are structured in different ways to meet their purpose. She gives examples of purposes such as to *entertain*, to *argue*, to *enquire*, and to *reflect*. Locke (2015) prefers the terminology *language function*. He offers the example of a travel story requiring more than one language function as it involves *description*, *narration* and *argumentation*. In my study, I use the term *language function* to denote the work that is done by a text to achieve its goal.

By way of example I explore below the language functions of *critique*, *argumentation* and *explanation*, since these are particularly pertinent to academic writing.

The perspective commonly taken is that critical thinking is a cognitive skill which relates to problem-solving and logic (Daniel, 2001; Jones, 2007) and the exercise of judgement (Tan, 2016). Andrews (2012) argues that the development of a point of view and evaluating published sources can enhance criticality. Daniel (2001) states that critical thinking must be contextualised within students' disciplinary areas (p. 50). In addition, Allamnakhrah (2013), Daniel (2001) and Mulnix (2012) argue that a focus of education is to promote the acquisition of critical thinking skills.

A fairly standard definition of a critique is provided by the University of Waikato (2011). They state that a critique is an evaluation of a text. "The aim is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the text including the validity of the scholar's assumptions, claims, ideas, conclusions, research methods, knowledge and engagement with the published literature" (para. 1).

Andrews (2010) defines argument as "a logical or quasi-logical sequence of ideas that is supported by evidence" (p. 3), which has a more critical aspect to it than discussion or conversation. Wingate (2012) outlines three aspects of argumentation: "the analysis and evaluation of content knowledge" (p. 146), "the writer's development of a position" (p. 146), and "the presentation of that position in a coherent manner" (p. 146).

I was unable to find a definition of the language function *explanation* in research or studies on academic writing. However, Derewianka (1990), in a text which explores grammar within the primary school context, shows how a range of texts function to achieve their purposes, stating that the *explanation* genre has two main types: "how something works" (p. 60) and "reasons for a [some] phenomenon" (p. 60).

Genre

We often think of genre as denoting a book or movie type such as "crime" or "comedy." Locke (2015) focuses on both the socially constructed nature of the text and the text itself. He states that "while a genre is social in origin, there is a clear emphasis on individual agency and creativity" (p. 73). Locke explains that genre is a "way of doing something in a text using semiotic resources" (p. 73). He calls on Freedman and Medway (1994) who from a New Rhetoric perspective defined genres as "typical ways of engaging rhetorically with recurring situations" (p. 2).

Australian genre theorists Cope and Kalantzis (1993) also argued that genres are “patterned in reasonably predictable ways” (p. 7). They describe genres as “social processes” because genres are produced “according to patterns of social interaction in a particular culture. Social patterning and textual patterning meet as genres” (p. 7). However, some genres are more stable than others, as some genres allow for greater creative authorial input and flexibility than others. Bakhtin (1986) (as mentioned earlier in this section) argued, for example, that the individual style of an author can be expressed more easily in artistic literature than in other types of documents.

Some theorists use the term *genre* and others *text type*. Lin (2010) argues that texts are “largely socially defined (e.g., *novels, academic articles*)” (p. 14) [italics in original] or defined by their “communicative or rhetorical functions (e.g., arguments, explanations)” [italics in original] (p. 14). Texts have sometimes been classified as “genres” and sometimes as “text types” (p. 14). Derewianka (1990) uses the term *genre* to refer to communicative functions such as “report, argument, narrative” (p. 6). In contrast, from the perspective of genres as “social processes” (see Cope & Kalantzis, 1993), Locke (2015) gives the examples of a lyric poem, novels, a piece of legislation and a curriculum vitae. It is Locke’s (2015) approach to *genre* that I used in this thesis.

Students are expected to engage with many different genres (in respect of both academic reading and writing). They can feel challenged by making textual decisions, especially since at times the purpose, the audience, and the expectation that students produce a written argument, is not always made clear to students. It cannot be assumed that students bring to their tertiary study a competent grasp of *genre* as a concept.

2.5.2 Macro-level

These aspects of academic writing are at whole-text level.

Voice

DiPardo, Storms, and Selland (2011) report that the notion of voice is a contested concept and there is no general agreement on how it should be defined. Elbow (1982) very simply states that voice is the sound of the author. In an important theoretical work, Ivanic (1998) closely connects the concepts *identity* and *voice* as an individual's identity is reflected or displayed in their writing. She identifies four aspects of writer identity: *autobiographical self*, *discoursal self*, *self as author*, and *possibilities for self-hood*. *Autobiographical self* is how the writer's text is shaped by the authors' "sense of their roots" (p. 24). *Discoursal self* is explained by Locke (2015) as "how we position ourselves in relation to an anticipated audience by the discourses we subscribe to and project outwards" (p. 53). *The discoursal self* is related to the way the author wants "to sound" (p. 25) in the text, rather than the "stance they are taking" (p. 25), whereas, *self as author* can be described as how "writers see themselves ... as authors, and present themselves to a greater or lesser extent as authors" (p. 26). Locke (2015) explains *possibilities for self-hood* as related to there being "certain social conditions that favor our willingness to takes risks in trying out or asserting or discovering identities ... in the act of writing" (p. 53). He relates this to our finding our voice. In this thesis, I adopt the view that there is a strong connection between voice, audience and stance, since one way a writer's voice can be heard is through the development of their argument or stance.

Coherence

Kern (2000) states that "coherence has to do with unity and continuity of the discourse ... the degree to which concepts and relations that underlie the surface are mutually relevant" (p. 80). Simply put, the parts of a text fit together well, in a manner which enables the reader to make sense of the text as a coherent whole.

2.5.3 Micro-level

These aspects of academic writing are at word- and sentence-level.

Cohesion

Cohesion can be identified as “explicit linguistic devices that link the sentences in a text” (Todd, Khongput, & Darasawang, 2007, p. 12). According to Leech, Cruickshank and Ivanic (2001), “there are four main types of cohesion: reference, substitution, ellipsis” (p. 83) and the use of “linking words” (p. 83) such as “linking adverbs and conjunctions” (p. 83).

Referencing

The concept of referencing, as used in my study refers to two aspects of academic writing: the use of in-text citations and the development of a reference list provided by authors at the end of their text to provide detail on sources cited.

2.6 Conclusion

In this thesis, I took the view that learners, when engaging in textual practices, are apprenticed into communities of practice. The underlying assumption of this thesis is that students are engaged in textual practices and are also conscripted into discourse communities. Considering academic writing as a sociocultural practice enabled a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the situated, diverse, and discursive nature of academic writing induction. Finally, adopting a rhetorical approach to writing drew attention to the way writers make textual choices. Locke’s framework also provided me with a framework, categories, and aspects, pertinent to academic writing.

In the following chapter, I review studies on academic literacy in a range of settings. I also review studies on students’ academic literacy learning experiences in two modes: distance and face-to-face. In addition, I review studies on student and staff understandings of aspects of academic writing and what staff and students consider helpful and unhelpful for tertiary students engaged in the process of writing assignments.

CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF STUDIES ON ACADEMIC WRITING

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I review studies on aspects of academic writing pertinent to my study. For my thesis, I adopt the position that literacy needs to be viewed, at least in part, as a social practice. Consequently, the approach taken in this study is that academic writing learning experiences are a socially situated set of practices.

In Section 3.2, I report on studies which explore distance students' academic literacy learning experiences as related to academic writing. In Section 3.3, I review studies on staff and students' understandings of academic writing. In Section 3.4, I draw on studies on academic writing practices which tertiary students and/or staff have identified as helpful or/and unhelpful, in respect to students writing assignments. In the conclusion to the chapter (Section 3.5), I draw together the studies reviewed and outline the contribution this study makes to existing research.

In conducting my search of the literature, my aim was to find empirical research on tertiary student and staff understandings of academic writing induction. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, I investigated three topic areas: distance students and academic writing, students and staff understandings of academic writing, and practices identified by students and staff as helpful or unhelpful for students' writing. Once findings began to emerge, I tailored later searches to the key themes identified. For example, when I searched for articles on tertiary students' understanding of referencing I narrowed my search to topics which included: whether or not students always produced in-text citations for sourced material, reasons for students choosing to paraphrase or use direct quotations and how students used citations to develop and justify their claims. In respect of staff, I searched for studies on staff understandings of referencing conventions and how staff taught students about using and referencing sources.

As I was interested in empirical research, my search generally involved journal articles rather than books. I used mainly Google Scholar and Discovery Layer Software named Proquest Summon provided by the University of Montor⁹ (pseudonym). Some major databases covered with Summon were: Elsevier, Taylor & Francis, Wiley, Sage, Springer, JSTOR, ProQuest, EBSCO and Informit.¹⁰ The search was limited to full-text articles written in English. If there was a large number of articles I chose those that were written recently, and had domestic students as research students, rather than EAL students. My search for articles continued throughout the term of my study. A number of the search terms used were those from Locke's (2015) rhetorical approach to writing framework, for example, *audience, critique, critical thinking, genre, voice, coherence, and cohesion*. Other terms were used to supplement these, for example, when searching for articles on *voice* I also included "authoritative and voice" and "identity and writing." A number of the articles reported on studies conducted in high schools. When this occurred, I added the search term "tertiary" to elicit studies conducted within the tertiary environment.

Two trends are apparent throughout this chapter. First, there was a paucity of research conducted in certain topic areas, particularly where research participants were domestic students. Second, the research conducted with pre-service primary education students and staff in respect of academic writing was carried out mainly in Australia.

Throughout this chapter, I have focused on studies conducted with pre-service education students wherever possible. When reviewing the literature, however, it became clear that findings from a variety of studies can be applied to a range of disciplines and their respective cohorts of students. In addition, wherever possible, I have cited studies which had domestic students as participants. When this was not possible I have indicated the fact.

⁹ I have used this pseudonym throughout to refer to the university where my study was conducted.

¹⁰ Information made available by the Faculty Subject Librarian at the University which was the site for the study.

3.2 Distance students' academic literacy learning experiences

In this section, I review studies which explore aspects of distance students' academic learning experiences and/or experiences of staff teaching in distance programmes. Where possible, I refer to studies on academic writing. As it turned out, there was a paucity of studies which explored teaching and learning practices related to academic writing via distance programmes.

Little research (especially recent research) has been conducted which investigated distance students' academic literacy learning experiences (e.g., Cronin, 1997; Hoadley-Maidment, 1997). Hoadley-Maidment (1997) investigated the "acquisition of academic writing skills by adult students studying by distance learning" (p. 55). The study was conducted with 11 students in their first year of studying in the foundation courses in the subject areas "social science or arts and humanities with the Open University" (p. 55) in the United Kingdom. Student perceptions were gained via interviews and questionnaires. There was a focus in these courses on the development of study and writing skills. The author argued that there were similarities between the experiences of students learning via distance and on-campus, but that the "text-based nature of distance delivery" (p. 55) affected how distance students acquired writing skills. She reflected that instead of students having opportunities to discuss ideas in tutorials (as on-campus students would), a large component of the course involved students reading texts and completing interactive activities. She commented that students appeared to understand the ideas in texts, yet in assignments they tended to "stick too close to the text" (p. 65). The author probably meant that students paraphrased ideas very closely to the original, in that they changed a few words from the original text. She gave two possible reasons: students did not realise they should use their own voice in their writing, or "they lack[ed] confidence to manipulate the subject-specific discourse" (p. 65). It would have added further to this study had the author qualified what she meant by "basics" when she reported that by the end of the semester "all students had grasped the basics of essay-writing" (p. 62). In addition, the author remarked that the students were taught writing skills during the semester, but did not say how.

Cronin (1997) undertook research at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia, and explored difficulties experienced by distance students in meeting the “academic expectations of tertiary study” (p. 1). Both students and staff believed that the skills related to essay writing were a challenge for students. Several students reported feeling anxious about study because either they had not studied for many years or lacked an academic background. This study indicates that students’ academic background (or lack of it) were more of a concern than the medium they were studying through.

There have been a limited number of studies which have explored pedagogical interventions designed to raise distance students’ academic literacy levels (e.g., Goodfellow & Lea, 2005¹¹; Spencer, Lephala & Pienaar, 2005). Spencer, Lephala, and Pienaar (2005) investigated an intervention designed to raise students’ academic literacy skills in a distance education university in Unisa, in South Africa. Participants were 27 Mercantile Law students ranging from first-to fourth-year, some of whom had been identified as “at risk” students. The interventions, which occurred through face-to-face contact, consisted of four workshops, “aimed at developing the students’ understanding of argumentative writing as well as helping them to develop the critical reading skills relevant to their discipline” (p. 225). Students were required to write two argumentative essays, one pre-intervention and one post. Post-intervention it was found that for most students (even though only approximately 50% of the students did the post-test), there was an improvement in essay content. The reading intervention consisted of students critically reading a range of texts and answering multiple-choice questions. The authors explain that multiple choice questions formed a high percentage of the assessments at the university. They conclude that it was “possible that the [reading] intervention raised students’ awareness and equipped them with new strategies to approach reading tasks and overcome reading difficulties” (p. 233). The authors recommend that students, particularly at-risk students, be offered academic support interventions. It would have added further insights to this study had information

¹¹ Study was conducted with 12 master’s level students. The authors state that some were EAL.

been given about students' post-intervention essays in relation to coherence, cohesion and argumentation.

Numerous studies have investigated aspects of online discussions (Forbes, 2012; Hew & Cheung, 2012; Mazzolini & Maddison, 2003; Penny & Murphy, 2009; Rovai, 2007; Wang & Woo, 2007)¹². However, few have explored whether students and/or staff perceived online discussions as helpful for assignment writing. One study by Khoo, Forret, and Cowie (2009) reported on the development of an online learning community in an asynchronous research methods online course in a New Zealand tertiary institution. Participants were a lecturer and 14 graduate students. Evidence was gained via interviews, observations and questionnaires. Part of an assessment involved students critiquing online aspects of each other's assignments. One student reported that this process was "really valuable" (p. 530) for writing development and also assisted with relationship building with other students. It was not stated if other students found the online critiquing process, in relation to assignment writing, valuable or problematic.

The most comprehensive study I located on pre-service primary education programmes was by Simpson (2003), who studied the distance delivery of 21 pre-service teacher education programmes around the world, including 3 in New Zealand. The study considered many aspects of these programmes including: national support, institutional support, student selection, tutor qualifications and skills, staff developments, materials, and assessment (the provision of feedback, and the timing of assessment tasks). This study did not consider staff and student understandings of academic literacy, or students' experiences of engaging in the writing of assignments via distance. The author found that staff had a good understanding of distance education but a weaker understanding of pre-service education. The study's lack of focus on academic writing was typical. As mentioned in my introduction, there have also been studies conducted with teacher education students and/or staff, at the same site as my research (e.g., Campbell, 1997; Donoghuy & McGee, 2003; Donoghuy, McGee, Ussher & Yates, 2003; Forbes,

¹² In Mazzolini and Maddison's (2003) study students resided in 34 countries. Wang and Woo's (2007) study was conducted at the National Institute of Education in Singapore.

2012). These all explored aspects of the delivery mode, but did not include academic writing.

Research supports the view that when students experience a sense of community, this has positive effects on their learning experience and development (Gomez & Rico, 2007; Goos & Bennison, 2007). There were a limited number of studies comparing whether learners' sense of community differed, depending on whether they were involved in distance or on-campus programmes (Carver & Kosloski, 2015; Drouin & Vartanian, 2010; Yang, Cho, & Watson, 2015). These studies found that in general, students experienced the face-to-face environment as more communal. One study by Rovai and Jordan (2004) investigated the sense of community amongst students enrolled in a master's degree in education. There were 24 research participants in the face-to-face course: 22 in the blended course and 21 in the online course. Evidence was collected via the Classroom Community Scale (CCS), developed by Rovai (2002) and end-of-course evaluations. The authors reported that the strongest sense of community was experienced in the blended course. They found that the face-to-face classes in the weekend complemented the online component and "were a valuable component both academically and in building professional relationships and a strong sense of community" (p. 10). This study did not give information on how a sense of community, and the blended approach assisted with students' academic development, in particular written assignments. My study contributes to research in this area.

To conclude, this review demonstrates that there are few studies which have investigated academic writing induction for students studying via distance. I was unable to find studies which had compared and contrasted distance and on-campus students' academic writing induction experiences. My study adds to existing research in the area of academic writing induction, especially in respect of distance teaching and learning practices.

3.3 Student and staff understandings of academic writing

The organisation of this section is based on my adaptation of Locke's (2015) view of textual production and is structured according to the categories: *social/contextual*, *macro* and *micro*. Within each section, I address distinct aspects of academic writing (e.g., audience). In most cases, my discussion of these aspects

follows a similar structure. I begin with a brief reminder of the meaning I employ for the aspect. I then review studies which explore student and then staff understandings of various aspects of academic writing. I then outline studies that report on or recommend pedagogical practices in respect of the aspect of academic writing.

With a rhetorical view of writing, texts are produced “in order to ... achieve a goal with a reader or audience” (Locke, 2015, p. 61). In other words, textual production is a social practice. Hence, I begin the section below with various aspects of the social/contextual category.

3.3.1 Social/contextual category

Audience

The audience is the person or persons the text is intended for and who can be known (e.g., the marker of an assignment), or imagined (e.g., a general academic audience).

Few studies explored tertiary student and/or staff awareness of *audience* when writing (e.g., Berkenkotter, 1981; Flower & Hayes, 1980; Kirsch, 1991; Wong, 2004). A consistent finding among the limited number of studies was that experienced writers generally have an awareness of audience while composing. This was illustrated in a seminal study by Flower and Hayes (1980), who investigated whether expert and novice writers spent time analysing their audience, and “if so, how [did] they do it?” (p. 23). The novice writers were college students who were receiving assistance from the Communication Skills Centre for difficulties with writing. The expert writers were “teachers of writing and rhetoric” (p. 23). The study used think-aloud protocols in which participants verbalised their thinking processes while they wrote. Both groups were given the same writing task. It was found that experienced writers considered the rhetorical problem and situation (audience and/or purpose) while writing much more often than the novice writers did. In addition, the staff considered all aspects of the rhetorical problem, including audience, and the writers’ goals in relation to the audience. In contrast, students were generally focused on surface features of the assignment, including “number of pages or ... format” (p. 29).

Another study of some relevance to this thesis was by Kirsch (1991), who studied experienced writers composing for two different audiences. There were five participants, consisting of staff and doctoral students, all of whom had a variety of writing and publishing experiences. Participants were asked to write two letters (one to incoming students and one to a faculty committee), taking on the role of writing instructors. Evidence was gained from notes and drafts of the letters, interviews and protocol analysis (composing aloud). Three trends emerged. First, four of the five writers evaluated their writing more often when they were writing for a faculty committee. The author suggested that this might mean that when writing for an authoritative audience, writers are inclined to revisit and edit their text more often. Second, when writing to incoming students, the writers set what the authors referred to as “textual goals” (p. 40). These goals were focused on providing information on the writing programmes within the department. The author argued that this could indicate the writers considered the students “less knowledgeable about writing programs than faculty members” (p. 40). Third, the writers frequently addressed their student audience “with the personal pronoun “you,” while they tended to address the faculty ... only in the beginning and ends of their letters” (p. 42). According to the author, these findings reflected the writer’s awareness of the context of the writing (the university and the writing programme) and “the readers’ positions of authority within that context” (p. 42). These factors appeared to influence the writing produced.

This section will review studies focused on the language functions *critique*, *argumentation* and *explanation* in the context of teaching and learning writing in tertiary environments.

Critique

This next section explores studies on critical thinking. A fairly standard understanding of critical thinking is that it is a cognitive skill which relates to problem-solving and logic (Daniel, 2001; Jones, 2007) and the exercise of judgement (Tan, 2016).

It is a commonplace understanding that a function of tertiary education is to facilitate students’ ability to engage in critical thinking (e.g., Elder, 2005; Mulnix, 2012). Studies I reviewed generally did not explore student or staff understanding

of critical thinking. (Elder, 2005; Mulnix, 2012). However, there were a number of studies where, through pedagogical interventions, students were given opportunities to engage in critical thinking and develop critical thinking abilities. These opportunities were presented through a number of modes; for example, through philosophical dialogue (Daniel, 2001), debate (Yang & Rusli, 2012) and online discussion (Bai, 2009). What these studies have in common is that they discovered that students' ability to engage in critical thinking can be developed by pedagogical interventions of various kinds.

There were few studies which researched domestic students' ability to engage in critical reading (Abbott, 2013; See & Andrews, 2007; Weller, 2010)¹³. One article by See and Andrews (2007) researched in part the aforementioned phenomenon. Their main study focus was to investigate the use of arguments among first-year undergraduate students in the United Kingdom. Four questionnaire items were related to critically evaluating source texts. It was found that 63 % thought they should accept findings from recently published texts; 79% of students agreed that they would accept findings from articles if the texts were peer reviewed; 85 % of students believed that "good research should be substantiated by numerical data" (p. 21); and 23 % agreed that "if [the] argument is convincing [the] conclusions must be true" (p. 21). The authors viewed the four questions as a "simple measure of students' critical thinking skills" (p. 21), which they gauged by assessing critical reading skills. The authors concluded that, based on students' answers to four questions, their critical reading ability needed development. I argue that there is more to critical reading and critical thinking than can be evaluated with the four questions, but this does give an indication of students' limited understanding of critically evaluating texts.

A number of studies (Buckingham & Nevile, 1997; Penrose & Geisler, 1994; Vardi, 2012a)¹⁴ have found that generally undergraduate students do not engage critically with sources. Penrose and Geisler (1994) examined two texts, one written by a student in their first year of tertiary study, and one written by a doctoral student (studying philosophy) in his final stages of writing his thesis. The authors found that the

¹³ Abbott's study was based on staff interviews.

¹⁴ In Vardi's (2012a) study approximately half of the 2500 students were EAL students.

undergraduate writer presented sources as facts or authoritative, whereas the doctoral writer presented sources as having competing or contrasting ideas or perspectives.

Vardi (2012a) conducted research with 2500 students taking part in a first-year communications unit in a large Australian university. Half of these were domestic students. She gave students writing instruction, where the focus was on assisting students to develop their ability to write in an “informed and critical way” (p. 926) about their topic. The instruction given included the “skilful selection, use and acknowledgement of sources” (p. 921). There was a marked improvement between the first and second assessment, with 37% (up from 26% in the first essay) showing the ability to “skilfully use citation in critical writing” (p. 927). Students were given referencing instruction in tutorials, which consisted of “deconstructing the assessment questions, discussing analysis, evaluation and argument, showing students how to use different forms of citation to further their viewpoint and determining search strategies” (p. 926). The author found a correlation between high grades and the use of “citation skilfully to support their argument” (p. 926). This study suggests that the teaching of argumentation should embrace other skills, such as the use of evidence.

Another study of relevance, and the only one I located which investigated students critiquing a text, was by Mathison (1996). The author investigated how 32 undergraduate students, who were in an upper-level sociology course, wrote critiques of a text. It was found that the majority of students wrote a “reporting and personal response” and “did not contextualize their commentary within a disciplinary framework” (p. 329). Few students wrote a “disciplinary-based argument for or against the information about which they were commenting” (p. 329). Many students focused on reporting weaknesses in the text which, the author argued, indicated that they thought “critique as a task in finding weaknesses” (p. 329). The author reported that students found this assignment difficult since they were unable to produce what the academic staff expected.

Mathison’s (1996) study also explored what staff considered to be a well-written critique of a text. Four academic staff were asked to develop their own marking criteria for grading the assignments. There was some agreement on criteria, including “evaluative commentary ... supporting commentary with evidence” (p.

340). However, there were differences in what staff judged to be quality writing. For example, one staff member rated negative commentary highest, whereas another staff member did not consider negative commentary to be an aspect of critique. This finding is consistent with research which has found that there can be individual variations in how staff judge the standard of assignments (e.g., Devereux, Macken-Horarik, Trimingham-Jack & Wilson, 2006; Lea & Street, 1998). The author reflected that a limitation of this study was that it described how students critiqued the text but not why they undertook certain practices. My own study adds to research in this area, since students in my study also critiqued a text as one of their assessments.

To conclude, there were a number of studies which investigated how pedagogical interventions can facilitate students' critical thinking skills. There was a paucity of studies which explored students engaging in *critique* through written assignments. As explained above, my study adds to existing literature in a number of these areas.

Argumentation

Andrews (2010) defines argument as “a logical or quasi-logical sequence of ideas that is supported by evidence” (p. 3), which has a more critical aspect to it than discussion or conversation.

Researchers are in agreement that the teaching and learning of written argumentation skills at tertiary level is an under-researched area (Andrews, 2009; Torgerson, Andrews, Robinson, & See, 2006; Wingate, 2012). Studies have found that students have a limited understanding of how to produce a written argument (e.g., Andrews et al., 2006; Davies, 2008). Davies (2008) and Wingate (2012) argue that staff do not generally have the skills or understanding of argumentation to teach argument-making adequately to students.

Wingate (2012) found both students and staff had limited understanding of producing a written argument. She explored 117 undergraduate students' concepts of argument when they arrived at a university. Student evidence was gained via a questionnaire and writing samples. Staff understanding of argumentation was judged through assignment feedback comments. It was found that students had little understanding of argumentation. In fact, 34 students described argument (on the questionnaire administered in their induction week) as “stating your personal

opinion” (p. 148). Staff appeared to consider the ability to argue to be an important aspect of writing since in assignment feedback the terms “argument,” “arguments,” and “argumentation” were explicitly used in more than half of the comments. However, many of the tutors’ comments referred to “argumentation inconsistently and vaguely” (p. 145). Conducting student and staff interviews would have added to this study, as these could have provided an opportunity to collect in-depth evidence. In addition, it would have been useful to know which faculties students were studying in as there can be disciplinary differences in the way argumentation is understood.

A number of researchers state that students are often not taught explicitly how to create a written argument (e.g., See & Andrews, 2007; Wingate, 2012). Davies (2008), Andrews et al. (2006) and Wingate, (2012) posit that “argument-making skills need to be explicitly taught” (Davis, 2008, p. 339). Davies argued that EAL students should be explicitly taught how to make an argument and states one way to do this is to teach students about inference-making. He defined inference-making as “reliable cognitive ‘links’ from one proposition or statement to another” (p. 328). He states that argument “in the tertiary context involves the ability to make sound inferences, and to examine them dispassionately” (p. 328). He explained that he was mainly interested in the “sub-linguistic inference-making as an instance of critical thinking (e.g., if P then Q, if Q then R, therefore if P then R) (p. 328). He stated that teaching students how to create an argument will “assist students to confront assignments with confidence, not bewilderment” (p. 339). His suggestions about argument also apply to domestic students.

To conclude, it appears that student and staff understandings of argumentation and the teaching of argumentation are areas that warrant further research. My study, which explores teaching and learning practices in respect of written argumentation, makes a contribution here.

Explanation

According to Derewianka (1990), the *explanation* genre has two main types: “how something works” and “reasons for a [some] phenomenon” (p. 60).

I found no studies which had investigated tertiary students and/or staff understandings of the language function *explanation* and no studies which had

explored pedagogical practices intended to facilitate students' ability to produce a written explanation. This may be because in academic writing "explanation" is a taken-for-granted language function not worthy of reflection and research. However, explanation is often required in writing. For example, Wolfe (2011) gives a number of types of arguments, including *decision-based arguments*. The author states that decision-based arguments occur where the author supports a verdict or decision. In some cases, the argument *explains* and justifies a decision. Therefore, from this perspective, in order to create a decision-based argument, *explanation* is required.

Genre

As mentioned in Chapter 2.5.1, from a New Rhetoric perspective, Freedman and Medway (1994) defined genres as "typical ways of engaging rhetorically with recurring situations" (p. 2). Australian genre theorists Cope and Kalantzis (1993) also argued that genres are "patterned in reasonably predictable ways" (p. 7). They describe genres as "social processes" because genres are produced "according to patterns of social interaction in a particular culture. Social patterning and textual patterning meet as genres" (p. 7). Certain genres are widespread in academia, for example, the expository essay, the argumentative essay and the report.

Alongside induction into academic writing is the expectation of producing a range of genres. This is well recognised in a number of studies (e.g., Gilbert, 2012, Trimmingham-Jack, Devereux, Macken-Horarik, & Wilson, 2004). For example, Trimmingham-Jack et al. (2004) reported on the scaffolding of academic literacy for pre-service education students. One of the researchers stated that in the 18-month period of the research project, students "completed nearly 30 pieces of assessment, of which only four were traditional essays" (p. 265). It was recognised by the programme head that each genre required "a different set of skills" (p. 263). She doubted that staff considered "scaffolding the students in mastering the skills of each one" (p. 263). In addition, none of the staff interviewed commented on how and if they assisted students to cope with the diverse range of assignments. Further discussion of Devereux et al. (2006) and Devereux and Wilson (2008) occurs in Section 3.4.1.

Some of the complexities of engaging in a diverse range of genres are well illustrated in a seminal study by Lea and Street (1998). They studied students' engagement in writing in higher education contexts from the perspective of both students and staff. They interviewed 23 staff and 47 students in two universities in the Southeast of England. Evidence was collected via participant observations, samples of students' assignments with and without staff feedback and "handouts on essay writing" (p. 160). One of the findings was that students reported needing to switch "between diverse writing requirements" (p. 163) and that students understood that it was their task to work out what type of writing was required. The authors argued that unpacking what was expected was "at a more complex level than genre, such as the 'essay' or 'report,' but lay more deeply at the level of writing particular knowledge in a specific academic setting" (p. 163). To further complicate matters students reported that there were individual preferences associated with academic staff. Students reported finding it difficult to "unpack what kind of writing any particular assignment might require" (p. 163). This could have been further complicated by the fact that some staff could "describe" (p. 163) what constituted good writing but struggled to be more explicit. The authors gave the example of one lecturer who said: "I know a good essay when I see it but I cannot describe how to write it" (p. 163). A strength of this research was that an ethnographic-style approach was used to gain an understanding of literacy practices and requirements from the perspective of participants. My study builds on Lea and Street's (1998) in many ways. For example, I gathered students' reflections on their experiences of engaging in more than one genre, and staff reflections on and my observations of their pedagogical scaffolding into the skills required, and expectations provided to students, in relation to different genres. In addition, evidence was collected on student and staff experiences of and reflections on students writing a number of *essays* where different assignment criteria had to be met.

There is a scarcity of studies investigating pedagogical practices for increasing tertiary students' ability to write unfamiliar genres. Clark and Hernandez (2012) discuss the results of a pilot study from a project entitled: "*Academic Argument and Disciplinary Transfer: Fostering Genre Awareness in First Year Writing Students*" (p. 65). The project involved 24 students in a first-year writing class. The authors' intention was that by raising awareness of the genre taught in the course (academic

argument) and of a text's "rhetorical and social purpose" (p. 65) students might have the "tools they need[ed] to address new writing situations" (p. 65). The authors make the distinction between "genre awareness" and "explicit teaching of genre" (p. 66). They argue that the former enhances students' ability to attempt writing genres not encountered before. In this study, students wrote three assignments which all involved increasing their understanding of constructing an academic argument. Students completed a survey at the conclusion of the course. All indicated that their new understanding of genre had been helpful in that it assisted them to be "less anxious" (p. 71) about writing. The authors posit that, "Despite the limited sample, one might make the case that a decrease in writing anxiety, unto itself, is likely to contribute to students' ability to grapple with writing tasks in other classes" (p. 71). I argue that students being "less anxious" (p. 71) does not mean that students have the *ability* to write in genres that are unfamiliar to them. It is unclear if this pedagogical intervention increased students' ability to attempt new genres and whether being taught how to produce an academic argument can be transferred to other genres (such as a report).

To conclude, it appears that there is some recognition that tertiary students need to produce assignments in a diverse range of genres, yet staff instruction aimed at giving students skills on how to approach different genres is an under-researched area. My study explored student and staff understandings of different genres, and pedagogical interventions designed to assist students to develop their ability to write assignments in different genres.

Voice

Voice is the sound of the author in the text (Elbow, 1982) or, as Ivanic (1998) says "the strength with which the writer comes over as the author of the text" (p. 400).

Studies which explored domestic student and/or staff understandings of voice appear limited in number (e.g., Read, Francis & Robson, 2010; Viète & Le Ha, 2007). As mentioned in Chapter 2.5.1, DiPardo, Storms, and Selland (2011) who reported on a pedagogical intervention to assist undergraduate psychology students to use their voice in their dissertations (later renamed "stance"), commented that the notion of voice is "variously defined, much debated, and decidedly under-researched" (p. 172). Generally researchers have found that less experienced writers

can find it challenging, in that it is “risky”¹⁵ (Viete & Le Ha, 2007, p. 48) to foreground their voice in written texts (Read et al., 2010; Viete & Le Ha, 2007). For example, Read et al. (2010) explored undergraduate student presentation of voice. The authors do not specifically define voice but relate it to the development of an academic argument. They interviewed via telephone 45 undergraduate history students in their final year. Nearly half the students said their ideas should be backed up by other texts. However, even though students identified that their voice should come through in their writing, the majority of them felt it was safer to use their tutor’s voice. They did this by adhering to the ideas presented in lectures.

A number of studies have explored how EAL students are taught about voice (Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Macalister, 2012; Stapleton, 2002; Zhao & Llosa, 2008) but very few have considered domestic students. One such study, by Castello, Inesta, Pardo, Liesa, and Martinez-Fernandez (2011), reported on an intervention they undertook with undergraduate psychology students in their eighth semester of study in a university in Spain. The intervention sessions “combined writing coach explanations, text analysis and guided discussions” (p. 103), which focused on text organisation, “positioning oneself as the author” (p. 103), and positioning the author amongst other texts. Evidence was collected from 28 students engaging in online meetings and 16 in face-to-face meetings. It was found that the student texts improved through the intervention, especially in the area of authorial positioning. The authors acknowledge that this study had limitations, including involving a small group of participants, and was focused on summative dissertations with one particular group of students. These authors view voice in a similar fashion to the study by Read et al. (2010), whereby voice is demonstrated through the development of a stance or argument.

To conclude, studies which explore student and staff understandings of voice and student pedagogical instruction on voice are limited in number. The two reported on above consider voice as an aspect of the development of a written argument.

¹⁵ Le Viete and Le Ha’s (2007) study was based on Le Ha’s (doctoral student) and Le Viete’s (supervisor) reflections of “the processes we [they] used in negotiating Ha’s representation of self in her novice research writing” (p. 39). Le Ha is an EAL student. Le Ha used the term “risk taking” in respect of making her voice visible in her thesis.

3.3.2 Macro-level category

Studies discussed in this section are concerned with content and coherence.

Content

Content in the case of this study is course-related subject information or disciplinary knowledge.

A number of studies acknowledge that students' understanding of content can develop through the process of writing. For example, Campbell, Smith, and Brooker (1998), who conducted interviews with 46 students enrolled in "either [a] first or third year Bachelor of Education [programme], explored how they [students] conceptualised and undertook an essay writing task" (p. 449). Results suggest that students can develop their understanding of the content of assignments through the writing process itself.

Content has been attended to in other sections of this chapter. For example, under *critique*, it is explored briefly that for students to write, they need to critically engage with resources. Therefore, content will not be discussed further here. However, *coherence* is a macro-level textual feature than deserves consideration.

Coherence

As mentioned in Chapter 2.5.2, Kern (2000) states that "coherence has to do with unity and continuity of the discourse ... the degree to which concepts and relations that underlie the surface are mutually relevant" (p. 80). Simply put, the parts of a text fit together in a manner which enables the reader to make sense of the text as a coherent whole.

There appear to be few studies which have explored student and/or staff understandings of textual coherence. This finding is consistent with Basturkmen and von Randow (2014), who state that there has been limited research into coherence. They refer to Struthers, Lapadat and MacMillan (2013), who suggest that this could be because "coherence is not directly observable" (p. 187). Studies which have investigated tertiary domestic students' ability to produce textually coherent texts have found that undergraduate students do not always produce texts which display a high level of coherence (Campbell et al., 1998; Prosser & Webb, 2006).

Campbell et al. (1998) conducted interviews with 46 undergraduate students enrolled in either their first or third year of a Bachelor of Education programme. These researchers were interested in how students conceptualised and constructed a 1,500-word literature review. Students' essays were classified, based on three categories in the SOLO (Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes) taxonomy (Biggs, 1988) (*unistructural*, *multistructural*, and *relational*). Each of these represented a progressively more complex "cognitive structure of the essay content" (p. 453). For example, an essay deemed to be *unistructural* "involved a simple serial listing of successive points with few if any links made between different parts of the essay" (p. 453). Some essays, written by participants at this level, provided very few in-text citations to support statements and claims made. *Multistructural* essays contained "simple synthesis of different perspectives" (p. 454) and some development of argument. Essays displaying *relational* traits synthesised "different perspectives" (p. 454) and a "theme or argument was generated and used to integrate different aspects of the essay into a coherent whole" (p. 454). It was found that no students in their first year and only one-third of students in their third year produced relational essays. This finding indicates that a significant proportion of students nearing the end of their bachelor's degree still did not produce literature reviews that demonstrated a high level of coherence. In the reporting of this study the authors used the terms "literature review" and "essay" interchangeably. Had students been writing essays perhaps more may have occupied the relational category. Following Campbell et al.'s study, I categorised assignments written by participants in my study as unistructural, multistructural, or relational. These assignments were written in a range of genres (essays, booklets and article critiques).

Todd et al. (2007) explored connectedness by considering cohesion, propositional coherence and interactional coherence, using Hoey's (1991) textual analysis and topical structural analysis framework. Propositional coherence is "background knowledge which allows readers to identify implicit links between the concepts and propositions" (Todd et al., 2007, p. 12). Interactional coherence is "unity to a text through a linked series of pragmatic functions or speech acts" (p. 13). The study explored coherence by examining EAL Thai tertiary students' texts and tutors' comments. Two Thai tutors (both with a very high level of English competence)

were asked to grade and mark eight texts written by first-year master's students. The authors found that tutors wrote comments on the texts when there were issues with cohesion and propositional coherence but not when there were issues with interactional coherence. The authors state that one implication of this study is some tutors may need their awareness raised of the "important roles that cohesion and coherence play in writing" (p. 24). My study explored student and staff awareness of these aspects of writing.

I found studies which investigated or gave suggestions on how to teach students how to produce assignments that had high levels of coherence were particularly scarce and were based on teaching EAL students (e.g., Johns, 1986; Lee, 2002).

To conclude, there appeared to be few studies which explored student and staff understandings of coherence. Studies which explore staff teaching domestic students about coherence are particularly scarce.

3.3.3 Micro-level category

This section will explore and critique studies on cohesion, referencing, syntax, punctuation and spelling.

Cohesion

Cohesion can be identified as "explicit linguistic devices that link the sentences in a text" (Todd et al., 2007, p. 12)

The majority of studies on cohesion explore its presence (or absence) in EAL students' writing (e.g., Castro, 2004; Liu & Braine, 2005; Zhao, 2014). In my search of the literature, I found no studies which explored staff understandings of cohesion or staff teaching students how to improve the cohesiveness of their writing. Yet, in searching Google I found many tertiary institutions (often the student learning centres) produce resources on "signpost" words, for example, Massey University (n.d.). This lack of studies exploring cohesion can be contrasted with the large number of studies that explore staff and student understandings of referencing conventions.

Referencing

In this section, referencing refers to both in-text citations and the reference list provided at the end of an academic text. Referencing explored in this section is at the mechanical level. Studies which investigated referencing at the conceptual level were briefly explored in Chapter 3.3.1.

There has been considerable research conducted on EAL students' understandings of referencing conventions. Often, however, the focus is on plagiarism (Chandrasoma, Thompson, & Pennycook, 2004; Pecorari & Petric, 2014; Pennycook, 1996; Song-Turner, 2008). Plagiarism was not a specific focus of my study, even though I was aware that there was potential for it to emerge as an issue. My main focus in relation to referencing was threefold: I sought to determine how domestic students understood referencing conventions, how staff viewed referencing, and student induction into the conventions of referencing. There appears to have been little research conducted on these topics. Most of the studies below have EAL students as participants.

A number of studies suggest that students, especially at the undergraduate level, are often not proficient at referencing (Greenwood, Walkem, & Shearer, 2014; Hyland, 2005; Kendall, 2005; Park, Mardis, & Ury, 2010), because they lack understanding of referencing conventions (De Lambert, Ellen, & Taylor, 2006; Ellery, 2008; Kett, Clerehan, & Gedge, 2001; Shi, 2008; Yeo, 2007) and even at postgraduate level, they do not always include in-text citations with their assignments (e.g., Harwood & Petric, 2011; Jabulani, 2014; Shi, 2008; Song-Turner, 2008)¹⁶. Shi (2008) researched the citation behaviours of 16 undergraduate students in a North American university, only three of whom had English as a first language. The students were asked to bring a research paper they were working on to an interview. Most students complied. It was found that 33% of the material that should have been attributed was not. The most common reasons students gave for not attributing material were: the information was used to “form one’s own point” (p. 9); the information was common knowledge; “there is no need to cite everything” (p. 9);

¹⁶ Studies by Harwood and Petric (2011), Jabulani (2014) and Song-Turner (2008) were conducted with EAL, postgraduate students.

and information had been acquired as “a result of learning” (p. 9). It would have been helpful if this study had differentiated findings between native and non-native speakers of English.

Research which investigated tertiary students’ reasons for choosing to paraphrase or use direct quotations has been undertaken mainly with EAL students (Choy, Lee, & Sedhu, 2014; Khrismawan & Widiati, 2013; Sun, 2009). In Shi’s (2008) study, both domestic and EAL students gave a number of reasons for choosing whether to paraphrase or use direct quotations. One domestic student reflected he used quotation marks around the word localization because he felt this lexical item was not often used and therefore belonged to the author. Another domestic student and one Cantonese student chose to “use paraphrases when citing secondary sources” (p. 19) because they did not know if this information could be directly quoted. Two EAL students used direct quotations, since they felt linguistically unable to paraphrase the information. Two EAL students, who had possibly attended a North American high school, showed an understanding of academic writing conventions when they reported that paraphrasing was the “skill preferred at the university compared with quoting which they learned to use at high school” (p. 19). Overall, the findings do not indicate differences in understanding between domestic and EAL students. My study contributes to the research literature because it was conducted with domestic students.

Some studies compare the citation practices of experienced writers and novice writers. Findings suggest that novice writers, as mentioned above, offer evidence as factual, whereas experienced writers use citations to support and justify their claims while synthesizing the literature (e.g., Buckingham & Nevile, 1997; Mansourizadeh & Ahmad, 2011; Ramoroka, 2014)¹⁷. Buckingham and Nevile’s (1997) Australian study compared the citation choices illustrated across 20 student papers from a first-year political science unit and 10 papers from what the authors call “experienced academic writers” (p. 99). These papers may have been published papers; the authors do not specify. The authors found that the “clearest difference” (p. 103) was that students presented sources as authoritative and factual, whereas

¹⁷ Both Ramoroka (2014) and Mansourizadeh and Ahmad (2011) studies were with EAL students.

the more experienced writers were able to actively engage with texts, use citation to develop argument, and demonstrate “academic controversy” (p. 109) to the reader.

In terms of the community of practice orientation taken in this research, staff are generally viewed as “experts” or “old-timers” regarding academic referencing conventions, while students are generally regarded as “novices” or “newcomers.” Because I found there were many studies (Ellery, 2008; Hyland, 2009; Kendall, 2005; Shi, 2008; Song-Turner, 2008) conducted by tertiary staff exploring the referencing understandings and practices of tertiary students, it is a fair assumption that referencing is an area of academic literacy that students entering tertiary study are viewed as needing instruction in.

To conclude, most of the research that has been conducted on referencing has been with EAL students. While a number of studies have investigated students’ skill levels, my project explored student perceptions of and attitudes towards referencing. Finally, my study addresses a gap in the research on staff understandings of referencing conventions and how staff addressed teaching these to students in courses.

Punctuation, spelling and syntax

Syntax, as it is referred to in this thesis, refers to what Locke (2015) describes as words arranged into groups (such as “phrases, clauses and sentences” [p. 66]) which make sense.

I found few studies exploring students’ understanding of and attitudes towards accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling in writing. A rare example is Bostock and Boon (2012), who undertook a study at a large Australian regional university. They administered a survey, adapted from *Bandura’s Self-efficacy Scale for Teachers* (2006), to 180 pre-service teachers to assess their “levels of literacy competence and confidence” (p. 19). As part of the study, students were asked to list the areas of literacy they would like assistance with. Many students commented that they wanted assistance with or “explicit teaching” of “grammar and punctuation” (p. 27), and a number of students identified “spelling” (p. 28) as an area of concern. This finding would suggest that these students understood that they

required assistance with word- and sentence-level writing and that accuracy in this area was important.

Some studies have suggested that pre-service students are challenged in producing assignments with accurate punctuation, grammar and syntax (Bostock & Boon, 2012; Hill et al., 2004; Macken-Horarik et al., 2006; Taylor, 2010). For example, Hill, Locke and Dix (2004) undertook an evaluation of the writing levels of Bachelor of Education (primary) students in a New Zealand university. The evaluation took place at the commencement of the students' first year of enrolment and was undertaken because of previous studies which found that Bachelor of Teaching (primary) students "did not have good writing skills" (p. 1). It was found that sentence structure, punctuation and spelling were areas that were problematic. In fact, more than one-third of the students were judged as having limited capability in these areas. The authors suggested monitoring writing skills development "throughout the second and third years of the programme" (p. 3). However, this did not eventuate.

Concerns about pre-service primary education students having limited ability in spelling, grammar and punctuation are not just confined to their levels of expertise at the point of their entering a tertiary institution (e.g., Bostock & Boon, 2012; Macken-Horarik et al., 2006; Zipin & Brennan, 2006). Bostock and Boon (2012) gave students in their first to fourth year of study a paragraph and asked them to identify any errors. Some of these errors concerned punctuation and spelling. Most students were able to identify 50% to 75% of the errors. The findings indicate that spelling and punctuation were areas of development for students. Zipin and Brennan (2006) reflected that they taught in Australian primary education programmes (early childhood and primary) and estimated that 15% of students who wrote final essays in the third and fourth year of their courses were found to be "very weak" in "spelling, grammar and sentence structure" (p. 337).

Studies outlined in this section give some indication of the importance staff place on grammar, punctuation and spelling in students' writing. When referring to literacy or essay writing skills the majority of the researchers mentioned in the previous section, included word- and sentence-level aspects such as spelling,

grammar and punctuation. Therefore, it can be inferred that accuracy in these areas is generally expected.

3.3.4 Reading

Because of its relevance and importance to academic writing, studies which explore academic reading are outlined below. Reading is further explored under Section 3.4.3.

It is recognised that success at tertiary level is dependent on students' ability to comprehend academic texts, yet many students (especially first-year) lack academic reading skills (e.g., Dreyer & Nel, 2003; Hermida, 2009; Weller, 2010). In fact, Dreyer and Nel (2003)¹⁸ state that "one of the most serious problems in higher education, ... is the problem of reading" (p. 349). They state that even at tertiary level, "it is often assumed that students have the skills and strategies needed to successfully comprehend expository text" (p. 350). They draw on Carrell (1998), who writes about both first- and second-language readers and argues that there is no evidence to suggest that students, without instruction and/or skill building, will acquire these skills. Therefore, it is not surprising that many educationalists recognise that it is beneficial for students (especially in their first year) to be taught academic reading skills (Devereux et al., 2006; Devereux & Wilson, 2008; Hermida, 2009; Scholes, 2002).

There appears to be little research investigating pedagogical interventions designed to assist tertiary domestic students to develop such skills. Abbott (2013) remarked that in the United Kingdom there have been fewer studies conducted on academic reading than writing. In this study, lecturers advised that students needed to move beyond the reading of texts as a simple requirement, and engage with the subject matter. In addition, students needed to engage in critical reading. Abbott provides a number of thresholds students must cross in reading. These include understanding that "reading provides a means for entering into the academic discourse of the subject" (p. 196), appreciating that texts have a range of meanings, "developing a critical perspective" (p. 197), and "developing their own critical voice" (p. 197).

¹⁸ Dreyer and Nel (2003) have EAL students as their participants

However, as found by the author, students may not always see the value of engaging with set readings.

In sum, it would appear that it is recognized that in order for students to do well academically, they need to develop academic reading skills. There has been little research conducted to investigate academic reading pedagogical interventions.

To conclude, this review demonstrates a range of gaps in the research. In respect of student and staff understandings, there has been limited research conducted, particularly in relation to purpose, audience, voice, argumentation, coherence and cohesion. As indicated, my research addresses a number of these gaps.

3.4 Writing practices identified by students and staff as helpful and unhelpful

Devereux, et al., (2006) and Devereux and Wilson's (2008) studies were particularly relevant to my study. Both were conducted by staff at the University of Canberra, Australia, and involved Bachelor of Education students. In fact, these two studies appeared to be reporting on the same data set.

Devereux et al. (2006) investigated and reported on what students felt assisted them with their academic writing and what they perceived as challenging. In addition, the authors gave some suggestions for teaching students how to write assignments. The study took place during a four-year Bachelor of Education course. Eleven women volunteered to participate. Evidence was collected via interviews (two per participant), two focus group sessions, and written assignments. Findings from this study will be reported on throughout this section.

Devereux and Wilson (2008) added to this study by providing and discussing a range of strategies they suggest could be used to assist students' literacy development, focusing particularly on academic reading and writing. They report that the participants were 10 female students and that interviews took place "at the end of the first and second years, and in focus groups at the end of the third and fourth year of the study" (p. 122). Findings from this study will also be reported on throughout this section.

I first report findings from the studies of Devereux et al., (2006) and Devereux and Wilson (2008) and then others.

3.4.1 Assignment conferencing and feedback

This section details studies in which staff and/or students identify assignment conferencing and feedback as helpful and/or unhelpful.

Course delivery modes

Tutorials

In Devereux et al.'s (2006) study, all students reported finding “effective scaffolding from staff in improving both learning and academic writing” (p. 13) valuable. I assumed the scaffolding took place in tutorials. Helpful practices identified were:

- “Staff modelling how to approach ... assignments” (p. 14);
- “Clarity in [staff] expectations for” (p. 14) assignments, including “how much background reading was expected” (p. 14);
- Succinctly written assessment questions;
- “Discussing set readings in tutorials” (p. 13), as students identified this was an important component of their writing success, “especially where critique and critical analysis was required.” (p. 13)

It is interesting that when students reflected on effective scaffolding in respect of writing, they also commented on reading.

Students in Devereux et al.'s (2006) study reported that it was helpful to talk about assignments with course peers. The study did not state if this was in the pre-writing stage or during writing, nor if this was in tutorials or outside of class. One of the teaching strategies Devereux and Wilson (2008) recommended was creating opportunities for students to discuss their ideas and use the “language of the field” (p. 129) with course peers and staff before beginning their assignments.

In Devereux et al.'s (2006) study, students also commented on what they found unhelpful. Some students commented negatively on a staff member attempting to “clarify an assessment task” (p. 14) with “a page of explanations” (p. 14). It was not stated whether this page of explanations was given to students in tutorials with

the opportunity for students to ask questions, or whether this information was made available by other means. In addition, one participant commented negatively on being given information on how to approach assignments (I have assumed that this took place in tutorials) which did not match what was written in course outlines. In addition, the student reflected that inconsistent information was given by different tutors. The student also commented that some tutors gave additional information on assignment expectations and criteria in tutorials and some did not.

I was unable to find any other studies that asked students and staff to identify academic writing induction practices taking place in tutorials which staff and students perceive as helpful and unhelpful for students.

Feedback on assignments

Feedback refers to written and/or verbal commentary about an assignment intended for the author of the text.

Pre-submission

Devereux et al. (2006) reported that several students found it helpful to have peers and/or partners and/or parents read and comment on assignments before they submitted them. Devereux and Wilson (2008) [reporting on the same data set], found that some students continued with these support systems throughout their university study. It would have added further to these studies if they had identified specific aspects that students' drafts were reviewed for (e.g., syntax and punctuation, or fulfilment of task instructions).

Studies report that it is beneficial for students to engage in the process of peer review of written assignments (both giving and receiving responses). It has been found that students' written assignments are often of a higher standard when the process of peer review has been undertaken (Ashwell, 2000; Chang, 2012; Crossman & Kite, 2012; Mulder, Pearce, & Baik, 2014; Pelaez, 2002; Yang, 2011).¹⁹ For these studies, peer review was a component of the tertiary courses. Vardi (2012b) reported on a study which was conducted in a large Australian

¹⁹ Chang (2012), Crossman & Kite's (2012) and Yang's participants were all EAL students. In Pelaez's (2002) study, 37% of participants were EAL students.

university in a third-year comparative industrial relations unit of study. Students were given feedback on their draft assignments. When students resubmitted assignments, after receiving feedback, they exhibited improvement in both the content and structure of their texts. A limitation of these findings, however, is that they were derived from an analysis of just four student texts. In addition, it was unclear how these four English as First Language students (out of the possible 100) were chosen and if (and how) their texts were considered representative of other texts.

The only study in which students reported on student-initiated peer review was by Devereux et al. (2006) (as reported in the paragraph above). My study addressed the gap in research on student-initiated peer review of written assignments conducted without staff facilitation and supervision.

I found few studies investigating why tertiary students do not always take up the offer of formative feedback on their assignments by academic staff (Handley et al., 2007; Vardi, 2000). In one study by Handley et al. (2007) the authors researched “tertiary students’ experiences of assessment feedback” (p. 1). The participants were two cohorts of tertiary students enrolled in two business papers. For both papers, there was a large percentage of students who spoke English as an Additional Language (EAL). For one cohort, written feedback pre-submission was optional and for the other, students received verbal feedback on assignments pre-submission. It was found that when feedback was optional, there was minimal student uptake for written feedback on draft assignments (3 out of 74), despite students being actively encouraged to seek it. One reason given by many students was that they had understood the assignment instructions. The authors commented that students appeared to have misunderstood the nature of the feedback, as “feedback is about giving guidance on the way in which students respond to the assignment - not about their understanding of the assignment brief” (p. 12). For the other paper which included tutors’ verbal feedback on draft assignments as part of the course, 85% of the students reported positively on the process of having interviews with staff to discuss draft assignments. The authors reported that almost half the students said they “liked the face-to-face meetings,” as this enabled them “to ask questions, [and] improve [their] work” (p. 8).

A limited number of studies have investigated whether students value formative feedback on draft assignments. Such studies did find that students value such feedback (e.g., Court, 2012; Handley et al., 2007). Court (2012) researched feedback as a component of the course provided to students on draft essays in a “first-year undergraduate course for trainee English language teachers at a UK university” (p. 327). The author found that generally students appreciated the written feedback received, since they considered it could help them improve their mark and provide opportunity to learn. I did not find research on was studies investigating both students initiating feedback on draft assignments from staff and non-academics such as course peers, family members and friends. My study addressed this gap.

Post submission

There has been some research conducted on feedback on graded assignments from the perspective of students (Carless, 2006; Weaver, 2006) and staff (Carless, 2006; Li & Barnard, 2011). Weaver (2006) and Carless (2006) both noted that feedback is an under-researched area.

A number of studies have found that students can misunderstand the written assignment feedback given by staff (Carless, 2006; Lea & Street, 1998; Lea & Street, 2000; Orsmond & Merry, 2011).²⁰ For example, in a British university, Orsmond and Merry (2011) studied the alignment between six biological science tutors and second-year undergraduate biological science students’ understanding of feedback. Evidence was collected via interviews with 19 students and 6 tutors’ and document analysis of written feedback. It was found that there were divergences between some students’ understanding of the feedback and tutors’ intended meaning. For example, students did not always comprehend what the tutor stated needed to be attended to. The authors give the example of a tutor indicating that a methodological point should be grounded in literature, and that the student should focus on “the style of presentation and give information about ethics” (p. 14). The student thought the purpose of the feedback was to assist him/her to “plan the

²⁰ Student participants from Carless’s (2006) study were EAL students.

project better” (p. 14). These authors suggest that staff may need guidance on how to give feedback.

Weaver’s (2006) study was pertinent to my own, since she investigated what types of feedback students perceived as helpful and unhelpful. The research was conducted with approximately 170 students from a business course and 340 students from an art and design course. The questionnaire had an 8% response rate. Students reported preferring a range of both positive and negative feedback, instead of mainly negative feedback. Students reflected *positive* feedback “makes a student feel good” (p. 388) and having mainly *negative* feedback could demoralise and demotivate them. Some students reported *unhelpful* feedback was feedback that was “too general or vague” (p. 387), that did not contain “suggestions for improvement” (p. 387), and that was “unrelated to assessment criteria” (p. 389).

To conclude, studies identify that students can misunderstand assignment feedback. My study adds to the existing literature.

3.4.2 On-campus services

Studies on student learning centres were viewed as pertinent to my study. On the basis of a number of studies, perceptions of both staff (Robinson, 2009) and students (Naeem & Day, 2009b; O’Shea & Tarawa, 2009; Robinson, 2009) are generally positive towards the service provided by student learning centres. It was reported that learning advisors in student learning centres gave beneficial assistance to students in relation to their academic development, particularly in the area of writing.

Many of the published studies on student learning centres were focused on what learning advisors do to assist students with their academic development. These were written from the perspective of learning advisors (Mitchell & Malthus, 2010; Ross, 2012; Wee & Grey, 2011). What was missing from published research were studies where tertiary students and staff (in courses) report whether or not they perceive this service as assisting students with their assignment writing.

To conclude, studies which explore the services provided by student learning centres generally find that students and staff find this service assists students with their writing development.

3.4.3 Materials

In Devereux et al.'s (2006) study, students reflected that it was helpful to discuss readings in class and to have tutors highlight important points from readings. Some reported that they found scaffolding of reading in tutorials valuable; they appreciated "discussing set readings in tutorials," "staff modelling how to approach the readings," and "highlighting important points from set readings" (p. 14). Two students reported that they were challenged by reading academic texts. One said the "register and quantity of the set readings was different to anything she had had to read before" (p. 11). The other student reported that until she attended a workshop on academic reading she did not know how to undertake reading the textbook. The authors made the suggestion that it is helpful when staff assist students to find the argument in texts.

Devereux and Wilson's (2008) study also commented on academic reading. As part of their "scaffolded assignment" at the beginning of the course, students were provided with a range of types of scaffolding (p. 126) such as "scaffolded homework" (p. 126) tasks, tutorial activities focused on academic reading and supplementary academic reading classes offered by "learning support development staff" (p. 126). The authors argued strongly that students should be given ongoing academic reading support to enable them to become critical readers. The authors also implicitly connected the development of critical reading skills to the development of literacy practices that they argued are needed both to be successful at university and in future careers. It would have added to this study had the authors provided detail on the reading activities that had taken place in tutorials.

Pecorari, Shaw, Irvine, Malmstrom, and Mezek (2012) explored the student use of, and attitudes towards, assignment readings. More than 1200 undergraduate students at three Swedish universities completed a questionnaire. Only 46% said that they always or usually did the prescribed readings for the class in which the survey was conducted.

Students were asked to grade the textbook. 86% of students rated the textbook as helpful or very helpful.

In conclusion, this section has discussed studies which investigated aspects of academic writing induction that students and staff deemed to be helpful and unhelpful. As discussed, there were divergences and convergence in what staff and students identified as helpful academic writing induction practices. There were a number of gaps in the existing research which my own study has addressed to some extent. The most significant gap relates to research investigating the practices and materials that student and staff perceived as helpful and unhelpful for academic writing induction.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the need for a study investigating the teaching and learning practices of academic writing induction, as experienced and understood by both staff and students. As mentioned in Chapter 3.2, little research (especially recent research) has been conducted investigating distance students' academic literacy learning experiences. In respect of student and staff understandings of academic writing, there has been limited research conducted on aspects of academic writing such as *purpose, audience, voice, argumentation* and *coherence*. This review also revealed a paucity of research investigating academic literacy induction practices considered to be helpful and unhelpful for students' writing development. My research added to existing studies in respect of the aforementioned gaps.

The following chapter discusses my research design. I argue for a qualitative, interpretive ethnographic study, with methods such as interviews and observation, as a way of addressing my research questions.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate the appropriateness of my research design choices. In Section 4.2, I remind readers of my research questions. In Section 4.3, I outline and justify the methodological approach taken, and in Section 4.4, I provide information on the research context and participants. In Section 4.5, I justify the methods used and in Section 4.6 explain how I analysed the evidence collected. In Section 4.7, I provide an account of ethical considerations I view to be of significance to my study. I conclude this chapter (Section 4.8) by outlining some limitations in my research design.

4.2 Research questions

My motive for conducting this study was to improve teaching and learning practices in respect of academic writing. In order to improve teaching and learning practices, it was important to gain information on student and staff perceptions and understandings of academic writing induction. My research questions are included here as a reminder to the reader and to set the scene for this chapter.

1. What understandings of academic writing do participating students and staff have?
2. What practices do participating students identify as helpful/unhelpful in respect of writing assignments?
3. What practices do participating staff identify as helpful/unhelpful in respect of students writing assignments and how do they build these into their teaching?
4. To what extent is there a divergence or convergence between participating student and staff understandings of academic writing learning practices?
5. What are the similarities and differences that occur between the academic literacies learning experiences of students in two delivery modes, where one is predominantly face-to-face and the other is predominantly online?

4.3 Methodological framework

In this section, I outline and justify the methodological framework that informed this study. I begin by explaining the difference between the terms *methodology* and *methods* as used in this thesis. These two terms are sometimes used interchangeably; however, in this thesis they relate to different aspects of the research design.

The term *methodology* in this thesis refers to “underlying principles of inquiry” (Wolcott, 2001, p. 93). Walter (2013) explains that “methodology is the worldview lens through which the research question and the core concepts are viewed and translated into the research approach” (p. 10) the researcher takes to the research. The author explains that this consists of the researcher’s standpoint, the theoretical conceptual framework or paradigm and includes the method by which evidence is collected. My methodology consisted of: qualitative research, interpretive research, social constructionism, ethnography and case study.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, *method* refers to specific techniques employed to collect research evidence in order to answer the research questions (Wolcott, 2001). Methods used included: interviews, observations and a survey. Melia (1997) argues that there should be a link between the philosophical position (methodologies) and the methods employed. In this chapter, I demonstrate the links between my methodologies and methods as well as the suitability of choices made in relation to the research questions.

4.3.1 Interpretive qualitative research

Citing Lather (1992), Merriam (2002) distinguishes three approaches to qualitative research: “*understanding* (interpretive), *emancipation* (critical and feminist), and *deconstruction* (postmodern)” (p. 4) [italics in original]. I considered the interpretive nature of qualitative research suitable for my research as I was interested in studying participants in their setting.

For this section, I draw mainly on Merriam (2002) and her view of “*interpretive qualitative research design*” [italics in original] (p. 4). Merriam outlines four characteristics of interpretive qualitative research.

First, interpretive researchers attempt to understand the meanings people place on their experiences and situations and the sense people make of their experiences. In addition, when using an interpretive research design the researcher attempts to understand the nature of the setting and what it may mean for the participants to be in that particular setting. In the case of my research, I used unstructured interviews (to be discussed in Section 4.5.1) as a way of enabling participants to talk about their experiences, values and decisions.

Second, the researcher is the primary evidence collector. In order to begin to understand the phenomena being studied, researchers enter the field and spend time with their participants, often as observers and interviewers. However, these experiences (both the researchers' and the participants') are subjective (Geertz, 1973), as people all have discursive lenses through which they view the world. The subjective nature of research will be discussed in Section 4.3.3.

Third, interpretive research is generally inductive in nature (Merriam, 2002). In this study, I used an inductive approach. I wanted to remain open to the possibility that the evidence generated might challenge or add to existing literature discussed and critiqued in Chapters 2 and 3. I found Charmaz (2006) helpful in her definition of induction as a "type of reasoning" that begins with a study of individual cases and "extrapolates patterns from them to form a conceptual category" (p. 188). She describes a coding process which involves taking note of participants' emphases as well as what they "lack, gloss over, or ignore" (p. 114). I drew on Charmaz (1983, 2006) when analysing my research evidence, as I found her two-step process of initial coding and focused coding helpful in generating emergent thematic categories. My analysis of evidence is described more fully in Section 4.6.

Another aspect of interpretive research is that the written product is "*richly descriptive*" [italics in original] (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). This means "words and pictures ... are used to convey what the researcher has learnt about a phenomenon" (p. 5) and descriptions are given of the context, the participants and activities. This thesis has used both words and tables. However, I have attempted to make this thesis more than "richly descriptive" (p. 5) by providing "thick description" (Geertz, 1973). In other words, as well as including description, at times I have also included interpretation, inference and implication. In general, the interpretation is contained in Chapters 6, 7

and 8, and inference and implications are considered in Chapter 8. Geertz's description is "thick" in the sense that as well including interpretation he brings settings and events to life. I do not do this, as it was not my intention to provide a vivid or "thick" description of setting and events.

In summary, an interpretive qualitative approach appeared appropriate for my study, since I was interested in understanding and interpreting the meanings participants ascribed to their academic writing induction experiences rather than presenting findings as objective facts. Also of importance to my conceptual framework was the socially constructed nature of academic writing.

4.3.2 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is consistent with the position adopted in this study, which views writing as a social practice (Barton et al., 2000b; Gee, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 1995). Below, I unpack social constructionism and explain how characteristics of this are evident in my study.

There is no one meaning of social constructionism; however, both Gergen and Gergen (2003) and Lock and Strong (2010) argue that it is concerned with how people socially construct the world through discourse. In this study, I drew on Gee's (2008) definition of Discourse (with a capital "D"): "Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing" (p. 3) (See Chapter 2.3.). Fairclough (2003) writes that discourses "are ways of representing ... the world" (p. 215).

Burr (2003) reduced the concept of social constructionism to four key assumptions. The first is that a social constructionist viewpoint means taking a "critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge" (p. 3). In other words, people question how their views are formed or "constructed" or whence they derive. For my study, I adopted a view of writing as a social practice and drew on the views of New Literacies Studies theorists (e.g., Barton, et al., 2000b; Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 1995). Acknowledging that there are differing views of academic writing implies that these are socially constructed and historically situated.

In taking a critical approach to academic writing, certain writing practices and texts can be seen as reflecting a dominant (or hegemonic) culture, thereby marginalising

the literacy practices of certain groups. Becoming part of an academic community requires individuals to engage in the textual practices of the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002) which may (or may not) be reflective of a dominant culture. In the case of this study, staff might be viewed as representatives of a dominant culture (the old-timers), who have greater access and understanding of academia than students (the newcomers), especially since they are the ones making judgements about what constitutes a well-written assignment.

Burr's (2003) second assumption is that the categories and concepts people use for understanding the world are historically and culturally situated and specific to time and place. She states that not only are these views "historically and culturally relative" but people's views are "products of the culture and history" (p. 4). The conventions of academic writing, for example, are specific to academia at a particular point in time and place, in this case in 2013 and 2014 in a tertiary institution in New Zealand. There are also conventions for academic writing which are socially and historically situated in contexts broader than the institution the research took place in.

Third, knowledge is socially constructed by people engaging in activity or practices, where "shared versions of knowledge are constructed" (Burr, 2003, p. 5). These "shared versions" are discourses for stories about practices that people subscribe to, such as academic writing induction practices. In my research, I was interested in the interactions that occurred between participants and others and how they co-constructed knowledge and understanding of academic writing practices. Also of relevance was the interactive way in which I, as the researcher, and the participants came together in a collaborative meaning-making process. A social constructionist lens draws attention to the fact that an interview process itself is a form of collaborative meaning-making and not an instance of an impartial interviewer drawing a pre-existent meaning out of an interview.

Fourth, "knowledge and social action go together" (Burr, 2003, p. 5). There are many different "social constructions of the world" (p. 5), and each one generates a "different kind of action" (p. 5) or a set of discursive practices. Academic writing induction practices are discursively constructed. Therefore, some students are likely

to be more comfortable with these constructions because of prior acculturation, whereas, others may not be.

In summary, in my study the use of ethnographic methods such as unstructured in-depth interviews and observations aided my comprehension of participants' understandings and experiences of academic writing induction. In the following section, I briefly describe some of the elements of the ethnographic approaches that were relevant to the study.

4.3.3 Ethnography

Collecting evidence with ethnographic methods and writing a thesis adopting ethnographic principles was consistent with my qualitative interpretive research design. I wanted to write a thesis with "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) and with an insider view of participants' understandings of academic writing and academic writing induction experiences. Ethnography, as both a process and a product, is explored briefly below.

The term ethnography can mean very different things in the field of education (Mills & Morton, 2013). Burns (2000) provides a somewhat generic definition by stating that "ethnography encompasses any study of a group of people for the purpose of describing their socio-cultural activities and patterns" (p. 393). The purpose of my study was to "capture the social reality of a group" (p. 395), while acknowledging that any social world is open to interpretation and sense-making. In my thesis, I have described and also interpreted the behaviour and understandings of my participants in relation to their understandings of academic writing and academic writing induction experiences.

My research approach resonated with Pole and Morrison's (2003) listing of the common characteristics of ethnography. They focus on ethnography as a *process* and list the common characteristics as:

1. A focus on a discrete location, events(s) or setting.
2. A concern with the full range of social behaviour within the location, event or setting.
3. The use of a range of different research methods, which may combine qualitative and quantitative approaches but where the emphasis is upon understanding social behaviour from inside the discrete location, event or setting.

4. An emphasis on data and analysis that moves from detailed description to the identification of concepts and theories which are grounded in the data collected within the location, event or setting.
5. An emphasis on rigorous or thorough research, where the complexities of the discrete event, location or setting are of greater importance than overarching trends or generalisations. (p. 3)

My research employed several key characteristics of ethnography as outlined above. First, my research was situated in a specific location, which was a tertiary institution. Second, my research was concerned with social behaviour, that of my participants, within the tertiary setting. Third, I used a range of research methods, such as observation, focus groups, and interviews, in order to gain an understanding of participants' perceptions and understandings of academic writing practices. Fourth, I used an inductive approach for evidence analysis. My end result was not the "identification of concepts and theories" (p. 3), but I did identify patterns and themes in the evidence. Fifth, I focused on the complexities of events. One way that I did this was to acknowledge that participants' experiences were subjective and open to variable interpretation. I did not report findings as objective truths but as evidence, of which I acknowledge there is often more than one possible interpretation.

However, I do not describe myself as having conducted a full ethnography. Rather, I view myself as having used an ethnographic lens (as described in this section) and employed ethnographic methods and attempted to write a thesis in an ethnographic style. My reason for *not* describing this research as an ethnography is that ethnographers usually have long-term involvement with the participants in the context of their daily lives in order to understand the range of social behaviour by people in a setting (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This was not the case with my study. My interactions with participants were limited to two semesters per cohort, and generally only a few hours per week. My interactions with participants (as discussed in Chapter 4.5) consisted of interviews and observations of tutorials, lectures and online interactions.

Ethnography, as a *product* (or text), has a number of characteristics. First, one aim of ethnographies is usually to produce a detailed "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of everyday cultural practice/s within the context that the cultural practice/s occur (Fetterman, 2009). This is consistent with interpretive research. For this research, I

assumed the view of New Literacy Studies theorists (see Chapter 2.4), who view literacy as a social practice (Barton et al., 2000b; Gee, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998) and subscribe to the belief that academic writing practices need to be examined in the context in which they are situated (Barton & Hamilton, 2012). I attempted to provide “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the salient features of student and staff understandings and experiences of academic writing induction. For example, when reporting my evidence, I contextualised participants’ quotations with description and/or interpretive comment.

Second, an ethnographic approach encourages the acknowledgement of subjectivities. This can occur through an “emic” approach, which is the participants’ perception of reality (Fetterman, 2009) and therefore involves the “subjective meanings placed on situations” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003, p. 139). In addition, there is the “researcher’s meaning and constructions of a situation” (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 139), which is referred to as the “etic” approach, since meanings and constructions of events are influenced by the researcher’s personal philosophy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In my employment as a learning advisor, I facilitate students’ academic writing development. At times, I employ a study skills approach. By this I mean I teach generic workshops on aspects of academic writing, such as how to develop paragraphs. My professional background, and the academic writing experiences I have brought to this research, will have influenced my interpretation of academic writing induction events and practices as encountered in this investigation.

Third, writing with an ethnographic style involves reflexivity. This means the researcher takes into account the research process as well as the research evidence collected (Glesne, 2006), that is, the influence the researcher has on the research process. A researcher exercises reflexivity by reflecting on his/her subjectivity, acknowledging how his/her background, assumptions and beliefs can impact on the research process (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). My background was outlined briefly in Chapter 1, and Chapter 2 (my conceptual framework) describes the lens I viewed my evidence through. In addition, a self-reflexive researcher considers how participants “react to the researcher and the research setting” (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 19). One way I did this was to have key students and staff reflect on their experiences of engaging in the research and whether or not they believed this

impacted in any way on their behaviour in the courses. I also acknowledge that participants' responses in interviews should not be viewed as objective responses (i.e., the truth) but "displays of perspectives" (Silverman, 2011, p. 199).

In conclusion, using ethnography both as a process and product, as explained above, suited this study. Employing ethnography as a process encouraged me to gain an understanding of participants' perceptions, understandings, and behaviour in respect of academic writing induction practices. Employing ethnography as a product enabled me to produce a thesis which included "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of participants' academic writing understandings and experiences as perceived by participants and as described and interpreted by me, the researcher.

4.3.4 Case study

There are differing understandings and definitions of the term case study. Burns (2000) described it as a "*portmanteau*" [italics in original] (p. 459) term, explaining that it has been used as a "catchall" (p. 459) phrase. He stated that it "involves the observation of an individual unit" (p. 455). Thomas (2011) argued that a case study is "a focus ... looked at in depth and from many angles" (p. 9), meaning the focus is on a particular case. The concepts in the next paragraph have either been addressed earlier or will be discussed in this chapter, so are outlined very briefly as key aspects of case study research which are pertinent to this study.

First, broadly speaking, case studies can be useful for studying complex human behaviour and for a researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives (Burns, 2000). This was my aim. Second, the researcher does not "start out with *a priori* [italics in original] theoretical notions" (Gillham, 2000, p. 2), because until the researcher collects their evidence and begins to "understand the context" (p. 2) he/she "won't know what theories (explanations) work best or make the most sense" (p. 2). Therefore, an inductive approach to analysing evidence is preferable. Third, with a case study, often more than one research method is used to develop understanding of the phenomenon being studied, as there can be differences in what people say they do and what they can be observed doing (Gillham, 2000). I conducted many observations and interviews, maintained an informal online focus group, and collected documents (such as course outlines and students' written assignments) as I did not want to rely on one

evidence source. Using more than one research method contributed to the strength of my evidence and the claims made.

There are many different types of case studies, for example, descriptive, interpretive and evaluative (Merriam, 1988). Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) state that in using these terms, Merriam is focused on the “intent of ... research” (p. 7), which they qualify as meaning “the methods of enquiry and analysis depending on what ... [the] purpose is for conducting the study” (p. 8). Since I employed an interpretive qualitative lens (as explained in Section 4.3.1), I view my case study as interpretive.

For my research, I had two distinct cohorts of students who were studying via different mediums. One group was studying predominantly on-campus and the other via distance learning. I identify with Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999), who use the term *comparable case selection* to describe ethnographers studying a single type of phenomenon with similar cases or “with different populations, and in varied settings” (p. 245). For my research the phenomenon was participants’ understandings and experiences of academic writing induction. As mentioned earlier, I had two cohorts that in many ways were quite similar; however, one cohort were on-campus students and the other distance. Studying both of these cohorts added a level of comparison and contrast to my research, which explored “the degree to which structures, patterns, or themes” were “stable ... across multiple settings or people” (Schensul et al., 1999, p. 244). Using two case studies as the units of analysis meant it was possible for themes to emerge as to the similarities and differences in experiences of participants while undergoing academic writing induction, in two contrasting delivery modes, face-to-face and distance.

4.4 Research context and participants

This study took place in a university in New Zealand. Participants in this programme were involved in the Bachelor of Teaching University of Montor (pseudonym) programme, which is a three-year programme for students who do not have a bachelor’s qualification. Student and staff participants were in the on-campus and/or distance programme. Students taking part in the on-campus programme attended both face-to-face lectures and tutorials for 12 weeks in the first-year paper and 8 weeks in the second-year paper. For the distance students, the

majority of their two courses were delivered online via Moodle²¹. However, up to three times a year, distance students were required to attend a one-week (or less) on-campus block course²².

A reason for choosing the pre-service primary education programme was that I was aware that concerns had been raised about the writing level of the pre-service student teachers at the site where the study was conducted. In addition, choosing this programme at this institution meant that I was able to explore student and staff understandings of academic writing induction practices in two delivery modes, face-to-face and online.

Students

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, student participants were from both the on-campus and distance course. I had two distinct categories of student participants from both courses. First, there were those who agreed to my observing their tutorial class and the online component of their course. Second, there were those who agreed to the aforementioned plus they agreed to be interviewed in their first and second year of study. I viewed these students as my key participants. I refer in my thesis to the student participants I interviewed with pseudonyms.

My research took place in two distinct stages in 2013 and 2014. In 2013, with the on-campus first-year paper, all 30 students in the tutorial class agreed to my presence in their weekly tutorial class for the semester, writing field notes, having informal conversations with them from time-to-time and observing the Moodle component of their paper. In 2013, in Semester B, with the distance course, all 49 students agreed to my observing the online component of their first-year paper and attending their on-campus lectures and tutorials. For the on-campus course, 10 student participants agreed to become my key participants. There were nine females and one male. Seven, who were all female, subsequently made themselves available for interviews. For the distance students, 25 students agreed to be my key participants and 13 followed through with interviews: 12 female and 1 male. In 2014, all 40 distance students²³ agreed to my observing the online component of

²¹ Moodle is an open source management system.

²² Information from a webpage which belonged to the University which was the site for this study.

²³ There was a reduction in numbers because of attrition.

their second-year paper and attending their on-campus lectures and tutorials. These were the same students that allowed me to observe their course in 2013. In 2014 the on-campus students were in different tutorial classes than in 2013. The tutorial class I observed consisted of about one-third of my on-campus tutorial participants from 2013. All students in this tutorial class agreed to my observing them during classes.

Appendices A and B provide demographic information about the student participants. As outlined in Chapter 5, on-campus participants were generally school-leavers and living away from home for the first time. The majority lived in the halls of residence, and all were female. Key student participants in the distance programme were mostly adult (over the age of 25). Most lived with a partner and had pre-school or school-age children, and lived at least 50 km from the university. A number of the participants had previously studied at tertiary level.

Staff

Some staff participants were involved in both lectures and tutorials and some were involved in one or the other. All were female. Please see Appendix C for further information on staff involvement in the papers.

Staff participants for the first-year papers (distance and on-campus) were those who were involved in the teaching of tutorials, lecturing, and/or coordinators of the papers. In addition, for the on-campus paper I observed lectures plus one staff member's tutorial class for the semester. I invited nine staff for interviews and seven were subsequently interviewed. For the distance papers, I attended on-campus tutorials and lectures and observed the online component of the course. In 2013, I interviewed two staff (Andrea and Toni) twice because of their involvement in both the on-campus and the distance paper. They were involved in the teaching of the on-campus students in Semester A, 2013, and distance students in Semester B, 2013. Toni was teaching the distance students for the first time, and Andrea had taught distance students for this paper in previous years. Toni had been the coordinator of the on-campus paper in Semester A, and Andrea was the coordinator of the distance programme in Semester B, 2013. Other staff participants were interviewed once.

Staff participants for the second-year papers were those who were involved in the coordination of the paper, and/or who taught the distance paper. I invited three staff to an interview and two accepted. I observed lectures and one staff member's tutorials for the semester.

4.5 Methods

This section outlines, justifies and delineates the range of methods used for collecting evidence in order to address the research questions, (e.g., interviews and observations). The methods chosen are consistent with a qualitative, interpretive, ethnographic approach.

4.5.1 Pilot study

I conducted a small pilot study (for which I gained ethical approval) towards the end of 2012, before beginning my main study. In order to conduct my pilot study I obtained institutional consent from my place of work. The reason why I chose my place of work was because lectures and tutorials at my intended research site had finished for the year. I observed one lecture and two tutorial sessions. To recruit student participants I explained the purpose of my research briefly and invited students to an interview. Before attending this lecture I had approached the lecturer who agreed to being interviewed. I interviewed one staff member once, and one student twice (one interview was conducted half way through the semester and one toward the end of the semester). Because of the limited number of interviews I then approached my daughter and interviewed her once. She was at that time undertaking tertiary study. I found it particularly beneficial to pilot my interview prompts and have practice at interviewing. I found that I had memorized the interview prompts and did not ask many probing questions, especially with the first student interview.

I also found it helpful to observe the tutorial classes and lecture and write up the field notes. One aspect of practice identified and trialled was developed a process in taking field notes which I used during my actual research project. I tended to have four parts to my field notes which began first, with general observations and my reflections made during the observation. Second, later that day I would write an overview of the lecture/tutorial, and what had happened during the observation that related to the assignment students were working on. For example, how the content of the lecture related to the assignment. Third, I would note and write

comments on anything in the lecture/tutorial that related to the set assignment. Fourth, sometimes I would also write some reflections on anything else that I thought would be useful to note, such as, how my observation went in general.

4.5.2 Interview

An interview can be described as a conversation that has a purpose (Berg, 2007). However, there are different styles of interview with varying degrees of structure. The choice of interview style is influenced by the methodology and interview questions (Richards & Morse, 2013).

Ethnographic interviews can be less structured than other types of interviews. They can be referred to by a range of terms, including in-depth interviews (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012), unstructured interviews (O'Reilly, 2005), unstructured interactive interviews (Richards & Morse, 2013) and, as one would expect, ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979). Whichever terminology is used, the interview is more like a conversation with the purpose of gaining information from the respondent on matters such as his/her experiences, values, decisions and cultural knowledge (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012).

Before describing the process of my interviews, I need to reiterate that an ethnographic approach acknowledges subjectivities (as discussed in Section 4.3.3). Silverman (2011) writes about the “truth” in interviews by noting that from a constructionist viewpoint, we conceptualise interviews as “displays of perspectives and moral forms which draw upon available cultural responses” (p. 199). Understandings and events were verbalised in interviews and at times in informal conversations (see Chapter 4.5.2). Therefore, evidence presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7 is subjective, as one would expect, in that it represents my participants’ understandings and interpretations of events and experiences. Silverman (2011) reports on what he terms the “truth” of interview evidence. He states that for constructionists the “data” (p. 199) collected

express interpretive procedures or conversational practices present in what both interviewer and interviewee are **doing** through their talk and non-verbal actions ... This means that we need not hear interview responses simply as true or false *reports* on reality. Instead, we can treat such responses as *displays* of perspectives and moral forms which draw upon available cultural resources. (p. 199) (emphases in original)

Inevitably, there is an element of performing for the interviewer. Oropeza-Escobar (2007) state that the researcher can (at times unknowingly) shape the interviewees' responses. I argue that it is inevitable that both interviewer and interviewee are mutually positioning each other, and their responses, in various ways. To the best of my knowledge, students and staff were openly sharing their perspectives in interview responses. One reason for my making this claim is that on occasion I was asked to not include in my thesis some information given. Having said that, there is inevitably an element of performing for the interviewer which I acknowledge would have occurred in interviews.

Table 1 shows the number of interviews conducted with staff and students and medium used. The first interviews for both first-and second-year students occurred towards the middle of the paper and the second interview towards the end of the paper. Staff interviews occurred towards the end of the paper. The duration of each paper was one semester which is approximately three months. As can be seen, and as mentioned in Chapter 4.4, there were more student than staff interviews. I interviewed 20 students in the first year resulting in 36 interviews. I interviewed 7 staff once. In the second year of evidence collection, I interviewed 12 students and conducted 18 interviews. I interviewed 2 staff once. The decline in on-campus student interview numbers occurred in the main because students from the first-year tutorial class were divided into two tutorial classes for their second-year. I chose to interview students participants who were in the tutorial class I observed.

Table 1: Number of interviews conducted and medium employed

Participants	Number of participants interviewed	Medium
First year on-campus paper		
Students	1 st set of interviews: 6 2 nd set of interviews: 7	10 face-to-face 3 telephone
Staff	Interviewed once: 7	6 face-to-face 1 telephone
First year distance paper		
Students	1 st set of interviews: 11 2 nd set of interviews: 12	1 face-to-face 3 Skype 7 telephone 1 face-to-face 3 Skype 8 telephone
Staff	Interviewed once: 2	2 face-to-face
Second-year on-campus paper		
Students	1 st interviews: 3 2 nd interviews: 3	3 face-to-face 2 face-to-face 1 telephone
Staff	1 (combined distance plus on-campus paper interview)	1 face-to-face
Second-year distance paper		
Students	1 st interviews: 3 9 interviewed at the end of semester	3 telephone 7 telephone 1 face-to-face 1 Skype
Staff	2 interviewed	2 face-to-face (combined distance plus on-campus paper interview)

As can be seen in the table above there were more student than staff interviews.

To reflect on my interview process, for the first few interviews I generally followed interview prompts, particularly at the beginning of interviews. For example, “Can you please talk me through the process of you writing your assignment.” Generally, these prompts were not shown to the participants as I wanted the interview to function more like a conversation. For the first few interviews, I felt that I asked participants a series of prepared open-ended questions. Unfortunately, at times, I tended to ask one question after another, in a way which did not always acknowledge the participants’ responses. Towards the end of the first semester of my research, my interviews were more conversational with me focusing on outcomes that I wanted for each interview, rather than asking a set of pre-written questions. In addition, as I conducted more interviews, I noticed I was more likely to ask follow-up questions, such as inviting students to give an example to illustrate a point made. In my own view, in other words, my interviewing practices improved with increased experience. (Please see Appendices D and E for interview prompts. Please see Appendix I for an example of a participant information sheet. Please see Appendix I for an example of a staff member consent form).

O'Reilly (2005) describes observations and interviews as complementary methods, since one can inform the other (p. 177). Consistent with O'Reilly, I found that observations of lectures and tutorials informed my interviews. For example, in the first-year on-campus course, I observed that only some of the PowerPoint slides from each lecture were made available to students. I was interested in the reason for this practice and how this impacted on students. Consequently, I asked questions about the provision of PowerPoint slides in both staff and student interviews. Please see Appendices E and F for examples of students and staff member interview prompts.

Interviews mostly took 30 to 60 minutes and ranged from 13 to 90 minutes. I took field notes of the interviews shortly afterwards (field notes are discussed in Section 4.5.4). All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants’ permission and were transcribed. The first set of student interviews I transcribed myself, but later I employed a professional transcriber, since I found transcribing the interviews time-

consuming. It was important that I use my time as productively as possible since I was working and studying at the time. While transcribing I did notice themes, trends, and possible points of interest. However, in checking the transcribers' transcriptions of interview statements I also noticed themes, trends, and possible points of interest. Therefore, I found little added benefit in my transcribing the interviews, and it was more time effective to have the interviews professionally transcribed. Member checks were conducted. Please see Appendix D for a copy of the email sent to participants. Most participants responded within the specified time frame that they were satisfied with the interview statement. A few participants had edited small sections of text which were generally grammatical changes.

I asked participants which medium they preferred for their interviews: face-to-face, telephone, or Skype (see table 1). This resulted in the collection of evidence in all three interview modes.

I discovered that each interview had its challenges. The first telephone interviews I conducted were with first-year, on-campus students. I found it more challenging to develop a conversational style via telephone than in face-to-face situations. Students interviewed by telephone tended to give quite short responses that often lacked depth. One on-campus participant I interviewed via telephone for the first interview and face-to-face for the second. She reflected that she gave more in-depth answers when interviewed face-to-face. I think this could have been partly due to me, on the phone, not allowing students enough time for thinking between responses before asking another question.

The majority of the distance students were interviewed via telephone. I experienced a different challenge with them than with on-campus students. Distance students tended to be quite talkative. I found it more difficult than with face-to-face interviews to manage turn-taking probably because the visual, non-verbal cues were not present. At times, I wanted to ask for clarification but did not do this, as it was difficult to interrupt the participant's conversational flow. James and Busher (2009) explain that when conducting a face-to-face interview, non-verbal cues are a feature of the social interaction between the researcher and informants.

In using Skype, it was helpful to be able to see the participant. I found it built rapport and I could see the non-verbal cues. However, the technology at times was

challenging. I found on particularly windy days that Skype would cut in and out during interviews. This meant it was sometimes difficult to hear what was said (both for me and the interviewee). When this occurred it also made transcribing more difficult.

Seymour (2001) posits that social scientists have viewed the face-to-face encounter as the most favourable way to engage with research participants when undertaking qualitative research. I found I was more comfortable with this medium, however, since I did not have an office, had no interviewing space on-campus and at times found it difficult to book a private room.

4.5.3 Informal conversation

A method of collecting information from participants in ethnographic research is through informal conversations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). This can take place in a range of settings, such as the informant and researcher meeting for a cup of coffee. Agar (2008) refers to “hanging out,” (p. 158) which he describes as having brief conversation with an informant while waiting for something to occur. While conducting my research, I sometimes engaged in informal conversations with student and staff participants before and after lectures and tutorials. At times, it was simply to engage in informalities such as salutations. Other times, I asked questions to inform my understanding of events. For example, sitting in the lecture theatre just before one lecture began, I asked two students why students in the previous lecture had been unusually silent throughout the lecture. This provided me with insights that I may not have been able to gain during interviews, owing to the time delay in conducting interviews and relying on participants’ memories of an event that may not have been significant to them. I saw these conversations between informants and myself as providing a means of accessing evidence possibly not gained through other methods.

4.5.4 Observation

Observation is a key feature of ethnographic research. Observation can be described as a research method where researchers “systematically observe and record people’s behaviour, actions and interactions” (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 170). Observations enable researchers to observe the participants in their surroundings, their interactions and cultural activities. This enables researchers to see first-hand

people engaging in their world (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). A description of the process I generally followed for observations is provided below. The taking of field notes is explored in Chapter 4.5.4.

I conducted observations of tutorials and lectures for both the first-and second-year classes. Please see table 2 for the number of the observations and tutorials conducted.

The observations could be described as systematic since they each followed a similar format. I generally arrived at least 5 minutes early for tutorials and lectures in order to observe students' interactions with each other before classes. In the few minutes before each tutorial began (and at times lectures) I attempted to build rapport with student participants by, for example, saying hello to a few students and asking how their week had been. I did this to reduce the likelihood that my presence would make students feel uncomfortable.

During each observation I sat with students. During lectures, in the first year of evidence collection, I sat at different places in the lecture theatre (sometimes near the front, sometimes in the middle, sometimes to one side, sometimes towards the back of the lecture theatre). In tutorials tables were arranged into small groups which generally consisted of approximately four tables. Generally about six to eight students sat in one group. There were approximately 30 students in each tutorial. In the first semester of evidence collection, I sat at the same table for an entire tutorial but chose different groups of students to sit with. Sitting at tables with students enabled me to observe (and hear) students engaging with each other, closely observe students taking part in tutorial activities and I was able to engage in conversation with students. In the second year, in lectures, I sat near the students that were my on-campus participants. In the second-year tutorials, there were four on-campus students who were my participants. I tried to sit at a table near my participants (and at times at the same table as my participants) so that I could observe them. I did not sit at their table each time because I did not want other students and the staff member to be able to predict who my participants were.

At the end of each tutorial observation I would say goodbye to students and wish them well.

One reason for conducting observations was so that I could describe and interpret academic writing events and practices rather than rely solely on participants' reports. In addition, observations were used to inform my interviews since a number of prompts were formulated based on my observations of tutorials and lectures. Observation enabled me to gain an understanding of academic writing induction events and practices that would not have been possible via other research methods.

The degree of participation by the researcher during observations can vary from engagement as a complete participant to a non-participant. A complete participant can be defined as someone taking part in the core activities of the group being researched. A non-participant, as the name suggests, desists from engaging in the core activities (Hennink et al., 2011). There can be varying degrees of participation within these two categories. Adler and Adler (1987) refer to complete membership, active membership and peripheral membership. Peripheral participation is used in a similar way to non-participation. My role as researcher was closest to a peripheral membership role (Adler & Adler, 1987) or non-participant role, which is the "least committed to the social world studied" (p. 36), as the researcher does not participate in core activities. I define the core activities of my student participants as practices, such as writing the required academic assignments and reading academic texts. At times, I did take part in certain core activities but only as a researcher. For example, I read the core texts for both courses, for several reasons. First, I wanted to become familiar with the content of the readings, just as I became familiar with other course content, such as assignment instructions. Second, as I read the texts, I tried experiencing the reading from the perspective of the student participants, taking note of lexical level, complexity of concepts and volume of reading expected.

In addition to observing lectures and tutorials, I also "observed" the online categories of each course. When observing students' online postings, I again adopted the peripheral membership role but in a less participatory fashion than with tutorials and lectures. I lurked. In other words, I observed without participating. I did so because there were only two designated roles possible in the Moodle set-up, that of lecturer, and that of student. It was not appropriate for me to take part as either, as I was a researcher – neither a lecturer nor student. If I had assumed either role, I could have influenced the direction of online conversations and perhaps impacted the development of students' writing.

4.5.5 Field notes

Field notes are a researcher's record of conversations, descriptions of settings, the researcher's reflections on conversations and settings (Burns, 2000) and interpretations of the aforementioned (Agar, 2008). Field notes are an important aspect of interpretive research or ethnographic research because with an inductive approach conclusions to be drawn are not pre-determined (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). The taking of field notes, and the reading of field notes, can enable the researcher to notice patterns of events which have become established as regular or typical practices (Schensul et al., 1999).

During my research, I took field notes of observations, conversations and interviews. Field notes of observations generally began with a general commentary. For example, when I was observing lectures I would note where I was sitting in the lecture theatre, where other students were tending to sit, and if my student participants were sitting near each other. I would then take field notes of what occurred in the tutorial. I would make notes of the general structure and content of each tutorial and when anything arose that related to academic literacy I would try to record this in as much detail as possible. Thus, even though I was using an inductive approach I was guided by my conceptual framework and research questions.

I took field notes of conversations that I thought might be useful. For example, during the lecture which took place on 8 May 2013, which was for first-year students, students were extremely quiet throughout the entire lecture. This was unusual since there was generally the hum of students talking to each other throughout lecture. In the following lecture I asked two students sitting next to me why students seemed particularly focused during this lecture and noted the students' response.

As stated above I took field notes of interviews. As soon after the interview as possible I would begin by making notes about how I felt the interview went, and anything that stood out for me at the time. The below is an extract I wrote after conducting my first interview with one first-year on-campus student on Saturday 13 April, 2013.

“During the interview I found it very difficult to decide whether or not to let xxx [student name] continue with her line of speech when she got off topic, or whether I should allow her to continue speaking about topics for which I could not see the connection between my question and her response. Approximately half way through the first interview I realised that once off topic she did not tend to get back on topic. By allowing xxx [student name] to talk at length about matters that did not relate to my questions, I noticed that much of what she talked about was relationships, relationships between herself and her family, in particular grandparents and mother. To me this indicated that she was homesick.”

The writing of this reflection encouraged me to consider what it was like for on-campus students to be living away from home for the first time. Another reason why I made note of the above student’s focus on family was that I was aware that part of my conceptual framework was communities of practice.

Field notes were written in two stages: writing initial field notes during lectures and tutorials and then enlarging on these later. This assisted me to gain insights. I found that by enlarging on my field notes I was formulating possible reasons and implications of events and practices observed. In the above example it was while enlarging on my field notes that I considered how often the student had mentioned family members and what this possibly meant. As mentioned above I interpreted this as the student being homesick.

A challenge with taking field notes in the first year was that I did not know what to focus on and write detailed notes about, since I had no predetermined themes or codes. However, as mentioned above the taking of field notes was influenced by my conceptual framework and research questions. Beginning evidence collection without having codes and/or themes is consistent with an inductive approach (see Charmaz, 1983). A result of my approach was that I took prolific field notes (in fact over 70,000 words in the first year), particularly during the observations of lectures and tutorials. For the first few weeks of my evidence collection I would sometimes reread my field notes in the evenings and ponder possible themes that were emerging and implications of my evidence. The practice of expanding on the field notes was effectively the beginning of my analysis of evidence.

After I completed the initial coding of two student and one staff member's interview statements (see Section 4.6), the categories I had in respect of student and staff understandings of academic writing included: punctuation, spelling, syntax, referencing, course content, structure, and flow. In a supervision meeting I presented these categories and my Chief Supervisor introduced me to his framework (see Figure 1) for a rhetorical view of textual production. This framework was a useful heuristic since it enabled me to consider aspects of writing that were both present and missing in the interview statements. It also enabled me to adopt the position of writing as a rhetorical act driven by the context, audience, and purpose. Drawing on this framework meant I was aware of aspects of academic writing that participants had not commented on, such as intended audience, voice and argument.

Despite adopting this framework as a kind of *thematic check*, I still attempted to use an inductive approach to evidence collection and analysis (see Section 4.6) in that I tried to keep an open mind to thematic possibilities that were not implicit in this framework. Charmaz (2006) states that with grounded theory coding (an inductive approach) in the initial focused coding phase researcher/s “mine early data for analytic ideas to pursue in further data collection and analysis” (p. 46). This is what I did.

I used field notes to record information such as what had occurred in tutorials and lectures. This aided my analysis and the writing of Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

In sum, the taking of field notes meant I had a record of conversations, descriptions of settings, my reflections on conversations, events and practices, some interpretations of the aforementioned, and suggestions for possible themes and codes.

4.5.6 Survey

The use of surveys is a common research method (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Vehovar & Manfreda, 2008). There are many types and forms of survey, such as the questionnaire. According to Burns (2000), the three types of items that are generally used in the construction of a questionnaire are: closed items, open-ended items, and scale items. A closed item is where participants are given a choice of answers to choose from. Open-ended items are generally questions to which the

participant/s respond. Scale items are a list, in terms of some kind of predetermined scale, and participants rate the items by “indicating degrees of agreement or disagreement” (p. 573).

In the first semester of evidence gathering, I emailed a brief Survey Monkey questionnaire to 10 on-campus student participants (please see Appendix G). Seven students completed the questionnaire. In my questionnaire, I used closed items (e.g., for information on experience with computers), open items (e.g., for previous education information) and scale items (for age gradings). The reason for using the questionnaire was that I wanted to obtain background information on students so that in the interviews, the focus was solely on academic writing. However, during the first set of interviews, I rethought this decision since I found that questions such as background and previous education could be used as ice-breakers. Therefore, when the first set of interviews were conducted with distance students in Semester B, 2013, I did not use a survey, but instead asked some questions from the survey at the beginning of the interview. This, I felt, worked well. I did not use a survey for staff.

4.5.7 Focus group

Focus groups can be referred to as group interviews (Silverman, 2011). The discussion is generally based on a set of questions predetermined by the interviewer. One reason for having focus groups is that group members “influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion” (Krueger, 1994, p. 6). This means that different research evidence may emerge than would from an interview that is solely between the interviewer and interviewee. A fairly recent type of focus group is the online focus group, which can be conducted both synchronously or asynchronously (James & Busher, 2009).

For my research, I attempted to supplement my student interviews with two asynchronous, unstructured focus groups (one for each cohort). I did this because I wanted to provide student participants opportunities to reflect on and discuss the writing of their assignments with each other. In addition, it provided them with a method for reflecting on aspects of their writing as events occurred. This immediacy was not possible with the interviews since they occurred only twice per semester. I did not invite staff to take part, since I wanted to create opportunities

for students to discuss together without an authority figure present. The asynchronous format meant students could reflect on their writing process or any aspect of writing at any time or anything else they chose to comment on or reflect on.

I trialled two social media sites. I originally applied for ethical approval from the institutions ethics committee to set up an asynchronous focus group, using Facebook, for the first-year students enrolled in the on-campus programme. This was not approved because the committee considered it non-secure and they had concerns about participants' confidentiality. I opted for Google Groups®, because it could be accessed 24 hours a day and had a private groups' setting. The setting I used was "only invited users." I gained ethical approval to use this site. I invited the 10 face-to-face, on-campus student participants to join this forum and uploaded an initial posting suggesting that they reflect on their assignment writing process. Three viewed my social media site but for the first day I did not have it set up correctly and they could view only. I changed this after 24 hours, but from this time on no student participant viewed the site or interacted with it. When interviewed, students gave reasons for non- participation. A typical response was "I found it really hard to navigate... I am okay when it comes to technology ... but that ... was completely new to me. ... I had no idea how to work that." Therefore, I decided against this form of focus group after the first semester.

The following semester I used Facebook Secret Groups for distance students, who were in their second semester of study. I gained ethical approval by providing written evidence that I could take measures to make the site secure. I set up the site and after the initial posting, where I explained to students its purpose, I did not interact since I wanted to lessen my influence on what students posted. In other words, I lurked. I invited 25 students to join. Fifteen signed up and most interacted or viewed comments written by other participants. Interactions were prolific, with first-semester students writing a total of nearly 6,000 words. In the second year, distance students interacted very minimally on this Facebook site. I found the evidence collected from Facebook useful, as it supplemented evidence collected by other means. For example, one distance student wrote, "This was one of the hardest essays to get my head around." I used this posting as an interview prompt. In the second year, I set up a Facebook Secret Group for the on-campus students. At this

point I had four student participants. Two requested to join the site but did not interact or post.

4.5.8 Documentary evidence

Documents used as evidence, consisted of course outlines, student assignments (some with feedback from academic staff), online conversations in Moodle and Facebook and set reading texts. I had a course outline for each of the courses (2 on-campus and 2 distance). In the first-year courses, set reading texts consisted of a book of readings and a textbook. The book of readings contained a selection of journal articles and book chapters. In the second-year courses set reading texts consisted of two text books, one of which they had used in a first-year course. I collected 47 student assignments (please see Appendix M), 31 from the first year (9 from on-campus students and 22 from distance) and 16 from the second year (2 from on-campus students and 14 from distance). I also had access to written feedback provided by staff for approximately half of these assignments. I asked students if they would be willing to share with me copies of their assignments. Some students emailed these to me. When I interviewed some of the on-campus students face-to-face we copied their assignment (when their permission was gained) if they had brought their assignment to the interview with them (as I had requested), and if there was a photocopier close by.

Supplementing observations and interviews with documentary evidence added another dimension to my evidence. For example, in some interviews, I asked students about the planning of their paragraphs, and from this it emerged that students generally understood that paragraphs contained one main idea. However, in examining student assignments, it emerged that a few students broke up paragraphs which contained one main idea into more than one paragraph. If I had relied solely on interview evidence, I might have drawn the dubious conclusion that students had complete understanding of paragraphing and were able to produce paragraphs that contained one idea (as compared to more than one idea in a paragraph) 100% of the time.

Please see the next page for a summary of the research methods used, and the frequency that I used these methods to collect evidence.

Table 2: Summary of research methods

Research method	Description	Frequency
Interviews	Unstructured in-depth interviews	Students: 2013, 1 st year paper, invited for 2 interviews Students: 2014, 2 nd year paper, invited for 2 interviews Staff: 2013, teaching 1 st year paper (both on-campus and distance), invited for 1 interview Staff: 2014, staff member teaching in the on-campus paper observed in tutorial, invited for 1 interview Staff: 2014, teaching on distance paper, invited for 1 interview
Observations – face-to-face	Observations: lectures & tutorials	2013: 1 st year paper, lectures, on-campus paper, 24 in total. 2013: tutorials, on-campus 1 st year paper, 12 in total. 2013: Distance paper, 2 lectures and 4 tutorials (2 tutorials for each stream). 2014: on-campus 2 nd year paper, observed 6 lectures and 7 tutorials. 2014: distance 2 nd year paper, observed 1 lecture plus 1 library tutorial
Observation – online (Moodle) and focus groups	Non-participant observations of Moodle and the focus groups (Google Groups and Facebook). Participant dialogue cut and pasted into Word. Field notes taken.	2013 and 2014: 1 st and 2 nd year papers, observations at least once weekly. I missed some of the observations of 2 nd year Moodle postings.
Field notes	Field notes taken of lectures, tutorials, observations (face-to-face and online) and some research meetings with staff.	Frequency of field notes depended on frequency of activities such as meetings, lectures and tutorials
Documents	Course outlines and students' assignments (both marked and unmarked that were made available to me)	Documents collected at relevant times. e.g., course outlines at the beginning of the courses

4.6 Analysis

In this section I comment first on the analysis process undertaken. Then I will briefly discuss the concept crystallisation.

The type of analysis chosen needs to be consistent with the types of evidence collected (Schmidt, 2004). Both the exploratory nature of my research questions, and the ethnographic nature of my methods, supported an inductive approach to analysis.

As mentioned above, and in Chapter 4.5.4, I used an inductive approach to analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 1983, 2006). Inductive analysis is “a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). It is also acknowledged by Braun and Clarke (2006) that coding does not happen in a vacuum, meaning, for example, that preconceptions, a conceptual framework, and the research questions themselves can to some extent influence the coding. In the initial stages of analysis my research questions and conceptual framework would have influenced the analysis of my evidence.

As discussed in Chapter 4.5.4, my first step in analysis was making field notes during observations. I then expanded on these observations as I typed up the field notes. After interviews, I wrote down themes and ideas that occurred to me. Within a few days of interviews being transcribed, I read the interview statements, noting down recurring or salient themes or ideas. These ideas I noted throughout the interview statements and wrote some summary sentences at the end of each interview statement (please see Chapter 4.5.4 for information on the taking of field notes).

Charmaz (1983) cites Glaser (1978), who drawing on coded theory practice, suggests a two-phase process for coding. The initial stage is line-by-line coding where the researcher takes a small amount of evidence (e.g., interview statements) and codes it one line at a time. I undertook this at the completion of my first year of evidence collection with two student and one staff member’s interview statements. From this initial coding, I generated a number of themes and codes which in respect of answering Research Questions 1 and 2 consisted of:

punctuation, grammar, spelling, referencing, flow, structure, word choice, coherence, genre (e.g. essay and booklet) and content.

As mentioned in Section 4.5.4, after completing the initial coding I presented my themes and codes to my supervisors. I was introduced to Locke's (2015) framework for a rhetorical approach to literacy (please see Figure 1). This framework guided my categorizing of evidence which I used to answer Research Questions 1 and 2. It also made me aware of aspects of writing not commented on by participants, such as audience, purpose and language functions. In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 2.5, I then read about a rhetorical approach to literacy and added this to my conceptual framework.

Charmaz (1983) states that the second stage of coding (focused coding) involves taking the codes developed in the initial stage and applying them to large amounts of evidence. This I attempted many times in the weeks following my analysis of the two student and one staff member interview statements. During each attempt I became overwhelmed with the large number of interviews and I was unsure how to store my analysis. I created a table in Word and it became obvious this was going to be unmanageable and difficult to change, merge and separate codes. I then tried using a table created in Excel. This also was not suitable. I then trialled Nvivo²⁴ and found I was able to analyse larger amounts of evidence and store my analysis in a more organised manner. This programme also provided me with a means of changing, adapting, merging and separating codes. The organisation of codes related closely to the five research questions. I began storing parts of extracts from interview statements under codes. I did this by examining each line of statement.

When I began writing Chapters 5, 6 and 7, parts of each chapter's structure closely aligned with the codes in Nvivo. However, I did not rely on what I had coded within Nvivo. I would read the interview statement extracts under a code, then revisit interview statements looking for particular instances of a code, or part of a code. I did this for two reasons: to check that I had not missed examples from other interview statements and at times I found it helpful to contextualise the evidence

²⁴ A qualitative data analysis software tool

with part of the interview statement, or sometimes the remainder of the individual statement. I later changed the structure of Chapter 7 to align with Locke (2015) with sub-sections that were the same as codes in Nvivo.

There was some modification to codes throughout the process which took place over a two-year period. Some initial codes for helpful and unhelpful practices were: course delivery modes, materials, feedback, student/staff initiated consultation textual strategies, on-campus services, referencing, building a learning community, and time management. The codes I present in Chapter 7.2 are: course delivery modes, materials, feedback and consultation and university services.

When analysing my evidence and writing Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I mainly drew on field notes and interview statements. I referred many times back to my field notes of the events that occurred in tutorials. In addition, at times I checked my findings against assignment scripts. For example, in Chapter 6.4.2, I report that four students reflected that they were challenged by paragraph structure. To investigate whether these four students assignment scripts had accurate paragraph structure I examined their assignment scripts plus other student participants' assignment scripts. As reported in Chapter 6.4.2, students generally did have one idea per paragraph. I also undertook an analysis of students' assignments for coherence (please see Appendix M). I did this because students and staff were quite focused on "flow" and structure. In addition, one can tell quite a bit about the expertise of a writer by considering how coherent a text it.

For my research, I identified with the concept *crystallisation* rather than *triangulation*. Triangulation is the employment of two or more methods of data collection in a study which investigates some aspect of human behaviour (Cohen et al., 2003). The reason for using more than one research method is that, when the researcher finds consistent findings across the different methods, he/she has more confidence in their findings. I used more than one research method. However, I viewed evidence collection and analysis as more complex than the term triangulation indicates.

Ethnographers, who embrace creative analytical practice, recognise that there are "far more than three sides by which to approach the world" (Richardson & St Pierre,

2005, p. 963). They, and myself, identify with the term crystallisation. The authors state that crystals combine “symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations. ... Crystals grow, change, and are altered. ... Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions.” (p. 963). In other words, there is no **one** way of telling and/or interpreting an event. “Each telling, like light hitting a crystal, reflects a different perspective on this incident” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 8).

When readers and audiences become immersed in the context new realities emerge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Fetterman (2009) states that “ethnographers crystallize their thoughts at various stages” (p. 577), which may result in a “mundane conclusion, a novel insight, or an earth-shattering epiphany” (p. 577). One example of crystallisation, which is more like an “aha” moment than an epiphany, occurred during the writing of my discussion chapter. While revisiting my evidence and the related literature, I realised that giving student participants a specific audience assisted them to make writing decisions.

4.7 Trustworthiness

It was important that my research was able to be trusted, by my participants, by myself, and by my readers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that conventional criteria (such as rigour, validity and reliability) are not appropriate for naturalistic inquiry and that terms such as truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality are terms used to assist the reader (and the researcher) to determine if the findings of a study are “worth paying attention to” (p. 290). I found these aforementioned terms used by Lincoln and Guba (1985) useful in explaining the “trustworthiness” of my research, yet I found these terms also had limitations in their applicability to my study.

4.7.1 Truth value

Truth value is concerned with whether or not the researcher has established truth, or credibility, in respect of the reality of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). I briefly described the research context and gave brief backgrounds of the participants (see Chapter 4.4). As explained in Chapter 4.6, I attempted to analyse themes and categories that emerged from evidence collection. In discussing these

themes and categories I attempted to make it clear when I was describing, when I was using participants direct quotations, when I was interpreting and when I was presenting possible implications. I acknowledged that participants' responses in interviews should not be viewed as objective responses (i.e., the truth) but "displays of perspectives" (Silverman, 2011, p. 199).

4.7.2 Applicability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) posed the question of whether: "the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other respondents" (p. 290). It was not my intention for my study to be applicable to other contexts or participants. It was my intention to report on and discuss my evidence in response to my research questions. I hoped that readers would be able to take my findings, discussion, implications and recommendations and gain insights as to the understandings that students and staff participants in my study had of academic literacy induction. I hope that insights gained can be used to improve the teaching and learning experiences of students and staff *in other contexts* in light of students' academic literacy induction.

4.7.3 Consistency

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also considered consistency which they related to whether or not "findings of an inquiry would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?" (p. 290). My study could be used to frame another study. In other words, my research questions, my methodology, and methods could be used in another study in both a similar and different context. For example, a similar study could occur with different programmes in the same tertiary institution, other tertiary institutions, high schools, or even a community literacy programme. In addition, the literature I called on demonstrated that many of my findings were consistent with other studies. Therefore, it is possible that some of my findings may be replicated. However, my participants' understandings and experiences are also individual and unique understandings and experiences. Consistency was not an aim of my study.

4.7.4 Neutrality

Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider whether "the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not by

the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer?” (p. 290). I acknowledged subjectivities in the collection, analysis, description and discussion of my study (please see Chapter 4.3.3). I have also explained that my research questions, conceptual framework and methodological framework would have influenced both my collection and analysis of evidence. In addition, in Chapter 1, I explained a little about my interest in the topic and my academic literacy background. In other words, I have attempted to make clear the lens that I bring to this study. I also explained in Section 4.7.1, how I tried to represent and make clear the views and understandings of participants.

In sum, this section considered the trustworthiness of my study in respect of truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality.

4.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical consent was sought and granted by the university’s ethics committee before I began the research. In conducting this research, ethical issues have been considered at every point and when warranted discussed in supervision meetings.

4.8.1 Informed consent

In gaining informed consent from participants, ethical guidelines, as outlined by the universities human research ethics guidelines, were adhered to. Signed informed consent was gained from all participants prior to the start of research evidence collection. All student participants received a written and verbal description of the research and were given an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered before signing two copies of the informed consent letter. All staff participants received a written description of the research and were invited to the staff meeting, where I introduced my research orally and answered questions. Not all staff participants attended. One copy of the written description of my research was kept by each of the staff participants and one copy by myself. Examples of information contained in the informed consent letters are: voluntary participation, protecting participants’ anonymity, right to withdraw from research and potential outputs from the study, including publications or presentations (Please see Appendices H & I for examples of informed consent documents. Appendix J shows research outputs).

4.8.2 Confidentiality

I took a number of measures to ensure student and staff confidentiality. In the thesis, the name of the university has not been given, and staff and students have not been identified. Nor have the papers been identified in which participants were enrolled. In addition, three social media sites were used for this research: Google Groups (one site) and Facebook (two sites) (refer to Section 4.5.6). All were set up as closed groups to ensure confidentiality.

4.8.3 Minimisation of harm

There were a number of ways I attempted to minimise possible harm to participants. One way was through confidentiality, as explained above. Another way was in considering the amount of time participants spent participating in the study. With ethnographic research, there are often a number of interviews throughout the research period. Participants were invited to take part in only one (staff) or two (students) interviews per semester, even though it would have been beneficial for my research to have had additional interviews.

4.8.4 Other ethical issues

I adopted an outsider role (Adler & Adler, 1987) as I was not a student enrolled in the course, nor was I a staff member. On a few occasions, however, I did change briefly to an insider role. An example was when a student arrived at an interview visibly upset since she had received feedback from her first assignment that she did not understand. She put the feedback in front of me. I suggested she contact her tutor but she thought that because it was study break, the staff member would not be on-campus. I had noticed that there appeared to be a minimal number of staff on campus. I suggested that after the interview I explain to her what the feedback meant. She appeared more relaxed and less upset. I did this because I did not want her upset during the interview, or leaving the interview upset. At other times, I reminded students of my researcher role. For example, I was asked by one student just before a tutorial began (March 22, 2013) to check her reference list for assignment 1A. I gently reminded her that I could not assist students with their writing, but suggested she have a look at the spelling of “New York.” I did not tell her of the other referencing errors in her reference list.

4.9 Limitations

There were a number of limitations in my research evidence collection. First, all but one of the key student participants I interviewed were female. However, students were self-selected and were not intended to be representative of the student cohort. Having more male participants could possibly have added another dimension to my research, for example, the emergence of gender trends in the evidence.

Second, for all papers, I observed a number of staff lecturing. However, I observed only one staff member teaching a tutorial class in each first-year and second-year paper. It would have been a more thorough piece of research had I observed more than one tutorial class per paper, but it would have been outside the scope of this research.

Third, my research took place over a two-year period. My research would have had more depth had I interviewed and observed participants over the duration of their three-year programme. However, three years of evidence collection was outside the scope of this research.

4.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a justification for my research design, namely using a qualitative, interpretive ethnographic study to enable me to address my research questions. I have argued that the exploratory nature of my research questions, and the focus on participants' understandings and experiences of academic writing, suited a qualitative study employing ethnographic tools. The interpretive nature of my research meant I both described and interpreted my evidence. The range of tools I used, such as interviews and observations, provided depth to my research. In addition, outlining ethical concerns and limitations to my evidence collection meant that I considered ethical issues that arose, the scope and some limitations of my research.

I begin the next chapter by restating my research questions, which informed the reporting of findings that emerged from my engagement with my evidence.

CHAPTER 5: STUDENTS' ACADEMIC LITERACIES

LEARNING EXPERIENCES: ON-CAMPUS AND DISTANCE

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I report on the evidence in response to Research Question 5:

What are the similarities and differences that occur between the academic literacies learning experiences of students in two delivery modes, where one is predominantly face-to-face and one is predominantly online?

In Section 5.2, I explain that the courses, in which my study was conducted, were typical to some extent of university level courses at the site of this study. In Section 5.3, I briefly outline some differences between the two cohorts of students. In Section 5.4, I compare the academic literacy learning experiences for the two cohorts of students in respect of course provision. In Section 5.5, I report on student responses to institutional resources. Section 5.6, the conclusion, summarises some similarities and differences in the academic writing learning experiences of students.

A significant amount of the evidence presented in this chapter, and the two following, came from interviews. I acknowledge the subjective nature of interviews (as mentioned in Chapter 4.3.3). I did not video or audio record tutorials and lectures. The descriptions and interpretations of events and practices which occurred in tutorials and lectures were based on my field notes, my memory and resources provided.

5.2 The courses were typical tertiary level courses

The courses were fairly typical of university-level courses and of the courses at the site of the study, in that there were course outlines, written assignments, lectures, tutorials, an online component, and prescribed readings. Also consistent with the approach taken with a number of online and/or distance courses at the site of the study, the distance students had both on-campus time (albeit limited) and took part in online discussions.

5.3 Cohort differences

The two cohorts entered the first-year paper with somewhat contrasting life and tertiary education experiences. First, the on-campus students were mainly young single people, whereas the distance students were predominantly adults with partners and children. Second, on-campus students were mainly school-leavers, so generally they had not had extended periods of full-time work, whereas distance students had spent a number of years in the workplace. Third, the on-campus students had less experience of tertiary education than distance students, since a number of the latter had previously undertaken tertiary study. Fourth, on-campus students took part in the first-year paper in their first semester of study, whereas distance students were in their second semester of study. When my research was conducted in the second-year paper, both cohorts were in their fourth semester of study.

These differences possibly contributed towards the first-year distance students exhibiting a higher writing standard (including lexical range) than the first-year, on-campus students. I draw this conclusion based on two types of evidence: my examination of students' written assignments in my admittedly small sample, and an interview comment by Andrea, who was involved in teaching both cohorts. She noted that the "quality of the writing" of the distance students was better, because they are "generally ... far more mature in their writing and their thinking, and they're more ... critical ... than our on-campus students." She attributed the higher standards of writing and maturity in writing to their "age difference ... and life experience." I understood Andrea to be commenting mainly on assignment content. I did not see evidence of distance students engaging more critically with the content, or displaying more maturity in their thinking in their assignments than the on-campus students. I noticed that distance students demonstrated a greater lexical range, and the syntax used in some sentences indicated greater control than that displayed in some on-campus students' assignments.

One specific example of contrast is pertinent here. I noticed a telling difference in vocabulary in my interviews with first-year students in their use and comprehension of the word *succinct*. Two on-campus students (Frances and Suzanne) received a feedback comment on their first essay stating that the introduction "could be written a bit more succinctly." Both students, when I asked about the feedback comment,

commented they did not know what the word meant. In addition, no on-campus student used the term *succinct* in interviews. However, of the 14 distance students interviewed, 5 used the term *succinct* when referring to their own or other students' writing. For example, Rachel (ds, I2²⁵) commented that she needed "to be more succinct" with her writing, which she thought she could do "by being brutal" with herself in terms of considering "what are the main points." Therefore, on the basis of this singular example, plus other types of evidence as outlined above, the two cohorts of first-year students appeared to have a different vocabulary level. The difference in vocabulary level was probably due to the fact that the distance students were older, and had more extensive life and work experience than the on-campus students. Certainly, the number of participants and student assignments I had access to was limited, so I make the claim above with caution.

I did not observe differences in writing ability, including lexical range, between the two second-year cohorts. I found it interesting that when interviewing Jaimee (the course coordinator), and asking her if she noticed differences between the writing ability of the two cohorts, her response indicated that she believed that distance students were more likely to hand in assignments that were problematic in some aspect, and remarked that they were more likely to go off at a "tangent." She reflected that she was able to identify in tutorials, on-campus students who did not have the "right idea" and addressed it during the tutorial. In contrast, distance students going off on a "tangent" did not become evident until the assignment was submitted. Her response probably indicated that she was of the opinion that all students benefitted from early guidance since they could misunderstand expectations.

Any contrast in academic literacy learning experiences can be explored by considering the resources provided to both cohorts of students and how students experienced and engaged with these resources. The main resources were: lectures, tutorials, online discussions, readings, and access to staff. These will be discussed below.

²⁵ (ds, I2) is an abbreviation for distance student, interview 2. Other abbreviations used are "ocs" is an abbreviation for on-campus student. I1 = interview 1. I3 = interview 3. I4 = interview 4.

5.4 Course provision

In this section and the next, I provide a brief description of course provision and the resources provided to students.

5.4.1 Tutorials

The first-year on-campus students had 12 one-hour, weekly tutorials. Tutorials generally consisted of information given by the academic staff member, student activities and student discussion (facilitated by the academic staff member). Each tutorial was related to the respective weekly topics. For example, in week 3 (Semester A, 2013) the lecture topic was “Learning to communicate” (course outline²⁶ 1). The topic for the tutorial was “language development.” In the first-year course, there was time specifically spent on assignment instruction in four tutorials: assignment 1A in three tutorials and assignment 2A in one.

The first-year distance students had two three-hour on-campus tutorials, one at the beginning of the semester, and the other mid-way through. During the first tutorial, there was instruction on assignment 1B, and during the second tutorial on assignment 2B. In addition, there was a weekly online discussion, which related to the weekly topic. This will be discussed more fully below in the Moodle section.

The second-year, on-campus students had seven, three-hour weekly tutorials. Many of the activities in tutorials related to assignments. For example, in the first tutorial, students were given an activity where they were to outline the strengths and limitations of the three learning theories (behaviourism, constructivism and humanism) explored in the course. This activity related to the content of both assignments, since these assignments involved students demonstrating an understanding of these learning theories. For example, for their first assignment (3A), students were to demonstrate “an excellent understanding of the learning theories” (co 3) and for their second assignment (4A), they were to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the learning theories in relation to teaching practice.

²⁶ Course outline will from now on generally be abbreviated to “co.” co1 was the course outline provided for first-year on-campus students. co2 was provided to first-year distance students. co3 was provided to second-year on-campus students. co4 was provided to second-year distance students.

There was also extensive instruction given during tutorials on how to approach specific assignments. For example, assignment expectations were explained, instructions and marking criteria were unpacked and explained, possible content was discussed, and language functions were explained and demonstrated. In addition, students had opportunities to engage in discussion and activities.

Second-year distance students did not have tutorial classes during their on-campus week. Instead, they had two lectures which were, to some extent, interactive.

Distance students were not on campus in the weeks prior to the submission date for assignments 4A and 4B (these assignments were identical). At this time, however, on-campus students in one tutorial were given extensive instruction on how to write these assignments. A Panopto recording was taken of the part of the tutorial where assignment instruction was given. It was subsequently made available to distance students (see Chapter 7.1.1).

The Panopto recording of the tutorial was not made available to on-campus students. A major difference, then, between the experiences of on-campus and distance students in respect to the second assignment was that the distance students could watch the Panopto recording, which explained how to do assignments 4A and 4B, as many times as they wanted. In contrast, on-campus students had the immediacy of the tutorial experience. This meant that these students relied on their retention of the tutorial experience and on their note-taking. I observed many on-campus students writing many notes during this part of the tutorial, indicating that students understood the importance of complying with the tutors' instructions.

To conclude, in the first-year of study for on-campus students, tutorials occurred regularly (mostly weekly), but for distance students only during their on-campus weeks. In the second year, on-campus students had tutorials, whereas distance students did not. The latter were provided with a Panopto recording of a writing instruction session provided during an on-campus tutorial. Distance students also engaged most weeks with their course peers through the online interactions, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.4.3.

5.4.2 Lectures

Format

In the first year, the on-campus students had 20 one-hour lectures, presented by eight lecturers. Each lecture was on an aspect of the paper's topic, and was accompanied by PowerPoint slides. Selected PowerPoint slides were made available to students via Moodle after each lecture.

First-year distance students attended a week on campus where they were divided into two streams. During the week, they had one hour-long lecture (for all students) and one three-hour tutorial class (for each of the two streams). Selected slides from the lecture were uploaded into Moodle. The distance students had 22 topics over a 12-week period. Each week, "lecture notes," which appeared to be a summary of the week's topic, were uploaded into Moodle. Some weekly topics provided for the two cohorts of students were the same and some had differences. For example, in Week 2, the topic for both cohorts was "The beginnings of life." For the first week after teaching recess (contact Week 7), the topic for on-campus students was "Looking at transitions through a developmental lens." The topic for distance students was "Māori perspectives on development."

In their second year, on-campus students had eight one-hour lectures. PowerPoint slides were made available to students after lectures via Koodle²⁷.

Second-year distance students had eight weekly discussions via Moodle. Students were sometimes provided with a Panopto recording of the lecture. They also attended an on-campus week, where they attended two lectures of two hours duration each. Each week, distance students were also provided with the same lecture PowerPoint slides as those made available to the on-campus students.

²⁷ Pseudonym for the open source management system that was developed (and used for some courses) by the university which was the site for this study.

Student views about lectures and behaviour in them

First-year on-campus students had a range of views about lectures. Generally, students were positive about the lectures but some said they had difficulty concentrating (please see Chapter 7.1.1).

My observations of the first-year lectures suggested that in many instances, some students appeared disengaged for some if not most of the lecture. For example, many students talked to each other at times during lectures (some briefly, some for longer lengths), a few used their laptops to check Facebook and at times, some appeared on the verge of sleep.

There was a contrast between student behaviour in lectures in the first-year and in the second. In the second year, students appeared focused and engaged since the lecture room was generally quiet with students appearing to listen and focus. Second-year on-campus students were positive about lectures (See Chapter 7.1.1).

Note-taking during lectures

Generally, on-campus students in both their first and second year reflected that they took notes during lectures. According to two first-year students, the extent to which they took notes depended on whether or not they found the lecture interesting (Cheryl, I1; Kathleen, I1). Students had different ideas about what to base note-taking on. Some first-year students thought that the aim of writing notes was to copy verbatim what was on the PowerPoint slides (Catherine, I1; Kathleen, I1; Suzanne, I1). Suzanne (I2) and Catherine (I1) reported taking photos if they did not have enough time to copy verbatim the entire slide. Kathleen (I1) was discriminating in note-taking, first deciding if something was “really important” and then if the important point was “not on the slide” she would “write all of that down.” She did not indicate what she considered important material. She also commented that she found note-taking by hand in lectures difficult so used her laptop. As she missed “half of” what was said, she “absorbed” what she could and picked up the rest of the content from tutorials and the set readings. Frances (I1) appeared to rely on intuition for deciding what to take notes on. She took notes on “things” she thought were “important” and explained that the way she knew what was important was that “something ... kind of goes off in my [her] head.” Catherine stated she struggled with identifying what to take notes on, as she did not know

“what ... important bits they [lecturers] want us to take out of” the lecture. Tui (I1) was more strategic in her note-taking approach than other students, stating: “they will introduce a topic, so you know that is what you are focusing on,” then when “information is really important or relevant to that topic ... you will write that down.” Tui gave the example of when lecturers referred “to theorists ... you will write the theorist’s name.” She claimed that she would not “write the whole slide down” but waited for the lecturer “to say something that really sums up the slide.” She would then “put what she said into my **own** words [student emphasis].” In summary, for these students, the purpose of note-taking was to capture the content of lectures.

In the second year, while some students still appeared to be using the verbatim model of note-taking, some were not. Cheryl (I3) stated: “I found I haven’t been taking as many notes in lectures, but rather just listening and then going back and getting the slide shows and stuff to go back to. I find it better to just listen and think about it, rather than just write frantically when you’re in there.” Suzanne (I3) said she used her lecture notes to assist with the content of assignments, since she referred back to check that she had understood the learning theory on constructivism correctly.

In contrast to the on-campus students who had to take their own lecture notes, distance students in the first year were provided with notes that were summaries of topics. Some first-year distance students stated that they used the lecture notes posted on Moodle (Amanda, I2; Carla, I2; Marie, I2; Molly, I1, I2; Tia, I2). Students used them in different ways. For example, both Amanda (I2) and Molly (I2) reflected that they used the lecture notes to direct their reading. Carla reflected that she used the lecture notes to study for the test. Marie remarked that she printed the lecture notes, “highlighted” what she considered important, and then filed them. Tia used them to look for information for the topic she chose for assignment 2B.

Second-year distance students were provided with the PowerPoint slides made available to on-campus students after each lecture.

In sum, both cohorts in their first and second year had access to course content via lectures or lecture notes. Generally, on-campus students reflected they took notes

of some kind in lectures. Students demonstrated development in note-taking from their first-year of study, to their second.

5.4.3 Discussion forums

Both cohorts had access to two, course-specific, online sites, throughout the two papers (one per paper) they enrolled in. One was set up by the course convenors (Moodle for first-year students and Noodle for second-year students). In addition, students set up and facilitated their own Facebook sites. On-campus students reported that each tutorial group had their own Facebook site, and distance students (who had begun the course at the same time) had another Facebook site. For student reflections on the Facebook sites, refer to Chapter 7.1.1 and for discussion refer to Chapter 8.4.2.

For first-year, on-campus students, Moodle was used mainly as a repository for PowerPoint lecture slides and also as a place for academic staff to post announcements. All student participants reported using Moodle to access lecture slides. Second-year, on-campus students had access to Koodle, which I was told was used as a repository for resources and for staff to post notices. I had access to Moodle but did not have access to Koodle. Distance students in both years were given access to a Moodle site for each paper, where resources were uploaded, notices could be posted to students, and six-weekly discussions were initiated and set-up by the course convenor.

For the first-year distance students there was weekly “online participation” (co 2) which was worth 15 % their final grade. The “online participation” consisted of two aspects. 10 % was for contributing to 10 weekly online discussions in which students were “expected to make a **minimum of 3 contributions per week**” [bold in original]. In addition, each student had a repository space in Moodle for uploading resources that they might use for assignment 2B. This potentially contributed 5% of their final grade. In the second year, there were also online discussions but with no grade awarded for online contributions. Participation was a course requirement.

All distance students were expected to take part in the online discussions. Generally, student participants in my study did this. Student responses as to whether

they found these discussions helpful for their assignment writing is discussed in Chapter 7.1.1.

In summary, both cohorts of students had access to Moodle sites for the papers (that were part of this study) they were enrolled in. Students also had access to Facebook sites which were set up and facilitated by students. Both cohorts took part in these.

5.4.4 Readings

Both first and second-year students were provided with prescribed readings. In the first year, both cohorts of students were provided with a book of readings (approximately half were book chapters and half were journal articles) and were required to purchase a prescribed textbook. Both cohorts had set readings each week. Student responses to the prescribed texts is explored in Chapter 7.2.2 and student engagement in readings is discussed in Chapter 8.4.4.

5.5 Resources

5.5.1 Access to academic staff

Both cohorts of students in both the first and second-year papers had access to academic staff in a number of ways. Both cohorts could ask questions via Moodle or Koodle and could email and make appointments with academic staff. Both cohorts could talk briefly to staff before and after tutorials and lectures. I observed this happening on a number of occasions. Staff did not advertise specific office hours, but students were told staff were available. A number of distance students reported having had contact with staff via telephone and reflected that they appreciated having access to staff. Molly (I1) was perhaps the most positive about staff availability, when she commented that she would have liked to have included an acknowledgements section at the beginning of assignment 2B: “I always wanted to thank Andrea ... she’s been amazing really; she has always made herself available” (See Chapters 7.1.2 and 7.2.2).

5.5.2 Library

Both cohorts of students had access to the library. Students from both cohorts could visit the library, could access resources online via databases, and could use the online question forum provided by the library. It was more difficult for distance students to physically visit the library. The library appeared aware of this, since

they provided a service where they couriered books to distance students. Refer to Chapter 7.1.4 for students' perceptions on the service provided by the library.

5.5.3 The student learning centre

The student learning centre provided both an online and on-campus service. The online service had two aspects: students could book a consultation on their written work via distance, and students could use a variety of online resources. Students could also book a consultation with a learning advisor and attend a face-to-face consultation. Therefore, both cohorts could visit a learning advisor, access online resources, and send work in for an online consultation.

In the first year, two distance students (Michelle (ds, I1 & 2; Molly ds, I1) reported that getting written feedback on draft assignments from Student Learning was helpful. In addition, Dawn (ds, I1) reflected that she had been told by a peer that she found “the feedback she got from the student learning centre²⁸ invaluable.” She wanted to use this service, but understood that the assignment needed to be written a week in advance to get feedback. Her goal for her next essay was to get her essay done “at least a week in advance” so that she could send it to the student learning centre. Dawn also remarked that she had enrolled in the student learning centre online writing paper and intended to look at the paper over summer to “organise” her essay writing.

In the second year, more students than in the first reported using the student learning centre (Catherine, ocs, I3; Joanna, I3; Molly, ds, I3; Mabel, ds, I3; Nancy, ds, I3), and all reported that they found this service helpful. Additional findings on the student learning centre are provided in Chapter 7.1.4 and student and staff perceptions of the student learning centre are further discussed in Chapter 8.4.5.

5.6 Conclusion

There were a number of similarities and differences in the academic writing learning experiences of students, where one cohort predominantly attended class on-campus, and the other were distance students. Both cohorts had lectures, tutorials (in the first year), prescribed texts, and access to university services such

²⁸ Name changed for anonymity

as the library. In the first year, on-campus students were challenged by note-taking and the need to concentrate in lectures. In their second year, distance students were provided with lecture notes, which were summaries of main points and also with a Panopto recording of a tutorial giving on-campus students assignment writing instruction. One difference between the experiences of on-campus and distance students was that at times on-campus students had a single opportunity to absorb information, whereas distance students were provided with resources that they could view at their leisure. It appeared staff attempted to provide a similar course and similar services to both cohorts, via the two modes.

The next chapter reports on student and staff understandings of academic writing. I draw on Locke (2015) for aspects of academic writing, for example, voice and audience.

CHAPTER 6: STUDENT AND STAFF UNDERSTANDINGS OF ACADEMIC WRITING

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is my reading of the evidence in response to Research Questions 1 and 4:

What understandings of academic writing do participating students and staff have?

To what extent is there a divergence or convergence between participating student and staff understandings of academic writing learning practices?

The majority of evidence drawn on for this chapter and the next came from the first year of my investigation. To have the same degree of evidence in the second year would have been outside of the scope of this study. Hence, I invited fewer staff members to take part in an interview in the second year. The purpose for collecting *some* evidence in the second year was to enable a depth to my study in a way that would not have been possible with one year of evidence.

I begin this chapter with Section 6.2, which provides information on the setting up of the courses. Section 6.3 is an overview of the courses. In Sections 6.4 and 6.5, I explore student and staff understandings of academic writing. In Section 6.6, I identify divergences and convergences between student and staff understandings of academic writing. The reason why I begin by focusing on preparations for the courses undertaken by staff, before students were enrolled, is to provide a context for the chapter.

6.2 The setting up of the courses

Staff were regularly involved in the course review process, which sometimes meant changes in the courses from semester to semester. Toni and Andrea (the two staff members teaching the distance paper) reported reshaping the first-year distance course from previous years. One of the modifications was changing students' second assignment from an essay to a booklet. According to Andrea (I2), the purpose of the reshaping was to make the course "more meaningful ... current" and "relevant" and to "use a multimedia approach" as a way of engaging the distance

students. Andrea explained that she tried to make “links” to what they were “currently watching on TV.” Toni also wanted the course to be relevant to students and reflected: “You give someone their own ‘mana motuhake,’ which means their own authority to explore something that’s of interest or of concern to them with boundaries that are unlimited.” Toni and Andrea were mindful that changes they made to assignment instructions and criteria needed to align with institutional or departmental protocols. They described themselves as writing “learning outcomes” so that they would “not get in trouble” (Toni, I2) since it is an institutional requirement that all course outlines learning objectives included.

Toni stated that she found it relatively easy to make the changes in the distance paper as there were just two staff involved, compared to the on-campus paper where they “had a lot of staff.” She may have meant that negotiating changes were easier with a smaller team. Toni reported that it was a very positive experience working with Andrea: “we just bounced [ideas] off each other.” Andrea explained that her role was “supportive” in that she was “helping behind the scenes ... with the setting up of the paper because this [was] the first time Toni [had] taken the paper.” Toni had been assigned the role of paper coordinator, whereas Andrea had taught the paper for several years.

In our interview Jaimee (coordinator, lecturer and tutor in the second-year paper) reflected there had been changes in the second-year course assignments between 2013 and 2014, the year my research was conducted in the paper. The change she referred to was in assignments 3A and 3B (the article summary, evaluation and critique). In 2013, this had been an online response to an article posted by students. She commented that there had been issues with this assignment. One issue was that the assignment process relied on student participation and not all students engaged through the entire semester. Another issue was that the “critique was poorly done ... because [students] were so concerned about discussing the article that actually critiquing the article got lost” (Jaimee). Therefore, what Jaimee brought to the planning of the course was knowledge about what had worked in the past and what had not worked so well for students. Assessments 3A and 3B were modified as a consequence of the process of review. Jaimee did not mention working with other staff on these changes.

6.3 Course overview

In this section, I briefly outline certain information contained in the course outlines as a way of contextualising the written assignment instructions and marking criteria.

Each of the four course outlines contained information on:

- course content and assessments, including assignment instructions and marking criteria;
- the teaching team (names and contact details);
- tutorial group times and places;
- attendance requirements;
- lecture guides and information on behavioural guidelines for lectures (recording lectures, mobile phones, talking in lectures, children/visitors in lectures);
- required reading;
- the process for applying for assignment extensions;
- course workload;
- what constituted plagiarism;
- class representation,²⁹ student complaint process and grade-related information, such as tutorial participation.

The first-year course outlines had aspects that were not included in the second-year course outline, namely, a student representative, procedure for student concerns and complaints, paper appraisal, and “style and referencing guidelines” (co 2), including plagiarism. Please see Appendix L for aspects of academic writing in the course outlines.

6.3.1 Assignment instructions and marking criteria

In this section, I outline aspects of written assessments for first and second-year courses. I begin by explaining some similarities and differences between the assignments, the range of skills it appeared students were expected to have

²⁹ Student elected representatives liaise between paper coordinators and students.

competency in, and I briefly discuss how the assignments for the first-year course were designed to scaffold learning.

There were some similarities between assignments. First, assignments 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 4A and 4B all required students to display their understanding of developmental theories and/or teaching practice. Assignments 3A and 3B were both summaries, evaluations and critiques of a journal article. Students were given a list of eight articles to choose from. One difference between cohorts was that for assignment 3A, for on-campus students, during tutorials, each student facilitated a discussion amongst three or four of their peers. The discussion was on the article they selected. Distance students (assignment 3B) each *wrote* an evaluation of their chosen article. For assignment 3B, the difference between the critique and evaluation was that for the critique (as explained in tutorials) students were to identify strengths and weaknesses in the article. The evaluation involved linking the article to “prior knowledge, practice” and wider reading and learning theories. Generally, therefore, students needed to understand content such as education theories and be able to relate theories to teaching practice in order to write the assignments. They were expected to adhere to academic conventions in their writing. This point will be expanded on below.

There were some key differences between the assignments. One was the extent to which students could develop a topic or present an argument. For the first assignment for each of the papers (both first- and second-year) the instructions were more prescriptive than for the second assignment. For example, for assignments 1A and 1B, students were to explain two theorists’ ideas, link this to an event or experience and comment on the implications of the theorists’ ideas for teaching. For assignment 2A, students were to discuss the question, “Is it important for teachers to recognise and understand diversity in development?” meaning that they could choose how they developed the topic, including the stance they adopted. The second difference related to assignments genres. Assignments 1A, 1B, 2A, 4A and 4B were essays, 2B was a booklet and 3A and 3B were readings tasks. The third difference was the language functions expected of students in their writing (e.g., explanation, critique).

In respect of assignment instructions and marking criteria, there was a range of skills that students may have been expected to be competent in. First, the assignment instructions suggested that there was the expectation that students could write in the genres stipulated. Staff supplemented the written instructions in the course outlines with academic writing instruction during tutorials. Second, instructions indicated an expectation that students reference in accordance with the APA³⁰ 6th edition conventions. In the first-year course, on-campus students were given a library tutorial on APA referencing. Third, students were expected to have information literacy skills, as they were to access a range of appropriate academic resources for all assessments apart from 1A, where they were to use the sources in the book of readings. Students were given examples of what constituted appropriate sources for specific assignments. In addition, students had a library tutorial in their second year of study, in which they were given instruction and practice on accessing electronic resources. Fourth, students were expected to produce assignments with word- and-sentence level accuracy. In the first-year course I interpreted “writing skills” to include word- and sentence-level accuracy. This was given as one of the marking criteria for each of the assignments. In the second-year course, the marking criteria for assignments 4A and 4B stated “present written ideas to a high standard: Accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar” (co 3 & 4). No marking criteria were provided in course outlines for assignments 3A and 3B. Students were given limited instruction on word- and sentence-level accuracy in tutorials but were reminded of the importance of such accuracy in the second year. Students were also advised to go to the student learning centre if they needed assistance with writing. Fifth, it was expected that students understand terminology used in the assignment instructions and marking criteria such as “coherence of the overall argument of the essay” (co 1) and have the ability to meet these requirements. Argumentation and how it was addressed in the course is explored in Section 6.5.1. Sixth, students were also expected to be able to produce assignments fulfilling different language functions, such as, “a brief description” (co 1), “a critical reflection” (co 2) and a “critical evaluation” (co 3 & co 4). In the second-year course, students were instructed on how to fulfil the different language functions required for the assignments.

³⁰ APA is the abbreviation for American Psychological Association

In the first-year course, more direction was given (in assignment instructions and criteria) given for the first assessment than the second. First, the first assignments for each course were more prescriptive than the second. For example, for assessments 1A and 1B, students were specifically told the topic, and were instructed on the content for their assignment. For assignments 2A and 2B, students were to develop a topic themselves. Second, the assignments were designed to scaffold students' use of appropriate academic resources. For assignment 1A, students were instructed in tutorials to use their textbook and the course readings only. For assignment 1B, students were instructed to include the textbook as one of their four resources. For assignments 2A and 2B, students were permitted to search for their own sources but were again given assistance in the course outline since they were provided with examples of acceptable articles and document types. Third, in the first-year course, marking criteria were also designed to scaffold learning. Each set of marking criteria gave students information in bullet-pointed form on how their grade would be determined. The marking criteria for assignments 1A and 1B were more specific than those for assignments 2A and 2B. Such scaffolding did not occur in the second-year course.

In summary, for most assignments, students required an understanding of educational theories and needed to be able to relate theory and/or literature to teaching practice. A difference between the assignments was that students were expected to write in different genres; the essay was the most common. The assignments assumed student competency in a number of areas, such as adhering to referencing conventions and the ability to search for appropriate literature. Students were given instruction in tutorials, which supplemented written assignment instructions and marking criteria.

Assignment outlines

The occurrences of aspects of academic writing in assignment instructions are listed in Appendix K. As mentioned earlier, "writing skills" could have included word- and sentence-level features of writing. I have entered this as punctuation, syntax, and spelling. I have including the category "reading" because of its relevance and importance to academic writing.

Appendix L demonstrates that there appeared to be a considerable focus on course content, referencing, reading and a range of language functions expected. There was also a focus on reading, especially in the second year. Aspects which had a minimum focus or not a focus were: lexis, coherence, cohesion and audience.

6.3.2 Tutorials: Writing instruction

In tutorials, time was spent giving students instruction on aspects of assignment writing. During the first-year paper for on-campus students, 40 minutes' instruction was given in preparation for assignment 1A in three tutorials, and for assignment 2A approximately 40 minutes in one tutorial. For distance students, instruction on assignment 1B occurred in the one on-campus lecture for approximately one hour. Different aspects of writing were the focus in different tutorials. For example, in the first tutorial for on-campus students for assignment 1A, most of the time was spent on content. For the third tutorial, aspects of writing, such as academic language, audience, word choice and referencing (including in-text citations) were explained and at times demonstrated on the whiteboard. For assignment 2A and 2B, most of the instruction or direction given was on assignment content.

Likewise, during the second-year course, both cohorts of students were given writing instruction in tutorials. During their on-campus week distance students had 1 hour and 40 minutes of instruction for assignment 3B. In addition, these students were given access to the Panopto video of an on-campus tutorial, in which instruction for assignment 4B was given (please see Chapter 5.4.2). The on-campus students received extensive instruction for both assessments. For assignment 3A students had a total of nearly 3.5 hours of instruction over three tutorials and for assessment 4A approximately 3 hours over three tutorials. Activities in tutorials appeared to be designed to assist students with the content of assignments.

Aspects of academic writing that were discussed in the courses, including tutorials, are shown in Appendix L which demonstrates that in both the first- and second-year courses, a major focus was course content. In the first-year course, in respect of writing, there also appeared to be a focus by students and staff on punctuation, syntax, grammar, and referencing. In the second year, there was quite a focus language functions, such as justification and critique. During the tutorials I observed there was much instruction given on how to fulfil these language

functions. Writing instruction given during tutorials is discussed later in this chapter.

Conclusion

There were some similarities and differences between the first and the second-year. One similarity was that most assignments required students to demonstrate their understanding of developmental theorists. A major difference between the first and second-year courses was that in the first year, there was a focus on aspects of writing at the micro level, whereas in the second year there was a greater focus on aspects at the macro level. The next section presents my reading of the evidence related to students' understanding of academic writing.

6.4 Students' understanding of academic writing

The approach I have employed draws on Locke's (2015) rhetorical approach to writing. When analysing my evidence at the end of the first year, I found that *many* (but not all) of the aspects present in Locke's (2015) view of textual production were represented. Drawing on Locke's framework raised my awareness of rhetorical aspects of academic writing that participants commented on less or did not comment on at all in the first year.

The evidence I call on for this section consists mainly of student interviews and written assignments. I begin with the social/contextual level, since in a rhetorical approach to writing, texts are viewed as produced to achieve a purpose (or serve a function) and texts are written with the intended audience in mind.

6.4.1 Social/contextual category

In this section I explore case study students' understandings of academic writing at the social/contextual level in respect of *audience*, *voice*, and *genre*.

Audience

In the first year, students implicitly alluded to audience and compliance when many commented on the importance of giving lecturers what "they want" (Cheryl, ocs, I1 & 2; Catherine, ocs, I1 & 2; Frances, ocs, I1 & 2; Joanna, ocs, I1; Kathleen, ocs, I1 & 2; Suzanne, ocs, I2; Tui, ocs, I1; Amanda, ds, I2; Carla, ds, I1; Cherie, ds, I2; Dawn, ds, I2; Molly, ds, I1; Rachel, ds, I2; Wilma, ds, I1). Compliance refers to "a disposition to yield to others" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2016, para. 1).

Students gained information about what was expected from a variety of sources, including the assignment instructions, marking criteria, tutor explanations in tutorials, and from discussions with course peers.

For assignment 2B, students were instructed in their tutorial classes to “consider what this book is going to do for me as a teacher” (Andrea, tutorial, August 28, 2013). Students complied with this instruction, as they said they had written their booklet for teachers to assist teachers (Amanda, ds, I2; Carla, ds, I2; Cherie, ds, I2; Dawn, ds, I2; Bob, ds, I2; Tia, ds, I2). Cherie, Carla, and Tia thought their booklet would help teachers pedagogically. For example, Carla reflected that her booklet would be useful for teachers “dealing with students with disabilities” (her booklet topic was on children and disabilities). Dawn thought the content of her booklet was useful for “telling teachers how to develop a community of practice.” Four students stated that they kept the audience in mind while they were writing the booklet (Amanda; Carla; Dawn; Tia). Dawn reflected that knowing that the purpose of the booklet was to inform teachers had an influence on her writing style, “it needed to be a little bit more professional or structured ... it was more like New Zealand curriculum graduating teacher standards” (ds, I2). Therefore, it appeared that for Dawn, having teachers as the audience meant making her writing more like a policy document. From my perspective, her assignment certainly appeared to be written in a quite formal manner. She received an A+ for this assignment.

Students’ awareness of compliance in the second year was just as strong as in the first year. Many students commented they were writing their assignments with the marker in mind. Therefore, the audience was the academic staff member grading the assignment. For example, Kathleen (ocs, I3) gave a fairly strong response compared to some students when she explained that an A+ essay would have “what the marker actually wants from you.” She reflected that it was “pointless doing an assignment that you don’t know who you’re doing it for. You’ve got to know your audience.” Carla (ds, I4) commented that students felt uncertainty about writing because they were required to write what the person marking the assignment wanted: “We all play the game, guess what’s in the lecturer’s head.” She was referring to other papers in the course, not the second-year paper that was part of this research. Compliance will be further discussed in Chapter 8.

In conclusion, it appears students considered the academic staff member marking their essay as their audience, unless instructed otherwise. Compliance, verbalised by students as writing what the lecturer wanted, was a concept that figured strongly through both the first and second year.

Language functions

Language functions explicitly or implicitly referred to in the assessment instructions or assessment criteria were: “*explanation*”³¹ (assignments 1A, 1B, 2B), “*description*” (assignment 1A, 4A & 4B), *commentary* (assignment 1B, 2A, 2B), *demonstration* (assignment 1B), critique as in “*critical reflection*” (assignment 1B) and “*critically discuss*” (2A), “*critique of article*” (3A & 3B), “*critique your approach*” (4A & 4B), *argumentation* (assignment 2A), *summarisation* (3A & 3B), *evaluation* (3A & 3B), and *justification* (4A & 4B). The language functions that are of particular interest to this study are: *description*, *explanation*, *critique* and *argumentation*. Findings in respect of these language functions are reported below and *critique* and *argumentation* are commented on in the discussion chapter.

Critique

The language function “critique” was in instructions for assessment 1B. Students were asked to provide “A critical reflection on what you see as the implications” of the ideas of the “chosen theorists” for teaching. Molly (ds, I1) was the only student who commented on critique during interviews. She appeared frustrated when she reflected that because of word count constraints, the “critical reflection” (assessment 2B) was a “token gesture.” She commented that she “would have loved to have had the opportunity to ... be more critical” (ds, I1). This statement suggests that Molly believed that in order to write a critical reflection, she required a substantial number of words.

³¹ Some of the language functions in this paragraph are in italics plus quotation marks. I have added quotation marks when I have copied the language function directly from the course outline. e.g., for assignment 1A students are asked to give “A brief description.” Therefore, above I have “description” in quotation marks. When I have not directly quoted from the course outline I have not used quotation marks. e.g., for assignment 1A students are asked to give “A brief comment.” I have changed this to *commentary*

I examined assignments to investigate whether there were differences between a “brief comment” (1A) and “a critical reflection” (1B). I found students generally wrote three to seven sentences for a brief comment. For a critical reflection, most students wrote two paragraphs, one for each theorist (Amanda; Carla; Cherie; Molly; Rachel; Bob; Wilma³²) on the implications for teaching. Paragraphs were generally about three to seven sentences long. Therefore, students used approximately double the word count for a critical reflection, as compared to a “brief comment.” I was not surprised by this finding since the instruction to write a “*brief* comment” [my emphasis added] probably indicated that students were expected to write a small paragraph. This is what students did.

In the second year, students were asked to produce a “*critique of [an] article*” (3A & 3B), and “*critique your approach*” (4A & 4B). When I asked second-year students about their first assignment, they did speak about the critique aspect of it. Generally, students stated that critiquing a text involved them writing about two strengths and one limitation of a text. When asked for examples of strengths and limitations, they often spoke of textual content and authors’ choice of sources. For the second assignment, they were to critique their teaching approach by outlining the strengths and limitations of employing the three learning theories (behaviourism, social constructivism and humanism) in their teaching practice, supporting their statement with relevant links to literature. Generally, students did this, most likely because they had received very explicit instruction on it. Students’ understanding of and their ability to engage in critique will be commented on in my discussion chapter (See Chapter 8.3.1).

Argumentation

No student commented on argumentation in relation to any of the course assignments, even though it appeared to be expected for assignments 2A, 2B, 4A and 4B. However, argumentation was commented on in the first year by Tui (ocs, I1) and Suzanne (ocs, I2), regarding another university paper which was on writing for tertiary study. Both students appeared to have the understanding that an argumentative essay was about taking a position. For example, Suzanne (ocs, I2)

³² I did not have access to all student participants’ assignments.

reflected that taking a position was about “how to persuade someone.” She also commented on how to structure an argumentative essay that contained five paragraphs: “you need, two or three points, why you agree and one point as to why you disagree” (ocs, I2). She appeared to equate argumentation with the structure of an essay and the requirement to present both sides of the topic, allocating more paragraphs on one side than the other. Tui also equated argument with having two sides. She commented that with an argumentative essay, the author needed to write that they are for or against the topic in more of an “assertive tone” (ocs, I1) than with the book review she had written for this particular paper. In sum, all students who spoke about argument reflected that it was about having two sides and did not equate argumentation to the assignments that were part of this study.

The word “argument” appeared in the marking criteria for assignment 1B. In examining the limited number of students’ 1B assignments I had access to, students clearly developed an argument. This did not consist of presenting two sides of a topic as identified by students above. The four students developed their proposition. The structure they employed was that they had one paragraph which explained an aspect of the topic and then the following paragraph explained the implications of the aspect in relation to teaching. Students argued that it *was* important for teachers to “recognise and understand diversity in students’ development” (Cheryl, ocs, assignment 1B). When I examined examples of assignment 2B (The Theory into Practice Booklet) that I had access to, argumentation was not apparent. Sometimes students did identify the purpose of their booklet in their introduction: “The importance of this booklet will be helpful on many levels creating an understanding on how ethnic identity has implications in school practices” (Nancy).

In the second year, the term “argument” did not appear in any assignment instructions or marking criteria. However, Amanda (ds, I3) and Molly (ds, I3) commented on argument in interviews, both in relation to the first assignment and their critique of an article. Molly considered the critique to be an argument: “I can see the format of a critique . . . offer the argument, either counteract it or agree with it, and then summarise it on each paragraph.” She commented on the structure of argumentation: “It has a very logical thought out structure to it” (Molly, ds, I1). In contrast, Amanda did not think she had created an argument in the assignment. However, she thought that understanding argument had assisted her with writing

the assignment as she “drew on that knowledge from that argumentative essay, being able to see both sides.” No student mentioned argument when asked about what makes a good assignment. I asked a few students (Amanda, ds, I3; Michelle, ds, I3; Suzanne, ocs, I4) about argumentation in relation to their second-year paper. Answers indicated that students had very little understanding of argumentation. For assignments 4A and 4B, students adopted the position that they would call on all three learning theories (behaviourism, constructivism and humanism) in the classroom. This was the position they had been introduced to in tutorials and was indicated in the assignment instructions. Generally, though, students did not talk about “position” unless prompted, and did not offer the information that taking a position and using evidence to back up their claim or position was central to argumentation (see discussion chapter for a commentary on this finding). In sum, in interviews, students demonstrated little awareness of argumentation or what it meant to develop a position.

When writing assignment 3B, which was a summary, evaluation and critique of an article, two distance students commented on the author’s argument. One student, who received a fail for the assignment, wrote about argument in her introduction. She remarked that the author had “created a well-rounded argument that uncovered positives and negatives of the approaches highlighted above.” The other student (who received an A grade), commented on the author’s argument five times (four times in the critique part of the assignment). For example, the student reflected that the author argued “that if a student understands that success comes through effort rather than ability, they can then begin to understand that individual progress is a measure of that success.” The marker used the terms argument and position in her feedback comment, explaining to the student that she was not quite sure of the student’s position and commented that her “argument could be clearer.” There was no comment on either student’s assignments which praised them for identifying the author’s arguments. If students had been taught reading strategies for approaching the prescribed texts (for assignments 3A and 3B), it would have been an opportunity to raise students’ awareness of the authors’ argument and how this argument had been developed (or not).

Description

In the first year, students were asked in assignment 1A to give “a brief description of an event or experience from your own life.” Describe means “give a detailed account in words of” (Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2017). For assignment 1A, first-year, on-campus students generally wrote a paragraph where they described a life event. For assignments 4A and 4B, students were to “describe how each theme (classroom management and culturally responsive pedagogy) would be reflected in their classroom practice. This also they managed. In short, the language function *describe* was not challenging for students.

Explanation

In the first year, students were asked in assignment 1A and 1B to give “explanations and key ideas” of chosen theorists. On-campus students were to relate this to “an event or experience from [your] own life” (co 1) and distance students to a scenario from their base class. Students demonstrated their understanding of the language function “explanation” by providing information on theorists’ ideas. Generally, students wrote 200-400 words explaining the key ideas of each theorist. Some students integrated their event, experience, or scenario, through the explanation, whereas other students explained the theory and then applied it to an event, experience, or scenario.

In conclusion, first-year students demonstrated greater understanding of some language functions than others. For example, students had a greater understanding of explanation than argumentation. In the second year, students demonstrated a sound understanding of the language functions expected to assignments. Overall, students appeared to have a limited understanding of argumentation.

Genre

Assessments 1A, 1B, 2A, 3A, 3B, 4A and 4B were essays. As one would expect, students understood that they were essays since the instructions for each assignment contained the word “essay.” All students (whose essays I had access to) wrote in a format and style appropriate for this genre.

Assessment 2B was titled “Theory into practice booklet.” When enquiring as to what genre students understood this to be, I did not use the term “genre,” as I

thought students would be unsure of the meaning of it. Students gave different responses. When I asked three distance students how their “theories essay” (assignment 1B) and “theory into practice booklet” (assignment 2B) were different (Amanda, ds, I2; Cherie, ds, I2; Molly, ds, I2), they gave different answers. Molly reflected it was, “more report writing than essay writing” (Molly, ds, I2). She could have been grappling with the issue of language function, as “report” is a genre and “to report on” is a language function. In other words, she may have been struggling to understand what work her language was supposed to be doing in this assignment. Cherie (ds, I2) remarked that the booklet was neither a report nor an essay, as it was “something different again” but did not appear to be able to explain what it was. Amanda (ds, I2) focused on purpose when she reflected assignment 2B was “like an educational type of document; a learning document.” She compared assignment 2B to 1B and in doing so, focused on the language function *explanation*. She commented that assignment 1B was for students to explain what they know about “two theorists,” whereas the booklet was “not just about the knowledge you’ve got but how to give that knowledge to somebody else.” Based on the above, students appeared to have different interpretations of what genre assignment 2B was and, therefore, the type of writing expected. No student used the term “genre” in the interviews or in tutorials.

In the second year, for assignment 3A and 3B students were required to write a response to a text, and in assignment 4A and 4B they were to reply to a job advertisement (in essay format). In the second year, Tawi was the only student who commented on genre. She reflected that she found that a difference between the first and second year was in terms of the “different genres” and that “unless she had a model to follow,” she “couldn’t really understand what [my] writing should look like.” For her, this meant that in the second year, she “had to do a lot of research” and “asking her peers” how they were “putting” the assignment “together.” By research, she possibly meant trying to find an exemplar written in the same genre as her assignment.

To conclude, from my examination of certain students’ essays, they appeared to understand how to write in the essay genre. The students who were asked to identify differences between assignment 2A and 2B had different responses to this. The one

student who commented on genre in the second year said that she was challenged by having to write assignments in different genres.

Voice

In the first year, the concept of *voice* was seldom mentioned by students. In the second year, students showed a much greater understanding and awareness of writer's *voice*. In fact, as will be shown, students' awareness and understanding of *voice* in writing was perhaps the most dramatic change in understanding between the first and the second year.

In the first year, students had differing opinions about the inclusion of writer's voice. Marie (ds, I1) reflected that writing at a university meant that she did not "make it personal" to herself. She did this by leaving herself "out of it" and making her writing "quite factual" (I1). However, Joanna (ocs 1), Cheryl (ocs, I1), Bob (ds, I2), Dawn (I2) and Michelle (ds, I2) were of the opinion that academic writing was about being more "personal." For example, Dawn (ds, I2) explained that in general, "with writing for university it's about being personal in your writing." She remarked that the extent to which the writer's "voice" could come through in academic writing was related to lecturer compliance. She explained that unless it was made clear by the lecturer, to what extent students can be "personal" in their writing, she "tend[ed] to keep it as neutral as possible" (ds, I2). I took personal to mean taking a strong authorial stance. From this comment, it appeared that for Dawn being "personal" in writing involved taking a risk. Bob and Michelle were the only students who used the term *voice*. Bob (ds, I2) felt students should use "their own voice rather than ... writing what" the lecturer wanted "to hear." Bob, when asked what constituted an A+ assignment, related it to the reader "getting a feel for the character of the person through their writing." Bob showed the least compliance of all the student participants in their first year of study, when stating: "so if I was a lecturer, I would look to see that they were using their own voice ... rather than writing what I want to hear."

Distance students commented that assignment 2B was more personal (Carla, I2; Cherie, I2; Michelle, I2; Molly, I2; Rachel, I2) than assignment 2A. They could have meant that for assignment 2B, they had chosen a topic they had a personal interest or in experience of. Carla reflected: "it was written by somebody who

actually [is] invested in the subject.” When Marie (ds, I2) commented that she hoped her “personality” came “through in it” (she was referring to assignment 2B), she could have been referring to something akin to writer’s voice. Michelle was confused by “personal voice” as if this was the same as “personal experience.” She remarked she had tried to “include some personal voice, because she [Andrea] had said “use personal experience.” Because “it was hard to include personal experience” she had “included personal opinions.”

In the second year, students appeared to have a much greater awareness of *voice*. One reason could be that *voice* was included as a term in the marking criteria for assignments 4A and 4B and was mentioned a number of times in tutorials. When students were asked how they had fulfilled the assessment criterion of *voice* in assignments 4A and 4B they defined *voice* as their own ideas backed up with research (Carla, ds, I3; Cheryl, ocs, I4; Mabel, ds, I4; Marie, ds, I4), which could be achieved by paraphrasing as compared to direct quoting (Amanda, ds, I3; Cherie, ds, I3; Michelle, ds, 31) and also by using “I” (Amanda, ds, I3; Tia, ds, I3). Three students reflected that they struggled with having their voice come through (Amanda, ds, I4, Molly, ds, I4; Cherie, ds, I3). Molly remarked that a difference between writing in the first and the second year was that in the first year, they had been given the instruction that because they were writing academic assignments they were to, “read[ing] the literature and tell us [academic staff] what you’ve learnt from it ... we don’t want you to use your voice.” However, in the second year, they were expected to use their voice which meant “switching back” (for Molly) to a style she used before entering the tertiary institution. I surmise, according to Molly, *voice* seemed to be expected in second-year writing but not in the first-year.

In conclusion, in the first year, students appeared to have differing opinions and some uncertainty about the inclusion of writer’s voice. In the second year, students could define voice but some appeared to find displaying their writer’s voice challenging. These findings will be further explored in my discussion chapter (See Chapter 8.3.1).

6.4.2. Macro-level category

This next section draws on evidence in relation to student understandings of writing assignments at whole-text level (content and coherence).

Content

Students both in their first and second year had the understanding that in order to write their assignments, they needed to access and comprehend the content/subject matter required for the assignment. In the first year, some students appeared challenged by assignment content which related to educational theorists. Molly (ds, I1) gave perhaps the most dramatic comment on content when she posted on the Facebook site I set up: “This is the hardest essay I’ve ever done.” In the interview, she explained that she had “never heard of” most of the educational theorists and found that she had to “understand the subject before [she] could even write notes about it.”

For assignments 1A and 1B students were to write about the key ideas of two or three theorists (e.g., R. Pere, B. F. Skinner). Four on-campus students talked about their choice of theorists for assignment 1A. Two (Kathleen, I1; Suzanne, I1) chose the theorists they were already familiar with before the course began. Frances (ocs, I1) reflected that she had chosen Durie’s theory because she was able to understand it. Two students chose theorists (Frances, I1; Joanna, I1) that they could link to the life experience they were to write about. Therefore, three of the four students chose theorists’ key ideas to write about because they had an understanding of the theories.

Writing assignment 1B, distance students, commented that they chose their theorist because they could connect the ideas of the theorist to their classroom experiences and observations (Carla, ds, I1; Cherie, ds, I1; Marie, ds, I1; Nancy, ds, I1). Part of the assignment instruction was that students needed to “provide brief scenarios within” their base class³³ to “demonstrate [their] understanding of the theories” (co 2). However, Rachel’s (ds, I1) choice of theorist was influenced by whether she felt able to write about their ideas, since she wanted “to use theorists that didn’t have a

³³ Pre-service primary education students are assigned base classes where they undertake their teaching practicum.

huge number of layers to their theories because [she] felt it was easier to ... write about a theorist who ... had ...one or two layers as opposed to one that had six or seven” (ds, I1). Therefore, in choosing a theorist, Rachel and the other four students mentioned above were strongly influenced by the written assignment. Perhaps distance students did not comment on whether or not they could understand theories as they were in their second semester of study. In contrast, the on-campus students were in their first.

In the second year, students reflected less about educational theories in interviews, even though for each assignment there was the requirement to write about theories (e.g., behaviourism, social constructivism and humanism). This could have indicated that students were less challenged by them than in their first year. In fact, Cheryl (ocs, I3), who was the only student who reflected on her understanding stated: “I couldn’t get my head around them all last year; I still don’t know all of them.” I interpreted her statement to mean that she was less challenged by theories in her second year than her first.

In conclusion, students reflected that they needed to comprehend the relevant subject matter in order to write about it. In the second year, students were perhaps less challenged by understanding development theories than in the first.

Coherence

Coherence in respect of well-written assignments

Coherence can be defined as “unity and continuity of the discourse” (Kern, 2000, p. 80). Therefore, in relation to writing, this can be understood in terms of structure, organisation and sequencing. In the first year, when students were asked what constituted a well-written assignment³⁴ the term most often identified was “flow” (Frances, ocs, I2; Joanna, ocs, I1; Suzanne, ocs, I2; Cherie, ds, I1, I2; Mabel, ds, I1; Marie, ds, I1; Michelle, ds, I1; Tia, ds, I1). Some students qualified what they meant by “flow,” with such elaborations as: the integration of paraphrasing within paragraphs (Suzanne, I2)’ the connection between the introduction, body and

³⁴ The students I asked this question to were: Catherine, ocs, I1; Joanna, ocs, I1 & I2; Suzanne, ocs, I1 & I2; Frances, ocs, I2; Cherie, ds, I1; Carla, ds, I1, Dawn, ds, I1; Mabel, ds, I1; Marie, ds, I1; Tia, ds, I1, Bob, ds, I1; Molly, ds, I1; Wilma, ds, I1; Amanda, ds, I1; Nancy, ds, I2, Cherie, ds, I2; Michelle, ds, I1.

conclusion (Cherie, I1, I2); and the linking of one paragraph to another (Joanna, I1; Cherie, I1; Mabel, I1; Michelle, I1). For example, when Mabel was asked what she had done well with assignment 1B, she responded that “it flows together.” She explained that this meant, “all the ... paragraphs were connected somehow and they had logical succession” (ds, I1).

In the second year, when students were asked questions about what constituted well-written assignments, coherence was commented on much less often than in the first year. Of the 10 students asked, 5 mentioned assignment structure. This is explored further below. In an examination of students’ assignments, I did not see significant differences in first- and second-year assignments in respect of the presence of clear structure, organisation and sequence.

Assignment structure

Many students in their first year also commented on the connections between the introduction, body and conclusion. First, students stated that they were aware that a function of the introduction was to signal the essay content (Dawn, ds, I1; Kathleen, ocs, I1; Rachel, ds, I1). Second, students commented that there was a connection between the body of the essay and the conclusion (Cheryl, ocs; Amanda, ds, I1; I2; Dawn, ds, I1; Mabel, ds, I1; Michelle, ds, I1; Rachel, ds, I1; Tia, ds, I1). From my examination of student assignments, they did generally signal in their introduction the content of their essay. Third, students commented that the content of the conclusion resembled a mirror image of the introduction (Carla, ds, I1; Dawn, ds, I1; Marie, ds, I1; Wilma, ds, I1). For example, Carla (ds, I1) gave a fairly typical response when she reflected: “So the intro is stating what you’re going to expect to see in the body of the assignment and the conclusion is a summary of the information gotten from the body.” In other words, students understood that the introduction signals what is in the body, and the conclusion states what has been covered in the essay.

In the first year, students commented that they unpacked assignment instructions in order to plan the structure of their first essay (Cheryl, ocs, I2; Kathleen, ocs, I1; Suzanne, ocs, I1; Carline, ds, I1). For example, Cheryl offered a typical response when asked how she had worked out how to structure assignment 1A: “just from sort of looking at this [indicating the essay instructions],” she was able to identify

the four parts to the assignment (a, b, c & d of the assignment instructions). With assignments 1B and 2B, students needed to develop their own topic so there was less of an indication of structure in the course outline; yet students appeared to be able to structure their assignments. When Cheryl, Joanna and Suzanne were asked how they decided on the structure of assignment 2A, expressed their understanding since they broke “down the question ... into different paragraphs” (Suzanne, ocs, I2). Likewise, distance students also did not appear to be challenged by decisions about how to structure assignment 2B.

In the second year, also students appeared to have an understanding of the connection between the introduction, body and conclusion. However, they did not comment on it as often as in their first year. I could see no significant differences in first- and second-year assignments in respect of how introductions and conclusions were written.

Paragraphs

In the first year, students reflected that they were challenged by paragraphing (Carla, ds, I1; Dawn, ds, I1; Catherine, ocs, I2; Michelle, ds, I2) and commented on different aspects of this. Catherine (ocs, I1) commented that she was challenged by writing what she called “structured paragraphs.” Dawn reflected that she decided when to begin a new paragraph based on how long her paragraph was. Carla made paragraphing decisions based on the number of paragraphs in her assignment. Michelle remarked she was confused by feedback that told her to break one paragraph into two. She “thought the ideas were quite related” (I2) and should therefore be contained in one paragraph. The above indicates a limited understanding of paragraphing by these students.

From an examination of student assignments I was provided with, generally students did have one idea per paragraph. In the first year, when students did have issues with paragraphing, they were more likely to break up paragraphs that contained one idea, rather than have paragraphs that contained more than one main idea.

In the second year, students did not generally talk about paragraphing. However, they seemed to understand that a paragraph contained one idea. Cheryl (ocs, I2)

explained the structure of a paragraph: “each paragraph had its own main points and within that paragraph, the first sentence mainly introduces the points in there – like the body of the paragraph that gives the reader the information and with maybe a closing sentence to virtually summarise.” I found Cheryl quite vague at times with her explanations in her first year. In attempting to probe for further information, I found that in general (not just in respect of paragraphing) she was not able to provide it. I felt that her vagueness indicated her level of understanding of some aspects of writing. Based on my assumption, the specific nature of this statement (and others in the second-year interview) probably indicates growth in understanding of academic writing for Cheryl from her first year to her second. One student (Mabel, ds) commented that she still challenged by paragraphs because she found “it quite hard to keep the flow by doing each paragraph as a separate entity.” Therefore, it appeared she was commenting on the linking of paragraphs (i.e., coherence). In the second year, from an examination of assignments I had access to, I did not see any issues with paragraphing.

Coherence: unistructural, multistructural and relational

As explained in Chapter 3, one way of exploring performance in terms of coherence is through the categories *unistructural*, *multistructural* and *relational* (Biggs, 1988). In the course of my investigation, I analysed student participants’ assignments (both first- and second-year assignments) according to these three categories. Unistructural coherence involves “a simple serial listing of successive points with few if any links made between different parts of the essay” (p. 453). Multistructural essays contain a “simple synthesis of different perspectives (p. 453) and some development of argument. Essays displaying relational traits are essays where authors synthesised “different perspectives” (p. 454) and a “theme or argument [is] generated by the students and used to integrate the different aspects of the essay into a coherent whole” (p. 454). Please see Appendix O for my analysis of students’ assignments which I analysed employing Biggs’ (1988) three categories.

I found generally students produced assignments which demonstrated aspects of the multistructural category, as there was some linking between paragraphs and generally students did reference information. For assignment 4B (written by

distance students), there was evidence of students writing at the level of the relational category, in that a theme or argument was integrated throughout the essay. I did not have enough on-campus student essays to make this judgement about their essays.

In conclusion, students understood the importance of coherence in their writing, which they related to “flow.” They also understood that there were connections between the introduction, body and conclusion. Students in the first year commented on finding paragraph structure challenging. They did not comment about this in the second year.

To conclude this section, students understood that they needed to understand the content of assignments in order to write them. Students had an awareness of some aspects of assignment coherence, both in the first and second year.

6.4.3 Micro-level category

Cohesion

Two students (Mabel, ds; Tia, ds) in their first year and no students in their second year commented on cohesion. The aspect of cohesion commented on by the two students was *linking words*.

Mabel, the EAL student (ds, I1) remarked that in trying to vary her sentence structure, she also added in “conjunction[s] like *occasionally* or *furthermore*.” These are in fact linking adverbs. Tia said that a helpful strategy for improving her writing was to take note in “some articles” of the “linking language”, like “therefore” and “followed on from this,” or “as a result of this” (ds, I2). Tia’s ability to list quite quickly a number of linking words demonstrated her awareness of this language feature. She reflected that she did not “feel overly confident” (I2) with her writing yet could identify what she considered a weakness in it and had a strategy in place to assist her to improve this aspect of her writing.

Cohesive devices were used throughout students’ essays, especially reference (words such as *he* pointing back to other words in the text). However, the readability of a few students’ essays could have benefitted from increased use of cohesive devices, especially linking adverbs. Both Mabel and Tia used linking words in their assignments although Tia’s use of them, especially adverbs, was limited,

particularly in assignment 2A. For example, in Tia's introduction to assignment 2A the only conjunction used was "and". In her introduction to assignment 2B she used the linking adverbs *also*, and *finally*. The use of linking words enhanced the cohesion in her introduction. Mabel, in both assignments 2A and 2B, used a range of linking words and phrases such as, *additionally*, *for instance*, *similarly*, *for example*, and *in contrast to*.

In conclusion, it appears cohesion was not something students generally commented on in relation to academic writing. Their assignments indicated basic cohesive competence.

Referencing

Referencing (including citations, paraphrasing and direct quotations) was an aspect of academic writing that all students mentioned in their first year. In fact, it was probably the most talked about aspect of academic writing. When students referred to "referencing," at times they meant citations, at other times the references page, and at times they appeared to be referring to both. Generally, contextual clues made their intended meaning clear.

Student confidence

In general, students in their first year indicated that they did not feel confident about referencing (Carla, ds, I1; Cherie, ds, I1; Dawn, ds, I1; Mabel, ds, I1; Michelle, ds, I1; Catherine, ocs, I1; Frances, ocs, I1; Joanna, ocs, I1; Suzanne, ocs, I1; Tui, ocs, I1). Two students described referencing as "difficult" (Catherine, ocs, I1; Frances, ocs, I1) and two students used the word "nightmare" (Rachel, ds, I1; Michelle, ds, I1). Students appeared to be commenting on different aspects of referencing. Michelle explained that her use of the word "nightmare" was because she was unsure whether or not she was producing a correct reference list, whereas Rachel was confused as to whether she was direct quoting or paraphrasing. Rachel was also concerned that in writing on a theorist's ideas (providing the example of Vygotsky), she might accidentally be "quoting him directly" (I1). Because as she had read a number of texts on Vygotsky, she might have remembered excerpts from a text and unintentionally presented the excerpts as her own. She was concerned that a consequence of this would be that academic staff would decide she had plagiarised.

Rachel, then, was concerned with both the mechanical aspects of referencing as well as its ethical/regulatory aspects.

In the second year, students indicated that they felt more confident at referencing. For example, Carla (ds, I2) commented that “initially ... referencing [was] huge” but in her second year she found referencing “quite simple,” since she had a system of referencing as she wrote her assignment. However, it appeared students were still at times challenged by referencing, since students asked each other questions on their Facebook sites. Cheryl (ocs, I3) summed up what was happening in respect of referencing questions on Facebook: “There is still occasionally referencing [questions], but nowhere near as much as there used to be.” This also appeared to be the case for distance students as well. Overall, it appeared students felt more competent in this aspect of academic writing in their second year than their first.

Accuracy

In the first and second year, all students included citations and all students provided a reference list with their assignments. However, in the first year, not all students included citations for each instance of sourced information. The two most extreme cases were two distance students who did not include citations for large areas of paraphrased text (Wilma; Cherie). Wilma based assignment 2A on theorists Bandura (1977) and Durie (1994). She cited none of the information on Bandura. She had citations for two of the four paragraphs that explained Durie’s theory. When asked how she decided where to place citations, Wilma responded with an explanation of the importance of not including too many in-text citations because “it takes away ... the knowledge that you’re trying to portray” to the “reader” (I1). This was possibly her attempt to display her writer’s voice. In addition, Wilma’s reference list did not match her citations. The mismatch might have been due to inaccuracy or Wilma not understanding that all works referred to in the body of an assignment should match the references list. Based on this evidence, it appeared Wilma had limited understanding of referencing conventions.

Cherie expressed that she was “surprised” at feedback (assignment 1B) instructing her to cite information on the theorists referred to. She was “surprised” because she had “read about those particular theorists ... in lots of different places.” She appeared to believe information read in a variety of texts and retained was her own

knowledge: “I wasn’t quite sure how they expected me to reference something that was ... out of my own head” (ds, I2). This indicated that for Cherie there was confusion about the academic requirement to acknowledge sources by providing in-text citations for information she had read in more than one text and remembered.

In the second year, students appeared to include citations for each instance of sourced information. In addition, there were a few instances of students synthesising literature in-text. By this I mean that there were instances of students paraphrasing more than one text simultaneously.

All students, across both years, included a reference list for each assignment, which adhered to APA (6th edition) conventions. The reference lists created by students for assignments 1A, 1B, 2A and 2B were reasonably correct, but many had errors. For example, students did not always include the country (but did have the city) in the publisher location details, and there were punctuation errors. However, there appeared to be progress in creating a correct reference list from students’ first assignment (1A & 2A) to their second assignment (1B & 2B). For the second assignments, reference lists were less problematic than those in students’ first assignments. In the second year, students’ reference lists were generally correct, although at times students made incorrect use of capital letters and sometimes included ISBN numbers. As far as I was aware, students had not been directed to include ISBN details.

Paraphrasing and quotations

In the first year, students commented that they based their decisions on whether to paraphrase or use a direct quotation on whether they were able to effectively paraphrase the material (Amanda, ds, I1; Carla, ds, I1 & 2; Frances, ocs, I2; Molly, ds, I1). For example, the reason that Carla gave for using a direct quotation instead of paraphrasing material was if she “could not think of a way of rewording it” (I1). Students (Carla, ds, I1; Cheryl, ocs, I1; Frances, ocs, I1; Mabel, ds, I1) said that staff preferred students to paraphrase as “they [academic staff] don’t want us to use direct quotes unless it’s absolutely necessary” (Frances).

First-year students (Cheryl, ocs; Frances, ocs; Kathleen, ocs; Suzanne, ocs; Mabel, ds; Marie, ds; Rachel, ds; Bob, ds; Tia, ds) demonstrated in interviews that they understood direct quotations needed to be effectively integrated in their writing. For example, Carla reflected: “a quote it needs to be in context within your paragraph.” In addition, Carla showed an awareness of voice: “if I do put a quote ... it’s to ... continue my line of thought with theirs” (ds, I1).

First-year students expressed the view that direct quotations added authority to written work (Carla, ds, I1; Bob, ds, I1; Suzanne, ocs, I2) by “back[ing] up” their “work” (Carla & Suzanne), or in other words, giving “support” (Bob). Suzanne and Bob appeared to be of the view that direct quotations had more authority than paraphrases. Suzanne used direct quotations if the point she was making was strong: “I use [direct quotations] if I am really stating something.” Bob reported using a direct quotation to give weight to a statement that needed extra strength: “If the idea that I’ve put on needs more support then I’ll direct quote, but if I think the ideas that I’ve put down are sufficient enough then I’ll just paraphrase.”

In the second year, students commented that they paraphrased and did not use direct quotations. The reason students gave was that the course convenor (also their tutor in their tutorial) had indicated that “they didn’t want direct quoting” (Amanda, ds, I2). In general, students did paraphrase and most assignments had no direct quotations in them. However, one distance student, who had previously reported to me that she was gaining A grades for assignments, chose to conclude assignment 4B with a direct quotation, which she placed in the centre of the conclusion. There was no feedback given to her on this use of a direct quotation instead of a paraphrase.

Employing sources

In general, students in both years used appropriate sources. However, they did receive guidance on this. For example, for essay 1A and 1B, students were told to use the book of readings and their prescribed textbook. For assignments 2A and 2B, students were given guidance on what types of resources would be considered valid, for example, “policy documents” (assignment 1B) and a list of possible resources. Students used resources suggested, plus other sources which were generally journal articles and academic books. When students were asked about choosing appropriate

sources, they stated that they accessed sources through the online database and the literature provided by lecturers (Carla, ds, I2) as “not everything on the web is entirely accurate” (Carla, ds, I2). However, there were instances of students not using academic sources. Demonstrating less understanding of using appropriate sources was Wilma (ds, assignment 1B) who used six sources for assignment 1B, four of which appeared to be non-academic websites. In the second year, in the assignments I was given access to, there were no instances of students using non-academic sources.

Summary

Students’ level of confidence and proficiency in referencing increased from their first to second-year in a number of ways. In the first-year some students were concerned that they might not be referencing correctly or accidentally plagiarise. In the second year, students did not generally reflect on these concerns. In the first year, there were some instances of students not providing citations for sourced materials. In addition, there were instances of inaccuracy in in-text references and reference lists. In the second year, accuracy increased. In the first year, students employed both paraphrases and direct quotations in their writing. In the second year, students generally paraphrased.

Punctuation, syntax, and spelling

Students in the first year, especially on-campus students, appeared to be quite focused on handing in assignments with accurate spelling, syntax and punctuation. For example, when students were asked what aspects were to be found in a well-written essay, they often commented on features that were at the micro level, such as spelling (Catherine, ocs, I2; Suzanne, ocs, I1; Tui, ocs, I1; Michelle, ds, I1), syntax (Catherine, ocs, I2; Frances; ocs, I1; Suzanne, ocs, I1; Tui, ocs, I1) and punctuation (Michelle, ds, I1). In addition, other comments made were possibly referring to these aspects of academic literacy since students at times did not use metalinguistic language features to describe exactly which aspect of language they meant. For example, when students described a well written essay as one that was “clear” (Catherine, ocs, I1; Joanna, ocs, I1), “makes sense” (Joanna, ocs, I2; Suzanne, ocs, I1) and “succinct” (Bob, ds, I1) they could have been referring to

appropriate and accurate use of syntax because this is necessary for clear and comprehensible writing.

Students in their second year appeared to have less focus on punctuation, spelling and grammar. One reason why I make this statement was that I observed that students talked less about these micro features of writing, especially when I asked students about what constituted a well-written assignment and about assignment feedback. Students' focus, in the first year, on punctuation, grammar and spelling will be commented on in the discussion chapter. In the second year, students generally handed in assignments with reasonably accurate spelling, syntax and grammar.

Both cohorts of students in their first year appeared to have a level of spelling, syntax and punctuation which did not generally affect the readability of their assignments. However, there were occasional punctuation, grammar, and spelling issues, with punctuation appearing to be the most problematic. The most common punctuation error that appeared in a number of students' essays was missing commas after *therefore*, *however* and *for example*. For example, "I learnt to cook using their style of cooking for example mum cut carrots into small cubes for salads" (Cheryl, ocs, assignment 1A). Since there were several punctuation errors in Cheryl's assignments 1A and 1B, it appeared that punctuation was one area of academic literacy that she was still developing. Cheryl was aware that she had not mastered word- and sentence-level writing, and adopted the strategy of having her "best friend ... quickly look over ... [her] assignment" for "spelling and punctuation" (I1).

In summary, students appeared to have an understanding that word- and sentence-level competence is a requirement of academic writing. The skill level displayed by students in assignments in their first year of study indicated that syntax, punctuation and spelling were areas of development for some students; punctuation was the most problematic. In the second year, students appeared less focused on word- and-sentence level accuracy. Also, there appeared to be fewer grammar, punctuation, and spelling issues in second-year than in first-year.

Word choice – lexis

Word choice was commented on minimally by key student participants in their first year of study (6 students) and even less so in the second (3 students). First-year students who commented on word choice generally mentioned different aspects of word choice. For example, “formal” writing was expected (Cherie, ds, I2; Joanna, ocs, I1). Cherie added that she wanted her essay to be able to be read by anyone (I2). I assumed she was referring to aspects of writing which probably included lexis. Tia (ocs, I1) like Cherie felt that she should use “simple enough language that anyone could read it” (Tia, ocs, I1). Bob (ds, I1) liked reading texts where the author had “paint[ed] a picture with it [the language]” (Bob, ds, I1). Bob was possibly a visual learner disposed to visualise the author’s message. He possibly understood that authors presented information in different ways; for example, they had different viewpoints. Cherie and Tia were possibly more interested in the transmission of information.

The student who commented most on word choice was the one student participant who had English as an Additional Language (EAL). Even though Mabel did have an EAL background, she appeared to have a very good level of English language competency, since she had lived in England and New Zealand for a combined total of 23 years. Mabel commented on word choice in two distinct ways. First, she (ds, I1) appeared to believe that there are prescribed words to use in academic assignments, since she explained she had “picked up what words to use” (I1) in a tertiary course she had undertaken previously. Second, she also identified that repetition of the same word was an issue for her, since she: “repeat[ed] too many times the same words” (I1). Consequently, she had employed the use of the synonym tool on Word for assisting her with word choice, suggesting that she was a diligent student who felt challenged or concerned about her lexical range. As explained in Section 6.4.3, Mabel also commented that she tried to avoid repetitive sentence structures by using words such as “occasionally” or “furthermore.”

When asked what makes a good essay, two students in their second-year of study, remarked that a good essay “had academic language” (Molly, ds, I4) and “smart words” (Suzanne, ocs, I3). Neither qualified what they meant by these terms. Mabel said that it was important to use the “right words.” She explained that this meant, “words that are closest to what you want to say, instead of using four or five

different words to explain what you want to say.” For Mabel, therefore, word choice meant using specific lexical items and by doing this she would reduce her word count. Mabel was the only student who commented on word choice in her first and second year. A difference between Mabel’s first and second year was that in the second year, she showed an awareness of using lexical items to explain her intended meaning. In the first year, Mabel possibly believed word choice was about using academic words and not repeating the same lexical items.

In summary, word choice was not often commented on by students in their first year and even less so in their second. The only student who commented on word choice both in the first year and second year was the EAL student who was perhaps more aware of this aspect of academic writing than the first-language English speakers.

Layout

Students in neither years commented on layout requirements for any assignments, apart from assignment 2B. Students appeared challenged and frustrated by the layout requirements of their “theory into practice booklet” and five students expressed frustration at the length of time it took them to present this assignment as a booklet (Dawn, I1; Michelle, I2; Marie, I2; Bob, I1; Tia, I2).

To conclude, overall there appeared to be a bigger focus by first-year students than second-year on the micro features of writing. This section has demonstrated that students in their first year, had an understanding of and some capability in writing citations, reference lists, paraphrasing and using direct quotations. However, all students, especially in their first year, felt challenged by referencing. In addition, when students referred to referencing, especially in their first year, they generally appeared to be talking about the mechanics of referencing, such as producing a reference list correctly.

To conclude this section, evidence indicates that first-year students had more of a focus on the word- and sentence-level aspects of writing than second-year students. Second-year students appeared to have greater understanding of writers’ voice. Students in both years appeared to have the understanding that compliance was required. In other words, it involved writing what the marker of the assignment expected.

6.5 Staff understandings of academic writing

This section draws on evidence in the form of course outlines, observations of lectures and tutorials, interviews with staff and assignment feedback. I conducted seven staff interviews in 2013 and two in 2014.

6.5.1 Social/contextual category

Audience

One difference between the first- and second-year courses was how audience was addressed. In both years, audience was not addressed in lectures or Moodle. In the first year, a specific audience was mentioned in assignment instructions for assignment 2B, “what does the information you have presented above in your booklet as a whole mean for teachers and teaching?” (co 2). In tutorials for first year distance students, they were given the instruction: “consider what this book is going to do for me as a teacher” (tutorial, August 28, 2013).

Four (of five) on-campus students’ first assignments had the comment on the feedback sheet: “Remember this assignment is a learning curve and so too is writing for an academic audience.” Students were not really given clarification on how to write for an academic audience. However, information was provided on expectations during tutorials, through assignment instructions and the marking criteria. For example, the marking criteria for assignment 1A stated that there was the expectation that students use “referencing skills” (co 1) which needed to adhere to “APA guidelines.” (co 1). Audience was not mentioned in feedback for the 1B assignments for the distance students.

In the second year, audience was mentioned numerous times by Jaimee in tutorials, especially for assignments 3A and 3B. Generally, students were told to consider the reader while writing their assignment: “your writing needs to make sense to the reader” (July 22, 2014) and “you keep in your mind that someone is going to read your summary ... so as a reader you decide if you want to go further and read the article” (July 3, 2014).

Audience was implied (but not stated) in assignments 4A and 4B, since the written assignment instruction was that students were to write a letter of application for a position in a primary school.

To conclude, in the first year when *audience* was mentioned to students, it was an “academic audience” and “teachers.” In the second year, students were told to consider the “reader” of the assignment. The implications of the differences in the terminology used will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Language functions

As outlined in Section 6.4.1, the language functions mentioned in the assessment instructions or assessment criteria were: *explanation* (assignments 1A, 1B, 2B), *description* (1A, 4A & 4B), *commentary* (1B, 2A, 2B), *demonstration* (1B), *critique* as in *critical reflection* (1B), *critically discuss* (2A), *critique of article* (3A & 3B), *critique your approach* (4A & 4B), *argumentation* (2A), *summarisation* (3A & 3B), *evaluation* (3A & 3B), and *justification* (4A & 4B). A very significant difference between the first and second-year courses was that in the first-year, students were generally not given instruction on how to manage the different language functions, whereas in the second-year courses they were.

Critique

According to my field notes, *critique* was mentioned once to first-year students. This was for assignment 1B, where students were to “critically discuss” the essay question. Students were asked to define “critically reflect.” One student answered “backed up with readings and research” which Andrea affirmed (fieldnote, May 3, 2014).

In first-year interviews, five of the seven staff mentioned that the course had been designed to assist students to think critically (Andrea, I1 & 2; Becky; Liz; Samantha; Toni, I1 & I2). This had been done in two distinct ways. First, the course was designed to assist students to engage in critical thought, in the primary school classroom (Samantha) and in relation to issues or information they would come across when teaching (Andrea, I1; Becky). Second, it was considered that the assignments (1B, 2A and 2B) allowed students opportunities to engage in critical thought (Andrea, I2; Liz; Toni, I1 & I2), especially the assignments that allowed students to develop their own topic (Toni, I1). Andrea reflected that the difference between assignment 1A and 1B was that instead of a “brief comment,” students were to “critically reflect.” In order for students to do this, they had been given 500 words extra for assignment 1B as she wanted students to “talk about what it may

look like, sound like, feel like in the classroom.” There could have been the assumption that if students were given opportunities to engage in critical thinking, it would occur. For example, there was no instruction for assignment 1B how “critically reflect” was different or similar to “reflect.”

Critique appeared to be an emphasis of the second-year courses. For example, in course outlines 3 and 4, it was stated that, “students will develop knowledge and understandings of, and *critique* the ways that theories about learning inform teachers’ philosophies, decision-making and practices” [my emphasis]. Jaimee summed up what she thought the overall learning outcome of the course was: “It’s really about unpacking some of their deepest, darkest beliefs about what they think about teaching and learning.” She also reflected that a difference between the first- and second-year assignments was that in the first year, students were asked to describe, and in the second year, students were asked to “think, analyse and critique.” In the tutorial I observed, students were instructed that critique is “where your opinion comes in,” backing up your opinions, not “believing everything you hear” (tutorial July 22, 2014). They were instructed for their assignment that they needed three points of critique, with one or two positive points and one or two negative. When critiquing a text, students were told to consider the age of the sources, whether or not they were academic, and to consider the audience.

Argumentation

In the first year, when students were given instructions for assignment 2A, aspects of producing a written argument were mentioned in several tutorials. Students were told in a tutorial (April 12, 2013) to “take a position.” It was explained to students that the essay was “prompting” them to answer “yes or no.” One student remarked that answering “yes” or “no” was the argument. There was no tutor response to this. She continued explaining to students that “there was no right or wrong answer. It is about the quality of thinking and backing it up.” Andrea was perhaps encouraging students to engage in a written argument. If students had taken notice of ideas presented to them in lectures and information provided in tutorials, they would have realised that they were meant to provide an affirmative response to the assignment question: “Is it important for teachers to recognise and understand diversity in development” (assignment 2A).

The second instance was in the tutorial on May 3, 2013, when students were reminded of the lecture they had had entitled “Diversity in development” and what that meant for them as teachers. The PowerPoint slide provided for this tutorial had some instructions for assignment 2A. The words were included on the PowerPoint: “Step one: Take a position” and “Step 2: Justify your position.” I saw students taking notes and saw two students writing “yes or no.” This process probably took about five minutes.

Another instance of the mention of argument was when students were asked (as outlined above) to define “critically reflect” in relation to assignment 2A. One student answered “back up with readings and research,” and Andrea’s response was “yes, back up your argument” and reminded students that their opinions needed to be backed up (fieldnote, tutorial, May 3, 2013).

A further instance occurred during the tutorial in the following week (May 10, 2013), when Andrea asked students to look at the marking criteria. She told students that it did not “matter” (Andrea) what their “opinions” (Andrea) were, since it was “about being able to justify their argument” (Andrea). I saw a number of students writing down the word *justify* at this point in the tutorial. The meaning of “argument” in relation to academic writing was not explained to students at that point, nor at any other point that I observed during tutorials. Andrea’s comments were at least partly an explanation of what argumentation is. She also implied that it was likely that there would be more than one position in relation to the topic presented.

In interviews, the importance of students creating an argument in their writing was commented on by first-year staff (Brenda; Liz; Andrea; Toni). Three staff, when asked what constituted a well-written assignment, referred to argument (Andrea; Brenda; Toni). For example, Toni said that she was impressed with what distance students had produced for assignment 2B, as students had “theoretical perspectives to support their argument.” Liz (asm³⁵, oc) was the only staff member who mentioned argument in respect of assignment writing instruction. She explained that she gave additional instruction to a group of students for their first assignment.

³⁵ asm is an abbreviation for academic staff member

This had occurred outside of the tutorial class. She explained that she had told students that they needed main ideas in their essay, and they needed to consider the argument (“what is the topic saying”) and then unpack the idea within the paragraph. She did not indicate that she had explained the terminology “argument” to students.

In the second-year, argumentation was certainly an expectation because for assignments 4A and 4B, students were asked to “demonstrate [their] philosophy” and “justify it” (Jaimee, tutorial, 23 September, 2014, fieldnote). *Justification* as an aspect of argumentation is explored in Chapter 8. For assignments 4A and 4B, it was explained to students in tutorials that they should generally underpin their teaching practice with all three learning theories (constructivism, behaviourism and humanism) explored in the course. Therefore, students were given very clear instruction on how to develop their essay in relation to their teaching philosophy and were shown how to use literature to justify their learning theories. Staff in the second year did not mention *argument* in their interviews with me.

Explanation

The language function *explanation* was one of the six categories in the feedback sheet for assignment 1A and one of the five categories for assignment 1B. It was also commented on in assignment feedback when it was felt that students had not fully *explained*. For example, “you ... need to provide more explanation here” (Tia’s assignment 2A). Therefore, it did not seem to be a matter of students not explaining, but not providing *enough* explanation. Students did not generally receive instruction via feedback on how to provide more explanation. *Explanation* was also on the generic feedback sheet. Students were not told in tutorials how to address the language function *explanation*. Therefore, there appeared to be the expectation that students would know how to fulfil the language function *explanation*.

Overall

There was quite a focus on language functions, especially in second year.

In the second year, assignments 3A, 3B, 4A and 4B were based on the language functions *summarisation* (3A & 3B), *critique* (3A, 3B, 4A & 4B), *evaluation* (3A

& 3B), *description* (4A & 4B) and *justification* (4A & 4B). The reason Jaimee gave for the choice of these language functions was that they “guide them [students] ... to think beyond writing ... in the first year we asked them to describe, and this year we’re asking them to think, analyse and critique” (interview). She acknowledged that students find this “really hard” (interview).

A difference between the first and second year was that students in the second year were given instruction on how to fulfil these language functions in several ways. First, a significant amount of time in tutorials was spent explaining and demonstrating to students how to fulfil the required language functions, for example, summary, critique, and evaluation. Second, in Moodle, the distance students were given information relating to the language functions they were expected to fulfil in assignments. For example, in week two, there were five instructions concerning assignment 3B. In each point, a language function was mentioned: “Make it clear if your critique is a strength or weakness of the article.” Third, examples of assignments (3A, 3B, 4A & 4B) were posted on Moodle for both on-campus and distance students. These demonstrated (among other things) the language functions expected. Fourth, in assignment feedback, the success criteria (given as part of assignment instructions as well) were based on language functions. For example, for assignment 3A there were four criteria. Two were in respect of language functions: “summary of article is clearly and concisely written ... three points of critique relating to the article are raised and outlined.” Assignment feedback was given to affirm when students fulfilled language functions, as in “great to see that you have clearly outlined your point of critique ka pai!” When students had not done so, a fairly typical comment was: “you have started to discuss the ideas rather than critique them.” Therefore, it appeared that the perspective taken was that students needed guidance and assistance in fulfilling the stated language functions.

In summary, in the first year, the language functions “critique” and “argumentation” were the ones most often commented on in interviews by staff. Staff assumed that students understood and were able to produce writing embodying these language functions. In the second year, there was a focus on students understanding and being able to fulfil the language functions *summarisation*, *critique*, *evaluation*, *description* and *justification*. Each of the stated language functions was

demonstrated and explained to students in a number of ways. The unstated language function “argumentation” was not really explained to students. “Taking a position” appeared to be expected in students’ second assignment, and they were given instruction on how to achieve this. The connection between argumentation and taking a position was not explained to students.

Genre

In the first year, the term *genre* was not mentioned in lectures nor in assignment feedback.

In the course outlines (1 & 2), assignments 1A, 1B and 2A were referred to as “essays.” Assignment 2B was referred to as the “theory into practice *booklet*” [my emphasis added]. The staff (as one would expect) appeared to have an understanding of format and style expected in an essay. Students, especially in the first-year course for their first assignment, were also given instruction in tutorials on how to write an essay. For example, Andrea gave students specific information on how to write an introduction and conclusion.

The genre of assignment 2B was a booklet. In one tutorial for distance students (30th August, 2013), a student asked a question on genre: “is it like an essay in a book?” It would seem that this student was trying to relate the assignment to a genre and by doing this, possibly work out its associated textual functions or writing style. Andrea responded: “There will be some headings and subheadings and I will show you that as we go along.” Possibly Andrea did not hear the question, avoided the question, or did not understand the question. My observation of the tutorial was that Andrea did appear to hear the question but comprehended the student’s question differently to my understanding.

In interviews, I sought clarification with staff (Andrea and Toni) on what genre the booklet was, since I was trying to establish whether the text demanded was more like an essay or a report. Both staff responded that they considered it an essay and a report. Andrea remarked, “it’s got some touches of a report, but it does follow an essay structure. ... I would say that it is more of an essay.” I got the impression that this was not something Andrea had considered before our interview, as she appeared to be considering whether the booklet was more like an essay or report while answering me. Both Andrea and Toni used the terms “argument” and

indicated they were looking for critical reflection in the booklet. For example, Andrea explained that she was expecting students to use the “literature to support and back up and to critically think about their argument about what it was that they were saying.”

In the second year, the issues of how to write an article summary and critique (first assignment) and how to approach and structure an essay were addressed with students. Assignments 3A and 3B were an “article summary and critique” (co 3 & 4), and assignments 4A and 4B were essays.

As mentioned earlier, students were given extensive specific instruction on how to write an article summary and critique and how to approach and structure their essay. For the essay, students were also given substantial information on possible content. For each assignment, one focus appeared to be in instructing students how to manage a number of language functions.

Voice

In the first-year course, *writer’s voice* was not mentioned in assignment instructions or criteria, lectures, tutorials or on Moodle. Writer’s voice was considered more in the second year. I make this statement because it was in the marking guide and in tutorials, and was defined and mentioned on more than one occasion. Toni (asm) indicated that an aspect of a well-written assignment was the presence of student voice. She described what students had produced for assignment 2B as “fantastic,” since “they had a personal story to it.” Toni attributed the high standard of the assignments produced by students to their being encouraged to express “their own *mana motuhake*,” (as mentioned in Chapter 6.2) which she explained meant “their own authority to explore something that’s of interest or concern to them with boundaries that’s unlimited.” Toni explained that this was her intention with assignment 2B.

In the second year, the word *voice* appeared in the “specific assessment criteria for assignment 2” (4A & 4B): “Develop and sustain a clear writer’s voice.” It was also on the feedback sheet for assignment 4A and 4B. While I had access to very limited written feedback on assignments 4A and 4B, an essay with an A- grade had the comment “Your essay was easy to read with a clear and sustained writer’s voice evident throughout.” In a tutorial (September 23, 2014), Jaimee explained “writer’s

voice” to students as: “It is the ability for your idea to be heard. Sometimes [the reader] gets a bit muddled when you use a succession of direct quotes. We know what the author thinks but not you. I suggest no direct quotes.” Therefore, according to this statement, writer’s voice has to do with paraphrasing instead of direct quoting and giving opinions backed up with a reference. Students were also told about reducing the presence of personal voice for the summary of their article: “no personal voice at this stage ... I don’t want your opinion if it’s a good one or not. Just a summary at this point” (July 22, 2014). However, when a student asked if they could use “I” in the conclusion of their article critique, the response was “you could use first person ... you could refer to your practicum” (July 22, 2014). Therefore, it would appear that for the article summary, students were not to use their voice, but the conclusion of the article critique could be more personal.

In sum, staff had more awareness of voice in the second year, than the first.

6.5.2 Macro-level category

This section explores staff understandings of academic writing at the whole-text level, in the areas of *content*, *coherence* and language functions. As one would expect, both in the first- and second- year papers staff focused on *content* more than other aspects of academic writing, since assignments called for particular subject matter.

Content

Content, both in the first and second year, was generally the focus of lectures, tutorials, Moodle discussions, the book of readings, the course textbooks, assignments and was commented on in assignment feedback.

In interviews, staff in both the first-year and second-year courses, indicated the importance of students understanding course content. Written assignments were seen as a way for students to engage with ideas (Andrea; Jaimee; Lynne; Samantha; Toni). Samantha gave a typical response when she remarked that students had “got to grips with the ideas ... and engaged with the ideas of whatever” they had “been asked to write about.” Lynne referred to the two A+ assignments she marked since the students had provided a “really good understanding of the weekly PowerPoints and whatever the kaupapa [principle] was.”

In both the first-year and second-year courses, the most common feedback comments written on assignments, were about content. For example, Catherine's assignment 1A had 15 written comments on her essay: eight were on aspects of content. In the first year, one of the most common comments on content that students received, instructed them to: "expand" or "unpack" ideas. In the second year, one common comment was on the links between the content and literature. For example, "good use of literature to support your ideas." One feedback comment to assist students' writing development was: "make it clear how this reference relates to the idea."

Coherence

Coherence was mainly addressed in tutorials. In the first year, coherence was focused on mainly in respect of overall assignment structure. In the second year, paragraph structure was also addressed in tutorials. Brief information on tutorial instruction and staff interview comments on coherence will follow.

In the first year, coherence was addressed briefly in a tutorial (March 8, 2013) where Andrea explained to students how to approach assignment 1A. She explained that the assignment was "a three-step process." Students needed to provide the "key ideas" of the "two theorists," explain "how these relate to the event or experience," and then "outline the implications for teaching" (fieldnote, from Powerpoint slide for tutorial, March 8, 2013). Students were told a number of times in Andrea's tutorial to make "links explicit between the experience and the theory" (fieldnote, tutorial, March 8, 2013). For assignment 1B, on-campus students were given less instruction and guidance by Andrea on how to approach their assignment. In respect of coherence, or structure, the single instruction students received was: "Your essay follows the same format as the first essay: introduction, body, conclusion" (fieldnote, tutorial, May 17, 2013).

In the first year, staff reported assisting students with structure in two ways. First, staff reported that they gave students instruction in tutorials on how to structure essays (Brenda; Gail; Liz). Liz felt she had attended to structure through a tutorial activity where students were given two essays written by other students to compare and contrast. One essay received an A grade and the other a C grade. I assumed from her comment that the essay that received the A grade was better structured

than the one that had received a C grade. Second, staff reported giving students written assignment feedback on structure (Andrea, I1; Liz). Liz was the staff member who possibly placed the most importance on structure. When she asked what feedback students had applied from their first assignment to improve their second assignment, the first aspect of academic writing she commented on was structure. She described it as, “sort of up there,” indicating she regarded structure as very important. In the second year, staff did not report assisting students with assignment structure.

In first-year interviews, when staff were asked to identify what constituted a well-written assignment, both Gail (asm, oc) and Toni (I2) commented on coherence. Both reflected that writing needed to “flow.” Gail identified an aspect of a well-written assignment as one that had appropriate structure: “They [students] have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion and that the ideas have a sense of flow.” She qualified “a sense of flow” as coherence of ideas as the “textbook example” should link to the “life example.” Toni (I2) remarked that many students had produced excellent 2B assignments, and explained that one reason was because of the “flow of their ideas.” She reflected that the booklet “was like a puzzle and it [the content] fitted just right.”

In the second year, students were given considerable instruction in tutorials on how to structure the different parts of their second assignment (4A & 4B). For example, “the introduction is like a roadmap. It is important to tell us what is happening in the essay” (fieldnote, Jaimee, 23 September, 2014). In addition, they were given instruction on paragraph structure by means of Jaimee creating and modelling a paragraph on the whiteboard.

In second-year interviews, the only comment touching on coherence was from Lynne, who commented on students whom she called “middle of the roaders.” I took this to mean students that receive C grades. She commented that these students “cover the information required” but have difficulty with some aspects of writing including “format of their assignments.” She agreed that she was referring to assignment coherence, including paragraph structure.

In conclusion, content was a large focus of both first and second-year courses. Generally, in assignments students were expected to fulfil a number of language

functions. In the first-year courses, there appeared to be the expectation that students would know how to fulfil these. In the second year, students were given explicit instruction in tutorials on how to fulfil each language function. Coherence was not a big focus of each course but students were given instruction on aspects of writing in tutorials, such as how to write an introduction and conclusion, and the connection this had to the body of the assignment.

6.5.3 Micro-level category

This section examines evidence in relation to staff understandings of academic writing at word and-sentence level.

Cohesion

Cohesion was not mentioned in the first and second year in course outlines, tutorials, lectures, or Moodle. Nor was cohesion mentioned by any staff member in relation to student writing. However, cohesion was commented on by Becky (asm, oc) in relation to poor writing at graduate level. She reflected that students do not use “transitions” such as “however” and “on the other hand.”

For assessment 1B, the word “flow” appeared in the feedback sheet under the category “presentation and writing skills” under each range from A to D. The A range stated “essay flows well,” and the D range stated, “flow issues throughout.” “Flow” might well refer to both cohesion and coherence. Based on my reading of the feedback given on students’ assignments, I found it difficult to gauge what “flow” referred to on the feedback sheet. For example, on Tia’s feedback sheet, every category was marked in the “B range” except “presentation and writing skills” which was marked “further work required: C range” with all this category highlighted including “flow issues throughout.” However, in examining feedback given throughout her assignment, content and syntax issues were the issues most commonly commented on. In short, it was unclear to me from the feedback what “flow” actually referred to.

Referencing

Apart from content, referencing, was the aspect of academic writing most focused on by staff in the first-year course and was also a significant focus in the second year. In the first year, the focus was on the mechanical aspects of referencing, whereas in the second year, staff appeared to have more of a conceptual focus.

Both in the first and the second year, students were shown how to produce reference lists and in-text citations. PowerPoint slides presented to students included in-text citations and at times reference lists. For assignments 1A, 2A, 1B and 2B, referencing was mentioned in assignment instructions under both “presentation” and “marking criteria.” Students were instructed to “use the APA system for citations ... include a reference list” and “appropriate academic sources ... evidence of relevant reading” (assignment 2B.” In the second year, in the marking criteria, “APA referencing (6th ed.)” was mentioned as needing to be: “correct” (4A & 4B), and “accurate and consistent” (3A & 3B).

In the first year, on the Moodle platform provided for the distance students, three of the four writing tips posted were focused on assisting students with referencing. One suggested that students create a reference bank in MS Word and two gave instruction on in-text citations. In the second year, there were two postings on Moodle concerned with referencing: Students were told not to use “use direct quotes” (week 3), and to “use a wide range of literature” (week 7), names of suggested texts were listed for students. Therefore, there was a change in focus in Moodle postings from year one to two. In the first year, students were given instruction at the mechanical level of referencing. In the second year, students were reminded of expectations of paraphrasing and were reminded of appropriate sources they could use for assignment 4B.

During the first year, there were two tutorials for on-campus students giving information on how to approach assignment 1A. For most of the second tutorial writing session (approximately 40 minutes), Andrea gave referencing instruction. She demonstrated on the whiteboard how to write citations at the beginning and end of sentences, and how to write secondary citations. Students were told to include a reference list and were reminded to present their references in alphabetical order and to indent the second line. Most of the instruction was on how to write in-text citations.

In interviews, staff teaching on the first-year paper indicated that students were expected to write citations and produce reference pages (Samantha, ocs; Brenda, ocs; Andrea, ocs, I1; Liz, ocs). However, two staff members had contrasting expectations of students’ referencing ability. When Liz was asked about written

feedback on assessments, she reported that she gave feedback on two aspects: “structure” and “referencing” since she wanted to “make sure they [students] do APA referencing correctly” (asm, oc). At the time of the interview, however, Andrea was not aiming for 100 percent accuracy from students. She commented that students had “given referencing a go” (I1), which probably indicated that she understood that on-campus students would not be proficient at it. Students at this time were in their first semester of study. For the second-year paper, Lynne, in her interview, reflected that she had given students some strategies: “have a master sheet of your references” and “cut and paste references.” In addition, she suggested to students that they visit the library where the “library support people” would be able to “guide [students] with in-text and referencing of assignments.”

Students were given assignment feedback on aspects of referencing. First, first-year students were given feedback as comments throughout their essays in instances where they did not cite correctly or use citations when paraphrasing. Second, feedback was given on students’ references pages. For example, a feedback comment on Catherine’s assignment 1A was: “good list of references. Be sure to indent second line.” Third, as mentioned above, APA referencing was one of the categories on the feedback sheet. In the second year, on the feedback sheets for assignments 3A, 3B, 4A and 4B, one “specific success criterion” was: “APA referencing (6th ed.) is accurate and consistent.” The only instances I found commenting on students not having in-text citations were in one essay where a student was told to reference the constructionist and humanist approaches. In addition, there were a number of occasions when students were told that they had “a useful literature link.” As can be seen, feedback was one way staff assisted students with referencing.

Many of the staff teaching first-year papers reflected in interviews that it was important that students be able to use literature to support their writing (Toni, I1 & 2; Liz, asm; Brenda, asm; Samantha, asm; Gail, asm; Andrea, asm, I1). For example, when asked what students needed to do to get an A+ essay, Toni (asm), indicated that students’ ability to use references in their writing was a top priority. Using sources to demonstrate understanding of a topic was something that staff (Anthea; Liz; Samantha; Toni) commented on. Toni noted: “I had a great booklet where I had a student in one paragraph that used four references.” Toni also

commented that the student “used different references of different people that talked about compassion but different layers with different meanings of compassion.” As I interpret this, Toni meant the student had synthesized a range of viewpoints on the topic.

In the first year, there was some evidence that staff preferred students to paraphrase rather than to use direct quotations. The importance of students using their “own words” was mentioned once in interviews by Samantha (asm). She remarked that this was a challenge for first-year students. In addition, Amanda (ds, assignment 1B) received the feedback comment to paraphrase instead of using two direct quotations very close together. In Cheryl’s assignment 1A, when two of the paragraphs had two direct quotations, no feedback comment was given to encourage Cheryl to paraphrase. In the second year, as mentioned earlier, students were told in a number of times in tutorials - and it was also posted in Moodle - that they were not to use direct quotations.

Two staff members in the first-year course commented on student plagiarism and appeared to view this as unintentional (Andrea, asm, I1; Samantha, asm, I1). In the second year, plagiarism was not mentioned by staff in the interviews.

In the second year, students were also given referencing instruction in tutorials. First, with the on-campus students, referencing at the mechanical level was addressed during a demonstration on how to write a paragraph for assignment 4A. Included in this demonstration was how to write an in-text citation, including how to do so when students had synthesized information from two sources (fieldnote, September 23, 2014). Second, instruction was given at the conceptual level for assignment 3A. Instruction was given on choosing appropriate sources and students were told by Jaimee not to use direct quotations: “We want to hear your voice.” Students were told that the academic staff marking the assignment were the audience and that direct quotations made it “difficult to know what [students] were saying.” (fieldnote, July 22, 2014). In addition, students were asked at times what evidence they would draw on to support their teaching philosophy (fieldnote, September 30, 2014). Third, students had a demonstration of how to write a paragraph for assessment 4A and 4B. Included in this demonstration was how to integrate sources into their writing (fieldnote, tutorial September 23, 2014).

In the second year, when I asked Jaimee what she considered a well-written assignment, she referred to one student's A+ assignment where the student's writing level was "amazing" since the student demonstrated "really deep critical thought" and gave the example of the student "synthesising a wide range of literature" and "looking from alternative perspectives." From this statement, it appeared Jaimee considered a well-written assignment as one where students were able to deeply engage with the literature, a view which aligned with Toni's statements above.

From the above, it would appear that staff demonstrations to students were mainly on the mechanical aspects of referencing. In interviews, staff also talked about the conceptual aspects of referencing.

The divergence between student and staff understandings of referencing and the approach used to teach students about referencing will be explored in Chapter 8.

Punctuation, syntax and spelling

Punctuation, syntax and spelling were attended to by staff in the first- and second-year course in the course outline, tutorials and feedback. Punctuation, syntax and spelling was not commented on during lectures.

In the first and second-year, in the course outlines (1, 2, 3 & 4), punctuation, syntax and spelling were mentioned minimally and only in the marking criteria for each assessment. In the first year, punctuation, syntax and spelling was not mentioned specifically but implicitly evident in the marking criteria under "writing skills." In the second year, the words "accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar" appeared in the marking criteria (assignments 3A & 3B).

In first-year tutorial classes, students were reminded briefly of spelling, punctuation and grammar requirements (on-campus students, March 8, 2013, and distance students, August 28 & 30, 2013). Andrea instructed students to be careful that they were using the correct spelling. She gave examples of commonly misspelt words: "affect and effect, their and there" (fieldnote, distance student tutorial, August 28, 2013). She clarified specific aspects of punctuation: the difference between "its" and "it's;" how to use apostrophes to show possession, and how to employ macrons to "acknowledge the bicultural" aspect of words such as Māori (tutorial, August 28,

2013). In addition, students were told to “proofread for grammar” before handing in their assignment.

In the second year, students were reminded in tutorials (once for each assignment) that they needed to hand in assignments that had accurate “spelling, punctuation ... grammar” (July 15, 2014) and “writing to a high standard” (September 23, 2015). Two strategies were suggested: giving their assignment to another person to read and comment on, and going to Student Learning for assistance.

For distance students, two aspects of syntax were addressed on Moodle in a posting under “writing tip for the week.” First, students were told that they needed to “keep sentences to no longer than 25 words maximum. ... That way your points will always be succinct” (Moodle fieldnote, August 15, 2013, posted by Andrea). Writing sentences of “no more than 25 words” was also mentioned in a tutorial to the on-campus students (May 10, 2013). Second, students were advised that “when you write, try and avoid words that end in ing.” The reason given was that “Sentences that do not have lots of words that end in ing always sound far stronger and affirmative” and it “changes” students “thinking” Moodle fieldnote, August 15, 2013, posted by Andrea). When questioned about the meaning of this posting (interview, I1), Andrea explained that when students stop using “ing,” as in “going to,” their “sentences have far more input and depth.” Andrea appears to be making a comment about strengthening verb modality.

In the second-year course, punctuation, spelling and syntax were not mentioned on Moodle.

In interviews in the first year, staff expressed the opinion that students should have correct punctuation (Toni, acs, oc), syntax (Brenda, acs, oc; Liz, acs, oc; Toni, acs, d) (all three used the word *grammar*) and spelling (Andrea, acs, oc) in their written assignments. When asked to identify what constituted an A+ essay Toni gave the example of a student who had achieved “from the grammar to the content” but “it was the critical analysis” that really made this essay an excellent one. In general, like Toni, staff remarked that there were other aspects of writing (apart from accurate punctuation, syntax, and spelling) present in an excellent essay.

Jaimee mentioned spelling twice in the interview. She had the opinion that incorrect spelling was an indication of poor literacy skills. Reflecting on the importance of accuracy in spelling she mentioned a previous student: “She’d be modelling writing [to her primary level students] and I remember thinking how could somebody get through university with such poor literacy skills.” Jaimee also reflected that having the ability to spell words correctly was particularly important for the pre-service primary education students, since they would be teaching in the primary level classrooms. She saw the student learning centre as a place students could get assistance with this.

Lynne reflected that a staff member had informed her that she was not to edit students’ work as part of feedback but to inform students that they “needed to address their basic writing conventions ... punctuation.” Therefore, it appeared that students in their second year were expected to hand in assignments with word- and sentence-level accuracy attended to but that it was not staff members’ responsibility to give students direct assistance with this aspect of writing.

Staff in the first year reported addressing punctuation, grammar and syntax in assignment feedback (Andrea; Gail; Liz; Toni). Liz and Andrea had slightly different degrees of acceptance of word- and sentence-level inaccuracies. Liz “tried to balance” out the emphasis she placed on marking assignments, between understanding of content and word- and sentence-level accuracy. Andrea (asm, oc) placed more importance on accuracy: “I don’t ... say, well this is the first-year students therefore I am going to let spelling go.” For Andrea, accuracy was partly her responsibility in that she “want[ed] to show” students “the right way,” beginning as soon as soon as they entered the pre-service primary education programme. In my examination of feedback given to students, inaccuracies in grammar and punctuation were generally commented on by Andrea.

Staff did not specifically mention in interviews giving feedback on punctuation, syntax and/or punctuation. In my examination of feedback given to students in the second year, there were two instances of feedback on spelling. One example is a student was told to watch their spelling when the students had “stands” instead of “strand.” There was also a feedback comment direction at syntax as one student was told that her “sentence structure could be enhanced.” As stated earlier, having

a minimal focus on this in the second year was possibly because students generally handed in assignments that had accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.

In sum, it appeared that staff shared an understanding that correct punctuation, grammar and syntax were important aspects of academic literacy. Students were given limited instruction on this aspect of academic writing in the first year and were reminded of it in the second year.

Word choice

In the first and second year, staff did not focus on word choice. It was not mentioned in the course outlines (1, 2, 3 & 4), in the lectures, nor on any Moodle postings uploaded by staff and was generally not mentioned in interviews. It was mentioned minimally in one first-year tutorial where students were told to use academic language, not to use contractions such as “don’t,” and not to use “etc.” (Andrea, fieldnote, March 8, 2013). It was also mentioned in one second-year tutorial, where students were told that for their in-class discussion for assignment 3A, they should “think about the language to engage [their] colleagues” (Jaimee, fieldnote, July 22, 2014). In examining the feedback given to students, I could not find any comments on word choice. This could be because generally there did not appear to be issues with word choice.

Layout

Layout was very minimally attended to in the first and second year. Layout of assignments was not mentioned in lectures, Moodle, Edlink, assignment feedback and generally was not discussed in tutorials. In the first year, students were given layout instructions about margin size and font in assignments. They were not given these in the second year. Distance students were given more specific instructions on how to set out their booklet (2B). For example, “have a title page” (Andrea, tutorial, August 28, 2013). The only time layout was possibly mentioned in tutorials in the second year was in relation to assignment 3A, when students were told that their lesson plan needed to be on one page (fieldnote, Jaimee, July 15, 2014).

In conclusion, aspects of academic literacy at the micro level that were hardly mentioned were word choice, cohesion and layout. It appears staff expected students to have accurate word- and sentence-level writing, in respect of grammar (syntax), punctuation and spelling. In the first year, students were given limited

instruction on this and reminded of accuracy in these aspects in the second year. There was quite a focus on referencing, particularly in the first year, in tutorials and in assignment feedback, which indicated that staff saw referencing as an important aspect of academic literacy. In the first year, referencing instruction given in tutorials appeared to be mainly on the mechanics of referencing. In the second year, instruction tended to be on the use of appropriate sources, the importance of paraphrasing as compared to using direct quotations. Students were also shown how to integrate references into a paragraph.

6.5.4 Aspects of academic writing addressed in the courses

As mentioned earlier, Appendix L shows the aspects and instances of academic literacy mentioned in lectures, tutorials, Moodle, the course outline, assignment feedback and interviews. In the first year, it appears that apart from content, aspects of academic literacy that were addressed most often were generally at the micro level, in particular punctuation, syntax, grammar and referencing. Linking theory to practice was also mentioned in tutorials a number of times. Aspects of academic literacy that were not mentioned to students, or were hardly mentioned, tended to be at the macro and contextual level: word choice, cohesion, voice and genre. In the second year, there was a strong focus on language functions, especially *critique*, and students were given explicit information in tutorials on how to fulfil different language functions. There was also a focus on certain macro-level aspects of academic literacy i.e., content, audience, voice, and at the micro level, referencing. In addition, the micro-level aspects of grammar (syntax), punctuation and spelling, and the importance of accuracy with these word- and sentence-level features were mentioned a number of times. Therefore, the salient difference between the first- and second-year courses was that there appeared to be more of a focus on the macro features of writing in the second year. However, the micro features of spelling, punctuation and grammar were not ignored.

Please see Appendix N for a table displaying a summary of student and staff understandings of academic writing.

In sum, both staff and students, especially in the first year, were quite focused on word- and sentence-level features of writing. Referencing was of particular interest, since staff realised that students would need assistance with this and gave relevant

instruction. However, the instruction given was mainly at the mechanical level, for example, how to do in-text citations. In interviews, staff also talked about referencing at the conceptual level, such as how to use sources to support their writing. One striking difference between students and staff was that staff were generally aware that essays needed an argument. However, in general students were not explicitly taught how to create an argument, especially in the first year. Overall, it appeared that divergences in understanding between students and staff lessened in the second year.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored student and staff understandings of academic writing. From evidence gathered in the first year, both staff and students appeared to be more concerned with academic literacy at the micro level. At the macro level, staff appear to be more concerned with these aspects than students. At the social/contextual level, students appeared to exhibit aspects of academic literacy that needed developing, such as their understanding of genres and their corresponding language functions. This was an aspect of academic writing that staff did not appear to give students instruction or guidance on. In addition, it appeared that there may have been assumptions made by staff about students' understandings of language functions, as staff gave students limited guidance on some language functions, such as argumentation. In the second year, there appeared to be much more focus by both staff and students on writing at the whole text level and social level. Language functions, audience and voice, had a much bigger focus in the second year, for both staff and students. However, cohesion (micro level) and genre (social level) were not really attended to. The next section explores my reading of the evidence in relation to academic writing learning practices that students perceived as helpful.

CHAPTER 7: HELPFUL AND UNHELPFUL PRACTICES

7.0 Introduction

This chapter is my reading of the evidence in response to Research Questions 2, 3 and 4:

What practices do participating students identify as helpful/unhelpful in respect of writing assignments?

What practices do participating staff identify as helpful/unhelpful in respect of students writing assignments and how do they build these into their practices?

To what extent is there a divergence or convergence between participating student and staff understandings of academic literacy learning practices?

I have structured this chapter according to the order of the research questions above. In Section 7.1, I report on academic literacy practices that students identified as helpful and unhelpful for their academic writing. In Section 7.2, I present practices that staff identified as helpful and unhelpful for students' writing. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the divergences between student and staff opinions were greater in the first year than in the second. Overall, it appeared that students were more likely than staff to identify the provision of resources as helpful or unhelpful.

7.1 Helpful and unhelpful practices identified by students

The themes that emerged from the reading of the evidence were: course delivery modes, materials, feedback and conferencing, and university services. These practices and provision of resources will be explored below.

7.1.1 Course delivery modes

Students identified the following course delivery modes as helpful and unhelpful: tutorials, lectures, online discussion forums, the repository space in Moodle and the library tutorial. Each will be discussed below.

Tutorials

In the first year, I asked 19 students (20 were interviewed) to reflect on what they found helpful and unhelpful in respect of their writing. All responded that the instruction Andrea provided during tutorials was helpful. The most common reasons given were: Andrea broke down the assignment instructions (Catherine, ocs, I1; Frances, ocs, I1; Kathleen, ocs, I1; Suzanne, ocs, I1; Bob, ds, I1; Tia, ds, I1; Tui, ocs, I1); Andrea explained what students needed to do (Cheryl, ocs, I1; Joanna, ocs, I1; Molly, ds, I1); and her expectations were clarified (Cherie, ds, I2; Michelle, ds, I2; Molly, ds, I1). Tui expressed her appreciation of Andrea breaking down the question when she commented: “Andrea, she’s amazing, she will look at the question, and then she will pretty much word-for-word unpack exactly what that means.” Molly’s (ds, I1) comments in respect of students provided with information on what they needed to do and the clarity of tutor expectations were fairly typical of what students appreciated: She found students receiving “clear” instructions on what Andrea “expected” and receiving information on how to write the assignment and “what ... to do ... amazing.” Such comments were fairly typical of students, and indicate that students appreciated the written assignment instructions and marking criteria as interpreted and clarified by staff.

As explained in Chapter 6.3.2, during the first-year paper for on-campus students, tutorial instruction was given in preparation for assignment 1A in three tutorials for approximately 40 minutes each time. Students were also given less instruction for their second assignment. For assignment 2A there was approximately 40 minutes of instruction given in one tutorial and in another tutorial students were given the opportunity to ask questions about their assignment. The question and answer session lasted approximately 20 minutes. For distance students, instruction on assignment 1B occurred in one on-campus lecture for approximately one hour. Different aspects of writing were focused on in different tutorials. For example, in the first tutorial for on-campus students for assignment 1A, most of the time was spent on content. For the third tutorial, aspects of writing, such as academic language, audience, word choice and referencing (including in-text citations), were explained and at times demonstrated on the whiteboard to students. For assignment 2A and 2B, most of the instruction or direction given was on assignment content.

Students had different responses to the provision of less support for the second assignment. Catherine (ocs, I2) agreed with the amount of support given, since she felt students should receive less tutor instruction with assignment 2A as compared to assignment 1A, because students had now written a number of assignments. Both Suzanne (ocs, I2) and Cherie (ocs, I2) did not like having less tutor support. Cheryl (ocs, I2) expressed the most severe reaction. She felt she “got dumped into it,” possibly indicating she felt unprepared for the assignment and abandoned by the tutor. I observed in tutorials that much of the instruction given for assignments 2A and 2B was based on possible assignment content, and in one tutorial students were told they needed to take a position, in other words, to answer “yes” or “no” to the assignment question. This was in contrast to tutorial instruction for assignment 1A, where students were also given instruction on generic academic writing skills, such as how to write in-text citations, how to write an introduction and conclusion, and were told that the order of the paragraphs in the essay should follow the order indicated in the introduction.

Both on-campus and distance students were given instruction by Andrea on how to write an introduction and conclusion. Andrea instructed students that the conclusion should “mirror” the introduction, as students could “take aspects of the introduction, copy and paste. ... If they mirror each other then you know you have met the requirements of this assignment” (tutorial for on-campus students, March 8, 2013). On-campus students did not specifically identify this instruction as a helpful or unhelpful practice in interviews but I observed them being quite focused and taking notes while this instruction was occurring. Distance students reflected that this instruction was helpful (Amanda; ds, I2; Carla, ds, I2; Dawn, ds, I2; Michelle, ds, I2). Carla described this somewhat mechanical process as the “no brainer way to do it” (I2). However, Dawn (ds, I2) appeared to view this tutorial instruction as helping other students (but not herself), since she viewed herself as knowing already how to write an introduction and conclusion. In the second year, Michelle (ds) and Carla (ds) commented in interviews that the way to write an introduction and conclusion was as Andrea had taught them the year before.

Two students (Michelle, ds, I2 & Molly, ds, I2) thought additional instruction on essay structure would have been helpful but commented on different aspects of it. Michelle reflected that students receiving instruction in the form of a “model” of

how to write paragraphs that contained “one important point per paragraph” would be helpful. Molly suggested that other students could probably benefit from further instruction on how to write an introduction and conclusion, since when Andrea had shown students the connection between these, Molly did not think that some students had understood (ds, I2).

In the second year, all on-campus students who talked about the writing instruction given in tutorials identified it as helpful (Kathleen, ocs, I3 and I4; Cheryl, ocs, I3; Suzanne, ocs, I3; Carla, ds, I3; Marie, ds, I3; Molly, ds, I3; Mabel, ds, I3). The only slightly negative comment was from Suzanne (ocs, I4), who said that while she found the process in tutorials helpful, she also found all the information they were given on how to approach the assignments “a bit overwhelming.”

Some of the reasons students gave for finding tutorial writing instruction helpful were similar to those shared in the first year, for example, the tutor “going through each section” of the assignment instructions (Kathleen, ocs, I4) making her “expectations” clear (Amanda, ds, I3; Cherie, ds, I3; Molly, ds, I3; Tia, ds, I3) and the tutor stating “what she wanted” (Kathleen, ocs, I3; Marie, ds, I3). “Going through each section” could have meant “breaking down assignment instructions” as was commented on in the first year. Students also identified specifics: the tutor gave information on essay structure and paragraph structure (Carla, ds, I3; Cheryl, ocs, I3; Cherie, ds; Marie, ds; Tia, ds); she gave information on suitable references (Suzanne, ocs, I3); and gave examples of how to fulfil the language functions *critique*, *summary* and *evaluation* (Mabel, ds, I3). Very specific instruction for assignment 4B was probably what Cherie (ds, I3) meant when she referred to “essay by numbers.” She identified the information given, including the Panopto recording, as “very, very helpful.”

In the second year, many distance students were enthusiastic about how helpful the Panopto recording was (Cherie, ds, I2; Molly, ds, I2; Marie, ds, I2; Amanda, ds, I2; Tia, ds, I2; Carla, ds, I2). Students reported finding this recording very helpful and used it quite extensively for writing their assignment. Carla was typical in the way she described using this Panopto recording, as she made extensive notes of the recording and referred to her notes while writing her assignment. Tia (I3) reported going from a D grade for the first assignment to A+ for the second. She was the

student who reported the most extreme difference in grade between assignments. She attributed the change in grade to her being “lazy” with the first assignment. For the second assignment, she “utilise(d) everything” (I3) the lecturers provided including watching the Panopto recording for assignment 4B “maybe ten times” when writing her second assignment (See Chapter 7.1.1).

In the second year, three students had suggestions for aspects of academic writing that staff could further assist them with: sentence structure (Cheryl, ocs; Marie, ds), paragraph structure (Cheryl; Mabel, ds) and paraphrasing (Cherie, ds). I found Marie’s answer surprising. Marie (ds) reported receiving A grades, yet she remarked that “sentence structure, that’s the thing I struggle most with.” Her assignments gave no indication of word- and sentence-level writing issues.

In sum, students both in the first- and second-year of study, found tutorial instruction helpful.

Lectures

When I asked on-campus students in their first year of study if lectures helped with the writing of their assignments they all agreed they did (Catherine, I1; Frances, I1; Joanna, I1; Kathleen, I1; Suzanne, I1; Tui, I1). The reason given most often was that lectures had assisted them in understanding course content (Catherine, I1; Joanna, I1; Suzanne, I1; Tui, I1). As students were interviewed shortly after the submission of assignment 1A, by content they probably meant educational theorists, since for this assignment, students were to “demonstrate” their “understanding of developmental theories” (co1). Suzanne perhaps indicated the strongest impact that lectures had on her assignment writing when she reflected that gaining an understanding of the theorists from the lectures assisted her to decide which theorists she would use. Other students did not reflect on the connection between the lecture content and their assignments.

Some students commented on their poor concentration in lectures (Catherine, I1, I2; Cheryl, I1; Kathleen, I1; Tui, I1), with some attributing this to their mood when entering particular lectures (Frances, I1; Tui, I1) and some to lecture delivery (Catherine, I2; Kathleen, I1). For example, Catherine (I2) attributed her lack of concentration to lecturers talking “in a monotone” and not engaging with students.

The practice in this paper was that only some of the slides for each PowerPoint presentation would be made available to students. First-year students reflected that they would have found it helpful to have had the lecture notes before the lecture (Joanna, I1) or known which slides would be made available after the lecture (Catherine, I1; Frances, I1; Kathleen, I1; Suzanne, I1). One lecturer inserted a Moodle symbol on the top-left hand side of slides that students would have access to after the lecture. Students commented that they found it helpful when the Moodle symbol was used to indicate slide availability (Cheryl, I2; Catherine, I2; Joanna, I2). Catherine (I2) reported that knowing which slides would be uploaded changed the behaviour of students, as students “actually listened” during the lecture. My observation of the lecture was that students were unusually quiet and appeared focused for much of the time.

First-year distance students had only one lecture during their on-campus week. However, lecture notes were uploaded each week to Moodle. The lecture notes were summaries of ideas and concepts related to the weekly topics. These, as far as I was aware, were not made available to on-campus students. A few distance students identified lecture notes as helpful with their writing (Amanda, I2; Cherie, I1; Molly, I1 & 2; Tia, I1). According to students, these lecture notes were helpful in assisting them to understand content. Cherie and Amanda reported viewing these lectures notes while writing assignment 1B. Amanda was perhaps the most positive of all students, as she described the lecture notes as “fantastic” (I2). When writing assignment 2B, she “referred back” (I2) to these lecture notes.

In the second year, students were very positive about the lectures in that they “enjoyed” (Suzanne) the lectures, found them “engaging” (Kathleen; Suzanne) and were “interested” (Cheryl; Kathleen) in the topics. (Catherine; Cheryl; Suzanne; Kathleen). Cheryl and Catherine reflected that they referred back to lecture notes when writing their first assignment. When I asked students to identify helpful and unhelpful practices, they did not generally identify the lectures.

In sum, lectures assisted students to understand course content, which some commented they found helpful for writing their assignment. However, some first-year students, found it difficult to concentrate in lectures.

Discussion forums

Moodle

In the first year, online participation was worth 15 percent of distance students' grade but was not a component of the on-campus students' course.

Distance students reported finding the Moodle discussions helpful for writing assignment 1B (Carla, I1; Cherie, I1; Marie, I1; Bob, I1; Tia, I1; Wilma, I1), with the most common reason given that the discussions aided understanding of the theorists (Mabel, I1; Bob, I1; Tia, I1). Molly was the most forthcoming about what she did in Moodle, stating that as well as taking part in the online discussions, she printed off the Moodle discussions every week. She not only read the discussions in her group, but discussions in other groups as well. Amanda (I1) mentioned that she liked having two avenues for discussion: Moodle and their own Facebook page. She reflected that the language used on their Facebook page was different from what they would use on Moodle, since with Facebook they sometimes got "passionate." She described the Facebook page as "more personal," indicating that there was a "bit more freedom of speech happening." Marie (ds, I1) stated that she found "reading the online discussions about other theorists" confused her "slightly," since she preferred to focus on understanding the two theorists she had chosen for assignment 1B. Therefore, "in some ways," the online discussions were "a help and in some ways ... a hindrance." Wilma (ds, I1) remarked that she did not find the Moodle discussions beneficial. She reasoned that she had the resources she needed, because she had done the course the previous year.

In the second year, online discussions were not included in the grade. Fewer students than in the first year identified the Moodle discussions as helpful for their assignment writing (Carla, ds, I4; Mabel, ds, I3).

Facebook

In the first year, many students (both on-campus and distance) described their Facebook sites as helpful (Suzanne, ocs, I1 & I2; Joanna, ocs, I1; Cheryl, ocs, I1; Frances, ocs, I1; Catherine, ocs, I1 & 2; Amanda, ds, I1 & I2; Nancy, ds, I2; Marie, ds, I1 & I2; Molly, ds, I2; Rachel, ds, I1; Tia, ds, I1)). As mentioned in Chapter 5.4.3, the distance students who began study in Semester A, 2013, had one site and

the on-campus students (in the tutorial group I observed) had another. Both of these sites had been set up by students. In fact, in the first year, Facebook was the third most commonly identified helpful practice (tutorial assignment instruction was the first, and feedback pre-submission was the second).

On-campus and distance students reported using this site mostly to ask each other questions about their assignments. The most common type of question was about how to reference specific texts (Suzanne, I1; Cheryl, I2; Frances, I1; Catherine, I1). For example, Frances reflected that “one of [her] friends ... didn’t know how to reference the curriculum, ... and one of the people actually told her how to reference it and did it for her” (ocs, I1). She was of the opinion that it was safer to ask students questions via this site than ask a lecturer since with a lecturer, before asking she considered if it was acceptable to “actually ask them this question” (I1), and she believed that she needed to be careful with the “wording” (I1) of her question. Students also reported using this site to share general information such as the details of a planned shared lunch (time, place and food suggestions). It would appear that students had set up their own community of practice in order assist each other to align/comply with the academic conventions of the academic CoP they were entering.

Distance students also reported finding this site useful as a way of connecting with each other and therefore forming relationships. Cherie (ds, I1) verbalised the community aspect of learning when she reflected: “It’s not just about the study, we’re all learning about each other’s lives and ... get really involved with each other.” She explained this was a positive aspect of study.

In the second year, when on-campus students were asked to identify helpful and unhelpful practices, they did not mention Facebook. When asked, Cheryl (ocs, I3) and Kathleen (ocs, I3) commented that they did not connect as much with the Facebook site for the second-year paper, since students had been put in different tutorial groups for the paper. Cheryl said that one thing students were assisting each other with via Facebook was finding quotations. She stated that using the “index” in the textbook did not always work because students needed to know “the right word” to look for, but that Facebook was “really helpful” as other students could tell their course peers which chapter the quotation was in.

In the second year, distance students on the whole appeared to be less positive about their Facebook site than in the first. Cherie (ds, I3), Marie (ds, I4) and Michelle (ds, I3) identified the use of Facebook as a helpful practice since it made students “feel connected to the whole group” (Michelle), the sharing of ideas occurred (Marie) and students assisted each other to locate information. In other words, students could tell each other specific content they were looking for their assignment and other students would tell them which text to go to.

A number of students suggested that Facebook was either not helpful or they had a negative attitude towards the use of the site set up by students (Amanda, ds, I4; Carla, ds, I4; Cherie, ds, I4; Marie, ds, I4; Molly, ds, I4). The most common reason given was that reading the Facebook postings on assignments made students feel unsure about what they were writing if it appeared different from what other students indicated via their posting (Amanda, Carla, Cherie and Marie). Molly (I4) provided the strongest negative comment about Facebook. She reported other students asking questions a few days before assignments were due. She drew attention to questions such as “Help, I haven’t started, anyone got any ideas about an example of behaviour theory that you’ve seen in practicum?” She reflected that she did not respond to these students, as she judged that they had not done the required reading. She indicated that this type of posting was inappropriate, since instead of students doing their own reading and researching in preparation for assignments, they relied on others. She conceded that on-campus students also possibly asked each other for this type of assistance but that “if you were on campus, you wouldn’t need to do that [ask this type of question online] because you’d be able to talk face-to-face.” Student perceptions and use of Facebook will be further explored in my discussion chapter.

What is emerging here is that students

In sum, students were more positive about the use of the Facebook site in the first year than the second. What

Library tutorials

Library tutorials were provided for students in their first and second year of study as an aspect of their courses. In the first year, the main focus of the library tutorial

was referencing sources. When first-year students were asked to identify what was helpful for their assignment writing, no student specifically identified the session with the library. When I asked Suzanne and Frances directly about the library tutorial, they had different viewpoints on the usefulness of it. Suzanne was positive: “That was good, it clarified some things and they also showed us how to get information online to get information from if you are stuck.” (ocs, I1). In contrast, while not attending the tutorial herself, Frances (ocs, I1) reflected that according to her friends, the “tutorial didn’t really help them,” because students were still “freaking out” about how to do APA referencing. Therefore, according to Frances, the library did not serve to lessen student anxiety about referencing.

In the second year, both cohorts took part in a library tutorial (one for distance students and one for on-campus). In this tutorial, students were shown: how to find articles online; were assisted to find the eight articles they could choose from for assignment 3A and 3B, and were given instruction and took part in an exercise designed to raise students’ awareness of how to judge if a source was academic and appropriate to use for assignments. No student specifically identified this session as a helpful or unhelpful practice. However, when asked about this tutorial, there was a variety of responses, possibly indicating differing levels of competence in the aspects of information literacy attended to in the workshop.

Four students responded positively (Cheryl, ocs, I3; Suzanne, ocs, I3; Marie, ds, I3; Carla, ds, I3). Each student, when explaining whether or not the tutorial was helpful, based their judgement on whether they had learnt anything. Carla (ds, I3) was the most positive; she described the sessions as “very helpful,” as she “always learning something.” She gave the example that in this tutorial she was reminded that the library had a number of online databases. In contrast, Catherine (ocs, I3) and Molly (ds, I3) did not think the tutorial was necessary. Molly, who told me that she received A grades for both of her assignments and used 14 academic sources for assignment 4B, was the least positive and remarked that it was “unnecessary,” as she had gone to library tutorials the first time she had attended an on-campus week. Therefore, students’ levels of interest in the library tutorials appeared to be related to whether or not they felt they had learnt something.

In conclusion, students identified a range of helpful academic writing induction practices. The most commonly identified helpful practice both in the first and second year was the assignment instruction given during tutorials. Many first-year students commented positively about their Facebook site. Students were less positive about the use of this site in the second year. In both the first and second year, students generally did not identify the library tutorial as helpful, unless asked about it.

7.1.2 Materials

Prescribed texts

In the first year, texts assigned to students consisted of a book of readings and a textbook. In the first year, students identified two ways the book of readings was helpful. First, many students found the content helpful, especially for their first written assignment (Cheryl, ocs, I1; Frances, ocs, I1; Joanna, ocs, I1; Suzanne, ocs, I1; Bob, ds, I1; Nancy, ds, I1; Cherie, ds, I2; Michelle, ds, I2; Tawi, ds, I1). Second, three students reflected that the reference list in the book of readings was helpful for assignment 1A and 1B, as students reported copying the reference entries from the book of readings (Catherine, ocs, I1; Frances, ocs, I1; Tia, ds, I1). Frances commented that she also used the reference entries as a “good model for other subjects.” In all likelihood she was copying the format of the references and applying it to other texts.

Students in their first year also reported difficulties with the book of readings: the number of readings (Cheryl, ocs, I1), the length of the readings (Cheryl, ocs, I1; Amanda, ds, 1), the size of the book of readings (Marie, ds, I1; Tia, ds, I1), and the degree of language difficulty (Catherine, ocs, I1). For example, Catherine (I1) commented: “I don’t understand half of the language in it let alone picking up the messages ... because it is written for someone who is above where I am at.” Some students described the readings as “confusing” (Marie, ds, I1) and “heavy going” (Amanda, ds, I1; Molly, ds, I1). In total 4 of the 7 on-campus students and 5 of the 13 distance students made comments that indicated that they found the book of readings challenging. Such comments indicate a possible explanation for the difference in level of engagement with the required reading between the two cohorts. The distance students generally reported reading the articles provided, whereas the on-campus students generally reported that they *should* read the

articles, but identified time as a limiting factor. On-campus students, if they did read the set readings, often reported that they skim read them. For example, Suzanne (ocs, I2) reflected: “I would look at who the author was, and what the title of the readings were, and then if I think it would be relevant to what I need to use, then I sort of skim through it and if it was, then I would read it in a bit more depth and pull out parts.”

In the second year, students were assigned two textbooks (one was the set text from their first-year paper for the same subject). Fewer students than in the first-year commented on the course text. Only one student commented on finding the textbook challenging. Carla (ds, I4) reported she found the reading textbook “really heavy going in some of the reading ... and not an easy read.” I witnessed students (both on-campus and distance) appearing overwhelmed when they were told in their first lecture they needed to read six chapters of the text in the first week. Students commented that reading assisted them with their assignments (Kathleen, ocs, I3; Molly, ds, I4; Tia, ds, I4). Tia said that she had read both the textbook and articles. Molly stated she read all the set readings plus some of the other texts that were referred to in these readings. Student perceptions and experiences of academic reading will be further explored in Chapter 8.4.4.

In sum, students, especially in the first year, found reading the prescribed texts challenging.

Theorist Summary Sheet

A resource named the Theorist Summary Sheet was provided to students in their first year of study. This sheet consisted of questions on the key features and possible classroom applications of the theorists Skinner, Bandura, Vygotsky, Pere, Durie, Bronfenbrenner, Macfarlane, and Royal-Tangaere. Students (mainly on-campus students) identified the Theorist Summary Sheet as helpful and reported using information in the readings book to complete the sheet (Catherine, ocs, I1; Cheryl, ocs, I1; Frances, ocs, I1; Joanna, ocs, I1; Suzanne, ocs, I1; Rachel, ds, I1). By completing the sheet, they had a summary of main points for each theorist. Some students said they used the summary to decide which theorists to base assignment 1A on (Frances, I1; Joanna, I1; Suzanne, I1). Catherine reflected that she used this sheet as a way of reducing her reading workload: “instead of having to read all of

the readings to find ... the two [theorists] I was going to focus on, I just needed to focus on five pages.” She reflected that without the Theorist Sheet she “would have struggled a lot more, about knowing where to look in the readings.”

Library APA sheet

Students in their first year remarked the APA (6th ed.) sheet provided by the library as helpful (Frances, ocs, I1; Tui, ocs, I1; Catherine, ocs, I2; Cherie, ds, I2; Marie, ds, I2). Both Tui and Catherine described how they used this resource to copy the format of examples from the sheet for their own references. Catherine gave an explicit explanation of what she did when she stated she used the “APA referencing guide” to copy “out the example and then [I] just fill[ed] in the words or the titles of the book or website” she had used. She reflected that because she used this process “technically” I2), her referencing must be correct. This interview was conducted at around the submission time for assignment 1B. However, in examining Catherine’s assignment 1A, out of the five in-text references four were written incorrectly, for example, (Durie, 1994 p24) and the three references in her references list were also not written correctly, according to APA 6th edition conventions. Some issues were: the hanging indent used for second and subsequent lines; she had referenced her textbook a little like an edited book in that she gave both the title of the book and title of the chapter (it was not an edited book); the publishing place of each text did not contain all information required, for example, “Oxford” instead of “Oxford, England.” When I examined her assignment 1B, I found her in-text citations were written correctly, and her reference list was reasonably correct.

In the second year, two students reflected that they had been using the library APA resource to check that they had their referencing “right” (Amanda, ds, I4; Cherie, ds, I4). Amanda possibly felt that she was still learning to reference correctly, as she commented that “one day I might not have to refer to that.” When students were asked to identify “helpful practices,” no student specifically identified this sheet. This might indicate that students were less reliant on the library APA resource in the second year than the first.

In conclusion, materials that first-year students identified as helpful in their assignment writing were: the readings book, the library APA sheet, and the Theorist

Summary Sheet. However, some students in their first year struggled with the size of the readings book, the number of readings, and the language level used in the articles. First-year students reported finding the theorist summary sheet helpful in orientating them to the main points on educational theorists. This assisted some students to decide which theorists to base assignment 1A on. In the second year, students commented very little on resources when they were asked about helpful and unhelpful practices.

7.1.3 Feedback and conferencing

Pre-submission

Many first-year students said that before beginning an assignment, it was helpful to discuss the assignment: with course peers (Catherine, ocs, I1; Cheryl, ocs, I2; Frances, ocs, I2; Joanna, ocs I2; Suzanne, ocs, I2; Tui, ocs, I1; Marie, ds, I2; Rachel, ds, I1; Tia, ds, I2), with the tutor (Cheryl, ocs, I2; Tui, ocs, I1), in class discussions (Tui); with a mentor outside of the university (Tui), and staff in students' base schools (Bob, ds, I1; Tia, ds, I1). The main reason why on-campus students discussed assignments with their course peers before beginning writing (particularly assignment 1A) with their appeared to be the need to clarify what they were asked to do and what was expected. The distance students appeared more interested in ideas: "bounc[ing] ideas off each other" (Rachel, ds, I1).

Pre-submission feedback was the second most popular helpful practice identified by students (writing instruction in tutorials was the first). First-year students indicated that it was helpful to have course peers (Cheryl, ocs, I2; Suzanne, ocs, I2; Joanna, ocs, I1; Carla, ds, I1; Molly, ds, I1 & I2; Tia, ds, I1), friends (outside of the university) (Cheryl, ocs, I1; Suzanne, ocs I1; Tui, ocs, I1; Michelle, ds, I1 & I2, Tia, ds, I1), family members (Frances, ocs, I2; Catherine, ocs, I2; Carla, ds, I1; Dawn, ds, I1; Michelle, ds, I2; Molly, ds, I1; Nancy, ds, I2) and staff in base schools, (Bob, ds, I1) review their essays before submission. Fewer students indicated that they asked course tutors (Catherine, ocs, I1; Michelle, ds, I2; Molly, ds, I1; Tui, ocs, I1) and the student learning centre (Michelle, ds, I1 & 2; Molly, ds, I1) to review their essays before they submitted them (feedback from the student learning centre staff to be discussed later in this chapter). Overall then, it appeared that students were generally having people who were not academic staff review their essays. Students had their essays reviewed for various aspects of academic

literacy and often for more than one aspect. These are discussed in the next few paragraphs.

The most common aspect students had their essays checked for was word- and sentence-level correctness. Many students reflected that they were getting their assignments checked for spelling (Cheryl, ocs, I1; Frances, ocs, I2; Tui, ocs, I1; Michelle, ds, I2; Molly, ds, I1; Tia, ds, I1) and syntax (Frances, I2; Cheryl, ocs, I2; Suzanne, ocs, I1; Catherine, ocs, I2; Dawn, ds, I1; Bob, ds, I1; Nancy, ds, I2). A few students commented that they were having their essays checked for punctuation (Cheryl, ocs, I1; Michelle, ds, I2) and word choice (Catherine, ocs, I2; Joanna, ocs, I1). In addition, two students remarked that they had their assignments checked to ensure their quotations were integrated correctly (Dawn, ds, I1; Molly, ds, I1).

Some students sought pre-submission feedback on macro features of writing such as “flow” (Cheryl, ocs, I1; Molly, ds I1 Carla, ds, I1), structure (Tui, ocs, I1) and to check whether they had fulfilled the assignment criteria (Bob, ds, I1; Tia, ds I1). Carla qualified flow as: “linking your paragraphs” (ds, I1).

Both in the first and second year, students reported that the services provided by the student learning centre were helpful. In the first year, Michelle (ds, I1 & 2) and Molly (ds, I1) reported that getting written feedback on draft assignments from a learning advisor at the student learning centre was helpful. Michelle gave the most comprehensive reason for finding the service helpful, stating that she had learned a lot from it because, as well as the provision of suggestions on how to improve her assignment, she was also given reasons for the suggestions: “if they suggested ... use another word ... she would explain why.” Molly (I1) indicated that she generally sent all her assignments to the student learning centre since doing this improved her “grade by half a grade.” Molly reported that generally the comments she received were about her needing to be more “succinct” in her writing. Students also suggested that the online resources provided by the student learning centre were helpful with their writing (Tia, ds, I1; Michelle, ds, I1).

Second-year students, did not generally identify as helpful having discussions about an assignment before beginning writing. However, Michelle (ds, I3) did say that she found it helpful to talk to course peers before beginning her assignment, since it gave her assistance with planning “how many paragraphs” she would have and

the content of “each part of the essay.” She found this “save[d] so much time.” Therefore, based on this comment, it appeared that Michelle’s discussion was focused on essay structure and content.

In the second year, when students were asked to identify helpful practices, generally they did not specifically identify having their assignment checked before submission. However, when probed more deeply, some students reported getting draft feedback from their course tutor (Suzanne, ocs, I3 & I4; Molly, ds, I4), the student learning centre (to be discussed in the next paragraph) and friends and family (Catherine, ocs, I3). Molly (ds, I4) remarked that because of feedback she had received from the course tutor, she had completely reworked assignment 3B. She explained that students shared information received from tutors, since students “give each other hints and help,” but when they received conflicting information, this “caused a lot of stress really for people.” Catherine said her father picked up “grammar” and “sentence structure” issues in her writing. When I asked some students why they had not sent their assignment to tutors before submission, they gave a range of reasons: not having their drafts ready in time (Cheryl, ocs, I4); and having done it for another paper and were not happy with the feedback (Amanda ds, I4). The most surprising answer was from Kathleen (ocs, I4), who reflected that students who had sent in draft assignments to their tutor got lower marks when they submitted their assignment than they would have if they had submitted their assignment without giving a draft to their tutor. She commented that she believed students were marked on improvement (from the draft to the final) rather than on the assignment *per se*.

In the second year, more students than in the first reported using the student learning centre (Catherine, ocs, I3; Joanna, I3; Molly, ds, I3; Mabel, ds, I3; Nancy, ds, I3), and all reported that they found this service helpful. Nancy explained that the reason she found the student learning centre tutor helpful was that she gave her ideas on how to increase the readability of her assignment. Mabel (ds, I3) and Joanna both reflected that the service was helpful. However, what they found unhelpful was that they could only ask for one aspect of writing to be commented on. For assignment 4B, Mabel had asked for her assignment to be checked for “fluency” or “linking words.” Mabel said the student learning centre tutor commented favourably on her cohesion and had also picked up small details such as referencing errors.

In sum, based on the above evidence, students in their first year of study, were more focused than second-year students on having their assignments checked for word- and sentence-level writing features, than in the second year. In the second year, slightly more students had their assignments checked before submission by university staff (student learning centre staff and course tutors) than in the first year.

Feedback – post submission

Students were provided with two types of written feedback for each assignment: comments which were written on their actual assignment, and a generic feedback sheet with assignment criteria given and grade range for each assignment criterion highlighted.

When I asked students in interviews in their first and second year, to identify helpful practices, they did not mention feedback. This could have been because of the timing of the interviews. When I asked first-year students directly if feedback was helpful, all agreed (Catherine, ocs, I2; Cheryl, ocs, I2; Frances, ocs, I2; Kathleen, ocs, I2; Suzanne, ocs, I2; Marie, ds, I2). Suzanne (ocs, I2) gave a typical response when she remarked that feedback “was good, it sort of showed me where I had gone wrong, and how to improve it,” which she identified as “really helpful.”

When I asked students to talk about the feedback they had received, generally they identified word- and sentence-level issues, such as punctuation (Cheryl; Frances), spelling (Catherine), and referencing (Catherine; Marie; Suzanne). However, Suzanne (I2) and Marie (I2) did refer to aspects of the macro level of writing. Suzanne mentioned content, as in “one paragraph” the feedback was that she “didn’t give enough information.” She explained that with the “Durie model [she] hadn’t quite gone into enough depth” and had not fulfilled the language function *explanation*, as she “had just sort of said what it was without explaining what it meant.” Marie (I2) noted that because of feedback received, she would focus on linking her paragraphs. When students talked about feedback, generally they talked about feedback written on their actual assignment, rather than the generic feedback sheet provided.

In the first year, I asked a few students to share with me their understanding of what specific feedback comments meant. Feedback Frances and Suzanne received stated: “you had a good introduction ... it could be written a bit more succinctly.” As

mentioned in Chapter 5.3, both students reflected that they did not know what “succinctly” meant. Therefore, as they had received this feedback prior to the interview, they appeared not to have looked up the meaning of this word. Second, Suzanne had been told to unpack her theory more, but when I asked her how she might go about doing this, she said she did not know. I asked Michelle why it had been suggested that a paragraph be moved in her essay. She thought that maybe this was related to “flow” but from her facial expression she appeared uncertain.

When I asked students in their second-year of study if post-submission assignment feedback was helpful, they all agreed it was. When I asked students to tell me about the feedback received, just like in the first year, they generally commented on the feedback written on their actual assignments rather than on the feedback sheet. Nancy (ds, I4) remarked that she found positive feedback helpful, as it appeared to boost her confidence since they she knew she “was not a failure.” Students understood the comments received. Student perceptions, experiences, and understandings of feedback will be further explored in my discussion chapter. (See Chapter 8.4.3)

In sum, students did not generally identify assignment feedback as helpful, unless asked. Students in the second-year of study demonstrated a greater understanding of feedback than first-year students.

7.1.4 University services

Library

More first-year distance students (4) than on-campus students (1) commented that library assistance was helpful (Tui, ocs, I1; Nancy, ds, I2; Michelle, ds, I2; Molly, ds, I2; Marie, ds, I2). Students identified a range of library services they found helpful. First, Marie (I2) reflected that she phoned the library for referencing assistance and for assistance with finding articles online. Second, Molly, Nancy and Michelle commented they used the online resources. Third, Nancy and Molly stated they had the library post books to them. Fourth, Tui (ocs, I1), the only first-year on-campus student who reported the library as a useful resource, reflected that she found the library staff “really helpful,” because they would give assistance with searching for articles and books and would also assist her with referencing and “checking grammar and spelling.” In fact, Tui remarked that library staff were

“more helpful than the tutors” in checking these aspects of her assignments. It is interesting that Tui was the only on-campus student who identified the library as helpful; she reported using the library in quite different ways from the distance students.

In the second year, four distance students commented that they found the library helpful (Amanda, ds, I4; Carla, ds, I4; Marie, ds, I3; Molly, ds, I3). They all used library services in different ways. Marie reflected she could phone the library and they would assist her with finding articles online. She also found the PowerPoint that the library had provided her in the library tutorial to be helpful. Carla said she found “using the library resources online ... really good.” Molly remarked that at least “once a week” she was using “on-chat” asking the library staff a question. “On-chat” was an online synchronous tool students used for accessing a librarian. In addition, Molly reported accessing the City Public Library³⁶. She lived close to the public library and reported that she had started using it, which she found to be “really helpful.” No on-campus student commented on the library as a resource. Molly was the only student who identified the university library as helpful for assignment writing in both the first and second year of study.

The student learning centre

As indicated previously in Section 7.1.3 students perceived pre-submission assignment feedback from tutors in the student learning centre to be helpful. Students also identified the online resources provided by the centre as helpful with their writing (Tia, ds, I1; Michelle, ds, I1).

In the second year, a number of students reported using the student learning centre (Catherine, ocs, I3; Molly, ocs, I3; Mabel, ds, I3; Nancy, ds, I3) and all reported that they found this service helpful. Students did not generally specify why they found this service helpful. However, Catherine (ocs, I3) commented that without the consultation with the student learning centre academic staff member, she would have been unable to write assignment 3A. Her main difficulty was in comprehending her chosen text. What she found helpful was that the student

³⁶ Pseudonym used for the sake of anonymity

learning centre staff member explained that the intended audience was “government” (I3), not “teachers” (I3). She reflected that without this information, she could not understand the text and therefore write the assignment. She noted that this was the first time she had felt the need to access student learning centre support.

To summarise, students generally referred to the university services (the library and the student learning centre) as helpful and there was some uptake of these services.

7.1.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, both first- and second-year students identified more helpful than unhelpful practices. The most common helpful practice identified by students (in both years of study) was writing instruction given in tutorials. In the first year, students reported that the resources that were helpful in their assignment writing were the readings book, the library APA sheet, and the Theorist Summary Sheet. However, some students struggled with the length of the readings, the number of readings, and the language level used in the articles. In the second year, students commented minimally on resources when asked what was helpful or unhelpful. Students identified pre-submission feedback as helpful, and when asked about post-submission feedback, they reflected that they also found this helpful. In the first year, the most common place for students to access pre-submission feedback was from course peers, and the most common aspect they had their assignments checked for was word- and-sentence level-accuracy. In the second year, students appeared more likely than in the first year, to seek pre-submission feedback from the student learning centre academic staff. They reported they found this feedback helpful. First-year students often commented on feedback at the word- and sentence-level and did not always appear to understand feedback when it was above the micro level of academic writing. In the second year, students generally understood assignment feedback.

7.2 Helpful and unhelpful practices identified by staff

The evidence for this section was drawn from interviews, lectures, Moodle entries, and observations of the two tutorial classes (Andrea’s and Jaimee’s for both on-campus and distance papers), both over one semester. All participants referred to are academic staff members that were involved in the teaching of the on-campus and/or distance papers. There were seven staff interviewed for the first-year paper

and two for the second-year. Jaimee and Lynne were involved in the teaching of the second-year paper. Other staff were involved in the first-year paper.

During interviews, I specifically asked staff what academic writing practices they thought were helpful to students. For most interviews, I did not ask staff what practices they thought were unhelpful to students as this was not initially part of the research question. Also, I did not specifically ask staff how they incorporated the practices they identified as helpful into their practice, since then I would have been making the assumption that staff explicitly taught these practices.

Before outlining practices that staff identified as helpful and unhelpful, their attitudes towards the inclusion of academic writing instruction into the papers will be briefly explored. Both in the first and the second-year papers, staff generally indicated a positive attitude towards the inclusion of writing skills (Andrea; Gail; Jaimee; Samantha; Toni). Andrea and Toni had differing opinions on the level of academic writing instruction that was beneficial for students. Andrea reflected that her intention was to give students an “understanding [of] how to write an assignment” (I1) with a lot of “scaffolding” for both assignments. She possibly meant writing instruction and assistance when she referred to scaffolding. Toni (I2) was also positive about including writing instruction, but cautioned that there needed to be a “balance” between “holding” students’ “hands” when they “need to be carried” and staff encouraging student independence. However, one staff member, Liz, did not agree with teaching academic writing skills as she felt her role was to teach content. She had the opinion that students should have academic writing skills before entering a tertiary institution. She did not appear to think that the students had entered tertiary study (referring to the cohort from Semester A, 2013) with adequate writing skills, as she reported that she was “quite shocked by the ... level of literacy of these students.”

The themes that emerged from my reading of the evidence were course delivery modes, materials, and feedback and consultation. These will be explored below.

7.2.1 Course delivery modes

Tutorials

Staff in the first-year paper identified a number of practices that occurred in their tutorial classes that assisted students with writing assignments. The identified practices are explored below.

Four of the seven staff in the first-year paper agreed that students benefitted from the provision of instruction on structuring assignments (Andrea; Brenda; Liz; Samantha), making this practice the most-commonly, commented-on as helpful. This included different aspects of overall essay structure (Brenda; Andrea; Samantha) and paragraph structure (Brenda; Liz). For example, Samantha focused on overall essay coherence when she commented that students benefitted from the provision of instruction on how the introduction, body, and conclusion “link together.” I observed Andrea’s tutorials where she instructed students on structuring their assignments, including overall essay coherence and the content of the introduction and conclusion. Andrea explained to students the three categories of their essay: first, explain two “theorists’ key ideas” (fieldnote, March 8, 2013); second, “give a brief description of an event or experience from your own life” (fieldnote, March 8, 2013); and third, comment on the “implications for teaching” (fieldnote, March 8, 2013).

In the first-year paper, the second most common theme (assistance with assignment structure was the first) that staff identified as a helpful practice was giving assistance in tutorials with writing at the micro level, in particular referencing (Samantha) and word- and sentence-level writing (Brenda; Liz). First, Samantha reflected that it was helpful for students to have assistance in tutorials on referencing. She reflected that students needed assistance with how to write in-text citations and reference lists, what sources were appropriate to use, and how to use sources. Second, Liz said that she had provided her tutorial group with a list of “common errors” from students’ assignment 1A to assist them with writing assignment 1B. She identified some of the common errors as “simple things” such as punctuation, incomplete sentences, incorrect referencing, and not writing introductions “succinctly.” Third, Brenda stated that she assisted students with their

writing in tutorials by “just going on basic things like ... sentence structure.” She did not indicate how she did this.

Gail, Samantha, Lynne and Toni remarked that students found it helpful to have consultation opportunities in tutorials. They each reported a different process. Samantha reflected that facilitating students’ understanding of concepts by having them discuss topics in class, and then encouraging students to “get some ideas down on paper” was helpful as a beginning point for writing their assignments. Gail remarked that it was helpful for students to be able to ask their tutor questions about assignments, during tutorials, in front of other students because others might have “similar questions,” and not all students asked questions in class. Toni allowed time for individual questions at the end of tutorials. She commented this was particularly helpful for assignment 2B. She allowed 20 minutes at the end of tutorials for this. It was clear that each of these consultation opportunities identified by staff had staff input. In the second-year paper, Lynne suggested that it would be helpful for students to be able to “work in peer groups with the stronger writers.” It was not mentioned that staff members were present for this process. I will return to the topic of consultation in my discussion chapter.

In the first year, Gail was the only staff member who commented on assisting students with academic reading. She reflected that assisting students to orientate themselves to the reading book was helpful for their assignment writing. She commented that in tutorials she had students working in groups to identify the key ideas of prescribed theories. She was probably referring to the Theorist Summary Sheet students began completing in tutorials.

When staff in the second-year paper were asked what practices were helpful to students, neither staff member identified providing assistance with structure in tutorials. However, I observed Jaimee providing students considerable instruction on assignment structure for assignments 4A and 4B. Some specifics were: she gave instruction on how to set out the introduction, suggested students have one section for each of the two topics and link the learning theories to points made in paragraphs, and then modelled a paragraph for assignment 4A and 4B on the whiteboard.

In the second-year paper, when Lynne was asked about helpful practices, she referred to giving students assistance with both referencing and word- and sentence-level writing: “basic things like referencing ... punctuation, capitals ... sentences.” She reflected that a difficulty with the distance paper was that there was no “time in lectures or tutorials committed to” writing.

In the second year, neither Jaimee nor Lynne indicated specifically that assisting students with academic reading was a helpful practice. However, assignment 3A and 3B were titled “professional readings task[s]” and were based on students’ ability to summarise and critique an article. Distance students were also required to evaluate an article. In Jaimee’s tutorial, I observed students being given instruction on how to write the assignment so that they fulfilled the different language functions required. However, they were not given guidance on how to approach the task of reading their chosen article.

In sum, staff identified that it was helpful to students to be given assignment instruction during tutorial time. Staff did not generally identify that academic reading instruction occurred.

Lectures

No staff member identified lectures as helpful or unhelpful for students’ assignment writing. However, Emma reflected that she had received feedback from students (in her tutorial class) suggesting that the Moodle symbol that she put on selected slides was helpful to them (see Chapter 7.1.1). The reason she gave for providing this information to students in lectures was that she saw “people scribbling down notes and they weren’t getting them all,” so she identified “the most important information the students need[ed] to know” with a Moodle symbol. These slides would be uploaded into Moodle after the lecture. She said she received feedback that students liked knowing which slides would be made available to them. From Emma’s comment, it can be interpreted that she felt the purpose of notetaking was to copy down what was on the PowerPoint slides.

Staff (Andrea, Gail, Monica, Samantha) were asked about the practice of selected PowerPoint slides, since only some were made available to first-year students rather than the entire PowerPoint presentation. Andrea, Monica and Samantha reasoned that students should really be in the lectures, and commented that if they were

provided with a full set of PowerPoint slides after each lecture they would be less likely to attend.

Discussion forums

As course convenor, Andrea, was the facilitator of the first-year Moodle site for the distance students. She was the only staff member, both first and second year, who identified the Moodle sites as helpful for students' writing. She referred to the "teaching tips or writing tips" that she posted on Moodle. Three of the four writing tips posted were on aspects of referencing, and the other was on syntax. The posting on syntax had two parts to it. The first part was on sentence length, as students were instructed to "keep sentences to no longer than 25 words maximum" (fieldnote, Moodle, August 15, 2013). The second instructed students not to use words that contained "ing" in their sentences (discussed in Chapter 6.5.3). The postings about referencing focused on the mechanics of referencing. For example:

Writing Tip for the Week: When you reference in text, you only include the author's surnames and not their initials for example: We really love Human Development and think it is the best paper in the Initial Teacher Education programme (Smith & Jones, 2013)³⁷. No initials! (fieldnote, July 12, 2013)

No staff member mentioned the students' Facebook sites.

7.2.2 Materials

Theorist Summary Sheet

The Theorist Summary Sheet was explained in Section 7.1.2. One staff member, Toni (I1) believed that the Theorist Summary Sheet provided to both on-campus and distance students was helpful to them since it enabled them to engage with their peers during tutorials while working on this resource. She observed "scaffolding from students to their peers" in which students discovered for themselves that the "answers" were on the sheet (I1). Toni explained that she used the resource as a student activity, because she felt tutorials were about allowing them time to take part in "thinking and talking amongst the others," as this "allowed" the students "to consolidate and see the formation of their ideas" (I1). It was not mentioned by Toni

³⁷ pseudonyms

or any other staff member whether the purpose of this activity was to orient students to the readings book or to assist them with identifying the main points of theorists, as a way of scaffolding students into assignments 1A and 1B.

In the second-year paper there was no similar resource.

Library APA sheet

Brenda reflected that the APA resource provided by the institution's library was helpful and reported suggesting to students that they use this. However, Brenda may have believed that this sheet should be used by students when they were new to referencing, but then they should become self-reliant in time and be less dependent on it. She reported some students "relied on it so much" that they did not develop the ability to "actually tell what's right" in relation to referencing. Therefore, this resource was seen as helpful when students were new to referencing but she possibly expected students to internalise referencing conventions and specifics. Continued reliance on this resource was possibly considered unhelpful to students.

In the second year, when Lynne was asked about helpful practices, the first aspect she mentioned was referencing. She described students' referencing as "being amiss" so suggested strategies like having "a master sheet of ... references" and going "to the library" to get assistance with "in-text and referencing." This possibly indicated that she felt it was in keeping with her role to suggest strategies, but she did not mention assisting students with their referencing *per se*. The referencing Lynne referred to was at the mechanical level.

7.2.3 Feedback and consultation

Pre- submission

For the first-year paper, Andrea reported a helpful practice for students was her proactive approach to monitoring distance students prior to their submitting assignment 2B. She explained that she did this by monitoring the repository space in Moodle, where students were instructed to upload resources they might find useful for assignment 2B. In this space, students could both upload documents and write comments. Andrea reflected that she would sometimes post a private message to students via this space or she might "call the students and ... have a conversation." She remarked that there were two reasons why she would do this: if

students wrote something that indicated they were unsure about an aspect of their assignment writing; or if Andrea had concerns that students were not uploading a sufficient number of resources into the repository space. If students agreed to a conversation, she would telephone. Andrea felt it was important that she telephone rather than communicate in another medium (such as posting a message), as she saw having a “conversation with a real lecturer” was an “important” component of “building a learning community.”

A commonly identified helpful practice, in both the first and second year, was staff telling students to access the institution’s student learning centre (See Chapter 7.2.4).

In relation to the first-year paper three staff members commented that students having conversations with each other about their assignments can be unhelpful (Becky; Brenda; Andrea). Brenda and Andrea were both concerned that students listened to their friends and/or peers instead of considering what was “actually in the paper outline” (Andrea, I1). This might result in students adding “in things that they think should be in there” (Brenda) and making “changes” (Brenda) which were “not necessary” (Brenda). Brenda reflected that another consequence of students discussing assignments with each other was confusion. She remarked that even though staff were providing consistent information, “sometimes students interpret information given differently than intended.” She expressed concern that this could result in academic staff not “look[ing] ... that great.” However, she conceded that it “can be quite helpful [for students] getting together and talking about the essay.” Becky’s concern about students working together was that then it became difficult for staff to gauge “how much of the work is the student’s own.” Therefore, it was viewed by these three staff that student discussion among themselves had the potential to be unhelpful.

In the first-year course, when staff were asked what practices were helpful to students with their writing only Andrea and Brenda identified feedback on drafts as a helpful practice. However, Gail and Toni indicated elsewhere in interviews that students benefitted from getting tutor feedback on their assignments. Both staff reflected that they gave students feedback with the intention that they apply it to future assignments: “when I gave feedback on their drafts I focused on things to do

with general essay writing because I said this will help you in your three years of study” (Toni).

All staff teaching a tutorial class in the first-year course gave students feedback on parts of draft assignments (Andrea; Brenda; Gail; Liz; Toni). According to Gail, staff did not look at complete drafts, because they had “agreed as a team” (Gail) to not “read through the whole” (Gail) draft as then it would “get ... marked twice” (Gail). I assume she meant that if the entire draft was read and commented on and then the submitted assignment was read again, staff had engaged in reading and giving feedback on the assignment twice. Students appeared to be given feedback in different ways. The student Tui (ocs, II) talked about getting feedback on her draft assignment in her tutor’s office. Brenda said she gave feedback “the last half an hour or w0 minutes in each tutorial,” and I assumed this was for students’ individual assignments. Gail seemed to give feedback as a class activity, since she asked students “to select two or three things” from their draft that they would like to talk about in class, “specific to their individual assignment.”

Not all students had their assignments checked by staff prior to submission. Brenda estimated that approximately half of the students in one tutorial had their drafts looked at by her, and less with her other tutorial group. In order for students to take advantage of this assistance, they needed to have their draft to their tutor a week before the assignment submission date. The reason for this cut-off point was that staff “used to get quite inundated with draft assignments.” From this statement, it would appear staff workload was the reason for having a deadline. By having this practice, it was clear that staff pre-submission feedback on assignments was considered helpful.

In the second-year course, Jaimee and Lynne had differing perspectives on whether their feedback before submission was helpful to students. Jaimee thought hers was helpful. She reflected that by giving students “a few pointers,” they “pull” up their grade “a little bit.” She reflected that the students submitting draft assignments were “A [grade] students anyway ... and usually what they give you is usually about an A- ... which can then be pulled up to an A with feedback.” Lynne, the newer staff member, appeared unsure as to whether the pre-submission feedback she gave to one student was helpful. When receiving the draft assignment, she sought

“guidance” from a colleague as she had not taught the paper before. She found that the student’s final assignment was not as good as the draft he handed it. She commented that she hoped that her feedback had not been the reason for the decrease in the standard of the assignment and hoped that “she hadn’t misguided him.” She stated that the student must have been happy with the grade as he did not “send” (Lynne) her “any questions to ... challenge” her on it. Perhaps the student was unaware that his draft was worth a higher grade than his completed assignment. It is also possible that he did not feel comfortable challenging his marker about the grade.

In the second-year paper, Jaimee was asked to identify unhelpful practices for student writing. She reflected that it was unhelpful not to give students sufficient opportunities to talk about the assignments. There were two aspects to this. First, Jaimee remarked that students had reported in the past that they found it “unhelpful if you don’t give much time to talking about their assignment.” Second, she also said that “one of the things that students find unhelpful is if my tutorial group spend a lot of time talking about the assignment and somebody else hasn’t.” Therefore, it was implicitly stated that students find it helpful to have discussion time in tutorials about assignments.

In sum, staff identified that pre-submission feedback was helpful.

Post-submission

In the first year, when staff were asked to identify which academic literacy practices were helpful for students in respect of writing assignments, Andrea was the only staff member who directly referred to feedback. In questioning staff about feedback, staff responded that it was beneficial for students (Andrea; Brenda; Gail; Samantha). The reason given by each staff member was that students could look at feedback from their first assignment and apply it to their second assignment. Two staff members made additional comments on feedback. When Brenda reflected that there was an improvement in her students’ assignments from assignment 1A to assignment 1B, she mainly commented on the micro-level of writing. For example, “referencing, ... grammar and things.” “Things” is possibly referring to word- and sentence-level accuracy. She also included one macro level component: “overall

coherence.” She remarked that she was “hoping” the improvement in writing was because students “read the comments from the first” assignment.

Andrea hoped that feedback from students’ first assignment would assist them to recognise the aspects of the genre *essay*. She hoped students would be able to “use the feedback from their first assignment and scaffolding” to realise that assignment 2A was the same as assignment 1A in that they were both essays, with the “only difference” was “that the topic” was “different.” However, the first assignment was prescriptive in its assignment instructions. The assignment instructions said “Your essay should cover” (co1) and students were given four parts to include in their essay.

In the second assignment (2A) students could choose whether they discussed culture, and/or disability and/or gender and the position they took on “diversity in development” (co1) and the “implications” of this to their “role as a future teacher” (co1). Andrea reported that she commented on aspects of academic literacy in feedback such as “spelling ... structure ... referencing ... language ... sweeping statements” and word choice. Again, these aspects of academic writing are at the micro level, whereas Andrea’s statement above refers to genre, which is at the contextual level of academic writing.

Of the two staff members interviewed for the second-year paper, one (Jaimee) identified post-submission feedback as a helpful practice. She reported that there had been discussion amongst colleagues teaching the paper about whether or not they should continue giving students the “specific success criteria” sheet with comments on aspects of academic writing, as well as comments throughout their assignments. The decision was that students would continue getting both types of feedback, “because the students have really valued the feedback,” and it was believed that the specific feedback on their assignments could “feed forward ... to improve their writing.” Therefore, it appeared that staff in both the first and second-year papers gave feedback with the intention of students applying it to future assignments.

In sum, staff saw consultation and the provision of feedback on assignments as helpful.

7.2.4 University services

Library

Staff did not comment on the library.

Student learning centre

It could be assumed that staff viewed the service provided by the student learning centre as beneficial for students' writing. In the first year, Liz and Brenda reflected that it was beneficial to refer students to the student learning centre for assistance with their writing. Samantha appeared to have a proactive approach and suggested students access this service pre-submission. Liz referred students who "failed or were border line in their essay" after she had marked their assignments. Brenda saw accessing this service as problematic for the pre-service primary education students because of the physical location of the student learning centre. There was a 10-minute walk from the building that the education students generally had classes in to the student learning centre. Brenda added that students lacked time to "go over there" or "make appointments." However, she may have thought this service helpful, as she conceded that some of her students "needed to go there, but they didn't."

Gail was the only staff member who mentioned resources, reporting it helpful for students to be guided to "use resources themselves," giving the example of online resources that the student learning centre had available on aspects of academic writing, such as "clear paragraphs." In addition to encouraging students to access and use these resources, she used the student learning centre resources in tutorials to assist students with aspects of writing such as "clear paragraphs." She reflected that it was important that when students sat "down to write on their own" they knew where to access "online resources ... to get ... information" on how to write. Therefore, she thought students knowing where and how to access online resources to assist them with their writing was a helpful practice.

In the second year, staff appeared to strongly promote the student learning centre. Jaimee mentioned the student learning centre four different times in the interview. Jaimee reflected: "A lot of them do go to the student learning centre now which is really cool. I'm really pleased about that 'cos that sort of helps them." Lynne commented: "I would consistently encourage students to go and access [student]

learning support.” Both encouraged students to access assistance from the student learning centre prior to submission.

In conclusion, in respect of the first-year courses, the most common helpful practices for students’ writing identified by staff took place in tutorials: giving students assistance with assignment structure, referencing and word- and sentence-level writing, such as grammar and syntax. In the second-year paper, a significant component of one of the classes I observed consisted of students being given instruction on structure. Staff teaching in the first and the second-year paper felt that pre-submission feedback from the student learning centre and course tutors was helpful to students. Some staff felt that students talking to each other about assignments could be unhelpful to students. When staff were asked if they felt written feedback on assignments after submission was helpful, staff agreed.

For a summary of what students and staff identified as helpful and unhelpful academic literacy practices please refer to Appendix O.

7.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, both staff and students reported more helpful than unhelpful practices. Both staff and students identified assignment instruction taking place in tutorials as helpful, with staff tending to mention generic writing instruction, and students mentioned both generic and assignment-specific instruction. The divergences between what staff and students identified as helpful were fewer in the second year than the first, since in the first year, students identified a number of practices that involved peers’ and friends’ input such as feedback on draft assignments and discussions in Facebook. In the second year, not many students commented on these. In fact, in the second year, some students identified student discussion on Facebook as unhelpful for their writing. Staff tended to identify practices as helpful that involved academic staff input, rather than students’ peers, family members and friends.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING STATEMENT

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I consider the findings in relation to existing studies, theories and my understandings and experiences of academic literacy. I make particular reference to the literature from Chapters 2 and 3.

I begin this discussion with Section 8.2 which identifies and comments on what I found surprising about my findings. Section 8.3, which explains why the papers could be viewed as operating as Communities of Practice (CoP) before students entered the papers. In Section 8.4, I discuss student and staff understandings of academic writing. This is structured within a rhetorical framework. In Section 8.5, I discuss academic literacy induction practices that staff and students identified as helpful and unhelpful. In Section 8.6, I comment on power relations, while in Section 8.7 I discuss some implications and recommendations of my study. In Section 8.8, I outline some limitations of my study and Section 8.9 suggests directions for further research. In the final section, I provide a brief concluding statement.

Assertions made in this chapter are made with caution, especially those in respect of staff, since numbers interviewed were limited and most staff participants were interviewed only once.

8.1 Surprises in the findings

I comment below on five findings I found surprising.

I was pleasantly surprised to observe the extensive nature of writing instruction provided to students during tutorial time. From my observations of tutorials and lectures in two tertiary institutions the extent of writing instruction given was not standard practice. As outlined in Chapter 5.4.1, in the first year in the tutorial classes I observed, the teaching staff member gave students instruction and information about possible content. She also provided generic writing instruction such as how to write an introduction and conclusion. In the second year course, the staff member appeared to have analysed the writing skills that students would require for the

assignments and provided students with instruction and opportunities to practice the skills required.

I was also pleasantly surprised by the provision of the Panopto recording to second-year distance students. Although this meant on-campus students had only a single opportunity to absorb information, distance students could view the Panopto recording as often as they liked.

I was also surprised by the extent to which students assisted each other, especially in the first year. Students assisted each other with aspects of writing. For example, understanding assignment instructions, guidance on how to approach and write assignments, and (as outlined in Chapter 7.1.3) some students gave their peers feedback on their draft assignments. Technology aided students. As outlined in Chapter 7.1.1, students assisted each other (both on-campus and distance students) through Facebook sites.

I was surprised by the lack of academic reading instruction (there was none) even though as a tertiary academic learning advisor I was aware that students are often not given academic reading skill building and/or instruction. I had expected to observe academic reading instruction in the second year course because of the very explicit writing instruction given and because the first assignment was based on reading an academic text. Students understanding of academic writing could have been enhanced by their receiving guidance on how authors constructed their texts and established their position.

I was also surprised that a number of teaching staff in the first-year course (see Chapter 6.5.1) reflected in interviews that one learning outcome was that students would engage in critical thinking yet the assignments did not reflect this. The assignments had students engage mainly in commentary and explanation (please see Appendix K).

8.3 The papers operating as communities of practice prior to students' peripheral participation

In Chapter 2, I explained that the concept of CoP as used in this thesis refers to groups of people who share a common domain (Wenger et al., 2002). These people,

share practices, resources and knowledge in respect of a common pursuit and, while doing so, learn.

Student participants entered papers that, I argue, had been operating as CoPs for a number of semesters previously. I make this judgement because in CoP terms, there was a domain, a community, and a common repertoire of practices (Wenger et al., 2002). Pre-semester, the domain of knowledge, was the course content. The community consisted of the academic staff involved in the teaching of the papers. Practices included the processes undertaken by staff as they established the courses. For example, staff met prior to students entering the courses. They reviewed courses, including course goals, content and assignments. Therefore, students entered papers that been designed beforehand. Staff would have set up the courses with the intention of enabling students to master the content, skills and attitudes related to the course objectives, which in turn were seen as contributing to students' formation as teachers. Aspects of this content were visible in course outlines (as I have identified in Chapter 6.3.1).

Documents (such as course outlines) reflected practices and aspects of academic writing that were valued by staff. Wenger (1998) mentions the "concept of reification," which he uses "to refer to the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects" (p. 58). In other words, reification is the process of making the immaterial, concrete. Wenger gives the example that in writing down a law, "a certain understanding is given form" (p. 59). Reification can be a product or a tool. The tool can be used to perform an action, such as arguing a point. I argue that the products of reification, as well as reflecting the understandings of the producers of the object, also reflect what was valued by them. In the case of my study, the producers were the authors of the course outlines. The course outlines would have been, to some extent, reflective of the understandings, practices and/or conventions of academia, the discipline area, staff in the faculty and academic staff involved in the courses.

As reported in Chapter 6, course outlines (which included assignment instructions and marking criteria) for both the first- and second-year courses indicated that there would be a considerable focus on certain language functions (e.g., explanation, commentary, summary and critique), course content, referencing and reading.

Course outlines indicated that there would be less focus on audience and some language functions (e.g., written argumentation), coherence, cohesion and lexis. As I will discuss, these choices on focus had an impact on the academic writing induction experiences of students entering these courses.

Wenger (1998) stated that when an object is “given form” (p. 59), it “becomes a focus for the negotiation of meaning” (p. 59), since people employ it to achieve a function or purpose. When the staff were setting up the courses, prior to the arrival of students, these objects included course outlines, lecture content in the form of PowerPoint presentations and prescribed readings. My analysis of these objects has shown that they provided evidence of staff purposes and proposed tasks for achieving staff purposes (for example, providing readings to students gave them possible, and at times expected, content for assignments).

At the same time, not all purposes, and the values underpinning them were necessarily explicit. A complication for these students (and one that is fairly typical for any students entering a course of study) was that in order for them to be successful, they would need to align themselves with “the dominant values, beliefs and structures” (Ivanic, 1998, p. 66) underpinning these objects and those of the academic staff teaching the papers (especially those who were the markers of assignments). Whether or not students and staff had the *same* understandings of what was expected and desirable was of interest to me, of course, and will be discussed in the next section.

My discussion of staff and student understandings of academic writing will draw on three lenses, which were outlined in my conceptual framework (Chapter 2). Firstly, the CoP lens, which includes the concept of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), provides a useful heuristic, since it is based on “a social model of learning as participation in practice” (Lea, 2004, p. 183). Secondly, the lens of academic literacies enabled me to consider academic literacy at the level of study skills, academic socialisation, and academic literacies. This model highlights the complexities of academic literacy and draws attention to issues of power and epistemology. Thirdly, a rhetorical approach to writing lens provides a structure and aspects for this section. The aspects of particular interest to this discussion are

audience, the functions of language (especially critique and argumentation), voice, coherence, referencing, punctuation, syntax and spelling.

8.4 Staff and student understandings of academic writing: What does applying a rhetorical framework highlight?

As mentioned in Chapter 1.1, I use the term *understandings* throughout this thesis to include knowledge, perceptions and mastery. Staff understandings of academic writing were inferred in part by my examining particular documents they produced (course outlines and assignment instructions), assignment feedback given to students, interview responses, and by examining how students were instructed in the conventions of academic writing through such means as tutorials. Student understandings of academic writing were inferred in part by my examining interview responses, through observations of students in tutorials and lectures, through written assignments and, for distance students, their online postings (for their courses and through the Facebook site I set up). Findings related to student and staff understandings were reported on in Chapter 6.

As I applied a rhetorical framework to staff and student understandings of academic writing, certain patterns became visible. First, participants' (both staff and students) understandings of academic writing were not always consistent. Second, certain patterns of prevalence and non-prevalence emerged in particular aspects of academic writing (as categorised in the rhetorical model). Third, students' understandings of academic writing more closely reflected those of staff in the second year than in the first.

From a rhetorical perspective, texts are produced in order to “achieve a goal with a reader or audience” (Locke, 2015, p. 61). The function or purpose of the text drives the form of the text or, as Locke (2015) puts it, “form follows function” (p. 62). The conventions of a genre influence textual features, such as layout, structure, punctuation, and syntax. Student participants, especially in the first year, did not generally demonstrate an understanding of the influence that textual goals and social/cultural contexts had on texts, since they were more focused on micro-features. It also appeared that staff had a greater focus on micro-features and less on social/contextual features.

In the following subsections, a rhetorical framework of academic writing is employed to frame the discussion of differences and similarities in staff and student understandings of academic writing. In doing so, patterns of prevalence (and non-prevalence) in respect of certain textual aspects are highlighted. In general, I begin each section with staff, since what students produced was guided by written assignment instructions, staff instruction and/or skill building, and staff expectations. In each section, I will draw attention to the implications of the patterns of similarity and difference, presence and absence that emerge.

8.4.1 Social/contextual category

Audience

It was difficult to gauge staff understandings of audience, since, from my observations, staff focused very minimally on it. In interviews, no staff member mentioned audience or the impact of explicitly providing students with an audience (or not) for their writing.

In the first year, audience was attended to in two assignments (out of four) but in quite different ways. For assignment 1A (first assignment for on-campus students), four out of five on-campus students had the written feedback comment: “Remember this assignment is a learning curve and so too is writing for an academic audience.” Neither this comment nor any other about audience was on the distance students’ first assignments I had access to. I interpreted the comment that their assignment was a “*learning curve*” [italics added for emphasis] as suggesting that students were yet to master writing an assignment which complied with writing for an academic audience and with expected academic conventions. This comment was perhaps meant to encourage students and remind them that they were new to academia and writing in a manner than complied with academic conventions.

As the terminology “academic audience” was not part of the assignment instructions or explained in tutorials, there appeared to be an assumption that students would know they were writing for an academic audience and that they would know what writing for one entailed. It would have helped had I asked students and the staff member what they understood the feedback comment to mean, in order to check possible divergences in understandings of it. It would also have been interesting to find out if staff shared a bank of feedback comments for

student essays, as is the practice in some papers, and if so, if this comment was included and what staff understood this comment to mean.

For assignment 2B (assignment for first-year distance students), in assignment instructions and in tutorials, it was stated that the intended audience was “teachers” (co2). In interviews, staff did not reflect on whether providing students with an explicit audience would influence their writing. The limited number of studies which have explored experienced writers’ awareness of audience while writing (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1980; Kirsch, 1991) have found that generally, experienced writers have an awareness of audience while composing. I would have considered the academic staff teaching on these papers to be experienced writers, so one would assume they would generally write with an audience in mind. What I found surprising was that they did not demonstrate an awareness of how providing students with an audience (or not) would impact on their writing process.

As mentioned earlier, there are few studies which have investigated the audience awareness of inexperienced writers’ (who have English as a first language) and whether audience awareness impacts on writing. My study’s findings differed somewhat from one well-known study by Flower and Hayes (1980), which had college students (whom they described as “novice” writers [p. 23]) and teachers of writing and rhetoric (considered “expert” [p. 23] writers) as participants. They found that experienced writers had a much greater awareness of audience while writing and in the editing stage. Inexperienced writers tended to focus on content rather than writing to the audience. In contrast, the experienced writers, both in the writing and editing stages, considered the writing purpose and goals much more often and developed their image of the reader as they wrote. My study would have had more depth had I followed up students’ responses about audience with probing questions such as how the audience had influenced their choice of topic, the content, and the writing style. In addition, it would have been beneficial to have observed the impact on student writing if *all* assignments had explicitly prescribed an intended audience (and if students had been given instruction on *how* to tailor their writing to different audiences).

In the second year, audience was also minimally addressed. Audience can be either *specific* (as in the audience was teachers) or *generic* (the reader). A specific

audience was not explicitly mentioned in lectures, tutorials, assignment instructions, marking criteria, or written feedback. However, a specific audience was indicated in assignments 3A and 3B, when students were told they were applying for a job at a “District Primary School³⁸” (course outlines 3 & 4). Therefore, one would expect the letter of application would be read by the Board of Trustees and the School Principal. Raising students’ awareness of the implied, specific audience was not addressed in the tutorial classes I observed.

However, raising students’ awareness of a *generic audience* was addressed in the tutorial classes I observed (for assignments 3A, 3B, 4A and 4B), when students were told numerous times to consider that “their writing needed to make sense to the *reader*” [italics added for emphasis]. “The reader” was also mentioned in assignment feedback. The intention of the staff member was perhaps to encourage students to consider the readability of their assignments in areas such as punctuation, spelling and syntax. According to Beaufort (1999), focusing on the generic reader is a typical behaviour of less experienced writers. She gives a fairly standard comparison between novice and more experienced writers in terms of rhetorical knowledge and how writers address audience stating that the “novice writer ... focuses on [the] generic audience and matters of correctness” (p. 75) whereas the “expert writer ... focuses on [the] specific audience needs and [the] social context” (p. 75). However, in the case of my research, it was the academic staff member (an expert writer, one assumes) who was instructing students to consider a *generic* audience (i.e., the reader). Yet for assignments 4A and 4B implying (but not stating), that students write for the *specific* audience (i.e., the principal and Board of Trustees). As mentioned earlier, the specific audience, or how to write to this audience, was not part of the tutorial or assignment instruction. If we take Beaufort’s (1999) view on board, student writers need to be provided with explicit instruction in addressing the needs of both a generic and specific readership.

In interviews, student participants focused more on audience than staff did. As mentioned earlier, distance students were told that the audience for assignment 2B

³⁸ Name changed to protect the anonymity of the institution where the study was conducted.

was teachers. In interviews, 6 students commented that receiving the information that the audience was teachers had influenced their writing, for example, in terms of choice of topic (2 students), content (3 students), and writing style (1 student). Therefore, it would appear that these students, who would be considered inexperienced writers at tertiary level by many, considered their audience when planning and/or writing their assignment.

As mentioned earlier, second-year students were told to consider the reader of their assignments. No student commented on this advice in interviews, nor when describing aspects of the writing process they had undergone, nor when identifying what they found helpful and unhelpful in respect of writing their assignments. Therefore, I find myself questioning if instructing students to consider “the reader” really did encourage them to focus on the readability of their assignments or influenced them in any decisions made in the planning or writing of their assignments. I can surmise that because students did not reflect on this with me, perhaps it had little influence on them or was not an instruction that stood out for them at the time of the interviews. In addition, even though it could be surmised that students were writing their employment application to the board of trustees and/or principal, no student talked about this audience or reflected that they considered this while writing. In my own view, for an audience to impact on students planning and/or writing their assignment the audience needs to be stated explicitly and students instructed on how to tailor their writing to this audience.

Having said that, many students (both on-campus and distance) gave *themselves* an audience, who, unsurprisingly, was the marker of the assignment. Students in Wong’s (2004) study also identified the course lecturer as their audience. This study investigated how four EAL postgraduate teacher education students mentally represented audience while writing. Two reported writing for the lecturer (the marker of the assignment). The author stated that students perceiving the “course lecturer as the audience of their writing” (p. 36) is typical of students. One lecturer-oriented student saw the lecturer as more knowledgeable than herself, and the other was hoping for feedback which could be useful for the next assignment. Students in my study (both first and second year) demonstrated an awareness of power relations, since they were generally focused on producing what they perceived the marker of their assignment wanted.

Student participants in both years and both cohorts, even when they were given an audience (both real [the teacher] and generic [the reader]), at times *still* identified the lecturer as the audience – thus wrestling with addressing two quite different audiences. Understandably, they were preoccupied with producing what they perceived the lecturer wanted in respect of content, structure, and writing style. In CoP terms (Lave & Wenger, 1991), students were peripheral participants learning to master certain practices in order to be successful. Having said that, it is important to note that when an audience *was* identified for them, students appeared to exercise more agency. Focusing on a specific audience appeared to assist them with making writing decisions.

In my experience as a learning advisor, when students consider the lecturer as the audience, they tend to try to supplement the written instructions and marking criteria by finding out more tutor-specific assignment requirements. Students are often content-focused, since they attempt to present the information they think the lecturer prefers. Penuelas (2008) states that it is typical of students to write for the purpose of displaying knowledge to their teacher. Schommer (1994) states that tertiary students, before they begin to comprehend the complex nature of knowledge, perceive knowledge as absolute and transferred from “authority” (p. 295). Student participants were perhaps at the level of understanding information as transfer of knowledge, or presenting information that they perceived their lecturer preferred. I have observed that the less specific the assignment instructions and criteria, the more focused students are on finding out exactly what the lecturer expects, indicating that at this point students perceived the lecturer or the staff member marking their assignment as having all the power and knowledge.

To summarise, what the above demonstrates is that students appeared to be more preoccupied with audience than staff were. When students were given a real audience (e.g., teachers) rather than an abstract one (such as the reader), it appeared to have a positive impact on their writing processes and decision-making. Based on my findings, I observed little change in students’ understandings of or focus on audience between the first and second year. In addition, it was difficult to compare and contrast distance and on-campus student understandings of audience, as audience was treated somewhat differently in their respective assignment instructions. However, both cohorts, and in both years, were focused on producing

what they perceived the lecturer (the marker of the assignment) wanted. As noted earlier, if students are given an authentic audience (e.g., teachers), they may experience more control over writing decisions. I contend that it would be beneficial to raise staff awareness of the importance of attending to audience in assignment instructions and tutorials.

Locke (2015) observes that there are a number of terms that are useful in helping students develop strategies for thinking about their writing goals in relation to a target audience: “voice,” “stance,” “point of view” and “position” (p. 184). This observation underlines the connection between audience, voice and argumentation. The language functions *critique* and *argumentation* are discussed in the next section, which is then followed by a discussion of voice.

Language function: Critique

Both first- and second-year courses were designed to engage students in critical thinking. The language function *critique* was stated (and implied) a number of times in the course outlines, and staff reflected in interviews that a course learning outcome was to develop students’ critical thinking abilities (as reported in Chapter 6.5.1). This finding is typical of tertiary level courses and is consistent with literature that identifies critical thinking as a function of tertiary education (e.g., Daniel, 2001; Elder, 2005; Mulnix, 2012).

Three staff members in the first-year course, when discussing assignments 1B and/or 2A and/or 2B, suggested that these assignments gave students opportunities to engage in critical thinking. Yet the language functions explicitly identified in assignment instructions (e.g., explanation, description and commentary) were generally at the level of memory and comprehension, which are at the two lowest levels of Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives (Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). On the other hand, learning to think critically involves analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Paul, 1992) which are the three highest levels of Bloom’s taxonomy. As noted in Chapter 6.5.1, a staff member reflected that one difference between the first- and second-year assignments was that in the first year, students were asked to describe, and in the second, to “think, analyse and critique” (interview). What is emerging here, then, is a dissonance between (1) what staff

view as a course learning outcome and the language functions explicitly identified in assignments, and (2) the actual place of critical thinking in first-year assignments.

In the second year, neither of the staff interviewed explicitly stated that the course was designed to engage students in critical thinking. As mentioned in Chapter 6.3.1, assignments 3A and 3B were both summaries, evaluations and critiques of a journal article. For the critique, students were asked to identify strengths and limitations of the article. For the evaluation, students were asked to link the reading to teaching practice and other texts. Staff most likely placed more importance on the critique than the summary and evaluation parts of the assignments. I make this judgement because both staff interviewed (involved in the teaching of the second-year paper) reflected that the main point of the first assignment was to have students engage in a critique of a written text. In the tutorials I observed, students were told that when critiquing a text, they needed to comment on strengths and limitations of it. They were given examples of points of critique which were mainly concerned with considering content and sources (e.g., age of references). Identifying and evaluating an author's argument was not mentioned to students. Mulnix (2012) states that "in order to think critically, a student must be able to grasp why certain forms of inference are acceptable and others are not" (p. 474). In other words, students must be able to identify "both sound argument forms and fallacies" (p. 473). This was one of a number of possible teaching opportunities where students could have been introduced to argumentation (but were not). Argumentation is discussed later in this section.

Students were provided with opportunities to engage in critical thinking in both tutorials and lectures. For example, in lectures, students were at times shown that there was more than one perspective or approach to a theory or concept. In tutorials, staff facilitated students' discussions about concepts and at times encouraged them to apply these to their teaching practice. However, Mulnix (2012) argues that providing students with opportunities for engaging in critical thinking is not enough. She states that students need to be taught (or "coached" in [p. 474]) critical thinking skills in a "straight-forward way" (p. 474) with teachers "modelling the [critical thinking] skill" (p. 474), having students practice, and then staff providing feedback. I did not generally observe staff implementing a systematic teaching approach to critical thinking, especially in the first year. However, I did observe

students in tutorials (in the second-year course) being taught to verbally summarise, evaluate and critique a text (for assignments 3A and 3B) using the three-step method as outlined by Mulnix (2012). This was used as a means of scaffolding students into the skills required for their assignment.

Student participants practised critiquing a text in one tutorial in preparation for the critique aspect of their written assignment. They then wrote a critique of a text and were given feedback on it. Mulnix (2012) also states that students need to practice more than once the skills involved in critical thinking. Willingham (2007) argues that students who can think critically in one situation may not be able to transfer this ability to another (p. 11). I felt that if in the future students were asked to critique a text, they would be able to identify some strengths and limitations of a text. Therefore, students probably could transfer this learning, because the process they engaged in did resemble the one outlined by Mulnix, first in the tutorial class, and then with their written assignment.

Another aspect of critical thinking is critically engaging with sources. Andrews (2010) argues that students can enhance the criticality of their writing “by weighing up of one source against another” and “by the adoption of a sceptical ‘vow of suspicion’ ... toward existing published knowledge” (p. 45). Generally, staff did not comment in interviews on this aspect of writing or demonstrate it to students. However, in asking students to engage in a critique of a text (assignments 3A and 3B), staff were perhaps leading students towards reading texts with scepticism.

In interviews, staff talked about students employing sources to support their writing. Certainly, Buckingham and Nevile (1997) (as introduced in Chapter 3) found that experienced writers were able to use citations to support and justify their claims, (compared to inexperienced writers, who presented sources as authoritative and factual). Yet, in the first year, using sources critically to build an argument or stance was not demonstrated or explained to students. The focus was on the more mechanical aspects in the first-year tutorial classes I observed. How to do in-text citations was demonstrated to on-campus students. Students were shown how to provide source information at the beginning and ends of sentences. Yet, some staff reflected in interviews that a well-written assignment was one in which students had employed sources to develop their topic and demonstrate their understanding.

Maybe staff meant that students were using sources to develop and support their ideas. What is apparent is that staff had a number of referencing expectations; however, these may not have been made clear to students.

In the second year, students were shown in a tutorial how to develop a paragraph (for assignments 4A and 4B), which included instruction on how to integrate information from sources to support points made. This demonstration appeared to be along the lines of Vardi's (2012a) research, where students received instruction and engaged in activities designed to develop their critical writing ability "through the skilful selection, use and acknowledgement of sources" (p. 921). Based on the assignments I had access to, most student participants followed the template demonstrated on the whiteboard, chose appropriate sources, and wrote a coherent, logically developed paragraph (probably because they followed the template). In my view, one outcome of this explicit instruction was that students' writing was of a higher standard than it would have possibly been otherwise.

There were certain differences in student instruction between Vardi's study and mine. First, in Vardi's study, students were taught to evaluate and analyse an author's argument. In my study, I was not aware of students receiving this instruction. Second, in Vardi's study, students received instruction on considering the types of evidence cited by authors used to convince the reader of the author's argument. In my study, student participants received instruction on types of sources that would be considered appropriate. Generally, however, there was not a focus on demonstrating and/or explaining to students how sources can be used to develop an author's argument. Third, in Vardi's study, students received instruction through a range of activities throughout the semester designed to develop their writing ability. In my study, student participants received writing instruction in a few tutorials. This was heavily contextualised by assignment expectations and content. Because students in Vardi's study were given skill development throughout the semester, the likelihood of their developing and retaining these skills would have been enhanced.

There were substantial differences between staff and student understandings of *critique*. Even though staff intended the courses to engage students in critical thinking, students did not articulate an understanding of this. In fact, in respect of

the first-year courses, only one first-year student commented on critique or critical thinking in interviews. This could have been because the focus of interviews with student participants was on the written assignments, rather than the courses. I expected that student participants would have been more focused on *critique*, since it was explicitly stated in assignment instructions 2A (“critically discuss”) for on-campus students and in assignment 1B (“a critical reflection”) for distance students. In my experience as a tertiary academic learning advisor, when the language function *critique* appears in assignment instructions and/or marking criteria, students often ask if they have fulfilled the “critical” aspect of assignments. They often seem unsure about their ability to fulfil this language function.

Student participants in their second year of study also did not mention their course was designed to engage them in critical thinking. However, when I asked about their first assignment, they *did* speak about the critique aspect of it. Generally, students reflected that critique consisted of two strengths and one limitation of a text. In assignments, they often commented on textual content and choice of references used by authors. This was not surprising, since what students understood and produced aligned with the tutorial instruction they had received. For students’ second assignment they generally did not comment in interviews on whether or not they felt they had critiqued their teaching approach. This is perhaps another indication of students’ minimal focus on *critique*.

In summary, there was a difference in the understanding of, or focus on, *critique* between staff and students. Being critical in writing and using sources in a critical manner were described by staff as qualities of a good writer, but this was not made explicit to students.

Language function: Argumentation

In each of the courses, students were expected to present an argument in at least one assignment. Information given in lectures and tutorials generally indicated to students which position they should take. In general, staff used the term *position* in preference to *argument* when addressing students. They were given limited guidance on how to develop their position, since generally (apart from the tutorial referred to in the above paragraphs) it was not a focus of instruction, nor was it commented on in assignment feedback. Yet, a number of staff (but not all) stated

in interviews that a well-written assignment was one that argued effectively and employed appropriate sources to develop their argument. One way of having students understand how to develop a position might have been to explain (and demonstrate) that they were in fact creating an argument, which involved (as outlined in Chapter 2.5.1) “the analysis and evaluation of content knowledge” (Wingate, 2012, p. 146), “the writer’s development of a position” (p. 146), and “the presentation of that position in a coherent manner” (p. 146).

Andrews (2010) argues that “criticality is highly prized and rewarded” (p. 45). He states that the development of a point of view can enhance criticality. It would have been beneficial to have given students explicit instruction on how to develop their point of view and argument in each assignment. This would have provided students with an opportunity to develop criticality in their writing. Vyncke (2012), who explores critical thinking in academic writing with international students in mind, states that students have difficulties being critical in their writing because of limited subject knowledge, difficulties expressing authorial voice and challenges with presenting an argument. I argue that her findings can also be applied to domestic students. It is clear that there are connections between critical thinking, voice, and argumentation. Both argumentation and voice will be discussed further in this section.

Overall, I found that argumentation was not generally at the centre of academic writing instruction or skill development. Having very limited (or no) pedagogical focus on written argumentation appears to be typical of tertiary institutions. Mitchell (1994, as cited in Mitchell & Riddell, 2000), researched the teaching and learning of argument in 6th Forms and higher education and stated:

[very little] attention [was] given explicitly to the role, purpose and method of argument.... Most often the importance of argument was tacit: it might be modelled by the teacher in speech, or signalled by an essay question, or praised as a feature of a “good essay.” [It was rarely] focused upon as a strategy at the centre of the learning experience; either in reading, writing or speaking. [It was basically] rendered invisible. (p. 196)

Davies (2008) and Wingate (2012) provide a plausible reason for staff not explicitly teaching students about argumentation. They argue that staff do not generally have the

skills or understanding of argumentation to adequately teach argument-making to students. It was unclear from my study whether staff were aware that they had not explicitly taught argument-making skills to students, nor how they might have done so.

Andrews (2010) states that argument is important in higher education. It is important that both “teachers and students ... know how the processes [of argument] operate” (p. 1) if they are “to be successful in that subject or discipline” (p. 1). Participants in my study were involved in a pre-service, primary education programme. In the field of education, the disciplinary context is complex. As Andrews (2010) argues, “education is not a discipline, such as history or biology” (p. 179) but a “field of enquiry” underpinned, or informed, by disciplines such as “sociology, psychology, philosophy, [and] economics” (p. 179). This means that education embraces a range of disciplines which, as he says, have their own modes of argumentation. Andrews also states that to argue effectively, both a “generic knowledge about argument” (p. 9) and the “discipline-specific contexts for argument” (p. 9) are required.

Drawing on such theorising, it is clear that in order for staff to teach students how to produce a written argument, they need an understanding of: (1), theories of argument; and (2), an explicit awareness of how to produce a written argument within their field (and in general). I would contend that staff also need the meta-language to verbalise argumentation processes and a range of strategies for teaching students about written argument. I further argue that in order to reduce student confusion about argumentation (and related skills), it would be beneficial for staff to have a consistent approach to the teaching of written argument, beginning with some kind of shared understanding of what constitutes argumentation (e.g., an agreed-upon definition).

Students’ understandings of argumentation are discussed next. I begin with first-year students.

Even though a number of staff considered a well-written assignment was one that contained an argument, most first-year students, in interviews, did not talk about argumentation in respect of assignment writing. In their first interview, however, two students, talked about argument in respect of another university paper they had been enrolled in which was focused on teaching students to write assignments in

tertiary contexts. Both students understood that argument was about developing a position. One student stated that an argument had two sides, for and against. The student's definition of argument was the same as a number of students in Wingate's (2012) study, who also defined argument as having two sides of a topic. She refers to this as a "narrow" (p. 149) definition, leading to an inappropriate structure for some essays. If student participants in my study had used this structure for any of their assignments, it would have been inappropriate. Even though these two students had learnt about argument in a tertiary-level writing paper, they (or any other student participants) did not indicate that for their first assignment they were to argue that learning theories helped them to make sense of events. Students might have been more aware of the need for them to present a position, had the word *argue* been used instead of the task verb *explain*.

For assignment 1B, on-campus students were told in a tutorial to take a position and justify it. From my examination of student assignments, they generally did this. I make this statement with caution, however, since I had access to only four student essays. Yet, no student commented on position, stance, or argument during interviews, so perhaps students did not have the explicit knowledge or understanding of argumentation to reflect on it in interviews. The position students adopted was the one indicated to them by the staff member in a tutorial. This is possibly because students recognised the balance of power lay with staff. Power relationships will be discussed in Chapter 8.5.

Second-year students did not generally use the terms *argument*, *position*, and *stance* in interviews. However, when prompted, they could explain the position they had taken for assignment 4A or 4B, which was the one presented to them in tutorials and indicated in assignment instructions. In general, from an examination of the student assignments, students were able to develop a position in a clear, coherent manner. This was most likely because of the very explicit demonstration they received in tutorials about how to develop a paragraph (for distance students, this was provided via a Panopto recording of the on-campus tutorial instruction). Again, as in the first year, no student challenged the position indicated to them or commented that they wanted to take a different one.

In general, then, it would appear that students (both on-campus and distance) had a limited understanding of argumentation. My findings align somewhat with those by Wingate (2012) who found students had a limited understanding of argument. Student participants in my study had very minimal awareness and limited understanding of argument. Based on my experience as a tertiary learning advisor, students having a limited awareness and understanding of argument is typical.

To summarise, both staff and students paid very little attention to argument. Student participants, when producing a written argument, may not have been aware that they produced one, perhaps tacitly rather than consciously. In addition, they generally produced the position indicated to them. If staff view a well-written assignment as one that contains an argument, and if this point is not made explicit to students and the associated skills taught (e.g., the importance of developing a position, evaluating and analysing sources), then it is difficult for students to develop this aspect of their writing. Lea and Street (1998) argued that “one explanation for problems in student writing might be the gaps between academic staff expectations and student interpretations of what is involved in student writing” (p. 159). Teaching students what a written argument is, and when and how to produce one, could remove one such gap.

Genre

Before conducting my study, I had thought my findings would align somewhat with Lea and Street (1998) and student participants would comment on the range of genres they were expected to engage in, and their frustrations arising from the individual preferences of staff members in respect of assignment expectations. However, this was not generally the case. Only one student, in her second-year of study, commented on the range of genres expected, and her difficulties understanding what was expected.

Student and staff uncertainty about genre emerged when I asked students whether the “Theory into Practice Booklet” (second assignment for first-year distance students) was more like an essay or booklet. I asked two staff what genre it was. I asked these questions since I was trying to align “booklet” with a genre I was familiar with, and by doing so work out the expected textual features, for example, whether or not an argument was expected. Both staff teaching the distance students

generally thought the booklet should contain an argument; however, this was not made clear to students. Students would have found it helpful if they had been told this assignment required them to produce an argument. It also would have been helpful had they received skill building in this area. In my experience it is fairly typical for students to not be given adequate instruction and skill-building in respect of students producing assignments in genres they may not have experienced before. In fact, Trimmingham-Jack et al. (2004) report that their student participants completed assessments in a wide range of genres, yet it appeared that staff did not give students instruction and/or skill building on the skills required for each genre.

In the second year, students *were* scaffolded explicitly in the skills required for each assignment. For students' first assignment they were asked to summarize, evaluate and critique a prescribed text. I considered that because of the explicit instruction and skill building given (which occurred more than once) on how to summarise, evaluate, and critique a text, students would probably be able to summarise, evaluate and critique a text in the future, if asked to.

Second-year students for their second assignment had to write an essay in which they discussed their teaching philosophy. It was indicated to students which position to adopt. Students were shown how to write a paragraph which developed the position. I am unsure if they could transfer the learning from the assignment to a future assignment since instruction occurred once and was heavily contextualised by the content of the assignment. Mulnix (2012), argues that students need to practice skills more than once. I agree with this statement.

Clark and Hernandez (2012) make the distinction between “genre awareness” and teaching explicit genres. They define the teaching of explicit genres as taking a pedagogically formulaic approach without taking into account aspects of writing such as rhetorical purpose. Students in my study, were given instruction which in some ways resembled the teaching of explicit genres. They were given some writing instruction which was very specific and content-focused for the assignments they were required to write. They were also given (in both years) generic writing instruction, for example, students were provided with a formulaic approach for writing introductions and conclusions.

Clark and Hernandez (2012) define genre awareness as “students learning how to write in a particular genre” (p. 67) while “also gaining insight into how a given genre fulfils a rhetorical purpose and how the various components of a text, the writer, the intended reader, and the text itself, is informed by purpose” (p. 67). They argue that by raising students’ awareness of a text’s “rhetorical and social purpose” (p. 65) they may have the “tools they need[ed] to address new writing situations” (p. 65). In other words, if students develop their understanding of genre awareness they are more likely to have the ability to attempt genres not encountered before. It would have been beneficial for students in my study to have had their general awareness developed.

Voice

As outlined in Chapter 2.5.2, the view of voice taken in this thesis derives from Elbow (1982), who describes it as the “sound” (p. 288) of the author on the page. I have also adopted the view that there is a strong connection between voice, audience, coherence and written argumentation, since one way a writer’s voice can be heard is through the development of his/her argument or stance. In doing so, he/she would generally be addressing an audience.

It was difficult to ascertain staff understandings of voice, especially the staff teaching the first-year courses. In the first-year courses, staff did not mention voice in tutorials, lectures, assignment instructions and criteria, or Moodle. In addition, it was not something that staff talked about in interviews in respect of writing.

In the second-year courses, there was a greater focus on voice. Voice was a criterion in the marking guide for the second assignment. In addition, in tutorial classes I observed, on-campus students were directed a number of times to paraphrase instead of using direct quotations to enable their “ideas to be heard” (tutorial, September 23, 2014). The instruction they received several times was to paraphrase to enable *their* ideas to be heard, whereas in fact, paraphrasing is the rewording of the *author’s* idea. The instruction about paraphrasing to enable their ideas to be heard could result in students confusion as to whether or not they should change the author’s meaning and, if so, the extent of the change.

Studies which explore domestic student and/or staff understandings of voice appear limited in number (e.g., Read, Francis & Robson, 2010; Viète & Le Ha, 2007). In

fact, DiPardo et al. (2011), who reported on a pedagogical intervention to assist undergraduate psychology students to use their voice in their dissertations (later renamed “stance”), commented that the notion of voice is “variously defined, much debated, and decidedly under-researched” (p. 172).

As mentioned in Chapter 3.3.1, I found sparse research exploring the teaching of voice to domestic tertiary students in respect to writing. I found that studies on voice tended to be conducted with EAL students. In fact, Stapleton (2002) reflected that there had been much research into “the issue of voice, authorial identity, or authorial presence in L2 writing” (p. 177) and found that much of the research concluded that voice should be an integral part of L2 writing pedagogy. I contend this also applies to domestic students. Stapleton argues that “voice is a critical aspect of writing” (p. 187), yet warns that it would be a mistake to give students the perception that the development of their voice in writing is more important than “the quality of the content, the level of abstraction, the sophistication of the argumentation” (p. 176). In other words, other aspects of writing, should not be overlooked.

First-year student participants had a greater focus on and/or awareness of voice than staff teaching first-year papers. Students tended to talk about whether or not they could be personal in their writing, and had differing opinions and some uncertainty as to whether they were to make their writing personal or impersonal. Students were possibly talking about what Ivanic (1998) refers to as *self as author* (refer to Chapter 2). It is also possible that what students meant was similar to *personal knowledge* as referred to by Lea and Street (1991), who comment on a student who felt he could not use his personal knowledge of the trade union in his essay on present-day poverty. When I look back at student interviews, I have guessed as to what they possibly meant by “personal.” It would have been helpful had I asked a follow-up question to unpack what students meant by *personal*. In general, the students who spoke about being personal in their writing thought academic writing involved writing in more personal manner than they had in the past.

In my study, one first-year distance student appeared to consider displaying her writer’s voice as risky behaviour. She reflected that unless the lecturer made it clear how personal they could be in their writing, she tended to keep it neutral, which possibly meant citing sources for every statement made, instead of giving her

opinion or referring to herself in the writing. I have myself experienced students' uncertainty about the extent they can be visible in their writing. A common practice seems to be minimalising their voice when unsure, often by paraphrasing extensively.

This phenomenon of students minimalising their voice aligns with what Andrews (2010) reports about a 16-year-old student in a high school who "retreated to the impersonal" (p. 167) writing style. The student did so because of "perceived inconsistency between tutors" (p. 167). It is possible that underpinning the student participant's (from my study) decision to keep her voice as neutral as possible unless instructed otherwise by the tutor, was that she may have experienced inconsistencies between tutors in her first semester of study or perhaps the student participant in my study was demonstrating an awareness of risk-taking in respect of showing her voice. Viete and Le Ha (2007) report that Le Ha (an EAL doctoral student) used the term "risk taking" in respect of making both her English voice and Vietnamese voice visible in her thesis. Read et al. (2010), who investigated undergraduate student voice in their writing, relate the presentation of student voice and the struggles that students identify to the "unequal power relationship between student and tutor" (p. 388). Based on findings from these researchers and the comment by the student in my study, that some students perceive having their voice visible as risky behaviour, because students perceive the balance of power lies with staff.

The only male student participant in my study displayed the most confidence of all student participants in respect of voice. He commented that he felt that lecturers would want students to display their own voice, rather than what they thought the lecturer would want to hear. Read et al. (2010) stated: "The conception that male students acted in a bolder and more confident manner than female students [in writing]" (p. 384) was "repeatedly stated [by students] in the interviews" (p. 394). Students perceived bolder behaviour was "expressing their opinions" (p. 394). Since my study used convenience sampling, the paucity of male participants was an unfortunate result, so I was unable to explore connections between voice and gender as outlined by Read et al.'s study.

A larger number of second-year students (than first-year) students referred to voice in interviews. In addition, more distance students than on-campus students talked about voice in interviews (7/9 as compared to 1/4). Generally, students defined voice as paraphrasing source texts (as compared to using direct quotations). This was the meaning given to them by the staff member teaching the tutorial I observed. Even though students demonstrated an understanding of the importance of their writer's voice being visible in their writing, some reflected that they found this difficult. Possibly students were struggling with having their ideas heard over and above the authors (whom they possibly viewed as authority figures or experts) they referenced in their texts. Certainly, students would have found it helpful to have been given instruction and/or skill development in paraphrasing and taught the relationship between paraphrase and voice.

Students would also have benefitted from explicit instruction and/or information on the presentation of voice in respect to assignments, including the different types of voice (as outlined by Ivanic, 1998, pp. 23–24, [see Chapter 2.5.2]). If students had been instructed in a rhetorical approach to literacy, they would have been taught to consider the purpose of a text, the audience, the argument, and as mentioned, introduced to different types of voice. If this had occurred, they may have found writing, and in particular portraying their writer's voice, less confusing and daunting.

Andrews (2010) states that in both high schools and higher education the impersonal voice tends to be favoured, except by students who write extremely well. He states that when students receive a high grade for an assignment, their personal voice is generally present “as long as it is supported or forms part of a work that is heavily referenced and evidenced” (p. 167). Similarly, student participants in my study were taught that displaying their writer's voice meant employing sources (paraphrasing them) in their writing. Viete and Le Ha (2007), recommend that pedagogies “take account of social and institutional relationships and look critically at how language use and social meanings are related. They see the process as one of negotiating different (sometimes conflicting) practices” (p. 43). I argue that if students are given the freedom to explore topics and argue cases, and are also given writing instruction and skills development, perhaps uncertainty

and confusion about voice, and some other aspects of writing would be minimalised.

One area not explored in this thesis was the matter of students paraphrasing and how close (or not) to remain to the original text. Hoadley-Maidment (1997) found that students “stick too close to the [original] text” (p. 65). One reason she put forward was that students may not realise they can use their own voice in writing. It would have been interesting to have explored this topic in my own study.

To summarise, first-year students had a greater focus on voice than staff did. In the second year, both staff and student participants placed more focus on voice. However, voice was defined for students as paraphrasing as compared to using direct quotations, which is a rather narrow view of voice. As one would expect, this was the definition that students adopted, yet they stated that they found it challenging to have their voice heard and/or to decide how personal they could be in their writing. This indicates that students need specific guidance on what voice can be and how to make it present in their writing.

8.4.2 Macro-level category

Coherence and structure

As stated in Chapter 2.5.2, “coherence has to do with unity and continuity of the discourse ... the degree to which concepts and relations that underlie the surface text are mutually relevant” (Kern, 2000, p. 15). In my study, staff reported assisting students with a number of aspects of coherence including telling students to link theory and practice (assignments 1A and 1B), telling students to develop a position (assignments 2A, 4A and 4B), showing students how to develop a paragraph (for assignments 4A and 4B [in which a position was presented]), and instructing students on the connection between an introduction, body, and conclusion. Some of these points have been discussed earlier. Thus it would appear that some staff, to some extent, understood that students would need assistance or instruction on aspects of coherence. A key requirement of the development of an argument is to ensure coherence. However, as mentioned earlier, providing students with instruction on how to develop an argument was an area that was minimal or missing from tutorial instruction, especially in first-year courses.

Even in the first year, students understood that assignment structure was required for a text to be considered well written. However, there were some differences between what they and staff commented on. Students commented on paragraph development (and particularly in the first year, some indicated that they were challenged by this), connections between the introduction, body and conclusion, and the ordering of their paragraphs. They did not generally comment on the connections between theory and practice, and the development of an argument. It was evident that staff understandings of coherence were at a higher conceptual level than those of students. If students had received instruction on assignment coherence in a similar fashion to the three-step approach Mulnix (2012) suggests (as outlined in Chapter 8.3.1) they may have increased their understanding of writing, especially in respect to coherence.

The occurrences and use of the term “flow” by staff and students were interesting (refer to Chapters 6.4.2 and 6.5.2). When staff were asked what constituted a well-written assignment, two mentioned “flow,” as in the clause “students’ ideas should flow.” In interviews, I did not ask staff to define what they meant by “flow.” I interpreted “flow” to mean paragraph development, where the main idea of each paragraph was developed throughout, and sentences within paragraphs linked to each other. Flow was also mentioned in the feedback marking sheet under “presentation and writing skills” for on-campus students’ first assignment. It is possible that “flow” on the feedback sheet also meant paragraph development. We have here a further example of terminology being used and not clarified or explained to students. Had I asked staff to define “flow,” this could have revealed differences in understanding of assignment terminology amongst staff.

More first-year students than second-year commented on “flow.” In fact, when first-year students (both distance and on-campus) were asked what constituted a well-written assignment, “flow” was the aspect mentioned by most (eight). Four defined it as the linking of one paragraph to another. It is quite common for first-year students, inexperienced in writing, to ask me (in my position as a tertiary academic learning advisor) to check their assignment for “flow,” which they usually define as the linking of one paragraph to another via the final sentence of each. Generally, however, there is often little benefit in having a concluding sentence that links one paragraph to the next. Often there are other cohesion issues needing attention at

sentence level. One way I have addressed this is my learning advisor role is to give students instruction on paragraph development in respect of how to develop an idea or position, and give them instruction on the use of cohesive words and phrases (e.g., however).

8.4.3 Micro-level category

Referencing

There was a major focus on referencing by staff and students. As one would expect, there was a distinct difference in levels of understanding between staff and students, especially in the first year. Using source texts to develop paragraphs was discussed in Chapter 8.3.1 in the section titled *language functions*. Referencing discussed below is at the mechanical or micro level.

It would appear that staff expected that students would not be proficient at referencing, especially in the first year, and this was reflected in such practices as the provision of information and instruction in tutorials, course outlines, on Moodle (for distance students) and in comments given on assignment feedback. Information and instruction provided to students, especially in the first-year, was often at the mechanical level, for example, how to write in-text references that adhered to APA 6th edition conventions. If students did not reference source texts, staff would remind them via assignment feedback. This meant that staff attended to instances of plagiarism in a constructive rather than punitive manner, since they probably understood that student plagiarism was unintentional and indicative of their level of understanding of the conventions of referencing.

Williamson, McGregor, and Archibald (2010) argue for a pedagogical, constructive approach, rather than a punitive one. They conducted a study investigating secondary-school students and using an inquiry-based learning approach over a semester to assist students to avoid plagiarism. Students were encouraged to engage with the topic and taught note-taking and paraphrasing techniques. This process was quite different from the process student participants experienced in my study who were not taught note-taking and paraphrasing techniques. It would have been beneficial for student participants to have engaged in activities of this nature.

All assignments submitted by student participants had a reference list. However, the reference lists (especially by on-campus students in their first semester of study)

did not always display complete accuracy in respect of APA 6th edition referencing conventions. This lack of student proficiency appears to be fairly common (e.g., Ellery, 2008; Hyland, 2005; Park, Mardis, & Ury, 2010; Shi, 2008). Even though the research examples given were EAL students, study findings align with what I found in respect of student participants' proficiency (especially in the first year of study). Student participants did show increased accuracy in this respect from the first to second year of study (refer to Chapter 6.4.3). Indeed, I have found it to be typical for second-year students to have a greater understanding and accuracy level with in-text citations and reference lists than students in their first year.

Even though students commented (in tutorials and interviews) that sourced information should be referenced, they (especially first-year students) did not always include in-text citations for paraphrased material. One first-year, on-campus student in talking with me about her assignment feedback, expressed surprise that she was expected to provide an in-text citation for information she had read in more than one place. This student was perhaps confused about who information belonged to when more than one author had written similar content. Another made a statement indicating that too many in-text citations took away the "knowledge" she was trying to display to the "reader." Her written assignment did have large areas of text that should have been attributed to sources used. This practice was in fact plagiarism since she had gained information from sources and was potentially presenting it as her own. The student claimed herself as the creator of ideas.

In Shi's (2008) study, EAL students gave a range of reasons for not attributing source material, two reasons were similar to what students in my study commented on, and two were quite different, for example, "there is no need to cite everything" (Shi, 2008, p. 9). The above highlights that there are a variety of reasons for students not attributing sourced information that do not constitute deliberate plagiarism. In fact, Vardi (2012a) recommends that further research be conducted, both on the development and the teaching of citation skills.

The phenomenon of first-year students omitting in-text citations is not unique to my study. For example, Song-Turner's (2008) study of plagiarism was conducted with 68 students in two postgraduate units. Of these, 95% were international students. The author found that 87% of the students who took part in the survey could identify

that plagiarism was not identifying source texts, yet 28% of those who took part in the study “either ignored the necessity to attribute the material to the original source, or did not know how to do it” (p. 43). Like Song-Turner’s (2008) participants, the two student participants who did not reference large areas of sourced information gave the above reasons for not doing so. Students in their second year of study generally referenced sourced information consistently, indicating that learning had taken place.

To summarise, staff appeared to understand that students would not be proficient at providing in-text citations for sourced material and producing accurate reference lists. Consequently, staff provided instruction on referencing in a number of ways. Students developed their ability to reference source texts and provide accurate reference lists during the first year of their study.

Punctuation, syntax, spelling

Punctuation, syntax and spelling were mentioned in most components of the first- and second-year courses, for example, in the course outlines, tutorials and feedback. In tutorials, first-year students (both distance and on-campus) were reminded briefly about the importance of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar and were given examples of some commonly misspelt words. In the second year, in tutorials, students (both on-campus and distance) were reminded of the importance of handing in assignments with accuracy at word- and sentence-level. In interviews, a number of staff reflected that students should hand in assignments with accurate punctuation, spelling and syntax. Therefore, it would appear staff viewed these aspects of writing as important. There are ample studies arguing that tertiary students should have well-developed literacy skills, including sentence-level accuracy (e.g. Devereux et al., 2006; Devereux & Wilson, 2008; Quible, 2008). My study found that staff seemed to consider that briefly addressing word- and sentence-level aspects of writing, or reminding students to hand in assignments with word- and sentence-level accuracy, was probably sufficient instruction.

Students in both their first and second year (both on-campus and distance) generally understood that it was important to submit assignments that had accurate punctuation, syntax and spelling, yet some students appeared to lack confidence in this area. Studies have found that grammar, punctuation and spelling can be areas

of development for tertiary-level students (e.g., Devereux et al., 2006; Hill, Locke & Dix., 2004; Taylor, 2010). Fewer students in the second year (than in the first) reported having assignments checked before submission, and while the reasons for this were not elicited by the interview questions, it is probably because students had increased proficiency and confidence in this area of writing.

In the first year, especially, some student participants could have benefited from assistance and/or instruction aimed at developing their competency in word- and sentence-level accuracy. Hill, et al. (2004) undertook a small research project with pre-service primary education students some years ago at the site of my study, during the second day of their programme of study. The authors found that over 40 percent of students had difficulty in the areas of syntax (sentence structure), punctuation and spelling. The authors suggested a simple diagnostic test be conducted with students in the pre-service primary education programme each year and additional assistance given to those who needed it. They suggested that short courses be provided by the institution's student learning centre or by the faculty on writing components such as "sentence construction" (Hill et al., 2004, p. 3). In the study, students were also given an information sheet informing them where they could seek help (e.g., from the student learning centre, and via a list of useful writing resources). The authors also suggested that students' progress be monitored throughout their course and interventions occur. I consider that these were all useful suggestions.

8.4.4 Conclusion

Applying a rhetorical framework highlighted aspects of writing that staff and students focused on, and also minimised or did not focus on. In general, the aspects of academic writing that were rarely prevalent, and also were not always made visible or explicitly clear to students, were at the higher level of the framework (see Figure 2, Chapter 2.5) such as argumentation (including critically engaging with sources), writer's voice, and audience. Staff appeared to expect that students should present a written argument, but without spelling this out. Divergences between staff and student understandings of expectations can result in mismatches between what is expected and what is produced, which can cause frustration for both staff and students.

It was clear that in the second year, students' understandings of academic writing were closer to staff members' than in the first. Lave (1991) states: "apprentices gradually assemble a general idea of what constitutes the practice of the community" (p. 95). They consider "how masters talk, walk, work, and generally conduct their lives" (p. 95). As Wenger (1998) states, old-timers or "more experienced peers . . . are living testimonies to what is possible, expected, *desirable*" [my emphasis added] (p. 156). It was not surprising then that when examining the understandings of staff and students, students' understanding of aspects of academic literacy aligned more closely with that of staff in the second year than in the first.

8.5 Helpful and unhelpful academic writing induction practices

Both staff and students identified practices that they considered to be helpful and unhelpful in helping students writing assignments. This section suggests that students' academic writing induction is more complex than simply learning the "norms and practices" (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158) of the academy, since there can be differences in understandings as to what these norms and practices actually are. Findings reported on in Chapter 7 align strongly with those of Devereux et al. (2006) and Devereux and Wilson (2008). Devereux et al. (2006) report on "the sources of support which they felt assisted them to acquire the writing skills necessary for success at university" and what students identified as "the challenges to tertiary literacy development identified by students" (p. 9). Devereux and Wilson (2008) suggest "a range of strategies that can be used to develop effective literacy practices" (p. 121).

My study, I contend, provides further insights and more in-depth understandings of academic writing induction practices. As discussed below, students were inducted into the conventions of academic writing, sometimes by staff involved in teaching the papers, sometimes by course peers, and sometimes by people other than the academic staff teaching the papers. Certain trends emerge after considering the practices students and staff identified as helpful and unhelpful for students' writing through the lens of academic literacies, communities of practice, and a rhetorical framework.

8.5.1 Tutorials (refer to Chapters 7.1.1 and 7.2.1)

When asked in interviews to identify helpful and unhelpful writing practices, most staff referred to generic writing instruction that took place in tutorials. Staff generally identified practices at the macro level (e.g., students were given instruction on structuring assignments) and the micro level (e.g., referencing at the mechanical level and punctuation, syntax and spelling). I noted a difference between how structure, referencing and word- and sentence-level components of writing were attended to by staff in tutorials. How to structure an assignment and how to reference sources were *demonstrated* to students, often using the whiteboard. However, as mentioned in Chapter 8.3, students tended to be *reminded* of the importance of accurate spelling, punctuation and syntax.

As mentioned in Chapter 7 the practice most often and most enthusiastically commented on as helpful, both by first and second-year on-campus and distance students, was the writing instruction given in tutorials. The most common practices identified by first-year students (both on-campus and distance) were that the tutor broke down the assignment instructions, explained what students needed to do, and clarified expectations. The findings from my study are in some ways similar to those of Devereux et al.'s (2006) study where "scaffolding by academic staff" (p. 13) was one finding. Apropos of this, the authors stated that students appreciated "clarity in assignment expectations" (p. 13). Students in Devereux et al.'s study approved of staff "modelling how to approach the readings ... and highlighting important points from set readings" (p. 14) and being given the opportunity to discuss the readings in tutorials. Students, especially those in their first year, also found it helpful when staff "assisted them to make links between theory and practice" (p. 13). It would appear that in Devereux's study, students recognised the importance of developing academic reading skills and understanding content from set readings.

Second-year student participants were also positive about the tutorial instruction received. The most commonly identified practice was the provision of the Panopto recording (provided to the distance students). Students remarked that this recording was helpful, since the tutor's "expectations" were made clear, and she stated "what she wanted" and gave instruction on paragraph and assignment structure. Compliance was demonstrated when a number of students remarked that they watched this recording many times and followed exactly what they were told to do.

Compliance showed through strongly in interviews with student participants in both the first and second year of study and will be discussed later in Section 8.5.

Students finding additional instruction and/or clarification of assignment instructions beneficial is explained by Wenger (1998), who states that “Participation is essential to repairing the potential misalignments inherent in reification” (p. 64). In other words, written documents sometimes need verbal clarification. Students appreciated further clarification, possibly because they recognised that different staff might interpret the assignment instructions and marking criteria slightly differently, or they might place importance and value on different aspects of writing.

Chapter 5 reports on similarities and differences between the academic literacy learning experiences of on-campus and distance students. The Panopto recording highlights one of the differences between the experiences of the two cohorts. The on-campus students needed to develop their note-taking skills to capture content (during lectures) and assignment instruction (during tutorials). Comments from students in interviews indicated that this was an area of development for them. Distance students did not face this challenge. In my view, on-campus students could have benefitted from some instruction and/or skills development on how to take effective notes.

Students’ desire to comply with lecturers’ expectations for assignments was demonstrated by a number of students commenting in interviews on “giving lecturers what they wanted.” One student reflected that in other papers, it was not always clear what lecturers wanted: “We all play the game, guess what’s in the lecturers’ head.” This statement possibly indicates student frustrations and confusions in respect of assignment instructions and expectations were not always clear to them (e.g., Hardy & Clughen, 2012). Since staff participants in my study did not comment in interviews my recognition that they might have slightly different requirements and expectations from each other in respect of students’ assignments, I am unsure whether staff had knowledge such as sentiments in students.

Students did not comment on the provision of tutorial assistance with word- and sentence-level features of writing (for example, punctuation, grammar and

spelling), yet students, especially in the first year, sought out assistance with this from peers, family members and friends (Section 8.4.3). Students probably felt they needed someone to check their actual assignment for word- and sentence-level accuracy, whereas staff perhaps believed that reminding students, or giving them limited instruction in these aspects of writing was sufficient to encourage competency in this area of academic literacy. Students would probably have appreciated some skill building with word- and sentence-level accuracy.

The practices that staff often identified as helpful generally took place within the institution and were instigated and/or monitored by staff. In contrast, students reported on a number of practices that occurred beyond staff jurisdiction or view. Students initiating and facilitating their own Facebook sites was one of these practices and is discussed next.

8.5.2 Facebook (refer to Chapter 7.1.1)

Drawing on Wenger's (1998) concept of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), new practitioners can be apprenticed by the entire community of practice, including other newcomers. In fact, Lave and Wenger (1991) acknowledge that engagement in practice involves peers learning from peers, and this "may well be a *condition* [italics in original] for the effectiveness of learning" (p. 93). The purpose of students setting up their own Facebook site appeared to be to assist each other with, for example, alignment with academic conventions (e.g., how to reference specific texts), sharing information on how to interpret assignment instructions and criteria, and informing each other about social events, such as shared lunches. This was an example of newcomers forming their own community of practice and apprenticing each other in order to comply and align with the expectations of academia. There was a paucity of studies on newcomers apprenticing newcomers in CoP settings..

One phenomenon not explored in either of the aforementioned texts is whether or not members in more powerful positions in the community of practice (e.g., staff) approve of newcomers (e.g., students) apprenticing each other outside of the view of old-timers. In my study, both distance and on-campus students had set up their

own closed Facebook sites³⁹. Staff (if they had known about these sites) may not have seen these Facebook sites as beneficial for students' learning, since two staff members commented that student collaboration was not always helpful. Students setting up and engaging in Facebook sites indicates that, while they can be thought of as being apprenticed into a community of practice (set up by lecturers), they were *also* members of other communities of practice, which lecturers possibly had no knowledge of or control over.

I was surprised at the extent to which students assisted each other through these Facebook sites, especially in their first year of study. In fact, in the first year, when students were asked to identify helpful practices, interactions on the Facebook site were the third most commonly identified. Students (both on-campus and distance) reported using the site to assist each other with practices such as sharing course information and content, and asking questions, many of which were on referencing. This is a further indication that students in the first year were challenged by referencing conventions and sought help from each other in this respect. It is noteworthy that they preferred to ask each other rather than staff teaching the papers, the staff in the library, and/or tertiary academic learning advisors in the student learning centre. This point will be discussed in Section 8.5. Certainly, based on my experience of working in this tertiary institution, students do ask library and student learning centre staff to assist with this aspect of writing. However, no student participant in this study commented on seeking assistance in this way.

Some distance students also reported finding their Facebook site helpful for building relationships with course peers. On-campus students did not comment on this, perhaps because they had more opportunities than distance students did to build relationships face-to-face.

In addition, a number of distance students commented that looking at student interactions on the Facebook site made them feel unsure of what they were doing for their assignment, if they were approaching an assignment differently from others. I found this interesting, because in the first year for assignment 2B, students

³⁹ Setting up a Facebook group as closed means that administrators must approve group members and only group members can see posted content.

could choose their topic, and there was much flexibility on how to structure and approach this assignment, compared to the second year, where students were given quite explicit instruction on how to approach and write their assignments. Perhaps students in their second year relied more on lecturer instruction than student interpretation of instructions. In contrast, I noticed that at times first-year students tended to ask each other questions in preference to lecturers.

Students (both on-campus and distance) were more positive about the use of their Facebook sites in the first year than the second. Students in their second year of study, when asked in interviews to identify helpful practices, did not identify these sites. Two on-campus students told me in interviews that they did not use their site as much as in the first year, since they had been put in different tutorial groups. From this comment, I surmised students possibly believed that when tutors gave additional information on assignments in tutorials, there were differences in information given.

One second-year distance student reflected that the Facebook site encouraged the less motivated students to rely on other hard-working students. Taylor (1982) argues that in a small community there are several behaviours that cause embarrassment, such as “taking advantage of others’ kindness” (p. 104). The student in my study appeared annoyed, not embarrassed, and I interpreted her response as saying that some students took advantage of others, relying on them to do the groundwork on assignments. I comment on this interview response, even though it was from only one student, since I have observed that some students rely on the kindness of other students to reduce the amount of preparation they need to do in order to write assignments. In my experience, some students, even though they provide the requested support, can view these requests negatively.

Studies (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Streitwieser, Light, & Pazos, 2010) have mainly researched novices being apprenticed by old-timers. However, novices also apprentice other novices. Lave and Wenger (1991) state that “where the circulation of knowledge among peers and near-peers is possible, it spreads exceedingly rapidly and effectively” (p. 93). My study found that technology aided the rapid spread of information among students. However, distance students in their second

year perhaps felt that the spread of information and requests for (and receiving) assistance were not always contributing positively to learning.

8.5.3 Feedback (refer to Chapters 7.1.3 and 7.2.3)

Two staff teaching on the first-year course reflected in interviews that feedback on draft assignments was helpful to students. Generally, staff were prepared to give feedback on draft assignments if they received them at least a week before the due date. Staff workload was the reason given for the deadline. It can be inferred that practical considerations meant they would not be able to give feedback on every student assignment. Staff probably surmised that many students would not have their draft ready one week before the submission date. By adopting a timeframe for this practice, staff were only going to see the draft assignments of the more motivated and/or organised students, the ones perhaps less likely to need staff feedback in order to receive a passing grade.

Studies have found that when students make changes in response to feedback, this generally improves their writing (e.g., Ashwell, 2000; Beason, 1993). However, not all staff arrive at a tertiary institution with teaching experience. A staff member teaching on the second-year paper for the first time noted in our interview that she had minimal tertiary teaching experience and that she gave feedback on *one* student's draft assignment. She reflected that she was uncertain if her feedback had assisted the student, since the grade awarded for the students' final assignment was lower than the grade his draft would have received. The staff member also reflected that the student must have been happy with the grade because he did not challenge it. I have observed most students generally accept the grade given to them by the lecturer, rather than challenge it, even though sometimes students may feel that they have been graded harshly. From the perspective of Lave and Wenger's (1991) LPP concept, even though this staff member (compared to students) was in a central place in the community of practice, she probably has pedagogical learning needs of her own, as one of the newer staff members. All of this suggests that it would be beneficial for academic literacy induction to occur for staff as well as students. (See Chapter 8.6.6).

The second most common helpful strategy identified by first-year students was pre-submission feedback from family members, friends, and course peers (as mentioned

in Chapter 8.4.1). Students were having their essays checked mainly for word- and sentence-level features of writing (e.g., spelling, syntax and punctuation). It is noteworthy that students indicated that they were not confident about aspects of referencing. Student participants reported other students asking on Facebook how to reference specific texts, yet they did not report asking for their draft assignments to be checked for referencing. Perhaps they felt this was outside the area of expertise of the people they had checking their assignments.

Some students in Devereux et al.'s (2006) study identified parents, partners and/or course peers were helpful in that they read and commented on draft assignments, and it was found that some students "maintained these support systems throughout their course" (p. 13). My study differed in some ways from this study. My student participants also had support systems in place for the reading of draft assignments, both in their first and second year of study. Unlike Devereux et al.'s (2006) study, this one found over time, that students changed, the extent and type of support they accessed. In my study, in the second year, fewer students than in the first reported getting feedback on their draft assignments from people such as peers and family members. It would have added further to my study had I asked students who were no longer seeking feedback from peers, family members and friends to say why. However, there was a slight increase in students getting feedback from academic learning advisors employed at the institution's student learning centre (See Chapter 8.4.4).

As mentioned earlier, not many students gave their draft assignments to their tutorial tutor for feedback. Handley et al. (2007) report that in their study, students enrolled in a first-year tourism module, were encouraged to gain feedback on their draft assignments from their tutor, which I interpreted to mean the academic staff member teaching their tutorial class. Only 3 out of 74 students submitted draft assignments. Based on interviews with 5 students, the authors found that they felt "feedback was unnecessary or untimely" (p. 11). "Untimely" was explained in terms of students getting ready for the Christmas break and/or not having their draft ready for submission. Student participants in my study identified reasons such as time management, not liking the feedback received from another paper and a belief that students who submit draft assignments get marked on their improvement between drafts, instead of being marked on their final assignment. The limited

number of students submitting draft assignments to lecturers may indicate that students do not see the value in pre-submission feedback, or that time management is a problem.

Even though there was a slight decrease in the numbers of students seeking feedback from the academic staff members teaching tutorials (four in the first-year and two in the second-year), there was a slight increase in the numbers seeking feedback from tertiary academic learning advisors (two in the first year and five in the second). One possible reason for the increase in numbers seeking feedback from learning advisors may be that students recognised that they commented on aspects of writing such as style and structure, rather than the content of their assignment (as lecturers did). In my experience, students can feel a strong sense of ownership of the content of their assignment and may not want anyone to comment on it prior to it being submitted for grading. In addition, learning advisors have no impact on student grades, so perhaps accessing their advice is safer than accessing academic staff members' comments on draft assignments. It would be beneficial to do further research to explore why there is minimal uptake by students of opportunities to submit draft assignments to academic staff.

In interviews, in relation to feedback received, first-year students generally referred to comments about punctuation, spelling and/or referencing. This was one indication that their focus on writing, or perhaps their level of understanding of writing categories, was at the micro-level, since staff did provide comments on aspects of writing such as the development of ideas.

Students generally agreed that feedback received was helpful, but when questioned further, first-year students were at times unsure what the feedback meant. I was unable to locate studies which had explored whether or not students understand assignment feedback. However, this finding aligns to some extent with a study conducted by Li and De Luca (2014), who reviewed 37 empirical studies, “on assessment feedback published between 2000 and 2011” (p. 378). They found that studies “conducted in different countries” showed that “students and teachers often have divergent understanding of assessment and feedback” (p. 388). In addition, a number of studies (Blair, Curtin, Goodwin, & Shields, 2013; Carless, 2006; Lea & Street, 2006; Orsmond & Merry, 2011) have found that there can be divergences

and convergences in what staff and students consider helpful feedback. No student participants in my study identified any of the feedback as unhelpful, which was consistent with students stating that they appreciated staff giving assignment writing instruction and/or assistance.

In interviews, participants generally referred to feedback that was directly written on their assignment, rather than given on a separate sheet. This finding aligns with that of Devereux et al.'s (2006) study. Several students in Devereux et al.'s (2006) study reported that they found it "more helpful when a marker wrote directly on the text rather than on a separate sheet, as this helped to make feedback clearer and targeted to specific problems in their writing" (p. 13). However, I have no way of knowing whether students (both in my study and Devereux's) applied the feedback given to future assignments.

As discussed in this section, assignment feedback may well be an area of development for both students and staff. Students could benefit from the provision of assistance and/or instruction on how to interpret feedback and apply it to future assignments. Staff could benefit from guidance on how to ensure written feedback is readily understood. In addition, students would find it helpful if staff had a consistent approach to written feedback.

8.5.4 Reading texts (refer to Chapters 7.1.2 and 7.2.2)

In a study by Devereux et al. (2006) and Devereux and Wilson (2008), both staff and students indicated that it was beneficial for students to be taught academic reading skills and strategies and, through tutorial discussion, assisted to comprehend the content of readings. Carson, Chase, Gibson, and Hargrove (1992) further state that in order to be successful in a tertiary institution, students need both reading and writing skills.

In my study, staff probably recognised that first-year students would need assistance with identifying main points from the prescribed texts on educational theorists, and for this reason provided a resource called the Theorist Summary Sheet (as outlined in Chapter 7.1.2). Students found this sheet helpful, since completing it meant they had a summary of a number of educational theories (they needed two for their first assignment). Students possibly had a greater appreciation of this resource than staff, since no staff member interviewed indicated that the purpose of

this sheet was to orient students to the readings book or assist them with writing a summary of a number of educational theories. Despite the provision of resource and students (especially in the first year) remarking in interviews that they were challenged by reading prescribed texts, neither staff nor students indicated that it would have been helpful had they been taught academic reading skills, either by staff in the courses or by student learning centre staff. Yet it is clear that students who struggle with reading prescribed texts, or who do not read the prescribed texts, miss out on content and miss out on the opportunity to develop their understanding of content.

Perhaps it did not occur to staff and student participants that the latter (especially first-years) would need instruction and/or skill building on how to read academic texts. Maybe staff and students were unaware that the process of reading academic texts is different from reading other texts, and that the first year of tertiary study may well be the first time students are expected to read academic texts. Not giving tertiary students academic reading instruction is not uncommon. Weller (2010), who researched both lecturer and second-and third-year tertiary students' accounts of reading in a humanities faculty, states that in the humanities field, students often do not receive instruction and/or skill building on how to read academic texts. She also states that in the humanities field, the pedagogy of reading is an under-researched area (p. 88). It may be beneficial to raise staff awareness of the need to develop students' reading abilities, and staff would perhaps find it helpful if they were given suggestions for how to develop these abilities.

On-campus and distance students differed, especially in the first year, with their level of engagement, with the prescribed readings. As reported in Chapter 7.1.2, distance students generally reported reading the articles provided, whereas on-campus students generally reported that they *should* read the articles, but identified time as a limiting factor. Hoadley-Maidment (1997) reported that the text-based nature of distance learning affected how distance students acquired writing skills. Instead of engaging in tutorial activities, a large component of their course involved them reading texts and engaging in online discussions. It would have been problematic had distance students not engaged with the readings.

To summarise, neither staff nor students expressed an awareness that students could benefit from instruction and/or skill development in how to comprehend academic texts. When students struggle to comprehend academic texts, they miss opportunities to engage with course content and develop their critical literacy skills.

8.5.5 Two on-campus services (refer to Chapter 7.1.4)

As mentioned in Chapter 7.1.4, the student learning centre offered a range of services: one-to-one consultations (up to 50 minutes with a tertiary academic learning advisor, by appointment); drop-ins (up to 15 minutes with a tertiary academic learning advisor, no appointment required); workshops embedded in classes; a limited number of generic workshops each semester; and a range of online resources.

When staff referred in interviews to the student learning centre, they mentioned the one-to-one consultations, and/or online resources. They perceived both as beneficial for students' writing development. Students were also positive about this service, and those who did talk about it, referred to the one-to-one services, where they had received feedback on written assignments.

There is limited literature on student learning centres, and much of the published literature is written by learning advisors themselves (Mitchell & Malthus, 2010; Ross, 2012; Wee & Grey, 2011). Generally, however, studies report that the perceptions of both academic staff teaching mainstream courses (Robinson, 2009) and students (Naeem & Day, 2009b; O'Shea & Tarawa, 2009; Robinson, 2009) are positively disposed towards such services and indicate a belief that tertiary academic learning advisors assist students with their academic literacy development. I was, not surprised, therefore, when staff and student participants talked positively about the student learning centre at the research site.

Staff employed both a proactive approach and a reactive referral process. They suggested to students in tutorials that they access this service while writing their assignments and they also wrote feedback suggestions on some students' assignments advising that they access this service.

Some staff participants reported promoting the student learning centre as a service for those who required extra assistance with their writing. This is not an uncommon

practice. In fact, Clerehan (2007) and Percy (2011) state that learning advising in student learning centres is often seen in terms of a deficit model – as a place to rectify the problems of students’ writing. However, tertiary academic learning advisors are trying to move away from this model to a more proactive and inclusive approach, where student learning centres are viewed as a resource for all students to access in order to develop their academic literacy levels. “A place for all” was the way that this service was promoted to students in second-year tutorial classes.

One service offered by the study site’s student learning centre was the embedding of academic literacy instruction. This means that learning advisors come into mainstream classes to give academic literacy instruction, which is often contextualised to the next assignment due. It is not unusual for student learning centres to offer this form of instruction. In fact, Cameron and Catt (2014), reporting on the modes of delivery of student learning centres in New Zealand in 2013, found that 95% of tertiary institutions who responded to their survey offered workshops embedded in courses. In addition, Naeem and Day (2009a) state that one role of tertiary academic learning advisors is to embed academic literacy instruction in courses. Perhaps participating staff in this study were not aware of this service or *they* preferred to teach students about writing themselves.

A session with the library staff was provided in all four courses. However, student learning centre staff were invited to one session only, which was in the orientation week for the first-year distance students. Possibly, as mentioned above, staff were not aware of the services offered by the student learning centre. Perhaps, they perceived the skills taught by the library (e.g., referencing and searching for online journal articles) to be specialised and best taught by library staff, while, academic writing skills were perhaps not viewed as needing a specialist to teach them. It is also possible that some staff viewed the student learning centre as a place only for students needing remedial assistance.

8.5.6 Conclusion

Certain themes have been discussed so far in this chapter. The practices that staff and students identified as helpful (especially in the first year) aligned more closely with the micro-and macro-level categories of writing than the social/contextual category. When investigating staff and student understandings of writing I also

found less focus on the contextual category, than on the macro and micro levels. If staff display limited awareness and/or focus on aspects of writing at the contextual level, then it is unlikely that students' awareness of these aspects of writing will be developed.

8.6 Power relations

Power relations have been briefly discussed in several places in this chapter. This section draws together a number of threads on the operation of power relations and the impact this can have on both staff and students' behaviour and experiences.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, students entered papers that were already operating as CoPs. The course documents (e.g., course outlines, assignment instructions, and marking criteria) were developed by academic staff involved in the papers. To some extent, these would have, aligned with academic, institutional, faculty, and departmental norms. For example, it is typical for students to submit *two* written assignments per paper, as was the case with the papers that this study was conducted in.

As outlined in Chapter 2.2, for Lave and Wenger (1991), learners in a community of practice take on the role of apprentice and at first have a peripheral position in that they take part to a limited degree and have a limited responsibility for the product (Hanks, 1991). Student participants were expected to write assignments. Staff exercised considerable power, because they were responsible for awarding grades for students' assignments. The markers of assignments based grades awarded on, for example, whether or not students had displayed their understanding of subject matter, and students were generally given some direction as to what that subject matter might be. Students also needed to present information in an acceptable form which complied with academic conventions.

One aspect of taking part in a CoP is that newcomers are inducted into the conventions and practices of the community by old timers (Hanks, 1991). Staff in this study did provide information to assist students with assignment writing. For example, staff provided assignment instructions, marking criteria and tutorial writing instruction. Some expectations were made explicit and clear to students and, as explored earlier in this chapter, some (like the expectation students produce a written argument) were not. Swales (1998), drawing on Porter (1992) states that a

discourse community has both stated and unstated conventions and mechanisms for “wielding power” (Porter, 1992, p. 106, as cited in Swales, 1998, p. 199). One mechanism for wielding power could be keeping conventions and expectations *unstated*, as was experienced by the participants in my study. Gee (1996) explains that when Discourses (he capitalizes the “D”) are invisible, they are “all the more powerful” (Locke, 2004, p. 51). Staff, probably unconsciously, had not taken steps to ensure student understandings of *all* components required to produce a well-written assignment. When students do not understand what is expected, this can result in a feeling of powerlessness. This was perhaps what was occurring when students experienced feeling confused and/or frustrated as they did in respect of displaying a writer’s voice (or not).

Students displayed compliance in a number of ways. As one would expect, they were appreciative of the assignment instruction given in tutorials, since they were interested in finding out what the tutor expected. It was pleasing to observe that they also appeared to be interested in learning about the conventions of academic writing. Compliance was also visible (and expected) when students wrote assignments based on the preferred position indicated to them by staff. Another example of compliance was that students wrote for the marker of the assignment, unless given a specific audience. When students were unsure about some aspects of writing, especially those that had not made clear to students, they tried guessing what was required. In Chapter 8.3.1, I argued that if students were given the freedom to explore topics and argue cases and given appropriate writing instruction and skills development, perhaps uncertainty and confusion about voice, and some other aspects of writing would be minimalised. This would result in more agency for students in respect of writing decisions.

As discussed in Section 8.4.2, students had set up Facebook sites that academic staff were not invited to join. The Facebook sites might be viewed as the students’ attempt to set up their own CoP where they inducted each other by answering each other’s questions, and sharing information and resources. As mentioned in Section 8.4.2, peers learning from peers occurs in a CoP and may in fact be a “*condition* [italics in original] for the effectiveness of learning” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 93). As mentioned in Chapter 2.2, Lave and Wenger (1991) explained that the peripheral position can be experienced as one of empowerment or disempowerment,

depending on whether the newcomer is included or prevented from participating in the community of practice (p. 36). At times students chose to engage with each other rather than with academic staff members. Lea (2005) argues that when students choose not to engage, it is one way “students retain power, and maintain their own sense of identity, in the learning process” (p. 190). Students’ engagement in the Facebook site, and inducting each other, could be seen as students setting up their own community of practice, which had the purpose of assisting each other to enter and operate effectively within the university-based communities of practice.

Students in their second year of study were less convinced that the sharing of information on Facebook was an effective learning strategy. It would appear then that Facebook uncovered some of the issues in relying on peers rather than approaching lecturers. As reported in Section 8.4.2, I noticed second-year students were more willing to seek clarification from staff, on aspects of their course and assignments, than first-year students were. Perhaps in the second year, students perceived the power differential between themselves and academic staff as smaller than in their first year of study. Students appeared to have gained confidence in approaching and speaking to lecturer.

As discussed previously, in order to reduce frustrations arising from differences in understandings and expectations between students and staff the implicit needs to be made explicit and clear. If staff are introduced to (or for some staff, reminded of) a rhetorical approach to literacy, where audience is a prime determinant for the functions and forms of language in a given text, then it is more likely that writing expectations will be explicitly shared with students. If such an approach to writing is not adopted, then part of the picture for students (and staff) is missing. In other words, crucial ways of addressing academic writing are not being articulated. In order for this to happen, both staff and students need, as a beginning point, a shared vocabulary for talking about aspects and categories of academic writing. If staff do adopt a faculty-wide approach to writing, then a true community of practice will be operating.

8.7 Implications and recommendations

A number of implications and recommendations emerge from this study. These recommendations may also be adopted/adapted by any institution wanting to

enhance academic writing teaching and learning practices. Even though the implications and recommendations discussed below are focused on academic writing, they are also applicable and/or adaptable to academic literacies (which includes information literacy and digital literacy).

8.7.1 A faculty-wide approach

My research was based in an education faculty. In interviews, especially in the first-year of evidence collection, it became apparent that staff had some differences in both (1) their understandings of academic writing and (2) approaches used for teaching students about writing. The faculty could enhance students' academic writing development by staff employing a consistent approach to academic writing.

A whole-school framework could be guided by staff employing an embedded approach, a rhetorical approach and an academic literacies approach. Many scholars argue for the embedding of academic literacy skills into courses (e.g., Cattell, 2013; Gunn, Hearne, & Sibthorpe, 2011; Seno, 2015). Gunn, Hearn and Sibthorpe (2011) state that "research informed practice models show that well-designed activities embedded within discipline-based programmes are one highly effective way to promote acquisition of these skills" (p. 2). They also state that with this approach, learners have opportunities to practise the skills in meaningful contexts. Many of the pedagogical suggestions in this section (8.6) could take place during course time, such as in tutorials. It will be recalled that student participants in my study commented that they found writing instruction during tutorial time very beneficial.

Employing a rhetorical approach to literacy (as discussed in Chapter 2.5), means that the context (including the text's audience and purpose) is viewed as the prime determinant of decision-making of textual features (for example, language functions, structure and syntax). Andrews (1992) states that in order to understand authorial decisions of textual choices, the textual context needs to be considered (p. 6). Andrews also states that "literacy study needs to take on a rhetorical dimension so that the political and aesthetic context can be explored" (p. 6) since texts and the writing of texts are subject to power relations. Taking on board the above arguments, writing instruction should take place in courses, so that students benefit from writing with their audience in mind, which will assist them in making appropriate textual choices.

Lea and Street (1998) state that an academic literacies approach is “a framework for understanding university writing practices” (p. 157). As discussed in Chapter 2.4, Lea (2004) comments that a limitation of the academic literacies model has been its lack of attention to pedagogy. Based on my search of literature, the situation does not appear to have changed. She states that a course designed which is based on an academic literacies model:

- Takes account of students’ present and previous literacy practices.
- Acknowledges that texts do more than represent knowledge.
- Recognizes the relationship between epistemology and the construction of knowledge through writing and reading practices, using both written and multimodal texts.
- Recognizes the gaps between students’ and tutors’ expectations and understanding of the texts involved in learning.
- Involve thinking about all texts of the course—written and multimodal—and not just assessed texts.
- Attempts to create spaces for exploration of different meanings and understandings by all course participants.
- Does not create a dichotomy between other literacies and academic literacies.
- Recognizes and builds upon issues of identity and how these are implicated in the creation of texts.
- Acknowledges the power dimensions of institutional structures and procedures and the ways that these are implicated in text production.
- Rather than trying to acculturate students into a discipline, attempts to see students as engaged participants in the practices and texts which they encounter during their study of the course.
- Sees the course as mediated by different participants. Allows spaces for this and embeds this in both the course content and the course design.
- Recognizes the integral nature of the relationship between literacies and technologies. (Lea, 2004, p. 744)

Unpacking each of the above points and suggesting how they might be incorporated into course design and delivery is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I argue that many of Lea’s points might be addressed by embedding academic writing instruction into courses, enhancing students’ academic literacies capability through academic literacy skill development activities, and by making the implicit, explicit. Employing a rhetorical approach to literacy would go some way to building students’ academic writing capability.

8.7.2 A research-based approach

A research-based approach to the teaching of academic writing would mean staff would be encouraged to research aspects of the teaching and learning of academic

writing within their programmes and disseminate the result of their inquiry in departmental seminars and conferences (both within and outside of the institution). In addition, a resource could be provided for staff drawing on published research on tertiary-level academic writing teaching and learning practices. This resource would need to be updated periodically to include new and/or additional research.

In New Zealand, generally, academic staff in tertiary institutions have a personalised professional development plan. In conjunction with their line managers, staff identify areas where they could benefit from further assistance and/or development. There is a range of ways that staff could engage in professional development in respect of academic writing. The institutions' staff capability centre (at the site of this study) facilitates staff workshops on a range of topics. It would be beneficial for staff to attend these. A staff development unit could develop a suite of workshops focused on teaching and learning practices of academic writing. For example, a workshop could be developed which would focus on strategies for scaffolding students in the skills required for assignments. The three-step method (staff modelling the skill, students practising, staff providing feedback) as outlined by Mulnix (2012) (see Chapter 8.3) could be one of the teaching suggestions introduced to staff.

One service offered by the staff capability centre is to observe classes and give feedback. It would be helpful if staff from this unit observed tutorials and viewed (and gave feedback on) how mainstream, academic staff were scaffolding students in the skills required for the prescribed assignments.

8.7.3 Teaching academic reading skills

There are a number of approaches that could be employed to enhance students' academic reading skill development. Devereux et al. (2006) state that students benefit from classroom discussion on ideas presented in texts, helping students to locate arguments in texts, applying theories to a case study and "modelling how students might use this information in their own writing" (p. 18). Hermida (2009) suggests (calling on Bean, 1996, p. 133) that students be taught "general analytical tools and the discipline-specific values and strategies that facilitate disciplinary reading and learning" (p. 23). Hermida (2014) lists the categories of analysis: (i) [reading] purpose, (ii) connections to other texts and deconstruction of assumptions,

(iii) context, (iv) author's thesis, (v) evaluation of author's argument, and (vi) consequences of author's arguments .

There are a number of approaches that could be implemented when teaching students academic reading skills. One is that staff teaching mainstream courses embed academic reading instruction into their tutorial classes. Another could be academic reading workshops run by staff at the institution's student learning centre. These workshops could be run in tutorial time or outside of class time. It would be beneficial for the learning advisor to contextualise the academic reading workshop/s with prescribed texts from students' courses.

8.7.4 Peer review

As discussed in Chapter 3.4.1, engaging in the process of peer review of written assignments is beneficial for those giving and receiving responses (Mulder, Pearce, & Baik, 2014; Pelaez, 2002; Yang, 2011). The peer review process could be included as part of the assessment process for at least one student assignment per semester, in at least one paper. If the peer review process were included in every course, it would be time-consuming for students. Therefore, there would need to be communication between staff across programmes at the planning stage. In addition, students would need guidance and/or skill-building on how to peer review assignments.

The initial peer review process should take place at least one week before the assignment is due. Therefore, written into course outlines would be three due dates for assessments: one for giving the written assignment to the reviewer; one for the reviewer returning the review to the author; and the final submission date for the assignment. A potential benefit of this process would be assisting students with their time management.

It would be beneficial for students if they were provided with a peer review form, which could be either generic or specific to individual assignments. Jung's (2001) peer review form is generic. Students are asked to evaluate writing according to aspects such as layout/organisation, grammar, punctuation and spelling. Please see Appendix P for my adaptation of Jung's form, which I have revised on the basis of a rhetorical approach to literacy. Seno's (2015) peer review form is assignment-specific, since it is based on the student participant's project proposal writing

exercise. For example, one criterion is: “the managerial problem can be clearly understood without prior knowledge about the project or the Project Sponsor” (p. 104). I suggest a combination of the two approaches above. The peer review form could contain specific components of the written assignment, as well as generic writing components. For example, in their first assignment, student participants in my study were required to explain the ideas of both a Western and a Maori educational theorist. The peer review form could ask if students had fulfilled this criterion, and whether students had deliberately addressed an academic audience.

Another aspect of peer review could be a referral process. If the student reviewing an assignment felt it had major problems, then the assignment could be referred to the lecturer who could give the student extra assistance and/or refer the student to a learning advisor. In some cases, an extension of the due date might be required.

8.7.5 Diagnostic assessment

Students entering tertiary courses could be given a simple, short, diagnostic assessment of their academic literacy levels and skills. Diagnostic tests come in many forms. Seno (2015) suggests that students assess their academic literacy levels via a questionnaire. Hill et al. (2004) had students complete a written assessment, by means of which lecturers then identified students’ areas of strength and weaknesses. Students were then made aware of university services and sources they could access to assist with their academic literacy development. Whatever the form the diagnostic assessment took, it would be beneficial for students to identify early in their course/s if they require academic literacy assistance and/or development and where they could access the assistance.

8.8 Limitations of the study

This study was a qualitative, interpretive case study. I conducted my evidence collection using ethnographic methods, including observations, interviews and documents. I employed this research design since I wanted to understand academic literacy induction from the perspective of both staff and student participants.

One limitation of my research was that I used convenience sampling (Cohen et al., 2003). The self-selection of participants resulted in my having a skewed gender balance. All but one of the participants were female. However, this was somewhat reflective of the ratio of females to males enrolled in the courses, since

approximately 90 were female. In addition, staff participants invited to interviews were also female since staff teaching the first- and second-year papers were predominantly female. Having said that, having a sample that was representative of the wider student population was not an aim of this study.

Another limitation of my research was that the study was conducted with *one* first-year paper and *one* second-year (both distance and on-campus). To get a broader view of students' writing experiences, it would have been useful to have included other papers. However, time constraints for evidence collection and access to papers would have made this difficult. In addition, evidence collection needed to be contained.

A final limitation of this research was that it was for two years only. If I had included students in their third year, I could have explored whether there was a shift in understanding and experiences between the second and third year. As explained above, evidence collection does need to be contained. Had I added a further year of evidence collection, the process of collecting, analysing and writing would have added substantially to the length of time taken for the project.

In sum, results must be viewed with these three limitations as caveats: nearly all participants were females, the research took place with a limited number of papers, and the study was for two years only.

8.9 Directions for further research

My study indicates that there are a number of directions for future research. One finding was that students were sometimes not given an audience, sometimes given a specific audience, sometimes a general one, and for one assignment an implied audience. It was found that the provision of different or unspecified audiences impacted on students' writing process in different ways. There are few studies which have explored the impact of giving inexperienced tertiary level writers (in particular for learners where English is a first language) an audience and how this impacts on their writing decisions. Research into this topic would enhance understandings of the student writing process, or that of less experienced writers.

Many studies (including mine) have found that written argumentation is generally not a focus of the teaching and learning experience (e.g., Andrews, 2010; Mitchell,

1994). Studies have found that staff do not always have the skills to teach students how to produce a written argument (e.g., Davies, 2008; Wingate, 2012). It would be beneficial to investigate methods for training staff to teach students how to produce a written argument. It would also be beneficial to investigate how students respond when written argumentation is at the centre of the learning experience.

There has been a paucity of studies conducted which have investigated how domestic tertiary students are taught about voice in respect of writing. My study found that students were aware of voice but were at times unsure about the extent their voice could show in their writing. My study also found that it was difficult to gauge staff understandings of voice, since it was not focused on by staff. I found that most research, that investigated the teaching of voice to students, was with EAL students, indicating a research gap with domestic students. All of the above indicates a need for research into student and staff understandings of voice. In addition, it would be useful to research approaches employed for the teaching of voice to domestic students.

There has been a very limited number of studies which have investigated the practices and resources students and staff identify as helpful and unhelpful for students engaging in the writing process (e.g., Devereux et al. 2006). It would be useful to investigate this topic with a range of cohorts of students, in different programmes and via different modes of delivery (e.g., students studying online, students studying via distance and students enrolled in programmes delivered on-campus).

I was unable to find studies which investigated students inducting each other into the conventions of academic writing via social media sites. Based on my experience, cohorts of tertiary students setting up Facebook sites to assist one another with aspects of study have become commonplace in the last few years. It would be worthwhile to investigate student use of these sites and whether students apprenticing each other is beneficial or not.

There has been very limited research conducted which explores academic staff and student perceptions⁴⁰ of student learning centre services and how students' use of the services impacts on their academic development. This is an area for future research.

This thesis argues for both a rhetorical and academic literacies approach to teaching and learning practices of academic writing. Research could also be conducted into the deliberate implementation of using this combined approach when teaching academic writing in a variety of settings.

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I mentioned a number of reflective regrets. These could frame or be part of future research projects. A possibly study could explore whether or not staff and students have the same understandings of terminology. The study could have a particular focus on whether or not staff teaching on tertiary level courses have the same understanding of assignment feedback comments. It could also explore whether or not staff share a bank of feedback comments. Another study could explore connections between gender and the strength or visibility of students' voice in their writing. Included in this study could be identifying and discussing factors that impact on students displaying their writers' voice. Finally, it would also be interesting to explore factors that impact on students applying assignment feedback to other assignments.

8.10 Concluding statement

I contend that it would be beneficial for students if writing instruction were embedded into their courses. In order to reduce student confusion and possible misunderstandings about what is expected from teachers, explicit instruction on components of writing would be beneficial. I believe that employing both a rhetorical and academic literacies approach to teaching students writing and about writing is warranted. In order for this to occur, staff will need assistance and/or professional development on aspects of academic writing pedagogy. Finally, in order for staff to incorporate academic writing instruction effectively into their practice, I would recommend a faculty-wide approach to writing.

⁴⁰ Those teaching on courses as compared to those academic staff employed as learning advisors.

Encouraging staff to undertake faculty-wide professional development as outlined in the above paragraph would demand a change in practice (for some staff) around academic writing induction. Changing practice is not always straight forward. It would be beneficial to begin the process by trialling, as a research project, the proposed new model within one department and then disseminating findings to other staff in such a way as to inspire and motivate them to aim for a unified approach to teaching academic writing. Part of the process could involve key staff working with, motivating, and mentoring other staff. It would also be important to create a no-blame culture in which staff could be encouraged to develop and explore how to incorporate academic writing induction into their courses.

8.11 Concluding reflection: The contribution my thesis makes

This study has contributed to an understanding of tertiary level students and staff participants' understandings and experiences of academic writing induction in a particular site. My contribution to practice has been outlined in Chapter 8.7, via my suggestions in respect of implications and recommendations for academic writing induction. My theoretical contribution is outlined briefly below.

My research demonstrated that a suitable lens for investigating academic literacy induction is to consider literacy as a sociocultural activity rather than a purely cognitive activity. My research also demonstrated that drawing on Locke's (2015) rhetorical process complemented Lea and Street's (1998) academic literacy framework, since it drew attention to aspects of academic writing not made explicit in Lea and Street's (1998) framework such as audience and voice. It also highlighted the rhetorical nature of writing, in that texts are produced in order to achieve a purpose with a reader or audience in mind. In applying a rhetorical framework it became apparent that aspects of academic writing that were not always visible or explicitly made clear to students were at the higher level of the framework.

My research has also made a contribution to the communities of practices' (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) literature in respect of newcomers apprenticing other newcomers. Students inducting other students into the conventions of academic writing was especially visible through their use of the Facebook sites, set up and facilitated solely by students.

My thesis also contributed to the limited number of studies that explored aspects of academic writing induction. One example was in respect of audience and how the intended audience influences student writing. Another example was that my study highlighted student confusion over how strong to make their authorial voice. I also found a limited number of studies which had explored what staff and students considered helpful and unhelpful for students in respect of academic writing induction. My research also made visible power relations present between students and staff and how this can impact on students' writing.

Overall, I consider that the main contribution this thesis makes is to highlight that if both staff and students have an increased understanding of academic literacy induction, insights gained could be used to improve the teaching and learning experiences of staff and students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: On-campus students' demographic information

Pseudonym	Age group	Background prior to study
Suzanne	17 – 25 yrs	Last year of high school was 2012 ⁴¹
Joanna	17 – 25 yrs	Last year of high school was 2012
Tui ⁴²	Estimated < 25 yrs	Finished high school about 6 years ago, has worked, plus had 2 children
Catherine	17 – 25 yrs	Last year of high school was 2012
Cheryl	17 – 25 yrs	Last year of high school was 2012
Kathleen	17 – 25 yrs	Last year of high school was 2011, 1 year of tertiary study
Frances	17 – 25 yrs	High school in 2012

⁴¹ Evidence collection began in 2013.

⁴² Tui did not complete the online questionnaire, so I have extracted the information I have provided from conversations and the interview with her.

Appendix B: Distance students' demographic information

Pseudonym	Working and/or academic background	Family situation⁴³
Cherie	Worked in a number of white-collar positions.	Has a 7-year-old child.
Bob	Has been teacher aiding in a school.	Did not mention children or a partner.
Michelle	Worked in a white-collar position before enrolling in the distance programme.	Children aged 11 – 13.
Amanda	2012 finished a qualification via distance through a tertiary institution.	Has young children.
Carla	Enrolled in a tertiary course some years ago. Did not complete due to issues with writing assignments.	Has 3 young children.
Dawn	Did part of a university degree beginning when she was 18.	Has 2 children under the age of 3.
Tia	No formal schooling since year 12 high school.	Children aged 3 to 11.
Marie	Did a tertiary level writing paper before beginning the distance programme.	Children at school.
Molly	Has done tertiary papers in subjects unrelated to teaching some years ago.	Married, has children.
Mabel	Been working as a teacher aid.	Lives in an isolated part of New Zealand.
Wilma	Has completed an early children education course overseas.	Early 40s, lives in an isolated part of New Zealand.
Rachel	Has been working as a teacher aid.	Approximately 40 years of age, lives in an isolated part of NZ. Do not know if she has children.
Nancy	Has a tertiary qualification.	Has 2 school-age children.

⁴³ I did not specifically ask about children and partners in interviews, The information provided emerged throughout the course of the interviews.

Appendix C: Staff involvement in the papers

Pseudonym	Sex	Contribution to first-year, on-campus paper, Semester A 2013	Historical involvement with the paper
Samantha	F	Lectures only.	Involved in the paper for a number of years.
Becky	F	Lectures only.	Lectured on the paper for a number of years.
Andrea	F	Lectures and a tutorial class. ⁴⁴	Lectured and involved in tutorials for a number of years.
Toni	F	Lectures and tutorial class.	First year lecturing, taking tutorials, and coordinator of this paper.
Brenda	F	Tutorial class.	Involved in teaching on the paper for a number of years.
Liz	F	One lecture plus tutorial class.	First time lecturing. Had taught tutorials for several years.
Gail	F	One lecture plus two tutorial classes.	Taught on the paper for a few years.
Pseudonym	Sex	Contribution to first-year, distance paper, Semester B 2013	Historical involvement with the paper
Andrea ⁴⁵	F	Taught on-campus classes, coordinator of distance paper, marking of assignments, involvement in online communications.	Taught on this paper for a number of years, first year as coordinator.
Toni	F	Marking of assignments, involvement in online communications.	First time teaching on this paper.
Pseudonym	Sex	Contribution to second-year papers Semester B 2014	Involvement with the papers
Jaimee	F	Taught the on-campus tutorial class I observed. Lectured in both the on-campus and distance paper. Coordinated the on-campus and distance paper.	Taught on the papers for 4 years and has been coordinator of the papers (distance and on-campus) for 3 years.
Lynne	F	Did part of one lecture for the distance students. Taught on the distance paper (online component).	First semester with this paper. Had taught on-campus Maori stream version of the paper once (the semester before).

Dear xxxx

Re: Phd research interview

⁴⁴ When I refer to a tutorial class I generally mean for the entire semester. When staff teach a tutorial class for the semester they generally also mark student assignments.

⁴⁵ Andrea and Toni taught in both first-year papers (both on-campus and distance)

Appendix D: Interview member check

Thank you very much for the interview a few weeks ago. Please find attached the interview transcript. Please note and assure that the interview and its transcript remains **confidential** thus ensuring your anonymity—as no identifying features will be used in the thesis or publishing which results from this research.

I would appreciate it if you would please have a look at the transcript. If you think your intent in our conversation was different than what is represented in the transcript, please let me know. As I intend to begin analysing these interviews in the next two weeks I would appreciate you letting me know by xxx.

Thank you very much for your participation in my research.

Kind regards

Christina Gera

PhD Candidate

Appendix E: Examples of student interview prompts

Please note: I took the prompts below directly from a student interview. The prompts were fairly typical of a first interview, with a first-year, on-campus student. I also give examples of additional prompts and questions that I asked distance students during their first interview.

I am interested in your experiences of the process of you working on your assignment/assignments for this paper.

Tell me about the last assignment you worked on. Talk me through the process of you working on this assignment. What was the first thing you did in preparation for this assignment?

When did you begin writing your assignment?

Tell me about writing your essay.

What was the process you went through in writing your essay?

When you are writing how do you feel?

How did you plan out your paragraphs?

When writing your assignment do you look mainly at the written instructions or do you refer to the information you were given in tutorials or was it a combination?

What do you consider a well-written assignment? By that I mean one that would get an A+ grade.

What did you find helpful and unhelpful with writing your assignment?

Tell me about the course readings.

How do you find the readings book?

What process did you use for reading it?

What makes an A+ assignment? What are the markers looking for?

Tell me about your Facebook page.

What sorts of things do you talk about on your Facebook page?

What would be different between posting your question on Facebook and you posting a question on Moodle to your lecturer?

So why would you use one or the other? (referring to Facebook and Moodle)

Tell me about the lectures.

Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

Additional questions for distance students

Tell me a little bit about yourself first. Why the distance programme?

How are you finding it [the distance programme]?

You've got the lecture notes on Moodle and you've also got the discussions on Moodle, how did you find them in relation to your essay?

How did you find it when you were on campus, and you were given the course outline and Andrea went over the theorist assignment [pseudonym used] essay with you? How did you find that process?

So after leaving campus, have you asked Andrea any questions about the essay or on Moodle or anything like that?

Appendix F: Examples of staff member interview prompts

Can you please tell me about your involvement in this paper?

Are the lectures different than in previous years, are the topics of the lectures different than in previous years?

Tell me about the student readings?

Do you think the students read the readings?

You gave xxx [number of lectures] in the xxx [name of paper] paper. I then listed the titles of the lectures. (That's quite a range of subjects. Is there one particular learning outcome that ties them all together?)

You had selected slides for your lectures? Why? How do you decide which slides to put up on Moodle?

Tell me about your lectures, how you planned your lectures and what you are trying to do in your lectures?

Do your lectures feed into the short essay and long essay? How?

What is the purpose of your tutorials? What are you trying to do?

Tell me about your scaffolding them into the assignment.

Part of my research is about practices that are useful for students in assisting them to write academic essays. Can you think of two or three practices? This could be something undertaken by staff or practices that students instigate themselves.

What are two or three practices that have been helpful and unhelpful for students with their assignment writing?

What do you think constitutes a well written essay at first year level? What is an A+ essay?

What do students need to do to receive a good grade?

Can you think of a metaphor to describe yourself in respect of your teaching?

Do you have any other comments?

Some additional questions for staff teaching on the distance programme

Tell me about teaching the distance students?

Do you think it's the same paper for the face- to -face students and the distance students or are there some differences?

What is the difference between the essay [assignment 2A] and the booklet [assignment 2B]?

What genre do you think the booklet is?

Appendix G: Online questionnaire

Name:

Age⁴⁶: 17 – 25 yrs, 25 – 30 years, 30 – 40 years, 40 – 50 years, over 50 years

Ethnicity⁴⁷: New Zealand European, Maori, Chinese, Indian, other

Educational background: Last qualification studied, and the year studied

Experience with computers:

- Do you have a computer at home? Yes/no
- Before enrolling in this programme how often did you use a computer before enrolling in your study? Rarely sometimes regularly
- Before enrolling in this programme did you previously done any online studying, or had an online component to your course?
- Before enrolling in this programme did you previously had experience with Moodle.

Additional question for xxx [name of distance course] students

Before enrolling in the pre-service education (primary) education programme have you done any type of elearning course before yes/no? If yes, please write the name of the course, institute, and year/s of doing the course.

⁴⁶ Students chose one of these options

⁴⁷ Students chose one of these options

Appendix H: Participant information sheet

Participant information sheets were given to all student and staff participants and adapted slightly for the different cohorts. The copy below was given to staff who taught the first-year, on-campus paper.

Dear Academic Staff Member,

I am currently a part-time PhD (Education) candidate with the University of Montor (pseudonym) and would like to conduct research as a requirement of my Doctoral Degree. I am writing this letter to invite you to be a participant in my research.

The title of my research is: “Academic literacies, through the writing of assignments, in a pre-service primary teaching education programme: Student and staff perspectives”. I am undertaking this research to explore the teaching and learning of academic literacy. It is anticipated this research will contribute towards an understanding of teaching and learning practices at tertiary level. This research has been given ethical approval by the xxx Human Research Ethics Committee [name taken out because of confidentiality].

I would like to invite you to participate in the study by agreeing to my attendance at your course for one semester. This would involve me observing the Moodle component of your course, observing your class at times, and interviewing you once during the semester.

I would like to interview you once during the semester, and estimate that the interview/s will take up to 60 minutes each. I would like to audio-record these interviews and I would also like to take some notes. You will receive a copy of your interview responses and you will have an opportunity to comment on accuracy. Classes I observe will also be audio-recorded. I will also possibly be including informal conversations in my research evidence collection. This means any conversations you have with me during the data collection period may form part of my research evidence. Research evidence gained will be confidential, be anonymized and shared with no other persons except my supervisors. No actual names will be used in the reporting of my research, and efforts will be made to keep participants, the Faculty and the University unidentifiable.

Your participation in this research project is strictly voluntary. You may withdraw at any time up to the commencement of research evidence analysis without providing any reason. If you do withdraw from the study, your responses will be removed from the research evidence and destroyed.

The information gained from this research will be used mainly for producing my thesis. Parts of the research may be used in writing articles and/or presenting at national and international conferences. In this instance, confidentiality as discussed previously will be strictly adhered to. My thesis will be published on the University of Montor digital repository after it has been passed.

If you would like to have further information, or have questions, please either contact myself as the first contact at Christina.gera@wintec.ac.nz, and also feel free to contact my Chief Supervisor, Professor Terry Locke as the second contact at locket@waikato.ac.nz.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read and sign two of the attached informed consent forms. Please email me to let me know that you would like to participate and I will arrange to collect the signed consent form from you. Please keep one copy for your records and return a copy to myself, the researcher.

Thank you very much for your support.

Christina Gera
Christina.gera@wintec.ac.nz
PhD candidate

Appendix I: Staff member consent form

This is a copy of a participant consent form which was given to all student and staff participants and adapted slightly for the different cohorts of students. This copy is for staff who taught the first-year, on-campus paper.

Research: Academic literacies, through the writing of assignments, in a pre-service primary teacher education programme: Student and staff perspectives

I, have been given and read an explanation of the research to be conducted by Christina Gera. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

I understand:

- My participation in this study is completely voluntary.
- Informal conversations with Christina Gera may be used as data.
- My identity and revealed information will be treated with confidentiality.
- There exists the potential that my participation may be identified. However, information published and revealed by Christina Gera will be treated with sensitivity.
- The research findings will be published in the researcher's thesis, presented in academic articles and/or conferences. The thesis will be published on the University of xxx [name of university] Research Commons digital repository after it has been submitted, examined and passed.
- Signing this form indicates my agreement to participate in the study.

I understand I have the right to:

- Alter, omit or add information up to the time I return the transcripts;
- Refuse to answer any of the researcher's questions without giving an explanation of why.
- Withdraw from the research up to the time of the analysis of research evidence.

I agree to

- Be observed in class and online (if there is an online component to the course).
- Be interviewed
- Informal conversations that may occur between me and the researcher being included as part of the data collection
- Provide the course outline of the course being observed, including task requirements and if available, marking criteria.

.....

Signature Date

.....

Name

Appendix J: Research outputs arising from this thesis

- Gera, C. (2014, November). *Using social networks for educational research: Ethnographic “reflexivity.”* Paper presented at New Zealand Association of Research in Education, Dunedin, New Zealand.
- Gera, C. (2014, September). *My research isn't trustworthy: What!* Paper presented at Faculty of Education Doctoral Symposium, Hamilton, New Zealand.
- Gera, C. (2014, November). *The duplicity of my insider/outsider role while conducting research.* Paper presented at Contemporary Ethnography Across Disciplines, Hamilton, New Zealand.
- Gera, C. (2015, May). *Student and staff understandings of academic literacy induction: Convergences and divergences.* Paper presented at Centre for Languages Academic Hour, Wintec, Hamilton, New Zealand.
- Gera, C. (2015, September). *Tertiary students learning to write assignments: Student and staff reflections on what is helpful and unhelpful to students.* Paper presented at National Teaching and Learning Conference, Tauranga, New Zealand.
- Gera, C. (2015, November). *Tertiary students' and staff understandings of academic writing.* Paper presented at Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education Doctoral Symposium, Hamilton, New Zealand.
- Gera, C. (2016, November). *How to increase tertiary students' understanding of academic writing: Make the invisible, visible!* Paper to be presented at the Contemporary Ethnography Across Disciplines Conference, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Gera, C. (2016, November). *Interviews and the power dance.* Paper to be presented at the Contemporary Ethnography Across Disciplines Conference, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Gera, C. (2016, October). *Tertiary student and staff understandings of written argumentation: Mind the gap!* Paper to be presented at the National Teaching and Learning Conference, Rotorua, New Zealand.

Gera, C. (currently under review). Academic, mainstream, staff perceptions and promotion of a student learning centre. In D. Laurs (Ed.). *Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa/New Zealand (ATLAANZ) Journal*.

**Appendix K: Occurrences of aspects of academic writing
mentioned in course outlines**

Component of academic writing	1st year course outlines (including assignments)		2nd year course outlines (including assignments)	
	On-campus	Distance	On-campus	Distance
Social/ Contextual				
Audience			Implied audience 1	Implied audience 1
Purpose/ Language functions	Explanation 2 Description 1 Commentary 3	Explanation 4 Demonstration 1 Critique 1 Commentary 1	Summary 2 Critique 2 Description 1 Justification 1 Summary 1	Summary 2 Critique 3 Evaluation 1 Justification 1
Genre	Short essay, long essay	Essay, booklet	Reading task, essay	Reading task, essay
Voice			1	1
Macro				
Content	Most of the paper on content and learning outcomes. Students need to display “evidence of understanding of the theory”	Most of the paper on content and learning outcomes. Students need to display “evidence of understanding of the theory”	Most of the paper on content and learning outcomes	Most of the paper on content and learning outcomes
Coherence		1	2	2
Micro	On-campus	Distance	On-campus	Distance
Cohesion				
Referencing (including plagiarism)	8	6	4	4
Punctuation, spelling and syntax	1 (described as writing skills)	1 (described as writing skills)	2 (described as spelling, punctuation and grammar)	2 (described as spelling, punctuation and grammar)
Layout	1	2		
Lexis				
Reading	3	3	5 As well as instances, there was quite a focus, as the first assignment was a summary, evaluation and critique of an article.	5 As well as instances, there was quite a focus, as the first assignment was a summary, evaluation and critique of an article.

Appendix L: Occurrences of aspects of academic writing in the courses

Please note: It was difficult to define an instance. For example, with word choice, there was an instance in a tutorial (15 March 2015) of three aspects of word choice. I have recorded this as three separate instances, as the aspects of word choice were quite different. In the second year of the study there were two tutorial instructional sessions. on evaluation. I have recorded these as one instance each. Therefore, I have made judgements below on how to record instances. Another limitation with the below is that I did not record tutorials and lectures, so have based instances on my field notes taken.

First year

Component of academic writing	Lectures	Tutorials	Moodle Not sure this column is accurately counted	Course outlines	Feedback	Interview	Total
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Contextual or social level

Language functions: 1. Explanation 2. Description 3. Critique 4. Argumentation 5. Commentary 6. Demonstration		√		√√√√√ √ √√ √ √√√√√ √	√√√√	×	6
voice	×	×	×	×	×	√	0
audience							
genre	×	x	x	x	×	x	0

Macro level

Content	Each lecture	Each tutorial	Most weeks	√	Numerous occasions	Numerous occasions	
					A few times	√√√√	Numerous occasions
Coherence	×	√	×	√	Numerous occasions (linking theory to practice)	A number of occasions	Numerous occasions (but generally linking theory to practice)

Micro level

Punctuation, syntax, grammar	×	√√√	√√	Stated as “presentation and writing skills” √√√√	Numerous occasions	Numerous occasions	Numerous occasions
Word choice	×	√√√	×	×		√	4
Cohesion	×	×	×	×	×	×	0
Layout	×	√	Once in response to a student question	√	×	√	4
Referencing	√	√√√√	√√√	√	Numerous occasions	Numerous occasions	numerous
Component of academic writing	Lectures	Tutorials	Moodle⁴⁸	Course outlines	Feedback	Interviews	Total

Second year

Component of academic writing	Lectures	Tutorials	Moodle	Course outlines	Feedback⁴⁹	Interviews	Total
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Contextual or social level

Language functions: Evaluation Explanation Description Critique Argumentation Commentary Demonstration Summary	X for all aspects	Eval 2 Explanat 1 Descript 4 Critique 15 Argu 1 Comm 1 Demo 1 Sum 1 Justif 4		Just 2 Describ 2 Evalu 6 Critique 4 Summ 4 Critiq 17 Implic 4		Eval 4 Critiq 30 Summa 0 Descry 2 Justify 3 Implic 0	Please see footnote 19.
voice	0	3		2		2	0
audience	0	8				0	
genre	0	2		2		0	0

⁴⁸ I did not collect the data from Moodle (distance students) and did not have access to on-campus students online platform.

⁴⁹ I had access to feedback on distance students’ assignments only, and mainly their generic feedback sheet. On this sheet content, spelling, punctuation, grammar and referencing were the main criteria.

Macro level

Content	Each lecture	Each tutorial	Most weeks	Much was content based	Numerous occasions	Numerous occasions	
Coherence	0	5		5		0	

Micro level

Punctuation, syntax, grammar	0	1		4			numerous
Word choice	1	1		×		0	4
Cohesion	0	×		×	×	0	0
Layout	×	3			0		4
Referencing	√	18		6	8		

Appendix M: Coherence level displayed in students' assignments

On-campus students' assignments

On-campus students	Assignment 1A	Assignment 2A	Assignment 3A	Assignment 4A
Cheryl	M	M	M	M
Catherine	M	M		
Joanna	M	M		
Francis	M			
Kathleen	M			
Suzanne		M		

Distance students' assignments

Distance students	Assignment 1B	Assignment 2B	Assignment 3B	Assignment 4B
Wilma	U			
Nancy	M		M	R
Molly	R	M	M	R
Amanda	M	M	M	R
Marie	M	M	R	
Cherie	M	M		R
Tia	M	M	M	
Mabel		M	M	R
Carla	U	U	M	R
Michelle	M	M		R
Bob	M	M		
Rachel	M	M		
Dawn	M	M		

Please note: I have not entered evidence for each of the 4 columns for some students, since not every student provided me with each of the four assignments.

Appendix N: Summary table of student and staff understandings of academic writing

Student understandings	Staff understandings	Convergences and divergences
Social/contextual		
<p style="text-align: center;">Audience:</p> <p>Students considered the audience was the marker of the assignment unless instructed otherwise</p>	<p>In the first-year, when audience was mentioned to students, it was the “academic audience” and teachers. In the second year, students were told to consider the “reader”</p>	<p>× Students appeared to focus on or have more of an awareness than staff in respect of audience.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Language functions:</p> <p>In general in the first - year students understood explanation, description and commentary. They appeared to have less of an understanding of argument and not much focus on critique.</p> <p>In the 2nd year students understood and could generally fulfil the language functions (summarise, critique, evaluation, description, justification)</p>	<p>Language functions – staff generally appeared to understand explanation, description, commentary, argument, and critique.</p> <p>In the second year students were given much instruction on the language functions required in assignments.</p>	<p>× - Students understood how to write fulfilling some language functions. Students had a limited understanding of argumentation.</p> <p>In the first year, there appeared to be an expectation that students could fulfil the language functions required. In the second year, students were explicitly taught how to fulfil the language functions required. However, in both years very limited instruction on argumentation occurred.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Genre:</p> <p>In the first year, students understood the genre for assignments 1A, 1B and 2A was the essay genre. Most students had an understanding of how to write in this genre. Students appeared confused as to what was expected with the booklet (assignment 2B).</p>	<p>Staff in the first-year course understood the genre for assignments 1A, 1B and 2A was the essay genre.</p> <p>Staff appeared unsure as to what genre assignment 2B was.</p> <p>In the second year, there was extensive instruction</p>	<p>√ Both first-year students and staff understood assignments 1A, 2A and 1B are to be written in the essay genre and understood in general what this meant.</p> <p>√ Both first-year students and staff were not all that clear of whether the genre “booklet” was similar to an essay or report.</p>

(e.g. Was it closer to a report or an essay). In the second year both assignments were different genres. Students appeared to understand what was expected with the critique and the essay (first and 2 nd assignment).	given to students on how to fulfil the required language functions.	√ In the second year both students and staff appeared to understand what a critique and an essay was and how to write these.
Voice: Students appeared to have differing opinions and some uncertainty about the inclusion of writer's voice.	Staff – in the first year there was very minimal focus by staff on voice. In the second year there was more focus on voice which was explained to students as paraphrasing instead of direct quoting.	× In the first year students had differing opinions and some uncertainty about voice and academic writing. Staff had minimal focus or awareness on voice. √ In the second year both students and staff showed an awareness of voice (staff raised student awareness).

Macro level

Content: Students understood they needed to write about subject matter in order to write about it.	Staff understood assignments were a way for students to engage with content.	√ Students and staff understood content was an important aspect of their assignment.
Coherence: Students understood the importance of producing writing that had coherence.	In the first year, coherence was focused on in respect of overall assignment structure. In the second year, students were also given instruction on paragraph structure. Staff understood structure was important in respect of writing.	√ Both students and staff had an understanding that assignments should have coherence.

Micro level

Cohesion: Generally not a focus for students.	Cohesion – Not focused on by staff.	√ cohesion was not a focus for students or staff.
Referencing: Students, especially in the first year were quite focused on, and challenged by referencing. Students recognised this	Referencing – Staff demonstrations to students were on the mechanical aspects of referencing. In interviews, staff also talked about	√ - Students and staff recognised referencing as an important component of academic writing.

as a requirement of tertiary level assignments.	conceptual aspects of referencing.	× - Staff displayed in general a higher level of understanding of referencing, especially in students first year.
<p>Word- and sentence-level accuracy:</p> <p>Students understood this was a requirement of academic writing. Some students challenged (especially in the first year) by this.</p>	Word- and sentence -level accuracy important.	√ - Both staff and students considered word- and sentence -level accuracy important.
<p>Word choice:</p> <p>Not many students commented on this.</p>	<p>Word choice –</p> <p>Not generally a focus for staff.</p> <p>.</p>	<p>√ - Word choice was not a focus for students or staff.</p> <p>This could have been because students displayed (in their assignments) a reasonable level of competence in word choice.</p>

Appendix O: Summary table of staff and students identified helpful and unhelpful academic writing learning practices⁵⁰

Categories	Convergences/divergences between first and second-year students	Convergences/divergences between students and staff
Writing instruction given in tutorials	Helpful ✓	Helpful ✓
Lectures	Helpful ✓	No commented on by staff
Course discussion forums	Helpful ✓	Helpful ✓
Facebook	Helpful ✓ first year, some second-year students thought it was helpful and some thought it was unhelpful.	Not commented on by staff
Library tutorials	Helpful ✓	Not commented on by staff
Readings	Helpful ✓ (but students, especially in the first-year, challenged by readings)	Not commented on by staff
Library APA sheet	Helpful ✓	Helpful ✓
Feedback and consultation pre-submission	Helpful ✓	Helpful ✓
Feedback post-submission	Helpful ✓	Helpful ✓
Library	Helpful ✓	Not commented on by staff
The student learning centre	Helpful ✓	Helpful ✓

⁵⁰ Please note that in the table above I do not comment on how many students and staff identified the practices as helpful and/or unhelpful.

Appendix P: Peer review template

Please use the guidelines below when evaluating your partner's writing. You must write comments to justify your evaluations.

Authors ID number: _____

Your ID number: _____

Peer review form	
Context of situation	Please comment
Has the writer written to a particular audience, e.g., an academic audience?	
Has the writer done as asked, e.g., explained, discussed, critiqued etc?	
Has the writer written in the appropriate genre?	
Is the writer's voice visible?	
Macro features	
Content	
Coherence: Does the assignment have coherence, e.g., is there a connection between the introduction, body, conclusion?	
Micro features	
Layout	
Structure	
Referencing	
Cohesion, e.g., Do the sentences link to each other? Are there connectors such as "In addition," "furthermore"?	
Word choice	
Punctuation, grammar, syntax	

Do you suggest a second reviewer look at this assignment (e.g., lecturer)? yes/no

