The Role of Written Feedback in the Development of Critical Academic Writing: A Study of the Feedback Experience of International Students in Taught Master's Programmes

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Abstract

Despite the body of research on the learning experience and challenges faced by international students in developing critical academic writing, little attention has been given to their experience of formative and summative written feedback. Published studies of feedback in UK higher education have been mainly undergraduate focused, based on survey methods, with little research on feedback in the context of particular programmes or on student experience over a number of related feedback events. This study investigated the impact of written feedback on critical academic writing in two Master's programmes at a northern university in the UK. The research, based on case study interviews and a grounded theory approach, explored tutor intentions and student responses to feedback, with additional content analysis of feedback reports.

The findings reveal that written feedback is unsuited to conveying the tacit nature of critical academic writing and that varying motivation and strategic engagement can also marginalise its role. In the wider context of internationalization, the case studies highlighted how a depersonalisation of the assessment process can result from marketization and large cohorts of international students. The importance of academic culture for engagement with feedback was evident, but large culture explanations were less important than specific teaching and learning regimes. Wide variation in tutors' beliefs and practices were linked to tensions between teaching and assessment roles, highlighting the need for more tutor dialogue around feedback. The study argues for more attention to developing critical academic writing through showing rather than telling (exemplars), and through dialogue around feedback and other modes of feedback delivery (audio feedback), since such approaches may strengthen personal relationships between tutor and student and lead to fuller engagement and motivation. This thesis makes a contribution to research on feedback and the international graduate student experience. It argues for more attention to the processes that feedback supports, and suggests that inter-disciplinary, one-year Master's programmes can place unrealistic demands on international students, implying the need for a longer transition to enable them to achieve the level of critical academic writing expected of them.

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Acknowledgements

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my original work. The work is not based on any joint research and it has not been submitted for any higher degree in another university.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis reports research carried out in two departments at a northern University in the United Kingdom, henceforth referred to as the University of Bradfield. Bradfield is a relatively prestigious research-led University, currently without a faculty structure, but with teaching organised within relatively autonomous departments. The research focused on the feedback experiences of two groups of international and overseas non-native speaker students on their taught Master's programmes, with a preliminary study in the department of Archaeology and the main study in the Department of Education. The focus is on international students who do not have English as their first language, and who did not study their first degrees in English or in an English speaking academic culture. This includes EU students although they are considered as 'home' students in terms of fees [1].The terms 'native' and 'non-native' speaker have become contested in recent years, particularly with the interest in English as an International Language and World Englishes (e.g., see Jenkins, 2003). Other studies in this area have used the term English as an Additional Language or EAL (see Poverjuc, 2011). Since EAL is often used in relation to secondary school students in the UK, this study will principally use the term 'international students', but will also refer to non-native speakers as students who do not have English as their L1 and did not study their first degree subjects in English.

This chapter begins by setting out the importance of the international and overseas student market within postgraduate education in higher education (HE). Despite a body of research on international students in UK higher education, a gap in postgraduate international students' experience of feedback is identified. The chapter goes on to situate the topic of feedback in relation to critical academic writing (CAW), and makes the case for more research in this area. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis structure and content.

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[1] The study does not focus on students from the US or Australia, for example, since despite their official label as international students, they share similar language and educational backgrounds to UK students.

1.1 Importance of International Students in UK Postgraduate Education

The number of overseas non-native speaker international students studying in higher education (HE) in the UK has grown significantly in recent years[2]. The postgraduate sector in particular has seen a tremendous growth in the past ten years, with international students[3] comprising a very important part in this expansion. By 2008/9, 68% of full-time taught postgraduates in UK universities were international students, and in the academic year 2011/12, this number rose to 69% of full-time taught postgraduates and 46% of all taught postgraduates (UKCISA, n.d.). At the University of Bradfield, figures for 2009 showed that 26% of students were postgraduates, with international students making up 20% of this number. Between 2006 and 2011, the proportion of postgraduates and the proportion of overseas students at the University of Bradfield were both expected to rise within an overall expansion of 20% in total student numbers (Student support and development strategy, 2009). The growing importance of this group of students for UK HE implied the need for the clearest possible understanding of their experience.

Despite the growth in the postgraduate sector in Higher Education, it has been described as a "poor area in terms of research" (White, 2009)[4]. When this study was conceived, teaching and learning for international students, however, had received considerable attention, mainly focused at the undergraduate level (e.g., De Vita & Case, 2003; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Robson & Turner, 2007; Ryan, 2011; Ryan, 2005). Much research had been carried out by international students on their own postgraduate studies (e.g., Brown, 2008; Pelletier, 2004), but little research had

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[2] A 48% increase in the number of international students in higher education was reported between the years 2002 and 2006 (Universities UK, 2009).

[3] EU students are deemed 'home students' for fee paying purposes. However, the focus of this study is on international students who do not have English as their first language, and it therefore includes EU students within this group.

[4] This description was made at the 2009 Teaching and Learning Conference at the University of Sheffield, where the characteristics and needs of the overseas student market were repeatedly highlighted; a majority vote in the closing debate agreed that the most important issue for postgraduate students was the provision of a "more structured support system for international postgraduate students".

focused on international taught Master's students' experience of feedback and its impact on their writing (Tian & Lowe, 2013).

1.2 Critical Academic Writing Skills at Postgraduate Level

A key requirement of undergraduate and postgraduate study at university level in the UK is that of criticality: critical thinking and critical analytical writing (Chanock, 2000; Wingate, 2011; Woodward-Kron, 2002). Although the precise scope of these terms is highly contested in the literature (see Section 2.3), they are seen by all to be 'foundational' at undergraduate and postgraduate level in the UK (see The Higher Education Academy, 2013). Even a cursory examination of the marking criteria used in the Department of Archaeology, the location of the preliminary study in this research, demonstrates the primacy of criticality in determining grade boundaries (criteria related to criticality in bold):

> 56-61: As above but showing a more competent coverage of the topic, with appropriate **data and criticisms presented in a balanced analytical and critical framework**. A clear pass.
>
> 62-68 As above, but in addition is **a well-argued and presented coverag**e, with good understanding and **critique of issues and data**, based on wide reading. Some signs of creative thought and originality but either not sustained excellence in this aspect or marred by other defects (use of language or inaccurate referencing, for instance).
> **(Extract from Archaeology marking criteria – see Appendix A)**

The role of marking criteria in relation to critical academic writing is taken up in more detail in Chapter 2, but the terms 'argue' and 'argument' used above clearly point to their centrality within such criteria. Despite the expectations of criticality and argument identified above, it has been claimed that argumentation is not recognised as a central skill for postgraduates. Andrews (2007), for example, argues that argumentative capability is the hidden criterion in the assessment of student writing. He observes that in the UK it is assumed that 'immersion in the discipline' will provide the student with the ability to think critically and to argue effectively, the assumption being that "the very nature of a discipline is that it is constructed around arguments, therefore there is no need to look at these explicitly" (Andrews, 2007, p.3).

The position implied above leads to a consideration of the concept of 'communities of practice'(Lave & Wenger, 1991) to understand how students

develop academic literacy within specific disciplines (see Section 2.3.1). It also begs the question of how feedback might operate differently within different disciplines and how it engages with criticality. Indeed, a study by Hyatt (2005) analysed a corpus of feedback comments on postgraduate assignments in Education, and highlighted a lack of comments that engaged students in a disciplinary dialogue, which, he argued, was necessary for induction in the discipline. Hyatt's work was not based on large numbers of international students, but it prompted me to question whether written feedback was capable of 'inducting' students in this way, particularly in terms of critical analysis within specific disciplines.

Reference was made above to research on the international student experience, and the challenges facing international students entering UK higher education have received significant attention in recent years (e.g., Durkin, 2008; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Jin & Cortazzi, 2011; McMahon, 2011; Montgomery, 2010; Ryan, 2005; Tian & Lowe, 2009; Trahar, 2007). Many of these studies take up the topic of international students' challenges in making a transition to a different academic culture. In a study published several years into this research, Ryan (2011) labelled early research attempts as 'fix the student' and studies from 2000 onwards as shifting to a 'fix the teacher' approach (p.638). Some studies have focused specifically on critical thinking and critical analytical writing (see Section 2.3), highlighting the difficulties novice students have in unpacking these concepts (e.g., Chanock, 2000; Durkin, 2008; Floyd, 2011; Woodward-Kron, 2002). It is clear that international postgraduate students in the UK, with little knowledge of UK academic culture, face a stern challenge in understanding and developing the skills of critical analysis and argument (Woodward-Kron, 2002).

Given that taught Master's programmes in the UK in general, and at Bradfield in particular, are concentrated within one year of study, there is a need for students to develop CAW skills very quickly in order to get the most from their studies. It follows from this that feedback might be expected to play an important role in developing CAW, but more research is needed to understand the extent to which it provides information on performance that can be used to improve and develop subsequent assignments. The next section provides some background relating to feedback in the context of taught programmes.

1.3 Feedback and International Taught Master's Students

Feedback, understood in its simplest form, is information given by teachers to students on their work (Boud & Molloy, 2013). It can be delivered in various modes, including face-to-face discussion, but it is most commonly discussed in terms of written comments on texts (marginal comments) or end comments in feedback reports. The main focus of this research is on written feedback, but the argument is made in Chapter 2 that feedback comes from several sources and must also be understood in relation to other teaching activities.

The literature often seems to consider feedback as a single concept, while in reality it can be understood as several different concepts (Askew, 2000; Boud & Molloy, 2013) and it needs to be understood within the context in which it is delivered. Feedback in the context of academic programmes differs from feedback in the context of L2 writing classes. Corrective feedback to L2 learners in English Language Teaching (ELT), has been the focus of much attention, (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2004; Hyland, 2001, 2003; Lee, 2012). The ELT context does not directly equate with the taught Master's context of the present study, however, but as this study deals with international students, Chapter 2 will make reference to findings in this area where they may provide insights into feedback processes within disciplines.

'Formative assessment' is a much used term in higher education, and one that is central to the concerns of this study. It refers to assessment evaluations aimed principally at improving student work, as opposed to 'summative assessment', which provides evaluation of student work for certification purposes at the end of a course of study (Sadler, 1989). Feedback on taught Master's programmes can be given on a piece of work that is not assessed, but cannot be used for revision purposes if the work is a finished product. Formative feedback can also be given on draft essays, however, which can be used directly by students to revise their work. Perhaps the most commonly discussed form of feedback in the literature corresponds to summative feedback presented in a report which may be delivered many weeks after assignment submission. These are important distinctions that will be explored further in Chapter 2, which considers the Assessment for Learning literature (AfL)

and its relevance to feedback given within taught Master's programmes at Bradfield. AfL is often equated with formative assessment, or assessment and feedback practices that do not provide summative evaluations alone, but use evaluation to improve learning and the teaching and learning process itself (McDowell, Wakelin, & Montgomery, 2011).

Alongside the different types of written feedback, tutor and student discussion of feedback often features in the AfL literature; it is seen as essential to the process of feedback dialogue (Blair & McGinty, 2012; Juwah et al., 2004; Nicol, 2010; Yang & Carless, 2013). This notion of dialogue is often extended to include peer feedback approaches (e.g., Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2002; Van den Berg, Admiraal, & Pilot, 2006; Wimshurst & Manning, 2013). In recent years, technological modes of feedback have also been advocated, such as audio (or podcast) feedback where audio files are delivered to students with commentaries on their work (France & Ribchester, 2008; Lunt & Curran, 2009; Savin-Baden, 2010); screen capture technology has also appeared more recently, allowing tutors to navigate within on-screen texts, while at the same time giving feedback commentary (Kerr & McLaughlin, 2008; Stannard, 2007). Chapter 2 defines these different types and modes of feedback, focusing particularly on formative feedback and assessment for learning (AfL) approaches.

Feedback has been claimed to have a powerful and critical influence on student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Hattie & Timperley, 2007), but in recent years the effectiveness of feedback in HE has frequently been questioned. Undergraduate students in the UK, for example, have expressed dissatisfaction with feedback in the annual National Student Survey (NSS), undoubtedly prompting increased interest in feedback as a topic of research. In 2007, 82 per cent of UK students found teaching on their undergraduate programmes satisfactory, but only just over half (54 per cent) felt their feedback had been prompt and helpful in clarifying points (Attwood & Radnofsky, 2007). Studies analysing written feedback have also suggested that feedback may not be so effective in practice (Hyatt, 2005; Mutch, 2003; Walker, 2009; Weaver, 2006; Yelland, 2011). These studies analysed samples of feedback in varying contexts, but none were based on the specific international taught Master's context, neither did they have a

specific concern with feedback relating to critical analytical writing. This presented a clear gap for the current research to address.

International students' experience of feedback and assessed writing has been referred to in studies in a number of countries such as the USA (e.g., Andrade, 2006; Fox, 1994; Leki, 1990), Hong Kong (Carless, 2006; Yang & Carless, 2013) and Australia (Lizzio & Wilson, 2013; Rowe, 2011). There may be differences in academic culture in these countries, but there are clearly similarities in academic writing conventions, and to some extent expectations of criticality. Chapter 2 teases out these differences and finds similarities where they are relevant to this study.

What is evident in the UK research literature is that the focus of studies on feedback, has tended to be on undergraduate, home students, with little or no focus on international non-native speaker graduates. It was this partial focus that lay behind the current work, as I wanted to consider the perspectives of international taught Master's students, in a study that promised to test existing findings for home undergraduate students in my own context.

It should be noted here that since the current research began in 2008, the gap in published research on feedback for international Master's students has been partially addressed through unpublished doctoral studies (Poverjuc, 2011) and published studies (Robson, et., al. 2013; Tian & Lowe, 2013). Tian and Lowe, however, focused not only on feedback, but on the totality of the cultural experience of a group of Chinese postgraduate students. These more recent studies will be referred to later in the literature review in so far as their approach and findings are relevant to this thesis.

1.4 Personal Interest and Motivation

I have worked closely with international students for a number of years in my role as Programme Manager for English for Academic Purposes (EAP), in the English Language Unit (ELU)[5] at the University of Bradfield. Designing and teaching academic writing on pre-sessional and in-sessional courses had highlighted the

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[5] I use the title ELU for purposes of anonymity, as this is not the actual title of my department.

difficulties such students have in adopting appropriate conventions and developing criticality in their writing[6]. From 2006, I was able to see another side to this challenge when I began teaching on two modules of an MATESOL taught Master's programme in the Department of Education at Bradfield. My earlier insights from supporting international students in EAP classrooms were thus complemented by experience as a marker and giver of feedback on academic modules. This experience prompted me to seek a greater understanding of how international students develop their academic writing skills through the period of a one-year taught Master's programme.

My experience developing teaching materials for academic writing has impressed upon me the need for specific research into the way students develop critical analytical writing skills; aware of the challenges overseas and international students faced in making a transition to postgraduate study, I was interested in finding out more about the way pre-sessional students went on to develop critical analytical writing over their taught Master's year and to gauge the impact of pre-sessionals on later writing development. At the same time, teaching on Master's modules has led me to question the role of written feedback in the process of the development of critical writing at postgraduate level. As a marker and giver of feedback, I received no specific induction or training as to how to do this most effectively. I thus wanted to know more about the impact of the type of feedback I was giving on subsequent student writing, a desire which led directly to the present research.

1.5 The Structure of the Thesis

In Chapter 2, feedback is further defined in relation to educational theories, highlighting the way that feedback viewed in terms of a transmission mechanism is out of kilter with current constructivist theories of learning. I then situate this research within an Academic Literacies (AL) approach before examining the

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[6] My EAP role initially involved organising and teaching pre-sessional groups of students who mainly progressed to taught Master's programmes, and later I designed and ran in-sessional courses for postgraduate groups within specific departments.

literature on critical thinking and critical analysis. The review discusses the distinction between critical thinking in embedded and context-independent approaches, before outlining a working definition of critical analytical writing for this study. The literature on the experience of international students in UK higher education is then reviewed to situate the present research in the context of internationalisation, at the same time identifying key themes related to issues of academic and learning cultures.

The literature review then deals with different types of feedback study, referring to insights from US composition findings on reader response theory, and reference to research on L2 learners' experience of feedback in the ELT field. The contested area of formative assessment and AfL approaches is then discussed, with an emphasis on the 'feedback dialogue' and the notion of 'feed forward'; the case is made for understanding the centrality of tacit knowledge in marking and criteria. The chapter closes with a review of research into mainly undergraduate perceptions of written feedback, and contrasts this with findings from studies of tutor perceptions of their role in giving feedback. I conclude with my main research questions and an argument for studies of a longitudinal nature that capture student and tutor perceptions and also analyse written feedback to explore how it contributes to developing CAW over the length of a taught Master's programme.

Chapter 3 gives the rationale for a flexible, qualitative research study based on the research questions. I outline the epistemological and ontological positions underpinning the approach taken, and argue for the value of a constructivist, interpretivist methodology, based on longitudinal case studies within the Departments of Archaeology and Education at Bradfield. The choice of interview methods supported by analysis of feedback texts is discussed, and a grounded theory approach is established. The case is also made for the value of triangulation of data and use of member checks to establish trustworthiness. I conclude the chapter with a section that establishes a framework for analysing written feedback comments.

In Chapter 4, I describe the design and implementation of what will henceforth be referred to as the preliminary study. This study collected data in the Department of Archaeology at Bradfield. The chapter details ethical procedures

taken and also discusses the thematic analysis applied to the data, dealing with various issues that arose in relation to the data itself.

Chapter 5 presents brief narratives and analysis of feedback from three student case studies in Archaeology. The main findings and results are briefly reviewed to show how they informed the main study that followed. The three detailed case descriptions are included as Appendix F. The preliminary case studies document the way three international students with differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds all struggled to develop their CAW; feedback analysis in each case highlighted a similarity between formative and summative feedback, with limited feed forward potential in comments.

Chapter 6 describes the design modifications and data collection procedures for the main study located in the Department of Education at Bradfield. The chapter documents how a group of female Chinese students was recruited, with a balance between those who had attended a pre-sessional at Bradfield and those who entered their programme directly. The chapter also documents the way that I included my own feedback data and practices in the research, in an effort to collect data from tutor-student interviews that I was involved in, and to provide a focus on a more innovative use of audio feedback alongside written feedback.

In Chapter 7, results for one formative feedback event are discussed. I document the different ways in which the task was realised by seven tutors and how it was experienced in various ways by the participants. The findings from the feedback analysis revealed well-intentioned, but variable, practice by tutors, with predominantly diagnostic and directive feedback foregrounding stylistic and language issues. In terms of developing CAW, findings suggested a limited feed forward potential of the feedback in both written and audio modes, though the latter provided more depth of explanation than was evident in the written feedback.

The summative feedback events for the main study are reported within case summaries and a thematic analysis in Chapter 8. A number of themes that emerged are discussed in light of the data from the student participants. Chapter 9 then presents analysis and discussion of tutor interview data from the summative stages of

the main study, revealing a diversity of beliefs and feedback practices and highlighting wider issues of the teaching, learning and assessment regime in which the study took place. The chapter includes a brief reflection on my own changing beliefs and practice throughout the period of the study and it situates the study within current debates around internationalisation. I highlight the way internationalisation at Bradfield was characterised by a marketized approach, and how this impacted on the feedback experience of the students in this study. Finally, Chapter 10 states the contribution of the research by pulling together conclusions and reflecting on their implications. The chapter summarises the limitations of the two studies and provides ideas for further research on certain aspects of feedback in this context.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined my specific teaching and learning context and motivation for a proposed study of the role of feedback in developing critical analytical writing in taught international postgraduate students. The principal motivation to carry out such a study lay in my experience in designing and leading EAP programmes to prepare such students for academic study, combined with my recent experience of teaching modules on an MA programme at Bradfield. Chapter 1 also identified the importance of NNS postgraduate students to UK universities, and highlighted a need for more research in this topic area. This chapter will review three main areas: the literature pertaining to theories of education that underpin learning and teaching in Higher Education; the body of work relating to the teaching of academic writing, critical thinking and study skills to international students; and the relevant literature on feedback in Higher Education in relation to international post-graduate students, including the literature on international students experience in higher education in the UK. This review will identify the principal problems and issues surrounding written feedback for international postgraduate students, particularly those that relate closely to developing critical analytical writing. It will highlight gaps in the literature in order to define a set of questions and themes that a study of this topic might address.

The review will conclude that feedback for international postgraduate students is relatively under researched, and that issues with the discourse of written feedback are closely linked to problems in understanding and developing critical academic writing. It will become clear that the concept of 'criticality' in writing is itself contested and that there are clear difficulties in making the tacit knowledge that it represents explicit. The review will conclude with a set of research questions that focus on the notion of 'feed forward' and usability of feedback in the context of taught Master's programmes. These questions will also address the extent to which findings from feedback studies on undergraduate native English speaking students can be confirmed in a study of international postgraduates.

2.1 Feedback and Educational Theory

An effective evaluation of the usefulness of feedback "must rest on an analysis of its purpose, the assumptions about learning on which it is based and recognition that feedback has different purposes" (Askew, 2000, p.3). At the time of writing, many studies of feedback seemed to base themselves on constructivist theories and the nature of these theories will be discussed briefly in order to situate theoretical approaches to feedback and writing. Attention will then turn to the influence of the academic literacies movement, and how this approach can provide insights into non-native speaker engagement with literacy practices in an unfamiliar academic environment.

2.1.1   *Early roles of feedback: receptive-transmission mode*

Early studies on feedback, such as Thorndike's law of effect, saw feedback as necessary for the reinforcement of learning (Burke & Pieterick, 2010). Later behaviourist theories also made feedback by reinforcement of desired behaviour a central part of learning and motivating learners. In the behaviourist approach, learning was broken down into small, tightly sequenced steps and teaching was separated from assessment (Shepard, 2000). The role of feedback was seen very much as a key facilitator of learning within learning psychology at the time that behaviourism was at its height (Kvale, cited in Boud & Falchikov, 2007).The 1970s, however, heralded the beginnings of a focus on learning with an information processing perspective; the idea was that feedback messages on strengths and weaknesses from tutors should be processed and acted upon by learners (Burke & Pieterich, 2010).

The information processing view has been criticised as reductionist in its analogy between the human mind and the computer (Liu & Matthews, 2005), in as much as its rather mechanistic and simplistic view does not take into account social characteristics of learners. Askew labels this view of feedback the "receptive-transmission mode" (2000, p.3), describing it in terms of the expert in the field giving information to the passive student. She refers to feedback in this mode as a 'gift'. Such a 'transmission' view of feedback is still significant, however, as a number of authors make the point that current feedback research still attempts to

build on the transmission view in evaluating effective types of feedback (Burke & Pieterick, 2010; Higgins, 2002; Scott & Coate, 2003).

Scott and Coate (2003) point out that much of the earlier criticism of feedback was based on an "unexamined, idealised conception of feedback as a process in which teacher comments should be precisely mirrored in student comprehension and use"(p.89). This is a very important point, as the same authors highlight the lack of attention in feedback research to the relation realised by the feedback between teacher-writer and student-reader. This conception of feedback as an unproblematic transmission mechanism also assumes that the message in a piece of writing can and should be fully transparent, an assumption which is clearly arguable (Lillis & Turner, 2001).

2.1.2 Feedback as 'ping-pong': A constructivist view

The educational approach labelled 'constructivism' views knowledge construction from the perspective of the learner: learners construct knowledge from their interpretation of experience in the external world, with a focus on active sense making, self-monitoring and developing awareness of learning (Shepard, 2000). Rust (2005) sums up the implications for assessment of this emphasis on social aspects of learning:

> A social constructivist view of learning (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Bruner, 1986, 1990) argues that knowledge is shaped and evolves through increasing participation within different communities of practice (Cole, 1990; Scribner, 1985). Acquiring knowledge and understanding of assessment processes, criteria and standards needs the same kind of active engagement and participation as learning about anything else. (p. 232)

The nature of feedback conceptualised from a constructivist view of learning has been characterised as 'ping-pong' by Askew, in her description of the 'to and fro' nature of teacher-student discussion (2000, p.10). Constructivist views of learning seem to have entered the research on feedback more fully in the last ten years, with a focus on 'self-regulated learning'(Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Price, Carroll, O'Donovan, & Rust, 2011; Rust, O'Donovan, & Price, 2005). This move has been described by some as a paradigm shift (Burke & Pieterick, 2010), but as Rust (2002) suggests, the move from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning may be more at

the level of rhetoric, as assessment practices in Higher Education in particular seem slow to change (Elwood & Klenowski, 2010). The latter point is important and any study of feedback in Higher Education would need to consider that a range of feedback practices might emerge, and be cognisant of the potential gap between what is viewed as good practice in the literature and what actually happens in specific modules and programmes.

2.2 An Academic Literacies Approach

Research on feedback and the development of academic writing must situate itself in terms of competing theories of student writing in Higher Education. Perhaps the most useful of these theoretical perspectives is provided by the Academic Literacies approach (AL), which emerged in the late 1980s (Ganobscik-Williams, 2006). This approach has been described by Lillis and Scott as "UK based teacher-researchers writing out of higher Education, and drawing on Applied linguistics, ELT-EAP, Education, sociolinguistics and linguistic ethnography" (2007, p.6). Arguably, the value of the AL approach is that it lays out alternative responses to issues of literacy development, providing at the same time an understanding of how teachers and researchers position themselves in relation to such issues.

2.2.1   Three models for understanding student writing

In their often cited overview of models of student writing, Lea and Street describe three perspectives: the *study skills model,* which sees student writing as a technical and instrumental skill; *the academic socialisation model*, which sees student writing as "a transparent medium of representation"; and the *academic literacies model,* which sees student writing as "meaning-making and contested" (1998, p.172). They do not see these as mutually exclusive or on a linear time scale, but rather in a hierarchical relationship, with each model building on what went before, so that AL " incorporates both of the other models into a more encompassing understanding of the nature of student writing within institutional practices, power relations and identities" (p.158).

The *study skills model* can be criticised on the grounds that it sees students as the problem, or approaches the development of academic literacy in terms of student

deficit with concomitant 'fix it' solutions (Ganobscik-Williams, 2006; Lea & Street, 1998). The *academic socialisation model*, a development from earlier approaches, recognises the value of study skills in developing academic literacy, but focuses more on student induction into academic communities of learning. Drawing upon constructivist views of learning, this model considers learning in social and cultural contexts. It has been criticised, however, in that it could imply a relatively homogeneous academic culture which merely has to be learnt and reproduced to allow access to the institution (Lea & Street, 1998). At the same time, it tends to ignore the reality of academic cultures specific to departments and even specific modules within them. A central point to be drawn from the above is that there is a 'transformative' element to the AL perspective, which purports to go beyond earlier "identify and induct" approaches common in English for Academic Purposes teaching that identified academic conventions and explored ways of helping students become proficient in them (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p.13). The AL approach encompasses *study skills* and *academic socialisation,* but sees these as limited in relation to the *academic literacies* perspective, which "... views student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation" (p.159). Thus, an AL perspective views writing as 'social practice', a perspective following directly from earlier Genre approaches in the US (Wingate & Tribble, 2012) and it has clearly had an impact upon attempts to understand writing and feedback in Higher Education in the UK. This impact is evidenced in the number of recent studies on feedback which explicitly refer to it as a central framework informing their approach and method (Burke & Pieterick, 2010; Mutch, 2003; Scott, 2003).

AL, therefore, offers a useful framework for research, arguing as it does for an understanding of student and tutor beliefs, intentions and actions. Such an approach would serve to situate research into feedback and writing of NNS postgraduates within an institutional context, focusing on specific groups rather than generalities. As Lillis & Scott (2007) suggest:

> ...the fluidity of the use of the phrase 'academic literacy/ies' in part therefore reflects its position at the juncture of theory/research and strategic application: teacher-researchers need to face both ways – towards academic theorising and research – and also towards institutions and practices as they are currently configured. (p.17)

The transformative nature of the AL framework presents some similarities with another methodological approach, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a 'tradition' which informed the development of the AL approach (Lillis & Scott, 2008). The section that follows will deal with CDA, setting out its relevance to studies on feedback, but also highlighting potential difficulties that the transformative nature of the tradition implies for teacher-researchers.

2.2.2   *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), developed most notably by Fairclough (1979), is concerned with the way power is exercised by controlling access to different discourse communities (e.g., Widdowson, 1998). It takes as a starting point the notion that language is not ideologically neutral, and its analysis attempts to 'expose' underlying ideological influence in texts (Lillis & Scott, 2008). It has influenced research and approaches in EAP, leading to a Critical English for Academic Purposes (CEAP) (Benesch, 1993; 2001; Pennycook, 1997). CDA and CEAP are methodological approaches that provide options for analysis of texts, including student essays, departmental writing criteria or tutor feedback, so such approaches might be relevant to a study on written feedback. However, it is argued here that CDA and CEAP tend to be limited to an interpretation of texts themselves, while largely ignoring the intentions of the writers and readers of those texts, making them less appropriate in this context.

Writers such as Benesch (2001), Canagarajah (2002) and Pennycook (1997) argue for a critical approach that goes beyond the 'pragmatic' function of instructing students to reproduce conventions in a power relationship where they are novices and tutors are experts. Their alternative critical EAP practice sees the need to make power relationships in the university explicit and to empower students to 'challenge' this status quo. For Benesch (2001), for example, student needs should also embrace 'rights' which are not simply entitlements but "a framework for understanding and responding to power relations" (p.108). What seems to be at stake is the notion that it is possible to help students meet institutional expectations whilst also equipping them with the tools to articulate their own expectations. To some extent, the AL approach seems to share a similar 'emancipating' belief. However, the danger here

may be that of ascribing motivations and needs to learners that they themselves would not always recognise.

Benesch (1993, 2001) also refers to the way in which EAP tutors may also challenge the work of the academy, and she argues for resistance to dominant pedogogy that is not inclusive, but she recognises the difficulties that marginalised ESL staff may face in taking up such positions. The present research only touches on the EAP context, but the implication of CEAP appears to be relevant here, namely that lecturers and tutors should be aware of the cultures and world-views of their students and that it is the responsibility of the academy to adapt itself to them to some extent. Benesch (2001) argues for "…EAP's potential for challenging the status quo of unfavorable conditions, so that faculty across the curriculum might develop more appropriate assignments, ones geared to their actual students rather than imagined, better prepared ones" (p.2). What CEAP also highlights is the tension between accommodating to and resisting academic conventions and how this is complex in terms of power relationships and identities.

Widdowson (1998) takes issue with CDA on a number of fronts, observing that in much CDA analysis, producers and consumers of texts are not consulted as to their intentions. Widdowson sees the problem in the CDA position as necessarily leading to a partial interpretation. This criticism echoes the point made above; if writers' intentions, whether they be those of tutors or students, and their readers' responses and motivations are not made clear, then a critical discourse analysis of text becomes simply an interpretation made by a third party.

CDA seems to assume that learners enter UK universities with a strong desire to question the very nature of their academic programmes, but such an assumption may ignore the often instrumental nature of the learners' engagement. The CDA perspective appears to make no allowance for the fact that learners may not wish to question the alien academic culture which they enter openly, and there can be a presumption of intentions that do not exist.

In a study that took an ethnographic approach unrelated to CDA, Durkin provides some evidence that learners in her studies opted not to embrace all aspects

of Western critical thinking, choosing instead to adopt elements that were more culturally acceptable to them (Durkin, 2011; Durkin, 2008). Durkin's evidence was based on self-report interview data, not simply an interpretation of text; her work, based on East Asian postgraduate learners, is a somewhat isolated example, but is relevant to a study on feedback and critical analytical writing and will be discussed in more detail later in Section 2.3.6. What is clear is that student intentions and motivations for the texts they write cannot be ignored, and that a study of practices and the intentions of writers and receivers of feedback, not only texts, is necessary for research into the role of feedback and its impact on writing.

The unequal power relation between tutor and student is often seen by CEAP and CDA approaches to be the central problem that needs addressing. I tend to agree with Swales (1990), however, who argues for, "... a pragmatic concern to help people, both native and non-native speakers, to develop their academic competence" (p. 91). The need for students to be able to do things with academic discourse rather than simply reflect upon it is echoed by the 'critical pragmatic' approach advocated by Harwood and Hadley (2004). Their critical pragmatic EAP offers a way forward by seeking to make the dominant academic discourse accessible, while at the same time raising awareness of the options that students have in their academic writing. This approach is shared by Ridley, who suggests that , "once familiar with the common learning, language and literacy practices in a discipline, a student can then opt to conform or challenge the conventional ways of being from an informed position rather than from a position of possible confusion" (Ridley, 2004, p.92). This is not to suggest that power relations and the critique of dominant discourses should be of no concern in the study of feedback and writing, rather it is recognition that they are not the central issues to be addressed.

To sum up, an AL approach seems to provide a useful framework for understanding institutional and tutor responses to issues of academic writing and feedback. However, the underlying emancipatory ideology of CDA seems less applicable to the context of feedback and writing in the current study. This is particularly true if it is agreed that some investigation of tutor and student intentions is important to understanding feedback and its role in writing development. Having established some important theoretical perspectives on academic literacy

development in more general terms, it is now time to examine more closely the topic of criticality in academic writing.

2.3 The Terminology of Critical Analysis

In Chapter 1, reference was made to the problems NNS encounter at postgraduate level when expected to develop critical academic writing. This section will set out key terms and definitions surrounding critical thinking and critical academic writing. It will go on to examine the literature on teaching 'criticality' and 'argument' in order to better understand how feedback might impact on the development of postgraduate writing.

A number of terms cluster together in relation to the concept of critical analysis. Terms such as 'critical analysis', 'critical thinking' and 'critical approach' are often used to describe what is desirable in student writing (Woodward-Kron, 2002). The terms 'argument' and 'argumentation' are also widely used, often as representations of critical thinking in spoken or written forms. I propose to use the term 'critical analysis' (CA), or 'critical analytical writing' (CAW) in this thesis in reference to the type of writing expected in postgraduate assignments as a general reference for these terms, but inevitably other terms will be referred to as they are used in the literature. It is not in the scope of this study to explore in depth the contested areas of critical thinking (CT) and argument, but it is necessary to establish relevant theoretical approaches that help to understand the nature of CAW in Higher Education. It is important to identify reasons why such writing can be problematic for international non-native speaker postgraduate students, while at the same time exploring approaches to development of writing skills in the Higher Education literature, the literature of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and the literature of writing pedagogy. The following sections will then attempt to tease out the most relevant and important concepts from CT that might inform a study of feedback and postgraduate writing.

2.3.1   Critical Analysis–Context Dependency

Although discussions of critical thinking are commonly found, definitions of the term are much less widely available (Atkinson, 1997; Moon, 2008; Phillips & Bond,

2004) and the literature on CT has been described by Phillips and Bond as both 'confused' and 'confusing' (p. 278). However, from their review of this literature, they identified four conceptions of critical thinking: "critical thinking as a *generic skill*; critical thinking as *an embedded skill*; critical thinking as a *component of the skills of lifelong learning*; and *critical thinking for critical being*" (p.278). The first of these conceptions, what might be termed a 'study skills view' of critical thinking and its representations, is commonly encountered and typified by the work of Cotterel (2005). The fourth category, exemplified by scholars such as Barnett (2007), is less concerned with pragmatic pedagogical applications than the study skills approach, however, and therefore of less relevance to a study on the topic of feedback and writing development.

Cotterel's approach sees CT as a set of transferable skills, a form of thinking that can be practised through exercises and activities independently of any specific disciplinary content or situation. This is often termed a *'context-independent'* approach, developed out of work by Brookfield in the UK (1987) and Ennis (1962) in the US. Support for the skills approach to CT in the UK can also be viewed as a response to widening participation and a similar concern that undergraduate students arrive at UK universities lacking these important critical analytical skills. This approach to CT as a set of skills and processes informs the content and teaching on the type of EAP courses offered to NNS postgraduates at many UK Higher Education institutions, including Bradfield[7].

A view of CT as a general set of skills that can be taught independently is opposed by those who argue for the development of CT only through the context of the disciplines. This is the second of the conceptions identified above by Phillips and Bond (2004). It is often termed the 'specifist' approach or a 'context dependent' approach based on the principle that "...thinking, by definition, is always thinking about something, and that something can never be everything in general but must always be something in particular" (McPeck,1981,p.4, cited in Moore, 2004). In a

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[7] As Manager of pre-sessional programmes at Bradfield from 2004 to the present, I first began to include specific critical reading elements in programmes in 2005. Later, I developed a set of four critical thinking workshops that were included in all pre-sessionals. These materials included examples and perspectives from Cotterel's work.

qualitative, interview based study of seventeen academics in an Australian university, Moore (2011) found that lecturers within specific disciplines of History, Philosophy and Cultural Studies were able to articulate quite developed understandings of CT, and that these did relate in some ways to disciplinary differences which would not equate to a set of generic skills that could be taught. The implication from this is that students can be taught CT skills more effectively within the context of the disciplines they study.

Discussions of disciplinarity referred to above often refer to notions of 'communities of practice' (Elwood & Klenowski, 2010; Jones, 2009; Lea & Street, 1998; Nicol, n.d.; O'Donovan, Price, & Rust, 2008; Swales, 1990). Lave and Wenger's notion of 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998) is based on groups of people with shared concerns interacting together over time. According to this idea, communities of academic disciplines construct their own understandings of the way their practices operate within academia. This concept encompasses the idea of enculturation into academic disciplines, as students pick up the rules of the game through interaction with peers, tutors and other members of their academic community (Jones, 2009). Trowler and Cooper (2002) introduced a useful variation of this idea of community of practice, referring to the department level rather than discipline, with their term, "teaching and learning regime" (TLR):

> ...a shorthand term for a constellation of rules, assumptions, practices and relationships related to teaching and learning issues in higher education. These elements may be aligned with each other in a more or less coherent way and, while they are expressed in individual behaviour and assumptions, are primarily socially constructed and located and so are relatively enduring. (p. 222)

The point made by Trowler and Cooper, and echoed elsewhere (Jones, 2009) is that TLRs are not the homogenous grouping that 'communities of practice' suggest. Indeed, Bloxham and Boyd (2007) highlight the tensions that can exist in such communities and adopt the idea of "expansive" and "restrictive" learning environments. In the latter, teachers are constrained by institutional procedures and workload pressures. Fear among senior staff can also occur in relation to demands for external accountability, which in turn can result in constraining teachers from innovating or researching the assessment process.

Becoming familiar with the 'rules of the game' would include disciplinary conceptions of CT, and support an embedded view of CT. As Woodward-Kron (2002) suggests, while critical analysis is not the same as discursive practices of a discipline, "...aspects of critical analysis such as critiquing established knowledge, supporting an argument by (sic) evidence, and evaluating phenomena according to selected criteria, are not unlike the disciplinary practices of expert disciplinary writers" (p.122)[8]. Notions of communities of practice and TLRs discussed above may provide important reference points for a study on feedback and critical academic writing within university departments and in different academic disciplines.

International students entering Master's courses in the UK may experience both context-independent and context-dependent approaches to CT, so it is not relevant to extend the discussion here to the effectiveness of each approach. It is perhaps preferable to consider Moon's perspective (2008), which takes as a principle that "the support of critical thinking development in a student needs to be the responsibility of all staff" (p.131). In this way, no one strategy for developing CT is seen to be the 'right one' and there may be value in any number of approaches.

2.3.2   Towards a working definition of critical thinking and argument

Having sketched in brief the debate surrounding the most effective approaches to teaching CT, this section will consider the nature of CT itself, in order to identify key aspects of criticality and argument in academic writing, plus the challenges these present to international postgraduates. There is no intention here to review in detail the vast literature on defining critical thinking because this would constitute a literature review in itself; it is more relevant here to establish how CT relates to the main topic of feedback and analytical writing.

There have been many efforts to define critical thinking, but definitions are far from clear and there appears to be some agreement that one single definition cannot suffice (Condon, 2004; HEA internationalisation site, n.d.; Moon, 2008). In

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[8] See Section 2.4.6. Chanock's (2000) study found clear disciplinary differences in the way the terms 'analysis' and 'description' were used in feedback.

fact, it has been argued that definitions of critical thinking emerge from cultural knowledge traditions and that there can be no universal measure of higher learning (Turner, 2006, p.3). This said, an attempt will be made below to identify a number of key aspects of CT in relation to argument in academic writing.

Moon's (2008) attempts to come up with a comprehensive definitional statement of CT provide a useful starting point:

> Critical thinking is a capacity to work with complex ideas whereby a person can make effective provision of evidence to justify a reasonable judgement. The evidence, and therefore the judgement, will pay appropriate attention to the context of the judgement. Critical thinking can be seen as a form of learning, in that new knowledge, in the form of the judgement, is formed in the process. (p.126).

This initial point of departure highlights central terms such as 'evidence' and 'judgement', key concepts for understanding 'argument'. Moon recognises that the concept of argument has much in common with critical thinking, sharing a concern for logic, use of evidence and epistemological beliefs. For Moon, however, argument is only a part of the process of CT, as she sees its purpose as persuasion, or 'to win a point'. There is clearly a degree to which academic argument in postgraduate assignments has to be persuasive in bringing together evidence to support positions in critical academic writing, but from the above, there are clearly other elements of CT that feature in this type of writing.

2.3.3   Depth of critical thinking-epistemological development

Another aspect of CT that is important in understanding critical analysis is that of 'depth of critical thinking', which is closely associated with the level of epistemological development of the thinker (Moon, 2008). Deep critical thinking can be equated with "good-quality thinking" involving analytical thinking rather than surface description of issues (p. 103). In written feedback comments, the distinction is often made between 'description' at a surface level and 'analysis' at a deeper level (Chanock, 2000).

The distinction between 'description' and 'analysis' can be related to notions of 'knowledge transformation' as opposed to 'knowledge telling'. "Knowledge

telling leaves the structure of knowledge essentially unaltered.... knowledge transforming develops new understanding through the interaction of rhetorical and substantive concerns" (Bereiter & Scardamlia, 1987, p.171). A recent study on undergraduate ESL writers' development of paraphrasing (Hirvela & Du, 2013) draws on the importance of teaching students how successful paraphrasing moves beyond knowledge telling to knowledge transforming, enabling the writer's voice to emerge. The important point here is that criticality in writing involves the type of reflective problem solving suggested above, and that depth of analysis is related to the quality of this reflection.

2.3.4   *Argument and criticality*

A useful reference point for understanding argument in postgraduate writing is provided by Andrews (2007) in a study of three Master's dissertations in Educational Studies written by international students; he discusses the critical dimension of the writing as central to the assessment of the relative quality of each piece of work. The study is relevant in that it focuses on international students' writing at Master's level in Education, but it also provides a point of departure that links to the wider literature in this area.

Andrews (2007) isolates seven 'principles' that he sees as constants in argumentative writing at postgraduate level. These are summarised below:

1. The presence of a single authorial voice.
2. The expression of voice 'treads a line' between the personal and impersonal.
3. Structure and organisation is vertical and paradigmatic[9]
4. Paragraphs are logically linked and connected one to the other providing horizontal linking of ideas.
5. Thoughts are demonstrated and connections between them (vertically and horizontally[10]) are made explicit.
6. A detached academic style and tone is maintained in a discourse that is typical of the genre of essay or paper.
7. There is evidence of critical thought. (p. 6)

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[9] By 'paradigmatic', Andrews seems to refer to defining elements and distinguishing between categories and hierarchies.

[10] Horizontal connections for Andrews are those linking paragraph to paragraph, while vertical connections go through each paragraph, section and complete text.

What is interesting here is the way critical thinking is presented as an element of argumentative writing, rather than argument being somehow a subsidiary set of CT as Moon suggests. Andrews focused on dissertations, which he demonstrated to be conducive to argumentation, but he also applied his principles to all examples of postgraduate writing. More importantly, Andrews (2007) goes on to discuss how "all work at Masters level has to be critical" (p.11), and he suggests that when marking postgraduate work the critical dimension is one of the key dividing lines between satisfactory and good, or very good and excellent. He states "the key quality of work above the line is that it is argumentative, as opposed to merely expositional and that it possesses a critical dimension" (p.11).

Two of Andrews' principles relate explicitly to academic voice, an important concept that merits extended discussion and is dealt with in detail in the next section. The notion of explicitness is highlighted with the need to signal structure and make connections in the discourse; Andrews suggests that academic style is a kind of distancing, implying a more formal register and tone. The seven principles outlined above, however, seem to background two important elements of argument, the evaluation of content knowledge and establishing the writer's position in relation to the material discussed. These elements are neatly captured by Wingate (2012), who has suggested that three components are important to the teaching of argumentation: "(1) the analysis and evaluation of content knowledge, (2) the writer's development of a position, and (3) the presentation of that position in a coherent manner.."(p.2). For Wingate, Andrews' ideas of interconnectedness equate to her third component, but she foregrounds the two important elements of developing a position and evaluation of content (domain) knowledge.

Rhetorical aspects of argument depend to a large extent on an understanding of disciplinary content knowledge (Geisler, 1994). Belcher (1995), arguing for the value of teaching critical reviews across the disciplines, summarised earlier work by Mulkay and Becher, stating, "A high level of domain expertise is needed to persuasively critique works in a specific discipline" (p.136). Critiques of individual papers constitute one of a number of possible graduate assignments, but the point is made here that domain knowledge is clearly required for analysis in postgraduate work. In this respect, it may be useful to bear in mind Geisler's (1994) model of

expertise as dependent on development of both rhetorical competence and domain knowledge.

The concept of 'developing a position' (Wingate, 2012) is often referred to as taking a 'stance' (Chang & Schleppegrell, 2011; Coffin, 2003); the connected set of ideas that Andrews identifies may not on its own equate to an argument unless a central position is taken and supported by evidence. Alexander (2008) makes this clear when she states that "students have to show awareness of the status of their sources and indicate their own stance, as well as the relationship between the citations and their own text purposes" (p.192).

Other studies and pedagogical materials provide evidence for the centrality of Wingate's (2012) notion of 'developing a position'. Chang and Schleppegrell's study (2011), for example, employed a systemic functional linguistics analysis in developing discourse and linguistic resources to create a convincing stance "...through a balance of assertion and concession" (p.141). In Coffin's book on teaching academic writing in higher education (2003) each of her categorisations of argument structures, 'exposition', 'discussion' and 'challenge', includes an 'overall position' that the writer puts forward at specific functional stages in an argumentative essay. In their work on writing doctoral theses, Kamler and Thomson define argument as taking a position and justifying it persuasively (Kamler & Thompson, 2006). Positioning and stance also take centre stage in critical writing in recent EAP texts (e.g., Gillett, Hammond & Martala, 2009) and web sites:

> ... it is often necessary to make it clear to your reader what opinion you hold or what your position is with regard to a certain issue. This is often called your "voice" or your "position" or your "claim". It may be based on other people's research (e.g., Smith & Jones), but the conclusion you have come to is your own.... it is not enough to simply describe a situation or recall the facts, you need to take a stance or position yourself in relation to the situation or the facts. (Gillett, n.d.)[11]

The implication made above is that taking a position through a synthesis of other 'voices' is a challenge for international students, whose writing is often

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[11] Gillett's widely used web resources were formerly hosted on the official BALEAP site and continue to be widely accessed by EAP practitioners.

characterised as a 'descriptive' re-statement of facts (Durkin, 2011; Paton, n.d.; Ridley, 2004; Woodward-Kron, 2002; Woodward-Kron, 2009). The section that follows aims to reach a better understanding of the problems that international students face in relation to achieving an 'academic voice' in critical academic writing.

2.3.5 *Finding a voice in academic writing*

In written representations of critical thinking, voice "crucially relates to the expression of the writer in the text and how this also connects with the discourse of the discipline" (Moon, 2008, p. 81). A term often used for this is 'authorial identity', or "the sense a writer has of themselves as an author and the textual identity they construct in their writing" (Pittam et al., 2009, p.154). The use of a single authorial voice is expected in postgraduate written assignments (Alexander et. al., 2008; Andrews, 2007), but drawing on multiple sources and voices is challenging for non-native speakers. In the EAP literature, this 'challenge' is well documented, with a focus on difficulties that international students from non-western cultures have with finding an academic voice (Atkinson, 2001; Belcher & Hirvela, 2001; Camps & Ivanič, 2000; Tang & John, 1999). Matsuda and Jeffery (2012) also highlight the way that voice is not made explicit in writing rubrics in US higher education, and this is also true of marking criteria within HE in the UK.

Although the notion of culture is contested, it has been useful as an explanatory tool in feedback research with regard to issues of ownership of writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). However, much of the work on voice in the EAP field has focused on surface linguistic features such as personal pronouns or use of passive constructions, which allow writers to take responsibility for their ideas. Stapleton (2002) took issue with this approach, concluding that a focus on voice and 'identity' may have been overemphasised at the expense of ideas and argumentation:

> ... teachers need to focus on the substance of an academic paper: Are claims supported with sound reasons which are free of fallacies? Are reasons supported by sound evidence such as reasonable research studies, statistics, consequences, analogies, and, yes, personal experience? (p.187)

Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003) investigated the relationship between intensity of voice and overall writing quality in 63 samples of undergraduate ESL student writing in a Canadian university. Using their own four category rating scale

for voice intensity: assertiveness (hedges and intensifiers); self-identification (first person pronouns); reiteration of the central point (re-statement of argument); authorial presence and autonomy of thought (counter claims etc.), they found no significant correlation between voice intensity and overall writing quality, suggesting this evidence questioned the importance of an individualistic voice for L2 writers. There were issues with this study, however, one being the use of a writing rubric that contained no voice criterion for evaluation of quality in the texts (Matsuda & Tardy, 2007) and secondly, the fact that any rubric used by a researcher would not necessarily reflect the way assessors rated quality in actual contexts (Zhao & Llosa, 2008).

The rubric used in the Helms-Park study referred to above was devised for L2 composition writing, which led Zhao and Llosa (2008) to test voice against a more "mainstream scoring rubric" (p. 159) more typical of assessment in university courses. Their study used the Helms-Park voice rating scale in an analysis of 42 texts from a New York State examination. The texts were written by L1 high-school exit writers on source-based tasks which had already been assigned a mark by experienced markers. Zhao and Llosa found that the four components of voice together were a significant predictor of writing quality, suggesting the amalgamative effect of voice features. They also found a positive correlation in particular between reiteration of central point and writing quality. The implication here was that clear statement of central argument is more significant than assertiveness or expressions of identity and authorial presence. Some caution should be taken with these findings, as the writing samples, although source-based, were in genres of formal letter writing, or presentation scripts, not extended essays, and the criteria for marking the texts was not made available. In their study in an Australian university of five markers' grading and feedback at different stages of the marking moderation process, Hunter and Docherty (2011) identified beliefs about voice to be among the most difficult to make explicit in assessment criteria. This suggests that a study of L2 writers and their feedback might further test whether markers' judgements of quality can be shown to relate to features of voice discussed above.

An important element of the voice debate relates to the perspective of how writers position themselves in relation to sources. Schmitt (2005) refers to students

moving through stages of development, from no citation in their work, to over citation, and finally to appropriate citation. Terms such as 'patchwriting' (Howard, 1995; Pecorari, 2003) have also been introduced to describe the interim stages of development of voice, where students copy and blend source material with their own voice. In a study at Lancaster University based on focus group from groups of UK and international students, Hayes and Introna (2005) noted that writers of all nationalities in their study found difficulties in paraphrasing, and they also suggested that patchwriting was an inevitable stage for many international students with little experience of paraphrasing in academic writing.

Groom (2000) identified three patterns in the way L2 writers typically display their voice in texts: 'solipsistic voice', which is typical of writers who make claims with no reference to literature in the field, lack hedging and ignore alternative positions and contested knowledge; the 'unaverred textual voice' of the writer who summarises the views of others, follows referencing conventions, but gives no opinion and takes no position of his/her own; and the unattributed voice that fails to reference ideas to sources, leading to charges of plagiarism (p.68). Only the second of these patterns would not be viewed as plagiarism, but writers whose text corresponds to the second pattern "confuse the presence of arguments with the act of arguing" (Riddle, 2000, cited in Groom, 2000) and often receive feedback comments such as "where is your voice? But what do you think?". In terms of pattern three, much has been written on notions of unintentional plagiarism as a response by international students to the challenges of writing at university (Carroll, 2003; Howard, 2003; Pecorari, 2001, 2003). In a study of undergraduate and graduate Psychology students, Pittam (2009) tentatively concluded that "problems with authorial identity could provide part of the explanation for certain forms of unintentional plagiarism" (p.166).

An awareness of these three distinctive patterns of writing described above may be useful in understanding the type of feedback comments international postgraduates receive in relation to voice and source use in CAW. They could be helpful in charting the development of an academic voice through a number of assignments, for example.

So far, a conception of critical academic writing has been sketched out in terms of key features that cluster around the central notion of 'argument'. At this point, the discussion will extend to a consideration of cultural factors in teaching argument in academic writing.

2.3.6   The influence of culture and ethnicity on CAW

International Master's students at a university such as Bradfield originate from a number of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. In this respect, it is important to consider how the influence of different cultures on writing is conceptualised in the literature. This also impacts on the notion of 'voice' referred to in Section 2.3.5 above. What follows is a brief discussion of how insights from contrastive rhetoric (CR), along with understanding aspects of background and culture, can aid in framing issues of difficulty and difference in L2 academic writing.

CR developed out of early work by Kaplan (1966, as cited in Connor, 2002), based on the premise that different cultures have different rhetorical tendencies. Kaplan originally developed his ideas around paragraphs and essays written by ESL students, and many of the early studies in this area related to academic essays. This early work is famous for identifying a linear pattern in western academic texts, as opposed to a more digressive approach in Romance and Latin texts, and a more indirect approach in Asian writing. Recent studies continue to draw on these ideas. Bacha, for example, makes the point that claims in written arguments in Arabic texts usually appear late in the text, but may not appear at all and that refutation of counter arguments is rare (Bacha, 2010).

Such a characterisation has come under criticism for privileging the writing of native English speakers (Connor, 1999; Hyland, 2003), but it has been influential in approaches that seek to identify cultural influence on writing style. Durkin (2004, 2008), for example, draws upon CR in her characterisation of difficulties that East Asian learners face in adopting argumentation into their writing, stating that, "Western rhetorical practice is less insistent on consensus, politeness and restraint..." (2004, p.83). Durkin's main contention is that East Asian learners are often resistant to argumentation in the Western sense, where it is opposed to these three values.

Whereas academic writing from the US and UK is characterised as 'writer responsible' (Hinds, 1987) with frequent use of transitions and metatext to create coherence and guide the reader, South East Asian writing has been characterised as 'reader responsible', in that the reader must make a greater effort to create this coherence. Thus, it has been suggested that Confucian-heritage writers (CHC) present material that they purposely do not make fully explicit, allowing their readers to infer meaning, and that not to write in such a way might be considered a form of disrespect to the reader (Chanock, 2010; Durkin, 2004, 2011).

Fan Shen (1989) provides an example of the cultural challenges faced by CHC writers in his account of his struggle to reconcile a Chinese identity with an English identity in his writing when adapting to study in a US university. As a student of English literature, he found learning to write a social and cultural experience, and discussed the difficult road to finding a way to express himself in his writing, how it took time to develop explicit approaches to developing a thesis and using topic sentences. Fan Shen was aware of two conflicting identities but importantly finally able to adapt and write in both Chinese and English. Crucially, this account illustrates how voice and identity are bound up with the culturally specific rhetorical writing practices discussed above.

The current view of contrastive cultural rhetoric is that it is just one in a series of factors that influence difference and difficulty in L2 writing (Connor, 2010). This multiplicity of factors influencing difficulty in critical analytical academic writing has been well developed by researchers such as Fox (1994) in the US, who explored the way that contrastive rhetoric, ethnicity, educational background, the L1 itself, and disciplinary differences can variously combine to create barriers for both native and non-native speaker development of academic writing. Drawing upon participant observation, she highlighted the role of cultural background as a barrier to the development of the critical analytical writing skills that are valued in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the US. Fox recounted stories relating to students from various background cultures to examine the nature of their collective ways of thinking, their beliefs and particularly their cultural orientations that valued silence and harmony. She looked at the way these factors made critical analytical writing in the western tradition difficult to develop,

or led to resistance on the part of the writers. Like Moon (2008), Fox saw that critical analysis involving the "...cultural expectation to write assertively..." (p.125) could challenge a way of being and imply a change of personality and worldview.

What Fox (1994) and Fan Shen (1989) both demonstrated was that notions of explicitness, clarity, and writer responsibility are not natural elements of 'good writing' but features of a type of writing closely linked to western cultures. Fox linked her students' resistance to change, persistence of indirect styles, tendency to digress and refusal to take a position to cultural behaviour and beliefs which inevitably involved the writer's identity as a person. Her work supported Fan Shen's experience of conflicting writer identities. Recent studies relating to Confucian heritage students (Chanock, 2010; Durkin, 2011; Durkin, 2004, 2008) draw heavily on Fox's work. Chanock's study (2010) illustrates how these concerns are still current, and argues for more understanding on the part of academic staff of the 'right to reticence' for such students in relation to expectations of assertive positioning and directness in writing.

Durkin's PhD study (2004) and subsequent publications (2008; 2011) echo this call. She proposes a 'third way' that combines elements of Eastern and Western culture. Durkin (2008) carried out an interview based study focusing mainly on 41 East Asian Master's students in two UK universities. Based on her findings, Durkin proposed a series of stages for East Asian students in a journey of adaptation to western academic norms of critical thinking and debate. She concluded that the majority of students in her study rejected acculturation, blending Western approaches with elements of their own cultural learning experiences. Durkin's focus was more on critical debate than writing, however, and it was based on an underlying conception of Western critical debate as masculine, "confrontational" and an "… aggressive search for the truth" (p.17). Durkin also relied heavily on views of Chinese Heritage Culture and 'large culture' as the key determinants in her participants' experiences, and these arguments will be critiqued later in the Section that follows. Indeed, Durkin's study was one of a number in recent years to explore the cultural behaviour and beliefs of international students from CHC backgrounds. Given the large number of CHC students studying at Bradfield, the next section will explore research findings on this group of international students in more detail.

2.4 International Students' Experience in UK Higher Education

This section briefly reviews relevant literature on internationalisation and the experience of international students in recent years in UK universities. It begins with a discussion of themes of marketization and transformation within the internationalisation debate, moving on to consider the shifting perspectives of recent research on international student experience in UK universities, with a focus on the role of small cultures and 'face'.

2.4.1 Symbolic or transformative internationalisation

Discussion of internationalisation in and of higher education is made difficult by the way the concept itself has been interpreted in a number of ways (Tian & Lowe, 2009), but there is agreement that economic concerns of recruitment and income generation have dominated the sector. There is evidence that institutions pay lip service to the rhetoric of internationalisation without capitalising on opportunities for a re-assessment of the purposes and process of higher education that the diverse student body demands (De Vita & Case, 2003). The terms 'symbolic' and 'transformative' internationalisation have been used to characterise recent debates on these issues (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011; Robson & Turner, 2008, Tian & Lowe, 2009), the former characterised by a neo-liberal, market-led approach related to globalisation, and the latter based on a more humanistic and personal approach focused on developing a more intercultural, pedagogically inclusive academy.

Robson and Turner (2007) carried out a study in a Humanities and Social Science faculty at the University of Newcastle in 2004/5, in which they investigated staff perceptions of the process of internationalisation to inform future targeting of support for the process. Staff closely involved in the process of internationalisation in managerial, teaching or administrative capacities were interviewed in groups and individually. Findings revealed varying conceptions of internationalisation, but indicated that many participants saw themselves as 'victims' of internationalisation in some way, and "...internationalisation was often seen to bring more work in teaching, learning and student support, undermining academic identities."(p25). Such negative views of internationalisation may in part be due to higher workloads

and increasing class sizes experienced with higher numbers of overseas students (e.g. Ryan & Louie, 2007).

While marketization appears to dominate the practice of internationalisation, teaching and learning challenges that it poses do not seem to be addressed. De Vita and Case (2003) highlight the lack of a reflective dialogue in HE institutions around culturally inclusive pedagogy. They refer to the persistence of a model resting on the transmission of "functionally based knowledge" (p.392) and argue for a culturally inclusive pedagogy. Later studies (Robson & Turner 2007; Ryan, 2011; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011) support this view. Ryan (2011) reviewed research on teaching international students in the context of internationalisation more generally, and concluded that Anglophone universities had not taken up opportunities to adapt teaching and assessment to changing contexts, and not exploited the possibilities for transforming themselves into truly internationalised and transcultural learning environments. In Warwick's recent doctoral research (2013) based on interviews with key staff, he found that interviewees in only one of four UK universities took a wider view of internationalisation that embraced culturally inclusive pedagogies. This situation has led to a recent turn in the literature that calls for university lecturers to take the lead in the integration of international students and in contributing to a transformative approach to internationalisation (Ryan, 2011).

2.4.2   *International students' (CHC) experience in UK universities*

The institutional approach to internationalisation described above forms an important background to the debates that surround the experience of international students themselves within UK higher education. The section that follows will briefly outline aspects of this debate which appear most relevant for a study that proposes to look at experience of feedback at Master's level. Much of the literature on international students in the UK has focused on the Chinese learner and learners from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) as they constitute the largest numbers of overseas and international students entering UK universities in recent years. Since international Master's students at Bradfield have increasingly been from China and East Asia, a consideration of this literature is clearly relevant to the proposed study.

Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC), a shared set of values and behaviours, has been used to refer to China and other East Asian countries in research on student experiences of higher education in western countries (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). Indeed, much research in the 1990s and early years of the previous decade (e.g., Cortazzi & Jin, 2001, Watkins and Biggs, 1996) focused on a number of cultural and social aspects of Chinese learners related to CHC, leading to a conceptualisation of 'the Chinese learner' that emphasised a similar set of characteristics. Ryan (2013, p.282) summarises the binary view of Chinese learners and Western learners that has featured in the literature in recent years:

Table 2:1 Comparison of Chinese and British academic values

China	UK
• Level of knowledge	• Type of (critical) thinking
• Learn from the teacher	• Independent learning
• Respect teachers and texts	• Question teachers and texts
• Harmony of the group	• Student-centred learning
• Consensus / avoiding conflict	• Argumentation / assertiveness
• 'Reflective' learners	• 'Deep' learners seeking meaning
• Critique of the 'self'	• Critique of the 'other'

East Asian learners and learners from CHC cultures have often been characterised in the same way as the Chinese learner in Ryan's table. Indeed, Ryan and Louie (2007) point to the false dichotomy created by such a characterisation, which situates Chinese and CHC students in a deficit position in regard to western educational values. Thus, western education values deep learning, critical thinking and independence, while CHC students are seen as dependent, prone to surface learning based on memorisation, and lacking in critical thinking.

A number of studies have taken issue with the deficit model identified above, or various aspects of it (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Grimshaw, 2008; Nield, 2007; Tran, 2013). Watkins and Biggs (2001) followed up earlier work that challenged the 'misconceptions' surrounding CHC learners, with their exploration of teaching at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in mainland China and Hong Kong. They focused on the paradox of the apparent success of students in the Chinese Educational system despite what westerners would caterogorise as poor teaching (large classes, authoritative teachers, expository teaching, apprently passive

learners). They concluded that it was important to look at educational systems holistically, rather than component parts of those systems, and put forward a belief in universal good teaching principles which "involve getting the learners to engage in the learning tasks at the appropriate cognitive level" (p.297). Grimshaw's study (2008) of students in two Chinese universities highlighted the complex and dynamic nature of Chinese education, and concluded that the student participants he observed and interviewed were complex individuals whose behaviour and belief could not be directly related to the CHC characteristics outlined above.

Gu and Schweisfurth, (2006) conducted a study which included a group of students from 13 UK universities. After a questionnaire survey, 13 students were interviewed, 8 of whom were taught Master's students. Gu and Schweisfurth concluded that these students determination to adapt was based on necessity and their experience was as much about their relationship with their teachers and the learning environment as it was about "cultural constructs within themselves" (p. 87). In a later study (2010) the same authors investigated the experiences of undergraduate students at four UK universities, and emphasised the role of personal, pedgogical and psychological factors in their adaptation.

Important changes have been occurring in countries such as China over the last decade which can impact on the knowledge and expectations of students entering higher education in the UK. Jin and Cortazzi (2006), for example, highlight the way expansion of Chinese student numbers in the UK corresponded with a massive growth in Chinese universities. While Chinese students in the UK tended to be 'top ranking' intrinsically motivated students in the 1990s, Jin and Cortazzi observe that many of these students now study in China, with the result that students studying in the UK are more often from newly rich families, with a more instrumental motivation to achieve qualifications that lead to well paid jobs on their return to China.

2.4.3   *International students and face issues*

The concept of 'face' has also been considered important in terms of frameworks of cultural difference useful to an understanding of Chinese and CHC learners in HE

(Durkin, 2004, 2011, Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Ting-Toomey & Cole, 1990). Face issues, however, can come into play with all learners receiving feedback. Ho (1976) refers to face as an image of self that refers to the respect a person expects others to show them in social encounters. At the same time, Ho asserts that face is not a personality trait but that it is universal, although "... the rules governing face behaviour vary considerably across cultures, the concern for face is invariant" (p. 881). Cultural differences related to Chinese and western face managing behaviour have been well documented and, importantly, there seems to be agreement that face is not related only to the individual but can involve awareness of the individual within a network of relationships (Bargiela-Chiappini & Haugh, 2009). Loss of face can refer to the person and their family group, as Gudykunst & Kim (2003) point out. They give the example of a failure to gain an academic grade as a personal loss of face to a western student, while for East Asian students this would also be a loss of face to family.

Theoretical studies on facework also focus on large cultures, and in this respect, western cultures of individualism are often contrasted with eastern cultures of collectivism (Bargiela-Chiappini & Haugh, 2009). The work of Hofstede on power distance is also frequently invoked. Hofstede's study was carried out in the field of business, with a questionnaire study that covered over 50 countries (Jones, 2007). From a factor analysis of 32 questions in 40 countries, he devised a theory identifying four bipolar dimensions: Power Distance; Individualism/Collectivism; Uncertainty Avoidance; Masculinity / Femininity. These cultural value spectrums continue to provide a focus for the study of 'face', despite criticisms of Hofstede's work. Hofstede's study was based on data from forty years ago in one company (Hermes, later IBM) and has been criticised for its assumptions of cultural homogeneity and narrowly defined dimensions (Jones, 2007). Indeed, Montgomery (2010) suggests that Hofstede's work may have endured as much for its empirical and quantitative strengths as for its ability to define national cultures. She also argues against equating cultural behaviour with artificially constructed groups.

A more useful focus on 'small cultures' has emerged in recent years in the literature in English language teaching and applied linguistics, based on the work of Holliday (1994). Holliday recognised the complexity and overlap between cultures at

classroom and professional academic level up to the level of national cultures. In this way, understanding what happens within specific academic settings can be seen to depend on the overlap of small and large cultures, and cannot be simply read off against notions of homogenous national cultures (Atkinson, 2004).

The concept of face is argued to be problematic in "emotionally threatening or identity vulnerable situations when the situated identities of the communicators are called into question" (Ting Toomey and Kurogi, 1998, as cited in Bargiela-Chiappini & Haugh, 2009, p. 230). Face, therefore, plays a key role in the emotional responses feedback can provoke. Higgins characterises the feedback process in terms of "discourse, power, emotion and identity" (2000, p.272). Feedback is given and received in a social context, and the tutor-student relationship must be understood in terms of its unequal power relation: the expert tutor who holds authority and the novice student (Higgins, 2001). Along with this power differential comes the problem of emotion, where the student may react to negative feedback by taking it personally and lose self-esteem. Self-esteem may be harmed by a focus on intelligence and ability in feedback, rather than emphasis on effort related to task (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Dweck, 1999; Nicol, 2005), a point echoed in the higher education context by Carless (2006) who argues for formative feedback without grades to prevent this emotional harm to students' egos, and arguably face.

In a very recent chapter of an edited book on feedback in the UK HE, Molloy and others highlight the emotional pain of losing face in feedback situations (Molloy et.al. 2013), and how it can be an attack on their identity. They refer to factors such as personality, experience and levels of confidence as the key to an individual's emotional reaction to feedback. Novices such as international students in the HE context may have very fragile confidence and self-belief. Students aware of the purpose of feedback, on the other hand, are more able to rationalise the negative emotions they feel after criticism in terms of the benefit the feedback brings in helping them improve. Importantly, Molloy argues that for the latter to occur, students must trust the source of the feedback, a point made in other recent studies around assessment and feedback (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Carless, Salter, Yang, & Lam, 2011). Receiving and responding to feedback can certainly constitute emotionally threatening events, while international students may also feel

particularly vulnerable operating in an unfamiliar academic culture which supposes a number of issues for their identities as writers and members of academic communities.

To conclude this section, it is useful to reflect on the dangers of over emphasising 'large cultures' as an explanatory tool, as it could lead to accusations of reductionism. As Fox (1994) acknowledges, there are "... so many variations in students' histories, so many factors in each one's family and educational background, not to mention the confounding effects of personality, gender and life experiences that can accentuate or mute the effects of culture" (125). Fox's position foregrounds cultural elements but also highlights the fundamental difficulty in developing critical analysis:

> ...'critical thinking' or 'analysis' has strong cultural components. It is more than just a set of writing and thinking techniques-it is a voice, a stance, a relationship with texts and authorities that is taught, both consciously and unconsciously, by family members, friends, teachers, the media, even the history of one's country. This is why 'critical analysis' is so hard for faculty members to talk about; because it is learned intuitively it is easy to recognise like a face or personality, but it is not so easily defined and is not at all simple to explain to someone who has been brought up differently (p.125).

This quote is neat and persuasive, but reducing everything to cultural influence would argue against the significance of the teaching context and the interaction over feedback and writing that takes place between tutors and students. The discussion in this Section has pointed to the need to explore learners' experience in terms of smaller groupings, while remaining mindful of large culture influences on their thinking and behaviour. It is argued that the cultural issues sketched out above may well impact on the problems in developing 'critical analytical writing' but their significance remains to be seen in the context of feedback and writing for postgraduate students at the University of Bradfield.

2.4.4   Summary- International students and CAW

This section of the literature review has considered critical analytical writing in terms of its relationship to critical thinking and also in relation to conceptions of argument in academic writing. Difficulties in arriving at a complete definition of critical analytical writing were noted, but the role of evidence to support judgements

was established as central, with depth of analysis equating to knowledge transforming rather than knowledge telling. Essential components of 'argument' in academic writing were also identified. One would expect a study of feedback relating to CAW to refer to how students evaluate content knowledge, take positions, and connect ideas coherently, with an academic voice based on synthesis of sources. Voice was also demonstrated to be related to cultural rhetorical traditions. The synthesis of sources was also shown to be at the heart of difficulties international postgraduates experience with academic writing, and a study might explore the way feedback addresses this.

The role of culture, with the emphasis on 'small cultures', and departmental disciplinary culture embodied in teaching and learning regimes (TLRs) was established as central to an understanding of international students' academic writing development. A study of feedback might be expected to connect with these various cultural factors as it explores the impact of feedback on CAW in taught Master's programmes. As Brown and Joughin (2007) suggest, "when students from particular cultural contexts consistently experience problems with assessment, we need to consider the role that culturally based factors may be playing and respond to these appropriately" (p.70). The challenge of adapting to unfamiliar academic discourse or discourses is likely to be even more crucial for international students from non-western academic backgrounds. Issues of self-esteem and confidence may be even more central for such students than for home students when facing unfamiliar assessment cultures so concepts of emotion and power are clearly important when seeking to understand student writing and feedback.

2.5 Feedback Studies-An Overview of the Territory

In a review of the wide ranging literature on feedback in Higher Education, a key challenge is how best to create order from chaos and find a way of grouping studies to map the landscape of the relevant research that has gone before. A number of books on assessment in Higher Education deal with feedback (e.g. Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Brown & Knight, 1994; Haines, 1994), while feedback studies are spread across journals on Higher Education and Educational Psychology, with further texts on feedback and L2 writing in English Language Teaching (ELT) and composition

studies in US colleges. Yelland (2011) comments on the rather recent emergence of the feedback topic, noting that the Journal Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education[12] contained eight articles discussing feedback between 1996 and 2005, but in the period 2006-2011, twenty four articles explicitly focused on feedback. In 2010 alone in the same journal there were seven articles with 'feedback' in the title[13].

In the UK context, growth in interest in feedback has often been in response to issues raised by the National Student Survey (Yelland, 2011), and this helps to explain why it is mainly focused on home undergraduate students[14]. The majority of these studies are located in the UK, (e.g., Brown & Glover, 2006; Hounsell, McCune, & Litjens, 2008; Mutch, 2003; Pitts, 2005; Walker, 2009), or Australia (e.g. Dowden, Pittaway, Yost, & McCarthy, 2011; Ferguson, 2011), with other contributions in various settings, but most notably Hong Kong (e.g., Carless, 2006; Carless, Salter, Yang, & Lam, 2011; Yang & Carless, 2013). Given that Higher Education systems in Australia and Hong Kong share a similar academic culture and similar assessment regimes, I consider research in these countries to be relevant to my study.

The literature on US composition studies and the ELT context both focus on studies exploring the way writers revise their texts based on feedback. This literature is less relevant to the present study since there is agreement that end of module summative feedback is the norm at degree and taught Master's levels, not only in the UK but in other countries such as Australia and Norway (Carless et al., 2011; Dysthe, 2011; Hounsell, 2003; Vardi, 2009). On the other hand, some findings from the ELT and US Composition contexts are pertinent to issues of style in written feedback comments, or where feedback to NNS does indeed inform re-drafting, so consideration will be given to these areas in the first section of the review.

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[12] Other journals carrying a significant number of articles on feedback in the decade to 2010 are Studies in Higher Education (10), Active Learning in Higher Education (7).

[13] In the 2006-2009 period, twenty four of 265 articles were on feedback, while in 2010 it was seven out of fifty articles. It should also be noted that feedback was often an indirect topic of many other articles in this journal in the periods mentioned.

[14] Hyatt's (2005) study of feedback comments on postgraduate Master's students is an exception, but the study did not make explicit the numbers of international students involved.

The review that follows will therefore focus on four areas[15]:

1) US composition studies, including reader response styles, and the ELT literature on feedback and revision

2) theoretical conceptions of formative and summative feedback and the quality of feedback, criteria and standards (Butler & Winne, 1995; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Higgins et al, 2001; Hounsell, 2003, 2008; Knight, 2002; Nicol, 2010; Sadler, 1989, 2009).

3) studies on student and tutor responses to feedback, with a focus on studies analysing feedback comments (Bailey & Garner, 2010; Bailey, 2008; Carless, 2006; Chanock, 2000; Dowden, Pittaway, Yost, & McCarthy, 2013; Howatt, 2005; Ferguson, 2011; Lea & Street, 1998; Mutch, 2003; Walker, 2009; Weaver, 2006).

4) studies emphasising dialogue around written feedback (Hounsell, McCune, Litjens, & Hounsell, 2008; Nicol, n.d.; 2006, 2010) and technological innovations to support it (Chew & Snee, 2011;France, & Ribchester, 2008; Salmon, 2008; Savin-Baden, 2010; Stannard, 2007).

2.5.1   A reader response style in feedback comments

A brief review of key findings in US composition theory is provided below based on its relevance to the issue of tutor writing style in feedback comments. A study of the role of feedback in developing student writing would be expected to address issues of 'quality' of feedback, and it is argued here that the way feedback comments are written remains an important factor in their usability.

Process approaches to writing in the 1970s and 1980s originating in the US emphasized the feed forward role of feedback in relation to multiple drafts and iterative writing. In the 1980s, much attention was given to the notion of teacher appropriation of students' texts, on the basis that in following directive feedback closely, students would only reflect their teacher's ideas and their writing skills

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[15] Hounsell (2003) usefully divided the literature into three broad groupings: studies relating to students' understanding of criteria and expectations and tutor expectations, students' experiences and perceptions of feedback, and a smaller group of studies scrutinising tutors' comments. Much of the research produced since that Hounsell article still seems to fall into these categories.

would not be developed (Brannon, 1984, Hyland, 2000). Reid (1994) provided a cogent argument against a 'hands off' approach to feedback in the ESL classroom, on the basis that the appropriation arguments ignored situational contexts and undervalued the need to make meaning clear to an academic audience. Reid argued that it was teacher's responsibility to share cultural and rhetorical knowledge with students, and she emphasised the idea of the teacher as cultural informant. In a later study, Hyland (2000) focused on issues of appropriation, tracking six students over a three-month period on a pre-university proficiency programme in New Zealand. Hyland concluded that one-to-one communication about feedback was essential if teacher and student intentions in writing and feedback were to be aligned and that formal peer responses to writing were less valuable than informal responses from close friends and spouses.

Directive feedback is often seen to impose tutor control on student work through evaluative comments, rather than the facilitative, advisory style of comment that encourages the student to make decisions about how to develop the text (see also Burke & Pieterick, 2010). Straub's work (1997) is also relevant in developing notions of appropriate use of directive and facilitative feedback .Straub carried out a study on the reactions to feedback comments by 172 freshmen students on a writing program at a large US state university. He used a 40 item questionnaire and presented comments from tutors, over half of whom were experienced teachers and researchers, whose work, he claimed, "…was informed by current theory" (97). Straub found that students were equally interested in global and local comments, but preferred comments on organisation and development, particularly those that were specific and elaborate e.g. "your paper might be clearer if you state x..". Students appreciated feedback on grammar and sentence structure and also liked comments on ideas, but not so much if they ran counter to their own ideas.

In terms of praise and criticism, Straub found that students did not respond well to more critical questions, and unsurprisingly preferred praise, but favoured outright praise less than praise delivered with reasons. Responses also indicated a dislike for highly directive comments, and particularly general comments that were terse and negative, e.g., "You've missed his point", or "what evidence?" Instead, the findings also pointed to a preference for more qualified evaluative comments that

offered some direction for improvement and asserted only moderate control over the writing. Students most preferred feedback that involved advice and explanations as such comments were framed as helpful and were specific in terms of suggestions for revision (p.112).

The Straub study, however, and to some extent the debate about appropriation has to be understood in terms of the context of US composition courses. On such writing programs, students typically write some kind of argument essays which draw upon personal opinions rather more than source texts which would be expected in an academic content course. In this situation, it may not be surprising that students reacted against what they saw as a teacher dismissing their 'opinions' for their own, as in the example below:

> 'The paper isn't about the teacher's opinion but of the students. We should work with the student's opinion, after all it's his paper.'

> Student response to a comment on paper about legalising drugs (p, 104)

Straub (1997) refers to the conversational style of facilitative comments and how such a style encourages a dialogue. A key strength is the way it "plays back the writers words, engages with the way the reader understands the text, deals with specific points in the text and elaborates on them, presents critical comments in a wider context of guidance and crucially allows a less directive approach that does not "take control over the writing" (p.389). It is argued that this reader response strategy, focusing on the effect of the writing on the reader, helps to shift away from dependence on external tutor feedback in favour of developing self-assessment on the part of the writer (Burke & Pieterick, 2010; Juwah et al., 2004; Lunsford, 1997).

The effect of tutor style and presentation of comments in terms of how writers react to them is important here, but the context in which this type of feedback is produced is quite different from that of the taught Master's situation, which is the subject of the present study. Straub's approach relates principally to feedback comments on drafts, and seems to be based quite narrowly on literature and composition studies. It is also possible that the 'conversational response' might create a major barrier to understanding for international students who struggle with this type of colloquial and idiomatic language (Haggis, 2006). The extent to which

tutors give feedback in such conversational tone and language would be worth investigating in an analysis of feedback comments, however, and the degree of facilitative versus directive comments in tutor feedback might also be worthy of analysis.

Given a range of tutor styles and preferences and the diverse contexts in which feedback is given, it could be argued that there can never be one right way of writing feedback comments, or one right style (Brown & Knight, 1994). However, there may be styles which are more effective and styles that are less effective and perhaps even styles that might be labelled as 'unhelpful'. As Straub (1997) suggests:

> We create our styles by the choices we make on the page, in the ways we present our comments. We have an opportunity to recreate, modify, or refine this style every time we write a new set of comments.... (p.248)

There seems no reason to treat Straub's arguments as any less relevant twenty five years on. This conclusion points to the need for a method to analyse written feedback comments with the goal of identifying those styles that are more effective and those that are less effective. This point will be taken up in Chapter 3.

2.5.2   Feedback in the ELT context

Much has been written on feedback in the ELT context (e.g., Dooey, 2010; Ferris, 2004; Goldstein, 2004; Huttner, 2008; Hyland, 2003; Hyland, 2001; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Nelson & Schunn, 2008) and relevant findings include student feedback preferences and the impact of feedback on writing. A particular focus of feedback in the ELT context has been on written corrective feedback and its impact on developing grammar (e.g. Truscott, 1999; Ferris, 2004). As Jonsson (2013) states in a recent review of the literature on feedback "…the question of error correction in ESL writing is somewhat marginal in relation to higher education in general" (p.65). One finding that may have more relevance to the present research is from a study by Ashwell (2000) who found no evidence to support the value of presenting feedback on language and content separately. Given the different focus of feedback in higher education, which is not aimed at developing language ability, and since its summative form does not allow for revisions, the debate on the effectiveness of

feedback on grammar will not be reviewed here. Other more relevant findings are considered below.

Hyland and Hyland (2006) commented that ESL students "consistently rate written feedback more highly than alternative forms, such as peer feedback or oral feedback in writing conferences" (p.3). Despite this finding, there has also been support in the literature for the value of writing conferences, with evidence that students receive more focused and usable feedback from this type of face-to-face writing tutorial than from written feedback (Zamel, 1985). From her review of research on feedback and revision, Goldstein (2004) concluded that neither writing conferences nor written feedback comments were inherently effective in giving usable feedback. Tutor-student tutorials constitute an important aspect of dialogue around feedback at tertiary level, and will be discussed later in this review.

Perpignan's doctoral study (2003) in the ELT context initially aimed to provide guidelines on effective teacher feedback, but became focused on the conditions under which effectiveness of written feedback could best be achieved. Her study, based on participant observation, involved a dialogue with her students around the feedback dialogue itself. The Perpignan study seems to offer more conclusions related to the value of qualitative research through Exploratory Practice (EP [16]) than findings on the role of feedback, but an important conclusion was that although students had very diverse preferences regarding the nature of feedback, empathetic approaches to dialogue were the key to success. This points to the relational aspects of feedback and will be picked up later in the section on student responses to feedback.

Perpignan (2003) referred to the small amount of research connecting tutor intentions with student responses to written feedback. One study that filled this gap was carried out by Hyland (2006) in New Zealand on a proficiency language course for intermediate level ESL learners. The study on response to praise and criticism in feedback involved three students from Taiwan, Korea and Japan, and was based on analysis of their feedback and subsequent revisions. Tutors' think aloud and

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[16] EP will be discussed in Chapter 3 along with other practitioner research methods.

interview data was collected to identify intentions behind the feedback. Hyland was interested in the different responses to praise and criticism, and importantly identified suggestions as a third category, where specific recommendations or 'constructive criticism' took place. Suggestions were differentiated from criticism on the basis that they identified do-able actions for the current text or for future writing, and often involved modals such as 'could', 'should', and 'need to' (p. 191). Results indicated typical patterns of praise-criticism, or criticism-suggestion and praise-criticism-suggestion in the feedback. The teachers used these and other devices to mitigate the face threatening force of negative statements, while also avoiding becoming over directive. An important finding was that miscommunication often occurred due to this type of indirectness, while students also identified praise used to mitigate criticism as insincere. Such findings are important, and relevant to this study, but again the context was not that of higher education subject teaching but a language proficiency course with an iterative process approach that led to revision of drafts after feedback.

In the ELT context, such as that in the Hyland study above, feedback situations usually feature the opportunity for rewriting drafts. A recent study by Poverjuc (2011) followed five international postgraduates on taught Master's programmes and drew heavily on this ELT literature, much of which related to writing tutors rather than degree subject lecturers, and to feedback comments on drafts that could have been used in subsequent revisions. In the ELT feedback context, the tone and nature of comments are likely to differ from those delivered in more formal summative contexts. Academic modules rarely provide this type of iterative feedback, which in turn means that student responses to feedback in the UK tertiary context are far less easy to follow up. This presents a challenge to the researcher wishing to gauge the impact of feedback on writing development.

2.5.3 Conceptualising feedback-assessment purposes

It has been argued that the term 'feedback' suffers from a lack of clarity of meaning (Price, et al., 2010) and that it "disguises multiple purposes which are often not explicitly acknowledged" (p.278). These multiple purposes require closer inspection, particularly in relation to such widely used terms as 'summative' and

'formative' assessment. Perhaps a useful way into this discussion is the notion of 'assessment for learning' (AfL) as opposed to 'assessment of learning' (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007, p.14).

Assessment of learning equates with a traditional view of the summative purpose of assessment: students' work is graded and marked for the purpose of selection, or certification, and judgements are made about student achievement (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). AfL, on the other hand, equates to the widely used concept of formative assessment, which has a more diagnostic purpose, providing ".... information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behaviour to improve learning" (Shute, 2008, p.1). For Sadler (1989), formative assessment is concerned with judgments about the quality of student performance with a view to improving competence by "...short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial-and-error learning" (p.120). In short, formative feedback identifies a gap between performance and the standards expected of a piece of work (Price, Handley, Millar, & O'Donovan, 2010).

In Hattie and Timperley's (2007) often cited model of feedback, reference is also made to reducing "...discrepancies between current understandings, performance and a goal" (p.86). Hattie and Timperley's study was a meta-analysis of research on feedback which often focused more on school based studies than studies in Higher Education. Despite this, their suggestion of four levels on which feedback operates has been widely cited in the HE literature. Hattie and Timperley posed three questions for feedback to address, "Where am I going? How am I going? and where to next?"(p.88). They also suggested four levels that influence the effectiveness of feedback: the level of task performance; the level of process of understanding how to do a task; a self-regulatory level; and a personal level. Hattie and Timperley argued that feedback on the personal level was least effective, while feedback on process and self-regulation were most powerful. They highlighted the way in which feedback on task is only effective when it refers to faulty interpretation and not lack of information. They concluded that further instruction rather than feedback was needed in the situation of the latter, and that too much feedback at the task level could also distract from focus on process and strategy for improvement. These levels

of feedback could be useful for understanding feedback in the context of the current study.

Summative and formative assessment may share the same methods, but summative judgements have to be 'reliable', as they are written for multiple audiences: the student has to be informed of the level of achievement and given a justification for how marks were awarded; the tutor communicating summative judgements is often writing for a second marker or moderator who will need to accept or reject the basis for judgements made; the tutor marking summative work is also mindful that external examiners may see these judgements and must ensure that they will be perceived as reliable and valid. Indeed, Yelland (2011) remarked that "tutors clearly share membership of a discourse community with their external markers but much less clearly with their students" (p.233).

Summative assessment has been viewed as essentially passive, with "no immediate impact on learning" though it may have deep emotional and educational impacts on the student (Sadler, 1989, p.120). One view is that grade focused summative assessment "...has no other real use than a description of what has been achieved" (Brown & Knight, 1994, p.15). Indeed, there is a view that grades belong with summative assessment and that students are more likely to read and respond to feedback if grades are not given on formative tasks (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gibbs, 2006)[17]. The most recent studies on feedback seem to agree on the severely limited feed forward role for feedback comments on one-shot assignments that arrive some weeks after students have moved on to new modules (Carless et al., 2011; Nicol, n.d.; Price et al., 2010).

Although summative assessment is not primarily for learning, it has been argued that it can support formative feedback for learning (Biggs, 1998). Feedback on summative tasks may provide a grade that tells students 'how they are going' as well as providing feedback at the level of performance on the task (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). More general comments on skills may feed forward if they have an impact on students' future work, helping to show students how they can close

[17] Research in school contexts has suggested, for example, that separating grades from feedback can lead to improvement (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

gaps in performance. Yorke (2003) also makes the point that formative and summative assessment are often conflated in practice, and that summative assessment may have a formative function if students learn from it. Thus, it would seem to be a mistaken approach to take a view of summative feedback as essentially worthless in terms of learning.

The terms 'high stakes' and 'low stakes' assessment, are often used for summative and formative assessment respectively (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Hounsell, 2007; Knight, 2002). Hounsell (2007) prefers the high stakes/ low stakes distinction because it frames assessment from a 'student eye view' (p.103). There is much 'at stake' in summative assessment events: the pressure to succeed will weigh heavily on students, leading to heightened emotions of pride and shame, while tutors are under pressure to communicate successfully and reliably to several audiences. Even if 'low stakes' assessment tasks can reduce this pressure, students may not be motivated to engage fully with them (Hughes, 2011), rendering them less effective.

2.5.4   Formative assessment: Assessment 'for' learning

Methods of assessment are only summative or formative based on the way they are used (Brown & Knight, 1994) and formative assessment is a fuzzy term (Yorke, 2003) since it can range from very informal, spontaneous feedback in the classroom, to relatively formal written assignment tasks. A mid-course formative task during a module can only be formative if the task delivers 'usable' feedback that students engage with, but if accompanied by a "rather skimpy set of written comments", then it cannot be defined as formative, despite the intention to use it as such (Sadler,1989 p.17). As Rust (2002) suggests, redrafting work based on feedback may be the only way to ensure "…a significant effect on future performance" (p.153).

It has been widely argued in the literature that for formative feedback to be effective, students need to develop evaluative skills which match those of their tutors (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Boud, 2000; Nicol & McFarlane-Dick, 2006). Indeed, Hattie and Timperley's level of self-regulation was mentioned in the previous section and the role of 'self-regulated learning' (SRL) is often discussed (Carless, 2006; Hounsell, 2008). SRL has been defined by Butler and Winne (1995) as:

> a style of engaging with tasks in which students exercise a suite of powerful skills: setting goals for upgrading knowledge; deliberating about strategies to select those that balance progress toward goals against unwanted costs; and, as steps are taken and the task evolves, monitoring the accumulating effects of their engagement. (p. 245)

This view sees feedback serving to help develop the ability to "monitor, evaluate and regulate [students'] own learning" (Nicol, 2010, p. 504).

Finally, while effective formative assessment requires the opportunity for students to use written feedback to self-regulate, it has been argued that certain conditions are also required of tutors. Yorke (2003) proposed a model for formative feedback based on tutors having knowledge of student epistemological development and the psychology of giving and receiving feedback. Hughes (2011) supports this approach with her model of 'ipsative'[18] feedback based on a long term comparison of learners' previous performance. It could be very difficult, however, to meet Yorke's conditions in modularised Master's programmes such as those at the University of Bradfield, given that module tutors often teach large groups of students for one term only, moving on to new module groups in subsequent terms. In my own experience with the modules I teach at Bradfield, for example, it would be typical for me to have only two or three of the students from my first-term module in my second term module groups.

Yorke poses two questions which may be used in evaluating the effectiveness of formative assessment and the feedback it produces:

1) Is what the assessor has done regarding feedback the best that could have been done… in the circumstances?
2) Did the formative assessment influence student behaviour? (p. 483).

Both questions are worthy of research, the first recognizing to some extent the constraints that institutional procedures impose, while the second could be extended to address more precisely the ways in which formative feedback influences student behaviour in the context of a study on feedback and writing development.

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[18] Comparison with previous performance leads to a focus on student progress. Hughes argues for formative and summative tasks linked with discussion of progress in generic skills in addition to task specific skills.

2.5.5 *Criteria and standards*

Criterion referenced assessment, widely adopted in Higher Education since the 1990s, has been seen to provide fairness to students and protection to markers by enabling them to justify their judgements (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; O'Donovan et al., 2008; Price et al., 2010). Alongside their function in guiding markers, however, marking criteria also operate to provide students with information about the standards their work is judged against (Sadler, 2013)Harrington & Elander, 2003), and this information will be referred to and accessed in feedback. Yelland (2011) and Randall and Mirador (2003) refer to the growth of 'audit' culture in Higher Education in the UK, and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education guidelines around transparency of assessment criteria and feedback. Yorke (2001) argues that bodies such as the (QAA) in the UK appear to imply that assessment issues can be resolved by expressing assessment criteria with the sufficient level of clarity, but that in reality standardisation by way of applying generic assessment criteria is not possible. This argument is explored below.

There does not appear to be agreement across the sector on what should constitute core criteria or how these should be weighted (Robinson & Norton, 2003). In Robinson and Norton's review of the literature, they highlight the way lecturers can vary in their judgements within departments, making idiosyncratic judgements and norm and peer referenced decisions on borderline cases. Yorke (2011) refers to how interpretation of criteria can vary, pointing to the way unstated criteria may be applied, and how markers vary in terms of generosity and meanness when grading. One study of five experienced markers explored their understandings and judgements of standards by looking at their responses to the same task with no knowledge of the original grades given (Grainger, Purnell, & Zipf, 2008). Grainger et al. found that markers applied similar criteria in two main groups, a technical group including aspects of language and style, and a content group, including criticality, structure and argument.

Marking criteria can be used in holistic or analytic rating scales, with holistic rating assigning a single score to a script and analytic rating providing scores on a number of aspects of a script (Weigle, 2002). A criticism of holistic rating relevant to

assessing international students is its lack of provision of diagnostic detail for various aspects of writing which may develop at differing rates, while it is also difficult to interpret since markers can weight criteria in different ways to arrive at a similar mark (Weigle, 2002). On the other hand, analytic scales can be more time consuming to use, with the potential for attention to specifics obscuring the whole (White, 1984, as cited in Weigle, 2002). A mark reached by adding scores of different criteria may differ from a more holistic appreciation of the work, a situation where the whole is more or less than the sum of the parts (Yorke, 2011). Research also shows that markers make holistic judgements before referring to criteria to decide their final grade (Ecclestone, 2001; Grainger et. al, 2008). Ecclestone (2001) carried out a study of nine assessors on an Education degree programme in a UK university. She divided nine markers into expert, competent and novice assessors, and found that experts relied more on intuition and referred less to criteria than novice markers, but that expert markers were also less able to articulate the tacit knowledge that their decisions were based upon. Ecclestone's study emphasised how interpretations of feedback were "rooted in expertise within a topic" (p.309) with its implication that critical analysis is not a generic transferable skill and giving support to arguments reviewed on the context dependency of criticality in Section 2.3.1.

What the Ecclestone study highlighted was that a list of criteria can be published and shared, but that this alone does not constitute communicating standards, as these rely on interpretation in context (O'Donovan, Price, & Rust, 2004). Standards depend on professional judgement, which means interpretation can vary with markers. Indeed, attempts to "... simply construct and distribute written grade descriptors to students to support effective learning may have little or no overall benefit, particularly for students transitioning to their first year at university" (Hendry, Armstrong, & Bromberger, 2012, p.149). This point is extremely relevant for international Master's students making the transition to study at UK universities.

Attempts to make criteria overly detailed may also lead to grade-oriented approaches and dependence on the tutor (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). Torrance (2007) makes the case for "transparency leading to instrumentalism" (p. 290), and raises issues of equity, where unequal levels of guidance result. On the other hand, there is evidence that tutors often ignore criteria, that expert markers rely on their tacit and

intuitive judgements (Ecclestone, 2001; Hunter & Docherty, 2011) and even that expert markers may feel 'straitjacketed' by criteria, feeling that their professional academic judgement is marginalised (Woolf, 2004,p. 489). Brown and Knight's (1994) statement that "it's far from obvious that tutor assessments are necessarily reliable" (p. 55) is supported by O' Donovan (2004), who concluded that " ...if even we [academics] as 'experts' cannot always agree on the meaning of commonly used criteria, how can we expect 'novice' students to mirror our interpretation?"(p.238). Thus, it seems that problems in developing a shared understanding of assessment criteria are often ascribed to the nature of explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge (Ecclestone, 2001; Elton, 2010; Hunter & Docherty, 2011; O'Donovan et al., 2004; Rust et al., 2003) and this concept of tacit knowledge will be explored further below.

2.5.6   *Tacit knowledge*

O'Donovan adopts Polanyi's distinction between explicit knowledge (Polanyi, 1998, cited in O' Donovan, 2004) that can be "put into words and expressed clearly" and tacit knowledge "learnt experientially" (p.328) that cannot be easily articulated. Elton (2010) also cites Polanyi, arguing that conventions of academic writing constitute tacit knowledge that cannot be satisfactorily made overt in words.

Difficulties in communicating criteria and making them explicit are well documented (Ecclestone, 2001; O'Donovan et al., 2008; Rust et al., 2003). If tacit knowledge of marking criteria and standards cannot be clearly articulated, then it is difficult to see how students can develop a shared knowledge of the discourse behind tutors' feedback comments. This communication problem is picked up by Haggis (2006), who takes it further, arguing that problems with language are one of the key barriers to student engagement in higher education. Successful communication in everyday life depends on shared understandings, but a lack of shared understanding around criteria and standards means a breakdown in communication in feedback (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001). The understanding of terms such as 'structure', 'argument', 'plagiarism', 'analysis and description' are often taken for granted by academics, but are not transparent and easily accessible to students (Chanock, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998). Reliance on marking criteria can involve a 'discourse of transparency' summarised below by Lillis and Turner (2001):

Students who, unlike academic staff, are unfamiliar with the rhetorical conventions of academic discourse are, as it were, held to ransom by the discourse of transparency. ... for example, *structure, argument, definition*, are deemed transparent and, therefore, not explicated. (p.61)

This lack of explication can be seen in phrases such as "Lacking in accuracy, analysis or criticism…Largely descriptive" (Archaeology assignment criteria-see appendix A). O'Donovan (2004) suggests that attempts to articulate tacit knowledge often focus on what it is not, and this can result in mark-loss focused feedback (Brown and Glover, 2006). A lack of critical evaluation in a student essay may be commented on, for example, but not explained. If the same comment were to be repeated for different essays, the student eventually might arrive at an understanding of critical evaluation by a process of elimination, but this would depend on many writing tasks and instances of feedback.

Indeed, if terms such as 'argument' and 'analysis' are not generic or transferable (Lea & Street, 1998), and do not constitute "common sense ways of knowing" (p.162), the situation is further complicated by the fact that there is not only one discourse of the discipline that the student has to grapple with, but multiple discourses relating to individual modules and tutors (Higgins et al., 2001; Lea, & Street, 1998; Pokorny & Pickford, 2010).

A diagrammatic representation of the nature of tacit knowledge within the feedback process is provided by O' Donovan (2004), who sets out feedback related events in terms of pre and post submission (see figure 2.1 below). The diagram highlights the way in which written feedback comments should be understood in a wider context of pre submission guidance, use of exemplars and pre and post-submission discussion with tutors.
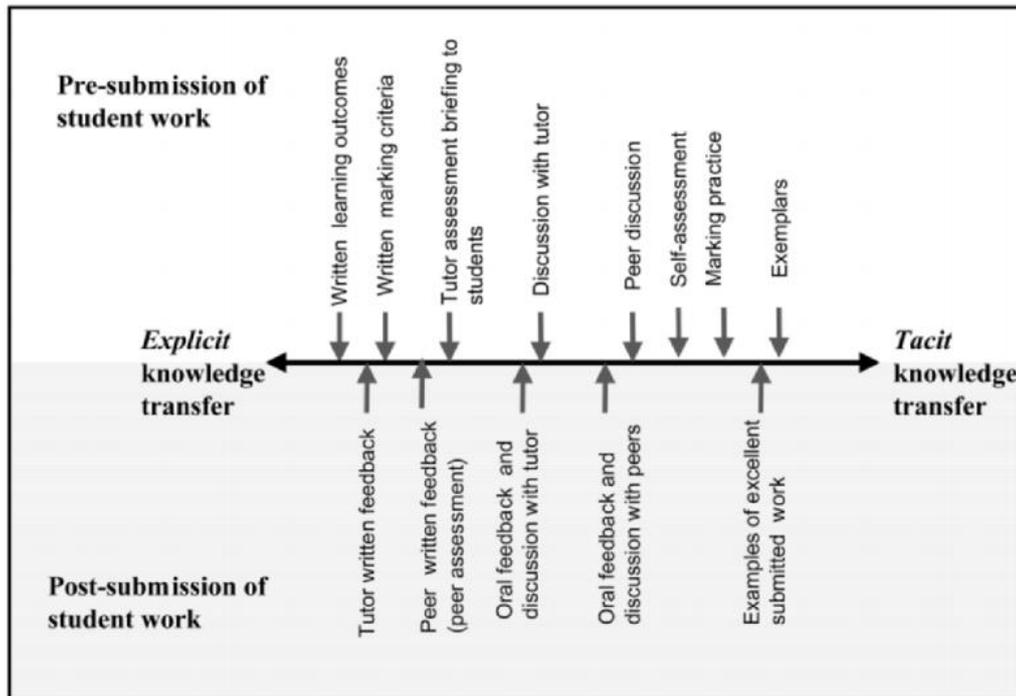
Figure 2-1 A spectrum of processes
The transfer or construction of knowledge of assessment requirements standards and criteria.
(O'Donovan, p. 331)

Arguably, research into the role of feedback in writing development should take into account the way tacit knowledge is made explicit, and how written feedback comments connect with the processes outlined above. It is important to note, however, that tutor written feedback is at the explicit end of the knowledge spectrum, but transfer of tacit knowledge occurs at the other end of the spectrum with processes such as use of exemplars that involve showing rather than telling. The next section will explore the nature of such exemplars in more depth.

2.5.7   The importance of exemplars

There has been a widespread championing of exemplars in the literature on assessment and feedback (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007: Burke & Pieterich, 2010; Handley, 2011; O'Donovan, 2004; Sadler, 2010). For Sadler (2010), exemplars refer to key examples selected to designate levels of quality, and they implicitly specify standards. Sadler observes that a "deep knowledge of criteria and how to use them ... does not come about through feedback as the prime instructional strategy", as telling students in feedback can only be effective if "... all the meanings and

implications of the terms and the structure of the communication are understood by the students" (p.545).

Bloxham and Boyd (2007) caution that dialogue around exemplars is essential if they are not to be seen as formulae to be imitated. Rust (2003) used exemplars and optional workshops with a group of undergraduate business students, and found that students attending the workshop achieved significantly better results in their subsequent assignment than those who only received the exemplars. Rust concluded that engaging in dialogue with the tutor was central to effective use of exemplars.

The finding above was echoed by Hendry, Bromberger and Armstrong (2011), who investigated the effectiveness of exemplars on the performance of Law students in an assignment task, concluding that the use of exemplars marked and discussed in class were more effective than simply receiving exemplars. Handley and Williams (2011), in a study of second year undergraduates, used the term, "time shifting feedback" (p.106) to describe how exemplars helped students understand criteria and standards before submission. In their study, students valued the guidance provided by exemplars online (Web CT) but were reluctant to engage in online discussion around them, leading Handley and Williams to conclude that the lack of significant improvement in a subsequent assignment was likely to be due to this lack of dialogue. Significantly, Handley and Williams were initially looking at student disengagement with feedback, but they actually identified students' difficulties in developing a tacit understanding of criteria as a more serious problem for interpreting feedback.

Until the emergence of the studies described above, there was little published research on the actual use of exemplars to establish standards (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007), but design issues remain relating to appropriate length and complexity (Handley & Williams, 2011) or whether or not complete assignments should be used as exemplars. Instead of full length assignment exemplars, there may be more value in re-constructing shorter extracts in order to highlight typical failings or problems in

writing[19]. Some guidance on teaching international students has recommended "providing model answers" (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007, p.152), but it is important to note that exemplars are not model texts of 'correct' answers, and students themselves appreciate the value of a range of exemplars from poor to good (Hendry, Armstrong, & Bromberger, 2011). It may also be true that students find it easier to work up from poorer texts that allow them to see the level they are at themselves. Where poor assignments are used, however, there is the question of whether lack of identifiable arguments could make it difficult for students to follow texts generally (Handley & Williams, 2011).

It has been pointed out that there may be an expectation for a wider use of exemplars in postgraduate work than undergraduate work, as in postgraduate work, "critical analysis and engagement is related to the demands of a particular assignment" (Catt & Gregory, 2006, p.24). Though there does not appear to be any evidence in the literature to support this assumption, it is certainly worth investigating in the present study involving taught Master's programmes.

2.5.8 Peer review and feedback

While exemplars have been under researched, a related area that has received more attention is that of peer-to-peer feedback and evaluation. It is argued that cognitive benefits result from engaging in assessing peer work and receiving feedback from multiple sources in addition to a tutor (Burke & Pieterick, 2010; Nicol, 2010; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Orsmond, Maw, Park, Gomez, & Crook, 2013; Sadler, 2010). Some studies claim that such feedback is less emotionally loaded than when it comes from tutors (Black, cited in Bloxham & Boyd; Juwah et al., 2004). It has also been argued that peer support is effective because peers are on the same journey and close to each other in terms of their shared learning experience (Burke & Pieterich, 2010; Juwah et al., 2004).

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[19] I have used this approach in two of my own modules. My experience of posting exemplars of this type on a VLE at Bradfield were similar to those of Handley and Williams (2011) discussed above.

Studies that deal with the challenges and difficulties involved in peer marking and feedback are less in evidence in the higher education literature but covered in far more detail in the literature on L2 writing, and it may be useful to briefly review findings in this area to assess their relevance to this study.

In a detailed study of peer feedback, Hu (2005) reported on action research carried out on successive cohorts on academic writing programme in Singapore aimed at preparing students for university study. Hu used peer review on an intensive writing process based course involving numerous opportunities for feedback and revision of drafts. Although he initially attempted to set up peer review feedback with detailed guidance, Hu found limited support for it from his students and with later cohorts focused on training activities and follow up as key to making the peer feedback effective. Using thirteen training activities focused on research and awareness raising, and following up comments from peer marking, Hu found that these comments were taken up effectively by his students and yielded good results in terms of developing writing competence and improving understanding of audience and writing errors.

In a review of peer feedback in ESL contexts, Rollinson (2005) concluded that peer feedback strategies could yield results but they were lengthy and time consuming due to the need for training. She maintained that peer feedback could only be effective when carefully set up and with adequate training for the students involved. In an EFL context, Lee (2009) later looked at Hong Kong teachers' readiness to innovate in feedback practices including use of peer review. Though not heavily used, peer review was seen as potentially useful but teachers indicated that constraints of time, curriculum organisation and large classes prevented them from using it more widely.

In higher education, tutor concerns about the use of peer feedback include fear of inaccurate grading and negative responses (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007), while issues for students surround their perceived lack of competence in carrying out such assessment, along with a reluctance to criticise others. Burke and Pieterick (2010), promoting the idea of peer review, warn that "students are unlikely to produce brilliant responses to their peers" work even when they have been involved in

defining the criteria" (p. 64). They also make the point that peer review must be managed carefully, with tutor guidance and help in developing appropriate strategies for the process to work. Cartney's study (2011) supported several of these points. In a peer marking intervention in small groups of first year Social Policy students, Cartney found emotional issues in the form of high levels of student anxiety both in giving and receiving feedback. Cartney also highlighted the need for marking criteria to be "further demystified" for students to engage effectively with the feedback exercise and one of her recommendations was for students to be involved along with external examiners and others in the re-design of marking criteria. The concerns relating to the emotional nature of peer feedback have led to calls for inter-peer assessment before intra-peer assessment. Brown and Knight (1994) refer to this on the basis that students find it easier to assess work of other groups (inter-peer assessment) before assessing the work of their own group. This approach was taken up by a much more recent study by Wimshurst and Manning (2012) which used case study exemplars in an Australian undergraduate programme. Students peer reviewed exemplars of different quality from previous cohorts, and findings revealed subsequent improvements in summative work across all levels of performance.

Unsurprisingly, the point has been made that international students may require more of the guidance and preparation mentioned above than native speaker home based students (Falchikov, 2005, as cited in Bloxham & Boyd, 2007) and it could certainly be argued that the cultural backgrounds of international students may influence their willingness and ability to engage in peer feedback activities. A number of studies in ELT contexts have been identified where the expectations of students from different cultures seemed to affect the nature of group cooperation (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). The central point here is that peer feedback approaches are not at all straightforward in the context of L2 writers; attempts to use peer feedback with such students cannot be routinely expected to succeed. It is also clear from the ESL research that peer feedback requires a great deal of time and training of students in what is expected for it to be effective.

2.6   Student and Tutor Perceptions of Feedback

A commonly found claim in the literature refers to feedback as an under researched area, at least in relation to student responses to feedback (Ferguson, 2011; Mutch, 2003; Pokorny & Pickford, 2010; Poulos & Mahony, 2008; Walker, 2009; Weaver, 2006). In reality, during the past decade, feedback has become a popular topic for research in higher education, although Section 2.4.2 highlighted the attention given to feedback in the English language context, albeit often in terms of written corrective feedback. The current literature on empirical studies of feedback in higher education could be described "as small-scale" (Hounsell et al., 2008), focusing on student and staff perceptions within particular course settings, rather than on the substance of feedback itself (p.56).

Several examples provide evidence for Hounsell's point above. Pitts (2005), investigated the views of third year undergraduate Music students based on a sample of 18 questionnaires and data from focus groups drawn from her sample. Weaver (2006), in a larger-scale study, used questionnaire and focus group data to explore the views of 170 undergraduates in Business and Art and Design at Nottingham Trent University. Pokorny and Pickford (2010) used four focus groups (a total of 18 students) from a Business school in an inner London University to explore students' views of the definition of feedback and feedback experience. It is also worth noting that the majority of these and other studies have employed questionnaire and focus group methods (Carless, 2006; Robinson, Pope, & Holyoak, 2013; Weaver, 2006) which tend to give a snapshot of student and tutor perceptions on feedback, but rarely examine feedback over long enough periods of time to indicate its role in developing academic literacy.

2.6.1   Analyses of feedback comments

 A relatively small number of studies has focused on the analysis of feedback comments themselves (Brown & Glover, 2006; Read, Francis & Robson, 2005; Hyatt, 2005; Leki, 2006; Mirador, 2000; Mutch, 2003; Walker, 2009; Weaver, 2006; Yelland, 2011). Two studies have taken up the idea of written feedback comments as a 'genre' (Mirador, 2001; Yelland, 2011). Yelland's later work took up

Mirador's earlier twelve 'moves' and explored them in some depth. As it was published after data collection for both of my studies, this work did not inform the design of the research.

Yelland applied Mirador's approach to 140 feedback comments on undergraduate English Studies assignments and concluded that they had a "predictive power" (p.223). He argued for the addition of a new move, *Mitigating Negative Comment* (MNC) based on his argument that making negative comments without harming the student was "...the most difficult task in writing feedback comments" (p.225). The latter point highlights the emotional impact of negative feedback comments, a theme that has been taken up in more recent work (Molloy et al., 2013). Arguing that feedback comments are indeed a specific 'genre', Yelland sought to discover the extent to which first and third year undergraduates were able to mirror the genre in their own feedback on other students' work. He found that both groups rarely used the 'standard' approach he had identified, and although students frequently attempted to mitigate negative comments at sentence level, they did follow the approach he had identified as a feedback genre in tutor feedback. Yelland's conclusion that markers more clearly share the same discourse community with their external examiners than their students is worth taking up in the present study. The current research did not focus on written feedback in terms of its status as a genre, however, though a study connecting feedback and the development of CAW might be expected to provide insights relevant to the topic.

In the earliest study of relevance in the UK context, Ivanič et al. (2000) analysed a sample of nine sets of written feedback comments from EAP tutors and subject tutors. The sample was rather small, and did not claim to be representative, but it is unclear how it was selected. The study used six categories to analyse the feedback in the typology listed below:

1. Explain the grade in terms of strengths and weaknesses;
2. Correct or edit the student's work;
3. Evaluate the match between the student's essay and an 'ideal' answer;
4. Engage in dialogue with the student;
5. Give advice which will be useful in writing the next essay;
6. Give advice on rewriting the essay.
(Ivanič et al., 2000, p.55)

Ivanič gave no rationale to justify this six-point classification system and it is clear that these categories are not mutually exclusive: explaining grades in terms of strengths and weaknesses is arguably the main intention behind many tutor comments, and a good match between a student answer and an 'ideal' answer, for example, would constitute a 'strength'. It could also be argued that 'justifying the mark' is a basic function of written feedback, and it implicitly encompasses many of the comment categories here, with the possible exception of the two 'advice' categories. Thus, there may be serious issues of overlap here. On the other hand, it may be useful to know when tutors explicitly refer to 'the mark' in their wordings, as this is closely bound up with summative evaluation and judgement.

In their findings, Ivanič et al. highlighted the salience of the function of justifying the mark, and indicated the problem of usability resulting from vague, general comments. The low frequency of developmental comments usable for future assignments was also noted. These points were supported by later studies (Brown & Glover, 2006; Walker, 2009)

A study by Mutch (2003) provided an example of a large-scale study of written feedback comments in an undergraduate modular programme within a Business school in a post-1992 University. The Mutch study took a sample of over one hundred feedback sheets from eleven degrees at different undergraduate levels. Broad positive / negative categories were further divided and included comments which had 'developmental content'. Mutch found that many comments were categorical, noting the often 'terse' and pared down style of comments as well as the issue of mitigated comments and how these may not always be interpreted as intended (p.31). He observed, however, that tersely stated comments should be understood in terms of the conditions of production, as feedback is required to do a lot in a reduced space, which in turn suggested alternative methods of delivery rather than avoiding direct comments. Mutch also identified a final category as 'conversation' where the tutor seemed to be musing in response to the student's work, offering a personal reaction which did not imply developmental action.

Mutch found an overall balance of positive and negative comments, but commented on variation in the amount of feedback provided by individual markers,

observing that this was mainly due to individual practice and not related to the material or grade. He also found that there was a significant element of what he termed "implied development" comments requiring interpretation on the part of the reader, e.g. "evidence of some good basic sources (implies a need for more sophisticated sources), or "too much of your word count was on descriptive content" (p. 32), which implied a need to replace some description with more analysis.

While Mutch's 'developmental' comments focused clearly on feeding forward to the student, the notion of implied skills development seems problematic; it has value in recognising the force of what is left unsaid, but may be inappropriate in a study of international students. Any message within feedback can only be effective if it is picked up, understood and acted upon by the student. International students are likely to be more challenged than home students in respect of understanding such messages, and 'implied' messages could be interpreted in different ways by the researcher.

In a later study, Hyatt (2005) carried out an analysis of a corpus of 60 feedback scripts from Master's courses in Education in a university in the north of England. The study did not specify the nature of the participants and did not differentiate between home and international students. As with the Ivanič and Mutch studies, it was also limited to an analysis of feedback taken out of context of specific programmes or modules of study. Hyatt's classification system, however, appeared to be useful for the purposes of this doctoral study. His categories were:

> 1. Phatic (maintaining social relationship)
> 2. Developmental (helping the student with subsequent work related to the current assignment)
> 3. Structural, (organisation of whole assignment or sections within it)
> 4. Stylistic (punctuation, lexis, syntax/grammar; proof -reading/ spelling referencing, presentation, register
> 5. Content related (positive, negative, non-evaluative)
> 6. Methodological (for assignments based on research)
> 7. Admin (relating to administrative issues)
> (Hyatt, 2005, p.344)

Hyatt's main categories were further subdivided to allow for considerable detail in the analysis. Like Mutch, Hyatt also included a 'developmental' category, arguably central for 'feed forward', but he extended this with subdivisions of *alternatives* for suggestions for improvement of the current work, a type of task

focused feedback similar to the example from Mutch above. He also included a separate *'future development'* category and two further developmental sub-categories: *'reflective questions'* and *'informational content'* (p. 344), covering Mutch's tutor musing or 'conversation' category. This was understandable perhaps in relation to his principal concern, to explore the extent to which written feedback was dialogic in its approach. Hyatt's main finding was that there was a lack of comments engaging students in disciplinary dialogue, with only occasional evidence of tutors engaging with definitions of academic discourse such as argument, criticality etc. With the exception of Hyatt's 'methodology' category, which would only be useful in relation to Master's level assignments featuring research projects, his overall listing of content, development and stylistic features provided useful, relevant and comprehensive coverage in the context of the present study on assignments on taught Master's programmes.

Read, Francis and Robson (2005) carried out a study with fifteen male and sixteen female lecturers from History departments across a range of twenty-four UK universities in order to investigate gender differences in marking and feedback. The lecturers marked and gave feedback on one male and one female authored undergraduate history essay and were also interviewed on their responses and marking. While the study found few gender differences in terms of the nature and pattern of the comments, it found wide variations in the judgement of quality and marks awarded. The authors attempted to analyse the tone and feeling of the feedback, focusing on negative and positive comments, finding four times more negative than positive comments. Following an earlier idea by Ivanič, they differentiated wholly positive or negative comments from what they termed "softened negative comments", or comments that were less authoritative and offered a more open ended tone, e.g., "In parts you tend to slip into description"-softened by a qualifier, or "Try to plan your essay more logically"-softened by suggesting action in the future" (p. 255). This approach recognised the limitations of a simplistic positive / negative approach to comments, providing a way of accounting for mitigating comments, and it will be referred to later in Section 3.6.1.

Leki (2006) carried out a study in a US university, based on interviews with twenty one L2 graduates from different disciplines, (thirteen PhD and eight Master's students) and feedback on fourteen of their texts. Her analysis of feedback appeared

to focus mainly on in-text marginal comments made on a variety of text genres including lab reports, research reports and exams. Leki used a number of general response categories which included "language and writing; evaluative comments; grades; task management; substantive response". She further categorised the latter under categories such as "correcting interpretation, "requesting elaboration" or "requesting clarification". This approach to analysis may have reflected the fact that her sample consisted of mainly marginal comments on texts.

One of Leki's main findings was the problem of illegibility of tutor writing, which seriously hampered understanding for three of her twenty-one participants. Handwriting issues were also raised in some UK studies (e.g., Higgins et al., 2001; Hulme & Forshaw, 2006; Robinson et al., 2013). Higgins, for example, found that forty per cent of interviewees in his study complained of illegible handwriting in their feedback. Students in Leki's study also claimed to be attentive to feedback and all wanted more, even in some cases where Leki observed that they were "drowning in feedback" (p.279). More than half of her respondents wanted more feedback that gave direction and guidance. Praise alone was not always valued, with a call for more guidance to accompany it. Surprisingly few students, given the number at PhD level, referred to iterative feedback which allowed revision of drafts, though those that did clearly valued it. In her final recommendations, Leki called for collaboration between writing experts and disciplinary tutors in providing EAP courses to support such students.

Although it was set in a large US university, covering a wide range of disciplines, with participants from a number of different countries, the study is still relevant to my own research. It is worth noting that the study did not focus exclusively on taught Master's students, and her data collection focused on a varied sample of texts from a range of courses and modules, with interviews exploring participants' experience and attitudes to feedback generally, but not in the context of any specific assessment events. Its focus on L2 graduate writers, however, and the implications she draws for EAP support for such students makes it particularly pertinent.

Brown and Glover (2006) studied feedback from science undergraduate courses at Sheffield Hallam University and the Open University. In a large scale study they examined one randomly chosen assignment and associated feedback for 147 students, focusing on both marginal and end comments on a range of assignment types including lab reports, research projects and essays. In their analysis, Brown and Glover assigned comments to general categories such as content, skills development, motivational feedback, or future study, but also used three categories to explore depth of feedback. Category one was assigned to comments that indicated errors or omissions, category two was for advice on how to correct, or actual corrections, while category three was for explanations of why answers were appropriate or inappropriate.

Over half of all comments in the Brown and Glover study were found to be content focused, and where skills issues were indicated they were rarely given explanations that would feed forward. One finding was that the amount of feedback did not correlate with the grade, i.e. that lower grades received more feedback, and in fact similar amounts of feedback were found at different grades, but with large variations for each grade. They found an overall lack of depth in comments. A major conclusion was that there was a tendency in both institutions to provide summative feedback regardless of the assessment, and that timing of feedback on final products meant that it was not used to improve future work. They also found a lack of shared understanding around assessment criteria leading to student misunderstanding, a finding echoed in later studies (Walker, 2009; Weaver, 2006) and commented on the large amount of mark loss focused rather than learning focused comments, comments justifying a grade and looking back to what has been achieved, not forward to future learning (Ivanič, Clark, & Rimmershaw, 2000; Weaver, 2006).

In a later study, Walker (2009) used the Brown and Glover's analytical framework described above along with questionnaire and telephone interviews within a faculty of technology in the Open University. She attempted to link analysis of written comments with student responses to them, taking a sample of 106 summative assignments with accompanying feedback sheets and interviewing 43 students by telephone. Walker drew on Hattie and Timperley's (2007) notion of retrospective and future gap altering comments on skills that could be used in future

tasks. Students in her study reported not understanding over a quarter of comments, fifty per cent of which were comments on content. Unsurprisingly, students mentioned that comments explaining points were more usable, and sixty four percent of skills comments were deemed usable for future work. This is not surprising as skills can be applied to subsequent work, while content usually refers to a completed task which may not be repeated. The Walker study, like that of Brown and Glover, was based on a variety of assignment types in a scientific discipline, so was less relevant for the purposes of this study and did not provide analysis of feedback and students' perceptions of its usability over a prolonged period of time.

The studies reported above, particularly those in the UK context, focused mainly on samples of undergraduate feedback, often in science disciplines and rarely provided data from the tutors who wrote the feedback. Where student reactions to feedback were further investigated, it was usually in the form of survey or one-off interviews. Their findings, however, converge on a similar set of points summarised by Nicol (2010) in his survey of the field. They are that feedback should be:

- Understandable
- Selective
- Specific
- Timely
- Contextualised
- Non-judgemental
- Balanced
- Forward looking
- Transferable
- Personal

 (p. 513).

Many of these points also concur with a report setting out ten principles[20] by the National Union of Students (Porter, 2009 as cited in Burke & Pieterick, 2010).

Ferguson's recent study (2011) in an Australian university provides relevant findings on student views of feedback. Ferguson surveyed 101 undergraduate students, and more importantly, 465 graduate students studying teacher education at a major Australian university. He used a pen and paper questionnaire to explore research questions focused on student preferences for feedback and their perceptions

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[20] Although worded in different ways, the principles agree on all points above, but also add that feedback should be "continuous", and "for learning, not just of learning" (p.82).

of its usefulness. The questionnaire was administered in the latter half of three undergraduate and one post-graduate pre-service education programme. He reported a high degree of consistency across the sample which prompted his claim that "...regardless of discipline, background and the nature of university experience, students had considerable agreement about what constituted quality assessment feedback and process" (p.54). Ferguson's findings concur on most of these 'qualities' of feedback listed above, emphasising the personal, guiding and motivational aspects, and he concluded that:

> The most important factor in 'good' feedback was a clear link between assessment tasks and guidelines, assessment frameworks and criteria and the feedback offered (p.60).

Where claims are made that students acted upon comments (Walker, 2009; Weaver, 2006) they should be treated with caution, however, as they are based on student self-report only. At the same time, these studies rarely make clear the nature of the assessment, so one is often left to assume that they were based on summative feedback reports. What is evident is that studies on feedback quality and on student perceptions of feedback quality were often framed by an expectation of formative feedback in situations where summative feedback practices predominated. One line of research this suggested was to explore the extent to which the claims made for Ferguson's study held true in my own context. That is, did the findings reported above (based mainly on native speaker undergraduates), compare with international taught Master's students perceptions of feedback in my university context?

2.6.2   *Tutor perceptions of feedback*

Studies on tutor perceptions of the feedback process are relatively few, usually contained within studies that explore gaps in student and tutor perceptions (Carless, 2006; MacLellan, 2001), but there have been several more recent studies focusing more on tutor practice and experience of giving feedback (Bailey & Garner, 2010; Li & Barnard, 2011; Tuck, 2011). In a 40-item questionnaire survey in a Scottish university, MacLellan (2001) investigated the views of 69 experienced staff and 130 third year B.Ed. undergraduates in relation to questions relating to eight variables including assessment purpose, timing, mode, marking and feedback. Each

questionnaire item attempted to measure the frequency that participants had experienced practices under consideration. McLellan found that for staff, the primary purpose of assessment was to award grades, and while they emphasised the developmental and formative nature of feedback, their responses suggested this was not a prominent feature of their practice; peer and self-assessment were infrequently used, for example, and the traditional essay was the main mode of assessment. Tutors were also found to overestimate the feedback detail they provided and its usefulness, while students questioned both of these.

In a later study, Carless (2006) used a 36 Likert-type item questionnaire to survey 460 staff and 1740 undergraduates in eight public universities in Hong Kong. Interviews were also conducted in English with 15 students to collect qualitative data, with a further 7 interviews carried out in Cantonese. Carless found that tutors and students generally agreed about the emotional aspects of feedback, but not on issues of feedback effectiveness: More than a third of tutors felt students were often given detailed feedback to improve their assignments while only about ten per cent of students agreed with this. Tutors and students also disagreed over attention to grades, with tutors perceiving students as oriented mainly to grades and ignoring feedback, but students challenging this perception. Carless concluded that dialogue and discussion between staff and students was necessary to make the assessment process more transparent for students.

In a study of 48 tutors across a range of subject disciplines in a post 1992 University, Bailey and Garner (2010) used semi-structured interviews to explore tutor experience of written feedback in their own contexts. Tutors were asked to reflect on purposes of feedback, what they hoped to achieve in their feedback and what they thought students did with the feedback. Findings included the awareness of the difficulty of providing effective feedback to students due to its multiple purposes and audiences. Tutors also reported varying beliefs and much uncertainty about what their students did with feedback. Bailey and Garner observed that teachers were aware of "...a conflict between their conceptions of the purposes of feedback, their intentions and the institutional requirements of the system" (p. 195), leading to their stereotyping of student motivations and indifference to the quality of feedback they provided. They concluded that when students failed to learn from

feedback it was often easier to blame them rather than the system. Institutional requirements (such as standardised feedback forms) intended to promote transparency and consistency were reported to have a negative impact on the feedback process, and contributed to a feeling of a lack of ownership over feedback practices.

A later study by Tuck (2011) came to broadly similar conclusions to that of Bailey and Garner. Located in six UK universities including Russell Group, Oxbridge and post-1992 institutions, Tuck's study focused on 14 tutors' perceptions and reported practice with all aspects of undergraduate writing and feedback. Based mainly on semi-structured interviews, Tuck also used a follow up interview which featured discussion of feedback sheets, with some additional data on think aloud during assignment marking. Tuck found evidence that institutional measures such as criterion referencing, standardised feedback sheets, double-marking etc. were more likely to exacerbate the problem of ineffectual feedback than remedy it, echoing Bailey and Garner's (2010) findings. Tutors complained about a lack of ownership of their feedback, and insufficient internal discussion about best practice. Like Bailey and Garner she found that individuals and small groups collaborated within their contexts but not at institutional level, and that in conforming to departmental policy, tutor feedback often resulted in uniformity and a lack of clarity. Tuck focused on the way tutors balanced competing tasks, concluding that different roles of teacher, academic worker and assessor implied different relationships which were "…not easily reconcilable …for givers and readers of feedback" (p.10). Although tutors adapted to institutional requirements in different ways to circumvent institutional barriers and provide effective feedback, tutor led innovations were often "small scale and short-lived" (Tuck, 2011, p. 11), and a fragmentary student learning experience resulted. Tuck called for more productive dialogue around writing.

Li and Barnard (2011) carried out a study with sixteen inexperienced part-time tutors in a New Zealand university. They collected data on beliefs and practices from a survey, followed by individual interviews, with nine tutors taking part in later 'think aloud' activities and focus groups. Their main findings supported earlier work by Bailey and Garner on the constraints of assessment requirements and their conflicting purposes. Tutors in the Li and Barnard study were primarily concerned

with giving feedback that justified their marks to colleagues and academic superiors rather than improving student writing skills.

2.6.3   *Face-to-face dialogue - technological solutions*

The dialogic nature of feedback promoted by dominant constructivist views of learning was noted in Section 2.1.2. An important theme in the literature surrounds the value of written feedback allied to oral feedback (Hounsell, 2003; Hounsell et al., 2008; Nicol, 2010; Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2005; Walker, 2009). A number of studies highlight either the lack of opportunity provided for students to meet and discuss feedback with tutors or the reluctance on the part of students to take up such offers (Hounsell, 2003; Duncan, 2007; Walker, 2009). Reasons for this uneven take up of feedback meetings have been ascribed to lack of time and space, and issues of power, mentioned above. There is also evidence that first year undergraduate students in transition lack knowledge and confidence to take up opportunities for dialogue with their tutors (Blair & McGinty, 2012). Feedback research on NNS taught Master's students might also consider the importance of their 'transition' in this context.

More recent literature makes the case for dialogue due to the limitations of written feedback (Carless et al., 2011; Nicol, 2010). The point has been made that written feedback is essentially a monologue, but that is being asked to do the work of dialogue (Nicol, 2010). The Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe)[21], sets out clearly their understanding of the limitations of written feedback, arguing for more face-to- face dialogue around feedback:

> -written feedback (i.e. without dialogue) rarely communicates tacit
> understandings about disciplinary content and academic literacy skills
> -student engagement is enhanced if written feedback is supplemented with
> dialogue - by using in-class discussions of exemplars, peer-review discussions
> supported by tutors.   (ASKe 1,2,3 leaflets, 2010)

What is significant here is the extension of the term 'dialogue' from individual tutor-student discussions to other teaching activities.

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[21] ASKe is a Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning based at the University of Oxford Brookes. A major project on Feedback was undertaken by Aske in 2007.

The issues that have been raised relating to engaging students with ongoing dialogue of this kind have led to some experimentation with technological solutions. An example of this is audio feedback, or podcast feedback (Lunt & Curran, 2009; Merry & Orsmond, 2007; Savin-Baden, 2010) and more recently using screen capture software for a video form of feedback that displays the text on screen with live commentary from the tutor (Stannard, 2007)[22]. Audio feedback was found to be more detailed and personalised than written feedback, enabling an 'empathetic voice' to emerge (Lunt & Curran, 2009) with tutors' able to use tone to mitigate negative aspects of feedback[23]. In the case of screencapture, students are able to see their own text on screen as the tutor gives a commentary, thus taking audio feedback a step further. A recent study of 14 students on a Distance Learning programme (Edwards, et. al., 2012) concluded that the audio-visual element of screencasting encouraged positive emotions for reception and processing of feedback, and suggested that it may also have helped to socialise students within their learning context. A study carried out by Jones, Georghiades and Gunson (2012) at Cardiff Metropolitan University trialled the use of screencast feedback with 75 Business undergraduates, one half receiving screencast feedback commentaries and one half standard written feedback on a practical spreadsheet task. Survey results indicated that the personalisation provided by the screencast was particularly valued by students. There was also an indication that international students appreciated the opportunity to listen and view commentaries several times, enabling them to gain a better understanding, whereas with written feedback they might have been embarrassed to ask for more explanation. Tutors also saw the benefit of the technology in enabling them to provide much more detail and content than written feedback would have delivered with the same amount of work.

Amongst other more recent studies on innovative approaches to feedback, a good example is a HEA funded approach at the University of Glamorgan (The Economics Network, n.d.), which featured Peermark software used with the popular Turnitin tool, used in many HE institutions for electronic submission of assignments.

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[22] Stannard initially used screencapture in an ELT context.

[23] I began to use screencast feedback in autumn 2010 and carried out research on my own module group which I presented at the Annual Learning and Teaching Conference at Bradfield in June 2011.

The intervention involved Economics students in modules on MBA and MSc programmes, with six international students interviewed for their reactions after the intervention. Some training in providing constructive feedback was given and students were asked to give feedback to peers based on seven questions relating to the writing criteria they were marked on. Precise numbers of students taking part in the project were not given and findings were reported rather briefly but they highlighted the international students' favourable reaction to the intervention in terms of the value of the peer feedback and the increased understanding of criteria. However, there were clearly some students who felt such peer feedback to be less convincing, and also those who lacked confidence to provide such feedback. The researchers clearly stated their belief in the intellectual capacities of the Master's students, though they admitted this might vary. This type of study gives an indication that working with marking criteria can increase understanding of feedback and writing standards. A key point is that it was supported with external funding, which is clearly important to buy out lecturers' time to engage in innovative activity of this nature.

The extent to which tutors made use of technological options such as those reported above for supporting written feedback was an area of interest in this doctoral study; however, apart from audio feedback, research on the other innovations reported above was not published until several years after I had begun my first data collection. Although not central to the design of the study, some aspects of this later research were likely to be relevant at the discussion stage of the study.

2.6.4   Summary: Findings from feedback studies

Despite claims that feedback is an under researched area, it has become a popular topic for research in the past decade. Perhaps as a response to issues raised by the NSS, it has been mainly focused on home undergraduate students. Based on survey research and focus group methods, it has provided a snapshot of student and tutor perceptions on feedback; it has rarely examined feedback over long enough periods of time to indicate its role in developing academic literacy. This is a significant gap my own study could address, analysing feedback events over the duration of taught Master's programmes.

The current literature on feedback is often based on notions of dialogue congruent with a constructivist view of knowledge and learning; however, such studies often describe feedback processes and feedback events characteristic of the receptive-transmission tradition. Developments in HE resulting from modularisation and larger student cohorts are often seen to be responsible for reducing opportunities for dialogue to take place around written feedback (Bailey, 2008; Hounsell, et. al., 2008; Nicol, 2010). A body of literature has identified issues with academic discourse that severely limit the potential for written feedback to be effective, calling for more opportunities for 'dialogue'. In particular, the notion of 'tacit knowledge' has been put forward as a barrier to effective feedback, and this is particularly relevant in the area of critical analysis in academic writing.

Meanwhile, although not comprehensive, research on the quality of written feedback comments clearly indicates a divergence in range, scope, quantity and expression of written feedback in Higher Education settings. The most recent studies seem to have back grounded the issue of quality of feedback comments themselves in an attempt to return to themes of self-regulation and shared understandings of criteria. Despite this trend in the literature, it is argued here that the quality of feedback remains central to effective feedback and a study that analyses written feedback comments could be useful for an understanding of their usability for developing CAW.

2.6.4   Research questions

After surveying the territory, and summarising what is agreed and what is contested, it is possible to identify the key research questions that this proposed study will attempt to address. I will explore the following general question:

What is the role of written feedback in the development of the critical analytical writing of international taught Master's students?

I will also attempt to answer three subsidiary questions:

a) **To what extent is written feedback in this context limited in its capacity to feed forward in terms of critical analytical writing?**

b) **To what extent does the form and style of tutor written comments impact on the usability of this feedback for students?**

c) **To what extent do findings relating to usability of written feedback with NNS replicate those found in the literature on home undergraduate students?**

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In Chapter 1, the importance of NNS graduate students in the context of UK Higher Education in general, and to the University of Bradfield in particular, was established, while Chapter 2 identified the role of written feedback in the development of NNS students' critical academic writing skills as an important and under-researched topic. The review of the literature highlighted the challenge facing NNS needing to develop critical academic writing on taught Master's programmes. In this chapter I will outline the methodology which forms the basis of the research. Firstly I will consider research orientations in terms of their underlying assumptions, before examining options for methods in terms of their suitability for a study of feedback and writing. This discussion provides the rationale for my choice of qualitative methods based mainly on a case study approach. One of the methods proposed, the analysis of written feedback comments, will be discussed in detail, to arrive at a suitable analytical framework for exploring written comments on taught Master's programmes.

A rationale for a research approach that includes methods of data collection should be matched to research questions (Waring, 2012) , so these are worth re-stating here:

Main question: What is the role of written feedback in the development of the critical analytical writing of international taught masters students?

Subsidiary questions:

a) To what extent is written feedback in this context limited in its capacity to feed forward in terms of critical analytical writing?

b) To what extent does the form and style of tutor written comments impact on the usability of this feedback for students?

c) To what extent do findings relating to usability of written feedback with international students replicate those found in the literature on home undergraduate students?

3.1 Feedback-Quantitative or Qualitative Research Approaches?

Methods refer to broad approaches to gathering data as a basis for inference, interpretation, explanation and prediction (Cohen, et al., 2007) and study design necessarily involves a consideration of data collection methods, or 'data making' methods (Richards, 2005). Methods have often been assigned to quantitative or qualitative approaches, a distinction that has been labelled as rather simplistic (Denscombe, 2003; Nunan, 1992, Wood & Welch, 2010). Quantitative research has been characterised as objective (outsider perspective), seeking facts and causal explanations through analysis associated with numbers (Denscombe, 2003). Qualitative research, on the other hand, has been viewed as more subjective (an insider perspective), associated with words as the unit of analysis, exploratory and inductive, seeking understanding of human behaviour from the perspective of the participants in the research (Nunan, 1992). Although so called 'paradigm purists' have insisted at different times on the incompatibility of the two approaches, a more pragmatic approach has emerged in recent years (Robson, 2002; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). More recently still, it has been argued that the terms quantitative and qualitative research do not exist (Waring, 2012) but that they refer to data that can be combined and used in different ways in any form of research.

Researchers should make clear the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning their research (Grix, 2002), since clarifying research terminology enables them to defend methodological positions and account for the positions of others. Waring provides a useful way of representing these assumptions as extremes on a continuum (Waring, 2012). Ontology refers to our view on the nature of the social world, with realists viewing the world in terms of "a singular objective reality", while constructivists see the world as "multiple realities constructed by individuals" (2012, p.16). Epistemology, the understanding of how "what is assumed to exist is known", is characterised by the positivist belief (realism) that direct knowledge of the world can be gained through measurement and

observation, as opposed to the interpretivist belief (constructivism) that knowledge is indirectly gained through interpretation. In terms of methodology, Waring assigns the realist, positivist position to experimental methods, and ideographic approaches to the constructivist, interpretivist position, perhaps a view that equates to the notion of quantitative approaches dealing with numbers, and qualitative approaches dealing with words.

This study of feedback and student response to that feedback necessarily relates to tutor intentions and student interpretations of their feedback. The analysis of actual feedback comments needs to involve my interpretation of the nature of the feedback delivered. There may be conflicting accounts from the various interpretations revealed, with my own interpretation overlaid upon these. Thus, the present study fits the constructivist, interpretivist position, suggesting a qualitative approach that rejects the notion of one objective reality for a view of knowledge and truth as relative (Bell, 2010, Nunan; 1992). It is important to establish these underlying concepts before comparing research methods that could be employed for a study of the role of feedback in academic writing. Although it may be possible to 'mix' methods to some extent, it will be necessary to take a clear stance on the type of knowledge obtained by any final study design.

3.2 Practitioner Research-Iterative Design Approaches

As the motivation for the present study on feedback practice and its role in the development of writing lay in my own teaching experience in EAP and on Master's modules in an academic programme, practitioner research approaches suggested themselves for consideration in the study design. Action research (AR), for example, is often used by teachers, and can employ a range of methods (Nunan, 1992). It is closely related to the more recent emergence of the exploratory practice (EP) approach (Allwright, 2005).

Action research (AR) can be understood as a form of professional development carried out by teacher practitioners. AR has been used in a variety of contexts and particularly in the professional development of teachers (Cohen et al., 2007). Cohen et al. note that AR is methodologically eclectic, uses feedback from

data in an ongoing cyclical process, includes evaluation and reflection and is formative (p.312). The latter point is significant, in that it implies that definitions of problems, aims and the methodology may alter during the actual action research process. This implies a 'flexible' research design (Robson, 2002) that could employ two or more phases of data collection, with modifications to the research design in later phases. Thus, a research design on one group of students in one department might be modified before a second phase in a different department.

Exploratory practice (EP), a research model pioneered by Allwright in the 1990s, was a reaction to traditional academic research in that it emphasised collaboration between teachers and learners. Allwright (2003) stated a concern with 'puzzles' rather than with solving isolated 'problems', and EP was envisaged as part of existing classroom practice. Perpignan's study (2003) was cited by Allwright (2003) as a good example of EP in practice and discussed in Section 2.4.1. Perpignan reflected on EP as a research approach, but she found that responses to feedback were so diverse and individual that "no understanding of the feedback dialogue could be presented ....to serve any useful purpose" (2003, p. 271). This in itself argued against adopting a similar design for the present study.

AR and EP represent 'insider' approaches with some form of intervention integral to their research design. This implies a focus on one specific group of learners, possibly in one Master's module, thus reducing the scope of the present research. AR in particular involves teacher intentions, with the assumption that problems can be isolated and 'fixed' in some way, but as my research questions focused on exploring problems with feedback and CAW, this suggested a design that led to an in-depth understanding rather than to specific solutions. I also took the position that an understanding of international graduate students and the nature of their writing would be enhanced by data from different disciplines and different modules at taught Master's level. This is not to suggest that insights from the present research might not in turn lead to identification of specific problems suitable for teaching interventions, but rather that such a research activity might eventually arise out of a substantial project on this topic.

In short, the value of an iterative, flexible research design was noted, but action research and exploratory practice did not seem ideal research strategies. The next section will examine the range of options in terms of methods that presented themselves for this study, and explain why I rejected fixed designs aimed at collecting measurable data for flexible design and methods associated with qualitative approaches.

3.3 Experimental and Survey Methods - Measurable Data

Experimental or quasi experimental data collection has been referred to as using a "fixed design" (Robson, 2002, p.4) and can be used with measurable phenomena, where independent and dependent variables can be identified and controlled (Bell, 2010). The case of feedback and its impact on critical analytical writing is not one that presents clearly measurable phenomena. An immediate problem is how to measure progress in critical analytical writing itself. While student grades can be viewed as one measure of achievement and progress, holistic assignment marking does not easily allow for isolation of specific marks for critical writing. Giving and receiving feedback is a process which in itself implies that student understanding and responses to feedback need to be studied over time. In this way, one-off experimental interventions did not seem appropriate. In the context of NNS graduate students, many variables presented themselves, including age, gender, educational background, first language, English language proficiency and subject knowledge. It would have been difficult to control so many variables in this research.

Survey methods are less controlled than experimental designs, focus on a specific point in time and can provide a scientific "ring of confidence" (Robson, 2002, p.230). As noted in Chapter 2, the majority of studies on feedback in recent years have employed survey methods and one-off interviews. Such studies have generally looked at large groups of undergraduate students in individual programmes: (Duncan, 2007; Walker, 2009; Weaver, 2006). Although widely used in relation to feedback, the survey method did not appear to fit the main research question on feed forward, or subsidiary question b) on usability of feedback. An understanding of students' response to and use of feedback in future assignments suggested a study design capable of collecting data over a period of time,

encompassing multiple assessment and feedback events. Survey methods providing a snapshot at any given point over the period of a taught Master's programme would not have provided this but would also have been problematic in terms of sample size. Taught Master's student numbers vary from department to department[24] at Bradfield, and to collect data from a large enough sample, only departments with large numbers of NNS on taught Master's courses would have been eligible sites for research.

3.4 Qualititative Approaches and Methods

I have argued above that a study of the impact of feedback on writing requires engagement with the processes of feedback and writing and the way these are perceived by students and tutors alike. Research based on the epistemological assumption that knowledge is experiential and subjective, the interpretivist position outlined above in Section 3.1, tends to emphasise accounts by informants (Opie & Sikes, 2004) and it is this position that I take here. I support the view that qualitative approaches are needed to explore complexities beyond the scope of controlled experimental research (Gillham, 2000). While experimental or survey methods may be more applicable to generalising findings and making causal links, qualitative approaches can provide a deeper understanding of a context (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Such approaches could provide in-depth data focusing on participant perspectives, tracking the process of feedback and how it influences writing over a period of a taught Master's programme. The principal data collection methods, therefore, that presented themselves were diaries (learner logs) and interviews.

3.4.1   Diary studies

A diary study can be defined as a "first person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analyzed for recurring patterns or salient events" (Bailey, 1990, p.215). Diaries, journals or learner logs are often used in research in language learning and by teachers, learners or participant observers (Nunan, 1992). The

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[24] While the Bradfield Management School and the Department of Education had numbers in excess of 150 students on taught Master's programmes over the duration of my study, other departments, such as Archaeology had numbers no higher than twenty on such programmes.

current research relates to the development of academic literacy, specifically the relationship between critical academic writing and feedback, so in this context diaries were considered as an option for data collection. The diary approach can provide reflection that enables the recording of emotional responses and feelings along with facts. Diaries could capture sensitive emotional responses relating to different stages of the assessment and feedback process and immediately after receipt of feedback.

Data collection via diaries or logs requires little on the part of the researcher, once set up, but despite the advantages listed above, it places a high degree of responsibility on the participants (Robson, 2002). Diary studies clearly require regular entries for data collection to be viable, and as they are self-administered there is no guarantee that participants will keep them up to date. Teachers or learners reflecting on daily classroom events may be able to make regular entries in a diary but the infrequency of feedback events, (one or two feedback events per term in a typical Master's programme), would mean a reduced amount of data. If the diary method were used alongside other forms of data collection, this could then run the risk of placing too many demands on time and effort on the part of participants. Nunan (1992) observes that most of the diary studies in second language learning are those of teachers, and that even as a course requirement they can be seen as burdensome. The diary requirement has been observed to be time consuming (Bell, 2010, Robson, 2002) and it could have been obtrusive for busy 'challenged' NNS trying to grapple with demands of an academic course in a foreign language.

Along with the amount of work, the challenge involved in diary writing could also not be ignored. Keeping regular diary entries would have represented a cognitive challenge for participants, particularly if they were international students entering departments with the basic test scores in writing and with little experience of free writing in English. Although regular diary writing might arguably be beneficial for developing the writing habit for international students, such an 'intervention' was not one of the research aims in this study. The informal diary genre is very different from the type of academic text that students are expected to write in their departmental work, nullifying to some extent any benefit to the participants from a 'practice' writing element. The potential for confusion was also

evident, since the more personal reflective writing styles used in diary entries would need to be separated from the more impersonal academic writing style required for assignments.

3.4.2   Interviews - a primary source of data

The interview as a means to collect data has long been established as a basic research tool in the social sciences (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). This section will outline the nature of this method, and why I decided to adopt it for the present research, at the same time identifying a number of potential issues that would have to be taken into account. The spectrum ranging from semi structured to unstructured interviews is often discussed in the literature. However, these types of interview are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). The structured interview involves the interviewer using a fairly rigid set of ordered questions, or 'pre-coding' not dissimilar to those used in a questionnaire survey, leaving the interviewer in control of the interview. In this way questions may be relatively 'pre-coded' and therefore one downside may be that they are less open to new and unexpected information. The structured interview may be used when the interviewer "knows what he or she does not know" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.269). More structured interviewing may be used at early stages as 'ground clearing' or at later stages to check details with respondents. In a study of feedback, interviews with students might initially require a relatively structured approach to gather baseline data, for example.

The semi structured interview, on the other hand, allows the interviewer to remain in overall control of the direction of the interview, while also enabling greater flexibility in terms of order of questions, probing and exploration of responses in more depth. The unstructured interview is seen to resemble a conversation, in that the direction of the interview is less controlled by the interviewer and based on open-ended questions that explore responses in depth (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As I began this study with some clear ideas of data I wished to gather, the semi-structured type of interview, based on a schedule of questions, was chosen to discuss issues arising from feedback events, but allowing the interviewer to probe for student reactions to feedback over the period of the study.

3.4.3   Issues with interviews

Interviews can be understood in different ways. Three significant conceptions should be taken into account: "the 'widely held' notion that interviews provide a means of pure information transfer; the notion of the interview as an inevitably biased transaction; the idea of the interview that recognises its parallels with many features of everyday life" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.350). The latter view sees interviews as social encounters, and the interview as co-constructed by interviewer and interviewee. This is the position I took in this research project. If the interview is understood as a social encounter, it also follows that all aspects of it cannot be brought under rational control (Cohen et al., 2007). The idea of the interview as pure information transfer is rejected here, but the notion of interviews as transactions that are inevitably biased does seem to hold some truth. The reality may be that attempts to be systematic and objective may flounder in the face of interpersonal relationships played out in the interview, and elements of bias may always be present. With this in mind, I have attempted to make clear any sources of potential bias resulting from research design and procedures.

Where the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is asymmetrical, there is an issue of the interpretive interview invading the student's private space (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). The element of power is present in the teacher–student relationship and as McDonough and McDonough observe, "this is even more salient when teachers /researchers are dealing with non-native speakers" (p.185). Another way of viewing this problem is in terms of 'status', and the wider the gap in status between interviewer and interviewee, the more difficult it is to gain access to the level of knowledge that the interviewer requires. Indeed, Powney and Watts (1987) argue that the information produced in an interview is directly related to the relative status of interviewer and interviewee.

My position as a member of staff in the University inevitably resulted in a status gap between myself as interviewer and student respondents. If I was interviewing in a department not my own, however, my position as an English language support tutor could arguably reduce this gap; I might be considered on the side of the students in this respect. To obtain depth of data from interviews, it is

important to establish rapport, trust and empathy with participants (Nunan, 1992; Powney & Watts, 1987) and this was arguably made easier to do in my 'support' role.

Researching the process of feedback suggested the use of tutor interviews in addition to student interviews. The power imbalance in this situation was rather more complex. Indeed, as a staff member I held an advantage over any research student in gaining trust and confidence of participant staff members. At the same time, as someone recognised as a language support tutor, there was the issue of whether I would be perceived to be of lower status by the subject specific lecturers. My status was clearly different, however, in my home department, where I was already a member of a subject specific lecturing team. Having written and delivered a core module and an option module on the MATESOL programme since 2006, I already had a working relationship with some of the pool of tutors that were later invited to participate in my study.

3.5 Case Study Research

The interview method discussed above is widely used within case study research, a strategy that seemed attractive for the present study. Case study is not a "flawed experimental design" (Robson, 2002) but a "fundamentally different research strategy with its own design (p. 180). The 'case' in case study can be many things, including individuals, organisations, institutions, events, projects or programmes (Day Ashley, 2012; Robson, 2002). Whereas in the 1980s, case study research was often seen as limited to "idea and hypothesis generating pilot studies" (Eckerth, 2008, p.303), exploratory at most, and with little scientific value or theoretical relevance, this view is no longer so widely held. It has been claimed that case studies in applied linguistics, for example, have led to far-reaching theoretical claims and models (Duff, 2008). I considered case study research suitable for the present study because it deals with the complex interaction of many variables in a few cases, unlike experimental research focusing on a few variables in a large number of cases (Day Ashley, 2012). The complex factors involved in giving and responding to feedback outlined in Chapter 2 seemed to demand such an approach.

Indeed, case studies may be used as an exploratory, descriptive or explanatory strategy (Yin, 2003) depending on research questions and focus. These purposes are essentially related to the processes of 'understanding', 'discovering' and 'developing' respectively (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The main research question in this study suggested an exploratory case study to gain a better understanding of the role of feedback in writing. However, the subsidiary research questions were more in the nature of 'why' and 'how' questions, and were more in the nature of explanatory case studies (Yin, 2003). Stake (1995) distinguished between the 'intrinsic case' where the particularity of the case itself is the focus and the' instrumental case' where the case is secondary in importance to the insights it gives into something else (p.4). This feedback study is an example of the instrumental case, with the interest not simply in the individual cases themselves but on the role of feedback in developing critical academic writing at postgraduate level. Stake also uses the term 'collective case study' (similar to Yin's multiple case study), when a number of cases are used to explore differences within and between cases. This research is an example of such a collective case study, allowing for comparison across cases but also across two research sites in two departments at the University of Bradfield.

The strength of the case study is that it is able to deal with a "variety of evidence, documents, artefacts, interviews and observations" (Yin, 2003, p.8). Perhaps the most important method of data collection in this research was the interview, giving data on feedback processes via student and tutor experiences over the period of a taught Master's programme. Data from documents pertaining to programme specifications, assignments, marking schemes etc., were also collected and tutor written feedback comments were also analysed to give an important source of data regarding the nature and quality of feedback.

Analysis of student participants' written assignments could have potentially offered a rich source of data for this study. However, a detailed and systematic analysis of the essays and assignments would have constituted an enormous undertaking. An attempt to provide an independent assessment of student texts might also have yielded data of questionable value, given that it is the tutor's assessment of a piece of writing that will matter to student participants in any study,

as they will be responding to this assessment. Of course, an attempt could have been made to assess student work at different points in the taught programme against an independent set of criteria (i.e. not the marking criteria that are set by the module itself). However, it has been argued in Chapter 2 that notions of quality in academic writing are context dependent, relating to specific disciplines and also module specific criteria. The value of an abstract, context independent assessment of participants' writing would, therefore, have been questionable for this study.

3.6 A Framework for Analysing Written Feedback Comments

The case study approach for this research envisaged data collection from a small number of participants, so analysis of feedback from a small sample of feedback was considered useful for triangulation purposes. I considered this type of data as central to an attempt to explore usability of written feedback, as such data can provide useful insights into the style and content of tutor comments. A number of systems for analysing comments were reviewed in Section 2.5.1. (Brown & Glover 2006; Read, Francis & Robson, 2005; Hyatt, 2005; Ivanič et al., 2000; Leki, 2006; Mutch, 2003; Walker, 2009). The analytical frameworks coded written feedback comments with a view to presenting data, often for different purposes, so it was important to arrive at a framework that was valid for the needs of the present study.*3.6.1 Adapting a framework*

 Some analytical frameworks discussed above were limited in the detail they could offer (Ivanič et al., 2000), or they focused on science disciplines and assignment types less relevant to this study (Brown & Glover, 2006; 2009; Mutch, 2003). In Section 2.5.1, Hyatt's study (2005) was seen to provide useful categories for the study envisaged here. The feedback Hyatt analysed was generated from 'essay style' assignments given to Master's students in Education, and they offered a reasonable depth and breadth of coverage. Given that comments could lend themselves to a number of interpretations, however, I decided to carry out further coding to deal with the level of depth of feedback, the language that it employed and the positive / negative messages it conveyed.

I added a depth coding categorisation adapted from Brown and Glover, (2006) to enable a stronger focus on the usability of the feedback. This involved a

second coding to identify any points that provided elaboration of earlier points, or *explanation*, where further guidance was given about why a point was important or how improvement could be made in future work.

Given the importance of the impact of positive or negative messages in written feedback (see Section 2.4.3) I decided to carry out a further re-coding to assess the relative balance of such comments in the sample using a similar approach to Read, Francis and Robson (2005). This system counted wholly positive and wholly negative comments, but also counted the 'softened negative' comments that mitigated the criticism in some way (see Section 2.6.1). Unlike some studies (e.g., Mutch, 2003; Walker, 2009) I decided to take the clause as the unit of analysis, not the sentence, on the basis that individual comments could be conveyed within one clause. While the study by Read discounted any sentences that had a positive and negative construction, such positive-negative pairings can be quite common, e.g., "Although the candidate has identified most of the relevant sources, I think the essay could have been strengthened by making stronger connections to the Nara criteria.." (Summative 2, Peter). In this example, I interpreted the first clause as a positive comment, and the second clause as an example of a softened negative comment. I agreed with Read et al. who argued that the cumulative effect of positive / negative feedback would have more impact on the reader than the ratio of such comments, but I felt that positive and negative constructions in one sentence did not necessarily nullify each other, but rather added to this cumulative effect. Examples of softened negative comments from the preliminary study are given below:

> It is advisable to include page numbers.. (*suggested action*):
> I'm not sure you came to grips with Fraser's article (*personal comment*)
> How do the concepts of age value and art value sit within such a culture? (*interrogative*)
> Part of the problem may lie in the structure of the essay (*qualifier*)
> You could have given real examples to illustrate how the problem can be resolved (*suggested alternatives*)

The categories above were based on Read et. al. (2005) but with the addition of the 'personal' comment category, which arguably introduces an element of contingency and reader response to lower the force of the criticism. I also decided to add another re-coding stage for comments that communicated messages around argument and criticality, and this is dealt with below.

3.6.2   *Argument and criticality in written comments*

It is often the case that a poor mark is justified in reference to a lack of argument (Chanock, 2000; Ivanič, Clark, & Rimmershaw, 2000; Mutch, 2003) or a poor attempt to construct an argument and engage critically with an assignment. Clearly, comments on content may also link to issues of criticality, and developmental comments are often aimed at making the student aware of the need for better argument and critical engagement. Hyatt's content related categories included argumentation but criticality could be the focus of comments within his structural category, as this comment suggests:

> It has a rather brief superficial feel and I would have expected at this level a critical engagement. (p.345)

I decided to add a re-coding stage for criticality and argument (CA) references, but that comments which related to specific content points in an argument would not be considered as CA comments, rather I was only interested in comments that used the language of critical analysis. An example of such a comment would be:

> …you were descriptive rather than analytical (Katy, formative 1)

In this way, I employed a narrower interpretation based on terms explicitly related to the discourse of critical analysis, e.g., *argument, critique, critical, evidence, analysis, description, depth of analysis.* As discussed in Section 2.4.5. (Haggis, 2006), such language relating to critical analysis is not transparent to students, particularly international students, so it can act as a barrier to understanding feedback. This coding was aimed at gauging the way explicit reference to issues of criticality and argument weakened the impact of written feedback. The framework that was adapted with the modifications suggested above is seen in Figure 3.1 below.

COMMENT TYPE	EXAMPLE
1.Phatic (maintaining social relationship)	There are a lot of encouraging signs here Katy.**[P]** You have tackled a difficult question and made some thoughtful observations.**[P]**
2. a Developmental alternatives (task focused- on gaps related to current work) **b. Developmental future** (process focused on closing gaps in future work) **c. Reflective questions** **d. Informational content**	It would have been useful to bring to the fore the specific and fundamental issues that arise in the conservation of redundant buildings[**SN**] The essay would have been improved by deeper and wider reading around the topic**. [SN]** The candidate needs to think about writing in their own words…**[SN]** Quotes should be used sparingly and to illustrate points you making, not to make points for you. It's important to consider limitations, were these the only ones? **[SN]** How do the concepts of age value and art value sit within such a culture? **[SN]** The one I recommend is Northedge's Good Study Guide…
3. Structure (at discourse level)	This introduction covers the main structural elements of aims, scope and sequence. **[P]**
4. Language and expression (punctuation / lexis / sentence construction/ -grammar/ proofreading and spelling	Be careful with commas **[SN]** Instructor is not a neutral term (lexis) **(E)** This is not a complete sentence (grammar/ sentence construction) **[N]** Always proofread to check spellings **[SN]**
5. Referencing /source use (conventions/ quotation/ bibliography	This source does not appear in the bibliography **[N]** The references in the text are broadly in line with departmental guidelines **[P]**
6. Presentation	It is enough to use the same font size and type (i.e. no italicisation), but to indent from the left **[SN]** The illustrations are a useful addition**[P]**
7. Register	The style of writing needs to develop an academic flavour**[SN]**
8. Positive content	The case studies are relevant to the discussion **[P].**
9. Negative content	The second case study was less good**….[SN]** The candidate does not explore the issues or the conflicts that can arise from a value-led system **[N]**.
10. Non evaluative summary	The essay sets out the broad area of study and provides an overview of a major conservation project
10. **Explicit justification of the mark**	My mark signifies that this piece of work is a clear pass, but with room for significant improvements
Further Coding	
Critical analysis [CA]	There is a clear attempt to present a <u>well-informed argument</u>. The essay illustrates a rather <u>descriptive view</u> on the subject.
Explanation [E]	The first case study was better because you talked about good and bad aspects of the restoration.
Positive [P] Negative [N] Softened Negative [SN]	See annotations added to comments in 1-10 above

Figure 3-1 A framework for feedback analysis (Based on Hyatt, 2005)

3.7 Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

Notions of validity and especially reliability traditionally applied to empirical science based research are not easily applied to qualitative research, although the concept of 'trustworthiness' has emerged, principally based on the work of Lincoln & Guba (1985). In place of concern for validity, reliability, objectivity and generalizability, Lincoln and Guba put forward the terms 'trustworthiness' in the form of parallel terms credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Qualitative researchers, at least those engaged in higher degrees, are expected to give an explicit account of techniques used to establish trustworthiness, and in what follows I will attempt to make transparent my own procedures and actions in designing and carrying out the research reported here.

3.7.1   *Procedures to establish trustworthiness*

Various lists of procedures that can help establish trustworthiness have been offered in the literature. Drawing on earlier work in the field, Marshall and Rossman (2011, p.40) list the following:

> Triangulation
> Searching for disconfirming evidence
> Engaging in reflexivity
> Member checking
> Prolonged engagement in the field
> Collaboration
> Developing an audit trail
> Peer debriefing

This thesis has attempted to provide a clear audit trail, with various documents appended, transcripts, letters of consent, feedback reports and examples of analysis, along with recordings of interviews. In this way, transparency should be ensured and the credibility of the research can be judged. Credibility is also partly assured by the length of time data has been gathered, or by 'prolonged engagement', by 'member checking' and 'triangulation'. The present research collected data over several terms of two taught Master's programmes, with five student participant interviews in the preliminary study, and a similar number for the main study. Although this may not qualify as 'prolonged' engagement, the building of relationships with participants over a period of time could have led to reducing the

'reactivity' issues mentioned above in Section 3.4.3 in relation to interviews, though there may be a threat to researcher bias with longer periods of engagement (Robson, 2002). However, it is important to consider procedures such as triangulation and member checking to further demonstrate 'trustworthiness'.

3.7.2   Triangulation

A key strength of case study data is that it provides the opportunity to use multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003) and this in turn allows for triangulation of data. In this study it was achieved through data extracted from interviews, supplemented with data from written documents. These documents were sometimes of a general nature relating to programme specification and assessment, for example, but a more important source of data came from documents written by student and tutor participants in the study. This type of data was useful for understanding the context in which written feedback was given and received and for situating feedback within teaching and learning events more generally.

Investigator triangulation, the use of more than one investigator or observer in a research setting (Cohen et. al., 2007) can provide further evidence of trustworthiness , reducing threats to validity from researcher bias and reactivity (Robson, 2002). In Chapter 4, Section 4.6.3, I provide details of my collaboration with a colleague in comparing preliminary analyses of tutor feedback comments. Comparison of interpretations led to agreement on an approach to coding. Useful as this was, it was not possible for me pay for co-researchers' time on my study, so further triangulation of this kind was not possible.

3.7.3   Member checking

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to member checking as a testing of "analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected" (p.314). As such, member checking can be a means to guard against researcher bias while also showing participants that you value their cooperation with your research. It involves referring to findings in order to check for "accuracy, plausibility and further illumination" (McDonough & McDonough, 1997, p.209). As well as checking a respondent's

intentions and checking for errors of interpretation, it provides the opportunity for respondents to add additional comments that may be stimulated by this playing back of conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

My own workload, a demanding full-time job and limited availability of time meant that my analysis of data from the preliminary study took place over a prolonged period of time, and at the point that I had developed a more coherent response to the data, student participants had completed their degrees and left the country. Although formal member checking was not practical, therefore, in the preliminary study, it is worth noting that more informal ways of carrying out member checking have been suggested (Lincoln and Guba,1985). One example of this is testing insights from one group with another group, something that the main study allowed me to do, based on the preliminary study findings.

3.7.4   Limitations of procedures for trustworthiness

The notion of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) has come in for criticism in the way that it is seen to establish rigorous attention to method after the event. It has been argued that strategies of trustworthiness may be useful in attempting to *evaluate* rigour, but that in themselves they do not *ensure* rigour. Strategies discussed above may be helpful for assessing relevance and utility, but they do not mean that the research will be relevant and useful (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). A relevant point made by Morse et al. refers to a limitation of member checking in that it may constrain the researcher to a level of descriptive analysis that is counterproductive. They argue that researchers, in trying to remain responsive to the particular concerns of their participants when checking results, can risk remaining too close to the data. All this suggested a need to carry out member checking with such limitations in mind, and with a view to making them clear in subsequent analysis.

Other more basic concerns revolve around the notion of a naïve realism that underpins appeals to credibility in terms of respondent validation. This concept refers to the view that there is only one social reality and one truth available to the researcher (Humes, 2010), and it is based on the assumption that the researcher

exists completely independently of the phenomena under investigation. Hammersley (2002), however, responds to such concerns by suggesting that a form of 'subtle realism' can be aimed at in qualitative research. For Hammersley, this 'subtle realism' views accounts of reality as participants' constructions, along with the researcher's interpretation, but it does not assume that such accounts are 'true' or 'rational' in their own terms. This research will be carried out with such an understanding of the co-construction of interview data in mind.

Chapter 4 Research Design and Implementation

4.0 Introduction

Earlier chapters of this thesis have outlined the background to the topic of feedback and critical analytical writing (CAW) in the context of NNS on taught Master's programmes. In Chapter 3, I provided a rationale for a case study approach based on interviews with student participants and tutors within taught Master's programmes. I also proposed a mixed methods design to collect additional data from participants' written feedback comments, with a rationale for a coding framework for analysis. An overview of the final research design is shown in Figure 4.1 below. A preliminary and a main study were carried out, located in two separate departments.

Preparation and Piloting (August-September 2008) 1. Seek permissions in departments 2. Pilot interviews 3. Gain consent of participants in Department of Archaeology	
Preliminary study Archaeology (September 2008-June 2009) 1. Baseline interviews students + tutors 2. Interviews with student participants in terms one and two after formative feedback events 3. Interviews with student participants in mid-term two and three, after summative feedback events 4. Second interviews-tutors mid-term three.	Analysis of feedback reports -transcription -preliminary analysis Write up of case reports (Chapter 5)
Main study Education (October 2009-June 2010) 1. Gain consent of participants 2. Baseline interviews (students) 3. Tutor + student interviews on formative feedback 4. Interview on summative feedback mid-second term, (tutor and corresponding student participant) 5. Interview on summative feedback mid-third term, (tutor and corresponding student participant)	Analysis of formative task feedback -transcription -cross case (Chapter 7) Cross case thematic analysis (Chapter 8)

Figure 4-1 Outline of study design

Figure 4.1 shows an iterative research design, borrowing from action research and design-based educational research approaches (Elliot, 1991; van den Akker et al., 2006). It shows how I collected data in the Departments of Archaeology and Education between autumn 2008 and the summer of 2010. This design is based on working up from the data, a feature of qualitative approaches (Richards, 2005). Two studies in different departments allowed me to incorporate a closer investigation of tutor intentions and student responses to feedback in the main study (see Chapter 6). Emergent design of this type is typical when naturalistic approaches are used (Richards, 2005). Robson (2002), drawing on Creswell, uses the term 'flexible design', describing a process which 'evolves' (p.166), with analysis of data presented at different stages. The literature on mixed methods approaches also includes examples of studies made up of several phases. A phase can be defined as a complete research effort that includes stages of inquiry, data collection and analysis, and final inferences (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 151).

This chapter sets out in detail the first phase of the research, which is generally referred to as the preliminary study, documenting the procedures for data gathering, indicating the way participants were selected and the implementation of the design. Discussion of the approach used to select participants will consider ethical issues, providing details of how these were addressed in the implementation of the first study. A final section will document data checks relating to both interviews and analysis of written comments. I will deal with strengths and weaknesses of the data, highlighting important issues that inform the later analysis chapters, and providing some early reflection on the design of the first study.

4.1 Locating the Preliminary Study

In Chapter 2, it was established that the bulk of feedback studies had been carried out through questionnaire survey and focus group procedures, but neither of these methods are necessarily suited to collecting data on how attitudes and responses to feedback may change over time and how feedback can influence writing development. A research design taking just one feedback event and exploring this in depth would reveal little about the development of CAW over time. Table 4.1 below, shows how I adopted a longitudinal design for the preliminary study, collecting data

from a number of feedback events in order to investigate the relationship between feedback and writing.

Table 4:1 Preliminary study data collection procedures

Preliminary study	Dates	Participants	Activity
Preparation Pilot	August September 2008	1 student (Education) 1 tutor (Education)	30 minute interviews, Transcription /analysis for suitability of interview method
Gaining consent	October 2008 Term 1:Week 0	Students on Master's programmes (9) in Dept. Archaeology	Presentation and invitation to participate; e-mail follow up for volunteers; letter detailing study
Baseline interviews	Term 1: week 2	3 Students who volunteered for study	Establishing prior experience and biographical details
	Term 1: weeks 3 / 4	4 Tutors teaching on Conservation Heritage Management (CHM)* programme	Establishing prior experience and perspectives on role of feedback and L2 writing issues
Formative interviews Feedback collected	Term 1: week 7 Term 2: week 7	Students Students	Establishing student engagement / understanding of feedback
Summative interviews	Term 2: week 5 Term 3: week 6	Students Students	Establishing student engagement/ understanding of feedback -reflection on taught experience of feedback on writing in taught programme
Second interviews	Term 3: weeks (6-8)	Tutors (x 3)	Reflection on individual student progress in relation to feedback and writing
Transcribing **Analysis Case reports**	Oct 2008-June 2009 December 2009-March 2010	Preliminary analysis as data was collected, thematic analysis Analysis of feedback reports, case study write up (Peter)	

(*Conservation and Heritage Management is a programme for students from a range of disciplines such as Architecture, Archaeology and History).

The pilot interviews will be discussed in Section 4.6 below. They were an attempt to gauge whether a thirty minute semi-structured interview was appropriate for capturing an international Master's student's reflections on feedback. The tutor pilot gave guidance on the number of questions suitable for a thirty-minute interview

and the type of data I might expect. Originally, I had only intended to interview the principal tutors involved in giving students feedback on their MA programme, but Peter's participation in the project gave me the possibility of adding some additional data relating to his performance and progress on his pre-sessional programme. This was possible because his main pre-sessional tutor was still at Bradfield. I also made a short additional recording with another participant in term two, to capture a post-interview discussion of difficulties with quotations. These additions were in the spirit of the flexible design adopted and using opportunities for data collection as they presented themselves.

During the initial data collection and preliminary analysis, I realised that the supervisor-student relationship at the dissertation stage would involve feedback drafts and a very different type of feedback context to that experienced on the taught programme. In my full time role as Programme Manager for pre-sessional courses at Bradfield, I also recognised that I would have limited time available to collect data from participants during the summer, my busiest time of the year. The unpredictable nature of the dissertation write up process in terms of the number and timing of feedback events was also likely to create logistical difficulties for data collection.

This research on international students was clearly constrained in the first instance by the number of departments at the University of Bradfield that had sufficient numbers of overseas and international students on taught Master's programmes. A study of this nature also meant that only programmes that required regular submission of formative and summative writing tasks would be suitable as a location for the research. Given the sensitive nature of a study that examined tutor practice, and the necessary intrusion into the work of staff, personal contacts within departments were also important for ensuring the collaboration necessary for a successful study.

Decisions regarding methods and procedures to be used in any research project often relate to what is practical and feasible (Robson, 2002). In this respect, my position in 2008 within the Department of Education at the University of Bradfield offered certain opportunities that would not have been available to other researchers. As a tutor in a department with large numbers of international students, I

had relatively easy access to the type of student that my study targets. My experience of teaching and overseeing English language support in departments such as Archaeology, Education and Management also provided valuable contacts and credibility in terms of access to such departments. As a member of staff, I was also able to approach other members of staff to enlist their cooperation as participants, something that may have been difficult for a younger inexperienced graduate student. In order to gather data on the usability of feedback I was in an ideal position to provide an insider view[25], which could give access to the perspectives of students and tutors alike.

At the outset, a small number of departments at Bradfield seemed to offer a suitable location for this research, based firstly on their having established taught Master's programmes involving international students and secondly on their use of assessment through substantive written assignments. My social science background to some extent steered me away from science disciplines, but the fact that such disciplines were unlikely to involve assessment based on an essayist style of writing, was also a key factor in excluding them. The study envisaged required an assessment regime based on longer written assignments and corresponding feedback events.

The Department of Economics at Bradfield, for example, had run taught masters programmes with high numbers of international students for many years, but often their programmes involved assessment via examinations, and did not require substantial writing tasks. The Bradfield Management School was already running a number of taught Master's courses in 2008, with a substantial number of students required to complete a pre-sessional course with the ELU. I gained permission from the Management School in June 2008 to carry out a study of students and staff on taught Master's programmes, but it gradually became clear that it might not be the ideal location for this study. An interview with the Director of postgraduate programmes at that time revealed that these programmes were experiencing rapid

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[25] Dunster (2010) refers to her position as an "insider in both camps" (p.55). As a member of the ELU's language support team, I also held a position of 'empathy' towards the students, with less of a gap to' bridge' than if I had been one of their tutors.

expansion of numbers[26] putting staff-student ratios and resources under greater and greater pressure. I also discovered that a number of modules were assessed through examinations, which implied an uneven or limited amount of written feedback on long assignments.

As I had organised and taught in language support courses in the Department of Archaeology for some years, I realised that it could provide a suitable location for a study of this nature. Although international student numbers fluctuated year on year, a number of established masters programmes were running in the Department of Archaeology in 2008. The nature of the writing required in Archaeology was also relevant to the concerns of this research, as 'essay style' tasks seemed to be predominantly the mode of assessment. These took the form of argument essays or long assignments in the form of what has been termed 'documented essays' (Alexander et. al., 2008 p, 182). This type of assignment is characterised by the way the work is presented, based on researching recognised authorities in the field. My experience in tutoring students in Archaeology had shown me that feedback was often detailed and regularly given on both formative and summative tasks.

In the summer of 2008, I gained permission from the Head of Department and then leader of the graduate school to carry out a study with the 2008-9 taught Master's cohort on taught Master's programmes. I gave assurances that the data collection would not be disruptive for staff or students, and that I would be sensitive to time factors and workloads. My role in providing writing support in the Department a few years previously provided credibility for my proposal. Three student participants agreed to participate in my study and several tutors within the department also agreed to be interviewed. The three students were taking the Conservation and Heritage Management Master's (CHM) programme, a programme for students from a range of disciplines such as Architecture, Archaeology and History.

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[26] Numbers on Management Master's programmes had moved beyond cohort sizes of 150 students by 2008.

4.2 Ethical Considerations

At this point, it is necessary to explore ethical concerns raised in carrying out this study. The following sections deal with ethical principles as they relate to initial data collection in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Bradfield. These focus principally on procedures for finding participants and conducting interviews, but later sections that deal with issues related to respect of persons also cover procedures that refer to the main study in the department of Education.

4.2.1   Ethical guidelines

In their guidelines for educational research, the British Educational Research Association (2004) identifies three types of responsibility that researchers must take into account: responsibilities to participants, sponsors of the research and the community of educational researchers. Three core principles are often referred to: 'respect for persons', 'beneficence' and 'justice' (Burton & Bartlett, 2009; Kubaniyova, 2008). The first of these relates to protecting identities of research participants and ensuring that their well-being is not put at risk, while beneficence refers to the maximising benefits whilst minimising harm. Justice refers to the way in which any benefits from the research are distributed fairly. Opportunities should not be given to some students but denied to others, for example. Five key aspects suggested by Burton and Bartlett (2009) provide a focus for fuller discussion of ethical considerations in the design of this study. They are namely:

1. Informed consent
2. Confidentiality and privacy
3. Honesty and openness
4. Access to findings
5. Avoiding harm (doing good)
   (p.32)

4.2.2   Selection of participants - gaining consent

Deciding on how many participants to track in the first study was not a straightforward process, but one that was heavily influenced by issues of practicality. As a full-time member of staff, working on the main Bradfield campus and not on

the Archaeology town centre site[27], there would be limitations on the time available for data collection, setting up and carrying out interviews. The strength of case study research lies in providing a depth of data with a small number of participants (Hyland, 2009; Robson, 2002), and it does not aim to generalise from large samples, so a large number of participants was not required. Even so, the most difficult unknown in this situation was the potential take-up of student participants. The study would rely on self-selection and voluntary consent from participants, and it was not clear what I might expect in terms of the ratio of volunteers to the cohort size targeted. As I used the opportunity of a presentation on language support as a means to speak directly to a group of these students, the invitation to participate in the research went out to nine students who attended that meeting. Of these nine students, three volunteered to participate in the study, and I carried out five interviews with each of them over the course of their taught programme.

The principles of beneficence and respect for persons are clearly linked to important procedural matters of gaining informed consent at the outset of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In order to find participants for the first round of data collection, I carried out a two-stage approach to obtaining informed consent for volunteers for my study. In the week before teaching began in 2008, I set up a first meeting with Archaeology students on Master's courses. The meeting was primarily aimed at outlining language support options provided by the ELU[28]., but I was also able to give a short presentation at the end of the meeting to outline my research project and invite collaboration. The nine students who attended the meeting were informed in detail of courses, workshops and consultation options within the English Language Unit's provision. I then gave a brief, five-minute presentation of my proposed PhD research, before inviting students to participate.

I outlined the potential benefits to participants in terms of the direct link I could provide to the English Language Unit, and I made clear the time commitments in terms of interviews while also explaining the level of access I required to their

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[27] The Archaeology Department site is located in the town centre, approximately 3 miles from the main Bradfield campus

[28] Archaeology students in the Town centre site often struggle to fit in classes on campus and find it more useful to book free consultations on drafts of their writing instead.

written texts and feedback. Students were told that I would e-mail them individually within two or three days of the meeting to invite them again to volunteer to participate in my study. In this way, I avoided inhibiting students by asking them to make a public commitment to participate, while also giving them time to consider their decision. The second stage was a follow up e-mail with attached letter of permission (Appendix C) to all students who had attended the initial meeting. This gave a detailed account of the project in writing, and invitation to participate. The written explanation was provided in the form of a letter that could be signed to give formal consent to take part in the research.

4.2.3   *Confidentiality and privacy*

In the presentation and the letters of consent, I was careful to outline the nature of the research and that participants would be guaranteed anonymity in any written report. The letter also guaranteed that participants' details would not be disclosed at any other point in the research process. However, it cannot be assumed that the mere fact of not mentioning names alone will ensure anonymity. A real concern was that of maintaining anonymity with small numbers of participants from the same department. Revealing details of countries of origin could have been an issue in this respect; since the cohort number was fewer than twenty, individuals might have been identified on the basis of nationality. I took the decision to provide only details of region in the written thesis report (i.e. East Asia / Western Europe) while retaining students' gender, but assigning them typical English first names. Maintaining anonymity of tutors was likely to be even more difficult. My approach to this was to refer to all tutors as female, and to avoid providing a level of biographical detail that would make it easy for those in the same department to guess identities. In the main study in Chapter 7-9, tutors B and D agreed to their names being used if I felt it was appropriate, but for matters of consistency, I maintained an anonymous approach. The time span involved in this research was also a mitigating factor to some extent. The delay between data analysis and publication of the final thesis was likely to be at least four years. The expectation was that student participants would have moved on and would be unlikely to encounter any written report.

4.2.4 Honesty and openness

My description of the research aims for the first study in my letters of invitation focused on feedback and academic writing, and did not highlight the issue of critical analytical writing. However, as CAW is generally recognised as an aspect of academic writing, I did not feel this was problematic. It was also my responsibility to ensure that time commitments would not be onerous for them, and my decision not to pursue the diary method was taken on this basis. I gave an indication that interviews with students would last around thirty minutes and endeavoured not to go beyond this in any of the five interviews they took part in. While I could offer to advise participants in terms of accessing the English language unit, I was also careful not to promise any other direct benefits of this research.

4.2.5 Access to findings

As a part-time researcher engaged on a study that might theoretically take five years to complete, from the outset of the study I was constrained in how quickly I could gather data and carry out in-depth analysis. Given that I was only in contact with participants on their one-year taught Master's programmes for a limited period before they left Bradfield to pursue careers in other parts of the world, it was not unexpected that contact might be lost before any meaningful analysis and findings had been produced. Although I constantly returned to the data to carry out initial analysis during the data collection period, I did not write up any coherent findings until Spring 2010.[29] This was not the case with tutor participants, and they could be given access to findings more easily when they became available. The use of member checks has been discussed earlier (Section 3.7.3) as one way in which the findings could be made accessible to participants, in order to strengthen validity of the research method and results.

4.2.6 Avoiding harm and beneficence

The principle of avoiding harm can be linked to that of maximising benefits to participants (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). Feedback can have a profound emotional

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[29] I wrote the first version of Peter's case study for a departmental upgrade meeting that took place in April 2010. This was required to progress to the later stages of the PhD.

effect and its sensitive nature is well documented (Higgins et al, 2000; Haggis, 2006). Discussion of negative feedback might certainly involve pain on the part of student participants, depending on how they viewed such feedback and how they chose to accept it or respond to it. In general, however, by building a positive rapport with student participants and creating a non-judgemental but supportive atmosphere, I hoped that some of this threat to face in the interviews would be reduced, and that reflection on feedback would not be a painful process for participants.

There were points during data collection where ethical concerns relating to 'beneficence' or potential harm came into play. One example of this was during the second formative feedback interview in term two, when one participant, Katy, was unable to decipher her tutor's handwriting on her script and I felt obliged to help her with this. What followed was an exchange around the meaning of terms such as 'anecdote' in the feedback, which I attempted to explain. In the corresponding interview with another participant, Paul, it was clear that he needed specific help on how to balance quotation and paraphrase in his writing. I decided that it would be easier and more effective for me to help him, rather than set up a consultation in the ELU that he might not keep[30]. I subsequently took several examples from the assignment that we were discussing and created a short handout to demonstrate how he could improve them, avoiding overuse of quotation. In each of these cases, my decision to intervene was based on my responsibility to the students and recognised that a decision to remain detached could have been more harmful to them.

Tutor participants could also have felt threatened if they suspected that details of their practice could be presented as in some way deficient, so it was important to assure their anonymity. Despite the fact that the preliminary study focused more on the student writer and the nature of written feedback, using data from tutors as triangulation, the issue of findings relating to good and bad practice could not be ignored. What constitutes good or bad practice in this context is open to interpretation, but the findings were likely to identify certain practices that I interpreted as more or less effective in pedagogical terms. One approach would have

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[30] At that stage of data collection, it was clear that Paul was reluctant to seek advice and help from the ELU. I also made a short additional recording at the end of the interview, as Paul made some further remarks on the reasons for his over reliance on quotation.

been to avoid presenting such interpretations, but I believed that as long as anonymity was maintained, tutor practice could be discussed in context and in relation to their stated intentions. Inevitably, the issue of a researcher's responsibility to 'tell the truth' as he sees it then comes into play (see responsibility to research community in 4.2.1 above). If poor practice was somehow ignored, the question would then relate to harm to future students, balanced against possible violation of ethical principles of anonymity to tutor participants.

Tutor and student workloads are a potential problem for research which asks participants to dedicate time to interviews over a relatively short time-span. In this case, every effort was made to approach participants at times which were convenient for them. To fit in with students' workloads and movements, I organised the interviews in the town centre buildings that Archaeology occupied. My contacts with administrators in the department from my work with them proved useful in booking empty classrooms for this purpose. However, there were occasions when students told me that they would be on the main Bradfield campus and that they preferred to meet there. As my workplace was in a central location this proved convenient, and I was able to book a meeting room, rather than my cramped office, to carry out interviews. While student participants were each interviewed five times, I decided to interview tutors once early in the taught year, and once towards the end of the year. In fact, given the different modules that students took, I eventually interviewed five different tutors (a total of seven tutor interviews) but in practice focused mainly on two key informants (tutor A1 and A2) who were more involved with the participants as their supervisors and marked their work over three terms. Tutors were asked for interviews at times they felt happy to arrange, but inevitably giving me thirty minutes of their time competed with their own workloads to some extent.

4.3 Designing Interviews

For this study, interview schedules adopted a mix of approaches, with semi-structured interviews dominating, although more structured items were also used at different points (see Appendix D). Initial interviews gathering data on participants' backgrounds were designed in a structured format described in Section 3.4.2, while a semi-structured interview approach was taken when the focus was on student

perceptions of writing improvements, or on student self-report of their developing confidence with certain aspects of writing. This allowed for a range of question types, but with an emphasis on more open questions that would elicit responses that were more detailed. However, as the original idea was to carry out research in different sites, a degree of systematisation was aimed for (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). On this basis, I used a relatively standardised set of questions for each round of interviews (see appendix D). The semi-structured type of interview was chosen as it could provide an appropriate vehicle for building up such rapport and trust, given that it can be relatively informal and relaxed and allow the interviewee to enlarge freely on responses and open up to the interviewer.

The first interviews established the background and experience of each student in terms of reading and writing academic English. The second part of the interview, consisting mainly of open-ended questions, focused on how the participants felt about their progress in writing the formative essays, their first writing task on their Master's programme. The second interviews focused on how the participants understood and responded to the feedback on their formative essays. Interview three focused on feedback relating to the first two summative assignments submitted at the end of the first term, while interview four considered participants' responses to the feedback on a second term formative task; a fifth and final interview looked at responses to the feedback given on final summative assignments. This final interview also attempted to elicit some reflection on more general points relating to participants' experience of the writing and feedback process.

4.4 Transcription

All interviews were digitally recorded and saved on a hard drive on my work computer. For the first study, I either transcribed interviews in full, or made notes and transcribed short extracts that appeared on first listening to be particularly significant. It is clear that whichever approach is taken to transcribing data, by nature of its changing medium from speech to writing, a transcription can never be a completely accurate portrayal of an interview (Gibbs, 2007). Given that this study is more interested in participants' perspectives and less concerned with expression and language use, the level of detail required for discourse or conversational analysis is

not required here. At the same time, it is important to aim for a transcription that provides as closely as possible a verbatim record of what is said in the interviews, along with other features of spoken discourse that may be useful for interpretation. Such features include hesitations, repetitions and pauses, or nervous laughter, for example. These features may indicate a degree of confusion or tentativeness, or tell us something about the sensitivity of a question, or indicate emphasis and stress on certain points. The transcriptions in this study will indicate hesitations and short pauses by using a series of dots, e.g. ... However, for occasional longer pauses, brackets will indicate a pause, e.g. (pause). Fillers or 'verbal tics' will be written as 'erm', 'um', etc. Contractions of verb forms such as 'I've, or 'it'll' will be transcribed in this form and not in full written form. In addition, there will be no attempt to 'tidy up' participants' grammar or expression in order to present a reasonably faithful picture of their language ability in interview conditions.

4.5 Approach to Analysis of Data

My approach to analysis was based on grounded theory (Robson, 2002), where theory emerges from data. Robson refers to this as "close to the commonsense approach one might use when trying to understand something that is complex and puzzling" (p.193). It is often referred to as the constant comparative method, where new data is constantly compared to other data and emerging theory as the study unfolds. In the first study, I revisited recordings and transcriptions as the three terms progressed, noting observations at different points. Because of my workload, I needed to re-read transcripts and notes and re-acquaint myself with the data several months after the data collection period. To some extent, this forced me to review my ideas and continue to compare theory and findings in the growing literature base with my findings in the preliminary study.

4.6. Checks on Interview Data

Although the interview can provide greater depth of data than questionnaires, it is" prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.352). The point was made in Section 3.4.3 that the best efforts to control the interview event may be thwarted by the way relationships play out in the interview, based particularly on underlying issues of power and status between interviewer and

interviewee. Given these issues, it is important to be constantly wary of how data is gathered and to carry out data checks to evaluate the usefulness of interview data. A number of common problems can arise, particularly in terms of devising questions. Arksey and Knight (1999) summarise the pitfalls facing unwary interviewers with a list of ten points which could usefully be checked for in the data. They include the problem of recall, choosing comprehensible vocabulary, issues with leading questions, questions based on assumptions and questions that assume respondents have the required knowledge to answer them. Some of these issues will be explored in examples from data from pilot interviews and interviews from the first stage of data collection.

4.6.1   Language proficiency and recall

The following extract is from an initial interview with Katy, (BS = the researcher), one of the three student participants in Archaeology. In the later part of this baseline interview, I was gathering data on participants' knowledge of assignment writing criteria set by the department:

> **Extract 1**
>
> BS: What did Tutor B say to you about the marking criteria…do you
>   remember, anything specific?
> Katy: erm… (pause)
> BS: …that's the marking criteria in… she looked at in class with you?
> Katy: Yeah like, be neutral, or be …writing critical, critical writing….
> BS: Mmm
> Katy: (laughs)…like that.
> BS: What do you understand by critical writing?
> Katy: Yeah…I try to but sometimes it's hard…
> BS: When, when she said critical writing like that, what did you understand?
>   For you what is critical writing then?
> Katy: …(pause) so, give some evidence…um (pause) erm well organised
>   (laughs)..
> BS: OK….yeah…well
> (Katy I:1)

The first issue this extract highlights is that of recall. It is possible that the student has trouble remembering exactly what was said about criteria in the class referred to, and it may not be surprising that she struggles to answer this question. As the interviews deal with earlier events such as receiving feedback or the experience of writing that took place days and possibly several weeks before the interview, then there is always an issue with the accuracy and reliability of participants' recall. One

way I attempted to counter this was to ask participants to have copies of assignments and feedback with them at interviews. Participants generally complied with this request, but in line with ethical principles discussed above, I did not feel I could insist on this if participants did not bring their feedback to the interviews.

Although I attempted to minimise questions that relied heavily on memory, interviews took place several days after feedback events, so to some extent the issue of recall could not be completely eliminated. A basic approach to controlling for the recall variable was to try to ensure that all students were interviewed at a similarly appropriate point after receiving feedback, within a one-week period and with a delay of no more than one week after receipt of feedback. My strategy was to provide sufficient time for students to digest their feedback, while avoiding at the same time a delay which might affect recall.

Katy's language level is clearly a constraint in the example above. Her misunderstanding of the first question which asks about the meaning of 'critical' seems to suggest a problem with language. Katy's inability to express herself at length and with fluency in this extract is telling. The need to phrase questions carefully in terms of vocabulary is also clearly highlighted here, though this may vary from participant to participant. The attempt to clarify this point with Katy in this example leads to several questions, and more interviewer talk, while the resulting response is a short broken sentence. In this case, language issues can be seen to affect the quality and richness of the data that the interview can yield.

The example above also shows up the problem of assuming the participant has the required knowledge to answer specific questions, as the direct question on critical writing highlights. Part of Katy's problem in finding an answer may have been as much due to a lack of knowledge as due to difficulties in expressing herself in English. Indeed, the tacit knowledge issue referred to in Chapter 2 may be evident here, and if tutors themselves find it difficult to articulate what 'critical writing' means (Chanock, 2000), then it is not unreasonable for a student in the early stages of her Master's study to struggle to do so.

The second extract below is from a pilot interview with a student on a language education Master's course carried out in summer 2008 (see Section 4.1) prior to embarking on the preliminary study proper. The student, referred to here as Cindy, was about to complete her programme having already submitted her dissertation. A question posed later in the interview asked if Cindy could remember any pieces of feedback on her assignments.

Extract 2

BS: Can you remember any feedback, because you were talking about this
       before…I'm thinking specifically about feedback that you were given on
       assignments that helped you to develop and improve your writing skills?
C: I remember…. The first one is not very easy to read, because it was
       unclear… so my supervisor suggest me to have the main sentence for
       each paragraph, yeah.
BS: So a kind of thesis statement really?
C: Yeah... thesis statement
BS: And, you thought that was useful?
C: Yeah.
BS: Except you were telling me it didn't quite work…
C: In the beginning, I didn't really get it and then in the term two I think it
       works better…..And the second one is too much information redundant
       and I repeat a lot…
BS: Any other things you remember from feedback?
C: The third one…because I conducted a study and it's my first time to do a
       study so I don't really good at data analysis I didn't really do that very
       well. For me now that's really helpful because that assignment told me
       how to do my further study
       (Student pilot interview 1)

This extract demonstrates the way a fairly scripted question elicits information that is elaborated on as the interviewer uses probes to follow up the initial response. What is significant here is that the interviewee is able to remember three separate points from feedback that she used to improve her writing. She is also able to reflect on how the development from feedback was not immediate, and how the feedback on paragraph writing only became clearer for her later in the second term. The student is able to express herself more fluently, but this may be related to the fact that the interview took place towards the end of the student's one year in the UK, unlike the example with Katy, which took place within a few weeks of the start of her programme.

The implication from the extracts above is that participants may vary quite widely in terms of language fluency and expression, and also in their ability to recall feedback events. This in turn implies that the interviewer's behaviour in terms of

providing prompts and explanation may also vary as a result. Where language is not an obvious barrier to understanding and expression, richer data may be expected, and vice versa. The challenge in design terms was to prepare interview schedules that would avoid over complex language.

4.6.2   Assumptions of knowledge - types of question

The danger of making assumptions about student knowledge, understanding or intention is present in interviews such as these. Perhaps an example of this is seen in the following extract from an early interview with a European student, Paul, where I ask about the student's perceived ability to act on formative feedback:

Extract 3
BS: So, looking at both of them.., can you identify points that you
          can....you've probably already told me this...can you identify points that
          you can easily   put right?
Paul: Well, structure...I can easily put that right...tutor B has advised me to get
          a book, and I did get the book...
(Paul, I:2)

The question here seems to assume that the student can act on the feedback and 'easily' resolve certain problems. In some ways, this could be viewed as a leading question that may be inviting a positive response. Perhaps a better approach would have been to identify the structure point, and ask directly how the student would respond to it. It may well be that the answer given would have differed little if the question was put in this way, but the danger of leading participants still remains.

In the same interview with Paul, I asked about feedback on English language issues. After some discussion, Paul gave details of feedback pointing out sentence construction errors, and I attempted to elicit a final response about Paul's perception of the amount of feedback on language that he received:

Extract 4
BS: So overall, would you say you got sufficient feedback on your English
          language performance there?
Paul: Yeah, Cultural Heritage...the Cultural Heritage Management one
          definitely, the other one a little bit less but there's still a lot of feedback...
(Paul I:2)

The use of the term 'sufficient' could be seen as problematic here, meaning different things to different people and the question seems to invite a positive response. This question may be viewed as a 'leading question' often unwittingly asked by interviewers (Powney & Watts, 1987). It could be argued that I led the interviewee into giving a positive response, but his response made clear a distinction in the amount of feedback he received on different pieces of work. Closed questions can be useful as probes and Roulston (2010) has shown how they can provide detail and check information provided earlier. The word 'overall' in the question above also implied the intention to gain a confirmation of what was discussed earlier. The implication for me was to choose open ended as opposed to closed ended questions where possible, but not to discount closed questions to probe or confirm information.

The 'reactivity' issues of power discussed in Section 3.4.3 are also raised in the example above. Although I was not one of their tutors, I was a member of the University staff, and participants may have assumed that I had a relationship with the tutors giving feedback on their programme. There is a real question over the degree to which students will give honest responses if these could be taken as criticism of their tutors. Interviewees may have perceived the purpose of the research in terms of a member of staff seeking to justify current practice. It has been argued that interviewees tailor their responses to the imagined audience (Powney & Watts, 1987) so there is a very real possibility that responses may have been influenced in this way in these interviews. Analysis of data will have to take this into account.

The problem of making assumptions in interviews relating to knowledge that the interviewee does not hold were pointed out earlier. In the first study, interviews attempted to gauge student participants' developing confidence with their academic writing. One approach I took in these interviews was to present them with the feedback grid used at the top of feedback forms as a guide to performance on key criteria. However, in extract 5 below, the problems of assuming a coherent understanding of the criteria becomes evident. In this extract from the second interview, the interviewer presents a modified grid with the following criteria taken exactly as used in the Archaeology feedback forms, but with the addition of a language item at the bottom of the grid:

5 = very confident   1= not very confident

	1	2	3	4	5
Content / relevance					
Style / argument					
Critical judgement					
Originality					
Accuracy					
References/ reading					
Presentation					
Language, grammar style, punctuation					

Figure 4-2 Confidence rating grid

(Adapted from Archaeology feedback form)

Extract 5
Peter: Now?.... right style...style... Critical judgement...I mean whether (speaking to himself)
BS: You feel more confident about that now...?
Peter: Yes, yes... because I learned ...many things more
BS: So you feel you got a lot.... that's helped you a lot, OK?
Peter: Mmm....accuracy? accuracy?...accuracy ,tick one, accuracy mean everything?
BS: I think that accuracy in their terminology is referring more to content than grammar, but it's also accuracy in terms of the statements you're using...if you say this person says this then you are right...
(Peter I:2)

The extract shows how I was forced to clarify the meaning of items in the grid because of a mistaken assumption that the interviewee would have their own coherent interpretation of each criterion. In this case, the term 'accuracy' is evidently unclear and leads me to suggest a definition. Peter's response to this grid seems to demonstrate the problem referred to in Section 2.4.6, where tutors' understanding of discourse surrounding assessment and feedback is not shared by the students (e.g., Chanock, 2000; Haggis, 2005; Hounsell, 2003). Peter's responses provide evidence of a need for more explanation around criteria, but the usability of this data is limited given his confusion over what he was responding to. A second problem here is the notion of 'confidence' and how interviewees can accurately gauge changes in confidence. Peter's claim above to have learnt a lot of things about critical judgement was made after the first formative essays in term one, so it was perhaps rather early to presume development of confidence and ability. Arguably, responses

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relating to perceptions of confidence and developing ability would be more appropriate after subsequent assignments and corresponding feedback, where the student had the opportunity to use the formative feedback.

In all of the extracts above, the co-construction of interview data is evident, with the implication that the veracity of this data requires careful consideration at the analysis stage. Some aspects of the data, the attempt to gauge student confidence with different aspects of their writing for example, need to be approached with caution, with the implication that not all the data collected here will be equally reliable or usable. One way of checking that such data is not wrongly used is to include sufficient context around extracts from interviews used in analysis and discussion sections, to allow the reader to see for themselves how this data emerged.

Issues with student understanding of the discourse surrounding feedback present themselves in the extracts considered above, highlighting the problem of how to approach interview questions that can gain reliable data on student responses to feedback. Reactivity issues related to the power relationship between interviewer and participant must be constantly addressed in this type of data. Finally, issues of recall and language proficiency also affect the richness and reliability of the data and will need to be taken into account at the data analysis stage.

4.6.3   Overcoming design problems with written feedback analysis

In devising or adapting a framework for analysis of written comments, a number of issues presented themselves (see Section 3.6.2). By its nature, any system for analysing written feedback is unlikely to marry neatly with intentions of those tutors writing the feedback comments (Ivanič et al, 2000). What tutors intend to convey in a comment may be interpreted differently by an observer and may also be understood and interpreted in various ways by the students receiving the comments. Any coding system for analysing written comments may result in a set of blurred categories that are open to debate and interpretation (Mutch, 2003). I illustrate this point below, with a brief discussion of my early attempts at analysis in which I also used investigator triangulation to aid decision making on the choice of discourse units, coding and categorisation of critical analytical comments in the framework

adopted. After a detailed briefing, and familiarisation with the study, I asked a colleague to carry out an analysis of two samples of written comments from the preliminary study to compare with my own analysis.

The point has been made that written comments can imply multiple meanings and carry out multiple functions. While 'justifying a mark', for example, and 'developmental' comments may be separate categories in a coding system, they may not always represent separable functions to tutors engaged in writing feedback. The following sentence provides a case in point:

> ...the main ideas have been explained, but the candidate does not explore the issues or the conflicts that can arise from a value led system".
> (Tutor A2)

In the analytical framework (Section 3.6.), the comment above could be interpreted as 'justifying the mark', or simply as a negative content comment. We agreed, however, that this constituted a combination of a positive content comment in clause one and a negative content comment in clause two. To qualify as a developmental alternative comment, the second clause would have had to frame the comment more explicitly in terms of what could have been done in the piece of work [31].The end weight of the final comment may indicate an intention to foreground the omission here, but the presence of a mitigating comment in examples such as this should not be overlooked, as their presence contributes a 'balanced' feel that may be significant in terms of the way the student receives the feedback.

The above example also illustrates another important decision I made regarding coding. It often seems as if the sentence is the basic unit of analysis in the coding systems reviewed in Section 3.6.1, but studies rarely make this explicit. Mutch (2003) is a notable exception, making explicit his use of the sentence as the unit of comment, but this approach ignores the fact that more than one point can be made in a complex sentence, which then may necessitate multiple codings. After

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[31] Hyatt's (2005) examples of negative content comment generally focus on a deficit but without specifying what the student could have done to improve it, e.g. "Generally there is a need to substantiate claims based on more solid evidence than simply one's feelings about what is going on" (p. 347).

discussion on this question with my colleague, we agreed that a two clause sentence, typically using a mitigating positive comment before a negative comment should be treated as two comments.

In this small sample of comments, we also noted a tendency to refer to 'language and expression' in general terms, and while marginal comments may have engaged with 'lexis' and 'syntax', it seemed these categories were unlikely to be specifically referred to in end comments. As a result, I made a further modification to the Hyatt framework, adopting a 'language and expression' category which included syntax, lexis, spelling and proof reading .

While coding of comments will always be a matter of judgement, the points made above illustrate the way I attempted to clarify my own coding system to aid consistency; they show that it was possible for two researchers to find broad agreement on assigning comments to categories within the system adopted here. For financial reasons I was not able to employ a co-researcher to code all the feedback samples in this study, but even this limited investigator triangulation on preliminary analysis of feedback was useful in establishing my approach.

Chapter 5 Summary of Preliminary Study

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of findings from three case studies from a preliminary study based in the Department of Archaeology at Bradfield. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the three student participants and the writing and feedback context that they shared. Detailed case descriptions and discussion of their implications can be found in Appendix F. This chapter aims to summarise the participants' experience by presenting a brief review of actual feedback comments and three short synopses of each case followed by a re-statement of the most relevant themes and insights from across the cases.

Table 5:1 Preliminary study participant details

	Age	Origin	English level	Pre-sessional	First degree
Peter	40	East Asian	IELTS 6.0 W- 6.0	8-week at Bradfield	Archaeology
Paul	26	Western European	TOEFL Ibt 109	No	Civil Engineering and Religion
Katy	22	East Asian	IELTS 6.5 W- 6.0	No	History

Biographical details in table 5.1 show that two male students and one female student participated in the study, and that the pseudonyms Peter, Paul and Katy were adopted. All three participants were taking the Conservation Heritage Management programme (henceforth referred to as CHM). While Katy and Peter were from East Asian countries, Paul was from Western Europe and he also had the advantage of stronger English language skills on entry to the programme[32]. Paul's fluency in spoken English often resulted in a more articulated account of his experience. Peter,

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[32] TOEFL Ibt of 100 was accepted in the Department of Archaeology as equivalent to IELTS 7.0 at the time of this study.

on the other hand, was the only participant to have completed a pre-sessional programme at Bradfield, prior to the Master's programme.

5.1. Writing Requirements and Feedback Events

Over the first two academic terms, Paul and Katy were required to write four formative assignments and four summative assignments, while Peter just wrote three of each by dint of taking a second-term module that did not involve this standard long-assignment assessment. Table 4.1 (Section 4.1) sets out the interview process relating to feedback on formative assignments in the first and second terms, and summative assignments at the beginning of the second and third terms. All these writing tasks were in the form of discursive essays and were generally referred to as 'essays' by students. It was accepted practice in the department for students to be able to send outlines to tutors for comment while they were writing assignments, but they were not allowed to send drafts for either formative or summative review. Importantly, this meant that feedback was always given on products and that titles for each 'essay' differed with each assignment. Details of the timing and nature of the interviews around these feedback events can be found in Section 4.3.

Issues of the timing of feedback often appear in the literature (e.g., Burke & Pieterick, 2010; Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001; Nicol, n.d.; Poulos & Mahony, 2008; Sambell, 2011), and the system of double marking at Bradfield inevitably meant that several weeks elapsed before students were able to read feedback on summative essays, though formative feedback was provided within a two-week period. Interestingly, issues of timing were not raised by students in these case studies, even when they were directly asked about the delay in receiving feedback. It may have been that participants' lack of prior experience of receiving and responding to detailed feedback comments (see Table 5.2) meant they had no reference point of comparison for these delays, or saw them as inevitable.

Table 5:2 Language support and feedback dialogue

	Paul	Peter	Katy
Prior experience			
-detailed feedback - opportunity for 1:1 discussion	✘ ✘	✘ ✘	✘ ✘
EAP courses			
Pre-sessional In-sessional	✘ ✘	✔ 8-week (Bradfield) ✔ One consultation during term two with ELU	✘ ✔ Consultations on drafts with ELU
Dialogue around feedback			
-uptake of opportunities to discuss feedback	✔ Regular discussion with tutor A1 on both formative and summative feedback reports ✘ No discussion with tutor A2 on formative or summative reports	✔ Discussed first formative feedback and two of four summative feedback reports ✘ Did not discuss either final formative feedback reports or two of four summative reports	✔ Early discussion on formative assignments ✘ Later no discussion on final formative/ summative assignments
Preference for marginal comments	✔	✔	✔

Due to the nature of the applied and to some extent multi-disciplinary programme that CHM comprised, these participants were from slightly varied educational backgrounds. The importance of Paul's engineering background introduced issues of disciplinary writing differences are discussed in Paul's case. Table 5.2 also shows an uneven take up of opportunities to discuss feedback over the course, with similar variable uptake of support opportunities. Paul, for example, did not use the English Language Unit for consultations on any of his writing, and in 2008/9, no dedicated English Language Support course was available to these students.

Table 5:3 Preliminary study-participants' marks on taught programme

	Formative assignments				Summative assignments			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Katy	53 (A5)	55 (A2)	56 (A3)	35 (A1)	56 (A3)	58 (A2)	53 (A4)	45 (A1
Peter	60 (A2)	52 (A1)	3. *	50 (A1)	67 (A2)	54 (A1)	3. *	55 (A1)
Paul	59 (A1)	63 (A2)	47 (A2)	Unavailable	50 (A1)	61 (A2)	58 (A2)	58 (A1)

 (Tutor marker in brackets. *module mark and feedback unavailable)

5.2 Case Synopses

5.2.1   Katy

There was evidence that some of Katy's difficulties in understanding her coursework and feedback were due to weak English language and study skills. Katy found her written feedback less useful later in her programme, and though she preferred the detail of marginal comments, she had difficulties deciphering handwriting and understanding the language her tutors used. Variability in amounts and focus of feedback from different tutors left her feeling confused. Where her marks were low, her feedback focused predominantly on deficits and she received few future developmental comments with potential for feed forward. Katy responded slowly in adapting her study approach, partly due to limited study skills training and difficulties in finding time to attend writing courses in the ELU. Despite early engagement in dialogue around feedback, Katy did not discuss feedback with tutors in her final term, which implied that she did not find such dialogue effective. Katy's case highlighted the need for tutors to adapt the language they use in feedback when working with international students. It also emphasised the limitations of feedback in one-year taught Master's programmes without more opportunities for such students to engage in dialogue about tutor expectations of CAW and truly formative opportunities to practice it.

5.2.2   Peter

Peter's experience was characterised by a struggle to understand the content of his discipline and also the study processes and the writing conventions of his discourse community. He struggled to read and write in the critical manner that his tutors expected, and though feedback made him aware of these failings, he was not able to

overcome them. Peter's status as a mature Asian student within an alien academic culture seemed to be significant in his approach to study, and may have had some influence on the way he engaged with his work. Peter perceived that he had made progress with CAW, but recognised that this was relative to his very low starting point. His markers were not of the same opinion, however. Peter's PS tutor questioned the impact it had made on his approach to reading and writing, while Peter himself questioned whether it could prepare him for writing in his department. Peter clearly attended to the more critical feedback comments where marks were lower, but in the end he lacked sufficient guidance, or the inclination and ability to learn from what was offered to him in the feedback.

5.2.3   Paul

Paul was from a northern European culture, but despite strong oral skills in English, his scientific background meant that he struggled to develop essay writing skills, and his engagement with feedback was quite similar to that of the East Asian students in the study. Paul clearly believed in the efficacy of detailed, specific feedback, and he appeared to engage with this type of feedback, but with disappointing results. His case highlighted relational aspects of feedback, and how emotional responses to negative comments can be an issue, despite respect for and trust in the feedback giver. Paul's pride and a desire to save face meant that he did not seek language support which could have helped him with his writing issues. To some extent his case debunks language and culture stereotypes, demonstrating that it is not only East Asian international students who can struggle in the one-year taught Master's context.

5.3   Analysis of Formative versus Summative Feedback

Formative and summative feedback (end comments) differed relatively little, with a very similar number of comments provided for both types of feedback. Formative feedback included a mark and was normally presented in the same report format as summative feedback. Table 5.4 shows that comments explicitly justifying a mark, e.g., "These questions should have been addressed so I cannot give a mark that signals a pass…" were equally as frequent for formative as for summative feedback. Phatic comments aimed at establishing relationships with markers, e.g. "Peter, I think this is a good effort at tackling a subject that is complex", were just as likely to appear in summative as formative work, as were developmental alternatives focused on what could have been done, e.g. "This candidate could have said more about heritage value in general…" or developmental comments focused on future work "…write your essay as if you are writing to an imaginary someone who knows nothing about your topic".

Table 5:4 Preliminary study feedback analysis by comment category

Comment type F- formative S-summative	Paul F	S	Peter F	S	Katy F	S	Total F	Total S
Phatic	1	2	2	1	2	3	5	6
Developmental Alternatives	4	7	6	2	7	3	17	12
Developmental Future	3	8	1	3	5	3	9	14
Reflective questions	5	-	3	-	-	-	8	-
Informational content	-	-	5	2	3	3	8	5
Structure	2	4	-	2	1	3	3	9
Language and expression	5	2	4	1	7	2	16	5
Reference /source use	5	8	2	5	4	4	11	17
Presentation	2	3	-	2	-	-	2	5
Positive content	7	18	5	7	9	4	21	29
Negative content	7	12	9	7	13	3	29	22
Non-evaluative summary	1	5	-	-	-	4	1	9
Explicit justification of the mark	2	-	1	4	3	2	6	6
Critical analysis	8	13	13	9	11	6	32	28
Explanation	4	4	8	4	6	7	18	15
Total							186	182

Some differences related to feedback purpose, however, reflective questions such as "How do the concepts of age and art value sit within such a culture?" were found only in formative feedback. Table 5.4 also shows how three times as many comments for both structure and language were found in formative as opposed to summative feedback.

5.3.1   Feed forward

The participants received between 10-20% of all comments in the developmental categories, with Katy and Paul receiving similar numbers of task-focused (developmental alternatives) as process-based comments (developmental future), while Peter received twice as many task-focused to process-focused comments. With such a low total proportion of process-focused comments (around 10%) the feed forward potential did not appear to be high, since these tasks were not iterative. Against this, one might argue that comments on structural, stylistic or content-related issues often have a 'feed forward' element. The higher numbers of retrospective gap-altering comments in the form of developmental alternatives were clearly task-focused, but investigator triangulation (see Section 4.6) also established that 'alternatives' in the developmental category could be considered explanatory in nature. The explanation in these comments, however, was limited to what the student could or might have done on the task completed, and as observed in the literature (Dysthe, 2011; Hattie & Timperley, 2007) this had limited relevance for future writing assignments.

5.3.2   The language of critical analysis

For Katy, thirteen critical analysis (CA) comments were recorded out of a total of fifty comments on her final three feedback sheets in term two. Only four of this comment type occurred in her first four feedback sheets. Katy's struggle with 'criticality' became more apparent in later feedback comments which focused on her deficits in this area. Significantly, one comment in her final summative assignment seemed to praise Katy's attempt at criticality, yet in the next phrase indicated that it was not appropriately developed: "There is a clear attempt to present a well-informed argument.....these arguments are not developed with a critical point of view". A quarter of all comments Peter received were judged to be using the

discourse of critical analysis. However, the vast majority of these comments came from tutor A1. This was also the case for Paul, with about a fifth of all his comments coded as CA, but again the majority were written by tutor A1 (15 of 19 comments).

5.3.3 Depth of feedback

The notion of depth (Brown & Glover, 2006; Mutch, 2003) is illustrated by the number of comments judged to represent some kind of explanation. Two of tutor A2's comments in Peter's formative feedback in term one showed how she explained earlier comments suggesting alternative content that could have been included:

> I'm thinking particularly of the conflict that might arise in the application of a value-led system in Buddhist cultures where the cyclical nature of time is all pervasive.
>
> This could have led to the question: whose heritage and who are we preserving it for? This aspect is particularly relevant when considering public participation in conservation because users of heritage buildings often have a different set of values to the 'experts' (Peter A2: F1)

Less than fourteen per cent of Peter's comments went beyond the level of indication (compared with over eleven percent in the Brown and Glover study), and around 10% of Katy and Paul's end comments were coded as explanation. In Paul's feedback, a number of these were made by tutor A1 on how to structure essays, as in the example below explaining the need for a thesis statement:

> An essay must be structured around a developing argument …. This argument is introduced or summarised in the introduction to the essays in one or two sentences… (Paul-A1:F1)

Other explanatory comments Paul received were focused on content issues, as in this example from tutor A2 in his final formative assignment for her:

> This candidate has taken a rather broad approach to the title… the interpretation of urban World Heritage sites as being historic cities in general is unjustified because while there are connections between urban World Heritage sites and their wider urban environments, only in cases of Bath or Edinburgh and 'so called' World Heritage cities are those connections inseparable.

These results suggested a diagnostic function for the feedback, but also cast doubt on its ability to clarify precisely how students could use it to improve subsequent work. It should be noted that most of the explanatory comments in the examples above were also focused on tasks that would not be repeated. Process-focused explanations might also have been presented and discussed in an in-sessional EAP programme designed specifically for these students with examples from typical assignments, but this was not on offer at the time of data collection. As the literature suggests (e.g., Carroll, 2013; Ridley 2004), too much explicitness can be overwhelming when it involves tacit and implied knowledge where students need time, discussion and practice to understand and use it effectively. It was clear that a second study in a taught programme with a different approach to formative feedback on writing might usefully explore these issues further, particularly task-versus process-focused comments, feed forward and depth of feedback.

5.3.4   *Positive versus negative feedback*

Following Read, Francis and Robson (2005), a separate count was made to estimate the amount of positive and negative feedback in the sample. Table 5.6 shows that there were roughly a third more wholly negative comments than wholly positive comments, but there were an even greater number of softened negative comments. These comments were critical comments but categorized as 'softened' on the basis that they were less authoritative and not wholly negative due to hedges, questions, use of first person, suggested alternatives to content, or suggested future action (see Section 3.6.1). Only Paul received more positive comments than wholly negative comments, with Katy receiving twice as many wholly negative than positive comments and Peter three times more negative than positive comments.

When the number of negative and softened negative comments were added for all three participants, there was a three-to-one ratio of negative over positive feedback. Whereas Paul received almost twice as many of the combined negative and softened negative as positive comments, this ratio was closer to five to one for Peter and four to one for Katy. The second study (see chs 7-9) provided an opportunity for further study of the balance of positive and negative feedback, to

explore the extent to which softened negative comments and the low level of positive reinforcement were features of feedback in a different taught Master's context.

Participant	Wholly Positive	Wholly Negative	Softened Negative	Combined Negative
Katy	14	33	27	60
Paul	37	24	43	67
Peter	11	31	21	52
Total	**62**	**88**	**91**	**179**

Table 5:5 Balance of positive negative and softened negative comments

5.4 Summary of Main Conclusions in Preliminary Case Studies

Drawing on the analysis of the feedback above, and the interview data findings reported and discussed in the case studies in Appendix F, the main points that emerged are briefly summarised below.

5.4.1 *Similarity of formative and summative feedback*

The similarity of formative and summative feedback was noted in Section 5.3 above. The feedback had a diagnostic function but provided limited clarification of how students could use it to improve subsequent work. Each assignment task was on a different title, which did not allow for revisions based on feedback. While marginal comments on formative work could be extensive, these were not consistently provided. Where end comments were in handwritten form legibility was sometimes an issue (see Katy, Appendix F, Section 1.6) as in the literature on home undergraduate students.

Variations in feedback were not seen to be related to assessment purpose, but variations in style were significant between different markers, a similar finding to that of Mutch (2003). Tutor A in the study provided fifteen of nineteen 'critical analysis' comments that Paul received, while tutor B rarely gave such comments in her feedback. Variation in the form and style of comments was clearly picked up by participants and Katy was explicit about the way these differences were confusing for her. Thus, the issue of consistency in feedback approaches and style of comments emerged as a focus for the second study, with the possibility of exploring further

how variations in feedback related to tutor or assessment purposes in a different context and assessment regime.

5.4.2   *Low feed forward potential*

The students received as much as a quarter of all comments phrased in the language of critical analysis, with the associated need to unpack the tacit knowledge referred to in Chapter 2. There was little depth of feedback in terms of explanation, around 10%, similar to the 11% reported by Brown and Glover (2006) in their study of undergraduate home students.

The higher frequency of more wholly negative comments than wholly positive comments in the feedback may have been related to the generally low scoring assignments (see table 5.3) , but the critical nature of the comments was more pronounced when the softened negative comments were added, resulting in around three times as much negative as positive feedback. This suggested that positive reinforcement was not a feature of the feedback, and the mark-loss focused feedback found in other studies was also evident here.

A low number of comments were focused on process, the most useful type of comment in Hattie and Timperley's (2007) study and typical of the explanatory comments favoured in the Straub (1997) study. This finding is relevant to subsidiary research question (a) on the extent of feed forward. Both formative and summative written feedback had a limited feed-forward potential in this context.

5.4.3   *Cultural and educational background*

Paul, a northern European student, struggled in similar ways to the two East Asian participants to develop essayist writing and criticality, calling into question the usual large culture assumptions around cultural explanations for writing problems that were discussed in Chapter 2.

Educational background was a key factor in explaining both Peter and Paul's feedback experiences; Paul struggled with the transition from writing in science disciplines to the 'argument essay' approach required in his programme, while

Peter's supervisor and his PS tutor referred to Peter's background as a mature Asian student, as a reason for his struggle to adapt to an unfamiliar academic culture. There was an implication that lack of content knowledge was part of the problem for Peter, and for Katy, and for both these participants it contributed to their inability to question texts in the critical manner expected of them.

The interview data provided some evidence of 'face issues' (see Section 2.4.3), mainly related to the lack of take up of opportunities for feedback discussion and for language support. In fact, Paul was the most explicit about face issues when he identified his reluctance to seek English language support for his writing. The relationship between educational background, cultural background and content knowledge thus emerged as a focus for the second study and the possibility of exploring these issues further with a different group of students in a different taught Master's context.

5.4.4 Grades and marking criteria

None of the students had previously received the amount of detailed feedback they experienced on their taught programme, and they were accustomed to receiving grades with little feedback. The students seemed to focus on the 'guidance' purpose of feedback, using marks to interpret where they were going (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), but this was clearly not easy for them to do. The holistic marking scheme meant a lack of transparency in terms of how marks were assigned. At different points, Katy and Peter referred to their lack of understanding of how markers arrived at their grades. There was evidence that the participants lacked a clear understanding of marking criteria and no evidence that lecturers did more than refer students to the handbooks containing marking criteria. Criteria grids with tick boxes were used on feedback forms by some lecturers, but their vague use of terms such as 'style' and 'argument' were not understood by the three participants. Use of peer marking or exemplar activities to help raise awareness of work of different standards was not evident. This suggested that a useful focus for the second study would be to investigate tutor use of marking criteria in a different context, particularly the extent to which they made students aware of the criteria, or helped them to interpret criteria.

5.4.5   The institutional context: language issues and language support

Language issues highlighted by their tutors were also reported as concerns for all three participants. Katy appeared to be slightly weaker than the other students, but even Paul, a proficient speaker, admitted to lacking confidence in using English in his studies. While most feedback end comments referred to the need for editing and proofreading, or the need to seek support from the EL Unit, tutor A1 was the only marker who included corrections or indications of language errors in marginal comments. Although Paul and Peter appreciated such comments, there was no evidence that they were able to learn from them. Katy's case also highlighted the need for tutors to adapt the language they used in feedback to enable international students to understand it. Perhaps unsurprisingly she was unable to understand words such as "anecdotal", "assertion" and "bland statement" in her feedback.

Peter's case provided evidence of the value of a pre-sessional in terms of developing the ability to structure assignments, address essay questions and take positions using source texts as support. The impact on Peter's ability to write more critically was limited, however, and Peter himself recognised that his PS course could not help him with disciplinary writing. His rather minimal use of source text support in early assignments saw some development in later assignments with multiple citations and more non-integral references, but there was also evidence of a persistent inability to question the source texts and language issues hampering his communication of ideas.

These three case studies highlighted complex issues around 'support' in developing academic literacy. Paul's European background and personality, his pride and the nature of the optional support provided by the institution meant that he did not take up English language writing support that was available, albeit on a different site. He viewed language support as remedial, and issues of face (Section 2.4.3) were clearly involved in his reluctance to seek help. Paul's case raised questions about language support solutions often promoted as a response to international students' perceived deficits. His case also debunks to some extent language and culture stereotypes; Paul was a proficient oral English user from a European culture not dissimilar to that of the UK, but he struggled with his writing and had similar

problems to the East Asian students when it came to engaging effectively with feedback. As only one participant took a pre-sessional course in the preliminary study, the implication was for the second study to include a group of students with pre-sessional experience, making it possible in a different context to explore student and tutor responses to issues of language and language support related to feedback.

5.4.6   *Feedback dialogue*

The three participants did not take up many opportunities to discuss feedback with their tutors, a finding that echoes that of the literature on home student undergraduates (see Section 2.5.4). Indeed in Katy's case, the more she struggled later in the programme, the less she sought to discuss feedback with her markers.

Paul seemed to respect the effort and detail that tutor A1 provided in her feedback, despite the often critical nature of her comments. He was willing to discuss feedback with her, seemingly because of her higher expectations than other tutors. The lack of reflective questions in the feedback analysis in Section 5.3.1 was reflected in tutor A1's view that Peter and Paul required more directive feedback and were not ready for more open ended questions she had used in feedback with other cohorts. The tutor's view raised the question of whether attempts to engage in dialogue about content were likely to fail with students struggling to understand and engage with that content.

A one-year taught Master's programme, particularly where it is interdisciplinary in nature, may not afford the time or the type of opportunity international students require for written feedback to play a role in developing critical academic writing. The second study provided the means to explore this crucial implication further with a different group of students in a different taught Master's context.

5.4.7   *Concluding comments- the basis for a second study*

Chapter 10 considers the limitations of the preliminary study alongside those of the main study (chs 7-9), so these will not be dealt with in any detail here. The experience and findings of the preliminary study, however, informed the design of

the main study. The original study proposal was for research in at least two departments at Bradfield, on the basis that each department represented a different community of practice and a different teaching and assessment regime. The ability to compare findings in two locations was expected to provide more insight into the contextual nature of international students' experience of feedback. The key areas for further research highlighted above were:

- similarity or variation in formative and summative feedback in terms of content, style and feed-forward potential, including a focus on positive / negative /mitigated comments and the use of the language of critical analysis;

- the issue of consistency of feedback and how variation in feedback was related to assessment purpose or individual tutor styles;

- tutor practice in the use of marking criteria, their awareness of tacit knowledge in the assessment process and their approaches to making it more explicit;

- a more in-depth exploration of the impact of a pre-sessional course on students' development of writing and ability to respond to feedback in their taught Master's programme;

- the role of cultural and educational background issues in student response to feedback and uptake of opportunities to engage in feedback dialogue;

- the problem of time and opportunities to use feedback to develop writing in a short one-year taught Master's programme.

While tutor interviews took place at the beginning and end of the taught Master's in the preliminary study, I decided that a second study might try to link tutor feedback and student responses at successive feedback events for a more in-depth study of feed forward and writing development. This would also provide more tutor data allowing for exploration of the nature of the teaching and learning regime (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Trowler & Cooper, 2002) and the learning and teaching environment in which the assessment process took place.

Chapter 6 Main Study Design and Implementation

6.0 Introduction

Earlier chapters of this study have given a rationale for exploratory research into feedback for international graduate students based on an iterative design approach. This chapter sets out the details of the second stage of the research, giving the rationale for the main study design in the Department of Education at Bradfield. This design decision is supported by the case made in Section 2.2 for understanding academic writing and feedback in terms of academic communities of practice and teaching and learning regimes (TLRs). For this main study, I employed a case study format again, based on semi-structured interviews and analysis of actual feedback comments. The chapter that follows documents the procedures for data gathering, indicating the way participants were selected and the implementation of the design. I also discuss my own participation in this study along with the use of member checking as a validation check. An overview of the final design for the main study is shown in Figure 6.1 below.

Table 6:1 Overview of main study

Data collection activities (October 2009-June 2010)	Analysis and write-up
Recruit participants Baseline interviews (students) Tutor + student interviews on formative feedback Interview on summative feedback mid-second term, (tutor and corresponding student participant) Interview on summative feedback mid-third term (tutor and corresponding student participant)	Transcription and identification of themes -analysis of feedback -cross case analysis of formative stage (Chapter 7) Individual case studies and cross case thematic analysis (Chapter 8)

A similar longitudinal design to the preliminary study reported in the previous chapter is indicated in figure 6.1, but with student and tutor interviews in parallel for each feedback event. In the preliminary study, I only interviewed tutors at the beginning and end of the period of the taught programme, but for the main study I intended to explore student usability of feedback in greater depth by matching tutor and student interviews around each piece of feedback. This modification to the study design emphasised the importance of the feedback context,

addressing the gap in the feedback literature too often dominated by discussions of tutor and student perceptions of feedback in general, with little in the way of contextual specification.

The nature of the feedback process at the dissertation stage could have provided data for an extended study or a separate study from that of the taught progamme (see Section 4.1). As for the preliminary study, however, it was simply not feasible to collect data on the dissertation stage, given my work commitments during the summer.

6.1 Selecting Location and Participants

The nature of the writing and feedback in specific taught Master's courses was a key factor in locating the first study, based partly on personal contacts within the department of Archaeology. As a tutor on the MATESOL programme at Bradfield, I was aware that documented essays were a key requirement in that programme, and that relatively detailed feedback was provided at four points over the year. Interviewing tutors for each piece of feedback to student participants also required cooperation from more tutors than in the first study, and I decided that my contacts with colleagues in the Department of Education would be a key to ensuring such collaboration.

A challenge faced by researchers carrying out longitudinal studies is that of maintaining collaboration of participants over the data collection period. Only three participants volunteered for the preliminary study, and I was fortunate that they did not wish to withdraw at any point. The fact that there were 79 potential participants in the MATESOL cohort in 2009 also influenced my decision to recruit from that programme. I opted to recruit eight students, with the knowledge that participants could withdraw at any stage for many reasons. Only one of three participants in the preliminary study had completed a pre-sessional course prior to the taught programme, so I decided that the second study could provide further insights into the impact of pre-sessional programmes by including more participants with this background. Recruiting half of these participants with pre-sessional backgrounds allowed me to add a separate research question to those stated in Chapter 2.

RQ: Does attendance on a pre-sessional programme impact noticeably on students' use of feedback and development of CAW? If there is a noticeable impact, how and why does this occur?

The procedure for data collection in the main study is outlined in Table 6.2 below. To ensure anonymity of tutors, I used the feminine gender as in the first study for reporting results and interview extracts. An additional issue to address here was the nature of my 'insider' position in the department of Education, but in this case I felt it was important not to anonymise any data relating to my own feedback.

Table 6:2 Main study data collection procedures

Main study	Dates	Participants	Activity
Gaining consent	October 2009 Term 1:Week 0	Students on MATESOL programme in Dept. Education	Presentation and invitation to participate; e-mail follow up for volunteers; letter detailing study.
Baseline interviews	Term 1 weeks 2-3	8 student volunteers for study -4 pre-sessional -4 non pre-sessional	Establish prior experience and biographical details Establish prior experience and perspectives on role of feedback and L2 writing issues.
Formative interviews	Term 1 weeks 7-8	7 tutors 8 students	Establish student engagement/ understanding of feedback.
Summative interviews	Term 2 week 5 Term 3 week 6	7 tutors 8 students 3 tutors 7 students	Establish student engagement/ understanding of feedback Reflection on taught experience of feedback on writing in taught programme.
Member checks	January 2011 March 2012	Student: Betty Tutor D	Interviews around participants' data and my conclusions.

Table 6.2 shows that one fewer student was interviewed in the later stages, as Helen unfortunately withdrew during the second term due to illness. However, data collected on her first formative and summative feedback, and data on her experience on the pre-sessional is also reported and analysed here. A further problem occurred in obtaining formative feedback for one of the eight students[33] in term one. Because

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[33] The relevant electronic file attachment was not available at the time of data collection, and a long delay before analysis meant that the file was not discovered missing until more than a year later. At this point the tutor's file had been deleted and the student could not be approached, as she had left the country.

of the importance of the formative feedback in tracing the impact of feedback over the taught programme, I decided to exclude this student's data from the final case studies and thematic analysis. The notion of 'saturation' of data is also applicable here, given that the final six cases presented many similar findings. The final chapter, therefore, presents case studies and thematic analysis for six of the original eight participants, with Helen's data included in a consideration of pre-sessional impact. In total, data from twenty seven student interviews and seventeen tutor interviews were considered in the final analysis.

As I led, taught and marked assignments on the second-term core module for the MATESOL, it would have been very difficult to exclude my own feedback from the main study. Rejecting student volunteers from my first term module group could also have reduced the potential number of participants. Section 3.2 discusses the value of practitioner research, and although I rejected the Action Research or Exploratory Practice models for my design, I also recognised their value. It also seemed appropriate to submit my own feedback practices to scrutiny along with my colleagues, and the principle of transparency was clearly important (see discussion of honesty and openness, Section 4.2.4). I believed that an exploration of my own feedback practices was justifiable, provided that I made my own data clear at every stage, and did not attempt to present it anonymously. To aid this process, I co-opted a colleague (referred to in quotes in Chapter 7 as I = Interviewer) to carry out interviews with my students when discussing their feedback, and also used the same colleague to interview me concerning these students' formative and summative feedback. This may seem rather artificially contrived, but it allowed me to present my own position in response to my own interview schedules, providing data that I could then compare and contrast with that from other tutor interviews. My interpretations of the feedback process were informed by my own practice, so exploring that practice was important in making visible the way that I arrived at my conclusions.

Table 6:3 MATESOL students' background information

Name	Age	Nationality	IELTS test scores	Undergraduate degree	Vocational work experience	Pre-sessional
Anna	22	Chinese	**Overall 7.0** R-7.5 L-8.5 W-6.0 S-6.0	English	6-week teaching practice in degree/ private tutoring high school	No
Betty	22	Chinese	**Overall 6.5** R-7.0 L-6.5 W-7.0 S-5.5	Business English	N	8-week
Clara	23	Chinese	**Overall 6.5** R-6.0 L-7.5 W-5.5 S-7.0	Biotechnology	2 years Teaching English in Kindergarten	12 -week
Diane	22	Chinese	**Overall 7.0** R-7.0 L-8.5 W-6 S-6	English	40 hrs informal teaching English to children	No
Ethel	24	Chinese	**Overall 6.5** R-7.0 L-6.5 W-6 S-6	English	home tutoring /private lessons 1 adult and 2 children	No
Flora	25	Chinese	**Overall 6.**0 R-5.5 L-6 W-7 S-6	English	N	8-week
Helen	30	Chinese	**Overall 6.0** R-7.0 L-5.5 W-5.5 S-6	Biology	2 years teaching Biology at tertiary level China	12-week

As in the preliminary study, I made a short presentation to outline my research at the end of a preliminary meeting with the 79 MATESOL students in their first week of term, and invited students to contact me by e-mail if they were interested in collaborating with me. All the students who replied were Chinese females, so I responded to the replies as they arrived, ensuring only that I had an

equal number of students with and without pre-sessional experience. Given that all participants in the second study were of the same nationality, it was not seen to be necessary to disguise this in the way that I had done in the preliminary study where each participant would have been identifiable if nationality had been stated. I then followed up with an e-mail reply, attaching a letter describing the study in more detail and arranging short baseline interviews in the second and third weeks of term. Students signed the letters of consent during these interviews, which were longer for pre-sessional students, as I asked them to reflect on their perception of the pre-sessional in terms of: development of language, awareness of academic culture and experience of academic writing and feedback.

6.2 Feedback Events and Interviews

A Department of Education policy, operating in 2009, required tutors to provide a formative task with feedback in first-term option modules only. Interviews were carried out with each tutor giving feedback on the first term task, establishing tutor purposes for the task and feedback, exploring the guidance they gave and asking them to prioritise the main points in the feedback. Interviews with students followed within a few days, checking their attention to the feedback, and asking them to specify the main points they took away as feed forward. The range of different tasks and the written feedback provides the basis for a thematic analysis and discussion of findings in Chapter 7.

Summative feedback interviews for term-one modules took place mid-way through the second term. Tutor interviews checked guidance on long assignments, while exploring their attitudes to explicit teaching of CAW. Student interviews explored their perception of progress based on earlier formative feedback, before asking them to identify the main points from their summative feedback. They were also asked how they intended to act on the feedback, whether they would seek face-to-face discussions and their views on feedback format and delivery .The final two assignments were written concurrently, with feedback returned in the middle of the summer term. Final interviews, accordingly, took place towards the end of term three, within approximately one week of the receipt of feedback and a few days after tutor interviews. These student interviews discussed the final summative feedback

and formative feedback on the Methods module, and explored perceptions of progress. The second half of the interview was on the feedback experience more generally, exploring the usefulness of the feedback in developing different aspects of writing, particularly referencing, use of sources, grammatical accuracy, structure and critical analysis.

Although formative feedback was not required in term two, in my own Methods core module, I set up a formative task for the three groups (approximately 28 students per group) based on dealing with competing definitions of a central concept of authenticity in English language teaching. With over 50 students in two large teaching groups, detailed feedback on the 1000 word assignments was not possible[34]. As a compromise, I set up a blog for submission of the task where brief tutor comments could be added. A set of general feedback notes were then provided to the whole cohort, based on commonly arising issues. The detailed feedback published on the VLE ran to three pages including language-related feedback, but focusing principally on aspects of CAW such as answering the question, dealing with competing definitions and examples of how to use evidence to support claims and avoid unsupported generalizations.

Master's students in MATESOL were provided with three terms of language support classes, the first term aiming to provide an introduction to academic writing. Although I did not wish to include a specific focus on these classes in the research, having already broadened the focus by including the pre-sessional impact, they provided inputs on writing which were referred to in student and tutor interviews. At the time of the study, these classes did not provide any guidance related to using departmental feedback, or link directly to departmental writing criteria, but they introduced elements of CAW in a first-term course that might best be described as a generic, 'content-flavoured' programme. Typical content of the two-hour sessions included: use of sources to support claims; structuring essay style assignments; paragraphing; academic style and hedging.

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[34] A colleague taught a third group of 28 students. English support tutors also gave feedback on language issues for the task.

One study skills workshop in support for Master's students was reported in Chapter 5 in the preliminary study, which contrasts with two study skills workshops offered in term one for Master's students in Education at Bradfield. The contents of these workshops (summarized below) included an exemplar of an assignment introduction, and several slides on criticality, with advice on how to look for omissions (e.g., lack of piloting) or small samples, lack of supporting data etc.

1. General points & introductions
2. Critiquing a real assignment
3. How to avoid plagiarism
4. How we mark assignments -focused on assignment writing requirements, APA referencing conventions and some consideration of elements of assignment structure such as introductions and conclusions.
(**Content from opening slide in first Workshop**

6.3 Analysis of Feedback Comments

For summative feedback, a standard feedback form was used across all taught Master's modules in the Department of Education.

Exam number:	Surname/Family name	Forename:
: MA Programme:	Module Title:	
Module Tutor:		
Title of piece of work:		

MA Module Report   Tutors' comments

Searching sources

Analysing data and ideas

Written communication

Other comments on the assignment

Targets for improvement

First Marker: Date: Second Marker: Date:
AGREED GRADE: (Please ☑ appropriate box):

DISTINGUISHED		*GOOD*		*SATISFACTORY*		*REFERRAL/FAIL*
☐ *100*	☐	*69*	☐	*58*	☐	*45*
☐ *85*	☐	*66*	☐	*55*	☐	*30*
☐ *75*	☐	*62*	☐	*51*	☐	*(less than 30) ...*

Note on grading: All module assessment tasks that contribute towards the award of the MA are graded on the university mark scale (0-100). There are three categories of pass: satisfactory, good and distinguished. These **correspond to the following bands of marks respectively on the university mark scale: 50 to 59, 60 to 69, 70 to 100.**

Figure 6-1 Summative feedback report form

The form provided a structure for feedback under the five headings indicated. *Written communication* was separated from *analysis of data and ideas*, the former providing a focus for comments on language, expression and structure, while the latter might include content and argument. The inclusion of a section on *targets for improvement* provided a focus on feeding forward to future assignments. Students received these feedback forms approximately one month after assignment submission, after the process of double marking and moderation. It is important to note that on receipt of marks and feedback, students were not routinely allowed to take away the original marked script, although they were able to consult it and copy it before returning it to the programme administrator. In total, 18 examples of these summative feedback reports were analysed, corresponding to three assignments for each of the six participants.

Only one tutor used the official form described above to give formative feedback, but because formative feedback was often handwritten and featured marginal comments as well as end comments, these were taken into account in formative feedback analysis. Given that students did not routinely see their summative assignment scripts, and consequently not all tutors wrote marginal comments, these were not analysed on summative events. Seven examples of formative feedback were analysed, with additional analysis of two sets of audio feedback that I provided for Clara and Diane. Analysis of the audio feedback enabled triangulation and comparison of these students' views of written and audio feedback.

Practice in the Department of Education at the time of data collection was for supervisors to give supervisees feedback, usually on assignment outlines. English language support tutors were also provided optional feedback on one draft per term for students in their groups. Collecting this data would have been difficult for me as it was unpredictable in terms of timing, only provided in some cases and would have involved cooperation from even more tutors within the department and in the EL Unit, some of whom worked at a distance from Bradfield. However, it was possible

for me to include an additional analysis of feedback on a draft for Flora (see Section 8.3) which illuminated issues with CAW in her own case study.

6.4 Member-checking

Section 3.6.3 discussed the desirability of member checking as a means of validating data and researcher interpretations. For the main study, I was fortunate in being able to interview one of my participants, Betty, in the year following data collection as she was studying in a second Master's programme at a Scottish university, and returned to Bradfield for her graduation ceremony. Before the interview, which lasted 39 minutes, I drew up a set of statements summarising my understanding of Betty's data. Due to the part-time nature of my study, I had not completed analysis of all the data at this point, but referred to preliminary findings in my interview. Reference to this member checking data is included in Betty's case study and thematic analysis in Chapter 8.

My own supervisor and internal examiner were among the tutors interviewed in the main study. As they were very familiar with my study design and developing analysis and conclusions from drafts of my work and TAG[35] reports, they also had opportunities to give feedback on my interpretations of data. In addition, in 2012, while writing up final case studies, I was able to interview tutor D to explore her reactions to my analysis and conclusions relating to her data and her responses are also referred to in reflecting on the final conclusions in Chapter 8.

6.5 Conclusion

The main study replicated to a large degree the data collection and analysis from the Department of Archaeology in a new location, the Department of Education, with a group of language education students. Modifications to research design were made to link tutor intentions in their feedback with student responses by carrying out paired tutor / student interviews around each feedback event. More attention was paid to analysis of marginal feedback comments in one key formative feedback event, along with analysis of audio feedback at the same stage. I also carried out a degree of

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[35] Thesis Advisory Group

purposive sampling in this second study to provide the opportunity to focus on pre-sessional impact in more depth.

Chapter 7 Results and Discussion-Formative Feedback

This chapter discusses the process of feedback in the formative mid-term task. It begins by identifying key aspects of the context for the feedback, variation in task design and the modes of feedback delivery. The analysis of end and marginal comments that follows highlights the directive, skills-focused nature of the feedback, with frequent critical analysis comments, but a lack of engagement with content. The chapter then explores emerging issues around engagement with marking criteria and use of exemplars, before dealing with student perceptions and understanding of their feedback from interview data. I focus particularly on grades, take up of opportunities to discuss feedback and a discussion of feed forward to future assignments. Despite a strong correspondence between tutor intentions and student understanding, some issues of mismatches are highlighted. Overall, the findings echo those in the literature showing variable tutor practice, evidenced by a principled attempt to help students within the constraints of the institutional setting. While student engagement and satisfaction at this stage appeared to be high, there were clear implications that the nature of the feedback process and quality of feedback resulted in limited feed forward potential for the development of critical analytical writing.

7.1 Task Variation in Formative Feedback

Table 7.1 shows how five of the tasks were short essay style assignments, while three were described by tutors as 'critical reviews', or summaries related to individual research articles. The shortest length of task set was 500 words in the case of tutor G, but generally tasks required 800-1000 words (compared to summative assignment requirements of 4500-5000 words in length). Formative assignments in Archaeology were of a similar length to summative tasks, provided a mark and generally used the department's official summative report form, while Education tutors used tasks of varying lengths, with different approaches to marks

and mode of delivery. I appear as tutor E in the table, which indicates my addition of audio feedback alongside the written feedback.

Table 7:1 Features of formative mid-term tasks

Tutor	Task and delivery	Guidance	Task alignment	Timing
A	Essay (1000) Choice of title End comments on script	Tutor written exemplar Criteria discussed	References required	1 week
B	Critical review (1000 words) End comments on tailored form	No exemplar Questions to guide critical review Criteria not discussed	No references Different format to summative	2-3 weeks
C	Essay (500)	No exemplar Department writing criteria not discussed	References required Structure similar to longer assignment	1 week
D	Critical review (1000) End comments on tailored form	No exemplar Questions to guide critical review Criteria not discussed	No references Different format to summative	3 weeks
E	Essay (800-1000) End comments on tailored form Audio feedback	No exemplar Criteria in tailored form discussed	References required - Different format to summative	1 week
F	Essay (800-1000) Department summative form	No exemplar Criteria not discussed	References required Title could be same for summative	1 week
G	Critical commentary (500 words) End comments on script	No exemplar Questions to guide critical review Criteria not discussed	No references required Different format to summative	2-3 weeks

The 'criteria' referred to in Table 7.1 are the official Department marking criteria. Tutors B, D and G used critical review tasks which set questions to guide students through the task, bypassing these criteria. Three tutors indicated that they did not explicitly discuss the assessment criteria, tutor F commenting that she assumed students would access this in the Department handbook. Only tutor A

discussed the department assignment marking criteria with the students before the task. Tutors B, D and E employed a tailored feedback form for formative purposes reproduced below in figure 7.1 and each tutor reported discussing the criteria in the form with their students.

In general, tutors did not use exemplars to prepare for their tasks, though tutor A used a self-written 300 word essay exemplar. Tutor C stated that she intentionally gave little guidance to students on this task, implying that it was very much a diagnostic exercise. However, exemplars were used by some tutors after return of feedback, and these will be considered in more detail later.

Table 7.1 shows that only one tutor gave a percentage mark according to the official marking criteria, while all other tutors gave a general band indication (e.g., Satisfactory / Good etc.). The tailored form used by tutors B, D and myself used a grid indicating Strong / Satisfactory / Weak performance on specific criteria.

Three tutors returned feedback after one week, with audio feedback returned within ten days of submission. Three tutors took between two and three weeks to return the feedback. Task alignment in table 7.1 refers to the type of task set by each tutor in relation to the later summative assignment task on these modules. Where the formative task closely replicated the summative task, there was a high degree of task alignment. Arguably, where formative tasks closely replicated a later summative task, they were likely to provide more usable feedback. All the formative tasks were, however, significantly shorter than end-of-module summative tasks, so reducing task alignment to a degree.

Referencing and integration of sources was an essential aspect in the assessment criteria for summative assignments, but the three critical analysis tasks were based on one text, so reference to a number of sources was not required. Although the task alignment was reduced to some extent, the tasks were designed to encourage students to challenge a published article that had a number of errors, thus specifically helping students to develop their evaluative writing ability.

Tutor F aligned the formative and summative tasks most closely, setting a title in her task that could be re-used in the summative assignment. For my practical classroom teaching module I set a short essay based on referenced sources, a task which did not align well with the lesson plan and commentary format of the summative assessment. I took this approach, however, because students had not completed enough of the course to be prepared for the planning aspect of the summative task, and I felt that a short essay with references was also useful preparation for later assignment writing tasks and the dissertation.

7.2 Modes of Feedback for Formative Tasks

Feedback forms were only used by four tutors, tutors A, C and G preferring to handwrite end comments on scripts. Only tutor F delivered feedback word processed on the official department feedback form for summative work. Along with tutors B and D, I used a tailored feedback form for formative feedback. Betty's formative feedback from tutor D on the tailored form is shown below:

Formative Task Feedback Module: …… Student Name: (Betty)			
Marking Criteria	Strong	Adequate	Weak
Argument and Analysis -addressing question -engaging with content - claims supported with evidence		✓	
Structure / Organisation – paragraphing - introduction + conclusion -use of headings/sub headings		✓	
Use of sources and citation -appropriate quotation and paraphrasing -accurate formatting of reference list			✓
Language / style / precision - accurate grammar - appropriate academic style - use of terminology and appropriate vocabulary		✓	✓

Areas for improvement
1. There are several instances where your meaning is unclear due to the language used. 2. It would have been good if you had critiqued more of the literature review and the claims made about the data in relation to the literature cited. 3. Do not include the first names of researchers.

Positive points to maintain for future assignments
1. You have made a decent attempt at summarising the main points of the article and provide clear evidence of trying to take a more critical stance. 2. You did well to identify some of the key limitations, for example the weaknesses in methodology.

Figure 7-1 Formative feedback sheet

Table 7.2 highlights wide variation in tutor practice for presentation of feedback and follow up. I was the only tutor to provide feedback in a format other than written comments, with my additional audio feedback commentary on each student's work. Only tutor G actually scheduled face-to-face meetings, but these took place in class. The number of students out of the total for each group who arranged to discuss feedback is shown in brackets. Only tutor D provided a model answer for her task, while only two tutors used exemplars to follow up the feedback.

Table 7:2 Modes of feedback on formative mid-term tasks

Tutor	Feedback Format	Face-to-face discussion	Whole class feedback	Post feedback exemplar
A	MCs+ end comments hw - no fb form	Invitation Questions after class	Yes	No
B	MCs Tailored fb form word processed	Invitation (1/ 19)	Yes	No
C	MCs + end comments hw- no fb form	Invitation (0)	Yes	No Worked example from student plan in class
D	Tailored fb form word processed	Invitation (0)	Yes	Model answer
E	MCs + tailored fb form hw-audio feedback (5 mins approx)	Invitation (2 / 20)	Yes	Exemplar of student work on summative assignment to follow
F	MCs + department summative form word processed	Invitation (0)	Yes	Exemplar of good student essay on this formative task
G	MCs + end comments hw-no fb form	Individual discussion in classroom session	N/A	No

(MCs = marginal comments; hw = handwritten)

7.3 Analysis of Feedback on the Formative Task

Analysis of the actual feedback comments were triangulated with students' interview in the formative assessment. Both written end comments and marginal comments on

texts will be considered, along with two samples of audio (podcast) feedback received by two of the participants. The frequency of types of comment and their distribution will be reported and the discussion will address the following research question:

RQ b) To what extent does the form and style of tutor written comments impact on the usability of this feedback for students?

The discussion will focus on the nature of comments relating to *critical analysis* and *depth of feedback*.

7.3.1 End versus marginal comments

In Chapter 3, I justified the focus of this study on written end comments rather than marginal comments, since marginal comments may not feature at all in much summative feedback. However, as the formative task involved the return to students of their texts with marginal comments by all tutors, it was possible and clearly useful to refer to them in these results.
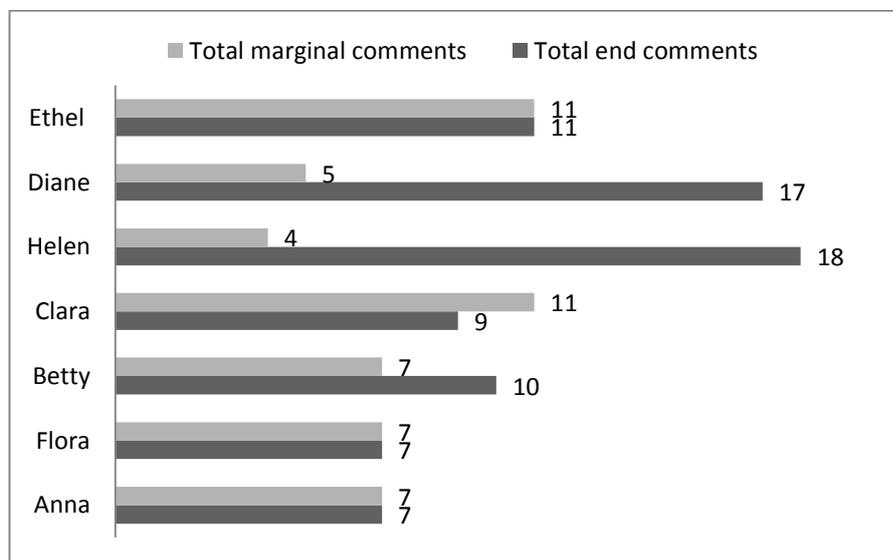
Figure 7-2 Comparison of end and marginal comments

The results suggest that tutors tended to give similar amounts of comment for both end and marginal comments in this formative task, or as Mutch (2003) observed, markers who write more feedback are also likely to write more on scripts. There are some exceptions to this, as figure 7.2 shows, with three or four times as many end

comments received by Helen and Diane, for example, but a more even split between the two types of feedback for the other students in the sample.

7.3.2 *Formative feedback text analysis-results*

The chart in figure 7.1 provides a comparison of the number of different types of comment received by seven students in their written end comments for the formative task (see coding categories in Section 3.6.1). *Critical analysis* and e*xplanation* categories were assigned after a second coding, with a further re-coding of comments to assign the positive / negative tone, so these are not added to the overall total of comments. There is a significant absence of any comments from the *developmental reflective questions*, or *informational content* categories.
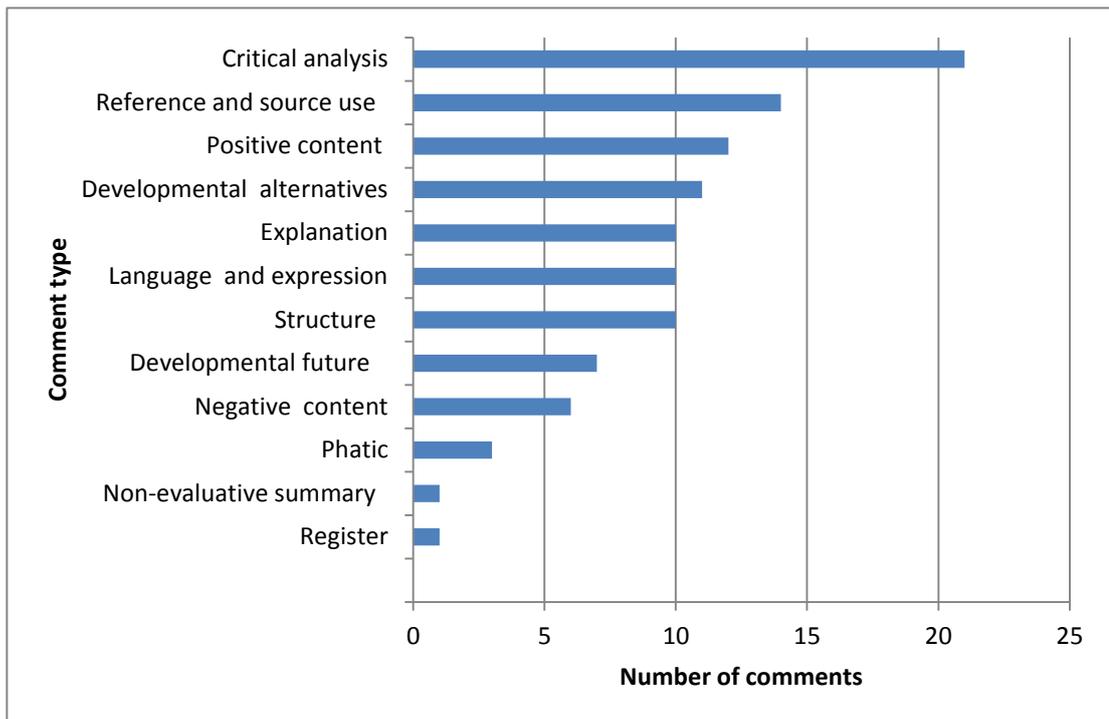
Figure 7-3 Formative task combined feedback

On the first coding, the categories of language (examples 1 and 2) and referencing (examples 3 and 4) received more comments than content categories.

> 1. Your language is very readable, but plural nouns for generalities (without the) need some work, and you could edit for these in future work. (Diane)

2. You need to pay greater attention to your choice of language, e.g. an overuse of idiomatic expressions and use of 'I' inappropriate in academic writing (Anna)
3. You do not always reference accurately (Ethel)
4. Take care to identify surnames (Flora)

The examples above show how such comments could be relatively specific (examples 1 and 4) or more general (examples 2 and 3). Example two was the only 'register' comment on academic style in the sample, and it is worth noting here how the issue of voice (See Section 2.3.5) was not picked up in this feedback. Five students also received at least one comment in the structure category (e.g., *Tell the reader in the introduction what you will argue:* Ethel), while only three out of a total of seventy four comments were categorised as phatic comments that function to maintain a relationship with the student (e.g., *In a strong assignment, there are only a few points to pick up here:* Diane).

Critical analysis (CA) comments from a second coding were significantly the most frequent of all categories (examples 5-7). These comments were typically framed as 'advice':

5. Try to include more critical comments (Ethel)
6. I would have liked to see greater analysis and assessment of the evidence used to support the writer's points (Anna)
7. Consider referencing more to support your points (Diane)

Only Flora did not receive such comments. Equally significant in terms of the low frequency count, were the total number of comments categorised as explanation. Less than a seventh of all comments in this sample were explanations relating to earlier indicative comments (e.g*., You could look at your use of 'it' and 'this', use 'this' when you refer back to ideas and whole clauses in the discourse*: Diane).

Less than a quarter of all comments were in the developmental categories. It is significant that only seven comments were categorised as future developmental, with only two students, Helen and Ethel, receiving five and two of these types of comment respectively. On the other hand, almost a sixth of total comments in the sample came in the alternative developmental category (example 6 above); these

comments were distributed fairly evenly across all participants, with only Flora again not receiving any comments in this category.

Unsurprisingly, comments on content were evenly distributed across the students, with only Flora not receiving this type of comment. Figure 7.1 shows that positive content comments were double the number of negative content comments. Analysis after re-coding of comments in all categories in terms of their tone (See Section 3.6.1) revealed a more nuanced picture, with far fewer encouraging versus critical comments. Table 7.3 below indicates that positive end comments were more in evidence than wholly negative comments. Positive comments in the margins were often simple indications such as 'good' or 'good point', while end comments often included aspects of understanding and criticality (examples 8-11). Negative end comments tended to focus on language and expression (examples 12-14):

8. You show some understanding of the central concepts (Helen)
9. You've displayed a good level of critical skills (Anna)
10. You provide clear evidence of trying to take a more critical stance (Betty)
11. You have a structure and develop a position (Clara)
12. You make confusing statements that don't make sense (Helen)
13. Pay attention to paragraphing
14. There are instances where meaning is unclear due to language used (Betty)

Marginal comments in the text were more often negative in tone and these negative comments often focused on the lack of referencing or language and expression (examples 15-18). Softened negative comments were also more frequent in marginal comments, often involving questions or couched in the language of advice (examples 19-22):

15. Inappropriate use of idiom here (Anna)
16. Ref- do not use first names of researchers (Betty)
17. Need a reference here (Clara)
18. Not clear! (Ethel)
19. How, and is this a valid concern (Betty)
20. How are these two ideas connected (Anna)
21. You should consider defining these terms earlier (Clara
22. You need to comment on the quality of evidence here (Diane)

Overall combined negative / softened negative comments were fairly similar for all students, suggesting that on balance the tone of end and marginal feedback comments was not one of encouragement and positive reinforcement, but rather

more diagnostic. The feedback tended to identify where requirements were not being met or improvement was needed, a finding similar to that of the preliminary study.

Table 7:3 Positive negative balance in formative feedback

Student	Wholly (P) positive	Wholly negative (N)	Softened negative (SN)	Combined negative (CN)	End and marginal CN comments
Anna	2 (1)	1 (4)	3 (5)	4 (9)	13
Betty	3 (2)	1 (5)	2 (5)	3 (10)	13
Clara	4 (2)	1 (5)	4 (3)	5 (8)	13
Diane	5 (1)	1 (1)	5 (5)	6 (6)	12
Ethel	3 (0)	2 (1)	5 (2)	7 (3)	10
Flora	1 (0)	1 (3)	2 (3)	3 (6)	9
Totals	18 (6)	7 (19)	16 (23)	28 (42)	70

(Numbers in brackets refer to marginal comments)

To conclude this section, a short extract from Flora's task with accompanying marginal comments is provided to further illustrate points made above. Corrections are indicated where words are scored through and comments or corrections are in bold within brackets:

Title: *Teaching takes the child's cognitive development into account* (537 words)
As ~~David R~~ Schaffer and ~~Katherine~~ Kipps (2007) ~~emphasis~~ [**emphasise**], "information about cognitive tools, skills and interpersonal relations are transmitted through intermediate social interaction" **[Page reference]**
Learning ~~knowledge is not equal~~ [**does not necessarily mean**]as absorbing knowledge passively.
Moreover, it is argued that each child understand questions in a different way to ask ~~questions appropriate to~~ **[needs better phrasing]** the child's level, the content must be changed…
Hence the main job of the teacher is to create environments to encourage children themselves to think critically and learn things through understanding rather than ~~the center of the class~~[**adopting a teacher-centred style**]

Figure 7-4 Flora formative feedback extracts

The marginal comments in Figure 7-4 tended to be corrections to language and phrasing and technicalities of referencing (words and phrases crossed out with comments and corrections within the brackets). In fact, of a total of eight substantive marginal comments,[36] three simply stated "page reference" where these were missing from quotes (Flora used substantial amounts of direct quotation in a short piece of writing, 68 words of her 500 word text) with another comment stating "use surnames here". Three end comments were written after the Reference list, two of these focusing again on technical referencing issues:

1. Good
2. Take care to identify surnames
3. After a direct quotation, you must give the page reference

The feedback and short extracts show how Flora, despite her pre-sessional work on referencing, was struggling with its technicalities. This feedback made no reference to criticality, but there were opportunities for positive reinforcement around Flora's approach to argument. An example of this was her clear thesis statement which she re-stated in her conclusion:

(from Introduction) In this essay, I will argue that the schools and teachers should consider individual differences among the students, attach importance to develop the autonomy in learning during the process of teaching and strengthen interaction among students.

(from Conclusion) In conclusion, the educational institutes and teachers should pay more attention to the students' individual differences, develop their ability of autonomy learning and cultivate the team spirit to share each other's' ideas.

The literature shows how students prefer praise with reasons rather than outright praise (Straub, 1997) but the bald end comment 'good' was not amplified in any way. Perhaps it reflected Flora's attempt to structure an argument, but it is significant that these strengths in the writing were not made explicit in marginal or end comment feedback.

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[36] There were a small number of direct corrections to language, such as 'that' crossed out and 'about' written above, with three examples of 'the' crossed out in the text.

7.3.3 Audio (podcast) feedback results and discussion

Two participants from my module group received audio, or podcast feedback in addition to written feedback. The audio recordings were transcribed and analysed for comparison with the written feedback. It is important to note that these two samples allow only limited scope for generalization, but results can be compared with findings in the literature. They are important for the experience of the participants in the study but also for an indication of the nature of the feedback that such technological responses can provide. Table 7.3 shows how comments were relatively evenly spread for both students. What stands out is the overall number of comments in this mode of delivery, with over twenty audio feedback comments for both participants, compared with an average of 7.5 written end comments for the sample of students as a whole. The higher incidence of audio comments as opposed to written feedback comments is also seen in figures 7.4 and 7.5, where each student's results are charted.

Table 7:4 Audio feedback

Type of comment	Clara	Diane
Phatic	3	3
Developmental alternatives	2	1
Developmental future	2	2
Structure	2	3
Language and expression	2	6
Reference and Source use	2	2
Positive content	4	4
Negative content	3	-
Critical analysis	8	4
Explanation	10	16
Total comments	28	34
Total words	860	800

Not all types of comment were more frequent in the audio feedback, however. For both participants there were more *developmental alternatives* in written than audio feedback. Comments in the critical analysis category were more than double for Clara in her audio feedback, but Diane, on the other hand, received two fewer CA comments in her podcast feedback.
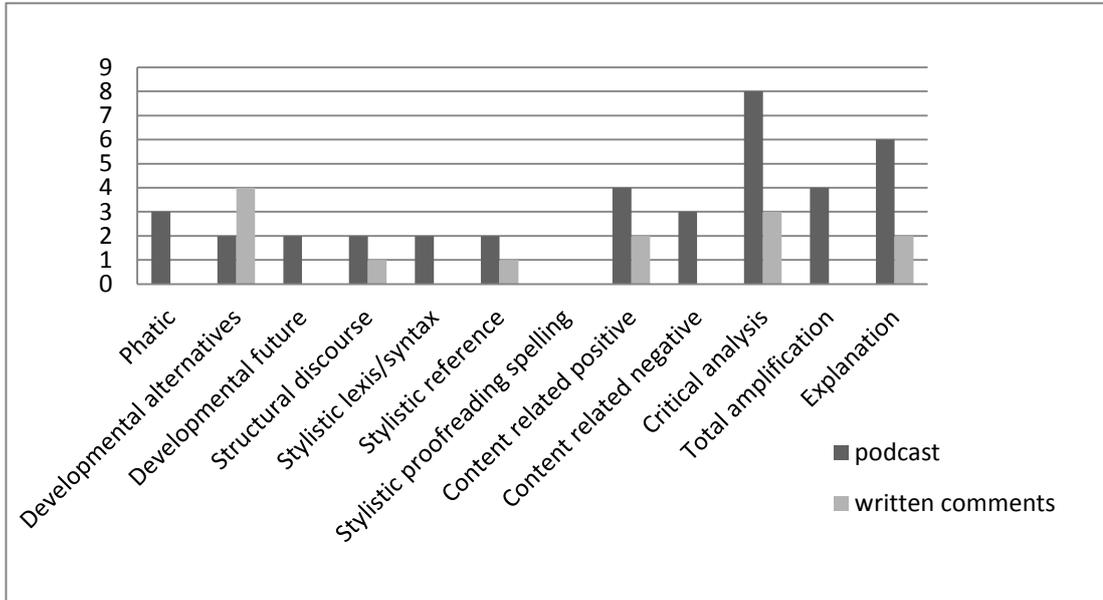
Figure 7-5 Clara - written versus audio feedback comments

The number of explanations stands out in both sets of audio feedback: between a third and a quarter of all audio comments. A number of explanations were in some way re-stated, and were not counted as comments in their own right. In fact, points which explain or summarise in a re-statement of the explanation account for 448/860 words in Clara's audio feedback, or approximately half of the spoken text, with a little less for Diane's audio feedback where 350/800 words fell into this category.
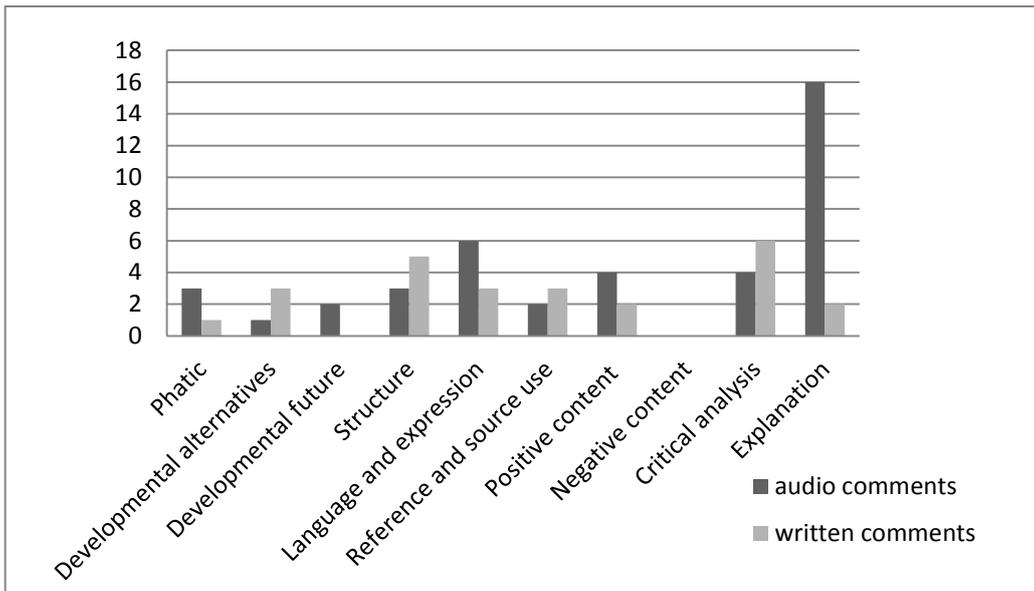
Figure 7-6 Diane -written versus audio feedback comments

The more frequent *developmental alternative* comments in written feedback, suggested that less task-specific advice was given in podcast feedback on what could have been done to improve performance in the task. At the same time, the more frequent incidence of *future developmental* comments in the podcasts implied that feed forward was more evident in the audio feedback. *Phatic* comments that might promote a more personal connection with the student were more frequent in the audio feedback, which again also featured a much higher frequency of comments explaining earlier indicative comments. While there was a combined total for all participants of only ten explanation comments in written feedback, twenty six explanation comments were recorded for only two students in the audio feedback. Despite the fact that this very small sample does not allow for generalisations, it indicated a feed forward potential for audio feedback that written feedback did not seem to provide.

Perhaps the finding above also reflects the nature of audio feedback in that it provides a clear invitation to the tutor to go beyond the simple indication of errors to give explanations of the rationale behind comments. In these two samples, there was a significant recap element, so rather than overloading students with too many feedback points, the podcast feedback provided focused explanations that were not evident in the written feedback.

Much of the existing research on audio feedback is on student perceptions of such feedback rather than actual analysis of the content (Savin-Baden, 2010), but the higher frequency of phatic and explanation comments, added to the recapping function in these podcasts support findings for the conversational nature of podcast feedback (France & Ribchester, 2008; Savin-Baden, 2010). An example from Diane's podcast illustrates this:

Tutor E: Often, 'this' is used at the beginning of the sentence to refer back to some kind of phrase, almost the whole sentence, anything more than one word is possible with 'this'. If you're using 'it' to refer back it needs to be one noun, one word to put in its place. So watch for things like that and the big thing in terms of language for you is the use of 'the'. You're using 'the' when you're talking about generalities, which are plurals, don't

> put 'the' in front of those, you're also using it in front of abstracts like 'research'. When you talk about the abstract noun like 'research' in general terms, so 'research has found that', not 'the research, we're not specifying it yet. If you write 'the research by McCarthy and Carter', then you're specifying it. So be careful with use of articles like that, it will help if you pick those up.

The personal conversational style is evident here and the encouraging tone of the comments also comes through, echoing earlier research findings (Ribchester & France, 2008) and it also connects with the value of personal response highlighted in the US composition literature (e.g., Reid, 1994; Straub, 1997).

Clara received more CA comments in her podcast feedback than her written feedback; a good example of such comments was the one below on supporting claims to avoid generalisations:

> Tutor E: So, when you make any kind of claims and I'll give you examples of this, you're looking at things for example your claim that you make certainly on page 5 at the top, you make generalisations about adult learners. To take an example, it's a good idea this because it is about context when you want to teach the kind of written and spoken grammar rules, but of course there are many different kinds of adult learners, you could have a group of adult learners who need to work, for example, who are doing an academic course-you wouldn't teach spoken English, but if they're working in a kind of business environment, if they're doing English language for business but it's more functional for work in a hotel for example, you might very much want to focus on it. So, I think you made a very big statement there which didn't allow for other contexts and other situations and that's where you've got to be careful.

By making reference to points in the student text, I was able to go into detail about how a specific claim could be qualified. Despite this explanation, it is significant that Clara felt it necessary to meet me to check her understanding of the feedback (see Section 8.4.4), a further indication of the way CAW poses problems for these international students, but perhaps also an indication that podcast feedback is not a substitute for discussion, though it can encourage dialogue around feedback.

The sheer number of words used above (165) to explain how to qualify claims in a particular context would be impractical in written feedback, but audio feedback makes such detailed explanations possible. The two examples given above show that audio feedback can engage with stylistic and language issues and perhaps

more importantly with issues of criticality. Even given the small sample involved, the conclusion is that audio feedback, by its nature can be potentially richer than written feedback in feed forward for students[37] and it may be a way of compensating for lack of face-to face dialogue (Jonsson, 2012).

7.3.4   Discussion - analysis of written feedback

The frequent comments justifying the mark reported in other studies (Ivanič, Clark, & Rimmershaw, 2000) were absent in this feedback, but unlike the formative feedback reported in the preliminary study (see Section 5.4.2) this is not surprising, since a specific mark was only given by one tutor. Comparisons with the literature are not easy to make and may not always be appropriate given this small sample. However, it is worth noting that in Hyatt's (2005) study of 600 feedback scripts for graduates in Politics, he found that content comments were most frequent (31.8%), followed by stylistic (27.8%) and developmental (23.5%) comments. In this formative feedback stage, stylistic comments (reference and language and expression categories) were most frequent (32.4%) with little to separate content (25.6%) and developmental comments (24.3%) in the frequency count. Hyatt's sample was almost certainly based on summative feedback, so caution is required when making direct comparisons.

The critical analytical category was assigned to more comments than any other category in this sample and aspects of CAW tended to be prioritised by tutors and students in terms of feed forward points for future work (see Section 7.5 above). Similar to earlier findings (e.g., Hyatt, 2005; Mutch, 2003), the balance of praise on 'content' comments was more positive than overtly negative, with twice as many positive to negative content comments, but analysis that included combined softened negative comments indicated a more negative tone in the overall feedback. In this study developmental future comments were much less frequent than developmental alternatives (task focused feedback). In this respect, tutors can only mark what is in front of them, and if there is a need to prioritise and avoid overload, they may find it

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[37] In the year following this data collection I began to use screencast feedback in the same MATESOL module on the basis that the video element in screencasts enhances the audio commentary (See Section 2.6.3). I carried out action research with my module group and presented this work at two conferences in summer 2011.

easier to focus on what the student might have done or could have done in the assignment rather than looking forward to future tasks.

Given that this feedback was the first that students received on their taught Master's programme, the high frequency of comments on language and referencing is not surprising. Tutors discussed the task as giving practice in producing a "good essay" and the content on which these tasks were based did not necessarily feature in later summative titles. Students were also not able to use comments to revise the task, so this may have influenced the balance of comments going to generic skills rather than content. The point was made by Paul in the preliminary study that he felt he was being trained in how to write, not in what to write.

Comments on language were relatively more frequent than those on content, so command of English is clearly relevant here. Preliminary study findings indicated that language could be a source of difficulty even for students with higher scores than the IELTS 6.0 or 6.5 that these students held on entry to their programme. The question that arises, however, is whether the marked focus on stylistic and language issues in the written feedback was likely to give students the wrong impression about the way they would be marked in later summative assessments. In their think aloud study of twelve lecturers marking according to assessment criteria, Bloxham, Boyd and Orr (2011) concluded that surface features did not figure in judgements on grades in summative marking. They referred to surface features as:

> …apparently technical and relatively minor tasks that the student had or had not done correctly, including spelling, punctuation, grammar and citation as well as presentation. (p. 666)

The authors of that study suggested that a focus on such surface features "may give students an inappropriate picture of their importance in achieving high grades" (2011, p.668). In Flora's case, her feedback focused on technical and language issues, but she expressed a wish for more feedback on 'structure' which relates to content and, by implication, argument.

The Bloxham study did not report exclusively on the work of international students, and in the case of these students it could be argued that grammar takes on increased importance when it obscures meaning, as a number of comments in

formative feedback suggested. The importance of citation in terms of developing an argument in 'documented essays' was put forward in Section 2.3.4, so such stylistic features were arguably not 'minor' at this formative feedback stage, and in relation to the development of CAW. Focus on stylistic elements, however, tends to background content, with content likely to assume a higher importance in summative assessment.

Hyatt (2005) called for "...introducing a reflexive explanatory element to ... feedback commentary", as a form of disciplinary induction and his categories of *reflective questions* and *informational content* could arguably be viewed to function in this way. Such comments have a similar quality to the reader response style 'facilitative' comments recommended in composition literature in the US for feedback on drafts (e.g., Straub, 1997). However, this formative feedback was on finished products and no comments were recorded in these categories. It is also possible that the early timing of this formative feedback explains why such reflexive comments were absent. Hyatt viewed reflective comments as inducting students into the discipline, but perhaps the formative nature of the tasks and the fact that students were only a few weeks into their taught programme had some bearing on the absence of such comments.

7.4 Impact of Task and Tutor approach

The importance of understanding formative assessment in the context in which it takes place is clearly evidenced from the results above. Tutors employed different strategies, integrating the tasks and feedback in different ways in their module teaching, with the nature of the formative tasks having a key influence on the feedback they provided. Variable feedback practices are well documented in the literature (Carless, 2006; Juwah et al., 2004; Rust et al., 2005) and it is not surprising to find that feedback practices here varied widely, even within the same institution and department. The next section explores the factors leading to this variation in more depth, considering the impact of such variation on engagement with feedback and upon the development of critical analytical writing.

7.4.1   Task design: formative-summative alignment

Chapter 2 discussed arguments for iterative submission and opportunities to revise
the same or at least a very similar task, in order for feedback to be truly effective
(Bailey & Vardi, 1999; Vardi, 2011). As with formative assessment in the
preliminary study, none of the tasks reported on here allowed for a cycle of
submission-feedback-revision. Only in one case was the formative task designed to
allow revision of a piece of work that might appear in the final summative
assessment. Modular systems in Higher Education are not seen to be conducive to
effective feedback practices (Juwah et al., 2004; Rust et al., 2005; Taras, 2010) and
arguably the nine-week timeframe for these modules allowed little time for such an
iterative writing process, with little scope for more than one piece of substantial
written feedback mid-course.

Four of the tasks were short essays attempting to mirror far longer
assignments, but such essays of 500-1000 words do not allow for detailed
argumentation. It is clear, however, that task design was often informed by tutors'
conscious attempts to provide specific opportunities for feed forward. At the same
time, decisions relating to specific strategies in formative assessment had specific
impacts on task alignment. Tutor C set a title which involved defining a central
concept in her module, with the expectation that students would benefit from work
on this specific task which could be used again in the summative assignment.
However, defining concepts is only one important aspect of developing an argument
in a summative assignment task. Length may be a factor here, as defining a complex
concept is part of a strategy in developing a longer argument, but if a short formative
task were devoted to discussion around definitions, it would leave little opportunity
to construct a complete argument in the task.

Tutors choosing to set critical reviews recognized the need to develop
students' ability to question research aims, methods and reported outcomes. They
were laudably addressing the need to develop critical thinking and writing skills. As
tutor B suggested, the aim was to provide "...something short….to cover a range of
assignment types", and as tutor D suggested, the demands of 'being critical' were the

main focus; partly because of this, a decision was made not to make demands in terms of referencing:

> BS: What other reading are they expected to do and what other referencing are they expected to do apart from the article they're summarizing?
>
> TD: My hope is that they will link what they read in this article to other things that they have read...it's the first time that many of them have written something in English, they have a lot going on. I don't make that a pre-requisite. It's a desire not a must. I think some of them struggle initially just to get the idea of what is a summary, what does it mean to be critical, so I don't want to push them, like bring too many elements into it if they're not able to deal with that.

The importance of synthesising from multiple sources in critical academic writing was referred to in Chapter 2 (Alexander, Spencer, & Argent, 2008; Andrews, 2007; Groom, 2000; Wingate, 2012) and the grade descriptors in assessment criteria make clear reference to this:

> ii) Outstanding selection from a wide, relevant and innovative range of perspectives and sources;
> (iii) Sources very well-integrated into the overall argument
>
> (Extract from Education marking criteria: Distinction band 70-79)

In the feedback literature, Carless (2006) found that referencing comments were valued by students for their feed forward function. The absence of a referencing requirement in the present study tasks meant that students were not required to synthesize from sources, missing out on practice with the challenging aspects of quotation, paraphrase and technical referencing required for successful CAW. Where tasks required synthesizing from sources, the need for a small number of references was made clear to students, but again, making this task 'manageable' was at the expense of close replication of the summative assignments.

7.4.2 Focus on Criteria

The central role of marking criteria in formative assessment was outlined in Chapter 2 (e.g., Burke & Pieterich, 2010; Price, Handley, and O'Donovan 2008; Sadler, 1989, 2010), and also central to the notion of self-regulated learning which involves developing an understanding of the criteria students are marked against (see Section 2.5.5). The marking criteria used in Education in the year of data collection were

produced and agreed by an assessment working group in 2007 and implemented in the year before this study. According to tutor F who had been involved in the group, the criteria were based on a number of sources: the then current criteria in the department were used with reference to criteria documents from a number of programmes and universities. Tutor F did not recall any reliance on specific "theoretical or conceptual background", but decisions were made based on aligning criteria with what institutions of a similar standing were doing.

In the Carless study of student and tutor perceptions of feedback in Hong Kong universities (2006), the five tutors interviewed were in agreement that criteria were difficult to decode and did not report carrying out activities to help decode them. In a more recent UK study on student transition from school to university, none of the ten university tutors interviewed fore-grounded explicit criteria though in most cases it was available (Beaumont, O'Doherty, & Shannon, 2011). In the present case, the nature of the tasks set and the choice of format to deliver the feedback were arguably responsible for some of this variation, as will be discussed below.

For one tutor, criteria were deliberately not given a strong focus:

> BS: And what about criteria for, you know, the actual essay, the marking criteria, do you go through that with them in any way?
> TC: No. I say to them it's a bit of a practice, it'll give me an opportunity to give you some positive constructive feedback…. But I say things like... you know, obviously I'd like to see it organised and good English and show that you understand the basic ideas about it, but that's about it.

This approach seemed to deliberately play down the importance of the task, stressing 'basic ideas' and 'English language'. However, tutor F's lack of focus on marking criteria did not appear to be completely deliberate:

> BS: Did you make any reference to the departmental, kind of, criteria for assignments or not, or would you keep that, sort of, separate?
> TF: I didn't this year. I didn't mention anything about the actual departmental criteria... this assignment is slightly different because it serves a difference purpose. But, yes, I suppose, no, I didn't put anything in writing, it was kind of, I just assumed that they would have access to that and that, if they were concerned they would check the criteria.

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The tutor's justification for not focusing on marking criteria referred to the different purpose of formative as opposed to summative assessment, but also revealed her assumption that it was the students' responsibility to look at the criteria.

The three critical review tasks were not standard assignments or essays, and understandably used different criteria from those in the Department marking guide. A distinction between 'standards' and 'criteria' can be made here; different criteria may be set for individual tasks but the official department criteria represent the 'standards' recognised across all modules and tasks (Bloxham et al., 2011). One might argue that formative tasks should have focused on the official marking criteria for summative assignments in order to develop an understanding of standards, but such an argument is not supported by the literature (see Section 2.5.5) which shows that marking criteria lack transparency, and demonstrates variability in the way tutors engage with criteria.

The decision by tutors B, D and E to create a specific formative feedback form was based on recognition that criteria could be broken down and made more explicit for students to work towards. This was a response to the commonly stated view of the difficulty involved in making assessment criteria explicit, verbally or in documentation (Juwah et al., 2004; Rust et al., 2005), but also a recognition that assessment criteria relate closely to individual tasks. As Bloxham, Boyd and Orr (2011) suggest, however, where tutors ignore published criteria or choose not to use them "…it may be a reasonable response to the acknowledged difficulty of working with predetermined criteria and statements of standards" (p.664). When interviewed myself, I made my rationale clear:

> I: Did you go through the criteria with them?
> TE: Yeah. What I use for this is my own design of form. I wanted a form that would focus much more on the points and not be too disparate and therefore help the student more. Also I use this form in conjunction with audio feedback. So I put up the form, I go through it with them and say, look, these are the criteria I'll be marking you against.

The approach described above, also that of tutors B and D, was to help students interpret the abstract criteria in the student handbooks. An example of the tailored feedback form is provided in Section 7.2. Argument and analysis were made more concrete in the tailored form, under the headings *addressing the question, engaging*

with content and *claims supported with evidence.* Official grade descriptors in the handbook employ phrases such as "identify 'excellent argument of the highest academic quality. Drawing students' attention to supporting claims was an attempt to help them to create their arguments, while also stressing the need to address the question aimed at guiding students away from simply writing descriptively around a topic.

7.4.3   Use of exemplars

The assessment for learning literature frequently discusses the role of exemplars in making standards explicit (Handley & Williams, 2011; O'Donovan, Price, & Rust, 2004; Sadler, 2010). In preparation for the present task, only one short (300 word) tutor written exemplar was used, but tutors B and D in a study skills workshop made available on the VLE an exemplar of a complete student assignment from a second term module. Without provision for student discussion with tutors and peers, however, free-standing exemplars such as this may be arguably of limited value, proving difficult for students to access and use (Hendry, Bromberger, & Armstrong, 2011).

Follow ups in class to the written feedback involved variable use of exemplars in different forms: tutor F used a good essay from her formative tasks as an exemplar, and tutor D provided a 'model answer' to the formative task, while I provided an exemplar of the summative assignment from a previous cohort. Tutor C also worked through one of her students' outline plans in the final session of the module, to help make explicit aspects of structure and content organisation for the summative assignment. While there is evidence here that some importance was given to post-submission activities supporting the transfer from tacit to explicit knowledge around standards and criteria (see O'Donovan et al., 2004), these activities were used inconsistently and variably. Students' supervisors were also available to discuss outlines of the summative task that followed the formative feedback, a topic that will be covered in Chapter 8.

7.5 Delivery of Formative Feedback

This section deals briefly with *amount*, *timing* and *attention to feedback*, and highlights the way this feedback event brings into focus arguments around *grading in formative feedback*. The section then explores tutor and student behaviour relating to *discussion of feedback*. I conclude with a discussion of the way tutors intended feed forward points were understood by students.

7.5.1   Perceptions of feedback: amount timing and attention

Table 7.5 indicates that the students were generally satisfied with both timing and delivery of the formative feedback - only one student expressed any dissatisfaction with the amount of feedback given, and this should be balanced against three responses that expressed a high level of satisfaction.

Table 7:5 Student perceptions and responses to feedback delivery

Themes	Anna	Betty	Clara	Diane	Ethel	Flora	Helen
Timing Satisfied ?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Amount VS-very satisfied S-satisfied US-unsatisfied	VS	VS	VS	S	S	US	S
Read the feedback	N/A	4/5	many times	3 /4	1	3	2
Preference for grade	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Perception of feed forward	50%	90%	Most	All	All	All	All
Face-to-face discussion I= intended Y= took place N= not sought	Y	I	Y	I	I	I	I

Table 7.5 shows relatively high attention to feedback; five students reported reading their feedback at least three times and two of these indicated that they read it four or more times. Only one student reported reading the feedback once only. It

should be noted that in Anna's case, she had only received her feedback on the morning before the interview, so N/A is recorded in the table.

The amount of feedback was seen as a problem by Flora, as she described it as 'only adequate', and she expressed a desire for more feedback in marginal comments that indicated where she had to improve:

> BS: Yeah. So you like to see, what you're saying is you like to see a lot of indications in the text, rather than fewer indications?
> Flora: If I made a mistake I am glad to find some mistakes, because you know If I know the mistakes this time and maybe I will, do not make the same mistake the next time. (F: FT)

The question of what amount of feedback is necessary to be effective will be returned to below in discussing feed forward.

Tutor complaints that students do not pay attention to feedback comments have been noted in the literature (e.g., Bailey & Garner, 2010; Carless, 2006) but students' reported close attention to feedback here should be considered with a certain amount of caution. Helen admitted that she had looked at the feedback a second time because she knew she would discuss it in the interview, clear evidence of the effect that participation in a research project such as this can have on participant behaviour. It is not possible to know the extent to which participation in the project motivated students to attend to their feedback, but the fact of having to discuss it with a member of staff on the programme is likely to have had some influence.

When Ethel said she had only read her feedback once, she also indicated that she was unhappy with her work, relating this to her reluctance to engage with her feedback. She hinted at a deeper problem of engaging with errors to improve her work:

> Ethel: No I think that's a very bad habit but I always, just like myself I really don't like to look back at my assignment after I finished it…… I don't know I just, maybe I just don't want to face my mistakes really.

The theme of engagement is returned to at the summative feedback stage in the next chapter.

7.5.2 *Grades in formative feedback*

Table 7.5 shows how student preference for grades was divided, matching a degree of uncertainty among tutors regarding their effectiveness in formative feedback. Some have argued against standard approaches, stating that grades can have a formative function (e.g., Elbow, 1993, cited in Burke & Pieterich, 2010). Indeed, in a recent study on student transition to university the vast majority of undergraduates interviewed expressed a desire that feedback should include a grade as a standard indicator (Beaumont et al., 2011).

Carless (2006), in particular, has argued that not giving grades is a way of avoiding stigma and negative effect on low achieving students. Tutor C also voiced such a concern, but added her view that grades were inappropriate for the formative task she set:

> TC: You know, … sometimes it's better to get that feel if you get that number… for this particular task I just thought it's a bit inappropriate because, you know, it's a thousand words, it's not the full assignment so you can't really give them a number for it. And I also think it's such an early stage in the module and the year that if you give them something which is a firm number it's only going to be not only inappropriate so you couldn't really do it anyway but if you were to do that they might be, you know, very off-putting to some people. (P2F)

I also shared these views, stating in my interview, that "... students should be focussing on the comments and on improving various aspects of their work, rather than looking at a mark and therefore being turned off by it". However, in reference to the preliminary study, I also suggested that students' reaction to grades could also be in inverse relation to that suggested above:

> TE: …I could see …with Archaeology students only last year that where students got an average to good mark, they were very often less, much less inclined to want to engage with the feedback. There was a sort of tendency to say, that was okay, so I don't need to worry about that….certainly, when students got poor marks, that often galvanised them to look more closely at it. (P2F)

A key point for both studies is that the student participants were used to receiving grades and not used to this type of formative assessment. Indeed, in a recent study of Chinese students on a UK Master's programme, many participants reported receiving only grades in China with no detailed feedback (Tian, 2008). Betty continued to value grades, and referred to this assessment culture:

> BS: Hmmm. But … so just going back, you've already said yeah the feedback is more important than a mark I think you made that clear, but you'd still quite like the mark you say?
>
> Betty: Yeah, because you know we are used to get mark when I was in China you know, so marks can decide students' maybe future or something like that. (B: FT)

Only tutor F gave a specific grade for her formative task, and the participant who received this grade welcomed it. Tutor F gave her rationale for this:

> TF: I really see it as a map, as a road map. So, for example, you can tell somebody how to get from A to B, or how they got from A to B. With marks, and especially if you have a grading scale, it's like on a road map; somebody says, well you are on A3 on page 62/63, and they go and they see and they say, okay, here is A, here is B and I'm here, and this is what I need to do, meaning they read the grade descriptors for the lowest and the highest, see where they are, and they can, sort of, based on that infer what it is they still need to do. (P2F)

Tutor F seemed to believe that grades show students, in the words of Hattie and Timperley, "how they are going" and "where they are going" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), but she stated that it depended on their understanding of the grade descriptors, which she did not focus on in class. Other tutors' rationale for not giving grades was based on the fact that it would not be appropriate for the type of task involved, but tutor B, for example, also admitted to being in "two minds" about this, stating that "...there was some logic to giving [students] a grade that helps to show them where they stand".

Flora was the only participant totally convinced about the value of not receiving a grade, stating "some students need encouragement and maybe they will do better in the next time…if they not get the bad mark". Ethel, on the other hand, commented that pressure from a poor grade helped students to improve. Anna concurred with this view, stating that she would have felt more "stressed…and put more effort into writing .." had the tutor told her she was grading the work. Later, Ethel reported her concern that her own assignment was "terrible" stating "… actually I feel it is terrible and I didn't get a mark so I don't know how terrible it is". Diane, while recognizing that the most important thing was "the feedback, not the marks…", also felt that tutors should give "scores and marks…" as they might help them [students] to become "….more clear about criteria and marking."

The findings here provide evidence of a more complex relationship between grades and motivation than is often found in the literature, and as in the preliminary study, giving poor grades did not necessarily de-motivate participants. Students need to know if they are under performing and it may be that grades and marks are just as effective as comments in providing this information. Grades also featured prominently in the experience of students in both the preliminary and main studies, and in the absence of guidance on how to use formative feedback, these students looked to grades to inform them of the gap between tutor expectations and their performance.

7.5.3   *Discussion: continuing a dialogue*

Table 7.5 shows that few students discussed their feedback, despite open invitations to do so. The timing of the interviews a few days after feedback comments had been returned may have influenced this result, but one might also expect that students with issues to address would act quickly to clarify them. According to tutors, take up of feedback meetings was variable. Tutor D reported that up to half of her students typically took up invitations to discuss feedback, tutor B expected few of her students to do so, while tutor A stated that she did not openly encourage students to arrange such meetings:

> BS: Yeah, so you leave it open to the students if they want to approach you,
> but you're not effectively encouraging them to come and...?
> TA: That's right, I mean out of a group of 17 if more than one person came
> I'd be surprised. (TA:F)

In my response to the question of feedback discussion, I made the point that scheduling meetings was not viable, giving this as reason for adopting audio feedback:

> I: So you welcome for the students to contact you in whatever way?
> TE: I will encourage them in the sense that I say, I'm very happy to do it, but
> I don't fix up meetings. Part of the point of the audio feedback
> actually… recognition that if I'm not going to fit them into… all 17 of
> them into 10 minute, 15 minute… then this is going some way to
> providing some more of that kind of in-depth one-to-one, if you like. I
> see it as some way kind of a way of recognising that I'm not doing that
> and giving them a bit more kind of personal attention....(TE:F)

One of the key advantages of audio feedback is the opportunity it provides for personalisation of feedback (France, & Ribchester, 2008; Savin-Baden, 2010), and a

higher number of phatic comments, recapping and explanation was highlighted in Section 7.3.3 above.

Tutor B had omitted to fill in comments in her feedback grid for one student so she arranged to see her to rectify the situation. Tutor B found that "... it needed that half hour to establish she was interpreting [the feedback] the way I wanted her to", and then went on to support my earlier point about formally scheduling meetings:

> TB: Essentially we should be doing one-to-one with them, but they're given the opportunity, they don't take it up.....if they did all take it up, we couldn't cope. (P2F)

The latter point may be particularly relevant, as with larger cohorts and module groups, tutors face obvious constraints on their time. In this context, few students in the module groups were likely to be supervisees of the tutors involved, meaning that such discussions could not be carried out within the time for supervision.

The importance of students' prior experience of feedback in undergraduate study in China was referred to in the previous section. When asked to compare her formative feedback experience with her previous experience, Clara stated that "…in China teacher cannot just give you the feedback and then to talk to you in person, no they can't." Once again, the Chinese international graduate student prior experience is at odds with that of the home undergraduate students who feature in the majority of feedback studies. As Beaumont et al. (2011) highlight in their study, home students, used to regular face-to-face feedback discussions with teachers, were dissatisfied with university feedback practices which did not provide such opportunities. The students in the present study, however, had no expectation of face-to-face discussion of feedback, which may help to explain their lack of take up of opportunities when they were available.

Clara along with Diane, received audio feedback in addition to written feedback. She explained how she had clarified a point relating to giving evidence to support claims:

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> I: Could you tell me a bit more why, I mean was it for example something you couldn't hear or couldn't read? Was it something that … language you didn't understand?
>
> Clara: Yes, I remember that one of my weak points Bill pointed out there is some generalisation and materials that cannot support claims … they're not supported, so this quite confused me. So at that time I don't know what's the meaning. But after seeing Bill talk face-to-face I now understand, yes. (C: FT)

On the basis of her positive experience in clarifying her understanding of her feedback, Clara advised several friends to take up the opportunity to discuss feedback. It is significant that a student receiving more detailed feedback than many in the study should still seek to clarify issues with her tutor. According to Clara, her friends had points of confusion from my feedback that they needed to clarify, but had not wanted to seek a meeting. Diane did not arrange a feedback meeting with me, but it emerged from her interview that she had not understood some marginal comments in the form of symbols for grammatical or sentence-level correction. More significantly, Diane also reported a problem in understanding the handwriting, a problem that emerged for three other students in these interviews.

Poor handwriting in delivery of feedback is reported in studies of feedback in the literature (e,g., Carless, 2006; Lea & Street, 1998, Robinson, et. al., 2013). Five of the seven tutors involved in this feedback event handwrote their end comments and all tutors handwrote marginal comments. Like Diane, Ethel reported how she had asked a friend to help her decipher handwriting:

> Ethel: Yeah the handwriting, it's just very difficult for me to read and after class I just invite one of my roommate and we just worked together to try to figure out what all these are so I think we just did once.
>
> BS: Right but you were able to, you think you understood the comments when you read them carefully?
>
> Ethel: Yes, yes, yes. (E: FT)

Ethel confirmed that she had succeeded eventually in understanding the handwriting, and for this reason she may have felt it was not worth arranging a formal meeting.

7.6 Feed forward: Linking Tutor Intention with Student Understanding

Students were asked to estimate how much of the formative feedback they received was 'feed forward', based on a standard definition of 'feed forward' as any feedback comments that can help improve future work. Table 7.3 showed that half of the students perceived all the feedback comments received to be feed forward, with three others responding that "most", "a lot" or "ninety percent" of the comments were. Only Anna did not share this high estimation of feed forward.

In the main study I attempted to connect tutor intentions and student responses over successive feedback events. In the interview corresponding to the formative feedback, tutors were asked to identify and prioritize three main points they intended the student to take from their feedback. Table 7.6 shows the main points prioritized by each tutor, with Anna's tutor identifying two main points only.

Table 7:6 Prioritising feed forward points

	Main point	**Secondary point**	**Third point**
Anna	Further explanation to support argument	Voice –use of 'I' and idioms	
Betty	Structuring and writing a summary	Vocabulary and language issues	More references and wider reading
Clara	Critical thinking	Use of appropriate material as supporting evidence	Language, academic style
Diane	Referencing for support and evidence	Grammar and cohesion 'it' vs 'this'	Overuse of articles
Ethel	Need to be more critical	Improving introductions	Improving structure
Flora	Improving paraphrasing	Referencing issues, first names/alphabetical order	Referencing issues, page numbers for quotations
Helen	Expressing statements more clearly	Connecting points to make argument more logical and coherent	Explaining and defining concepts

(shaded cells= CA)

Table 7.6 shows that almost a third of all points selected related to critical analysis, with five of seven students identifying such points at the highest level of importance, and two students selecting them as their second main points. A fifth of the points selected referred directly to referencing and paraphrasing issues, with three of these appearing as the most important main points. Language points were all in second or third place, with two relating to voice and academic style.

Tutor intentions and student understanding aligned strongly in this stage, perhaps unsurprisingly, given that three students received a form which specified three points 'to work on', while the official department feedback form used by tutor F contained a section on 'Targets for Improvement'. The few cases of discrepancies between tutor intention and student understanding of feed forward priorities will be examined below.

7.6.1 Priorities in feedback versus overload

Tutor C initially identified argument, structure and language in that order as the main points for Ethel to take from her feedback. Later in her interview, however, she admitted to missing an example of poor referencing where a first name was used rather than a surname, and she raised the issue of overload:

> TC: I noticed, oh look she thinks that this writer's surname is Derek and it's not it's his first...
> BS: It's very common...
> TC: Yeah a Chinese student. But, you know, I don't think... I didn't circle that because I was thinking don't overload them but I feel probably I should have because that would have been helpful to her. But, yeah I'm not going to pick up everything. (P2F)

Ethel identified "being more critical" as the main feedback point, followed by the need to improve her introduction and her structure, arguably higher order issues than referencing. Tutor C went on to highlight the difficulty tutors face in focusing their feedback for optimum guidance:

> TC: The way I did it, I didn't know which one you were going to do it from, which one we were going to be talking about. So what you've got there is not some oh well I've highlighted this particular person, you know, when I look at it again I think I could have shaped that a bit better.
>
> TC: I've put at the end of it, finally, make sure you always use speech marks when quoting, really that should have come up here because this is all

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about, you know, you don't reference accurately. You see that can come there, then you get the substance of this is the guidance and the business about making an argument, critical comments etc. And then it should have finished with that, you know the sandwich approach of... and you can do this and it leads forward. So I think I'm sort of reasonably happy with that feedback but it could have been better. (P2F)

Tutor C is eager to point out that she did not specially prepare this feedback, but in discussing her 'feedback sandwich' she demonstrated that there could be a number of feed forward elements in any given piece of feedback, and difficult choices must be made about what to include or omit from feedback, a point explored further below.

7.6.2   Prioritizing feedback using feedback sheets

From tutor A's feedback, Flora indicated that paraphrasing was the most important point to work on (see table 7.4).

> Flora: I think paraphrase in my opinion is the most thing. It's more important than the reference, because I think this ability should take longer time to improve. However, the references section only follow the guidelines of my handbook, and I correct it immediately, I think. (F: F)

However, Tutor A discussed referencing issues as the principal points for feed forward:

> TA: On the last page here I've got two comments, firstly 'take care to identify surnames', because they're confused about what is a first name and what is a surname. And the second point was the need to give a page reference at the end of a direct quotation, so those are the two central things. But of course, if you look at my annotations there's little things that are implicit … there's a couple of things that I've annotated in the actual text that sort of indicates that there's certain things about her use of grammar that aren't quite right. (TA: F)

Tutor A's point highlights the limitation of written feedback to give clear explanations in a concisely worded manner. Although not asked directly about the amount of feedback she gave, tutor A referred to the problem of amplifying feedback comments:

> TA: I would hope that the sort of degree of detail that I give here conveys the concerns that I've got. I think there is a problem with more detailed annotation which is that if you take something like 'the centre of the class', I mean I could write quite a lot about that … And you can easily have sort of three or four lines which actually look as though something's

> gone completely wrong and there's a major concern here, yet the
> concern's quite a minor one, which is that she just used one set of words
> when another set would have made it clear. So I don't want to make
> them over anxious by seeing that I'm writing too much. (TA:F)

In tutor A's first extract above, she mentions a number of issues that were "implicit", returning to this point again when probed to identify a third main point:

> TA: I'd probably say that there are some sentences that aren't clear, so she
>   needs to think a little bit more carefully about whether her use of English
>   in conveying the meaning that she intends for some sentences needs to be
>   improved.
> BS: Okay and of those three what would be the most important do you think
>   or is it just really not possible to -?
> TA: Well funnily enough I'd say of those three it's the last one and it's the
>   one I haven't actually listed at the end, I've left it implicit. (P2F)

Only on reflection did tutor A realize that she would have liked to highlight the need to work on language and expression as the most important feed forward point, which in the event, was left implicit. This example points again to the challenge involved in writing clear, usable feedback. Perhaps there is an argument here for the use of feedback forms. Tutor A handwrote her end comments on the final page of the student script, but arguably use of the summative form containing a section on 'targets for improvement' might have helped focus on a clearer prioritization of points in the same way that the form used by tutors B, D and E structured feedback response around three positive and three 'to work on' points. In sum, Flora's three feed forward comments did not focus on CA or content, but technical and language issues; the implications of this feedback will be picked up in the next chapter.

7.7 Summary of Conclusions

This chapter has looked at one formative feedback event in detail, and as in the preliminary study, a key issue that emerged was the participants' lack of background in academic writing and lack of experience of detailed written feedback. Findings relating to inconsistent practice in formative feedback echo those in the recent literature (especially Bailey & Garner, 2010; Beaumont et al., 2011; Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Robson, Leat, Wall & Lofthouse, 2013; Tuck, 2011). I have made a case in this chapter for understanding feedback in context, something often missing from published feedback studies which tend to be based on summative feedback and rarely link tutor intentions and student responses.

The feedback considered in this chapter also needs to be understood in relation to other formative teaching events that surrounded it. Post-submission discussion and tutor-led discussion of feedback was variable, as was use of exemplars, with no mention of peer marking activities at this stage. These various pre-submission activities serve to make explicit the tacit knowledge relating to CAW, and should be considered alongside the feedback itself when attempting to understand its impact on student writing.

Despite important caveats regarding the influence of insider research and the interview context, tutor–student power imbalance in interviews did not prevent some frank and honest responses. Dissatisfaction with three week delays in receiving feedback was expressed, as were criticisms of a lack of grades, or impenetrable handwriting. For these international graduate students, their low expectations of feedback could be linked to the generally positive views they expressed on feed forward and usability. Prior experience of receiving little more than a grade clearly contributed to students' demands for grades in formative feedback.

Analysis of this sample of formative feedback also showed that it was predominantly directive, with an absence of reflective comments engaging with student content. Some participants received as many comments on the margins of their text as in their end comments, but many end comments and all marginal comments were handwritten, creating a clear problem for half of the participants who reported difficulties understanding this handwriting. International students are likely to be less familiar with styles of UK handwriting than home students, so poor handwriting may be a more significant cause for concern if it undermines communication of feedback messages. Evidence that my own students struggled to read my feedback emerged in data collection, a finding which led to my decision to word process all end comments on formative tasks.

The most important feed forward points related to critical analysis, but these were often advice to 'be more critical' rather than explanations about how to approach the task. Audio feedback was much richer in terms of explanation and comments feeding forward, but did not feature more reflective comments on content. A limitation to be borne in mind here is that I had already provided written feedback

to the two participants, so arguably the audio feedback did not need to cover all the indicative points contained in the written feedback. The two student samples, while not allowing for a reliable comparison of audio and written feedback, did at least provide an indication of a real alternative for formative feedback. The limitations of feedback related to critical analysis in both written and audio formats were highlighted by Clara's need to clarify critical analysis comments in a feedback meeting, even after receiving both forms of feedback.

Despite its purpose as 'formative feedback', this feedback event did not require students to act on their written comments, there being no opportunity to revise the text, and minimal opportunity to integrate elements of the task in later summative work. Indeed, task design was also crucial in determining the absence of some types of feedback comment and the frequency of others. Critical review tasks, for example, did not call for synthesis from several texts and resulted in less guidance on referencing and use of sources in CAW. The lack of focus on criteria and grades was partly explained by tutors' choice of task, but also implied that tutors did not find department criteria easy to work with, echoing recent studies (e.g., Bloxham, Boyd & Orr, 2011; Tuck, 2011). Tutors did not engage with peer marking activities and when exemplars were provided they tended to be isolated texts that served as 'models' rather than true exemplars. As a result, practice did not always reflect the theory of effective formative feedback espoused in the literature. The implications of these findings will be picked up in Chapter 9 where tutor interview data provides a focus for discussion on departmental assessment practices and wider issues of assessment.

Finally, this feedback event was only the beginning of a process; student perceptions of usability were understandably limited at this stage. Exploring the alignment of tutor intention and student understanding revealed difficulties for tutors in prioritising feedback, with some important points sometimes remaining implicit. Even though comments on criticality were frequently recorded and featured as a high priority for future work, it remains to be seen how usable these comments were for students in the summative feedback in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8 Main Study Summative Feedback

This chapter presents results from the summative stage for the six participants in the main study in the department of Education at Bradfield. I first present a brief synopsis of the six case studies in order to orient the reader to later sections of the chapter. The following section presents and discusses quantitative results from participants' summative feedback. Full case descriptions for each student were made, but constraints of space mean that they are not included here, and instead I present a synthesis of key themes in a cross-case analysis. Flora and Betty's case descriptions can be found in Appendix H, however. The themes relate in different ways to the central research questions: the role of written feedback in developing CAW; the limitations of written feedback and feed forward in this context; the extent to which the findings for these international students replicate those in the literature for home undergraduate students; the impact of the pre-sessional programmes on feedback and writing for the four participants who had attended them.

8.1 Case Study Synopses

Due to limitations of word count and space, I have summarised the essential outcomes for each participant below. These summaries represent my interpretation of the participants' stories in an attempt to help the reader make sense of what follows in the later discussion.

8.1.1 Flora

Flora, at 25 years old, was one of the more mature students in this study. Her struggle with assignment writing and criticality was not helped by the rather short and uninformative piece of formative feedback she received, but there is evidence that she received ample feedback later and took the opportunity to discuss it. A number of factors that might alone have explained Flora's problems can be discounted. Her lack of domain knowledge was similar in many ways to that of other participants, and she had the benefit of orientation from a pre-sessional, which she valued for its help with assignment writing, though less so for critical analytical writing. Flora also entered her pre-sessional with a stronger writing test score (7.0) than other participants. There was no evidence to conclude that Flora's maturity as a

student may have contributed to her difficulties in adopting important elements of CAW. Analysis of formative and summative feedback later in her programme suggests that she may have been overwhelmed by feedback that indicated deficits in CA, but at the same time, by its nature, the feedback could not communicate the tacit knowledge that she needed in order to improve.

8.1.2 Betty

Although she did not see a significant improvement in her marks on the taught programme, Betty did not struggle in the same way as Flora. She received detailed feedback throughout, and used her opportunities to discuss feedback, benefiting from the fact that one module tutor was also her supervisor. Betty showed signs of developing as a 'self-regulated' learner, approaching her module tutors to discuss her feedback. She reported the benefit of increased confidence in her spoken English from her pre-sessional, which could have influenced her proactive attitude to engaging in dialogue around feedback. Betty recognised, like other participants, an improvement in criticality, but qualified this in a comparison with the lack of expectations of criticality in China. With the benefit of hindsight, and in her member checking interview, Betty reiterated her belief in the need for practice to develop CAW, and referred, unprompted, to the value of her in-sessional support classes in academic writing, admitting that it was only a year later, doing a second Master's degree at a different university, that she realised her lack of understanding of feedback in her taught Master's year at Bradfield. Betty's case implies the need for a longer transition period for international Master's students, while also pointing to how development of CAW is a long-term process.

8.1.3 Ethel

Ethel portrayed herself as a student content just to pass her assignments. She gave an honest account of how she found the topics of her modules uninteresting and she appeared to lack motivation to use feedback to improve. Indeed, she admitted to ignoring feedback comments, she was the only participant not to seek *any* form of discussion around her feedback, and analysis showed that certain comments were repeated from formative to summative feedback in the second term. Feedback analysis again showed that Ethel received similar amounts of feedback to other

participants but, though not particularly negative in focus, critical analysis comments tended to focus on deficits without the depth to explain how to improve. It is impossible to know how representative Ethel might have been of students on her programme, or indeed how representative she might be of international Master's students on taught programmes generally; her case is a reminder that, however timely and developmentally focused feedback might be, there will be students who are not willing to engage with it. Ethel was an exceptional case in this study, matching the image of grade-oriented home undergraduate students sometimes referred to in the literature.

8.1.4   Anna

Unlike Ethel, Anna seemed to be highly engaged on her programme, and a short teacher training programme taken in China prior to her taught Master's may have been evidence of intrinsic motivation and interest in the TESOL programme. Anna's marks did not dip below the mid-sixties, with one Distinction. Like Betty, she reported, unprompted, on the benefits of her English language support courses for her writing. Anna appeared to be able to use feedback to improve on a certain level, and judged by her marks alone, she achieved a high level of criticality; judged by her feedback comments, however, Anna was still lacking in depth of analysis. She received fewer comments than others on criticality, perhaps reflecting fewer deficits in that area: a possible reason why she only discussed feedback early in the programme. Anna recognised a recurring issue with depth of analysis, receiving repeated comments on defining concepts fully and appropriately. Anna may have been a student able to develop self-regulated learning to some extent, but satisfied with her marks, she saw little need to seek further dialogue on feedback as her course progressed.

8.1.5   Clara

Clara was not able to achieve any scores at the distinguished level, but consistently gained marks in the 'Good' band, this despite apparently beginning the taught Master's at a disadvantage to other students in terms of her IELTS writing score (5.5) and first-degree subject. Early feedback events seemed to make a difference to her writing development, but it was Clara's inability to gain the depth of criticality,

highlighted at different stages in her feedback, which seemed to make the difference between 'good' grades and the distinguished grades that she did not achieve. Clara's case provides insights into the nature of dialogue around feedback; her feedback discussions showed how concepts 'learnt' on a pre-sessional required practice and dialogue with her tutors to make them fully operational. One concrete example showed how discussion on deepening the analysis could be effective through 'showing' with reference to situated examples. Clara's later reluctance to arrange meetings with module leaders provided hints as to why students choose not to engage in such dialogue. Like Anna, she seemed relatively content with average to good marks (taught average 67) that exceeded her expectations, and by the final interview she was focused on the dissertation, seeing no need, or relevance, for further discussion of assignment feedback. Thus, student motivation and institutional factors appeared to limit the potential for Clara to make even more effective links between written feedback and face-to-face discussion.

8.1.6   Diane

Diane, like Flora and Betty, experienced a downward trend in her marks, but, as in Betty's case, there is evidence that she devoted little time to one of her assignments. for which she received a borderline fail (45). Diane was honest about the trip home that accounted for her lack of time to devote to the term-two assignments. She found her formative task feedback helpful, but was frank in attributing poorer marks in later assignments to the little time she spent on finding resources and reading. Diane received a substantial amount of summative feedback, with one hundred comments over three reports, but noted that comments such as "too descriptive" had featured throughout. Although positive about the role of written feedback for developing critical analysis, Diane admitted that she did not know how to develop depth of analysis. She admitted to largely ignoring the general feedback on the core module formative task, stating her preference for 'specific' feedback on her own strengths and weaknesses. For this reason, and because of its personal nature, she said she valued the audio feedback she received. Although Diane engaged more with her programme than Ethel, her case also highlights students' strategic engagement with feedback; it lends support to the use of audio feedback for formative assessment,

with the personal element that written feedback cannot provide, particularly where students are reluctant to seek dialogue with tutors.

8.2 Feedback Analysis: Summative End Comments

This section presents a comparison of the combined summative feedback (end comments) across the module assignments, and compares it with the formative feedback presented in Chapter 7. Particular attention is paid to the 'Targets for improvement' (TFI) section on the feedback reports, an important section that obliged tutors to summarise feed forward points. The analysis explores issues relating to amount, quality, tone and usability of feedback, analysing and presenting data to triangulate with student and tutor perspectives from interviews.

Table 8:1 Summative marks and feedback comments by assignment

	Option module1		Core module		Option module 2	
	mark	comments	mark	comments	mark	comments
Flora	66	9	30	24	51	26
Clara	66	35	66	23	69	8
Ethel	75	17	58	12	58	19
Betty	66	23	58	21	62	23
Diane	69	38	66	37	45	25
Anna	69	19	66	29	75	30

Table 8.1 shows how the number of feedback comments made varied between 8 and 38 over the 18 assignments in the sample. These variations are not so surprising, given that the feedback was based on different tasks, delivered by seven different tutors. The table reveals a similar finding to that of Brown and Glover (Brown & Glover, 2006) in their study of undergraduate science students. They found no evidence for the hypothesis that grades and amount of feedback would correlate, i.e. less feedback at higher grades, and more feedback for poorer grades. No clear pattern emerged here in terms of the amount of feedback for similar grades[38]. Only Flora received more comments as her marks decreased, while Diane actually received more comments on her highest scoring assignment (69) than for her

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[38] Tutor B reported her experience of finding less to comment on for higher grade work, but this is not borne out in the analysis of actual feedback reports.

other assignments. There was no consistency in the number of comments given in relation to individual grades; the grade of 66, for example, awarded on six of the assignments, recorded comments ranging from 9 to 37.

Analysis of the specific TFI section in the feedback form will be commented on separately in Section 8.2.5. These comments presented a different picture to the above, with higher scoring assignments clearly receiving fewer comments in this section. Because this TFI section represents a kind of summary of comments explicitly intended to feed forward to future assignments, such a result is not so surprising.

The average number of comments received by the students in their feedback over the three assignments was 65.8, with an average of over 21 comments and over 313 words per assignment. Table 8.2 below shows some considerable variation in word and comment counts, with Diane receiving almost twice as many words as Betty. Betty's total of 63 comments, however, was only just below the overall average for the group. Ethel received the lowest number of comments, only 37, in marked contrast with the 100 comments that Diane received, but she still received an average of 248 words per feedback report. Thus, there were individual inconsistencies in some assignments, but the students generally received substantial amounts of feedback in terms of word counts and comments. The inconsistencies in amount of feedback seem to relate to tutors' individual feedback practices. Comparing feedback according to tutor is also difficult with this data, since each tutor in the study marked varying numbers of modules.

Table 8:2 Word and comment totals in MATESOL summative assignments

Participants	Words	Comments	Depth	CA comments
Diane	1371	100	15	21
Clara	1030	69	10	14
Anna	899	67	9	16
Flora	881	59	4	17
Ethel	743	37	7	14
Betty	719	63	8	27

Table 8.2 also shows quite a wide variation in the number of CA comments received, with Ethel and Clara receiving 14 CA comments in total as opposed to 27 for Betty. Comments providing depth with examples and explanation were few in number, but the range was even greater, with Flora receiving only 4 such comments, while Betty received double this number (8) and Diane received almost four times as many (15). These variations relate to quality of feedback to some extent, reflecting the limitations of written feedback. Pertinent to this idea of quality is the degree of feed forward, which was identified as a crucial element in feedback usability and effectiveness (see Chapter 2) and this will be explored further in Section 8.2.5.

8.2.2   Summative and formative feedback compared

The amount of feedback analysed for formative feedback in Chapter 6 was only 66 comments from seven scripts, against 564 comments from 18 scripts in the summative analysis. Despite this difference in sample size, a comparison of the combined results for summative and formative feedback (see figures 8.2 and 8.3) show some interesting parallels and key differences. Differences in content and developmental comments were particularly relevant for understanding the way in which formative and summative feedback dealt with critical analysis.
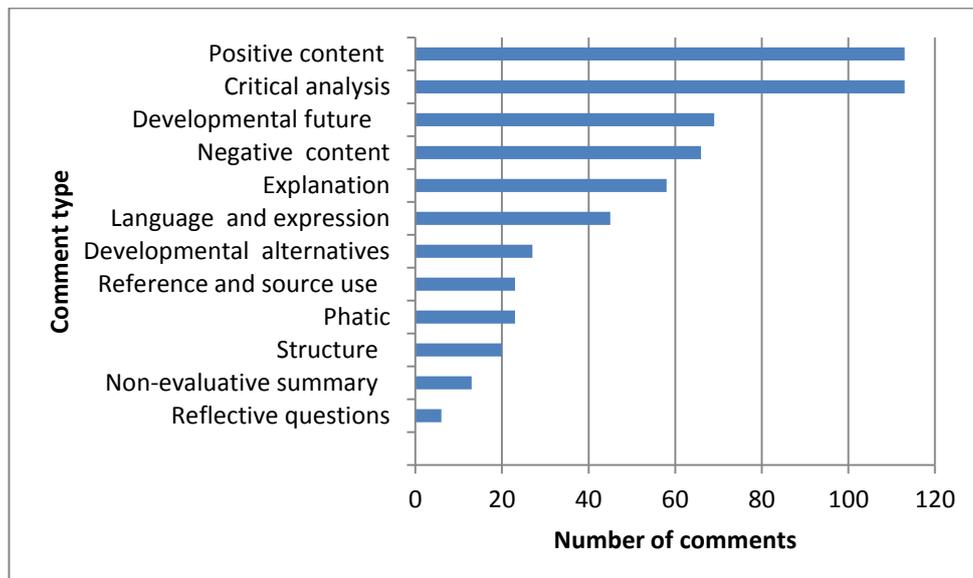
Figure 8-1 MATESOL summative feedback comments combined

CA comments were the most frequent comment type in both formative and summative feedback, with CA comments comprising a third of all formative feedback comments, but closer to a fifth of all summative comments.
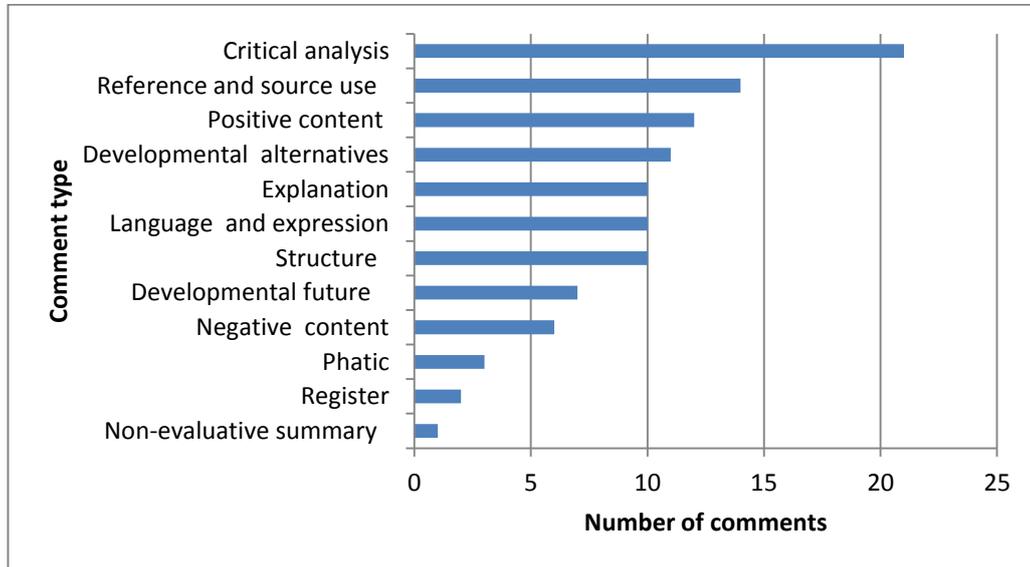
Figure 8-2 MATESOL formative feedback comments combined

Reflective questions featured in summative feedback but were absent in the earlier formative feedback. This was the reverse of what occurred in the preliminary study (see Section 5.3) but in both studies such questions were rare. *Explicit justification of marks* and *informational content* comment types included in the theoretical frame in Section 3.6.1 were also missing from formative feedback, unsurprisingly in the case of the former given that grades were usually not awarded on formative tasks. *Language and expression* and *explanation* comments occupy a mid-point in both tables. Phatic comments were relatively low in number for both types of feedback.

Comments on *reference and source use*, the second most frequent in formative feedback, did not feature highly in the summative analysis. More formative feedback on referencing may be understandable, since in the first term students were probably attempting to synthesise from sources based on the APA reference system for the first time. The absence of the *register* category in summative feedback indicates that academic style issues relating to impersonal/personal voice, or use of idiomatic and colloquial language, did not

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present themselves as a problem in summative assignments. Four of the seven participants had ample instruction and feedback on this aspect of their writing in their pre-sessional programmes[39], and English Language Support classes in the first term contained one session relating to this area. In fact, only Clara from the pre-sessional group identified academic style as one of her three main points to work on from the formative feedback and this did not reappear in later feedback. Anna too identified academic style as one of her points to take forward from the formative feedback, but she explained how she was able to correct the problem in her first summative assignment. The results suggest that the students were able to eliminate problems with academic style quite early in the development of their writing.

Proofreading was not expected for the short formative task, while students in Education were encouraged to use proof-readers in summative assignments. Although proofreading might have made a difference to improving academic style issues, only Clara and Flora reported using proof-readers on summative assignments, suggesting a limited impact on the overall feedback.

8.2.3 Content criticism and praise

Twelve out of eighteen of the marks in the sample of summative feedback scored in the 60s, so it was not so surprising that positive content comments, e.g., "You make a valid point about linking listening to other skills" were the most frequently occurring comment type on first coding. A different picture emerged after a re-coding of all comments that combined softened and wholly negative comments (see Table 8.3). Anna received more positive than combined negative comments, with Clara receiving a balance of positive and combined negative comments. It is significant how quickly the comment types then diverged in relation to lower average scores, as Betty and Ethel, with averages of 62 and 63 respectively, received more than twice as many combined negative to positive comments. The result that stands out is that of Flora, with almost four times as many combined negative comments to positive comments.

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[39] Typically, academic style might be the focus of several lessons in the first month of pre-sessional programmes at Bradfield, with a separate section in the marking criteria for 'style'.

Table 8:3 Positive-negative balance in summative feedback

Participant (average mark)	Wholly positive	Wholly negative	Softened negative	Combined negative
Anna (70)	27	2	24	26
Betty (62)	13	10	22	32
Clara (67)	27	9	19	28
Diane (59)	29	27	22	49
Ethel (63.6)	12	5	21	26
Flora (49)	10	19	18	37
Total	**120**	**72**	**126**	**198**

Previous studies have highlighted the finding that 'praise' in feedback is often given to mitigate negative comments that follow (Hyland, 2001; Yelland, 2011) and that students view 'vague' or 'faint' praise as less useful than specific explanations of why their work is good or needs improving (Duncan, 2007; Straub, 1997). Mitigating comments of this nature were more often found to be present here in lower scoring assignments than higher scoring ones. Analysis of a feedback report from one of the failed assignments (mark of 45), shows four examples of positive content comments followed immediately by critical content comments:

1) <u>A satisfactory range of sources</u>, but you have not used APA referencing style appropriately....
2) <u>There is a clear attempt to answer the question and evidence of presenting relevant and appropriate research</u>. However, there remains little substance to what you have written.
3) <u>There has been some attempt at analysis</u>, but it is not clear what criteria you are using and there is little depth.
4) <u>In the conclusion you suggest X</u>, yet you do not explore this at all.
(Extract from Diane second term option module feedback)

Yelland (2011) argues that avoiding threats to face in negative feedback comments is the single most difficult task for the tutor, and that positive-negative ordering is a standard solution to the problem. While this type of comment style is evident in lower scoring feedback reports in my study, it is much less frequent in those reports scoring above sixty, providing some support for Yelland's claim.

In this sample, a number of points that could have been interpreted as 'negative' content comments were coded as developmental future comments if they

appeared in TFI. Comments that Flora received on weaker assignments, such as 'avoid unnecessary repetition', 'do not describe, analyse', or 'write more', are directive, examples of Lea and Street's categorical modality, which they argue reinforces the authority of the tutor (Lea & Street, 1998). Such comments give advice but even when they summarise earlier examples in the feedback, they point clearly to deficiencies in the work. Flora, in particular, received a high number of these comments and it is clear that their negative, directive tone did not help her address the weaknesses in her work.

8.2.4   Developmental comments compared

Developmental future comments did not feature highly in the formative analysis, but were the third most frequent type of comment in the summative feedback. Since all summative feedback comments grouped in the TFI section of the department feedback form were by definition coded as developmental future comments, the increase in frequency of this type of comment in summative feedback is, therefore, understandable. In this way, the report format obliged tutors to make comments of this type in their summative feedback.

It is also worth pointing out that developmental alternative comments (typically using modal structures such as '...could have included x', 'might have done y...') provide feedback related to a specific task, and might therefore be less usable for students at this summative stage, while the more general developmental future type comments could be assumed to have more of a feed forward potential. A close analysis of all feedback comments in the TFI sections of feedback reports will follow, in an attempt to gauge the nature of these comments and their feed forward potential.

8.2.5   Analysis of Targets for Improvement

Appendix G shows that top performing assignments received far less in the way of substantive feed forward in the TFI section. Clara, for example, received only six TFI comments on her three assignments scoring 66, 66 and 69, while Anna received only seven comments in TFI on three assignments with scores of 69, 75 and 66. In contrast, Flora received twenty comments on her two final assignments that scored

30 (a clear fail) and 51 (a bare pass). Similarly, Diane received only three TFI comments for each of her assignments scoring 66 and 69, but nine TFI comments for her referred assignment that scored 45. The consistently high number of TFI comments for referred assignments is unsurprising, since tutors were expected to provide students with detailed comments on what they had to do in a re-submission to achieve a pass.

Technical referencing comments were a recurring issue for some students, such as Diane in Option Module 1(OM1), with such comments reappearing in both her later assignments. For Clara and Flora, no mention was made of issues with APA in their OM1 but these surfaced in both final assignments. Anna received comments on citations and APA in her OM1 and in her OM2. Only Ethel did not receive any technical referencing comments related to the use of APA, and only Betty seemed able to eliminate such errors after feedback on them in her OM1.

The results suggest some inconsistency in tutor marking, but at the same time they point to inconsistent progress with technical aspects of referencing. It is possible that Flora and Clara's markers ignored or were less concerned about APA errors when giving their OM1 feedback, while markers for their later assignments were less tolerant of these errors. This might suggest that tutors gave more leeway for technical referencing when marking first assignments, but were more demanding later in the year. What is also evident here is the way this type of error seems resistant to feedback, with four of the six students receiving comments on APA use in their final assignments.

The high number of CA comments (20/67) was evident, but comments on source use (11/67) relate indirectly to CA and often advised on 'wider use of sources', or more 'up-to-date sources', exhorting students to use more 'published literature'. A further smaller group of comments (4/67) related to structural issues relevant to the construction and signalling of an argument, with advice on logical structuring of sections and use of headings. When added together, these three types of comment comprised more than half of the TFI comments recorded (35/67).

Table 8.4 below shows the 18/46 CA comments on the two final summative assignments and how many of them have an advice frame corresponding to the softened negative comment type. Diane and Flora, however, received more directive comments exhorting them to analyse and not to simply describe, terms which clearly still required unpacking for these students at the end of their taught programme. Several comments emphasise making connections between parts of texts and the common theme of 'depth' of analysis is evident, with even higher performing students advised to supply more evidence and support from sources.

Table 8:4 CA comments in TFI final assignments

	Critical analysis comments
Anna	-Perhaps a little more reading and evidence in terms of references
Clara	-Make sure all aspects of your discussion are supported by reference to published literature
Betty	-Try to be more critical in how you interpret the research you present -Make sure you link the first and second half of your discussion: you are in danger of contradicting yourself if you do not do this -Think about how to balance the discussion more appropriately (e.g. not spending too much time on one area, in this case defining 'task' at the expense of discussing other issues relevant to the topic
Ethel	-Aim to strengthen the complexity of your arguments without losing the clarity of your writing -Experiment with the use of evidence to support your arguments
Diane	-Engage with what you do write: description is not the same as analysis -Link your analysis more closely with the literature you cite in the first section -Think more critically about the ideas you present -Perhaps look at the analytical points and seek to develop them in more depth
Flora	-Make sure what you write directly relates to the topic under discussion -Make sure all aspects of your discussion are supported by reference to published literature. -Avoid anecdotes or citing from your own experience as though your experience is universal -Answer the question set -Do not just describe, analyse -Make sure all aspects of your argument are supported by reference to the published literature -Do not just make assertions without offering reasons as to the 'how' and 'why'

8.2.6   Summative analysis: Conclusions

 While there were inconsistencies in the amount of feedback returned to students, shorter reports were balanced by other examples of very generous feedback. Overall, students received an average of over 300 words per assignment in written feedback, averaging more than 21 comments per assignment. In general then, students received substantial amounts of written feedback in their feedback reports.

Lower-order considerations such as language and expression were a little less frequently observed than in formative feedback, with the focus more often on content. It was noted that an absence of comments relating to academic style issues in later assignments suggested that students had developed their writing in this area early in the taught year. Against this, comments relating to technical issues with referencing, though not as frequent as in formative feedback, clearly persisted, and showed that even in later assignments, students had not mastered APA style or taken care in following its conventions closely. A tendency to use 'softened negative' comments was noted, and as in the preliminary study they were more evident in feedback on low scoring assignments. Overall there were more combined negative and softened negative comments than positive comments.

Despite the high number of developmental comments referring to future work in the feedback reports, due in part to the provision of the TFI report section, the analysis revealed a strong bias for such comments to be framed in the discourse of critical analysis, many based around the use of sources. Frequently, the TFI comments, though framed as advice, were directives which simply pointed up the lack of critical analysis in the texts. The 'discourse' of written feedback (Haggis, 2006; Higgins et al., 2001) was evidenced by the form of general directives that assumed an already well-formed knowledge of terms such as 'argument', 'analysis', 'evidence', 'description' and 'assertions'. Such comments were also more frequent in the few failed or 'referred' assignments, but struggling students were likely to be the least able to engage with the tacit knowledge these comments were based on. These same comments, however, also represented a measure of how students with marks in the 60s were directed to more critical approaches, with the expectation that they would understand and act on them to gain higher marks in future. These points are explored in more depth in the next section with extracts of writing and feedback that trace Flora's progress from formative to first summative stage, and also consider her continuing issues with criticality in a draft for a final assignment.

8.3 Feedback Analysis: Flora's Progress and Reversal

In Section 7.3.2 extracts from Flora's formative task with her feedback showed how the tutor's brief comments did not provide detailed indications of the strengths of the

writing, but picked up some language issues and gave more indications of technical referencing issues. Analysis of Flora's first summative assignment and feedback indicated that she was able to develop her writing in some of the areas referred to in that feedback, but significantly the first summative comments did not focus strongly on elements of criticality.

8.3.1 *Formative to summative progress*

Table 8.5 shows how Flora reacted to her formative feedback, particularly in her use of referencing conventions. Whereas she used more direct quotation with errors in technical referencing in the formative task, her correct use of secondary referencing is evident in extract a) and she also used a range of report verbs to introduce her sources (e.g., *argued, maintained, indicated*); she appears to paraphrase consistently in these extracts, something that is reflected in the assignment as a whole, where she only used three direct quotes of no more than one sentence each time.

Table 8:5 Flora summative 1 extracts and feedback

Assignment Title: The impact of scaffolding on the learning of young children [Mark= 66]	End feedback comments
Extract a) from Section on 'Parent Influence' Stevenson and Becker (as cited in Elliot & Dweck) argued that students whose parents are more involved in their learning activity will have higher academic performance during the primary and junior high school years. Gronick, Kurowski, Danlap and Hevey (as cited in Elliot and Dweck) also maintained that primary school pupils are likely to have better grades in reading over the period from the primary school to the Junior high school. It can be clearly to be seen that there is a significant link between parents' participation and children's academic performance.	You have identified a good set of sources You also make clear where in your text you have used your sources
Extract b) from Section on 'Peer Influence' A number of studies have indicated that if two children learn together both children will benefit but only when the children are both capable (Fernandez, Wegerif, Mercer & Rojas-Drummond, 2001). It can be obvious that older children will have more experience and knowledge than younger ones. For example, some researchers have found that children learn a lot from assistance of peers who is more older and more competent than them) Berk and Winsler, 1995).	Greater sophistication in your critical analysis *(Targets for improvement)*

(Italics in feedback column indicate section of report; underlined text = grammar expression issues)

The second extract also shows how Flora is able to maintain her own voice by using non-integral referencing and avoiding the author-prominent style more evident in extract a). In both extracts, Flora seeks to make her point by use of 'it'

fronted expressions (*it can be clearly seen / it can be obvious that*) although these may not be accurately expressed grammatically in every case (underlined text indicated grammar issues). There were no marginal comments in Flora's summative text, so no examples were given of where the analysis was lacking or where and how it might have been developed, but the single feed forward comment in extract b) on the need for more sophisticated analysis is significant. Perhaps the examples in table 8.5 indicate a lack of criticality, with a rather obvious point made in extract b), or the unquestioning acceptance of the evidence pointed to in extract a), where no mention is made about the nature of the studies or reliability of their findings. Perhaps, again, the level of criticality can be linked to the assignment title, in this case negotiated by Flora with her tutor. Flora's title seems to be more of a general topic and in itself does not pose a clear question or set out a problem for the assignment to tackle.

In the interview relating to this feedback event, the tutor was explicit about the fact that her feedback did not justify the mark:

> TA: What I don't think I'm doing is I'm not justifying my mark at all
> because I don't think you can infer from my comments what sort of mark
> I've arrived at.. (TA: S1)

Examination of the nine comments on the report form, however, showed that at least seven could be linked directly to grade descriptors in the marking criteria. The feedback comments (numbered and in bold below) are matched with department marking criteria (in italics):

> (1) **You have identified a very good set of sources for your essay**
> = (*ii*) *Selection from a wide and relevant range of perspectives and sources that draws upon contemporary academic debate*
> (2) **You also make clear where in your text you have used your sources**
> = *References clear and accurate using appropriate APA conventions*
> (3 **Your writing style is generally clear although there are some minor lapses in your English.**
> = *Near perfect grammar/spelling/syntax*
> (4) **You display a very good understanding of the key idea.**
> (5) **You present a good coverage of ideas and material**.
> (6) **Overall, this is a good overview covering a good range of material.**
> = *Demonstrates a good command of the topic by showing perception and insight;(60-69)*
> (7) **Greater sophistication in your critical analysis**
> = *Clear, cogent and well-structured argument; Critical distance and sound analysis of the question (60-69);*
> (Flora Summative assignment 1 -feedback linked to criteria -marking criteria *in italics*)

Closer analysis of the feedback above suggested that understanding and coverage was given heavier weighting than criticality, which was only referred to in the lone comment on the need for "more sophistication" in future work. The mark of 66 placed the assignment in the 'good' band with two corresponding elements of criticality matched with feedback comment (7) above. In fact, the feedback here seemed to refer to what was lacking in criticality, with the use of the word 'overview' tending to suggest a good summary but not necessarily 'critical distance' or argument. The comments on sources seemed to match the grade descriptor very closely, while the 'minor' errors in language seemed a generous interpretation of 'near perfect' in the corresponding descriptor. Comment (7), however, suggests that the marker may not have weighted the criticality elements as highly as other elements, as the absence of sophisticated critical analysis suggested that the work was lacking in a well-structured and cogent argument, or the critical distance necessary for this grade.

The analysis above indicates that Flora's feedback, with the exception of one comment in the formative and first summative assignments, did not focus on issues of criticality, but provided generally positive feedback which indicated a 'good' performance in each case. Analysis of her texts and her feedback suggested that a high level of criticality was not necessarily achieved, and that feedback on Flora's first module did not provide usable feed forward to help her achieve it in future work.

The development in Flora's writing from formative to first summative assignment is identified above, but the progress was not maintained in her second term assignments, as her marks and feedback suggested. Flora's issues with criticality in particular become evident from a closer inspection of her writing and feedback on a draft.

8.3.2   *Criticality in draft feedback*

Flora's EL support tutor had given her feedback on a draft for the second-term option module (see Section 6.3). Analysis of the draft feedback provides insights

into Flora's case, and her struggle to improve her writing. The draft assignment feedback consisted of twenty-eight marginal comments typed in the margins. Twenty-one consisted of one word or phrase suggestions for correction, while seven were more substantial. Seven longer comments were placed in the body of the text and these are presented below. The comments relating to critical analysis have been bolded, with positive praise comments in italics:

> 1) You don't say how these definitions have informed your thinking.
>
> 2) *All of the foregoing is interesting and thoroughly done* – but very inconclusive so that, as your reader**, I do not know where you are going. You don't say which definition(s) of culture will be your guide, you don't connect the section on pragmatic competence clearly to the cultural issue and you don't tie any of it in with the central issues you raised much earlier on about which culture(s) should be aligned to English in the first place. Your work reads like an interesting compendium of scholarly writing, without much in the way of direction**.
>
> 3) But you seemed to stop at the Cultural Revolution stage. In any case, the challenges you present are not at all connected to the background you presented earlier on.
>
> 4) Well, actually, I have not perceived this complexity as a result of reading your paper. **You have not focused your work enough and need to sketch or draft your actual argument clearly and then put back your reading and reference work when you know where you are going.**
>
> 5) *In my view, you have achieved a great deal more in this one paragraph than you did in the preceding ten (or more) pages – because you have come to a point*. **You need to USE your reading to inform your points, not just display the fact that you have read**!
>
> 6) This is illogical
>
> 7) You don't say which definition.
> **(Flora - formative comments on option module 2 draft)**

Flora clearly received detailed advice here, linked to specific examples in her work. Issues with developing an argument leading to a conclusion are evident, and her descriptive display of knowledge, or the 'unaverred voice' discussed in Chapter 2 (e.g., Andrews, 2007; Groom, 2000) is highlighted. Points that indicated or amplified this aspect of criticality are bolded in 2, 4 and 5, above. Closer inspection of the feedback demonstrates other key themes from the literature, such as the need to make connections horizontally and vertically in the text (Andrews, 2007), or the need for an argument that takes a position (Chang & Schleppegrell, 2011; Wingate, 2011), which feature in comments 1, 2 and 7. Comment 4 is a clear reference to the need for a central argument, an issue of voice discussed in Section 2.3.5 (Zhao & Llosa, 2008). Flora had produced a central argument evidenced by a clear thesis

statement in her formative task (see Section 7.3.2) but was not able to repeat this at the draft stage here, presumably due to problems in understanding and organising content for this assignment.

The feedback above is directive, overwhelmingly focused on identifying the problems in the text. Only comment 4 seems to be facilitative, giving Flora advice on how to alter her approach. Two points seem to give praise, but one (comment 2) provides a positive opening that only serves to mitigate the main point about Flora's inconclusive writing. Similarly, in comment 5 a positive tone referring to a clear point in a particular paragraph is immediately followed by critical comments on the lack of such points in the preceding text. The use of positive comments to mitigate critical points that follow was discussed in the feedback analysis above (Section 8.2.3). Whether students are able to focus on the positives when they are presented in this way was not a focus of this study, but could be a useful avenue for future research. Flora's supervisor wrote these comments in the knowledge that a face-to-face meeting would follow, so the lack of encouragement in the comments may have been redressed in that discussion.

The feedback discussed above was part of an iterative process often presented in the literature as central for feedback comments to be usable and acted upon by students (Bailey & Vardi, 1999; Carless et.al., 2011). Flora had the opportunity to act on these comments to revise subsequent drafts, but when she finally submitted the work, she only achieved the lowest pass mark (51). In the 'analysing data and ideas' section of the corresponding feedback, her marker commented:

> Your argument is disorganised, is frequently repetitious, circuitous and at times contradictory. These contradictions indicate a lack of critical reflection on what you are writing. The argument lapses into description....
> **(Flora - OM2 feedback extract from summative report)**

In targets for improvement in the same feedback report, there is further evidence of Flora's inability to use her supervisor's feedback; she continued to struggle to use source texts to support her arguments, and the four critical analysis points extracted below show how she was unable to organise her overall argument effectively:

-Make sure what you write directly relates to the topic under discussion
-Make sure all aspects of your discussion are supported by reference to
published literature
-Avoid anecdotes or citing from your own experience as though your experience
is universal
-Look at how to structure your assignment more clearly and logically, actually
pay attention to the section headings you use and make sure what you write
under each heading relates to that heading.
(Flora- OM2 feedback TFI comments)

Given the time spent on drafting and discussing this assignment, it is surprising that Flora's final assignment was below the word count required. It is less surprising that technical issues of referencing are mentioned, as these might not have been given sufficient attention if Flora was grappling with higher-order issues, as the feedback suggests. What is evident is that repeated comments on criticality did not help Flora, and her downward spiral could have been linked to poor confidence and self-esteem, which would not have been supported by these feedback comments at a late stage of the programme.

8.4 Key Themes: Cross-case Analysis

The sections that follow take up a number of themes identified in Table 8.6 below.

Table 8:6: Key themes in main study summative feedback

Key themes	Betty	Clara	Flora	Helen	Anna	Diane	Ethel
A. Prior experience of feedback	✔		✔		✔	✔	
B. pre-task guidance and exemplars	✔	✔				✔	
C. Dialogue around written feedback	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔
D. Motivation and engagement	✔				✔	✔	✔
E. Institutional barriers to feed forward	✔		✔			✔	
F. General versus personal and individualised feedback		✔			✔	✔	
G. Pre-sessional impact on CAW	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	

Results from various cases will be used in an attempt to compare findings within the group. The discussion that follows seeks to find tentative explanations and to highlight the significance of each theme in terms of the main research questions.

8.4.1   Theme A: Prior experience of feedback

After the first summative assignment, participants were asked how they felt about the department feedback report format, with the majority responding favourably. Perhaps students were reluctant to criticise department procedures, and an interviewer effect could have operated here, but students' prior experience also seemed significant.

Diane admitted that she had little experience with other forms of written feedback, but she declared that the summative feedback was the "...best and most detailed," that she had received, and that the layout of the report was "clear". Anna responded positively, stressing the value of the TFI section, but again admitting to having no experience with other formats. Betty referred to comments under the 'Analysing data and ideas' heading as "...more detailed...more useful..." and she did not prefer any other feedback formats, but expressed a preference for marginal comments on the script. Thus, students were appreciative of the detailed feedback in the report format, but their lack of experience of feedback did not appear to provide them with any points of reference for comparison. Participants, it seemed, were happy to accept feedback as a 'gift' (Askew, 2000).

Flora was the only participant less than satisfied with the amount of her first summative feedback, reporting that she had read it once only because, apart from a mention of problems with critical analysis, "… there is only my mark and not anything about my problems…". Flora's response is perhaps unsurprising when actual feedback was compared (see Section 8.2), as this showed that Flora received 9 comments in 98 words of feedback for this first assignment, compared with an average of 23 comments and 355 words for the other participants on the same assignment.

Participants in this study, as in the earlier study, had experienced a grade-oriented feedback system (discussed in Section 7.5.2), but had little or no experience of receiving detailed feedback. Their appreciation of the more detailed feedback they received at Bradfield can be compared with the dissatisfaction of home undergraduates in Beaumont's study (Beaumont et al., 2011). Students in that study appeared to expect speedily-returned, detailed feedback which would be discussed with their teachers. The participants in this study did not have such expectations.

8.4.2   *Theme B: Pre-task guidance and exemplars*

Section 7.3.3 referred to arguments in the literature for the use of exemplars to communicate tacit knowledge (Handley & Williams, 2011; Hendry, Bromberger, & Armstrong, 2011), but noted the variable use of exemplars for the formative tasks. Similarly, few mentions of exemplars were made later in the programme. Clara, however, made a clear reference to her perceived need for exemplars during her meeting with me to discuss her formative feedback, stating that she needed a lot of writing practice and adding:

> Clara: I just want to borrow some good piece of assignment from my classmate
> but she declined...(C:FM)

In the final interview, Betty was forthcoming about the value of one experience of discussing an exemplar and assigning marks based on the department criteria. Diane also found the same activity valuable, finding it "clear and really helpful...", but this was an isolated activity, carried out in one module, with no evidence that other modules employed similar activities.

A certain amount of guidance other than that focused on exemplars was mentioned by several participants. Diane, for example, referred to some explanation in class of how to write the Methods assignment for specific topics with each assignment title covered in PowerPoint slides available on the VLE. She explained how these showed "how to address some topics without really definite answers to the topic...". Helen referred to her tutor using the final classroom session to discuss how to structure assignment questions, and referencing. She commented that these were "…very simple and very general to the whole class". Indeed, though a certain

amount of guidance was given for all the module assignments in this study (excluding formative task advice), the variable nature of this guidance was apparent.

Explicit discussion of marking criteria before assignment submission is viewed as only a first step by many (e.g., Nicol, 2010; O'Donovan, Price, & Rust, 2004; Ridley, 2004; Rust et al., 2003), and repeated exposure to exemplars using marking activities is widely proposed to establish standards (Handley & Williams, 2011; Hendry et al., 2012; Orsmond et al., 2002). It is evident in the summative as in the formative stage that tutors rarely made criteria explicit, and few marking activities based on exemplars were reported. Tutors' approaches to pre-assignment guidance suggested an "idiosyncratic" approach noted in the literature (Price, Carroll, O'Donovan, & Rust, 2011, p.482). The tacit knowledge embodied within marking criteria and the way in which criticality is approached within disciplines and even individual modules imply that attempts to engage students with criteria may always founder (Hunter & Docherty, 2011). Perhaps there were opportunities to demonstrate standards through exemplars that were wasted here, however. These issues of inconsistency and variation will be returned to in Chapter 9.

8.4.3   Theme C: Dialogue around written feedback

Chapter 2 discussed the dialogic approach to feedback, predominant in the recent literature (e.g., Barnett, 1997; Chanock, 2007; Hyatt, 2005; Nicol, 2010; Orsmond, Maw, Park, Gomez, & Crook, 2013). There are calls for such discussion to take place during the assignment process, (Lillis, 2006; Ridley, 2004), and Section 8.3 provided a detailed analysis of feedback that accompanied one such discussion. Few students who had declared an intention at the formative stage to meet tutors actually did this, a finding reflected in feedback studies generally (e.g., Burke, 2009; Price, Handley, Millar, & O'Donovan, 2010). At the summative stage participants rarely reported discussions of feedback with their fellow students. Diane commented, "...we just ask each other pass or not then we will not say any more…". The focus here, therefore, will be on tutor and student discussion, exploring its potential in terms of development of CAW, and considering the factors that inhibited it. The section will firstly consider Anna, Diane and Ethel's experiences in relation to reasons for minimal engagement in discussions around feedback, before turning to

Clara and Betty's experience of feedback discussion for insights into its nature and potential in this context.

8.4.3.1 Low engagement in dialogue

The low take up of opportunities for feedback discussion has been repeatedly noted in the literature (Blair & McGinty, 2012; Nicol, 2010; Tuck, 2011). In the preliminary study, Peter only sought discussion when he received poor marks, while Paul responded to the nature of the feedback he received and his tutors' investment in that feedback. In the main study, Betty, Clara and Flora sought discussion around feedback, but Anna met tutors only twice (once in class), and Diane and Ethel did not meet to discuss any of their feedback.

Anna recognized the ample opportunities for her to discuss her feedback and saw the point of such discussions to "clear up comments", but she commented on how "written feedback was more permanent, easy to follow…" than oral feedback. Anna received the highest average grade (68.25) which might explain why she did not arrange such meetings; she also received only a quarter of her comments related to critical analysis (CA), against almost a third for other participants. It is, therefore, possible that she had fewer points to clarify and less need to discuss feedback later in the programme.

Despite Anna's high marks, depth of analysis continued to be an issue for her, as for others in the study. Anna felt she had made progress with criticality in her writing, but later she referred to issues in the feedback on her second option module:

> Anna: I tend to miss some point that is important to my argumentation, like some omission of a definition, to be more elaborative about a specific term and to be extensive and deep into one topic. (A: S2).

Anna may have been in a situation common to many students where they are satisfied with average to good marks, feeling little incentive to enter into a dialogue about their written feedback. On the other hand, as Hyatt (2005) suggests, such a dialogue may "...play an absolutely crucial pedagogic role in helping to induct students into the particularities of an academic discourse community..." (p.351). Hyatt seems to argue for a situation where students learn to challenge, not just to follow and reproduce, but even for more successful students like Anna in this study,

such an outcome did not necessarily occur. The better performing students often did not use feedback dialogues to get the extra boost that might have given them marks in the Distinguished band.

Neither Diane nor Ethel reported any meetings with module tutors to discuss their summative feedback. Diane was aware of the opportunities to discuss feedback with her option module tutor, but when probed, gave the following explanation of her reluctance to take them up:

> Diane: Maybe I will not see her...
> BS: Why, why... why do you think that?
> Diane: Maybe it's just my personality, I always do things by myself. I know it
>   is really helpful to ask advice for...from tutors but I seldom do that, but I
>   sometimes will talk to X.
> BS: She's your supervisor?
> Diane: Another thing's that I...erm... the tutors always gave quite general advice
>   and maybe I still don't know how to improve it.(D: S2)

Diane's claim was, interestingly, at odds with studies in the literature that show student preference for feedback that is not specific to a finished task, but general and relevant to future tasks (Carless, 2006; Weaver, 2006). How she could make such a claim without actually engaging in discussion is unclear. When asked if written feedback was effective without oral feedback to back it up, Diane clarified her position:

> Diane: I think it's effective because it already points out the strengths, the weak
>   points, maybe like the audio feedback you sent us you talked through the
>   essay from the first page to the last page. The written feedback is also
>   very helpful, it also points out the weak points. Of course, it is better if it
>   is with oral feedback but I think it's already effective. (D: S2)

The suggestion here is that Diane, like Anna, was satisfied with written feedback and saw no reason to discuss it further. Diane's performance, with an assignment average of 61, and her actual feedback suggested that, like Anna, 'depth of analysis', was a problem. This was evidenced by one of her three TFI comments in the core module assignment, on which she scored 66, which stated "Perhaps look at the analytical points and seek to develop them in more depth".

It was difficult in the interviews to follow up reasons for students not taking up opportunities to discuss feedback. Diane's 'personality' response could be

interpreted as a lack of confidence, or basic shyness or embarrassment, factors suggested in the literature for students' reluctance to use opportunities to discuss feedback (Juwah et al., 2004; Värlander, 2008). Whatever the exact reasons, this was a sensitive issue and, after an initial follow up, persistent probing was felt to be inappropriate on the grounds that it might endanger the relationship of trust and rapport that had been built up (Powney & Watts, 1987). The limitations of the interview method used were exposed to some extent here.

In Ethel's case, on the other hand, her complete lack of take up of opportunities to discuss feedback was clearly linked to more general issues with motivation. Indeed, she stated that written feedback was effective without the need for oral discussion, but she seemed to adopt a strategy based on engaging only to the level necessary to pass her assignments, rather than to achieve higher marks. Ethel's strategic approach and lack of engagement will be discussed in depth in Section 8.4.5, where her lack of engagement with dialogue on feedback is linked to her low engagement with her study in general.

8.4.3.2 The nature and impact of dialogue

A lack of feedback discussion was not a factor in Flora's failure to develop CAW through her assignments, and perhaps her case supports the argument that 'doing time' or visible engagement with feedback may not be sufficient to ensure success (Handley, Price, & Millar, 2011). For Flora, an evident lack of transferability from her feedback contributed to poorer marks as the programme progressed, and confidence and self-esteem issues may also have come into play. In Chapter 3, the impracticality of collecting data from supervisor-student meetings was discussed, and no data are available on exactly what took place in Flora's discussions around feedback. In two cases, those of Clara and Betty, however, I was able to capitalise on opportunities to collect data on discussions around feedback. Clara, a student in my first-term option module, took up the invitation to meet for discussion of both mid-term formative feedback and the summative feedback received in term two. In Betty's case, Tutor D agreed to record a supervision meeting on feedback from the first assignment. Some observations on these data provide insights into the nature of the discussions and give more evidence of their impact in this context.

Clara met me for approximately twenty minutes to discuss formative feedback. Several misconceptions emerged during that meeting, illustrating how concepts introduced a few weeks earlier on her pre-sessional had only partially been taken on board and understood. An example of this was when I pointed out how she had referred to claims about the value of teaching spoken grammar without supporting references:

> Clara: So I need these references to support it?
> BS: In a sense yes, because otherwise it's unsupported. That's a general observation that may be true or may be not...I mean I don't know...to make those kind of observations I'd be careful because you're kind of, you're making an observation that you may have heard about, but that's anecdotal evidence remember.
> Clara: Oh... (C:FT)

A representative extract below from Clara's formative task shows the marginal comment and end comments (in brackets in the text) referred to in the interview, highlighting the lack of appropriate support and referencing:

Assignment task: *To what extent should English Language Teachers focus on teaching 'spoken grammar' in the classroom, as opposed to traditional grammar that is based on written English?*	
Text extract	**End feedback comments**
At present, whether or not teaching spoken grammar in [*insert*] language learning classroom has always been a controversial issue.[*rephrase-need a reference here*] Most people consider that English language teachers should only teach written-based grammar, as nearly all of the grammar rules originally from the study of written version. Whereas others claim that English teachers should add spoken grammar in the language learning classroom, because it is more useful to serve communicative purpose.[*reference?*]	Look for ways to support your points from the literature and avoid generalisations and claims that are not supported in this way.

Figure 8-3 Clara formative task example (Words in brackets and italics = marginal comments in text)

The 12-week pre-sessional that Clara attended introduced different types of evidence including the concept of anecdotal evidence, but her pre-sessional feedback had clearly not helped her resolve uncertainty around using sources to support points, a problem that surfaced here, two months into her taught programme. Later in the same meeting, Clara made a surprising statement about her concerns relating to plagiarism:

Clara: If I use lots of references I'm worried about it [plagiarism]
BS: You have to use the references, the literature, the sources, you have to (pause)
Clara: Combine them together
BS: Yeah...
Clara: Link them...
BS: Synthesise them and link them in some way if you can...
Clara: I think that's my most weak point because before that I didn't realise that. Just that, academic writing should do like this. (C:FT)

Here, Clara referred to her doubts that using other sources in her text was a form of plagiarism; she needed reassurance that her paraphrasing and use of quotations was acceptable. The precise point intended by the word 'before' is unclear, and it could refer to before the pre-sessional or before the formative task under discussion in this meeting. Although I suggested the value of revising the task, I did not insist on the re-submission, and Clara was the only one from a module group of twenty to submit a revised task. The extract below is her attempt to revise the text discussed in Figure 8-3above.

Many English teachers have mainly taught written grammar in the classroom. McCarthy and Carter (1995, p.207) claimed that English teachers always focus on teaching written-based grammar to achieve (the) 'correct' English. However, the 'correct' English may not appropriately used in spoken language. According to Rings (as cited in McCarthy and Carter, 1995, p.207), "…speakers of English (who)… can only speak like a book, because their English is modelled on an almost exclusively written version of the language". Therefore, it is likely that teaching spoken grammar is in urgent need. McCarthy and Carter (1995, p.207) argued that English learners would be able to exchange expressions in both "written and spoken contexts" if they were taught the two kinds of grammar. **(Extract from Clara's revised formative task)**

It is evident that the process of revision enabled Clara to position the spoken grammar debate with reference to sources, and even though there was a dependency on a single source, she also followed conventions in acknowledging a secondary reference. Clara did not use non integral citations which foreground information rather than author, often seen as a mark of a more competent writer (e.g., Davis, 2013), but she showed her ability to use a range of report verbs and introductory phrases such as *claimed*, *according to* and *argued*.

Two later comments in the same meeting illustrated Clara's preoccupation with her need to use her own 'opinion' in her writing:

BS: Think about your conclusions, do you need to hedge them?

Clara: I thought everything from my opinion have to use hedging.
BS: It's not about this bit of content, it's about asking those type of questions.
        Ask more questions, ask about the implications.
Clara: Is it just refer to my own opinion? (C:FT)

The concept of hedging was introduced and practised on the pre-sessional, but Clara seemed to overgeneralise its use in the first example above. In response to Clara's reference to the importance of her own opinion, I advised her to question statements about content in order to achieve a greater depth of critical engagement. I also advised Clara to use the term 'academic judgement' rather than opinion, as the latter is often not informed by research. The belief that academic argument requires statements of personal opinion was reported by a third of the respondents in Wingate's recent study (2011) of novice undergraduate writers (see also Paul's case for issues with assertion), so Clara's confusion here should not be so surprising. What is significant is that Clara was still struggling to understand such concepts after completing a pre-sessional course and almost a term into her Master's programme, evidence that pedagogic support for academic writing and source use can be necessary after EAP preparation programmes (Davis, 2013).

Clara later discussed her first assignment feedback with me, and given her lack of teaching experience and background in Biology, the relatively basic level of content in her questions around teaching techniques and planning was not surprising. Much of the dialogue in the meeting was that of the expert tutor transmitting information to the novice, similar to that observed by Blair and McGinty (2012) in a study of feedback discussions with UK undergraduate students. Clara's over-use of hedging (the importance of transport) is in evidence in the extract below, from the beginning of her introduction on her first option module assignment. She had clearly taken on board the need to support her statements, as the two references show, though the page numbers were not necessary for paraphrased text. Clara was unsure of why I had underlined the first sentence on her script.

Assignment: *Write a lesson plan to teach a vocabulary and speaking lesson on the topic of Transport.*
It is generally acknowledged that teaching new words is always followed by speaking practice (Thornbury, 2002, p.93). In addition, learning vocabulary is not only to understand the meanings in coursebook, but also aims to use it in real life (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p.121). Transport seems to be closely related to everyday life. For example, when a Chinese wants to buy a ticket in a British railway station, he/she has to communicate with English speaking staff. Therefore, it seems useful to teach transport-related words to students.

Figure 8-4 Clara-option module extract 1

In our discussion, it emerged that Clara had assumed that all vocabulary teaching involved drilling of new words, thus leading to her overgeneralisation that it was "always followed" by speaking practice. I pointed out that vocabulary can be taught for passive use: "…we don't necessarily do speaking work with that vocabulary, sometimes we pre-teach vocabulary before a reading text."

The discussion moved on to an exchange on the notion of 'common knowledge', with Clara checking where she did not need to reference. It is worth noting that her second reference in the extract above was almost superfluous as it made a rather obvious and common-sense point; such overuse of referencing could be interpreted as a performance strategy (Harwood & Petric, 2012), providing references that the tutor appeared to value without a true understanding of their use. Clara's confusion about referencing and common knowledge which emerged, however, suggested that overuse of referencing was mainly due to continued confusion around when to apply it. Clara also sought clarification about a comment in the feedback report about her lesson aims. The feedback in the report stated:

> Your main aim seems to be achievable in this lesson though subsidiary aims seem confused, and I cannot see how students can be more familiar with grammatical rules if they are not referred to in the lesson.

Clara was struggling to understand the purpose and role of lesson aims in her plan. She explained that certain grammar structures were assumed to be more or less grasped by the learners in the context of her lesson plan, which I pointed out was a further reason for not including a grammar teaching aim if it was not a focus of the lesson.

Later, Clara admitted to being confused about another content point in the feedback report analysis section:

I wonder if the transactional speaking activities (buying tickets) that you
mention in your introduction might not also have given a good speaking context.

The discussion allowed further explanation of "transactional situation" and the
relevance of activities based on buying tickets as a natural context in her lesson. All
these points in the post-feedback discussion picked up task-focused elements. They
were evidence of a student with no teaching experience and a lack of discipline
knowledge trying to engage with module content (lesson planning), and
demonstrated the importance of understanding of content knowledge for criticality to
be possible.

The second meeting finished with an exchange prompted by a direct question
from Clara on how to achieve 'depth of analysis'. Clara referred to the following
section of the same text discussed above and my feedback comment:

Assignment text	Feedback end comment
As Harmer (2007, p.53) noted, activate exercises should be personalised. Considering this point, in the last speaking activity, the students will be allowed to use any vocabulary related to the topic.	…the Harmer reference top of page 10 on personalized activities. There is a tendency to simply state 'X says this is true' as support for your decisions, rather than going into more depth about why this is valid.

Figure 8-5 Clara: Option module extract 2

In my earlier meeting I had advised her to use a questioning strategy, but in
this meeting I referred Clara back to her own text to 'show' how she could have
elaborated on her point about personalisation in activating student language by
explaining its significance and by so doing establishing her own assumptions and
position.

BS: With any concept or term, do some kind of explanation, don't just
        assume the reader knows…. say something more about personalisation
        and why it is useful.
Clara: So I need to think about what the reader understands..
BS: Yeah, it could be an educated reader who doesn't know these terms, you
        have to take that line with it.
Clara: OK.

Clara may not have been able to use the earlier advice, due to the fact that it
was an abstract form of 'telling' rather than 'showing'. Exemplification around
Clara's own text appeared to be necessary in the later meeting. Significantly, Clara's

marks were strong later in the programme; she did not receive further comments relating to depth of analysis. In fact, tutor D's feedback on Clara's second option module assignment indicated that she had clearly moved forward with the CAW issues raised in the two meetings:

> TD: Really good synthesis of information, they made sure they stayed relevant to the topic, clear line of argument, comprehensible, well structured, all the things that you want in an assignment. (TD: S2)

Clara's example above resonates with arguments in the literature that recognise the difficulties involved in articulating and making explicit the type of tacit knowledge surrounding a term such as 'depth of analysis' (Chanock, 2000; Jacobs, 2007); it also supports arguments for exemplars that *show* students how to do critical analysis, rather than feedback that attempts to tell them (Kean, 2012; Hendry, Bromberger & Armstrong, 2011).

In Betty's case, tutor D spent over twenty-four minutes of a supervision meeting lasting twenty seven minutes discussing feedback on her first assignment. Betty questioned two comments in her feedback report, both of which related to a need to be more explicit in the writing and avoiding generalisations that were seemingly not intended. In the interview on this summative feedback, Betty discussed the way she had been able to clarify her intentions in the meeting, and concluded that her error had been in the way she presented her points, with the result that they appeared to the tutor to be 'contradictory'.

Tutor D went through her comments in Betty's marked script, with some discussion of examples of poor expression, but further significant points arose where she explained the need for more precision, more up to date sources to support the argument and greater depth of analysis:

> TD: Erm, this part, there's a lot written about motivation I think you've made a good point about motivation and CLT, one that other students didn't get, but then you didn't explore it sufficiently deeply. So you could have got extra points. You've raised this as an extra thing, this is where you've done your independent thinking and that's good, but you didn't give it enough research to really get the credit for it. (TD: SM)

As with Clara's meeting, the discussion focused on the need for more support to develop points in the argument. The extract is also indicative of how verbal discussion allows tutors to manage critical comments which constitute face-threatening acts. Tutor D provided plenty of praise and encouragement with phrases such as, "... you've made a good point, you've done your independent thinking and that's good...". Whether the need for Betty to explore her point more fully was self-explanatory is not clear, but, significantly, Betty did not question this further.

Betty made clear to me her belief in the importance of these post-feedback discussions, not only in the data collection period, but in her member-check interview the following year. However, in terms of her later marks and feedback, she did not make the same progress with her writing as Clara. In Targets for Improvement in her second option module, she received comments about avoiding contradictory statements, and the need to avoid 'implausible conclusions'. She also received comments about faulty choice of vocabulary, discussed in the meeting reported above, and she admitted in her final interview that this was a recurring issue throughout the year.

To conclude this section, it is significant that only half of the participants took up opportunities to discuss feedback, with discussions more likely to take place when supervisor and marker roles coincided. Timeliness was a problem, as two of the three summative feedback reports were received late in the summer term when students were beginning to focus on the dissertation. In Anna's and Diane's cases, it is likely that satisfaction with marks meant there was little incentive to follow up feedback. Where data were collected on post-feedback discussions, they were typically expert-novice interactions, but a brief analysis suggested their potential to go beyond clarification of minor detail. In Clara's case, major misconceptions seemed to emerge, and discussion of examples from her text helped her to deepen her understanding of concepts introduced on her pre-sessional. Explanation and exemplification of CAW took place in these discussions around situated examples in a way that did not happen in the written feedback. Betty's member-check interview highlighted the fact that feedback may not be effective immediately, that it requires a period of time and a number of writing events for uptake to occur. Finally, it may be more than a coincidence that the students taking up offers to discuss feedback were

in the pre-sessional group. The role of pre-sessional study in preparing students for CAW will be taken up again in Section 8.4.8.

8.4.4   *Theme D: Motivation and engagement*

Although research has tended to focus on the question of effectiveness of feedback, student engagement with feedback has been relatively neglected in the literature (Handley et al., 2011). There often seems to be an underlying assumption not only that students are grade oriented, but that they are generally striving to achieve the highest marks possible. In reality, student motivation and engagement may be variable across programmes and modules. The few studies that address questions of engagement highlight the complexity of the concept. Handley suggests that engagement may not always be visible, and that it cannot simply be measured by 'doing time', or measuring time spent reading and discussing feedback (Handley, Price & Millar, p.551). Engagement or dis-engagement is interpreted here in terms of students' reported interest and study efforts, as these pre-determine to some extent their engagement with feedback. In the next section, I will draw upon the cases of Ethel and Diane, to explore issues of strategic engagement more fully.

8.4.4.1 Ethel's disengagement

Ethel made an honest confession to having only read her first summative feedback once, and then only because of the interview. She explained how she was shocked by the result, receiving a mark of 75, and later explained that she had not expected to get a high mark because she struggled to make the word count:

> Ethel: I looked at the mark, maybe the first sentences and then I just put it
> someplace.
> Ethel: When I began to write I found it difficult to write that amount. If I
> translate it in Chinese it would be only two thousand words in English.
> (E:S1)

Ethel questioned her high mark in her first assignment, explaining how she made up her word count by re-instating a section she had earlier judged to be inadequate. She later discussed not knowing the standard her tutor was expecting, but also feeling undeserving of a high mark. She referred to her first assignment marker as 'kind' and later applied her assumption that the same marker would be equally generous on a later assignment. Ethel's perception was that the tutor

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"…maybe has lower standards for the assignment". Ethel's experience here points to variable tutor perceptions of quality when marking, which can in turn lead to varying expectations of the assessment process (Brown & Glover, 2006; Ecclestone, 2001; Hunter and Docherty, 2011; Price et al., 2011).

Ethel gave a clear indication that she ignored feedback comments and that she did not attend to individual comments or general feedback on her formative Methods task; she remembered receiving informal feedback on her second option module, but could recall nothing about it in the final interview. These points are supported with reference to the actual feedback comments made on the formative Methods blog, for example, where issues about addressing the title were identified, and these same issues were pointed out in the Methods summative report. In addition, Ethel did not seek any discussion of feedback from her tutors, explaining again that this was due to a lack of interest in the topics. She stated "I know I have problems, questions but I just don't want to work it out".

Discussing her understanding of comments on critical analysis in her second assignment, Ethel referred again to her lack of interest and motivation:

> BS: What does it tell you?
> Ethel: Erm... Just to improve more the discussing in the essay and more critical thinking and something like...
> BS: Do you know how to do that?
> Ethel: While I was doing that I knew I'd got these weak points and I knew I was not doing that properly but for that topic I didn't have much interest. I think at that time I only want to pass it so I was not aiming the high mark or something. (E: S2)

When asked whether more feedback events and feedback opportunities would have made a difference to the development of her writing, Ethel's response was negative:

> Ethel: It would not be very helpful for me...
> BS: Why do you say that?
> Ethel: Again because I do not have much interest for what I'm now doing, I mean the whole module erm, everything. (E: S2)

Analysis of Ethel's feedback revealed a similar picture to that of other participants, with a lack of depth in terms of amplification and explanation, and a significant number of comments relating to a deficit in critical analysis (see feedback

analysis Section 8.2.5). It was also noted above that she received relatively few feed forward comments. On the other hand, two feedback reports were detailed, containing almost as many positive comments and Ethel also had two opportunities to engage with formative feedback during her later modules.

Diane, like Flora and Betty, experienced a downward trend in her marks, but as in Betty's case, there is evidence that she devoted little time to one of her assignments. Indeed, Diane was honest about a trip home in the Easter vacation that left her with only nine days to devote to the term-two assignments. In the event she only gave three days to the option module that received a borderline fail (45). Diane simply stated that the results were dependent on time devoted to each task. In fact, when asked to comment on the impact of any early feedback on her writing, Diane remarked that the formative task had been "..really helpful..." and that her poorer marks in later assignments were because she "... spent really little time on finding resources, books...".

Reference has been made in the literature to the way that some students may not wish to identify with the academic community of their tutors (Yelland, 2011). Ethel's responses, and, to a lesser extent, Diane's, suggest that she did not want to make efforts to be inducted into the academic discourse community of her Master's programme. Both cases point to the importance of individual student motivation, suggesting that the quality and timeliness of feedback can be largely irrelevant when motivation to engage is lacking. For Ethel in particular, it was a problem of interest in the topics and modules, so it may be fair to suggest that quality of feedback did not play a central role in her disengagement.

It is evident that students made decisions to apportion effort based on interest, perceptions of task difficulty, or their knowledge of their markers, all three typical findings in the literature for undergraduate students (Orsmond et al., 2005). Tutor comments highlighted the way strategic approaches to study were not uncommon for this type of student. Where students engaged variably with their written assignments, the value of written feedback and engagement with that feedback was reduced, with the role of written feedback in developing CAW reduced accordingly. The student participants in this study were self-selecting volunteers, so

the very fact of their participation in my research project might be seen as evidence of a certain level of motivation. One might accordingly have assumed that they would engage to a high level with their programme. Ethel and Diane's cases, however, illustrate the dangers of such an assumption.

8.4.5   Theme E: Institutional barriers to feed forward

Modularisation of academic programmes has been observed to bring with it a number of challenges to the delivery of effective feedback (Lea & Street, 2000; Nicol, 2010; Weaver, 2006). One-term modules were standard in all departments at Bradfield when this study began, with summative feedback delivered after modules had been completed, and arguably when it was less useful or usable. Clara gave an example of this, referring to the fact that discussion with tutors did not seem relevant, as she was already focusing on her dissertation when she received her final assignment feedback. This is quite a significant point that related to both preliminary and main studies.

Modularisation has been observed to reduce opportunities for dialogue and lead to summative aspects dominating over formative aspects of assessment. Student and tutor interviews provided evidence that formative tasks and more formalised feedback were generally not offered in second-term modules; the large cohort for the core module meant that detailed written feedback was not possible, with the result that general feedback offered on the VLE was largely ignored. I have argued in this thesis that it is still important to understand feedback as communication (Higgins et al., 2001) and to focus on the quality of that feedback, but the institutional context in which feedback was delivered often marginalised the role of feedback. Perhaps the absence of recent research on the quality of written feedback comments reflects the realisation that efforts to improve written feedback can be wasted under current assessment regimes.

8.4.6   Theme F: General versus personal and individualised feedback

There are examples in the assessment literature that suggest giving general feedback on problems to the whole group (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Burke & Pieterich, 2010; Ryan (2000), on the basis that it can avoid individuals' loss of face and save time for

tutors. For the second-term core module with the whole cohort, students received brief comments via a blog and detailed general comments on a formative task via the VLE (see Section 6.2). A page of language-related feedback was given on sentence construction issues and poor expression, with advice on how to avoid them. The main focus, however, seen in the extract in Figure 8-6 below, was on addressing the assignment title, dealing with competing definitions and developing points through more supporting evidence.

Title: *Identify some of the key issues relating to the term 'authenticity' in the English language classroom. Make reference to either the teaching of listening or the teaching of reading in your discussion.*

Address the title and answer the question!
Don't change the title…always write the title on the top of the assignment and keep checking that you are answering the question and engaging with the title. Many students simply stated a topic at the top of their page! Analyse titles for key words and look for indications of balance required in the answer. The title for this task asked you to make reference to listening or reading not to write principally about either-the most important point was 'authenticity'.

The problem of defining authenticity was a key focus of the assignment that many of you missed:
- consider the nature of materials and how authentic materials can still be scripted (TV drama and films).
- the debate about whose 'real English' is used in authentic materials is an important issue that most overlooked
- consider conflicting definitions and state which one you adopt and why (with references of course). It is not enough to 'describe' different authors views or definitions, you must explain why you adopt one of these and its particular value

Claims and evidence
Generally speaking, you used sources quite well to support points. However, there are still examples of very broad generalisations that either need references or should not be made at all. e.g.,
"The main purpose of learning a foreign language is to use the language in real life."
-Many students study foreign languages to pass examinations or for study and not to use in real life, so this is a claim that is not accurate!
"Most ELT course books often use irrelevant and improper English; they always use outdated situations and contexts."
"Students always lack background knowledge for authentic texts in the classroom..."
- Take care or avoid words like '*most*' and '*always*' that make strong claims! More recent course books will be reasonably up to date and relevant and not have 'improper' English.
- Many students need to make more in-text references to support points. If a statement is made that seems like common knowledge, it may not need support but ask yourself if the point is worth making if it is common sense or commonly held.

Figure 8-6 Core module general feedback

Diane's and Anna's cases illustrated how the feedback addressed to the module group received less attention than individual feedback. Diane referred to the general comments in this formative feedback as not very useful because it was "...general feedback..." stating the following:

> Diane: I just went through that. I remember it pointed out a big problem is that
> we didn't focus on the topic, we get side-tracked... and I was doubting
> that I also had the same problem. (D: S2)

Diane did not attend to the general feedback on definitions, evidenced by the fact that she received a specific comment in her summative core module feedback on the need to set out definitions more clearly.

In her final interview, Anna commented briefly on the formative feedback from the Methods task, stating that it had helped with respect to structure and referencing. Her individual blog comments (see below) did not match this closely:

> Well organised and coherently written academic text. You make some good
> points but miss the whole debate on defining authentic which is partly the point
> of the task. Read and refer to Gilmore.
> **(Anna −Core module formative task feedback comments)**

Later, in her core module feedback, Anna recalled omitting to define 'metacognitive strategies' and the feedback also mentioned a need to refer to 'authenticity', the very topic of the formative task (see comment above). Despite her strong assignment marks, the evidence shows that Anna did not attend sufficiently to the general formative feedback in the second term and that she was not able to respond immediately to it.

Diane and Clara valued their audio feedback at the formative stage because of its personal nature, reflecting similar findings in the literature (Bond, 2009; Gould & Day, 2013; Lunt & Curran, 2009; Savin-Baden, 2010)[40]. Asked to reflect on the audio feedback in her final interview, Diane made this comment:

> Diane: It's just like talking with you although not face-to-face, when I hear the
> voice it's just like you are talking... when you were talking you just asked
> me to come to the first page, which points, and that's really good. (D: S2)

The element of personal attention was seen to be important for the relationship between student and tutor in Paul's case, and it can influence student engagement with feedback. In this study, personal and individualised feedback rather

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[40] Section 7.3.4 also highlighted research showing how screencast feedback enhances audio feedback, and can be even more effective in providing personalised and detailed formative feedback.

than general feedback approaches were more likely to engage students. This finding echoes recent studies that focus on tutor-student relationships and emotional responses to receiving feedback (Carless et al., 2011; Dowden, Pittaway, Yost, & McCarthy, 2013; Rowe, 2011; Värlander, 2008).

8.4.7   *Theme G: Pre-sessional impact on CAW*

 In the academic year 2009-10, to enter the MATESOL students with a 6.0 overall score and 6.0 in writing were able to take the Bradfield 8-week pre-sessional programme, while students with a 5.5 in writing were required to take the 12-week programme. Table 8.4 below shows that both Flora and Betty actually held IELTS writing scores of 7.0, but required the 8-week programme because of 5.5 scores in reading and speaking respectively. Helen (Biology) and Clara (Biotechnology) did not have first degrees in English language or Linguistics and Flora (25) and Helen (30) were older than the rest of the group, with some experience outside higher education. Flora finished with the lowest average assignment marks in the group, despite a high writing score on entry, while Clara had one of the lowest writing scores on entry, but finished with the highest average in the group.

Table 8:7: Background of pre-sessional participants

Name	Age	IELTS	First degree	Prior teaching	PS	MA marks
Flora	25	**6.0** R-5.5 L-6 W-7 S-6	English	No	8-week	OM-66 OM2-51 CM-30 (55.75) D-30
Betty	22	**6.5** R-7.0 L-6.5 W-7.0 S-5.5	Business English	No	8-week	OM166 OM2-62 CM-58 (66) D-63.7
Clara	23	**6.5** R-6.0 L-7.5 W-5.5 S-7.0	Biotechnology	2 years Teaching English in Kindergarten	12 -week	OM1-66 OM2-69 CM-66 (67.5) D-69
Helen*	30	**6.0** R-7.0 L-5.5 W-5.5 S-6	Biology	2 years teaching Biology at tertiary level in China	12-week	OM1-62

(OM=Option module, CM = Core module D= Dissertation.* Withdrew due to illness; IELTS writing scores underlined; overall average in brackets)

8.4.7.1 Language versus academic skill development

Participants with pre-sessional entry to the MA programme were interviewed in the first two weeks of the academic year to discuss their experience and perceptions of progress on their PS courses. A set of possible benefits were presented to the students for ranking, in order to explore these perceptions. Participants ranked writing skills highly (average 2), but Table 8.5 shows how other language skills were ranked below knowledge of university systems, knowledge of UK academic culture, development of independent study skills and research skills. In fact, the research literature indicates that rapid development of language skills in such programmes is not easy to achieve. For relatively advanced students, even a 12-week programme may not be able to boost language proficiency levels significantly (Feast, 2002; Green, 2007). Small gains in IELTS writing test scores were found in Green's study (2007) for example, and Shaw and Liu (1998) found improvements in academic style in areas such as impersonality, formality, and hedging, but these were not matched

by developments in language proficiency measured by grammatical accuracy or complexity of language[41].

Table 8:8: Ranking of pre-sessional benefits

Pre-sessional benefits	*Average ranking	Flora	Clara	Betty	Helen
Developed knowledge of how to write academic assignments	2	2	2	1	3
Developed knowledge of university systems	4	1	7	9	2
Developed research skills	4	4	5	3	5
Developed independent work	5	3	6	10	4
Provided knowledge of UK academic culture	5	5	8	6	1
Developed reading skills	6	9	4	7	6
Developed listening skills	7	8	11	2	8
Developed speaking skills	7	10	9	4	7
Improved vocabulary	7	12	3	5	10
Provided unconditional offer	7	7	1	11	11
Improved grammar	9	11	10	8	9
A Way of making friends	10	6	12	12	12

(Shaded cells indicate first and second rankings; * rounded down to nearest whole number)

Research in the UK and Australia indicates that pre-sessionals often have less impact on language skills than on other academic skills. They can be more effective in introducing writing conventions and norms (Poverjuc, 2010), or developing student confidence, and leading to a better understanding of learning strategies and the requirements of degree programmes (Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). This was evident in the student experience here. Betty referred to the "...very different writing style from her home country.....particularly making notes and paraphrasing...", indicating that the pre-sessional had shown how academic writing was different from IELTS writing. Flora mentioned that she had expected more work on listening and reading skills on the pre-sessional, but was satisfied with the writing skills element.

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[41] The authors of the study recognised that this may have been a result of the pre-and post-test tool they employed.

Helen commented on what she had found 'new' in the pre-sessional writing component:

> Helen: Oh, I think the way of academic writing is very, very new for me. It is different from the Chinese writing, especially in the UK you have to have a strong argument in the introduction. But in China we always summarise what we have said or what we have write, and in the conclusion we have standpoint or something like that. It is new for me. (H:PS)

Helen, however, also indicated that her pre-sessional did not improve her language skills in the way she had expected:

> Helen: Um... Before I arrived here I think I will improve my English greatly. But when I come here I think English ability improved is not as much as expected. But I know how the academic studies in the UK. That is very important. (H:PS)

Betty was an exception here, as she highlighted how she gained confidence in speaking skills on her pre-sessional, a point she reiterated in her member check interview. A lack of confidence in oral ability might impair students' ability to engage with learning activities in a taught Master's programme, and could certainly inhibit students from engaging in dialogue around feedback with tutors (see Katy's case in Chapter 5). It is also worth noting that Betty, along with Clara and Flora in this pre-sessional group, were the students who most consistently met and discussed feedback with tutors, and the ability to develop as a self-regulating learner depends crucially on confidence in speaking.

8.4.7.2 Critical thinking and critical analytical writing

Little or no research specifically measures or charts the impact of a PS programme on the development of criticality in writing. Archibald (2001), for example, found that argumentation and structure improved in the writing of students on an 8-week pre-sessional programme at Southampton, but his study was based on an IELTS-style pre- and post-test which did not engage with critical academic writing as it is conceptualised in this study. Other studies have found that students value the focus on critical thinking that PS programmes provide (Dooey, 2010; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011) and though similar views emerged in the present study, they were more qualified.

Helen's pre-sessional developed her awareness of critical academic writing, as her quote above shows, providing her at least with important language and concepts. She was aware of the need to signal arguments and to take a stance early in an assignment, with the need to re-state that position in the Conclusion. Betty highlighted the critical analysis aspect in PS writing skills, stating that the "…most helpful thing is how to use evidence to support your own idea", but she qualified this, stating that there was "... not too much critical..." compared with the taught degree programme. Flora indicated that her pre-sessional had shown her the importance of critical writing, realising the need for "...good evidence to support your idea, thesis statement", but on critical thinking specifically she observed that the pre-sessional "…doesn't help me a lot", and felt that more time could have been spent on that aspect.

Clara's case usefully illustrates the way PS knowledge is provisional, particularly in relation to developing criticality. In the interview exploring her pre-sessional experience, Clara reported developing awareness of CT and referencing:

> Clara: One of the biggest points I remember is the critical thinking in the class
> so I think it's made me think about what is critical thinking... and also the
> reference format in academic writing. (C:PS)

Section 8.4.3, however, reported Clara's confusion about referencing and plagiarism in a first-term meeting discussing feedback. In a later meeting with her tutor, Clara clarified how to use 'hedging' in her conclusions, a topic covered in her pre-sessional, and in the same meeting she clarified the difference between personal opinions, anecdotal evidence and academic judgement. This example serves as a reminder that what is learnt or developed in a pre-sessional must be taken forward and practised in the taught programme, and that improvement in CAW is a long-term process.

Pre-sessionals attempt to prepare students for taught programmes but cannot do so by closely replicating those programmes. Flora observed that her PS had been "..helpful for the assignment, but during the pre-sessional it is more easy than this one" ; she referred to the 1200 word assignment requirement for pre-sessional work, compared with 4500 words in her Master's programme. Helen also recognised that

PS essays and reports were "...not as complicated as actual reports or real essays..." but she felt they had "opened a window" for her. Evidently, the pre-sessional programmes provided an introduction to CAW for these students, but as Peter observed in the preliminary study, such courses cannot fully prepare for the discipline-specific critical thinking and writing required in taught Master's programmes.

8.4.7.3 Pre-sessional feedback

When asked to discuss feedback on her PS, Helen pointed to an aspect that she needed to improve, referring to a comment about using signposting in her essays. I probed on how much guidance she had been given:

> BS: Did you get enough help from the tutor, do you think, to show you how to put it right? Because it's one thing to say, 'This is a problem, no signposting' but did you understand how to put that right or did you discuss that with your tutor and did you get some good help in what to do to improve?
>
> Helen: I discussed this question with my tutor in the tutorial and she gave me some examples of how to do it. So, I improved a lot from this. (H:PS)

Helen's comment illustrates how feedback on the Bradfield pre-sessional programme was frequent, and detailed, with timetabled tutorial discussion. Feedback was given on two long assignments (1000-1200 words) with additional feedback on a short report (600 words) and tutorial discussions on long essay drafts. In discussing this feedback, however, Helen drew attention to the way in which 'telling' students how to write was not sufficient without practice: She explained how feedback helped her pay attention to mistakes, but went on to state that "it's very important, I think because you know how to do it, it's different from you do it."

8.4.7.4 Summary

Their pre-sessionals introduced students to critical thinking and critical writing, but two students recognised the limitations of such programmes for preparation for writing in a Master's programme. The observation that PS assignments at Bradfield appeared 'easier' than those in the taught programme, was perhaps a reflection of the nature of pre-sessionals, which give a high degree of one-to-one support and supervision (Dooey, 2010), building confidence for the transition to unfamiliar

academic cultures and demanding tasks[42]. Unfortunately, such an approach often contrasts with the realities of degree programmes with large cohorts of students, and few opportunities to engage with tutors.

Betty explicitly recognised the boost to her confidence from her pre-sessional, and there is some evidence that Clara, Flora and Helen similarly adopted learning strategies from their courses. Peter's PS experience did not lead to a greater willingness to seek out tutors and discuss feedback in his taught programme, but three of the four students[43] with PS experience in the MATESOL group were the participants who made the most of opportunities for dialogue with their tutors. Finally, Clara showed that concepts and skills may only be developing at the end of a pre-sessional and they require effort and engagement to move them forward. Unfortunately for Flora, such efforts and strategies were not in themselves enough to ensure success.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the limitations of written feedback in dealing with tacit knowledge around critical analytical writing (CAW). Substantial feedback was provided at the summative stage, but two out of three pieces of feedback were received after the taught programme had ended. Analysis of feedback showed limited feed forward potential even for 'Targets for improvement' comments, which were often directive and assumed a high level of tacit knowledge. CAW, judged by improvement in marks, developed in some cases, but 'depth of analysis' comments featured even for stronger participants. One aspect of CAW, academic style, did not feature in later feedback, but referencing issues were more resistant to change over several feedback events. Summative aspects of feedback dominated as institutional practice reduced opportunities for formative feedback and dialogue, and this was not helped by inconsistent guidance and feedback practices. The cases themselves

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[42] In a small-scale study of pre-sessional impact that I co-presented at a BALEAP Conference in 2012, one student commented that pre-sessionals needed to be "...not too cosy, but fierce…we might need more pressure".

[43] Helen withdrew during the second term, but she also had a discussion with her marker on feedback for the assignment she submitted.

suggested the importance of tutor and student relationships for engagement, the impact of individualised as opposed to general feedback, and the potential for face-to-face discussion to develop an understanding of conventions and criticality. Although useful as an introduction to CAW, knowledge and skills from the pre-sessional required practice and dialogue with tutors to develop fully. Chapter 9 will present and discuss tutor interview data to further explore student and tutor relationships and examine how tutor beliefs and practices impacted on the role of feedback in this context.

Chapter 9 : The Tutor Perspective

This chapter surveys the tutor interview data from the main study. It will be recalled that seven tutors were interviewed with respect to six pieces of formative feedback and 18 pieces of summative feedback. The chapter takes up Bailey and Garner's (2010) claim that "… in British higher education the lived experience and beliefs of teaching staff remain under-explored and under-represented" (p.196), and addresses the gap in research around academic teachers' lived experience in terms of feedback practice (Tuck, 2010). It explores tutor beliefs and practices within their teaching and learning regime to provide insights into the role of feedback in developing the critical academic writing of the international student participants in the study. This data provides important triangulation with data from feedback analysis and student interviews in earlier chapters, while also providing a means to connect the study to the wider concerns of internationalisation and assessment at Master's level discussed in Chapter 2. The chapter includes a reflection on the nature of my role and my own evolving feedback practices during this study. The data reveal diverse tutor beliefs, assumptions and practices, and the chapter highlights the way this diversity was related to the teaching-feedback link and the tensions between tutor roles of teacher and assessor. What emerges is a picture of a depersonalised assessment process which can be linked to financially driven imperatives of internationalisation operating on this Master's programme.

9.1. The Teaching – Feedback Link

Chapter 2 highlighted the principles of AfL that stress the need to consider feedback in relation to teaching and to embed assessment within it. In interviews on the formative task and first summative feedback, tutors were asked about the way students were prepared for tasks and feedback, and the ways in which feedback was followed up. The interviews suggested that feedback in the form of written marginal and end comments on assignments was supported by other forms of feedback in the classroom, but the range of pre and post submission activities advocated in the AfL literature were not widely used (see Chapter 7).

9.1.2. Formative feedback in teaching

In the first summative feedback interviews, tutors expressed a view of formative feedback that was not restricted to comments on formal assignments, as tutors F and D explained

> TF: …they get formative feedback on a week by week basis, they read articles and have small group discussions where specific groups cover specific questions, and then we have a class discussion where we cover all of these questions and I comment on the structure of the paper, what could be used to pick on in terms of style of writing, what could be useful in terms of content, that they may be using for assignments, to make sure that they realise, not only what's written, but what authors do when they do certain things, when they say certain things etc. (TF:S1)

> TD: In terms of written work, every week they get assigned readings and they get questions that go with those assigned readings….I always make it clear that I'm happy to have a look at anything that they've actually written for the homework. We go through the answers either directly or indirectly the following class so they get feedback on what it is but it's up to them whether they decide they want direct feedback. In terms of oral work, every week a group of students are expected to present a five or 10-minute summary of what we talked about in the previous class. (TD: S1)

In fact, at two points in her interview on summative feedback, tutor C suggested that a different type of formative feedback was more useful than written feedback on formal assignments:

> TC: I think the best work when there's a, I don't mean informal when it's unprofessional, but it's a more dynamic form of feedback... go too heavily to this regulated, you know formalised stuff and you're missing opportunities to engage...
>
> I think the most valuable feedback is not the, you know formal structure, but you get feedback every five seconds. (TC: S1)

The examples above show how tutors held a wider conception of the notion of formative feedback than more formal written feedback on formative tasks. Although this feedback sometimes led to written comments on short homework activities, it was mostly oral in nature. The examples above, however, suggest activities that went beyond 'telling' and engaged students in reading and thinking critically. This study did not set out to assess the impact of such teaching and feedback on student writing. Such research would be difficult but worth considering in future studies.

9.1.3. *Assumptions of wider support for CAW*

The focus of tutor interviews was limited to discussion around specific feedback and feedback practices in general due to constraints of time and manageability. Tutors, however, mentioned other inputs to CAW in the form of the ELU writing support, and department study skills support (see Section 6.2). This section will briefly explore the way tutor assumptions around these activities were related to their feedback practices or influenced them in some way.

Some tutors referred to the role of the ELU support classes in developing students' writing skills. Tutor A, for example, spoke of his "sense" that the English language writing support classes were "…successful in helping them [students] shape the essay…the first hurdle", while Tutor D referred to assumptions she made about development of writing through the ELU courses:

> My summative reports are fairly superficial in that sense what I'm hoping is that supervisors and English language tutors are dealing with the nitty-gritty of writing. (TA: S1)

> Given all the help in ELU classes, and three assignments if they can't present something that's more coherent it's a worry. (TD:S2)

Tutor A's comment was significant, providing evidence of a view that written feedback on assignments was not the most important vehicle in developing student writing. It may also provide some explanation for the briefer comments recorded for this tutor in analysis of feedback, with particular reference to Flora's early feedback. Tutor D' s comment pointed to an assumption that language support classes coupled with summative feedback should have been sufficient to develop student writing to a higher level than she encountered in many of the assignments she marked. In the same interview, tutor D referred to her belief that comments such as "be more critical" might have little feed forward value in themselves but would work as a "reminder" for students to refer back to work done in the ELU classes. The issue of the effectiveness of generic writing support courses, however, was highlighted in Chapter 5. One of the limitations of such support programmes is their limited ability to induct students into discipline-specific, or even module-specific writing, particularly in terms of conventions around the use of sources to achieve criticality and this is supported in recent publications (Gorska, 2013; Davis, 2013).

At the time of data collection, three study skills workshops were offered in the first term, aimed specifically at international Master's students, designed and led by tutors B and D[44]. Not surprisingly, these two tutors showed awareness of the workshop inputs to writing:

> This is the first year I've written, 'you've not paid attention in class, you've not paid attention in study skills'. (TD: S2)

> I sometimes put 'nice introduction' onto the script itself....but most of them have done it with the study skills, most of them more or less do it as we've asked. (TB: S1)

Tutor A's comment at the beginning of this section referred to the work of supervisors in helping students develop writing skills, and where module tutors were also supervisors this clearly helped establish relationships, for example in the cases of Peter and Betty. Where module markers and tutors coincided, it often led to more discussion of feedback, with supervisors having the ability to track student progress. The important role of the supervisor, however, was constrained by time and workload pressures. Tutor F referred to the difficulty in devoting time to her 10 supervisees, a point made more strongly by tutor D, responsible for 20 supervisees during the year of data collection.

> The problem is that the supervisors don't have time to follow up on it. I will sit down in the last supervision of every term and say OK this is what you got for this assignment but don't have time to sit down and dig out their last report because within that meeting I've also got to then talk about their dissertation. They want to forget the assignments particularly if they've passed them and you know they're happy, they want to move on, so there isn't the time to say 'this is your first feedback report, this is your second feedback report, where are the changes ?' There just isn't time to do it. (TD: S2)

These comments allude to the pressures and demands of a taught programme that took place over nine months, highlighting difficulties in timing of feedback return, and how the potential for dialogue around feedback was constrained by competing demands on the supervision process. The comment also refers to students' lack of motivation to discuss the feedback (see Clara's case study) from second-term modules. It is worth noting that two-thirds of the summative feedback was received by students in their third term. Supervisors' comments were usually limited to drafts

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[44] Reference was made to only one workshop on study skills in the Department of Archaeology.

where content was less familiar to them, unless they were actually leading and teaching relevant modules. Tutor D referred to the opportunities that supervisees had to get feedback on their draft introductions and conclusions, but admitted that with 20 supervisees to deal with it was a difficult task to follow individual student progress.

9.1.4 Pre-submission feedback- teacher as guide or assessor?

Tutors indicated that they carried out a certain amount of pre-submission support for students, discussing assignment plans, as in this example, which also involved classroom teaching:

> …in the final session of the term I ask for volunteers to do a sort of worked example.. 'come on give me your question, what would the plan look like…' and then we go through that on the board and then that's it. So it's generally encouragement for them to come and see me. Send me a plan, I'd like that and then... but not all of them will do it and then in the session a couple of worked examples, normally in the final session at the end of term. (TC:S1)

Although I worked on the MATESOL from its inception, as a member of the ELU, a separate Centre within the Department of Education, I was unaware of the department history in relation to the question of pre-submission guidance and feedback. Tutor B made some aspects of this history explicit in her response to the question of providing more pre-submission as opposed to post-completion feedback:

> TB: Erm, well we've had to cut back on offering before they submit, partly for time reasons and partly because people have been getting very upset about us inputting before they submit..
> BS: I'm not aware of this, so could you explain a bit more of that?
> TB: It was suggested that we ought to be much more consistent across the board about how we intervened before people submitted, what advice we gave and what support we gave. I always used to think that doing these things was a learning activity, and I wanted them to learn and I wanted to kick them so they did it alright, so they could see what was wrong and they would then perform to the best of their ability, but I think I probably used to do more with them than most of my other colleagues, and there was always this question about whether anyone should do anything at all...and we have cut back and cut back... (TB:S1)

These comments echo findings in the literature (Bailey, 2008) that highlight conflicts between tutor beliefs and institutional requirements. Tutor B seemed to view more advice and pre-submission guidance as central to learning, but issues with fairness and the need for students at Master's level to be able to develop autonomy seemed to

be more of a concern in the department in general. These issues are explored further below.

Recent studies have drawn attention to the problem of low achieving students becoming dependent on their tutors (Orsmond & Merry, 2009) and the danger of more pre-submission feedback creating such dependency was alluded to by two tutors in the study. While tutor D, for example, appreciated the need for pre-submission feedback, she suggested that there were issues with how far this could be taken:

> TD: I agree with it to a point...However, ... there's a real danger that it becomes...you're just telling them what to write and how to write it...we represent academic institutions that want them to think creatively and independently and critically.... I think students do get feedback beforehand that's the point of the midterm assessment, that's the point of the study skills...they get feedback beforehand and they get opportunities through supervision but I think that giving them any more...we're telling them how to write. (TD: S2)

The comment above recalls a point made by Sutton and Gill (2010) that tutors have to "…establish appropriate boundaries between assessment and feedback", with the risk of fostering dependence on the tutor. The assumption made here was that the scaffolding and induction into assignment writing that took place in the first term was sufficient preparation for these students. Tutor F shared tutor D's concern that students needed to work independently on summative assignments:

> TF: At the end of the day summative feedback on assignments is for them to show us how much they can work independently, how much feedback we've given them during the course, during the module they can actually use and implement without external support, and this is what we're judging them on. (TF:S2)

Commenting on Helen's first summative assignment, Tutor F was surprised at her lack of awareness of how to address and the assignment title:

> TF: I kind of just assumed that that students understand that we are not just asking them to list the differences between things but kind of to consider the overall meaning of it all... why do we discuss this?...perhaps this is something that I should explain in a ...erm, after the title... but I wouldn't have thought that you need to do that at Master's level (TF: S1)

International students often require help in understanding the difference between titles and topics, an area often focused on in the study skills literature. EAP programmes also focus on how to analyse and answer assignment titles (see Chapter 2). The comment above assumed a mastery of these skills after one term, but Helen's inability to create a coherent argument going beyond a descriptive listing of points could be evidence of the need for more time and practice on the skills.

Tutor F elaborated further on the need to foster independence and autonomy, suggesting that too much pre-submission help would be counterproductive:

> TF: It just seems to me that if you want to assess the student on what they can do, you should train them be able to do it, not really interfere with the actual final product... there is no point in making that one product the best it can be,...... you want the students simply to have transferable skills to be able, once they're out of the University, to work on their own, to work autonomously and I don't think that that necessarily follows by actually helping them on a particular assignment. (TF:S2)

The notion of self-regulation features strongly in the literature on feedback (Hounsell et al., 2008; Nicol, n.d.-b; Sadler, 1989, 2010), with a focus on students developing the ability to assess their work against standards, and thus reducing dependency on their tutors. The comments above indicate tutor awareness of the difficult line between providing guidance that develops autonomy and self-regulation as opposed to perpetuating a dependency on tutor feedback and advice. Tutor B clearly felt a tension between her desire to support students in a teaching mode, but felt constrained by department guidelines on pre-submission practice. Tutors F and D, on the other hand, did not want to compromise the part of the assessment system that rested on the creative work of the student, thus emphasising their role as assessor. A recent Higher Education Academy report authored by a number of key researchers in the field argues strongly for a reappraisal of assessment in HE, and to some extent it supports this position, concluding that replacing tutor-student dialogue with more feedback or guidance may create additional work with limited effect (Ball et. al., 2012). All three tutors were acting in good faith, their positions revealing the constant tension between teaching and assessment roles.

A final significant point emerged in Tutor D's use of the term 'telling' in the first extract above. The argument has been made in this thesis for a move away

from feedback as 'telling', (Section x) based on its inability to engage with tacit knowledge at the heart of CAW. Feedback as telling tends to construct a relationship of dependency, whereas engaging students in the pre-submission stage with activities around exemplars allows them to actively engage in opportunities to become aware of standards, rather than to seek the answers directly from tutors.

From my own perspective, the expectations for a rapid transition to Master's level study and independent learning may be unrealistic for the majority of the international students in this study. Recent literature on international students' transition to study in UK universities calls for 'inclusive teaching pedagogies' that recognise the difficulties of this transition (De Vita & Case, 2003; Ryan, 2013; Warwick, 2013). The development of a new approach to study and writing after only nine weeks of teaching of a taught programme is asking much of students who require time and practice to develop unfamiliar writing skills and academic conventions in order to read and write critically in assignments that meet standards that are still unclear to them. A similar argument has been made in terms of home students making the transition from A-levels to university (Beaumont et al, 2011), with these students often disadvantaged by the A level examination system which is focused on guidance and detailed personal feedback to obtain high results. There is much evidence from the literature on international students (See Section 2.4) to support the argument that, with the added disadvantage of working in a foreign language, these students are even more in need of opportunities to develop a self-regulating capacity, and even more in need of scaffolding approaches that allow them to develop awareness of standards.

9.2. Personalising the Process: Assessment and Feedback Dialogues

In Chapter 8, the low level of student take up of opportunities for dialogue with tutors was reported and discussed, and the importance of personal relationships between student and supervisor was highlighted (see also Paul's case in the preliminary study). This section will report on tutor data relating to these issues, focusing on their reported practice in relation to engaging in dialogic feedback with their students. The lack of dialogue around feedback and assessment amongst the

tutors themselves will also be considered here, linking the discussion to wider issues of assessment in higher education.

Chapter 7 dealt with the topic of student-tutor discussions of feedback, reporting how few students requested them. Tutor G reported that there was "no opportunity to see students" after summative feedback, while tutor B stated that she did not arrange meetings to discuss feedback because when they received it students were "…so far beyond and on to other things". Tutors A and F remarked on the few students who arranged meetings with them, only two or three students arranging meetings in Tutor F's advertised office hours.

Tutor B commented that where her module group were supervisees she found it easier to comment on feedback, while tutor D reported only discussing feedback in her role as supervisor. Other Master's programmes with fewer numbers were also running alongside the MATESOL programme at the time of data collection, and two tutors in the study were programme leaders themselves. They generally supervised students on modules they led, which provided an opportunity to develop a relationship with students. Tutor C reported much interaction with students enrolled on the Master's programme that she led, but not with other students in the MATESOL programme:

> TC: I do usually say it to supervisees of mine but it's a small world, in terms of [Master's programme x]. I teach and supervise half the group, in a sense I can comment on it and I've got the expertise to do it, so it's easily done. (TC: S1)

Tutor B also referred to the potential for more effective feedback where she had smaller groups on her own programme, but that anonymous marking procedures seriously limited this potential:

> TB: ... where I have been involved in talking them through aspects of the topic, and when you see the script you know who it was, it's a small group, you can't help it at graduate level.. Then you are tempted , do you pick up points that predated the assignment, say 'this was discussed with you , you didn't do this.', but I have to play this game about seemingly not knowing who they are but I frequently could give much more intelligent comments by referring to earlier discussions. (TB: S1)

There was a clear indication in these findings of the importance of the relationship between supervisor and student in terms of the way feedback was delivered. Tutor D, responding to a question about engaging in dialogue within her feedback, commented on how this depended to some extent on her knowing the student in her supervisor role:

> When I write the reports I really try to imagine being the person reading it, being on the receiving end of the comments. Yes, there is an element of dialogue in it as in this case I've got to know them a little bit, my supervisees. (TD: S1).

While the value of face-to-face discussion of feedback seemed clear for some tutors, in line with calls for dialogic feedback in the literature, others cast doubt on its efficacy in this context. Tutor G favoured one-to-one discussion, giving formative feedback in one-to-one mode in class, while tutor D stated that there was a limit to the effectiveness of written feedback as dialogue and that "...the dialogue has to be face-to-face". Two discussions around feedback featured in Chapter 8, one of these involving a discussion with tutor D and the second on my own feedback with Clara. Against this evidence of dialogue and recognition of its importance, tutor H, the marker of Ethel's final summative assignment, questioned its value:

> TH: Students misunderstand comments, then they ask to see you, you try to talk them through, and they still don't understand. There's no guarantee when you talk to them …. I've assumed that the oral feedback would supplement and build on the written feedback, even then there's no guarantee their understanding is such at this stage that they can actually grasp what it is you're trying to say.

The implication of 'at this stage' in the extract is that the international students at the end of their taught programme were not capable of using feedback discussion to good effect. This was not simply a language issue for tutor H, who later suggested that one-year taught programmes were not adequate for these students:

> TH: Ideally they should have be on a two year course…the first year should be very much preparing them for academic study… (TH: S2)

A recent study of the feedback experience of international Master's students found that they were reluctant to seek help from tutors unless they had failed assignments (Robson, Leat, Wall, & Lofthouse, 2013). The same issue was raised by tutors in this study. Tutor D referred to the fact that the only students not in her

supervision group who discussed feedback were usually students who had failed the assignment, and at the same time she also remarked on successfully performing students' lack of motivation to use feedback to gain better marks:

> TD: It's a shame because those with higher marks would be tweaking them and getting even higher marks. (TD: S2).

In fact, discussing feedback with students who had failed and who needed to re-submit work was seen as an issue for tutor F:

> TF: If people can work on the same topic as before and we give them detailed feedback on what they have to do and then we give them a mark, it's a problem, we need to give them general feedback. (TF: S2)

The tutor seemed to suggest that detailed and specific feedback would mean unfairly telling the student how to write the re-submission. The situation of obligatory discussion of feedback as a means to helping students pass in a re-submission case is not often discussed in the literature, since the implication seems to be that iterative feedback is about preparing students' pre-submission of summative work (Carless, 2006; Vardi, 2012).

What is evident from the above is that tutors in this context did not necessarily share the views in the AfL literature on the effectiveness of feedback dialogues. Time was often an issue, with tutors reporting the pressure of supervising a large number of students and how little time this allowed to speak individually with them. Where a personal relationship was developed between supervisor and student, discussion of feedback was more likely to take place. The importance of the personal relationship in creating opportunities for dialogue and ensuring they took place connects with findings in the literature emphasising the need for personal contact between feedback giver and receiver (Crook, Gross, & Dymott, 2006; Rowe, 2011; Värlander, 2008).

9.3 Tutor Roles-Individual Autonomy or Collaboration

The previous section on tutor practices of discussing feedback with students leads to a less commonly discussed question, that of the amount of discussion on feedback and assessment that tutors engaged in among themselves. Handley et. al. (2013)

observe that there is a range of ways tutors participate in dialogue around assessment, ranging from formal induction courses and workshops and marking meetings to informal 'corridor conversations' with colleagues over criteria and standards. The AfL literature stresses the importance of discussions between markers, to ensure that they share similar conceptions of quality in the work that they mark, in some cases specifically recommending more talk between academic staff to build consensus of standards from exemplars of student work (Bloxham, Boyd, & Orr, 2011; Ecclestone, 2001). Indeed Bloxham and Boyd (2007) take up earlier work on the concept of "expansive learning environments" versus "restrictive learning environments" (p.222). The former are characterised by collaborative working in small teams, while the latter are characterised by staff working individualistically and in isolation. Bloxham and Boyd identify various constraints such as heavy workloads and the need for robust assessment procedures which pull departments towards restrictive working practices. The way that tutors in this study experienced these constraints will be discussed below. The evidence in this study pointed to the presence of a more restrictive working environment which led to tutors working more on an individual than collaborative basis.

Interview data suggests that tutors held diverse views on attempts at standardising practice. Apart from collaboration between myself and tutors B and E in creating a formative feedback form, there was little reference made to formalised discussion amongst the tutors on issues of assessment and feedback, although informal discussions clearly took place. An example of informal discussion around the issue of the amount of feedback was provided by tutor D:

> TD: It gets mentioned every single year. Nobody seems to do anything.
> There's no like minimum that we're actually told to write, and I get when
> it's a good assignment it's actually quite difficult to write a lot, but
> clearly there's assignments when it's not so good and some tutors are
> writing two lines, and that is not addressed and that is not fair on the
> student. (TD: S2)

The use of the word 'mentioned' suggested informal talk here. Tutor D's response indicated frustration and a lack of power; she seemed to want more guidelines and imposed standards from above in terms of how much feedback tutors

should write. Tutor H's response to the question of more standardisation around feedback and assessment referred to her experiences in school teaching:

> TH: We should be having a day when we are given scripts and we mark them, exemplar material graded, as at school. (TH: S2)

This enthusiasm for collaborative marking activities were not so strongly supported by other tutors, however, and tutor F saw the threat of increased workload and bureaucracy:

> TF: In theory yes, I don't know whether it feasible you will always have individual interpretation and short of box ticking where you …has this been achieved? I don't know is the answer. In theory yes, in practice I have some reservations whether it would work, whether it's going to be another bureaucratic burden. (TF: S2)

As a tutor/marker on this programme from 2006, I was not aware of any formal meetings to discuss marking, feedback and standards in the period of this data collection, other than one optional meeting towards the end of the period of this study in 2012, attended by range of lecturers in the department. The meeting was not for moderation purposes but sought to contribute to agreement about consistency and standards in marking assignments. Participants marked and gave feedback on an assignment from an earlier MATESOL cohort. A range of responses resulted from the ensuing discussion, with suggested grades varying between 48% and 62%, and differences in tutor perceptions of the level of criticality in the work. To date this meeting has not been followed up, but it usefully raised awareness of the situated nature of criticality and its effect on judgements, providing a forum to discuss ways to give more effective feedback and highlighting the potential for lack of consistency in marking.

What the examples above illustrate is a piecemeal and fragmented approach in the Department in terms of opportunities to reflect on assessment practice, suggesting the need for more dialogue and formalised discussion among tutors if greater consistency in marking is to be achieved. Indeed, the recent Higher Education Academy report on reappraising assessment in HE makes just such a recommendation:

Assessment of high level complex learning is largely dependent on holistic judgement rather than mechanistic processes. Academic, disciplinary and professional communities should set up opportunities and processes, such as meetings, workshops and groups to regularly share exemplars and discuss assessment standards. (Ball, et. al., 2012, p. 22)

These issues will be explored further in the following sections, with a closer consideration of the diversity of tutor practice in their use of marginal written comments and standard forms, along with their views on the viability of standardising practice more generally.

9.3.1. Standard forms and varied feedback preferences

In the interview on first summative feedback, tutors were asked to comment on their views on the effectiveness of the department feedback report form (see figure 6.1 Section 6.3). This form was in use when I began to work on modules in the department, but it was clear that it had not always existed and that tutors with more experience in the department had had to adapt their earlier approaches to writing feedback comments. The interview question was designed to tap into feedback beliefs and preferences, and the use of the feedback sandwich approach was also raised. Responses revealed more about the way tutors adapted their practice to standardised assessment procedures.

Tutor F felt the form could have been better, but she worked around it and had no major issues with it. This was confirmed by the fact that she was the only tutor to use the form for the formative feedback task:

> TF: People give paragraphs of general comment first then give specific comments. It's flexible…I think you still can…(use a feedback sandwich approach)...there's nothing telling you have to do it a particular way.... people can use it in different ways. (TF: S1)

Tutor G was generally positive about the form, apart from finding the 'Any other comments' section largely irrelevant. She commented on the value of the targets for improvement section (TFI). Tutor D also felt that the form was "generally fine" for her purposes but went into some detail about the need for an additional category on presentation:

> TD: I would like something on presentation, because I think it's important but it's not really clear in the department how important, and some of us are more pedantic than others about it. Then students are picked up by one tutor on it but not by another and it's not consistent. It's one reason you might not give a distinction, it's considered important in assessment criteria. (TD: S1)

When prompted to clarify her definition of 'presentation', tutor D referred to use of correct referencing style, or formatting such as line spacing, or formatting reference lists. Of course, referencing might be considered by some to be integral to argument and structure as discussed in Chapter 2, and noted in other studies (Mutch, 2003), though this comment refers to their technical / presentational aspects. What the extract highlights, however, is that varying judgements existed over weighting of elements in criteria and feedback, a point discussed further in Section 9.3.5.

Tutor A recognised the use of the value of a standardised form, but felt it constrained the way she could present feedback, while also providing evidence of a degree of individualisation in earlier tutor practices:

> TA: Whereas I think this (points to feedback report) has been helpful in terms of standardisation...I quite like the way I used to do it. Unfortunately I suspect quite a lot of people like the way they used to do it, everyone was doing it differently. (TA: S1)

She went on to state how the report format led her away from engaging with the content of the assignment, contradicting tutor D by emphasising the way the form highlighted presentational aspects of writing:

> TA: I can't say I'm very keen on it...I find it a bit mechanistic. ...it seems to be a bit generic in terms of the qualities of presentation rather than the content of the essay per se. I tend to find that my comments tend to be in terms of almost a rating of how well they've done each of these things rather than actually getting to the intellectual meat of what they've covered in the essay. (TA: S1)

Tutor C felt that the report format was helpful for indicating student progress in different areas. When probed on whether the form militated against the feedback sandwich approach she had earlier referred to, she felt the form could be used flexibly, stating "…I don't think the form is necessarily against these, searching sources, you can have a little sandwich there". She went on, however, to express

some reservations with the form in terms of the institutional management of the assessment process:

> TC: I do think there's a value of spelling things out a bit. Now this form, the categorisation is to some extent that, but it's almost, it's skewed towards you might say a skills base, rather broad, but an organisation it's like a management thing. (TC: S1)

Tutor B provided the most critical view on the report format, finding it unhelpful for structuring his feedback on the grounds that breaking response down into categories ignored the essentially holistic nature of the feedback response:

> TB: You have to use sources, you have to use some sort of language skills, you have to do analysis to write it. In theory it ought to work, but actually it doesn't because they all interact.I'm usually stuck for things to say in 'other comments' because I've usually said it all. I tend in desperation to talk about APA referencing because I can't think of anything else.I'm then faced with targets for improvement, which I think- Oh God I've got to say the same thing all over again. Essentially most of it comes under 'analysing data and ideas'. I personally much preferred it when I just gave them a paragraph.. (TB: S1)

The responses above to the report format illustrated the tension between tutors' need to follow department guidelines while affirming their own approaches to writing feedback. Three tutors seemed to prefer to write end comments in a paragraph form that for tutor C at least corresponded more to his sandwich approach. Tutors were grappling with the process of assessment embodied in department procedures but their response in practice differed according to their own preferences for delivering feedback. Further evidence of this diverse practice and response to the assessment process are provided in the next section, with a consideration of approaches to writing marginal comments in summative feedback.

9.3.2. *Marginal comments-depth of feedback and addressivity*

Chapter 6 referred to the policy at the time in the Department of Education not to return marked assignment scripts to students, in part a reason for limiting the analysis of feedback to end comments on reports. Several students in the study seemed to favour marginal comments, and Chapter 7 discussed the significance of marginal comments on short formative tasks in terms of explanatory guidance, at the same time highlighting issues of indecipherable tutor handwriting. Leaving aside

issues with handwriting, annotations on the students' scripts can help link comments with examples in their texts. This is clearly important and necessary, given the low level of amplification and explanation reported in the analysis of the feedback in Section 8.2 above. While end comments typically indicate the absence of criticality in CAW, marginal comments have more potential for exemplification (see Paul's case, Section 5.4.7).

Tutor C referred to students not picking up their marked scripts as a reason for not writing extensive marginal comments on summative work:

> TC: I don't do what I think a lot of people do, write a huge amount on the
>   script, because it's crackers if they don't pick it up. (TC: S1)

Tutor C's perception that other tutors wrote large amounts of marginal comments on scripts is interesting, but the evidence from the case studies did not support such a view. At the same time, her comment revealed an assumption that students did not study their scripts on receipt of marks.

Aware that my students would not necessarily read my marginal comments, my own practice in writing summative feedback at that time was to try to give detailed information about how to find examples in the script, providing page and paragraph numbers that students could find in their electronic versions of the text. When I checked in the final interview whether students preferred marginal comments, as opposed to examples in the report, they reported a strong preference for marginal comments on the scripts. Diane in particular in her final interviews made several references to her desire to see marginal comments on her work.

Other tutors recognised the value of marginal comments. Tutor G felt her marginal comments were important to her students, while tutor D commented:

> TD: In the feedback form, I'm as detailed as I can be ... but it's difficult
>   to...when you say...if you write for example, 'generalisations, be more
>   critical..' unless you've got an example of it, it doesn't necessarily mean
>   too much.. (P2S)

Section 8.2.5 highlighted the limitations of the written feedback in the TFI sections, noting the high frequency of comments similar to the terse, directive 'be more critical' example here.

What was evident from a number of interviews, however, was that where tutors wrote marginal comments, they often did so with an eye on audiences other than the students. Tutor F indicated that she wrote few comments and that they were not necessarily for the student:

> TF: It may be simply that I do that while I'm marking so that it can remind
>   me at the time I'm writing the report, what were the issues....
> BS: It's more for yourself as well?
> TF: It's partly for myself as well...
> BS: or a second marker?
> TF: And the second marker as well, so it serves several functions. (TF: S2)

Tutor A agreed that such comments were more for the benefit of markers than students:

> TA: But I think my annotation there is more for my own benefit and the
>   benefit of the second marker and the external if goes to an external, just
>   to verify that I ...we've read the whole thing and where there are [sic] the
>   odd query..... Every now and then when someone makes a really good
>   point I'll put 'good' in the margins. (TA: S1)

This issue of 'addressivity' is well documented in the literature (Bailey & Garner, 2010; Tuck, 2011), but it applies equally to more formal written comments on feedback reports; in both marginal comments and formal end comments, summative feedback inevitably involves this tension between providing feedback for learning purposes and feedback for accountability (Tuck, 2011). Where marginal comments were used by tutors here, they appeared to be as much for purposes of accountability and for audiences other than the students themselves, which may have reduced their feed forward value.

9.3.3   *Direct feedback versus attention to emotions*

The importance of emotional issues relating to receipt of feedback were highlighted in Chapter 2 and picked up in Chapter 7, particularly in Flora's case study. Whereas tutors referred more to their role of educator in formative feedback, they seemed to

focus on the need for directness in summative feedback. Tutor F was aware of the issues around negative comments in her summative feedback:

> TF: I do try to highlight the positive aspects, but I'm probably fairly blunt about things that need improving, so if something doesn't make sense to me, I don't understand, then I say so. Perhaps I need to train myself on how to say things in a more wrapped up way, but I normally say it, kind of, pretty straightforwardly (TF: S1)

The reference to using a 'wrapped up' way to present comments indicated that tutor F questioned her need to adopt a more hedged approach to mitigate her negative comments. In fact, her analysis of her feedback report for Helen revealed that she did frequently use softened negative comments (see Section 3.6.2) e.g. " *it is a pity that* you didn't include X ...; *you occasionally* write in an abstract way...; providing an example here *would help* to show what you mean.. ; your discussion is *not always* supported by references". The words in italics indicate hedging or expressions that mitigate the negative force of the comments. Perhaps this demonstrates a relative lack of awareness on the part of some tutors of exactly how their feedback was constructed and how it could be interpreted. .

Tutors D and F reported similar practice on the point of directness in their summative feedback:

> TD: I do warn my students that I'm very direct in the comments … so they need not to take it personally but they need to see it as an opportunity to look at the things that they need to improve on. I do work on the sandwich principle, positive/negative/positive …but sometimes when something is completely unsalvageable, I just think it's more helpful to tell somebody, … my observation is when I've done that with students, that there may be tears but they're usually actually appreciative of you being honest with them. I don't see the point of pretending something's okay if it's not. You can say it nicely but… (TD: S2)

> TF: I feel also, that may be coming from my background, I find that other lecturers maybe spend more time praising the good aspects of the work, and I try to do that up to a point, but at the end of the day, the student I believe needs to know which are the aspects they need to improve on, where they actually didn't get it right. So, possibly there's too much emphasis on what didn't go right, but telling them everything was fine, but here is 51 doesn't quite work (TF:S1)

Tutor F's assumption above that other tutors provided more feedback that was positive reinforcement was not supported by the feedback analysis in Chapters 7

or 8. These tutors' summative feedback was mark-loss focused rather than focusing on positives, a tendency also commented on by tutor B:

> TB: It worries me sometimes that we spend our time detailing negative points but the positive points are not gone into in so much detail..I don't know whether that's a problem or not,whether students see it as this I don't know. (TB:S1)

Tutor D also discussed her tendency to focus on deficits in her feedback, suggesting that workload and time pressures led to her more directive approach:

> TD: Yeah probably I spend a lot of time writing too descriptive, not critical so it's sometimes easier to say what something isn't rather than what it is. There's definitely not enough time. It's a lot easier to say 'don't do this, do this', which isn't a dialogue than to say, 'why don't you reflect on this, or let's discuss this, have you thought about x?' There isn't the space or the time. (TD: S1)

These tutors recognised the importance of providing accurate information on performance in the feedback, and used this to some extent as a justification for their 'mark-loss' focused feedback. The extracts above also illustrate how tutors are often unaware of how their feedback is received. The point has been made that interpretation of feedback by the learner is as important as what is said by the feedback provider (e.g. Molloy et al., 2013), but again these findings point to the need for feedback providers to better understand how feedback is understood and acted upon.

There was also an implication in the extracts above that emotions were part of the process of feedback and assessment, and that students were able to understand this, a point made in a very recent work on feedback emotions (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Värlander, 2008). It has been argued that in order to accept critical feedback that challenges internal assumptions, students need to be able to respect the intentions and expertise of the feedback provider (Bryson et. al., 2009; Molloy et. al. 2013). In this regard, students may be able to rationalise the discomfort of critical feedback on the basis of that it can 'do good' in the future, something that Paul seemed to do in the preliminary study in the face of large amounts of critical feedback. It was clear that Paul respected his tutor's expertise and intentions, and he felt he was able to overcome initial negative emotions on receipt of his feedback. These points seem to come back to the need for students to understand the purpose

of feedback, but also the need to build strong personal relationships between tutor and student to ensure that emotional reactions to feedback can be rationalised effectively.

9.3.4   Feedback and grades-differing applications of marking criteria

From personal experience as an external examiner, a problem that sometimes emerges is that of a lack of fit between tutors' feedback and a grade given. In the second interview, tutor B made reference to the importance of matching feedback comments with marks awarded, but focused on how critical comments for improving a piece of work were not easy to include in feedback on a high scoring assignment:

> TB: There is a slight worry that if you give someone a high mark and the page is covered with 'you could have done that you could have done this', it gives the impression that there is a mismatch between the comment and the grade even if it actually isn't. (TB: S1)

Interestingly, the comment does not refer to positive reinforcement, but seems to be an explanation for briefer feedback comments on higher scoring work. Tutors A and C did not feel it was easy to match feedback with grades, however. Looking at one piece of feedback, Tutor C referred to the way her feedback did not suggest a precise mark:

> TC: This one's quite a good one, she got 75. If it had 85 on it or 65 I wouldn't be surprised. (TC: S1)

Tutor A suggested that her feedback could not be matched to specific marks:

> TA: What I don't think I'm doing is I'm not justifying my mark at all because I don't think you can infer from my comments what sort of mark I've arrived at…(TA:S1)

Once again, tutor practices seemed to diverge. If students use grades and feedback to see how they are going in their work (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), it is important that the two align to avoid confusion. On the other hand, the comments made above may simply show that these tutors did not attempt to match feedback with marking criteria, or that it was not possible to easily link criteria with marks, an issue with weighting discussed in Section 2.5.5. Tutor D, on the other hand explicitly

addressed this problem, referring to her practice of using the language of criteria to justify the mark:

> TD: When I'm writing the comments I try to put at least one or two comments that are taken from the grade that I award the student so that they can actively see there's a justification for that mark being given. If there's a distinction I make sure there's the word 'excellent' in there so that it's obvious, but it's also for me, if I can't pick out any of those comments as being relevant then I shouldn't be giving it that mark. (TD:S2)

Tutor D was a less experienced member of staff than tutors A and C, and the above comments may also reveal something of the way experienced and less experienced markers operate. Research has found that more experienced markers tend to refer to their internalised standards rather than to published criteria when marking, while less experienced staff refer more to the criteria (Ecclestone, 2001; Woolf, 2004). In a member check interview two years after data collection, tutor D reaffirmed her tendency to use the language of criteria in comments, but she also referred to her leniency in applying the criteria on English language:

> TD: It was impossible to be as strict as the criteria suggest without mostly awarding 'satisfactory' to most overseas students. I was a little looser in applying those criteria, provided it was evident the work had been properly proof read and I could understand the line of argument. I was OK with it not sounding perfectly English, as I didn't think that was a reasonable expectation. However, I'm not sure all of my colleagues would agree. (TD: S2)

It is worth noting the 'Pass' and ' Good' bands in the marking criteria referred to were: "Satisfactory level of grammar/spelling/syntax with some errors (Pass- 50-59); Near perfect grammar, spelling, syntax (60-69)". The tutor comments mention the option for students to employ proof readers, but if not taking this option, there was an expectation that students would spend time editing the text for accuracy of English. At the same time, the comment suggests the way tutors' interpretation of comments could vary, a point picked up again in Section 9.3.5 in relation to referencing. While 'satisfactory' is open to various interpretations, the 'near perfect' wording in the 60+ band leaves less room for such interpretation. The problem of how to weight criteria in a holistic marking scheme emerged here (see Section 2.5.5.), with the implication that language was felt to deserve a lower weighting than criticality, but it also pointed to a lack of shared standards among tutors on weighting for language accuracy.

The nature of tacit knowledge and the need to unpack language used in marking criteria was discussed in Chapter 2, and reference was made to the use of opaque language in the feedback analysis in Section 8.2. The amount of feedback written in the discourse of critical analysis may have been partly due to justifying marks. Tutor C was critical of a "managerial" approach to assessment, viewing informal feedback in the classroom as "more dynamic" than formal written (see Section 9.1), while tutor D seemed to be acting in good faith to ensure transparency and accountability in her feedback. Perhaps the latter practice was evidence of the 'techno-rationalism' that Bailey (2008) identifies, an approach that seeks to link learning and assessment to outcomes specified in criteria. Tutor C's more generous marking, highlighted in Ethel's case in Chapter 8, may also have been related to her practice of referring less to the official published criteria than her own internal criteria when marking. Even where tutors attempted to refer and rely on criteria for judgements and feedback, they found it difficult to apply them, as in tutor D's comments above.

This section has reported on tutors' awareness of their mark-loss focused feedback approaches often resulting in too little positive reinforcement. Despite some appreciation of emotional issues, there was a commitment by some to a direct approach to give accurate information necessary for improvement. At the same time, tutors were not always aware of how they actually wrote their feedback comments. Issues with interpreting criteria and reporting on them in the feedback were also raised, with some tutors more inclined to believe that transparency could be achieved by working closely with criteria, while others questioned this assumption. The need for more dialogue between tutors and markers referred to in Section 9.2 was clearly supported by these conclusions.

9.3.5. *The feedback sandwich-a questionable strategy?*

The feedback 'sandwich', a standard approach to giving feedback was discussed in Chapter 2, and referred to in the previous section. Tutors often referred to using this approach, and though it is intended as a means to mitigating negative threats to face (Yelland, 2011), the most recent work on the 'sandwich' strategy suggests that it is "…potentially one of the most undermining of attempts to encourage good practice"

(Molloy et. al., 2013, p. 128). Tutors variously referred to using the 'sandwich' approach. Tutor C referred to writing '"little sandwiches" in different sections of the feedback form, while in my own marking I was also accustomed to beginning my feedback in the *analysis of ideas* section with positives before moving on to the negatives. Tutor D also remarked that she would "…start off by saying something good, negative comments, finish with something good".

Tutors A and B found the feedback report form constraining, and discussed their preferences for writing a paragraph of feedback that appeared to resemble a sandwich, but was described more in terms of a positive-negative pairing.

> TA: I tended to sort of have a style of saying what I liked about the essay, what things I think could have been ... better, then I'd make some points about some of the things they'd actually said or argued references and make some general comment at the end... a coherent paragraph. (TA: S1
>
> TB: I always used to structure it with an overall comment and then go into detail with things I did and didn't like... (TB:S2)

 Molloy and colleagues (2013) acknowledge the importance of positive feedback as reinforcement but are also critical of a sandwich approach that is motivated by fears of feeding emotional responses. Molloy makes the point that the positive / negative view of feedback is reductionist and that the critical element of the sandwich may be the most important element for improvement, but by attempting to disguise it, feedback becomes less effective. The feedback analysis in both preliminary and main studies found a high frequency of 'softened negative comments', with combinations of praise and criticism, but Molloy's arguments might lead to the conclusion that these would be better separated, rather like the 'positive points for future assignments / areas for improvement' format of the formative task employed by three tutors in the main study for formative feedback (see figure7-1). I did not focus specifically on student perceptions of these strategies, (i.e. how they viewed them and responded to them), but this could be a useful focus for future research.

9.3.6. *Inconsistency and barriers to standardisation*

Inconsistency around giving marginal comments has been raised in earlier chapters, and the issue of inconsistency was raised in final tutor interviews in relation to questions on standardisation of feedback practices. The issues of time pressure and

workloads have been reported as impacting on tutors' feedback practices (Bailey & Garner, 2010; Orrell, 2006; Tuck, 2011) and though not directly addressed in interview questions, they emerged at different points in this study. Tutor F made reference to department work allocations which indicated a limited time to mark 4-5000 word assignments and write detailed feedback reports on them:

> TF: On average the department expects me to spend half an hour reading and marking this, but in reality it's anything up to one hour and a half to two hours but anything more than that would be unmanageable. (TF: S1)

I did not ask tutors directly about the time they spent on marking and feedback, but in my own case, like tutor F, I recognised that marking and feedback on one assignment was more likely to average one hour than thirty minutes, and that some scripts took longer than that. What this implied was that the often generous amounts of feedback recorded in this sample could not have been provided by tutors firmly adhering to the thirty minute time allocation referred to above.

In Section 9.3.1 mention was made of tutor D's preference for a category on the feedback form for presentation. She included referencing in presentation and was explicit about the need for consistent messages in feedback on this aspect, stating that students were "picked up by one tutor on it but not by another". A less rigorous approach to feedback on referencing was taken by tutor B, however. Her approach depended more on the number of errors, as she put it "if it's only one or two I really couldn't care." Tutor F took a similar line:

> TF: APA, if it's good I would say 'good use' of it. For those who aren't using it, it doesn't have to be APA style as long as it is consistent. If you have students who only make an occasional error then you can be very strict but if you have students who are just all over the place, you'd be happy if they could just reach an approximation to what the referencing system should be. So I think they are at that stage here. (TF: S2)

The students referred to above were seen to be struggling with APA conventions, perhaps reflecting their stage of development of academic writing skills. It also suggested a limited impact of earlier feedback on this aspect, a theme picked up again in the final section of this chapter.

Tutor D repeated her complaint about consistency in terms of the amount of feedback in reports:

> TD: The lack of consistency in terms of how much people write, that is not OK, students notice it. Look I've been given three lines of feedback what am I supposed to do with that? (TD: S2)

In Chapter 8, large differences were recorded in amounts of feedback that Clara received for final summative assignments, and the amount of feedback received by Flora on her first summative and later assignments differed greatly. Tutor D, along with myself, wrote some of the longest feedback reports in the samples analysed. When asked about the problem of overload in feedback, and whether she tried to focus on specific points to make her feedback manageable, tutor D gave this response:

> TD: No, I try and pick up everything that I can and I appreciate that when you get something back and it's covered in ink, which is why I write in pink or blue, never in red because it looks a bit aggressive…. I just try to give as much feedback as possible. (TD: S1)

It is very difficult to make pronouncements on exactly how much feedback is required for it to be effective. The point has been made in the literature that the amount of feedback is not an issue if the feedback is clear and students can act upon it (Crisp, 2007; Carless, 2006).Tutor B highlighted how the quality of the work marked could affect the amount of written feedback that was possible and desirable:

> TB; If I can't find anything wrong with it, if it's just really good, we were doing just three to four lines ... There are other times when it's not my particular area when I just do a commonsense review of it. In which case you say,' well you could have talked abut this, you could have expanded that a bit more', but you are not getting into detailed negotiation with the students. But I have to admit to being inconsistent and variable with this. (TB:S1)

This comment is interesting in its implication that marking was focused on finding deficits, but also suggested that there was little point writing large amounts of feedback where high performing students did not require it. It also raises the issue of markers being required to mark assignments in areas where they were not experts, with the result that they were not able to engage so effectively with issues of content and criticality. Due to the large size of the cohort, Ethel, Flora, Anna and Betty's

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final assignments on the core module were marked by tutors D, G and H who did not teach the module. Increasing module sizes on the MATESOL from its inception (27 in 2006 to 81 in 2009) was clearly an issue for allocation of marking during this period. The problem of markers' unfamiliarity with module content was also seen in the procedures for second marking aimed at ensuring accountability and fairness. Second markers could often be tutors with little or no background in the content of the module they moderated.

At the beginning of this study, my own approach to module feedback had been to try to provide ample and detailed feedback, and my reports were among those with the highest word counts in the feedback analysis. However, evidence of the limitations of written feedback in the literature, largely supported by findings from this research, have led me to consider Price's position (2007) that perhaps less written feedback for summative assignments is more appropriate than more feedback. Price and others (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Price et al., 2010; Sadler, 2010; Sambell, 2011) view written feedback as an unsuitable vehicle for communicating tacit knowledge, a position set out earlier in this study (Section 2.4.5) and one which analysis of feedback in both studies seems to support.

Research also appears to be inconclusive on the issues of length and complexity of feedback. It has been argued that lengthy, complex feedback can distract from key messages, or that students may be discouraged from reading such feedback, but as Shute (2008) observes, quality of feedback and understanding of its purposes may be more crucial to its effectiveness. There is no ideal amount of feedback to aim for, since different tasks and quality of written products would appear to require differing amounts of feedback. This issue could be the focus for future research and might usefully be explored by collaborative groups of markers within departments and module teams.

9.4 Tutor Explanations for the Limited Role of Feedback

The role of written feedback in the development of critical analytical writing in international taught Master's students was the focus of the main research question in this study. This section considers tutors' perspectives on student motivation to engage with their feedback. This leads on to consider tutor perceptions of the limited impact of the feedback and the educational and cultural reasons that some ascribed to this.

Tutor A discussed her assumption that students would use their mark to see the gap between their current performance and what was expected for higher marks:

> TA: I think the overall mark is doing that because you're hoping that everyone is aspiring to get something in the distinguished range over 70, so if anybody gets a mark that's below that, then that's, as it were, a mark for how much they need to raise their game. (TA:S2)

However, the tutor almost immediately reflected on her experience with students who were satisfied with a 'good' grade, possibly the situation for Ethel and Diane (Section 8.4.5):

> TA: There are certainly some of the students who are quite content, and they do say to me. 'I'm hoping to get something in the 'good' range, if I do I'll be very happy'. So, I think some of them are getting a sense that they're not able to get the top grades and if they can keep performing in the area of 'good', they'll be very happy with that. (P2S)

Tutor D reported discussing feedback forms with her supervisees but observed that many "…just look at the grade."

> TD: I definitely think the MA students spend a lot of time looking at the grade...
> BS: Your perception is that they don't read it [feedback] very carefully then?
> TD: Judging by the things I know I've said in class that some of them have taken no notice of... like 'you will get picked up for that, you will get marked down for that, do not say this in an assignment', and I'm still seeing it... (TD: S2)

Tutor B suggested a similar experience in terms of her students reacting to comments calling for more depth and detail:

> Tutor B: It's fairly clear that she has to go back to explore things in more detail, whether she will do that I don't know, some do and some don't. (TB: S2)

Tutor F reported her perception of the lack of effectiveness of formative feedback:

> TF: Given that, at least last year when we had this formative assessment followed by the summative assessment, I didn't get a feel that they've made much use of the feedback that was given to them. (TF: S1)

A similar response to the effect of feedback in the summative stage of the programme was also expressed by several tutors. In the final interviews, Tutors responded to a question on the amount of progress they perceived in the quality of the assignments. Two extracts below illustrate the type of frustrations reported:

> TD: …the basic stuff, like they're' not taking notice of what we're saying, but the same stuff in both terms, it's quite demoralising to be honest. Most of the time, the problem is that they're just being too descriptive. (TD: S2)

> TH: With the majority, some of the problems were being ironed out. It's just frustrating when some of the problems recur, it's a developmental process, they've got to learn, but you know by this stage… why is it now, why are you still making these mistakes when I'm sure you've been told about these things before? (TH: S2)

Both tutors seemed to refer to 'basic' writing problems, but tutor D indicated the lack of criticality as a centrally recurring issue. The theme of feedback as 'telling' emerged again here, with frustration focused on the assumption that students had not responded to feedback that 'told' them about writing problems. Tutor F picked up this problem of students understanding the feedback that they received:

> TF : …it depends on the students' level, academic level and level of proficiency in English, very often I feel that the students do not understand what is being said. Erm, I think it's kind of about readiness, if the student is ready at a level where this sort of feedback can help in that direction it does help but if the student has to go a long way of simply being able to read and understand something then no feedback about developing criticality and argument will help because you can't teach them to run before they can walk. (TF: S2)

Language proficiency seemed to be a concern in the examples above, but also a recognition that fundamental principles of academic writing needed to be mastered

before students could engage critically in their writing. Tutor C also made this point after referring to 'cultural' issues relating to criticality:

> TC: I apologise in advance to say this to the students but it is a sort of clichéd generalised approach, you know. Students in the West are pretty good at critique not very good on having the knowledge on which to base that critique. They're full of opinions but have they got the knowledge? Students from the East are very good on knowledge and reluctant to develop a sense of critical engagement. And I said 'what you're looking for is a balance between those things'…but I think that critical, you know, analytical demonstration can only really come across if they get, you know, the good presentation skills, English and referencing and it's in a sensible structure. (TC: S1)

The tutor seemed to assume that his students had a good knowledge of their subject but their reluctance to engage critically was culturally determined, an example of deficit views based on large culture arguments that were discussed in Section 2.4.2. This assumption also carried an implication that domain knowledge was not an issue for the students, contradicting tutor F's comments above about students struggling to read and understand content material. Given their lack of background knowledge in the various modules offered on their Master's programme, it is easy to see how difficult it could be to develop the command of domain knowledge that criticality depended upon (see Section 2.3.4, and also the cases of Paul and Flora). The range of options open to these students increased after the data collection period, but at that time, students were not always able to take modules directly related to TESOL, a point noted in Flora's case (see Chapter 8) and impacting on the development of the domain knowledge necessary for students to engage in critical analytical writing.

In her member checking discussion, Tutor D was more explicit about the way the educational background of the students impacted on their ability to develop CAW:

> TC: The kind of tasks we ask students to do for MAs is nothing like many have experienced if they come from a purely exam based system testing rote knowledge…I wonder if we were asking too much of these students…we would do well to be more mindful of what a leap this is for many overseas students because of their cultural backgrounds. (TC; MC)

The comment again suggests a major role for cultural and educational background in the performance of the students. There was no suggestion made in this or other

interviews with the same tutor that the assessment regime or the timing of assignments and feedback should be changed to help students make this 'leap', the assumption seeming to be that students not the university needed to adapt (De Vita & Case, 2003; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Ryan, 2011). I did not ask tutors directly on their views about restructuring and adapting the assessment regime in the department, so it is also possible that their silence on this point was an artefact of the interview process.

Tutors were asked for their views on whether and how students could be taught to use argument and criticality in their writing. Tutor D referred to the time needed to develop criticality, stating, "…it's not something that you develop overnight", while tutor G emphasised an inductive process rather than teaching:

> TG: It's easy for us to point it out but I don't know how helpful that would be the students, because it's learning by doing isn't it? It's developing by exposure, doing it over and over and over. It's easy to fix language or convention or whatever...... they find it difficult....is it something that can be explicitly taught? (TG: S1)

The recognition that criticality in writing is 'caught' as part of an induction process that requires time was at odds with the reality of the taught programme. The fact that students received formal written feedback only once before writing their first summative assignment implied little opportunity for such feedback to induct them into disciplinary and module writing practices. The focus of subsidiary research question a) was on the extent to which feed forward operated in this context, but the fact that feedback for two out of three summative assignments was received at the end of the taught programme when it could not be applied to further assignments effectively reduced the potential for feed forward.

9.5 The Assessment Regime and Internationalisation

The interview data reported and discussed in this chapter have pointed to an acceptance on the part of some tutors that written feedback had a limited role in developing CAW. The wider frame of the assessment regime operating in this context has been referred to, with reference to the way tutors' diverse beliefs and practices were a feature of their community of practice, reflecting the way

individuals in such academic communities do not necessarily share beliefs and practices (Lave & Wenger, 1999).

The MATESOL programme this study was based on was in a period of transition and growth at the time of data collection, with an increase from 27 students in 2006 to 81 students in 2009, the year of data collection. The increase in numbers continued in subsequent years, to reach approximately 150 students in 2012-13. While the growth of the programme was undoubtedly related to economic drivers, the issues of resourcing and threats to effective pedagogy were evident in 2009. It could be argued that this programme reflected a symbolic internationalisation (see Section 2.4.1) focused on student numbers and income, rather than a transformative internationalisation discussed in the literature (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Robson & Turner, 2007; Ryan, 2011). This was a programme that rarely attracted home students, but attracted large numbers of international students, the majority of whom came from China. The discussions around issues of culturally inclusive pedagogy referred to in Chapter 2 are usually premised on minority groups of overseas undergraduates working alongside large numbers of home students, but the students in this context had few opportunities to mix with home students in the course of their studies. Internationalisation in its 'transformative' sense (Robson, 2011) relies on students and teachers from different cultures and backgrounds engaging with different perspectives and cultures, something the Master's programme in the main study was not able to provide.

Pressure and time issues from increasing programme numbers were reported earlier, and these included the difficulties in meeting the needs of large numbers of supervisees and the need for tutors to mark module work that they were unfamiliar with. The number of students and time pressures were identified by tutors as problematic for developing tutor-student relationships so necessary for optimal reception of feedback. At the time of writing, the researcher was responsible for twenty-two supervisees on the MATESOL programme. Efforts to improve the programme since 2010 saw a 'Planning and Communicating Research' module introduced, with one of its aims to ensure students began planning for the dissertation in the second term of the programme. However, this also led to even less time for discussion of first assignment feedback in second-term supervision meetings

which required more discussion around dissertations, exacerbating a problem already referred to by tutor D in Section 9.1.3. Arguably such changes might be more beneficial to strong, highly performing students, but those struggling to engage with assignment writing could have been further disadvantaged by squeezing the time on the taught programme.

9.6 Conclusion

This section contains a brief review of the main conclusions from this chapter. Tutors saw a limited role for written feedback in developing CAW, and they were often frustrated that their students were not performing as well as they would have liked. At different points, reference has been made to tutors' recognition that their written feedback was often ineffective in developing their students' assignment writing. The responses in interviews over the period of the taught programme provided a picture of diverse beliefs and practices.

- While there was a realisation on the part of some tutors that feedback as 'telling' was unlikely to be effective in developing CAW, their responses did not suggest a wide use of exemplars, dialogues around feedback etc. contained in the AfL literature;
- Tutors expressed mixed views on the desirability, practicality and effectiveness of dialogues with students on their feedback with a strong implication that the diversity of beliefs and practices led to an inconsistency that undermined their best efforts.
- The informal feedback of the classroom was sometimes valued more than formal written feedback and the importance of inputs other than feedback for writing development were noted. Tutors also recognised that their summative feedback was crafted for multiple audiences, not only for the student;
- Subject knowledge was often not foregrounded as an important issue in the development of CAW, while lower order issues of language and referencing were seen as fundamental to achieving criticality. This is surprising, given that the Master's modules in this taught programme did not build on prior knowledge;
- While tutors recognised the difficulties the international students in this study faced in adapting to a new academic culture, assumptions about the influence of CHC were also evident, with some implication that poor uptake of feedback and limited development of CAW was a result of a student deficit;

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- Issues of sequencing and timing of assessment were made explicit by some tutors who recognised that a longer programme might be necessary for teaching and feedback to operate effectively. Few tutors, however, actually questioned the assessment regime or expressed a need to review it;

- There was evidence that the process of assessment led to a depersonalised experience for the students, and that crucial supervision time to discuss feedback was squeezed in this process;

- Tensions between teaching and assessment roles were often evident. The Master's level requirements of student independence and self-regulation were seen by some to be compromised by more feedback or pre-submission guidance. Beliefs and practices varied on how much preparation students should be given before summative assessment, with concerns about providing detailed feedback when it was for re-submission;

- Tutors were often aware of a tendency to write mark-loss focused feedback. A number of tutors referred to using a feedback sandwich and also reported a commitment to direct feedback that they felt necessary for students to be able to improve their work. In some cases tutors were not aware of how their actual feedback contained a high frequency of 'softened negative comments';

- A number of tutors recognised that they lacked knowledge of what their students understood from feedback and how they used it;

- There was an evident tendency for tutors to work individually with little formal collaboration around assessment practices, in what might be described as a restrictive working environment (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007). The lack of shared assumptions and practice suggested the need for more dialogue among the staff in relation to feedback practices, with a focus on the wider issues of assessment and the aims of the programme;

- Few possibilities seemed to exist for developing a more transformative internationalisation due to the nature of the majority Chinese cohort and the assessment regime in which this programme operated.

This chapter will close with a reflection on my own role and its bearing upon tutor responses in the interviews, with a final section discussing my own changing beliefs and practice resulting from the study.

9.7 Impact on the Researcher's Feedback Practice

9.7.1   Perceptions of status in interviews

In the preliminary study, my position was that of outsider, or at best someone known to the department and the tutors I worked with in my English language support role. In this way, I was not a member of the department or a lecturer in their discipline. There were occasions when tutors seemed to view my questions as language related rather than relating to content or more general progress. One example of this is in the final interviews, where tutor A4 discussed Katy's final assignment.

> BS: From the essays that you saw, do you feel she made any progress?
> TA4: She does come for feedback sessions quite regularly, but I don't think she comes with an understanding that she needs to work on her language skills, she discusses other things regarding her essay, and we have talked about the language problems quite often, but the thing is, if she doesn't realise that is a problem she won't work on it. (TA4:2)

My question was not intended to check on progress in language proficiency, but the tutor clearly interpreted it in that way.

In the main study in Education, I was known as an EAP teacher but also for my own work teaching on the MATESOL module. For several years before the data collection period, tutor A as leader of Graduate Schools had liaised with me in setting up the ELU support groups. Tutor B had been my director in the ELU until 2003, while I had also recruited and directed two pre-sessional programmes that tutor G had worked on before she had secured her lecturer position in the Department of Education. This also meant that two of the tutors interviewed had quite extensive experience teaching EAP. Although not a lecturer in the Department, I had successfully created and led two modules from the beginning of the MATESOL in 2006, and this could have contributed to my acceptance by lecturers as an equal rather than being viewed as of lower status as a 'support' tutor. Some of the lecturers may also have acted as second markers and seen my feedback. Tutor H (FH) for example referred to my detailed feedback in her interview. For these reasons, it may not be surprising that there was no evidence in the interviews in the main study that suggested a power differential, and certainly no evidence that tutors saw my interest as primarily 'language' or support based.

9.7.2 One approach to formative feedback

The study has demonstrated how difficult it can be to accurately measure the impact of feedback, and how assessment lacks precision (Ball et. al., 2012), which has led me to a similar conclusion to that of Price et al. (2010) who state that:

> Input measures such as timing, frequency, quantity or externally judged product quality can only indicate that some of the conditions for effective feedback are in place. They cannot prove that feedback is effective. (p.287).

The point has been made earlier that that there can never be one approach or 'silver bullet' in terms of feedback, and learners' responses and actions can be as important as the quality of feedback and its mode of delivery. To elaborate further:

1. The amount of feedback is not the key to effectiveness; at the outset of this study I worked on an assumption that providing substantial amounts of feedback was a response to what students wanted and that the more detail provided, the more chance that students would find something of relevance in the feedback. By the end of the study I realised that there was no correct 'amount' of feedback, that large amounts of summative feedback in particular may miss their mark and that what is appropriate depends on tasks and contexts.

2. Formative feedback needs to be integrated with teaching by providing opportunities for engagement with marking criteria and standards in the form of exemplars (Ball et. al., 2012; Hendry et.al. 2011; Juwah, 2004): I realised that marking criteria become more meaningful in relation to concrete examples, and this involved showing rather than telling as a means to overcome the problem of tacit knowledge (see Section 2.1 and 9.1.4). Using exemplars of varying quality can help students to understand and engage effectively with feedback.

3. What students do with feedback is as important as the quality and conditions of delivery of the feedback; they need to take responsibility and act on feedback. The findings of this study concur with the recent emphasis in the literature on researching what learners do with feedback, and how to encourage them to seek dialogue and engage with it (Carless, et al., 2011; Handley, Price & Millar, 2011). To this end, in my teaching, I aim to go beyond simply setting tasks and providing feedback, but

introduce stages which engage students with pre-emptive feedback (Carless, 2007) and encourage more dialogue around feedback. The brief description below is of a specific approach to providing formative feedback within a module. The approach is based on the three conclusions referred to above.

9.7.3. *Task approach using screencast feedback*

The approach to formative feedback outlined below is intended as appropriate in the institutional context in which it operates. Other approaches might also provide feedback effectively in similar contexts, e.g. use of blogs, formative use of Turnitin and Peermark (Economics Network, n.d.) or multi-stage assignments (Carless et. al. 2011, Vardi, 2009) involving iterative approaches with drafts, but in the institutional assessment regime of this study, these were not so applicable or even possible.
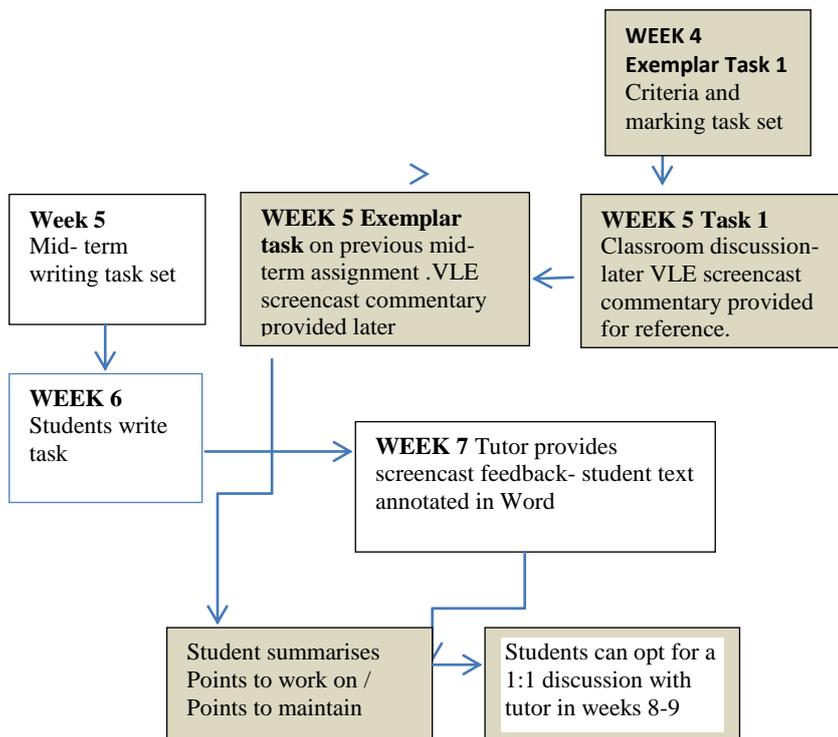
Figure 9-1 Formative feedback approach
(Shaded boxes represent the stages that engage the student in the feedback process).

Figure 9.1 shows the formative feedback approach I have employed in my own TESOL module since 2011. The first task in the process introduces students to the formative feedback sheet referred to in Section 7.2, which they use to 'mark' a short (500 words) examination essay on the title -*Why does pronunciation teaching tend to be neglected? What kind of approaches might ensure effective teaching of pronunciation?* I allow 15 minutes in the following two-hour class for pair and classroom discussion of this exercise.

The exemplar used in Week 4 shows how a position can be developed with support from sources within a standard essay format. This first contact with an exemplar and marking criteria is followed up with provision of a previous midterm task essay (on a different question), with students introduced to the marking criteria that they will use to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the text. These exemplar tasks are a variation on peer marking, using previous cohorts at one remove that avoid the emotionality and confidence issues of marking actual work of peers while maintaining the appraisal function of peer marking (Wimshurst & Manning, 2012). The two preparation tasks integrate formative feedback within and around classroom teaching and follow a 'showing' rather than simply telling principle. The commentaries are a way of comparing students' developing 'feel' for standards against that of their markers.

A screencast commentary (5 mins) is released on the VLE several days later for students to compare with my own assessment (see Section 2.6.3 for rationale for this mode of feedback). After submission of their own 1000 word task, I mark electronic copies, making annotations with Word comments or highlighting key examples to use in a 5 minute screencast, in which I comment on various aspects of the work. Students must view the screencast to fill in their own feedback form (the marking criteria form used in tasks 1 and 2). The aim here is to engage the student in attending to and making sense of the feedback. The 1:1 feedback tutorials are then optional and in the three years of this approach, they have been taken up on average by about 40 per cent of the students. Students are also able to discuss points further in e-mail form.

The above procedure aims to build in a 'forced' engagement with feedback. The screencast has the advantages of audio feedback in its personalised tone, allowing more focus on examples from student texts on the screen, and giving opportunities for explanation which are localised within the text. The student task of noting the main points in their feedback sheet while or after viewing is aimed at making the feedback more memorable, ensuring engagement and possibly helping them to see questions they wish to clarify in a 1:1 dialogue later. This approach to formative feedback is one response to the need to move away from a 'telling' form of feedback to a pre-emptive form of feedback (Carless, 2007) involving 'showing' in exemplars. I would argue that this is a valid response to the challenge of providing formative feedback, not only in the context of this study. However, it is a limited response to the assessment and teaching situation outlined in the context of international students on one-year taught Master's programmes, a topic I will return to in the final chapter.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

My motivation for this doctoral research derived initially from my role as a longstanding teacher of EAP, but a relatively inexperienced teacher on Master's modules at the University of Bradfield. It became clear, and the survey of the literature supported my view, that critical analysis was central to success in UK postgraduate writing, and that obtaining and reacting to feedback was important for student achievement. There also appeared to be a gap in the research on the role of feedback for international taught Master's students, despite a body of work on the international student experience. A flexible research design was adopted, based on a case study approach that explored students' views of their experience, with triangulation provided by data from tutor interviews and analysis of actual feedback comments. My own feedback practices were subjected to scrutiny in the main study, and this enabled data collection around other forms of feedback, namely student-tutor feedback discussions and the formative use of audio feedback. This last chapter brings together findings from the case studies for the preliminary and main studies, and considers outcomes and implications. The chapter begins with a summary of findings, highlighting the contribution of the study, before moving on to discuss its limitations and to make recommendations for future research.

10.1 Key Findings

The key findings from the preliminary and main studies will be outlined below in terms of the research questions (RQ a-d):

General Question: What is the role of written feedback in the development of the critical analytical writing of international taught Master's students?

RQ a): To what extent is written feedback in this context limited in its capacity to feed forward in terms of critical analytical writing?

In both studies, student and tutor participants shared similar positive views of the need for and value of feed forward in feedback comments, but in reality its potential was limited. I summarise the findings within six main conclusions below:

1. Institutional factors meant that most feedback delivered was on end-of-module summative assignments, usually based on content that would not be repeated.

Modules were taught in ten-week terms at Bradfield, with assignments marked anonymously and returned in the middle of the following term. Formative assignments were used prior to each summative assignment in Archaeology, but as independent tasks that could not be revised or integrated into summative assignments. In the main study, opportunities to receive and use formative feedback were rare, but Chapter 7 reported in detail on the one formalised opportunity for individual formative feedback in the first term. Formative feedback, therefore, was rarely 'timely' and in Education far more time was spent on writing comments for summative feedback which may not have been the most effective use of tutor time. One approach suggested in the literature to tackle such a situation might be a trade-off to provide more feed forward on drafts of summative assignments and less feedback on the final product, replacing detailed summative feedback with grades and checklists (see Hounsell, 2008). Such a change could only be pursued, however, as part of a more radical agenda for change within the department.

The students' favourable responses to the 'feed forward' potential of their feedback could have been an 'interviewer effect', with participants unwilling to criticise feedback practices, but it was less likely to be true for tutors, whose faith in feed forward was likely to be due to assumptions about feedback that are rarely explored. There was a taken-for-granted notion that everything that tutors offered was of value[45], and Chapter 9 showed how tutors assumed that when students were 'told' about deficient aspects of their writing, that would be sufficient for them to improve in subsequent assignments. Chapter 9 also showed how tutors were unable to follow up on written feedback, and often unaware of its impact. For the students, on the other hand, it was not possible to know if the feedback was usable until they engaged in further writing.

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[45] When discussing the role of their feedback in developing critical analysis, tutors D and H explicitly expressed doubts about its usability.

2. Formative feedback operated differently in each department studied, but various practices did not reflect the theory found in the Assessment for Learning literature (AfL).

In neither study were students required to act on comments on formative assignments, nor were they given opportunities to revise work in their light. The case studies in Archaeology showed little difference in the nature of the formative feedback compared with summative feedback, and a high proportion of comments tended to signal the absence of critical analysis, rather than give explanations of how to improve it. The main study, of MATESOL students, provided evidence of a similar focus on the lack of critical analysis and also a marked lack of content comments at the formative stage. There was evidence in Katy and Flora's cases that critical analysis comments increased in later feedback reports when their marks dipped. The students generally lacked familiarity with both disciplinary content and 'academic' conventions, and it was clear that not everything could be tackled within one task, an argument for more tasks and more formative feedback opportunities.

The AfL literature stresses the importance of making marking criteria explicit (see Sections 2.5.5, 5.4.3 and 7.4.2), and the difficulties in articulating criteria and using it in holistic marking schemes. Chapter 9 highlighted a diversity of beliefs around the value and transparency of the marking criteria; several tutors in the main study attempted to make official criteria more explicit by using their own adapted formative marking criteria, focusing particularly on aspects of critical analysis (see Section 7.4.2). Staff often lacked sufficient trust in the marking criteria to engage with them, supporting findings in the literature that suggest this is a rational response to making professional judgements involving tacit knowledge (Bloxham, Boyd, & Orr, 2011; Ecclestone, 2001).

Opportunities to develop students' tacit knowledge of standards, crucial in developing critical analysis, were few and far between. The amount of pre-submission guidance revealed a level of inconsistency that may have impacted on motivation and engagement. Exemplars, championed in the AfL literature as a principal means of dealing with tacit knowledge and understanding marking criteria (see Sections 2.5.7, 7.4.3, 8.4.2), were rarely reported by tutors or students, and used inconsistently in both studies. In this way, students were deprived of opportunities to develop awareness of standards expected of them in their writing.

3. Recurring comments suggested that certain aspects of critical analytical writing, notably referencing, were more resistant to feedback than others.

Comments on register or academic style did not seem to reappear after early stages in the main study, while comments on criticality, source use and referencing commonly recurred. As much as a quarter of all comments prioritised by tutors and students in the MATESOL formative feedback focused on referencing and support from sources, with technical referencing issues recurring in subsequent summative feedback. One implication is that the feedback by itself did not feed forward effectively in this area, suggesting other forms of training were necessary. These participants had typically been required to write short compositions of little more than a few hundred words in English in their undergraduate courses (see e.g., Tian & Lowe, 2013; Tian, 2008) , and research suggests that source use, which is at the heart of CAW, is a developmental process (e.g., Davis, 2013; Hayes & Introna, 2005; Hirvela & Du, 2013; Pecorari, 2003). All this suggests that more opportunities for 'low stakes' writing and feedback were also necessary to promote the development of CAW.

4. Development of CAW was impeded by a lack of disciplinary content knowledge

These findings should be understood in terms of the types of programme that formed the basis for the study, as neither CHM nor the MATESOL were in specific subject areas studied by students at undergraduate level, and recruitment was from related disciplines which did not build on one core of disciplinary knowledge. It appeared that a number of students were struggling to develop the level of expertise and content knowledge that would enable them to engage critically in their writing, and this connects to the conception of critical analytical writing outlined in Chapter 2 (e.g., Geisler, 1994; Wingate, 2012). Lack of breadth of knowledge in terms of content (Moon, 2008) seemed to be an important limiting factor (see Section 2.3.4). The module choices available in Education also meant that in Flora and Ethel's cases, they took first term modules in general areas of Education unrelated to TESOL content.

5. Students' lack of engagement and motivation could marginalise the role of feedback

A reasonable assumption might be that these voluntary participants would be among the most engaged students on their programmes, so Ethel and Diane's variable engagement was a little unexpected. Studies focusing on the nature and quality of tutor feedback tend to assume all students are equally motivated to achieve the highest grades, but such a focus on improving the quality of feedback could simply be a waste of time if students are not sufficiently engaged to use it.

Motivation is subject to change and variable even over one course of study. It was not possible to assess the degree of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation that Peter, for example, held for his subject. Peter was a mature professional working in his own country, and may not have been open to questioning long-held beliefs in the way that his tutors required for him to achieve criticality in his work. In the same way, the exact motivations for pre-experience participants taking the MATESOL were not clear. This research did not set out to assess motivation and engagement, and the power relationship between a tutor interviewer and student participant made it difficult to investigate these factors. It is likely that many Chinese learners attracted to courses such as the MATESOL corresponded to the group of more instrumentally minded students identified by Jin and Cortazzi (2006) in Section 2.4.2, which might also explain a more strategic engagement in the cohort. Strategic engagement (see 8.4.4) may also be a valid response to adapting to the workload demands of a one-year Master's course. Flora's struggle to devote equal attention to her two 5000-word assignments at the end of her second term were evident; faced with limited time to write two formative assignments, Paul admitted to concentrating most of his time on the task in which he had more interest.

6. Dialogue around written feedback was limited, but there was evidence of its potential to feed forward.

Participants such as Betty and Clara (see 7.5.3 and 8.4.4) took advantage of opportunities to discuss feedback, and both perceived benefits, though Clara appeared to use this discussion to best advantage. Often feedback was discussed as part of the student supervisory system, as in Betty and Paul's cases, but where markers were not the students' supervisors such a discussion was far less likely to take place. Betty's report of increased confidence in her speaking ability gained from

her pre-sessional was significant, as international students working in a second language are likely to feel embarrassed or under pressure to perform in English in one-to-one tutorials. Given that the participants came forward to cooperate in the study, however, one might assume that confidence was not the principal reason for any lack of engagement in discussing feedback.

In Chapters 5 and 8, it was noted that students received quite substantial amounts of feedback, although this could vary. However, timing of feedback was an issue, with two thirds of end-of-module summative feedback delivered in the final term for MATESOL students, when they had effectively moved on to the dissertation stage. This meant that some participants did not see the point of discussing the feedback. Students were reluctant to take up opportunities for discussion even with formative feedback. Peter only sought tutorials for advice on low scoring assignments, and in the main study two tutors indicated that discussion generally only took place when students wanted advice about re-submitting a failed assignment. Point 5 above made reference to the fact that students such as Anna and Diane, with 'Good' or even 'Satisfactory' pass marks were content with them, which meant they did not seek feedback discussions.

Additional data from several feedback discussions showed that despite their essentially novice-expert nature, they provided potential for feed forward. Clara and Betty were able to check their understanding, and to negotiate and clarify where intended meanings were unclear in their writing. Clara's discussions illustrated the need for clarification of partly understood concepts from her pre-sessional, while Betty, reflecting on her experience a year later, affirmed her belief in the value of these discussions, and saw them as more effective than written feedback alone.

7. The institutional context and teaching and learning regimes (TLRs) in which feedback operates can be equally (if not more) important than the quality of the feedback delivered.

In Jonsson's recent review of the literature on feedback (2013), he concluded that poor quality feedback may only be a small part of the picture relating to its effectiveness, a conclusion supported by findings from the main study. Regardless of the quality of feedback, the time pressures of a one-year programme and the

assessment process constrained the potential role for feedback. The MATESOL programme was one in the process of rapid expansion. Between 2008 and 2014, there was a growing predominance of Chinese and East Asian students in each successive cohort, with only a handful of non-Chinese students taking the programme. This implied a number of consequences: the lack of a truly international student community; department resources under pressure, as decisions to employ new staff at Bradfield were usually based on actual numbers rather than less reliable predicted numbers; knock-on effects of managing large cohorts, evident in the increased number of supervisees that some tutors were assigned. This last point is particularly telling, as increasing numbers of supervisees made it more difficult to engage in discussion about feedback, and made it harder for tutors to establish the close relationships of trust that research indicates is necessary for effective feedback.

When this research was carried out, the one-year MATESOL Master's format was clearly popular, particularly with Chinese students, as year-on-year increases in cohort size suggested[46], with obvious economic benefits for the University of Bradfield. A purely economic conception of internationalisation, however, is equated with the notion of 'symbolic internationalisation' discussed in Chapter 2, and such a programme runs the risk of being labelled a 'cash cow', (see press reports , e.g., Buchanan, 2013; Morgan, 2010). Chapter 9 also highlighted the way in which this taught programme was increasingly squeezed into two terms, and participants' progress and marks often showed the need for more opportunities to practice critical academic writing (see Betty's member check comments in Appendix I).The implication here is for universities to be more flexible in the length of such programmes, but there is a strong possibility that 2-year programmes may be too expensive and far less popular for the market to bear. On the other hand, 18-month programmes, such as that recently established by the University of Liverpool and Xi'an Jiaotong Universities based in China (StudyLink, n.d.) may ensure more time for the taught component of a Master's programme. As explained above, the Bradfield MATESOL had evolved into a virtually monolingual programme, and Chinese students possibly facing more straitened economic circumstances could begin to opt for home-based programmes if they offered better value for money; the

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[46] Numbers grew from 80 in 2010 to over 150 in 2013.

sustainability of current one-year programmes for this market could be threatened. Leaving aside economic considerations, recruitment for the programme would need to be far more wide ranging for it to offer the basis for the 'transformative international experience' discussed in Chapter 2 (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011; Robson, 2011).

Chapter 9 highlighted the tensions between competing demands of teaching and assessment, and how guidance was difficult to balance with the demand for autonomy and independent learning. It also demonstrated how the departmental assessment culture meant little staff dialogue around feedback and marking. While one set of marking criteria for holistic marking of all assignments was administratively easy to apply, it did not provide the diagnostic information that a more analytical scheme in the form of a matrix might have offered to international students aware of the need to develop various aspects of CAW. Tutors' attention to aspects of language and technical referencing was seen to vary widely, so use of analytical scales might also have provided a clearer indication for tutors and students of how to weight such elements. However, where the language of critical analysis is used in descriptors, analytical scales may still pose problems for students in unpacking tacit knowledge.

The argument has been made that critical analysis is situated, and although Chapter 9 provided evidence that tutors engaged in activities to make the process of critical analysis more explicit, there was evidence that approaches were very individual, and that more sharing and collaboration could lead to improved responses to this group of international students (e.g., the collaboration of three tutors in the design of formative feedback sheets).

While it is recognised here that 'one size does not fit all' in feedback terms and that absolute standardisation and consistency may not be desirable or possible, the study raised the need for more open discussion around the nature of assessment practices in the department hosting the main study. The lack of a culture of dialogue around assessment in the Education department at Bradfield underpinned tutors' diverse beliefs and practices in giving feedback. A number of taken-for-granted assumptions were identified in Chapter 9, reflecting varied beliefs and practices:

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- tutors did not often engage with marking criteria in the classroom, but some used the language of criteria in feedback comments;
- at other times tutors showed awareness of the lack of transparency of such comments;
- some tutors were more inclined to adopt teaching roles and others focused more on assessment roles;
- tutors' belief in the efficacy of feedback was variable, leading to inconsistent approaches.

One implication from this study would be for more formalised staff development training, a point made in several recent studies (e.g., Carless et. al., 2011; Evans, 2013; Handley, den Outer & Price, 2013), which recognise the need for more staff dialogue and staff development activities, which would allow the questioning of assumptions and attitudes and improve consistency and quality.

RQ b) To what extent does the form and style of tutor written comments impact on the usability of this feedback for students?

1. **Feedback was mainly 'directive', with little difference between formative and summative feedback.**

Feedback analysis revealed that a diagnostic function was typical of much of the feedback in both studies, with few facilitative comments to help students concerning 'where to go next'. Formative and summative comments tended to signal the absence of critical analysis, rather than provide explanations of how to improve. Thus, in the preliminary study, fewer than 10 % of Peter and Paul's comments were future developmental in nature, with even fewer of their comments explaining how to improve.

Comments categorised as feed forward were not all equally usable. The 'Targets for improvement' section in the Education report (Section 8.2.5) obliged tutors to write comments to close the gap in performance with respect to future assignments, but because they focused largely on critical analysis and source use, the large amount of tacit knowledge contained in the comments reduced their usability; a higher proportion of such comments were received by struggling students, and like Paul and Peter, Flora in particular was unable to respond to them.

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The case studies highlighted the way that much formative as well as summative feedback was diagnostic and focused on deficits. Analysis of the 'tone' of the feedback revealed a high proportion of 'softened negative' comments, suggesting less of a focus on positive reinforcement than on explaining how marks were lost.

2. Marginal comments provided more explanation for feed forward, but were used variably, with problems of illegible handwriting.

Echoing findings from other studies (Higgins et al., 2001; Robinson et al., 2013), comments in the margins were often rendered less usable due to illegible handwriting (see 7.6.3). Despite substantial amounts of feedback in end comment reports (averaging 300 words and 21 comments per assignment in the main study), this was shown to be terse rather than expansive due to reasons of length and constraints of time. Analysis of marginal comments (Section 5.2.3) showed the advantage of being read in context; they were often focused on content and indicated and explained where the writing could be improved. Such comments in the margins were not consistently supplied by tutors in either study, however, understandable perhaps on 5000 word assignments, but also due to institutional arrangements in the main study, which meant that marked scripts were not routinely returned to students[47].

3. Summative feedback was often addressed to other members of the discourse community rather than the students.

Much feedback was written in an impersonal style, using the institutional language of the published marking criteria. Tutors also reported using marginal comments for their own reference, or for second or external markers. Thus, marginal comments in themselves were not always feed forward, and also subject to the addressivity issue typical of summative end comments. The audio feedback discussed in Chapter 7 seemed to offer a more personal feedback solution, but for moderation purposes, it may not be appropriate for summative work.

4. Alternative methods of feedback can provide the detail and depth of explanation missing from written feedback.

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[47] This situation was remedied in the year following the data collection.

Analysis of two samples of audio feedback (see 7.6.2), though limited, demonstrated its potential for providing more detailed and explanatory feedback. The conversational style of audio commentary also meant a more personalised delivery, and this was appreciated by participants. This type of individualised feedback was also seen to engage students far more than general whole-class feedback provided electronically (Section 8.4.7), illustrating how certain uses of technology can enhance the role of feedback. Apart from this approach, however, tutors were generally not seen to employ peer feedback activities or discussion of exemplars in class, so the opportunity was not taken to reduce dependency on the tutor by providing more formative feedback from a variety of sources.

RQ c) Do findings relating to usability of written feedback with NNS replicate those found in the literature on home undergraduate students?

The points made above often echo findings from studies on predominately home, undergraduate student contexts:

1. The lack of take up of opportunities to discuss feedback (Nicol, 2010; Orsmond & Merry, 2011; Pokorny & Pickford, 2010; Price et al., 2010);
2. Handwriting issues (Higgins et al., 2001; Robinson et al., 2013);
3. The problem of tacit knowledge and understanding the language of critical analysis (Carless et al., 2011; Haggis, 2006; Higgins et al., 2001);
4. The importance of the personal element in making feedback effective (Bryson et. al., 2009; Hughes, 2011; Price et al., 2010; Rowe, 2011).

There were differences found between the two departmental contexts, however, and these were best understood in relation to prior experience and academic culture. The international students in this study were not used to detailed feedback, but were generally appreciative of whatever feedback they received.[48] While native speaker undergraduates have expectations around criterion-referenced, personalised written feedback, linked to oral discussion (Beaumont et al., 2011), these students did not have such expectations, but reported that they wanted as much detailed feedback as possible, even though it became clear that they did not necessarily know what to do with it.

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[48] In the MATESOL end-of-year feedback, three questions relating to feedback and assessment revealed scores of 4 and above (on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being excellent).

Educational and cultural background influenced motivation and ability to respond to feedback. Participants' backgrounds clearly influenced their view of grades as a means of seeing 'where they were' and of reassuring them that they were passing. Peter was a mature student from an East Asian culture, and his consistent issues with criticality throughout the pre-sessional and taught programme were linked to this background by two tutors. Although the tutor accounts may not reflect the whole 'truth', they were elicited independently and based on observing Peter in two quite different programmes. But developing critical analysis was not only a problem for East Asian students. Paul, the only non-Asian in the research, had an easy grasp of spoken English and a high TOEFL test score and was from a nearby Western European country, but he still struggled to make the transition from a scientific disciplinary background to UK essay-style argumentation. In his second term, Paul required help with 'over quotation', a problem indicative of a developmental stage in using sources to construct disciplinary arguments (Groom, 2000; Schmitt, 2005).

Paul's case usefully cautions against stereotyping (i.e. that European students can easily develop CAW, while Asian students typically struggle to develop it) and also against making the assumption that English language proficiency is the central cause of a lack of development of CAW. Among the group of Chinese students in the main study, Anna and Clara appeared to be relatively successful in achieving criticality, suggesting that the 'large culture', deficit view of CHC students and their inability to develop CAW was not applicable here (see Section, 2.4.2).

RQ d) Does attendance on a pre-sessional programme impact noticeably on students' use of feedback and development of CAW? If there is a noticeable impact, how and why does this occur?

The participants attending pre-sessionals valued them as an introduction to UK academic culture, but particularly in the main study, they were less positive about the value of the pre-sessional in developing language proficiency. Clara's experience emerging from feedback discussions in her taught programme indicated how concepts and skills that students may feel they have mastered on a pre-sessional may only be provisional, and they need to be developed further in the disciplinary context

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of a taught Master's. Clara required opportunities to practice and to clarify feedback face-to-face before she was able to use it, evidence that feedback dialogues could be effective with this group of students.

Pre-sessional students were more likely to engage in discussion of feedback (see 8.4.7), possibly due to settling in and gaining confidence before their main programme; they saw the benefits of technical writing skills and of an introduction to criticality which involved using sources to construct an argument. But while Clara (lowest writing score on entry) and Betty went on to grapple relatively successfully with their assignments, Flora (highest writing score on entry) went into a downward spiral in her marks. This suggests a need for caution in making assumptions about language entry scores and their relation to subsequent student performance, and supports other recent findings that strong IELTS writing scores do not necessarily predict success in academic writing at university (Benzie, 2010; Hirsh, 2007).

Two students in the main study reported unprompted on the value of the English language support they received during their taught programme, but similar classes were not on offer to participants in the preliminary study. Language support for Education provided generic skills, but some tutors in the main study seemed to have unrealistic expectations of its role in developing CAW. The main study suggested that generic writing skills support can be limited in terms of critical analytical writing in specific disciplines, so approaches that embed support for writing in academic modules themselves (Wingate et. al., 2011) might be a useful way forward at Bradfield[49].

10.2 Impact of the Research on the Researcher

In the main study I became a participant as well as an observer. My approaches to feedback formed part of the data examined and, where appropriate, I added my voice to the other voices presented. I explained my own practice where pertinent to the discussion and reflected in more depth on this in Section 9.7. I was already using audio feedback in 2008, but this research helped me to appreciate its value with

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[49] Indeed, since 2012, several departments at Bradfield have collaborated with the EL Unit to set up courses focused on writing and seminars within specific modules.

respect to formative feedback. Although I did not introduce a specific intervention in my teaching in this study, findings on audio feedback prompted my own 'action research', which then led to my adopting screencasts for formative feedback on Master's modules. Finding that my students struggled to decipher my handwriting, I have since adopted electronic feedback through the use of Word comments in formative scripts. Feedback analysis showed that I wrote larger than average amounts of detailed feedback on summative reports in the main study sample, leading me to question this approach. Realising the limitations of written feedback and the need to integrate it with other teaching activities, I introduced more exemplars and marking exercises into my teaching. Finally, I have set up a group within my department as a forum for dialogues around marking and standards in the MATESOL programme, aimed at developing a shared language of feedback and more consistent approaches to how it is provided.

10.3 Contribution of the Study

This thesis has made a contribution to the growing literature on international non-native speaker students' experience on taught Master's programmes (Durkin, 2004, Poverjuc, 2010; Poverjuc, Brooks, & Wray, 2011; Robson, Leat, Wall, & Lofthouse, 2013; Tian & Lowe, 2013). The thesis highlights the need for HE institutions in the UK to examine assumptions around feedback practices within assessment and teaching processes. The case studies raised questions about the nature of departmental assessment regimes and supported arguments for enhancing feedback dialogues, both between student and tutors and between lecturers and teaching staff within teaching departments. The main study also highlighted the way that marketization and larger cohort sizes resulted in a depersonalisation of the assessment process, and how this 'symbolic' internationalisation impacted on the role of feedback within a specific assessment regime (see Section 9.5). The case studies emphasised the importance of personal relationships between tutor and students for optimal engagement with feedback, echoing Perpignan's (2003) conclusions that an empathetic approach to dialogue around feedback is a key condition for its effectiveness.

Many feedback studies have been based on surveys or one-off interviews, focused mainly on summative feedback, but this study attempted to link formative and summative feedback events in a more longitudinal design. This research makes a contribution by showing that written feedback has a more limited impact than many scholars believe. It suggests that assumptions of the 'power of feedback' can be over stated and that feedback must be understood in the context of the teaching and learning regime in which it operates; it has demonstrated how conceptualisations of formative feedback can founder in this context, where the limitations of written feedback combine with institutional factors and the prior experience and academic culture of international students.

The findings give strong support to the argument for more opportunities for formative feedback, and teaching activities integrated with it, if novice students are to develop the necessary tacit knowledge for induction into their academic disciplines (Elton, 2010; Haggis, 2006; Jacobs, 2007; Parry, 2008). The findings also support the need for tutors to become more aware of their own expectations for criticality and to make their expectations more explicit to students in exemplars rather than through the 'telling' that is characteristic of traditional approaches to written feedback.

10.4 Limitations of the Research

The qualitative nature of this research means the findings are not easily generalisable to other contexts. The study was based in two departments in one institution with a small number of case studies of participants opportunistically selected and not necessarily representative of their cohorts. It is hoped, however, that readers will be able to relate findings to their own contexts where these are applicable.

The data obtained gave a voice to students and tutors, with triangulation from analysis of feedback itself, but the findings were based on my interpretation. In terms of rigour of data collection, I carried out member checks with a student and a tutor participant, and used co-researcher triangulation at the piloting stage. While interviewer effects related to power issues must be taken into account, (see Sections 4.6.2, 7.4.1), frank and honest accounts that did not fit a 'performance view' were evident, and there is no guarantee that students would have been more honest with

post-graduate researchers, for example. Narrowing the social gap between the interviewer and the interviewee might have introduced other effects, such as the need to provide incentives to participate.

The two Master's programmes were similar in that their multidisciplinary, applied nature did not require a base of discipline knowledge for entry; it would have been useful to include Master's programmes in disciplines with such a knowledge base to better understand the impact of domain knowledge. Similarly, the narrow range of participants, all East Asian apart from one Western European, suggests that including students from a wider range of nationalities would have been useful.

Student interviews provided ample data, but they were not all equally reliable or usable (see 4.6.2). Recall could have been a problem, but was countered by discussing feedback within a few days of tutors producing it and of students receiving it. Research on the impact of feedback on writing arguably demands longitudinal studies that extend further than the design of the present research, but for reasons of practicality it was only possible to focus on the writing and feedback in two terms of taught programmes; including the dissertation stage would undoubtedly have given a more complete picture.

A further limitation was the difficulty in gauging the depth of student understanding from interviews in successive feedback events; students were not able to apply feed forward comments immediately, or to know at the interview stage how useful the comments would be. I will reflect below on how some of these limitations could be addressed in future research.

10.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Student understanding and use of feedback develops over time, as Betty's member check interview suggested. One approach to researching this development could be to carry out a teaching intervention that identifies feedback comments on early work, discussing them at successive stages of a programme. Such research might also isolate specific types of comment, charting any change in understanding or application over a period of time.

Emotional responses to feedback are becoming more recognised (Dowden et al., 2013; Rowe, 2011; Värlander, 2008; Yang & Carless, 2013), but were not easily accessible in the current study design. Future studies using learner diaries might capture emotional responses to feedback, providing more insight into how to present feedback most effectively. I rejected the diary method on the basis of its intrusion and additional work for students (ethics), but such a study might, for example, form part of a teaching intervention with a complete module group.

The use of audio feedback (and by extension screencast feedback) emerged from the study as a potentially powerful option, and future research might explore its impact on formative feedback. Limited research has been done on using screencast feedback with a cohort of undergraduate students (Edwards et. al., 2012; Jones, Georghiades, & Gunson, 2012), but the potential benefits for international students as a specific group have not been explored. Research might focus on how students interact with such feedback, possibly through a stimulus-recall or think-aloud approach which might also study how students attend to screencasts, whether they present particular cognitive load difficulties and whether they provide significant feed forward over a number of feedback events.

10.6 Final Thoughts

With assignment writing taking place in only two terms of a taught Master's programme, international students have to adapt very quickly to a new academic culture and its conventions and to write extensively in a second language with a high degree of critical analysis. Undergraduate students on the other hand have three years to make a similar transition, usually in their first language. This study has attempted to provide a better understanding of how feedback should be integrated more effectively with teaching to make such a transition easier.

As other studies on similar groups of students have highlighted (Dunster, 2009; Poverjuc, 2011), multiple factors are involved in determining the success of feedback, making this kind of research very difficult to undertake. I hope that in a small way, this study has identified some of the difficulties and pointed to new directions for such research in the future.

Appendix A: Glossary of abbreviations and acronyms

AfL	Assessment for Learning
AL	Academic Literacies
AR	Action Research
BS	Bill Soden (researcher)
CA	Critical Analysis
CAW	Critical Analytical Writing
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CHM	Conservation Heritage Management (Master's programme)
CM	Core module
C: FT	Clara, formative task
CT	Critical thinking
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ELT	English Language Teaching
ELU	English Language Unit
EP	Exploratory Practice
HE	Higher Education
I:	Interviewer (co-researcher for BS student interviews), Chapter 7
MATESOL	Master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
NNS	Non-native speaker(s)
NS	Native speaker(s)
P:S2	Paul summative interview 2 (Chapter 5)
PS	Pre-sessional
PST	Pre-sessional tutor
OM1	Option module 1 (main study summative assignment)
TA1:I2	Tutor Archaeology 1, Interview 2- Chapter 5
Tutor D: S2	Tutor D (main study) summative interview number 2.

Appendix B: Departmental marking criteria

Archaeology-Marks and attainment at MA/MSc level

The Department of Archaeology evaluates achievement at Diploma and MA/MSc level using the new University Mark Scale: 50 is taken as the benchmark for minimum attainment at postgraduate level.

Grade descriptors

Below 35	Insufficient engagement with the subject to suggest any real understanding of work at post-graduate level. Irredeemable fail.
35-39	Covers some aspects of topic with understanding and knowledge, such as could be derived from seminars and directed reading, but lacks essential information and/or references to essential texts. **Lacking in** accuracy**, analysis or criticism. Largely descriptive and** not always correct. Inadequately referenced. Insufficient coverage of material to warrant a pass.
40-49	Covers some aspects of the topic with understanding and knowledge, such as could be derived from seminars and directed reading. This work is characterised by a lack of balance and/or accuracy. It **may also be descriptive at the expense of analysis, uncritical of its sources and inadequately referenced**. Dissertations falling in this bracket should be signalled for referral in the first instance. (NB Dissertations falling within this bracket may be referred in order for the dissertation to reach a pass mark of 50%. Work should only be referred if the examiner(s) consider it is capable of improvement. Clear written guidance as to what needs to be done should be indicated.)
50-55	Covers topic, showing **knowledge and understanding within a structured framework and some analytical and critical awareness**. Referenced in accordance with the conventions set out in the Archaeology style guide, although some inaccuracies may be present. A bare pass at MA/MSc level. NB: 50% is *minimum* mark *normally* required for a dissertation to pass, the *maximum* mark allowable for a referred dissertation and the *aggregate* mark required for a Pass.
56-61	As above but **showing a more competent coverage of the topic, with appropriate data and criticisms presented in a balanced analytical and critical framework**. A clear pass.
62-68	As above, but **in addition is a well-argued and presented coverage, with good understanding and critique of issues and data, based on wide reading. Some signs of creative thought and originality** but either not sustained excellence in this aspect or marred by other defects (use of language or inaccurate referencing, for instance).
69	The award of this mark signals that the examiner has noted **evidence of creativity and originality and would not oppose the award of a distinction if the other examiners thought more highly of the same work.**

70-74	Marginal distinction level (70%+ is a Distinction). Normally **displays detailed grasp of material within a clear and critical framework, and with originality in some aspects of argumentation and/or genuine engagement with scholarship,** showing potential for doctoral research.
75-79	Clear distinction level work. **Confident, detailed and critical analyses of topic with an original component in the line of argument and/or genuine engagement with scholarship**, demonstrating a developed capacity for doctoral research.
80-84	As above, but also characterised by **originality of argument** and soundness of scholarship.
85-94	Outstanding work characterised by **exceptional powers of analysis and exposition, depth and breadth of knowledge and originality in argument**, with little need for corrections. Work at this level is original and publishable in its own right, even before the candidate moves on to doctoral work.
95- 100	Near perfect to perfect! As above, but with no observable blemishes.

(Bolded text highlights have been added by the researcher for descriptions that specifically refer to critical analytical writing)

Appendix C: Letter of permission

Preliminary study   Bill Soden, ELU
                                         The Department of Education
                                         The University of Bradfield

October 2008
Permission Letter- Academic Writing Project
This letter briefly summarises the research aims and methodology. It sets out the nature of the research and your participation in it. This document should be signed to indicate your consent to participate in this research project.

Aims of the research
This is a longitudinal study, involving several departments at Bradfield. The main aim is to reveal how students' develop their academic writing during their taught degree at Bradfield. The study will attempt to track the way students respond to written assignments, and how they use feedback and support offered in the department and in the university. The study also aims to shed light on the nature of discipline specific writing within the participating departments. It is hoped that a better understanding of this area will lead to improved, focused support for writing within and without your department.

Methodology
I will be interviewing small numbers of students, and academic staff who supervise or teach them. Although I may wish to carry out several interviews over the course of the year, these interviews will be short (20-30 minutes) and I will attempt to arrange them at the convenience of the participants. At the consent of participants and the department, I would also like to obtain and analyse drafts and final submissions of your assignments.

Confidentiality
I can assure you that any information gathered in the in the course of the study will be treated with the strictest confidence. Entire and absolute anonymity of participants will preserved in relation to the data collected. You will not be identifiable in the thesis, published reports or conference presentations that may emerge from this project.

I give my consent to participate in the study as outlined above:
Name:

Signed :

Appendix D: Interview schedules-preliminary study

Tutor Interview 1 Schedule   Preliminary information

a.   Please could you list your main Qualifications?
b.   How many years have you taught postgraduate students?
c.   How many years have you been a member of the Department of Archaeology at Bradfield?
d.   Which Masters programs and modules do you teach on?
e.   How many years have you taught on these programs or similar programs?
f.   Could you estimate an average number of international (NNS) students that you have taught each year on these programs?
g.   Can you tell me what nationalities you have taught?
h.   How many internatinoal students have you supervised in recent years?
i.   Do you carry out marking of main modules coursework for these students?

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Questions	Probes
1. What experience of writing conventions do you expect such students to have when they enter their courses?	• Does their experience vary widely? • Do your expectations of this vary according to nationalities? • Can you give some examples of this?
2. What level of background knowledge in the discipline do students have when they enter the masters programme (s) that you deliver?	• Do they come in with first degrees in other disciplines or related subjects? • Do NNES students have the same kind of subject grounding that a NES undergraduate would have?
3. 3. What role does assignment writing play in the masters programme (s)?	• Is there a strong oral component in assessment? • Is fieldwork or collaborative project work important /assessed?
4. 4. What are you looking for when you assess students' written work?	• Do the criteria differ substantially module to module/ degree to degree? • Do you expect students to move from a descriptive grasp of the field to an ability to construct arguments and use critical analysis? • Do you assess students in terms of whether or not they demonstrate progress? • Do you take into account their ability to use feedback they have been given?
5. 5. What genres do you require your students to write?	• Can you give examples? • Long assignment-discursive essay type • Research report or fieldwork report • Critical reviews? • Dissertation?
6. How do your expectations of student writing change during the course of the degree?	• Can you give examples of International students in recent years?

- Does their grasp of content steadily improve?
- Do they show that they are becoming part of the discourse community?
- To what extent does their ability to construct arguments and use sources to create and support arguments develop?
- Are students generally at a significantly different level by the time they reach the dissertation?

7. In your experience, what do international students have the most difficulty with in their academic writing in terms of meeting the department's requirements?

- Does the nature of their difficulties change over the course of the degree?

8. To what extent do you believe that students' language proficiency affects the way they adopt academic writing conventions?
 (1 = language proficiency has very little effect, 5 = language proficiency has a substantial effect)

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

9. Rank the following in terms of the level of difficulty that students experience in developing academic writing skills through their masters' programmes.
(please give a number between 1 and 5 where 1 = not very difficult to master   5 = very difficult to master. You may use the same number for each item)

	Understanding ideas and arguments in source texts (books/journals etc).
	Selecting relevant information from sources
	Using various sources appropriately through paraphrasing and quotation
	Developing a line of argument
	Structuring the assignments appropriately
	Using sufficient critical analysis in your writing
	Editing grammar, vocabulary and style for accurate English in final submissions of work

Tutor Interview 2- tutors' attitudes and practice in giving written feedback

Questions related to the specific students' work

1. How often did you meet with these students to discuss feedback?
2. Did you feel these students showed evidence of acting upon earlier feedback to improve as the course progressed?
3. Did you see any development in the students' academic writing performance? Specifically, did you see any evidence of development of critical analytical writing and the ability to develop effective arguments? If so, can you give details?
4. What about the self- esteem of the students? Do you have any indication that these students have shown a loss of confidence over the period? Would you identify these students as having medium to high self-esteem?

Questions on tutors' specific approaches to giving written feedback
   1.   What do you see as the functions of written feedback ? How do these functions vary for formative versus summative feedback.

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2. To what extent do you feel that you carry out the following functions when you give written feedback? Can you indicate any variation in the extent to which you engage in these activities in relation to formative as opposed to summative feedback?
a. Justifying a mark-explain the grade in terms of strengths and weaknesses;
b. Correct or edit the student's work; (if yes, is this directive or simply indicating problems)
c. Indicating the gap in performance and expectations- evaluate the match between the student's essay and an 'ideal' answer;
d. Engage in dialogue with the student; e.g. asking open-ended questions that make the student think about approaches, content etc
e. Give advice and guidance that will be useful in writing the next assignment;

3. Are you conscious of writing your comments in any particular style e.g?
-Do you tend to ask questions rather then make statements?
-Do you try to aim for an impersonal style or personal first person style?
-Do you try to 'mitigate' negative comments in any ways that you are conscious of?
-Do you make an effort to provide encouragement?
-Do you write comments that you intend as a starting point for discussion, with the expectation that students will enter into dialogue with you?

4. When writing comments, what about the balance between positive and negative comments- do you actively look for a balance? Do you try to make specific comments about positive aspects, or tend to make more general comments?

5. Do you usually write comments on the student's text in addition to an official feedback form? Why /why not? If the answer to the above question is Yes, what type of comments do you write?
6. How much do you give more general comments on the process involved (reading / drafting/ editing etc.)?
7. Do you give comments on language, e.g. on sentence construction, spelling, word form errors, use of vocabulary, tenses, punctuation, academic style? Why / why not?
8. Do you give feedback on the rhetorical aspects of writing, structure, paragraphing, use of introductions and conclusions, etc? Why /why not?
9. Do you include a quick check table at the top of the feedback? Why /why not?
10. Do you write your formative feedback comments in a different way to the summative comments?
11. Did you give guidance on how to use the criteria and how to use the feedback at any point or points during the two terms?
12. Do you feel that your students make sufficient use of their feedback? Do you have any evidence for this? Do students regularly discuss feedback, clarify and show understanding?
13. To what extent do you believe that standardizing feedback practices within the department are …
a. desirable
b. possible
c. practical (given staff workloads)
d. likely to lead to improved student performance

14. What about any attempts at departmental level to improve the quality of feedback (however that might be defined):

Would you
a. welcome any attempts at departmental or university level, to open up a discussion of what constitutes quality feedback
b. welcome attempts to standardize written feedback practices with the aim of improving feedback quality in the department
c. feel that individual styles of tutors should be respected and that there is no value in attempting to standardize feedback
d. feel that there may be value in exploring ways of improving the quality of feedback but that current workloads make it impractical

Pre-sessional tutor interview schedule - Peter

1. What can you tell me about Peter's strengths and weaknesses in English language skills?
2. How did Peter progress in the various skills over the PS?
3. How about Peter's ability to pick up academic conventions and work in the UK academic culture?
4. Looking at Peter's feedback and writing again, did he benefit from the PS in terms of developing writing skills, and if so in what ways?
5. Do you remember Peter's ability in terms of reading for his assignments? Was he able to do the amount of reading and did he generally seem to understand it?
6. What about the way he fitted into the group and related to other students? Was there anything that you saw that you might comment on in terms of his ability to cope and become part of the academic community in his department?
7. How about Peter's personality and learning style, can you recall anything on this? Was he receptive and open to new ideas? Was he able to take on board suggestions in feedback?
8. On feedback, did Peter use opportunities to ask you about his work and discuss ways to improve? Did he clarify points in feedback with you?
9. Overall, how prepared was he for academic study in his department by the end of the PS?

Preliminary Student Interview Schedule 1

Preliminary Information :IELTS/TOEFL score on entry (writing)?
Other English qualifications?
Years learning English?
Other experience using/ teaching English
Academic work prior to UK- English ?
Academic discipline: Did you take an undergraduate degree in the same discipline as your Masters course? If no, give details of relevant degree/ academic study /vocational study for your Masters?
Essay writing/ assignment writing in English?
Compositions in English? Words? Type of essay? Example
Reading: Had you read any journal articles or research articles written in English in your subject discipline?
Did you take any **preparation courses** for academic study prior to coming to the UK?
Academic writing-assignment 1

1. Do you feel confident that you understand the task and the type of writing that is required of you for the first assignment?

2. Where have you received advice from so far on how to approach this writing task?

	Information in the Department Handbook
	Advice and guidance from your supervisor
	Advice and guidance from English Language Support classes
	Advice and guidance from tutors on your modules
	Advice and guidance from friends / other students
	Other sources of help (please specify_

3. Rank the following in terms of their level of difficulty that you have experienced so far in writing the first assignment.
1 = not very difficult 5 = very difficult

	Understanding ideas and arguments in source texts (books/journals etc)
	Selecting relevant information from sources
	Using various sources appropriately through paraphrasing and quotation
	Developing a line of argument
	Structuring the assignment appropriately
	Balancing descriptive writing with critical analysis
	Editing grammar, vocabulary and style for accurate English final submissions of work

Preliminary study Student interview 2
Academic writing-Feedback on Formative Assignments
CHM = marker 1   CS = marker 2

1. What was your first response to the feedback?
- What were you pleased with?
- How many times have you read the feedback?
- Did you think the feedback reflected the mark you got?
- Not so pleased with?
- Were you surprised by any of this feedback?
- Is this feedback similar or different to any you have received before?

2. Have you had the opportunity / taken the opportunity to discuss this feedback with the tutors?   Why/why not?
3. Can you remember two key points from the feedback that you will be working on for these next assignments?
4. What positive points can you remember that you will take from the first feedback?
5. (Looking at the feedback form) Did you find any points in the feedback hard to understand in any way? Give details, why was this?
6. (Looking at the feedback form) Can you identify points you feel that you can easily put right/ points that you feel you need more help and guidance with? Do any terms or concepts need explanation?

7. Did you receive feedback on your English language performance- grammar, style, punctuation, vocabulary?
- What do you remember about it?
- Was it sufficient?
- Would you like more?
- If the feedback concentrated on your content and largely ignored your language, are you happy it did that?
- Did you get any positive advice as well as negative advice on language?
- What areas were you advised to work on?

8. Put a P against any aspects that you received positive feedback on, and a C on any points that you received more negative or critical comments on. If you received both positive and negative points for certain aspects then indicate both.

	Understanding ideas and arguments in source texts (books/journals etc)
	Selecting relevant information from sources
	Using various sources appropriately through paraphrasing and quotation
	Developing a line of argument
	Structuring the assignment appropriately
	Balancing descriptive writing with critical analysis
	Editing grammar, vocabulary and style for accurate English final submissions of work

8. In terms of confidence as you go forward with the next assignments, how confident are you in the following areas 1- is little confidence

5 –very confident   1   5

Content/relevance					
Style/argument					
Critical judgement					
Originality					
Accuracy					
References/reading					
Presentation					
Language –grammar, style, punctuation etc.					

9. How will you approach the reading/ writing of the next assignments: in largely the same way as with the formative essays, or will you take any new approaches? give details why, how?

Preliminary study Student Interview 5
Academic writing-feedback on final summative assignments/ overall view of feedback process

1. After the final summative feedback on assignments in term 2 have you had time / taken the opportunity to discuss this feedback with the tutors? Were they able to clarify any points with you?
2. You have now completed the final summative assignments and the cycle of assignment writing and feedback; can you tell me about any areas of your writing that you feel you managed to make progress on through the course of the last two terms?
3. Did you feel that the type of assignments that you were set, in terms of content and approach, allowed you to put into practice the advice that you gained in feedback for a previous assignment?
4. Were the formative essays and feedback effective in preparing you for the summative tasks? Tell me about any differences between the formative feedback and the summative feedback
5. Did you ever receive feedback on drafts that allowed you to go away and revise before handing in your final assignment?
6. How useful is the table at the top of the form, with the breakdown of categories?
7. Did you discuss these at any stage with your tutors? Do you feel that you clearly understood these categories as you wrote your assignments?
8. Do you feel that you 'developed' an understanding of these terms as the terms progressed?
9. Were there any points repeated in feedback that you felt you had to work hard on throughout the two terms? Were there any points in feedback that you felt you were able to act on immediately to make improvements?
10. Did you feel that addressing issues with 'language' was the responsibility of your tutors in this feedback? If yes, did you receive sufficient/useful feedback on language? Where did you get the most useful help on language issues?
11. To what extent have you changed your approach to the reading/ writing for assignments over the course of the two terms? What influence did your written feedback have on prompting these changes?
12. What about your motivation to do this course? Were you /are you hoping to use this in your own country to get an academic post? Have your plans changed in any way in terms of what you hope to do in the future, and how you hope to use this degree qualification?
13. In terms of your experience of assignment writing and written feedback, to what extent do you agree with the following? (give a mark on a 1-5 scale, where 1 = I totally agree - 5 = I totally disagree)

    The process of writing and receiving written feedback has

    a. given me a much better understanding of content on my course
    b. enabled me to understand clearly what is involved with writing in a critical manner and developing argument
    c. enabled me to challenge and question comments made by my tutors
    d. given me the opportunity to discuss comments in detail with my tutors
    e. helped me improve my writing in terms of language (grammar, punctuation, organization, style)
    f. helped me improve my academic writing in terms of how to use sources and referencing conventions

Looking back at your responses above, to what extent do these responses differ in relation to the different approaches to feedback that your tutors used?

Appendix E: Sample interview transcripts

Main study: Tutor formative task interview
(BS = researcher TF = Tutor F)

BS: Okay, [Tutor name]. Right, thanks for agreeing to help me with the project, and I'll get, sort of, straight into the interview, if that's okay?

TF: Yeah.

BS: Okay, we're looking at the formative task, and this is the first one, the first bit of feedback the students had, will have, in the whole year. So the first question is really about the kind of task, this formative task, the genre that you chose, the type of task, what was it that informed your choice? I mean, why did you choose this kind of task?

TF: Well, this is the type of topic that is very similar to the topics that they would have for the real assignment so that's…

BS: That's basically it.

TF: That's basically it, yeah.

BS: And it's a sort of, it's kind of a discursive essay basically, isn't it?

TF: It is, yes.

BS: Yeah. Okay. And was this assignment, or does this assignment, the title and the topic of it, is it in any way part of a longer task that forms the, you know, that could be part of summative assessment, or is it effectively a self-contained finished task? What I'm, what I'm saying is that, you know, the topic is the mental lexicon.

TF: Mm hm.

BS: Now is that going to, will that topic, and a title which is not obviously the same title but a related title, maybe come up that they would be able to use what they'd done in this task?

TF: Yes, yes. Yes. So it's, they'll have six topics for the final assignment to choose from, one of them will be on the mental lexicon, so potentially if they want to write on the same topic of the mental lexicon, they can, and they can use the feedback that they received on this mock assignment as well. Some students choose to work on the same topic, some students move onto different topics.

BS: Right, okay. And just, because you've used this one before…

TF: Yes.

BS: So how, what percentage of the students do you, roughly do you think, tend to take this one on again?

TF: 20% take it on again.

BS: Right. Okay. Yeah.

TF: Not more than in years when there was no formative assignment, mock assignment. So the percentage of people choosing this topic on the mental lexicon hasn't changed. Last year was the first year that we had this mock assignment and the percentage hasn't changed in any way from other years.

BS: Oh that's interesting. Quite interesting.

TF: But they do receive feedback, yeah.

BS: Yeah. The percentages are the same, so the take up is the same for the topic.

TF: Yep.

BS: And just about formative tasks generally, do you set similar kind of tasks to this during the term and during the course, or is this, this kind of formal one quite different to what you do week by week?

TF: It is very different to what I do week by week. What I do week by week, they get formative assessment in a different way, they do different tasks. The main way in which they get formative feedback on a week by week basis is, they read articles that are potentially related to the topics that we cover, and that can be potentially used for writing their assignments, and they get guided reading questions, and then they have small group discussions where they cover, not all of the questions, the groups, specific groups cover specific questions, and then we have a class discussion where we cover all of these questions and I comment on the

structure and the assignment, what could… Not the assignment, the structure of the paper, what, from that paper, could be used to pick on in terms of style of writing, what could be useful in terms of content, that they may be using for assignments, to make sure that they realise, not only what's written, but what authors do when they do certain things, when they say certain things etc. So that's the main form of what they get as a formative feedback during the course.

BS: So just to clarify, are they writing very much at that, for that?

TF: No, no.

BS: It's more discussion and…

TF: Yes.

BS: Yes. Yep. Okay. Going back to this particular task, what guidance did you give to students beforehand then? For example, word limits, sources… What kind of things do you, how do you set it up?

TF: Okay, word limits are 500 to 1000 words, so a short assignment just to see how they think rather than, kind of, writing extensively. What was the other one…?

BS: Sources.

TF: Sources, yep. For sources, I make it clear that this differs from the final assignment. This, they only had a week to do this; it was fairly early in the term. I was aware that they hadn't had a chance to read lots and that they wouldn't be able to read lots within that week, and produce the assignment, and follow all the other lectures etc. So, and for me this was really to see how they think, how they structure writing, rather than to show me how much they can read. So that was the advice that I gave them, that it would be good if they could include a source or two, not to worry even if they didn't, that this assignment could be written even without actually consulting the literature, just relying on the handout, as long as they understood what was going on and that they can, kind of, think about the topic, answer the question as asked, structure it properly, and just show me that they can weigh evidence that was at least presented in the class, that they can reach certain conclusions. That was the sort of information they were given. Yes, and the most important bit of information that I tend to give students is to keep it simple, not try to be too clever, not try to complicate things to much, just to kind of to keep it straight to the point and simple.

BS: Yep. Okay. Did you go through the criteria? I mean, in a sense what you're talking about is criteria there, aren't you? You were talking about, for this task, that's all criteria in a sense, that you're judging it on.

TF: Yes.

BS: So that was, you discussed that with them in the class.

TF: Yes, yes.

BS: Is there anything written down for that? I mean, did you make any reference to the departmental, kind of, criteria for assignments or not, or would you keep that, sort of, separate?

TF: I didn't this year. I didn't mention anything about the actual departmental criteria. You know, I implicitly refer to them when I say, well I don't really, but I'm not bothered how many books you read for this assignment, which, kind of, in the criteria test you have three blocks, basically explaining this assignment is slightly different because it serves a difference purpose. But, yes, I suppose, no, I didn't put anything in writing, it was kind of, I just assumed that they would have access to that and that, if they were concerned they would check the criteria.

BS: Yeah yeah. Okay. And you did talk about how to structure it? How that was part of what you discussed? That you were interested in the way they structured it. Did you discuss that very much, how they would structure it?

TF: Not really. Again, there is an assumption that at this point, MA level they know what structuring means, that may be a not very well based assumption, but it's an assumption I think should be there, and they'll get formative feedback, so it's… This is the first stab; write in whatever way you think you should be writing an academic assignment…

BS: Yep.

TF …and then I'll give you feedback, what you are doing right and where you need to improve…

BS: Okay.

TF: …without me actually giving them a recipe for how they should be doing it.

BS: Yeah. Sure. Yeah, I can, I can relate to that. And did you, obviously you made clear what kind of feedback you would give and how you would give the feedback?

TF: Yes. I said that they'll get feedback on the same form on which they would be given proper feedback on their final assignment, and they will be given a, sort of, mark, so it would be very much similar to what they get in the end. And I know that not everyone follows this practice in this department, but I feel that it's useful for students to, kind of, get the feel for what it's going to be like really at the end, what sort of feedback they can expect, what sort of…

BS: Yeah.

TF: I just kind of thought like that, so that's… That would be the most useful.

BS: Yeah.

TF: And I also know that sometimes in formative feedback people don't give marks, but just kind of, you know, you've done this well and this is the room for improvement. But, from what students say, and there was this (overspeaking) -

BS: Yes, I was going to ask you about this, so you jumped, but it's fine, carry on. I'm just interrupting you, but you... Go on. What about the marks, yeah? Because you do give a mark…

TF: I do give a mark.

BS: …and in the literature it's often, you know, it's very commonly seen to be agreed that giving a mark is not, you know, standard good practice with formative assessment, but you do…

TF: Yes.

BS: So I was going to ask you, what's your rationale, so…?

TF: Right. Well, students like to be given a mark. That's kind of, that's their preference, and when I was a student I really liked to be actually told, not just a description of what you are doing, but kind of, where am I on this map. And I really see it as a map, as a road map. So, for example, you can tell somebody how to get from A to B, or how they got from A to B, but saying, oh you started well but then took a left turn at the bridge close to a river next to a mountain, and then you should have actually turned right, and then you went 300 metres, and then instead of, you looked back on yourself. And for me, personally, that kind of just description of what they did, students very often can't actually pick up, can't relate, basically, the tutor comments to what they've written. With marks, and especially if you have a grading scale, it's like on a road map; somebody says, well you are on A3 on page 62/63, and they go and they see and they say, okay, here is A, here is B and I'm here, and this is what I need to do, meaning they read the grade descriptors for the lowest and the highest, see where they are, and they can, sort of, based on that infer what it is they still need to do. And, just to say kind of, my feeling that the students like it is not just kind of based on my impression, but the department had this survey of what students and tutors think of feedback and, it was done with graduate students, but I think they share certain things in common with postgraduate students, is that they said the most important aspect of feedback for them is the mark. And I know that some colleagues scoffed at that and said pfft, you know, they really don't know what… But it is, for them it is, and I can relate why it is important for them, and it's about giving them the mark.

BS: Okay. Good. That's really important, one of my questions, and I would like to, maybe later, discuss the survey, because I'm not really aware of it, but, yeah, I need to know about that. I'm going to ask you more about the specific points in the feedback in a moment.

TF: Yeah.

BS: But I think I'll just, more general stuff still before we get to that. Yeah. For formative tasks and formative feedback, and I suppose what I want to just quickly talk about is your overall approach, and whether it's different in any way from summative and how you approach formative feedback tasks like this. So for such a formative task, do you adopt a particular

strategy, with a, sort of, cruel to be kind approach? Or do you mark it much in the same way as the summative work? Do you see what I'm getting at?

TF: Yes, yeah. I see what you're getting at. No… I wish I could be cruel to be kind, but if I did that very few would actually get a pass mark. So I probably inflate the marks a bit to give them confidence. So, you know, I give them comments where I try to praise certain aspects of what they did, whether there is anything to praise or not, you find something, and then you say what aspects need improving, but overall I give them a mark higher than what I would normally have given them on the real assignment if they'd written something like that.

BS: Yeah, yeah. That's the sort of thing I'm looking for. Yes, so, do you, I think you've already kind of referred to that. Do you try to balance positive and negative comments, or hedge these statements and then mitigate the negative criticism in any way, do you think?

TF: I'm probably more direct than most other people, so I do try to highlight the positive aspects, but I'm probably fairly blunt about things that need improving, so if I, if something doesn't make sense to me, I don't understand, then I say so, so, perhaps I need to train myself on how to say things in a more wrapped up way, but I normally say it, kind of, pretty straightforwardly.

BS: Well, there's a lot of debate around that and I'm not sure that the hedging and the mitigation, you know, is always a good thing to students, so I think there's an open question there definitely, and an interesting one for study.

TF: Yeah.

BS: Yeah. And I suppose one of the questions which, maybe this is not an easy one to answer, I mean it's maybe an obvious one, is how is the procedure and process different for summative assignments? But I suppose that's fairly obvious. I mean I'm sure that, your summative assignment you'll be, you mark, obviously for this option, you mark all of those and they go back to the student. I think it comes into my next question really, which is really about the follow up. What is your intended follow up, for this one anyway, let's talk about that. How will you follow up the feedback now with the class?

TF: In the next session I will discuss more generally, things that, kind of… How do I put it…? Give general feedback. So this was all kind of specific written feedback. Oral feedback will be more general in terms of people who, alright no actually, there's another thing I'm doing and I did it last year as well. First of all, actually, I give them an example of a good assignment, okay, and I ask them to read that assignment in class for five, ten minutes, it's a short piece.

BS: Is this before or, have you done that already, will you do that now?

TF: No no no. So, they first get the feedback so that they can digest what I said and relate it to what they've written. The next thing is, in the class next week they'll get an assignment from a last year student, which was a very good assignment, got a distinguished grade. That's the one that you actually have.

BS: I think you gave me that last year.

TF: Yes, you have a photocopy of that one. So I'll use the same one this year. And we just go paragraph by paragraph and discuss what was good in this paragraph, what was the author doing in this paragraph, why it was successful, what kind of, why it is a good strategy to do so. There are some limitations of that assignment as well, so I, kind of, invite students to see if they can spot what the limitations are, what could have been done better, what could have been omitted, and things like that. And then, after discussing that particular piece of work, I give, sort of, more general feedback, kind of; so people who did really well in this assignment, what they normally did is basically, they didn't change the wording of the title to start with, telling them, kind of, why it is important to read the title carefully and how it helps them to structure the assignment. So then I would give them an example of how this assignment could have been straightforwardly structured, based on what was in the title, kind of, how to introduce it, what would be the parts of the essay, tell them about the importance of signposting. The second bit is that people who did really well kept things simple, didn't introduce too many different things, and referred to what was discussed in the class, referred to what was in the sources that were recommended in the class. There were

people who basically just went and collected sources that were not recommended, and I have nothing against students going and exploring it further but they really, there is a good reason why I discuss in the class what I discuss, and why I recommended the reading that I recommended. So this is, kind of, better for them, easier, gentler introduction than just, kind of, plunging straight. And things like, about irrelevant material, to avoid relevant, to keep things relevant. Sometimes I read, well, half of the assignment and I just kind of think but, you know, this is not relevant. It's probably not true. It's probably, there is some relevance but it's not explained, so I explain to them they need to say what the relevance is, what they're doing by saying something. A lot of irrelevant material is material that students just put in but they didn't themselves understood what it was about, and explaining that not to put anything they don't understand, or that they can't explain. If they didn't understand it the reader is not going to understand it either, so it's kind of going through those, sort of, general points with them. And… I'm trying to think, give them some dos and don'ts, basically.

BS: Yeah, sure. About how long do you spend on that, cause that's quite thorough?
TF: About half of the session.
BS: Yeah. Half of the session. That's interesting. So about an hour, maybe, on that.
TF: Forty-five minutes. I probably try not to go over forty-five minutes.
BS: But that seems quite a lot.
TF: And I may give them, kind of, a small hand out of dos and don'ts and general things as well.
BS: What about talking to them individually? Do you routinely set that up and ask them to come and see you individually about it? Or do you encourage them to come and see you if they want, leave it open to them to approach you? What's your view on that one?
TF: I don't insist that they come and discuss it with me. I think that there's already, especially for MA student level, a lot given, so they get detailed feedback, marked assignment in the, kind of, comments in the margins, they get these general things. They're, I say that they're welcome to come and discuss with me, any of aspects of their work, including this, or anything that's bothering them. Some of them take me up on that and come, some of them don't, but it's really, kind of, I don't see a point of insisting that they come and have further tuition on what they should be doing, and lecturing, which is kind of…
BS: No, no.
TF: You have to trust them at this level that they can judge what they need.
BS: Sure, sure. But it's just, how many do you think do take up that offer? In an average cohort, you've got seventeen in the group presumably?
TF: Half of them. Half.
BS: Maybe as many as half do come and talk to you individually?
TF: Yes, yes. Yeah.
BS: Right. I'd like to talk more specifically about this particular feedback, if that's alright? And the first thing I was gonna ask is, is, if you could pick out three main points first of all, three main points, that you wanted to convey to the student, what would the three points? Be looking at it again, because obviously you're going to have to look at this again and not…
TF: I have it in my mind to read it, because I... I've marked all of the others.
BS: Yeah, obviously I'll give you some time to, to reacquaint yourself with it, because obviously, you know, you can't do it from memory.
        Silence from 00:21:14 to 00:22:25
TF: Two or three points that, that...
:   Yeah, three main points.
TF: Three main points. Well, the first, well, kind of, the sort of the points in the targets for improvement that's kind of, in a way, a summary of what the main issues are. Probably the main issue may be that's actually not phrased like that in the targets for improvement, is that half of the time I just didn't understand what the student was saying. And I know I'm digressing a bit, but I'll come back to that. I didn't understand what the student was saying, and I couldn't quite decide whether that's a problem of language; the student couldn't express herself or the student didn't understand what she was reading, or it's just the style of writing, that she doesn't know what to include in her writing. I couldn't quite decide what it

was. So depending on that, my, my advice would differ, so it's, kind of, one is work on your language, if language is a problem. The other one is think about what you're saying and what you're doing, think of the sequence of ideas, think of the argument, what are you actually trying to say? What are you trying, the reader, to know? That was not clear, so that was the main problem. So here it's expressed as, make sure that points are organised in a coherent argument, and that what you say in one sentence logically links to what you have said in previous sentences. That's this kind of idea.

BS: So you've given me two, two, quite substantial things there, haven't you? I wonder if…

TF: Well, they're, they're they're...

BS: You could give me a third one, or…

TF: No no no, I would say that's the first one, but I can't decide what, you know, depending on whether it's her language or whether she's just not structuring it well. I can't decide. So that would be, kind of, to address that it's one or the other. She needs to decide what her problem is, I can't really judge. I think it's probably both, but…

BS: So it could be two points really.

TF: It could be. It could be two points.

BS: Which is what I'll put down here.

TF: Yes.

BS: Would there be a third thing coming through there?

TF: There would, there would be, but just give me a bit of time to…

BS: No no no, I'm not trying to rush you.

TF: So, so, just to elaborate. For example, here I give the example where she says, for example, the mental lexicon is the study of human cognition. I mean, lexicon is not a study. It's a store of words, it's not a study. But she says things like that and I can't decide whether it's a language problem or she doesn't really understand what she's talking about. Okay. So that's the thing…. The, if you like, if there is to be the two points, the the... the other point would be to read the title carefully. So what this student has done, and several others have done too, is, she picked up one point from the title but ignored the other points, and if she's actually read it carefully and structured the assignment in that way then she would have covered more, she would have, maybe the argument would be clearer as well, so it's kind of, it's all a bit connected, it's difficult.

BS: Yeah.

TF: So and if, kind of, if, if you took that the first one was one, one aspect, this was the other. The third one is think about referencing, to check, for example she talks about, she's one of the students who went and looked into, let me just see… [author name] is fine, that's kind of what I recommended, it was good she… And she then went on and looked at something, somebody called [author name] That was an edited volume, she refers to it but it's actually, it's not clear what she's read from there. I Googled it and I found it, and it's…

BS: So it's something that she got online.

TF: Well, yeah. Well, it's a book. It's a book.

BS: Oh right, so she does actually refer to the book, do you think?

TF: It's a book, but it's also available, kind of, you can get it through Google, and I looked at the table of contents and it's far too complex and specific and narrow, and, kind of, wouldn't really be suitable for dealing with a topic that's quite general that she, to write in two pages, so that was not well chosen. I didn't say it was not well chosen, I just, kind of, make, at least with referencing, you know, are you talking about edited book? Are you talking about authored book? What are you talking about?

BS: Yes, yes. Okay. Right so, to clarify, so it, the third one seems very clear enough. There's an issue about referring and using the source and referencing properly, and your second one was really that, you know, make sure that you address the title.

TF: Yes.

BS: Yeah. And the first one is this, kind of, expressing ideas, really, in some kind of coherent way, whether that be language, or, or understanding logic. But it's kind of tied up together.

TF: Logic. Yes.

BS: Okay. And, and so that one that we've just talked about, that's the most important for you then, that one on the logic of the ideas, the expression of the ideas.

TF: Yes, yes, that... That would be the one, yes. But, the final logic about referencing, so that was, for example, the problem. The other problem is, she uses some good examples, and I think they're probably found from (inaudible name) but she doesn't say so, so that's kind of, she doesn't acknowledge it at all. So referencing, that is the problem.

BS: Referencing is the problem. Okay, that, that's fine. And, a question I had earlier actually but it really relates here, I think as much, is when you look at these formative ones, this one particularly but, I mean, others as well I suppose, do you find you're, you're trying to focus on a small number of points and there are other issues you could have picked up?

TF: Oh yes.

BS: So you definitely, kind of, feel that you have to focus on, not to overload the student.

TF: Yes.

BS: You have to focus the comment, yeah?

TF: Yes. To focus the comment it just, kind of, would be physically impossible to, kind of, my comments on their assignments would probably be longer than their assignments if I was to comment on everything.

BS: Yeah yeah. Sure. Yeah. Good. Okay. I suppose what I, one of the questions that, it's a bit difficult this one. I'm interested in the whole idea of feed forward, which is, you know, when they get comments on, on, on, whether it's summative or formative, what they can take forward. Because of the way that the form is structured, you have a very clear target for improvements, so they're obviously, kind of, feed forward. The student should be able to take those forward. Are there any other comments that you make there, for example in the other part of the form, that you think should help the student in future assignments? That are really about…

TF: Absolutely. I think that everything that I say anywhere in the, in this form, should help them.

BS: So every comment, really, should be helping them with their future assignments.

TF: Yes. Yes.

BS: And would you, I mean, is that true, do you think, as true in summative, when you write up one of these for a summative as well?

TF: Yes. Oh yes. Yes. I think this is the whole point of feedback. I mean, it tells you something, feedback on anything really, kind of, somebody tells you something about what you've done wrong. It's not, kind of, to tell you off, it's basically to tell you how to do it in future.

BS: Right. I suppose what I'm thinking about is if you, and it's maybe not so clear with this one because it's far more formative anyway, but when you're, when you're giving feedback on the content of a particular assignment and you give feedback about alternatives or omissions and things like that…

TF: Yes. Right.

BS: They're less feed forward, aren't they? They're much more about the particular assignment. You know what I'm saying? But maybe that's not, not the case here, in, in, because of the way that, you know, it's approached?

TF: I think that my approach to summative assignments is not radically different. So I would give them a general statement, for example, you make confusing statements that don't make sense, it says here, and then I give them an example, for example the mental lexicon is the study of human cognition and language education. There are many more instances, which I've indicated in the next by a question mark. So in a way yes, I've given the feedback, although their assignment was not clear to me. But what I'm saying is, you make confusing statements and that's something that you need to address, and you are not going to rewrite this assignment, but when you're writing a future assignment, you need to do it.

BS: Yes, yes. I agree. That's, that's at the level of, this is something that you can take forward, definitely, because it's the same for any assignment.

TF: Then, sorry, the last item. So the first paragraph tells the reader how the essay's going to be structured. This is a very good strategy, so it means, keep doing that, that's good. What is a pity is that you decided to focus on a lump out of the question from the title and ignored the other. That can be kind of, it means, in future read your questions carefully and address

everything that's being asked, sort of, so, anyway… And I would very much write my feedback for summative assessments in the same way.

BS: Same way. And just on the same point here, about, the points that you've made, the three points that we've made, you, do you feel that you could add any more, by way of amplification or explanation, to what you've done, or do you feel that you've done that? Because you've just been saying, you know, you've pointed out that they're not making sense and here's an example. Do you feel that you've done that sufficiently in there then?

TF: Well, I think that there are the things…

BS: Yes, sorry, where were we? So we were looking at this point about…

TF: Whether they'd made the ideas clear.

BS: Yeah, whether you feel that, yes, whether you feel that you've amplified it or explained enough, or whether there's any way you could do more. I mean that is…

TF: Well, I think there's more to, kind of, illustrate that. So for example it says, you used theoretically notions without explaining them or giving examples. That means, this is why what you are saying is not clear, and then giving her examples, like inflectional words, but she doesn't say mental semantics. I still don't know what it means. So that, kind of, is on. And then, I think, later on in targets for improvement, I say, explain and give examples for any theoretical concepts you introduce, so that's, kind of, this is why, I think, part of what she was saying was not clear to me.

BS: Yeah. So that's basically explaining to her what she needs to do, isn't it?

TF: Yes.

BS: Yeah. Okay, that's fine. And there was one more question and this, again I'm not sure… I mean, what students understand from written feedback is always a big question, and when you look at the feedback again there now, which you have been doing, you've been thinking about it. Is there anything, looking again at it now, that you think, well, the student might struggle to understand this?

TF: I don't know.

BS: Yes. Yeah it's difficult to know, isn't it? Yeah.

TF: Sometimes I think that, if they couldn't, if they couldn't make much sense of whatever reading, and expressing themselves in a particular way, just telling them that, well actually you didn't understand it and this is, kind of, where you got it wrong. I don't know they can make sense of that if they couldn't make sense of it in the first place.

BS: First place, of course.

TF: So it's…

BS: It's difficult to…

TF: It's difficult to say.

BS: Yeah.

TF: And, given that, at least last year when we had this formative assignment, assessment followed by the summative assessment, I didn't get a feel that they've made much use of the feedback that was given to them.

BS: No, that's an interesting question, sort of, maybe a final question actually, because I've come to the end now. Yeah, overall what kind of effect do you think that this has? I mean, this is really what you've just been saying right there. Do they pay much attention to this? Do they really respond to it? What's your, kind of, feeling over your experience with the… I'm thinking about the formative one now particularly, because I'll be talking to you again later in the year about the summative ones.

TF: Yes. Well, I feel that some students respond to it and they shape their writing later on to address these comments, other students don't, and I assume that some students understand better what was the problem, and some students don't. But I wouldn't be able to tell you who these students are and what the difference between them is, and why it is that some can respond to it better and some don't. That's, kind of, for you to find out.

BS: Yeah. Absolutely! Well, listen, many thanks, because we've certainly come to the end, and I think we've taken perhaps a little bit more time than I'd hoped, but I,.. it's been very useful, so I shall stop the recording there, if I can.

End of Transcript

Main study: Formative feedback student interview
(BS = researcher B = Betty)

BS: Right, Betty, thank you very much for coming in, this is -

B: You're welcome.

BS: Good. And this is your, the interview, the second interview because we've had one already, this is the interview on the formative task, yeah?

B: Yeah.

BS: So I'm going to start by asking you some general questions. First of all how much guidance did you receive on how to write the task? Did you get guidance on how to structure it, on the reading you should be doing, did you get recommended reading for that task? What kind of guidance did you get?

B: Inaudible00:34 from the tutor?

BS: Yeah, from the tutor.

B: I just get some information, what does the summary mean and just some basic information of the summary from the tutor on how to maybe inaudible00:59 information, how to organise your critiques and then I found some materials for myself to support it –

BS: Right, the materials, you mean the reading?

B: Yeah reading and also how to write a summary because this is my first time to write these kind of articles, so –

BS: Okay, interesting. What did you … where did you go to get that information, what sources did you use about how to write a summary?

B: I borrowed some books about how to write graduate essays or summaries from the library, yeah.

BS: Okay, it will be interesting to know which books but … and did you find them useful?

B: Partly yeah, because different books have different –

BS: Different advice.

B: Yeah.

BS: Okay, maybe we'll come back to that. And you knew … did you have the reading … did Tutor D suggest the reading for you?

B: You mean summary?

BS: Yeah, so you knew which text you were doing, was that how it worked?

B: Yeah, she gave us text.

BS: Yeah and were you encouraged to read other things, to do other reading around this or just the text?

B: We only asked to focus on this text about … we had to find some other materials to support our own evidence, opinions.

BS: Okay, so you didn't … you were encouraged to look for other -?

B: Yeah.

BS: Okay. How many texts did you use in the end, did you reference any texts in the end, did you -?

B: I forgot to reference.

BS: Okay, but you did use some of the texts then, you did your referencing in the text itself or did you -?

B: Yeah, actually I don't think I did very well on this task because in this task I just mainly focused on the … because it's a research article so I just focused on those method or something like that, not pay too much attention on the appearance of the essay so I don't think I did very well.

BS: Okay we'll come back to that in a moment. So going back actually you're saying that now, but I wanted to ask you about how you felt when you'd done the work, so when you handed in that piece of work at that point, how did you feel about it, did you feel confident or happy with it or worried about it, what do you think?

B: Actually I feel more confident than –

BS: Than that?

B: Worried, yeah.

BS: Right, so you weren't so worried when you gave it in, you felt you'd done okay?

B: Yeah.

BS: That's interesting. Okay, what were you confident about, did you feel you understood what you were doing then, you'd done a good summary, what was the -?

B: I think because I done very good summary, yeah.

BS: Yeah, okay, well we'll come back to that afterwards then. Were there any aspects of the task that you found more difficult than others do you think?

B: I think how to … the most difficult thing is how to organise this kind of article, I don't know how to just put the summary in the first part and then give some critiques or just a mix of them. Yeah, I'm not very sure about that.

BS: So the structuring of it was difficult?

B: Yeah a little bit difficult.

BS: Hmmm, okay. So I've asked you about the reading but you read about how to write summaries, obviously you read the journal article that you were critiquing, but how many other books and journals do you think you read in connection with the task then?

B: Maybe three and four.

BS: Okay, but you didn't reference them in this task?

B: Yeah.

BS: But did Tutor D ask you to reference them or was that a problem or not?

B: She did but I didn't work much on the appearance, just use some books about how to organise the –

BS: Hmmm, okay. And you said that you were reasonably happy when you'd done the task, that you felt fairly confident, so did you feel you'd done enough reading at that point at least?

B: I think not enough, yeah.

BS: Right. That was when you'd done the task, you still felt you hadn't done enough reading?

B: Yeah.

BS: Okay. And after the feedback do you feel that you did enough reading now or do you feel still that you need to do … you needed to do more?

B: You mean how to improve my -?

BS: Yeah, I mean do you think at the end of all this that the reading … you'd done enough reading or do you still feel, oh no I should have read more?

B: I think I should have read more based on Tutor D's feedback.

BS: On the feedback?

B: Yeah.

BS: Okay. And when you did this task what did you understand the purpose of this task to be, what was the purpose of the task?

B: I think the purpose is how to think critically on those general articles how to take your own stance.

BS: How to take your stance, right.

B: Yeah.

BS: Okay. That was the main task, the main purpose of it in fact?

B: Yeah and how to summarise.

BS: Yeah, okay.

B: Not just copy all quotations.

BS: Yeah, okay. How long was it before you got your feedback? How long did it take when you gave the actual work in and when you got the feedback, how long was that?

B: About three weeks.

BS: About three weeks?

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B: Yeah, because we handed it in and then we got feedback last week.

BS: Okay. And how do you feel about that time, was that a reasonable time or do you feel it should have been shorter?

B: I think it's reasonable but actually for myself I think it would be better if it was earlier, because it takes a long time because some of the points we write in the article, but I can understand that because maybe tutors have a lot of work to do, I can understand that. So I think it's reasonable.

BS: Yeah, but have you felt that it was difficult to remember some points then when you got feedback?

B: Not too much difficult because if I read articles again I can remember it, yeah.

BS: Yeah and it's quite a short piece isn't it?

B: Yeah, it's quite short.

BS: Yeah, okay. Did you … you didn't receive a mark, there's no mark on that, right?

B: Yeah.

BS: Did you … did the tutor explain that she would give you a mark or not give you a mark? Did you expect to receive a mark?

B: She explained that it's just a task and mark is not so important, so … but I think for me I think mark is not most important thing.

BS: It's not important?

B: Yeah, the most important thing is the feedback, yeah.

BS: Hmmm, yeah. Sorry, that was my next question really. You didn't receive a mark but would you have preferred a mark, do you think that would have been more useful? I think you've kind of answered it, you don't think it would have been more useful to have a mark as well.

B: I think if I can get mark it would be better because I know … I don't know how to say –

BS: Go on.

B: But if I got a mark I would not … I don't mind too much about the mark just the feedback, yeah.

BS: Hmmm. But … so just going back, you've already said yeah the feedback is more important than a mark I think you made that clear, but you'd still quite like the mark you say?

B: Yeah, because you know we are … used to get mark when I was in China you know, so marks can decide students' maybe future or something like that.

BS: Yeah, although this one is not an assessed mark that goes forward is it? If there was a mark it wouldn't count for anything, it would have just been for you I suppose.

B: Yeah, maybe a little.

BS: Okay, well that's interesting. Okay, looking at the amount of feedback that you got here, on that sheet and then the comments and the annotations in the text, do you think that's a reasonable amount of feedback, did you expect more feedback or less and do you think that's about right, what do you think?

B: I think generally I'm happy with that because you can see that it's very detailed and I'm very happy with that. But maybe some of the grammar or the vocabulary I still need to improve, but I'm not very clear –

BS: About -?

B: About that.

BS: About that, yeah.

B: But I know to improve the … how use the vocabulary or the language just takes practice and so generally I'm happy with this feedback, it's very detailed and it point out what areas of that I still need to improve, I'm very happy with that.

BS: You're happy with that, at the amount of feedback?

B: Yeah.

BS: Good. And going more specifically then, were there any feedback comments that you didn't understand fully? So for example anything here or anything in the text as well that you didn't really understand, what do you think?

B: I not understand why does this have two ticks … I don't know –

BS: Hmmm, so just for the tape, on the grid at the top, language style and precision seems to have two ticks, one in the weak and one in the top of adequate. Yeah, maybe that's just a mistake with the spacing, but it's not clear which is which.

B: Yeah.

BS: Okay, that's just a mistake on the grid I think isn't it?

B: Yeah.

BS: Otherwise the comments on the main format sheet are clear are they?

B: Yeah I think they are clear.

BS: How about the comments in the actual text, on your text, are they all clear? I mean handwriting sometimes can be a problem, did you understand the handwriting?

B: Mostly yeah and when I got feedback I … when I didn't know what this mean I asked Tutor D.

BS: Right, I was going to ask you about that in a moment. What were the three … if I asked you now, what were the three main points that this feedback was asking you to do or advising you for the future? What would you say the three main points were that you could take from this feedback for your work in the future?

B: You mean I still need to improve?

BS: Hmmm.

B: I think the first thing is how to write a summary because I'm not very clear about that, so I made some mistakes often, maybe (inaudible12:31) or the structure and second one is to take more practice on the vocabulary and the language. And the other one maybe do some references and read more readings about these kind of articles.

BS: Hmmm, those would be the three … yeah -?

B: Yeah, I think.

BS: Yeah, okay. And if there was one of those three points which is the most important for you, that you understand to be the most important, which one of those three would it be?

B: I think for this task I think the most important thing is how to write a summary, how to write these kind of articles because I think this is very important thing for next task.

BS: Yeah, it was the purpose of it wasn't it really?

B: Yeah.

BS: I wanted to ask you about comments where you felt that … did you feel you had enough examples and explanation of things? So for example if there was a comment here, 'there are several instances where your meaning is unclear due to the language,' can you find examples and were there plenty examples to help you understand what she meant by that, what do you think?

B: Maybe this paragraph.

BS: Hmmm. So the examples are underlined are they and there are question marks?

B: Question marks?

BS: Yeah. What about these … were you able to go away and improve those do you think, have you been able to rephrase them or -?

B: I think I will rephrase … I'm sorry?

BS: When you look at those okay, after studying the feedback and studying these examples, have you been able to … do you know what to do now to put them right, can you rewrite them do you think or is that still difficult?

B: Maybe it's still difficult because at the beginning I thought I have already expressed very clearly but then I got feedback saying it's not so clear, so I'm a little bit confused about it.

BS: Okay, so those are the comments on the language right?

B: Yeah.

BS: It says, the second point is, 'it would be good if you critique more of the literature review and the claims about the data in relation to the literature,' was that one clear for you?

B: Yeah.

BS: Does it need any more explanation?

B: No.

BS: Okay. And it says, 'don't include the first names of researchers' but that's clear as well isn't it?

B: Yeah.

BS: Okay. Right, in the literature there is a term that people talk about a lot called feed forward right, feedback we all … everyone talks about, feedback, this is feedback, but feed forward is an idea that when you get comments for example on your work, feed forward is the most important thing which means that the comments all … the comment helps you to improve in the future, not just improve this piece of work but the next piece of work. How much of the feedback that you received here do you think is feed forward, how many of the comments … how much of it helps you in the future do you think?

B: Basically I think maybe the language I think, I always think the language is the most … is my biggest problem.

BS: And do you think those comments about the language are really feed forward for you then, they will help you to improve in the future then?

B: Yeah I think so.

BS: But what about the rest of the comments, do you think … do you feel that … what proportion of the feedback here is feed forward do you think, is it a high proportion or … what would you say?

B: I think maybe 90% yeah.

BS: Hmmm okay. Right now we've mentioned this before but it's very important this one, did you ask Tutor D, your tutor, to clarify any points from the feedback, have you had an interview with her, one to one or gone to her at the end of a class and asked her questions?

B: No I just asked several points but not one to one, but I still have some problems so maybe I will ask her tomorrow because we just got the feedback last week.

BS: Right, so there's still a time for you to go and -?

B: Yeah.

BS: And are you going to ask to have an appointment to meet and talk about it or will you just try and do it at the end of the class?

B: If I can make appointment with her it will be better, yeah.

BS: Okay. So you got the feedback last week, I just want to ask you what you've done with it so far. So how many times have you read the feedback?

B: How many times?

BS: Hmmm, do you think … have you only read it once quickly or have you read it several times, what do you think?

B: Several times maybe … maybe four or five times.

BS: Hmmm, okay. Have you been away to look at any key terms or have you used any books yet to try and help you with what you've got there, when you got comments, the language problems, have you done any studying … gone away to look at books that might help you with the writing or with the things that you've done there?

B: I borrowed some books about how to … the writing the language.

BS: Hmmm. Which ones?

B: Books for the graduate writing I'm not very –

BS: Hmmm, maybe I'll try and get the detail of that later perhaps. And did you look at Bailey for example, the book that we used in the summer?

B: Yeah.

BS: Was that useful?

B: Yes I think it's very useful.

BS: Aha. And have you done any rewriting of this, have you tried to rewrite any bits of this to try and improve it yet or do you intend to, I mean maybe you don't, I mean I'm not … because the tutor doesn't want you to do that, doesn't ask you to do that but some people do. But you don't … you're not going to do that?

B: I'm going to … I just rewrite some sentences not too many, I intend to write a whole passage … the whole articles.

BS: You're not going to write the article?

B: I'm going to.

BS: You will?

B: Aha.

BS: Okay, yeah. And do you … are you going to show that to your tutor do you think or is it just for you to rewrite it?

B: I think if she could help me to read it I will submit it to her.

BS: Hmmm, okay. And you said to me that you've already selected some points to clarify with her then, you've found some questions you want to ask, right?

B: Hmmm yeah.

BS: Which ones, can you tell me which ones you're going to ask?

B: Maybe this point.

BS: So this says, 'that's not usually how journal articles are organised,' yes. What's the problem with that do you think?

B: I'm not very clear about what does she mean.

BS: Hmmm, what she means by that point?

B: Yeah.

BS: About organisation of journal articles. So you've got a question on that one, yeah?

B: Hmmm.

BS: Anything else that you were going to ask?

B: Maybe this sentence, I mean it would be inaudible20:39 beneficial influence, it's this word I don't know, but she says it not very clear, so –

BS: Yes the comment is, 'it's not clear what this means' and you're not … you don't really understand why then, is that your problem there?

B: Yeah.

BS: You need that to be addressed, because the sentence says something about collaborations between nets and let's, there's this prominent influence on both teachers and students. Yeah, so that's in your introduction isn't it? So there are two specific questions right?

B: Yeah.

BS: How about the language ones, are you going to ask her about those, because you said earlier that some of those you weren't sure about how to put right?For example this one, do you understand that one, colloquial, she's written colloquial above the word?

B: I know, I use this word because when I prepare for the inaudible21:45 test I always use this, this word and it's fine, so … but this one's okay, I know inaudible21:53 can now be used in academic writing so I think this one's okay.

BS: That's okay, you can just change that?

B: Yeah, hmmm.

BS: So the main questions were those that … where you needed to make something clear right?

B: Yeah.

BS: Okay, I think that's fairly clear. And at the beginning before you got the feedback, did the tutor say you can have a one to one discussion afterwards or did she not mention that?

B: You mean one to one means -?

BS: With you … you can arrange to see her individually.

B: She did say if we had problems we could have, yeah one to one.

BS: Okay and at the moment you're thinking that you might take that up, you're not sure?

B: I'm not very sure, I will try to make appointment with her.

BS: Okay. And just checking, that's individual feedback, what other feedback did you get … did you get any general feedback in the class to follow this as well?

B: Yeah, we got general feedback, the problems that we got in the language or the inaudible23:12 the structure or use on colloquial words and something like that, yeah.

BS: Yeah, did you find that useful?

B: Yeah, because maybe this time I didn't make those mistakes but maybe other classmates made, but maybe next time I will make it, so she mentioned that I avoid to those mistakes next time.

BS: So you find that useful?

B: Yeah.

BS: I meant to ask you earlier, did you discuss any of this feedback with your friends or with other students, did you compare feedback or did you ask any advice about anything on there?

B: No, we didn't compare our feedback, we just talk about confused things and we found that common thing is how to improve our language.

BS: Right and when you say you talked about the confused thing, you mean the things that you were confused about still after the feedback?

B: Yeah.

BS: And they were usually language things were they?

B: Yeah language things, the most common things is the language things.

BS: Right, interesting isn't it?

B: Yeah.

BS: Okay, did you receive any other feedback on the VLE or anything or was it just done in class?

B: We got a sample of the feedback, this article on the VLE.

BS: When you say a sample do you mean a model?

B: Yeah a model.

BS: And so that was a model answer, a good answer?

B: Yeah.

BS: And did you find that useful?

B: Yeah I think it's very useful.

BS: What kind of things do you … can you get from that then, how does that help you do you think?

B: I think I'm now clear about how to write this kind of summary and critiques, how to write this kind of article because before we just write something about disagree or agree or something like that. So now this is I think a totally new type of writing for me, so now I think I'm happy with this experience I think.

BS: Hmmm. Now just to come back to that, it's quite interesting, you did the eight week pre-sessional didn't you with us?

B: Yeah I did pre-sessional.

BS: Yeah and on the pre-sessional you didn't do any of that kind of summary and critique then, this was the first time that you'd done it?

B: Yeah.

BS: Yeah, okay. Right I think that's about the end of the interview really. Do you have any other comments about the feedback, about this task or anything I haven't asked you about that you thought about?

B: I think generally I am happy with this feedback but it would be better if I can have a one to one to talk with Tutor D, maybe that will be more clear because always the feedback is very limited to some extent, if we can talk with each other it would be more clear.

BS: Yeah. Well you have that opportunity I think, so you need to use that. I think it's a good idea to try and arrange to see her, it will be good, yeah.

B: Yeah.

BS: Excellent, okay, thank you very much, I'm going to end the interview there, thank you Betty.

End of Transcript

Appendix F: Preliminary study case reports

Case Study 1: Katy

1.0   Introduction

This case description charts Katy's progress in terms of her developing perception and use of feedback. Katy's problems in adapting to the needs of academic study on her programme are highlighted and examples of problems in understanding her feedback are then discussed. The final section considers the impact of weak English language skills on Katy's understanding of criticality and argument, and how this affected the development of her CAW.

1.1   Progress: assignment marks

Katy's marks on formative and summative assignments are evidence of a rather limited progress in her writing. Table 1.shows that although formative marks were slightly improved in the subsequent summative assessments for her first three modules, this was usually a matter of no more than three marks, moving from low to mid fifties in the summative results.

Formative essays	Summative essays
1. (A5) 53	1. (A4) 56
2. (A2) 55	2. (A2) 58*
3. (A3) 56	3. (A2) 53
4 (A1) 35	4. (A1) 45

Table 1: Katy's marks on taught programme

Marker = (A1) *Feedback was not made available for this assignment

Katy later failed both formative and summative assignments on her Conservation Heritage Management module in the second term (tutor A1). In fact, when she discussed her formative mark of 35, Katy admitted that this module was "not in her area", recognition that that she was unfamiliar with content knowledge and lacking the expertise necessary for CAW.

1.2   Prior experience and developing perception of feedback

All three participants in the preliminary study tended to view the feedback they received very favourably, at least initially, due to their complete lack of any previous experience of such feedback. Katy's prior experience of feedback in an academic

environment matched that of the other two participants, so once again it is not surprising that she initially felt very positive about the feedback she received. Katy pointed out in her second interview that in her country, essays were submitted and "scored" but not returned to the student. She also stated, after her first experience of formative feedback, that it was "surprising ...they write so much comments ...and also I can talk to them".

In her final interview, however, when comparing the feedback she received from different tutors, Katy indicated that not all her feedback was so useful. She commented on the style of tutors A2 and A3, as opposed to that of tutor A1:

> Katy: Not enough, just general things. It's hard for me to get what should I do exactly. From tutor A1 there's lots of detailed advices. (K:I5)

Rather like Paul, Katy clearly appreciated detailed feedback even if it focused on critical comments. She identified the purpose of feedback to improve her writing, and when comparing comments on her final formative (35%) assignment, she again compared the feedback with that of other tutors, stating:

> Katy: This one was very shocking but I think this one was the most helpful for me because this one has a lot of advice (K:I4)

When asked in the final interview whether she had made progress as a result of formative and summative feedback over the taught course, Katy again indicated some variability in the feedback and her view of its effectiveness:

> Katy: I think I did but... [noise interruption]
> BS: yeah...go on...
> Katy: But I got different marks and they're talking about different things. Sometimes I'm not sure which one I have to follow.
> BS: So, when you say you 're not sure which one you have to follow, what do you mean, do you mean which...which markers feedback is more important? Do you think they're quite different?
> Katy: In some way...
> BS: So that's confusing for you...?
> Katy: Yeah. (K:I5)

Like Paul and Peter to a lesser extent, Katy valued 'detailed' feedback, even though she did not seem to be able to act upon it effectively during her taught programme.

Her comment above points to variability in marking and feedback and her confusion indicates a lack of clear feed forward from her feedback.

Confidence and self-esteem were highlighted in the literature on feedback (see Section 2.4.6) as a key factor in students' ability to develop their learning in response to feedback which may often be negative in a critical sense, (e.g.,Race, n.d.; Värlander, 2008)

> BS: What about self esteem? In the literature it's often mentioned that to make this kind of progress and to develop often depends on confidence? ....have there been any problems with that?
> TA4:   No I don't think no, we've never discussed that much...I don't think she has ever come to me with that as something that's disturbing her. (TA4:2)

In fact, tutor A4 referred to evidence that Katy engaged well with content and had a certain confidence with her ideas, but she returned to the problem of language and expression:

> TA4:   I found she has very good ideas, in the assessed lecture, all the examiners thought she had good ideas, she had put them well in PowerPoint slides, but she wasn't able to express them effectively. (TA4:2)

She went on to state that she saw Katy's problem, "...with articulation and translation from her own language to English and then writing it...". These issues with English language will be explored further below.

1.3   Developing study strategies

Katy clearly lacked appropriate study skills for a UK degree programme. At the end of the second interview, Katy discussed the way she made photocopies of texts that seemed useful for her writing, and she explained that she used post-its to mark important parts of texts to return to when she wrote her assignments. She explained that she did not take notes of quotable material in source texts, but rather that she wrote these directly on the computer when writing the assignment. At the end of interview three, Katy reported that she had begun to make notes much more as she read, and it was only in interview four that Katy reported on her attempt to plan her work more before writing:

Katy: Before I just keep writing, and not very much [pause] frame, framework.
Now it's very important to think about writing frame. (K:I2)

Both Peter and Paul reported changing their approach to reading, spending more time reading relevant texts and focusing on addressing their assignment titles. Katy also seems to have adopted some necessary basic study strategies as her course progressed, but this was not reflected in significant improvement in her marks. There is an implication here that study skills, whether general or specifically embedded in her taught programme, could have made a greater difference to Katy's progress if she had accessed such support earlier in her programme.

1.4   *Understanding the language of feedback and marking criteria*

Katy's experience of feedback pointed very clearly to issues around understanding assessment criteria, particularly in relation to CAW and the use of 'argument' in her assignments. When asked about marks on formative work, Katy clearly did not see their value:

Katy: For me it's not very useful
BS: Why, why do you say that?
Katy: I don't know how they make this mark and um...
BS: In the formative it's not so relevant to have a mark you think...?
Katy: mmm... (K:I4)

Katy's response here was not an indication that she did not want a mark for formative work, but rather that she did not understand how markers arrived at the mark. This point clearly implies a lack of understanding of marking criteria and how they were applied.

Katy, unlike Paul, stated a preference for the marking grid at the top of the feedback forms. However, when asked in the final interview if she felt she understood the terms in the grid, she laughed, indicating that this was not the case:

BS: Which ones do you think you can understand... which ones are not so clear for you?
Katy: mmm...this one [points to 'Style and argument' criterion]
BS: Yeah, the style and the argument are still not very clear... (K:4)

I probed more deeply on this point, asking Katy to be more specific about various terms in the marking criteria grid:

> BS: So, thinking about those terms, you're still kind of concerned about this one [point to grid]. Do you think you've developed a better understanding of those terms through doing the assignments and the feedback ? Which ones do you think you better understand now than the first term?
>
> Katy: Actually, those... the first part I can't really say...
>
> BS: You're not really sure about critical judgement, originality, accuracy... what about referencing, presentation, content?
>
> Katy: Presentation it's very hard to know what is good presentation.
>
> BS: And content and relevance?
>
> Katy: [Long pause]... content...what, what's this [surprised tone]?
>
> BS: Well I mean one of the problems you had with this last essay was answering the question I suppose, so that's still a problem maybe? (K: I4)

It was evident from the above exchange that despite her belief that the marking grid was useful, even at the end of the taught programme, Katy was unsure about what each criterion actually meant. It is also clear that this was not simply a language problem, in that Katy could not articulate her thoughts in English here, but that her responses represented a lack of understanding of the criteria.

1.5   English language issues

Katy entered her master's programme with the basic English language entry requirements[50] and she had not been able to take any form of pre-sessional to prepare her for study in the UK. Although Paul was comfortable and articulate in his spoken English, and Peter had the confidence to express himself with reasonable fluency, Katy was often more hesitant and struggled at times to express herself through the course of the interviews. This lack of confidence and fluency in oral English is reflected in the interview extracts which follow, where longer pauses are marked in the extracts used. I also found it necessary to probe and prompt far more to gain full and detailed answers to questions.

Katy was asked in the penultimate interview about her ELU consultations, and what they had focused on:

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[50] At that time, Archaeology required IELTS 6.5 overall scores for direct entry to their taught master's programmes.

> Katy: He says I have problems with word order?
> BS: Can you see how to improve that?
> Katy: Yeah [long pause] I think it's because of my mother tongue, it's completely different about that, word order, so ...erm...[laughs] writing a lot, and reading..
> BS: Are you still translating your writing, we talked about this last time remember, you said that you translate...
> Katy: Yeah
> BS: You do it into [your first language first and then translate it into English
> Katy: Actually I can't build my thought clearly
> BS: In English?
> Katy: Yeah   (K:I4)

Katy's supervisor, tutor A4, marked one of her final assignments and had discussed her feedback with her through the programme. She was keen to point out the language issues that Katy faced, and referred to the poor standard of language still evident at the dissertation stage:

> BS: From the essays that you saw, do you feel she made any progress?
> T A4: She does come for feedback sessions quite regularly, but I don't think she comes with an understanding that she needs to work on her language skills, she discusses other things regarding her essay, and we have talked about the language problems quite often, but the thing is, if she doesn't realise that is a problem she won't work on it. (TA4:2)

Tutor A4 commented on a 'huge difference' between first and second essays, noting the possibility that she used proofreaders in subsequent assignments. However, the tutor then mentioned that her first chapter dissertation draft was "nowhere close to good language" and that she had again recommended using a proof reader.

When asked to identify two of the most important points she would take forward from her first formative feedback, Katy indicated two pieces of advice, to use a 'proof reader' and to read a standard study skills book on essay writing. At the same interview I advised Katy to seek help through ELU consultations, as she had already missed registration for an academic writing course.[51] Later in her final interview, Katy explained that she did take up two thirty-minute consultations with an ELU tutor on her writing, but that a practical course on three days of the week in her department had prevented her from enrolling on a writing course.

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[51] The ELU offered an *Advanced Academic Writing* course, consisting of eight two-hour classes in the first or second term.

Katy did not feel that it was her tutors' responsibility to help with language problems, but even in her final feedback reports, language continued to feature as an issue. When asked to comment on differences and similarities between formative and summative feedback, Katy discussed a comment in her final formative feedback that related again to 'argument' and to the style of her writing:

> Katy: This is summative..?
> BS: Yeah
> Katy: Formative, [tutor] X said I should develop more argument, she said I should put some academic...
> BS: Academic style?
> Katy: Yeah...
> BS: I tried, but this makes my English more difficult to understand. (K:I5)

Katy seemed to imply that her attempts to adopt a more formal academic style resulted in her losing clarity of expression. Katy also reported here on feedback that linked 'style' with argument, and the next section explores this further.

1.6   Language criticality and argument

While discussing her feedback at the end of the spring term, a common problem with understanding tutor handwriting emerged, but it also indicated the extent of Katy's struggle to understand language relating to critical analysis:

> BS: Is there anything in the feedback that you still don't understand..?
> Katy: Yeah, actually it's handwriting like this one, I couldn't read, so
> BS: This is tutor A1? So, so, of the...let me see if I can help..That's (reading from script) 'a number of reasons'. If I can clarify it for you I will... so this is definitely 'unsupported'.
> Katy: Right, OK.
> BS: This one is difficult because it's 'anecdotal', do you know what it means?
> Katy: No.
> BS: Anecdotal is when you're not basing your evidence on lots of research and studies but more on your personal experience...
> Katy: OK.
> (K:I4)

Although handwritten reports were not typical in this study, detailed marginal comments were always handwritten, and this represented a potentially serious impediment to understanding. In fact, I spent several minutes deciphering words and phrases in the handwritten feedback comments- other terms included 'observation', 'assertion', 'the literature' and 'bland statement'. Although Katy was able to show her understanding of the word 'assertion' as a statement lacking evidence, for

example, she clearly did not understand 'bland'. After my explanation of 'bland' she was able to paraphrase its use here as 'empty' (as in 'empty statement'). The language used in this feedback was typical of the discourse of written feedback often discussed as problematic for students to understand, (e.g., by Chanock, 2000; Haggis, 2006; Higgins et al., 2001). As in Peter's and Paul's case, it focused on 'deficits' in relation to critical analysis and argument. My short clarification of terms indicated that Katy, with some help, was linguistically able to grasp their meaning, but we did not embark on any discussion of how she might improve her writing to avoid them.

In the interview discussing the second term summative assignments, I asked Katy if there were any points she still wanted to clarify on the failed assignment. After a long pause, Katy responded in the following way:

> Katy: Actually I didn't address the question...
> BS: And what about these points, earlier on again, it says, 'a central argument was not advanced, little critical engagement', do you understand what it means by that?
> Katy: Not critical enough [pause] …What ….is not advanced..? (K:I 5)

When Katy stated above that she did not understand the meaning of the phrase 'to advance an argument', I explained my interpretation of the wording, that the argument was not clearly 'put forward' and that she was not clearly stating her central argument, to which she responded:

> Katy: So I have to develop an argument...
> BS: Are you clear about what that means then …Are you clear about what that means?
> Katy: Central argument... what do you mean?
> BS: Do you know what to do to put that right, what kind of things can you do to put that right?
> Katy: Maybe I have to focus more on one topic…but but actually I can't really understand…I thought uh, about argument related to the question that I wrote….

Katy's struggle to understand what constituted 'argument' in her discipline was clearly not helped by the language used in feedback here, but it is also evidence of her weak English language skills.

Katy, like Paul, had performed poorly on one of her final assignments due to her not addressing the question in the title. One recent study of tutor beliefs and practices around marking indicated that 'not answering the question' had the most negative impact on a student's mark (Greasley & Cassidy, 2010). Clearly this failing is not only typical at early levels of study but can occur, as here, at the end of a taught programme. What it suggests is that these students required more training in how to analyse assignment titles, a fundamental first step to developing a coherent argument in an assignment. It also suggests that it may not be sufficient in itself to indicate in feedback that the assignment title has not been addressed, and that students need explicit teaching around this issue.[52]

1.7   Conclusion

Katy's early enthusiasm for her written feedback seemed to diminish as she progressed through her programme. She preferred the detail of marginal comments, but reported difficulties in deciphering handwriting and understanding the language used in her feedback. Katy indicated that variability in feedback from different tutors left her feeling confused, and a wide variation in amounts of feedback was noted, with a variable focus on CA in her comments. In fact, Katy's later feedback focused predominantly on deficits (see Chapter 5) and feed forward was not provided in future developmental comments. In the greater incidence of critical analysis comments in later feedback, only one comment did not indicate a deficit. Katy realised that she needed to improve her use of argument in writing, but as in Peter's and Paul's cases, did not appear to be supplemented by guidance in the form of exemplars or explicit teaching of writing skills. With limited study skills training and unable to find time to attend writing courses in the English Language Unit, Katy responded slowly in adapting her study approach. Crucially for Katy, however, a weaker command of English than that displayed by Peter and Paul resulted in difficulties in understanding her coursework and difficulties in understanding and responding to feedback. Although she seemed to engage in dialogue around feedback on earlier assignments, she did not do this in her final term -which in itself suggested that she did not find it effective. Katy's case implies a need for tutors to consider the

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[52] Study skills material often cover this area, (e.g. Lewis, 2003), but fully addressing how to answer an essay question might be best tackled within an embedded approach to teaching writing rather than 'bolt on' study skills support (Wingate, 2006).

language they use in feedback when working with international students. At the same time, a similar message emerges as for all participants in the preliminary study, that a one-year taught master's programme, particularly where it is interdisciplinary in nature, may not afford the time or the opportunities international students require for written feedback to be effective in developing critical academic writing.

Case Study 2: Peter

2.0 Introduction
Peter's case supports the view of a limited role for written feedback in terms of developing CAW (research question a) while also offering insights into the impact of form and style of written feedback (research question b). His case also supports findings in the literature from the feedback literature on home undergraduate students (research question c), highlighting issues surrounding the role of marking criteria and how the theory of formative feedback does not correspond to practice. Finally, Peter's case offers evidence that pre-sessional programmes can have a limited impact in preparing students for critical academic writing within their taught postgraduate programmes.

2.1 Background and pre-sessional experience
Peter had no previous experience in an English-speaking academic culture, but had taken an 8-week pre-sessional course prior to entering the department of Archaeology at Bradfield to study on a Master's programme. Peter had worked for several years in heritage management in his own country. His motivation for doing the Cultural Heritage Management MA was to expand his knowledge in the area and he clearly felt this would prove useful for his future career. In his previous academic studies, Peter had only read occasional journal articles in English and the longest essay or composition that he had written in English when he began his ELU pre-sessional course in August 2008 was the 250-word task 2 composition required for the IELTS English language test. Peter had achieved an IELTS of 6.0, with a score of 6.0 in the writing test, but he required an overall 6.5 score to enter his Master's programme.[53] Table 2 shows how Peter's marks were mainly in the 50s (50 = Pass),

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[53] The Bradfield 8-week pre-sessional was accredited by University Teaching Committee and Graduate Admissions as a means to convert a 6.0 overall IELTS score for entry to degree programmes provided that students passed all assessments.

but that he was able to make slight improvements from formative to summative assessments in two of the three modules.

Formative essays	Summative essays
Module 1.60 (A2)	1.67 (A2)
Module 2. 52 (A1)	2.54 (A1
Module 3 required short tasks, and no feedback in usual format or marks was available.	
Module 4. 50 (A1)	4. 55 (A1)

Table 2: Peter's assignment marks
(Tutor marker in brackets)

Pre-sessional (PS) courses aim to develop language and study skills and introduce students to UK academic culture. The task-based approach used on Peter's course involved writing two long essay-style assignments (up to 1000 words in length), one of which was in Peter's own discipline, in answer to a question set by a member of staff in his department. Among other things, the PS course provided input into how to structure academic essays, giving practice in using paraphrase and quotation in reporting sources and adopting an appropriate academic style. Detailed written feedback was given on these areas, in addition to extensive feedback on language accuracy and vocabulary.

Peter performed sufficiently well on the placement test at the beginning of the course to be placed in a higher-level group within the cohort. It should be noted, however, that the test included a listening test score and that the main test focused on lexis, grammar and knowledge and use of cohesive devices; it was not a writing test. According to tutor reports, Peter made steady but slow progress with his writing on this course, clearly passing the end-of-course writing test; he was never identified by his tutors as being at risk of failing. The effectiveness of such pre-sessional courses is difficult to measure (Atherton, 2006; Saunders, 2006) but some implications relating to the impact of EAP courses will be discussed later.

2.2   Development of CAW-matching feedback to text
Several extracts from Peter's case study are included below for a more in-depth appreciation of how his feedback linked to his writing. The aim here is to look for evidence of development in Peter's CAW, but also attempt to link specific feedback comments with the texts they responded to. Since student texts and feedback reports

were rarely available before interviews took place, this represents a post hoc approach that cannot guarantee that the researcher has faithfully captured the intentions of the marker in each case. Where marginal comments were given, these are located in the text, but end comments are matched to text extracts on the basis of the researcher's interpretation.

Figure 1: PS feedback-text and comments

Assignment: *Assess the impact of international migration on one country and comment on its economic and social consequences* [Mark = 14/ 25]	**End feedback comments**
Extract a) from *Introduction* For the past decades, international migration <u>extremely</u> **[Gr]** has played an important role in Country X <u>by the result</u> **[WW]** of colonisation in Southeast Asia. This is because there are both immigration and <u>emigration which appear</u> **[P]** to cause both positive and negative impacts, the positive impacts are probably more important. This essay aims to assess the impact of international migration <u>form</u> **[WW]**both groups, immigrants and emigrants, and comment on their economic and social consequences. Therefore, the two main issues are separated to assess and comment on their consequences. Only regular migration, however, will be dealt with, as researching into irregular migrants may still <u>have</u> **[Gr]** many limitations. Extract b) from Section on *Migration of Country X nationals* Country X has been a developing country where people in the countryside have obtained low <u>incomes which</u> **[P]**are certainly not sufficient for their lives. Therefore international labour markets have <u>stably</u> **[WW]** attracted them as <u>treasure troves</u> **[WW]** since the past few decades. In 1995, the number of immigrants <u>obviously</u> **[St]** reached the peak and then gradually decreased with the remittances of 1500 millions US dollars per year (Huguet and Punpuing, 2005). This information <u>reflects that</u> **[Gr]** the trends of migration in Country X have evolved and <u>change</u> **[Gr]** rapidly, Huguet and Punpuing (2005) also reported that the most attractive country in <u>the recent year is obviously referred to Taiwan</u> **[Gr]**.	Your introduction is effective in that it establishes the background to the topic and indicates how you plan to approach it. You establish the limits of your discussion successfully. Be careful to avoid overuse of adverbs such as 'truly' 'absolutely' etc. On the whole you communicate your meaning but you will have to work on improving your control of verb tenses, relative clauses and determiners (e.g. most people…most of the people who) You use the conventions of referencing accurately and you are not over-dependent on your sources (but you should perhaps be more critical of them).

(Tutor's marginal comments were in form of codes, bracketed in bold in the text)

The short extracts above from Peter's final assessed essay on his pre-sessional provide some evidence that Peter had made progress in his writing. Peter clearly received positive feedback here. His well-organised introduction informed the reader how he would address the title. Although a thesis statement was not so clear, he hinted that he would argue for positive impacts of migration. The two extracts provide evidence of Peter's grammatical issues with verb tenses and

adverbs, The comment referring to Peter's lack of criticality of his sources supports a similar observation made in the interview I carried out with his PST. Analysis of the whole text, however, showed that Peter only used two of the five references in his reference list in his actual text, the two that appear in the paragraph extract above. This was evidence that he was rather dependent on these sources, and also supports the view that progress in the ability to synthesise from sources requires time and practice (Davis, 2013; Hirvela & Du, 2013).

Peter's first formative assignment shows evidence of development of some features of academic writing, and the nature of his use of sources. In extract a), Peter shows the same awareness he showed in his PS essay of the need tell the reader about his assignment structure. He seems to include a type of 'thesis' statement or summary of his argument with the sentence beginning "I believe…". Tutor A's marginal comments, however, indicate that he only described the reading, and did not really answer the question. Peter asserts that education is important but the comment calls for a consideration of the role education play in the heritage industry.

Figure 2: Peter formative text and feedback (Tutor's marginal comments were in form of codes, bracketed in bold in the text)

Assignment: *What role does or should 'education ' play in the interpretation of heritage sites for the public?* [Mark= 50]	**End feedback comments**
Extract a) (from Introduction) This essay begins with introduction the definition of 'interpretation'……The role of education is explored in the subsequent part…important factors relating to the interpretation process are classified into various internal factors, such as the learning characteristics of the audience, and external factors, which mainly focus on tourism industry.**[why?]** I believe that these are the two main factors which are necessary for interpreters to take into account when working with heritage interpretations. Education also plays important role regarding these two factors.**[why, what role does it play, need to define this to answer the question]**	…you have read some useful material…However, you have not answered the question because you simply summarise the reading back to me.., this shows you have understood the key points of each reading, you do not show me you can defend that understanding through explanation and argument.
Extract b)(from Section on Role of Education) Today heritage sites have become one of the most important learning resources **[Reference?]).** However, McManamon (2007, 26-7) argues that though interpretation is a very important process in heritage management , most people do not truly understand the content of heritage site interpretation due to the complexity of the content. Archaeological interpreters should pay more attention to reach the general public. Paying attention to the public outreach is alone inadequate.**[why]** The archaeological interpreter should have adequate skill for delivering knowledge to public.**[general statements that need explanation and support]**	You tend to make simple assumptions that are contested and discussed in the literature, you needed to engage critically with these rather than assuming that there are unproblematic 'truths' in the literature.

Extract b) shows how Peter made an integral reference to one source, McManamon, but the marginal comment before this indicates his tendency to assert points without support from the literature. This is commented on again with the statements that complete his paragraph. Extract b) comments suggest Peter's need to question the positions he described in the literature.

Figure 3: Peter final summative text and feedback

Assignment: *Critically review a museum exhibition and discuss how and in what ways, the interpretation of the past may be understood as educational. Who is being educated, what are they being educated about and for what purpose?* [Mark= 55]	**End feedback comments**
Extract a) from Introduction This essay intends to review the exhibitions of the Jorvik Viking Centre in terms of its educational role, but not in terms of Viking study…this essay focuses on the exhibition inside the Centre building … A discussion on the educational role of museums will be reviewed. Secondly the critical review of the museum exhibitions will be presented in terms of exhibitions (methods and messages) and audiences. This critical review explains the educational role of these exhibitions in terms of who is being educated, what they are being educated about and for what purpose? **[What does the essay argue, especially in terms of a) museum education b) the Jorvik exhibition?]**	You present a solid discussion of key educational issues. However, this is an essay of two parts...the second part is very descriptive and does not draw on the part of the essay effectively
Extract b) from first half of essay: The appropriateness of entertainment in the educational role of a museum has become a major debate in the field of the heritage interpretation of a museum (Malcom-Davies, 2004).Some scholars argued that the insertion of elements of entertainment…may devalue the educational role of a museum (Schadla-Hall; Hewison, 1987 cited in Smith 2006, 199). Smith (2006) notes that the use of elements of entertainment in interpretive methodologies is not necessary to reduce the educational value of museums. It is able to enhance the educative role of museums (Uzzell and Ballantine, 1998;Hjemdahl, 2002; Malcom-Davies, 2004 cited in Smith 2006) **[ditto, why reference Smith when referenced in paragraph above?]** especially for children. …Entertainment and education can be combined if the entertainment is carefully based on academic facts and without imagination that affect public misunderstanding of science.	…it is unclear what you have actually read as the essay includes references you have cited in secondary sources, by including these you are effectively padding out your bibliography and this is unacceptable.
Extract c) from final section: The interpretation focuses on the positive aspects of Vikings, whereas some negative aspects are intended to omit. For example, the issue of warrior is interpreted to the aspects of being brave and strong, instead of the awful warriors who invaded this land and oppressed native people.. In terms of history, this fact is hidden under the edutainment **[explain]**	The English expression in the discussion of Jorvik is less clear than the first part of the essay,…

Extract a) from the third paragraph of Peter's Introduction, shows how Peter is aware of the need to define the scope of his assignment, and in setting out his structure, he refers explicitly to the questions in the title. The marginal comments, however, highlight the marker's expectation of a clearer summary of his argument. The marker identifies the need to go beyond the exhibition in question to argue in terms of museum education in general.

Extract b) indicates Peter's developing ability to use sources. The number of sources used and multiple citations to support individual points are evident here, and attest to some progress from his writing at the end of his pre-sessional. Moreover, Peter tends to use more non-integral citations that allow his voice to feature in the writing. The paragraph seems well constructed in terms of the point he makes about entertainment and education, with a final example that seeks to underline his position. Against this, it is clear that Peter is still struggling with technical issues of secondary referencing, as both marginal and end comments suggest. Peter's expression is not always clear either, as in the phrase "…not necessary to reduce the educational value", though the subsequent text makes his intention clear.

Extract c) exemplifies to some extent the end feedback comments on poorer language in the final section of the assignment, but also provides evidence of the lack of critical application of the earlier section. Peter 's expression, " the issue of warrior… negative aspects are intended to omit…hidden under the edutainment" is less accurate in this section. The marker's marginal comment, however, seems to be a reaction to the term 'edutainment', which was not used or defined earlier in the assignment, but is clearly linked to extract b), one of several paragraphs discussing issues around education and entertainment.

2.3   Peter's perspective - reading and audience

The sheer amount of reading required for a Master's degree often comes as a shock to International postgraduates. There is a need to be able to read quickly and efficiently and to do this in an "autonomous way" (Alexander, et. al., 2008, p.124). One aim of the PS programme was to develop flexible reading strategies to enable reading for a purpose. Although a PS programme taking students from a range of disciplines is not able to focus on specific disciplinary texts, there was an attempt to

introduce a critical reading approach in Peter's course, with students expected to take notes from sources to support their ideas in two major written assignments.

Responding to feedback on his first formative tasks, Peter recognised that he would have to read far more than he had expected. Although he had adopted some selective reading strategies during his PS course, it was only after receiving his first summative feedback that he came to believe that such strategies were not adequate to the task. In fact, it became clear that he had been unable to fully grasp the meaning of texts when using such strategies.

> Peter: Oh yes, yes I felt that, maybe because for my summative essay, I spent a lot of times with it and read more, now the reading problem, I'm getting better for reading, because I think the main point is I spend much more time with it with the reading. The former time, I focused on one paragraph or one or two sentences but now I read the whole article. (P:I3)

Even after his second formative task, at the end of his second term, Peter still seemed to be grappling with similar issues related to his reading; he stated, "I think the same, the same thing…the most important is I don't read enough I should read more and ….deeply...."(P:I4)

There is evidence that Peter struggled throughout to understand the process of academic study and to read effectively for his written assignments. Such problems with reading might understandably lead to difficulties in gaining the breadth and depth of understanding necessary to write strong assignments. In Chapter 2. the importance of domain knowledge or knowledge of the territory (Andrews, 2007; Geisler, 1994; Wingate, 2011) was established as central to the development of an argument in academic writing. Peter's difficulties with understanding the reading on his programme could be expected to restrict his ability to develop this knowledge of the territory.

Peter's difficulty with reading implies that the selective reading strategies promoted on his PS course may not have been sufficient for him to use effectively without a disciplinary background that would allow him to make judgements on where to read intensively. Generic pre-sessional courses that prepare groups of

students going into different subject disciplines cannot provide a subject specific vocabulary or content focus, and this was the case with the course which Peter took.

Although not a central problem in feedback on the first formative tasks, Peter received feedback in his first summative task on a problem relating to explaining his work for a non-expert audience, a point picked up once again in his second-term formative feedback:

> Peter: …she still makes the suggestion for this essay too. For me I think it is quite hard to write something and to try to think that someone could understand...my own idea I understand but it is quite difficult to measure …as you say we should assume that we write this essay for someone who does not know about this field. (P:I4)

Because pre-sessional tutors do not have expertise in students' subject disciplines, it is made clear that essays written in their subject areas must be aimed at the lay reader, and carefully explained. However, when grappling with the far more complex and rich content matter in his Master's modules, Peter experienced difficulties in knowing what could be assumed and what needed to be explained in his writing.

2.4   Argument and critical analysis - marking criteria and standards

In Chapter 2, the argument was made that students' need to develop understanding of assessment criteria by internalizing notions of quality in written work (Sadler, 1989; Hounsell, 2003, 2008; Duncan, 2010). In the initial interview, Peter was asked whether he was aware of marking criteria for the essays he was writing:

> BS: Erm... and on the same question have you received any special advice about the criteria?
> Peter: No for the ….related to the essays there's nothing on the website only the information about the course
> BS: Right. And you haven't seen the criteria for each mark?
> Peter: Mm I have seen the objective of the course and the assessment and the thing that I have to do for the course…
> BS: …but not the criteria, in other words the criteria exist for say, to get a mark of 70 you need to do this, to get a mark of 50…
> Peter: All is different… because for the pre-sessional we have some criteria to complete, yes, but here is not.
> BS: Well, they exist, it's just that maybe your tutors haven't told you where to look for it yet, I think.
> Peter: They haven't ...I think it's because they think that this kind of thing is like a common thing that most students should be known. (P:I1)

Peter was clearly unsure about marking criteria and how marks were awarded. In fact, in the second interview after he had received feedback on his first formative essays, this uncertainty seemed to continue:

> BS: Did you think the feedback was reflection of the mark? … when you look at the feedback and you look at the mark, you think…yes this fits.
> Peter: Actually I'm not sure how the marker can calculate the score from the feedback,but I think it's OK for me…especially for the second one, the score is…I think the score is too much for me…. (P:I2)

Peter went on to confess that he did not feel confident that he had understood the material while he was writing the essay, but he was pleasantly surprised that the feedback suggested otherwise:

> Peter: When I wrote this and the feedback come back it seemed to mean that I understand clear… clearly that is my surprise…
> BS: Because you still think you didn't understand it clearly?
> Peter: Laughs…no… I think …because it is better than…. The marker can understand what I try to explain. P:I2)

The formative feedback discussed here included marks, although these marks did not count for assessment purposes. The three participants reported that they had never received detailed feedback on written assignments in their own countries, only grades. Much of the literature on formative feedback suggests that marks should not be given for this type of formative assessment. The suggestion in the literature is that students (referring to undergraduate students in the main) become grade fixated' and distracted by marks, which they focus on rather than engaging with feedback (Burke & Pieterich, 2010; Nicol & McFarlane-Dick, 2006; Shute, 2006; Taras, 2003). Peter seemed to be very focused on the 'guidance' purpose of feedback, using his marks to interpret where he was and where he was going from his feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), but this was clearly not easy for him to do.

Peter's approach seems to concur with Leki's (2006) findings that students request evaluation of their performance, and are less interested in feedback when they achieve satisfactory or good marks. In this respect, awarding grades for formative tasks is questionable; students tend to pay less attention to work with a good grade, focusing on feedback that accompanies a poor grade. Peter adopted precisely this approach, attending more to feedback accompanying lower marks, addressing the negative points rather than attending to positive points. Indeed, a low

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mark in one essay prompted Peter to seek a tutorial with the marker, an option that he did not seem to take up very often.

Interestingly, Tutor A1 later commented on her perception that Peter was struggling to understand material far more than she was initially aware. This example can be compared with a case reported by Scott & Coate (2003), where the tutor's comment overstated the level of performance on understanding a task, leading the student to make a false conclusion about his level of understanding.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Peter compared feedback in his department at Bradfield to the feedback he had received on his PS course, and commented that, although very similar, the PS had focused on grammar and vocabulary, while his Master's course feedback focused on content.

2.5   Peter's perspective on developing argument
Peter identified developing argument as his main weak point when discussing his first formative feedback:

> Peter: I think is…the most important thing for me is the problem about the developing argument…so I think that this my weak point. Actually when I try to understand this...this concept is very difficult for me…how can I develop the argument. (P:I2)

Later in the same interview, when asked if there were any terms or concepts referred to in the formative feedback that were still unclear, Peter identified as a problem the notion of 'critical judgement' (a key criterion specified on the feedback form):

> Peter: …for me I understand that I should understand clearly the topic, about the thing that I will write, but if I cannot understand clearly I cannot emphasis which one I should write (right)* or which I should wrong I:2). (*unclear which was intended). (P:I2)

At the end of the interview on the first formative feedback, Peter was asked whether he had made any changes to the way he studied or prepared to write his assignments; he stated that he had made only a slight change to his overall study approach:

> Peter: ….I try to write the first draft first and then after that I try to write some supporting detail from many sources but now I feel that I have to read

> books so many times …I'm not sure that I try to change when I know the outline... I try to set a key sentence for each paragraph and this time I try to select some ideas…maybe quotation. P:I2)

From these quotes, there is more than a suggestion that Peter was deciding on his position and content without a good understanding of the literature on his assignment topic. In fact, in his final interview Peter pointed to this problem inadvertently when he concluded that feedback had helped with developing an argument:

> BS: What about areas of writing that you were able to make progress on during the two terms …can you tell me about any of those?
> Peter: I think the way that we develop the argument…I think I understand more I know the structure of the essay of the writing and I know how to connect each point together and make it a developed idea…..
> BS: Not just this one … but across the two terms, do you think you made most progress with this?
> Peter: I think only in the term of develop argument because...from the starting, the first formative of the first term I only write something that is…come from my idea, and.I think it's quite descriptive. And after that I learn how to use sources to support my ideas, to support my argument, and finally I am I think I get more idea of how to use these sources and how to develop argument in the essay. I think it's quite better than other aspects…for example grammar, vocabulary. I don't think I much improved. (P:I5)

Later in the same interview Peter referred to repeated weak points and comments from his final assignment that indicated a need to improve the way he connected up ideas and developed argument:

> Peter: Um, I'm still not sure in this issue but I try to understand that, how can I develop argument it should be in the whole essay, it's not only in a few sentences that we say something and maybe in a few supporting sentences. But in the whole essay we should have some kind of background introduction, literature review, and after that we should say the thing that we wanted to say and it should be related to the literature, I understand that . P:I5)

It is significant that Peter had already begun to draft and work on his dissertation at the point in the third term when the final interview took place. He seemed to be referring to a notion of argument at dissertation level in this extract. Here he referred to a macroscopic view of argument, while earlier in his assignments it seems he was applying some kind of notion of argument to shorter stretches of text. What is evident from Peter's own words is that despite the value he placed on feedback for developing CAW, his progress in this area was slow.

2.6   *Peter's perspective - feedback on language*

While feedback on writing assignments within academic disciplines focuses primarily on content, comments on content are "often embedded in concerns about academic writing conventions" (Coffin et al, 2003, p.105). Markers differ quite widely in the amount and type of feedback that they give, and this is evident in Section 5.3.9 below. Peter noted that even on formative assignments one marker gave no annotated comments on language (grammar, punctuation, or vocabulary) in the main text and only made a short reference in the main comments on "unclear sentences", for example. His second marker, however, gave far more detailed feedback on language, providing annotated comments within the text and more detail on language issues, which Peter declared to be "useful".

Peter's markers recommended that he use proof readers but he did not regularly use them, preferring on two occasions to consult ELU tutors for help with revisions on short drafts of his work. Even after this help, his second tutor had made comments about frequent errors in his English that required attention:

> Peter: Um actually I thought that the feedback should focus on the context of
> the subject, right, ,but I think she points out more about the grammar and
> I think this one is a good point because it is not only I can learn the
> main context of the subject but I can learn how to write. I think it's good
> (P:I4)

When prompted on the amount of feedback on language that he would prefer, Peter stated "…as much as possible for me", stating that it was important for him to be told about mistakes that he made "again and again". This is in line with findings in the literature that indicate that L2 students want more feedback from their markers (Burke, & Pieterich, 2010 Leki, 2006). Overall, Peter he took away from his feedback on language issues an indication of a need to work on prepositions, but more importantly for him, the need to work on style "…in some sentences…I think that it's correct in grammar terms but I should switch the position or something.."(PI:3). Peter admitted, however, that he did not receive a clear explanation of how this 'style' could be achieved, and at that level feedback on language may have failed to provide a clear guide for improvement.

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2.7   Engaging in dialogue around written feedback

Discussion with tutors and markers to clarify comments was discussed in depth in

Chapter 2 as a desirable element of the process of formative assessment and

feedback (Askew, 2000; Hyatt, 2005; Nicol, 2010). It became clear that Peter did not

use to the full such opportunities to speak with his markers about feedback. In the

initial interview, carried out while working on the first formative assessments, Peter

recognised that the UK university system required more independence:

> Peter: Because when I study in [my own country], a very long time ago…we
> can consult the supervisor as much as we want. We can go and knock the
> door and if my supervisor is in the room it's OK. But I think now we
> have to study by ourselves.. I think it's quite different from the study
> system in [my own country] so I have to adjust. (P:I1)

Surprisingly, despite the easy access to his supervisor in his undergraduate studies,

Peter did not have any experience of receiving detailed feedback on written work, a

similar finding for Paul and Katy. Comparing his initial experience of feedback on

his Master's course at Bradfield with what he had been accustomed to in his home

academic culture Peter stated that, "...actually (in his home country) we have no

feedback…so we don't know how we can improve, we have only score.".

    When asked in the second interview whether he had sought out his tutor to

discuss feedback, he stated:

> Peter: I have a chance to see her but it is only a short time because there are
> many students in the queue so I have to talk with her only for the
> dissertation and we said only a few things about the, the essay…the
> feedback.
> BS: That was tutor A? You didn't really have time to discuss it?
> Peter: No because we had twenty students. She asked me about, about the…
> the mark... It's OK for me I satisfied for this score because …actually I
> know my standard…know my ability. I think I understand the comment
> that she wrote here. (P:I2)

Later, Peter admitted that he had not approached the marker of his other formative

essay, stating. "Because, I'm not study with her….". However, significantly he went

on to state, "... I'm not sure the culture here that we can…." (P:I2). In this admission,

Peter referred to rules or conventions of the UK academic system that he was unsure

of, supporting his earlier observation of a very different academic culture in his

home country, where he observed that tutors were always available and it was the norm to visit them and talk to them.

Although he spoke to tutors about the three sets of formative feedback, he only managed to see one of his tutors to discuss his first summative assignments, and again only spoke briefly to the tutor who had marked his final summative assignment. Interestingly, Peter's reason for discussing his feedback on the second term formative task was that he had gained his lowest mark (50) for this. When Peter did engage in dialogue on comments received, he felt he had been able to clarify comments only up to a point, and he recognized that issues of understanding still remained. When he queried a comment on presentation in one of his first formative essays, Peter was pleased to discover that he could and should include illustrations and visual material. However, with other issues clarification was not so easy:

> Peter: I understand but I'm not sure how can I improve, for example style. The two markers said that I still like something like 'clumsy'. I'm not sure what is the …how I balance the explanation in the detail with something that not clumsy.(P:I2)

The problem with improving 'style' raises the question of whether tutor comments can go beyond the indication of the problem to a deeper level of explanation and guidance on how to improve. The discourse used by tutors often employs language that assumes a similar understanding by students to the tutor, but fails to be effective when students lack this shared understanding (Haggis, 2006; Hounsell, 2008; Sadler, 2010). The term 'style' seems to fall into this category, and even in face-to-face discussion, it is not easy for tutors to explain what they expect or show the student how to achieve it.

Perhaps Peter's perceptions reported above indicate the need for more directive feedback and guidance for students in his position, since attempts to engage in dialogue around content are likely to fail with students who are struggling to engage with that content. This point will be taken up in reference to tutor's views and analysis of the actual comments that Peter received in his feedback.

2.8   The tutor perspective

This section will explore tutors' accounts relating to Peter's feedback and writing development, focusing firstly on an account by Peter's pre-Sessional tutor, including some reflection on implications regarding the role of pre-sessional (PS) programmes generally. This section will be followed by a consideration of the views of one of Peter's main academic tutors and markers. This triangulation of data leads in some cases to conflicting accounts with a number of implications.

Peter's main pre-sessional tutor (PST) had been a lecturer at a university in the south of England for a number of years prior to a career in ELT. She had worked on a number of pre-sessionals in the English Language Unit, and was responsible for marking and feedback on all Peter's writing tasks. At the end of the period of data collection, the PS tutor agreed to be interviewed after first familiarising herself again with the file of written work and feedback from Peter's PS course. The interview was semi structured in nature, with a series of open ended questions relating to the tutor's assessment of his progress, with reference to written feedback forms. The tutor was asked an open question on how Peter had progressed through the PS, particularly in terms of his writing:

> PST: He didn't hit me at the time as being problematic in terms of writing. I
> can see that he made progress on the things that looked as if we were
> teaching, that is academic style, reporting verbs, .the sorts of things that
> clearly he'd never encountered before, you could see him trying to apply
> as you looked through them…(PST I)

The tutor was able to identify areas of progress, but also to recall key areas that remained a problem throughout the course. In fact, when asked whether there was evidence to show that Peter was able to use feedback to improve his work, he was less than positive:

> PST: I can't see much evidence of that from what I've looked at. I think he
> didn't understand how very distracting and confusing his grammatical
> control was… that his thing on countable uncountable nouns… on
> singular plural agreement, he just didn't develop his editing skills, he just
> didn't see the significance of it, erm…he… erm yeah he got these
> fossilised errors he…I don't know… I mean he wasn't the only one in
> the group not responding to that. PST I)

The PST unsurprisingly referred to feedback on language here, but she went on to identify her understanding of critical analysis as an issue:

> PST: And the other thing I've noticed is that every bit of feedback I gave him refers to the uncritical approach to sources. So I think he simply didn't understand what we meant by being critical. He saw that he had to construct an argument that he couldn't just repeat what others had said, but I don't think he could cope with ... criticising another writer, I think he was, it was basic, it was something as basic as that, culturally something as basic as that, that he just couldn't cope with reading something printed and being asked to challenge it. PST I)

Peter's experience relates to Dooey's (2010) finding that independent thinking and evaluating published work was challenging for many students on EAP programmes. It is also worth noting the PS tutor's reference to the importance of challenging published sources, a feature of criticality highlighted in the literature (e.g., Durkin, 2011) that students can be resistant to, particularly those from Asian cultures.

When prompted on his use of the term 'culturally' here, the tutor mentioned the fact that Peter was "the oldest person in a room full of Asians" and that this meant that he was often deferred to by other students. The tutor went on to discuss how Peter was reluctant to tell the group anything about his own work in Heritage Management. However, in terms of the transition to the Master's programme, the tutor expected that his professional knowledge would enable him to cope.

> PST: I assumed that the work he was going to do [in his department] would be far more related to a professional world that he already knew about, so I suppose I assumed that that would get him through.(PST I)

The overall picture that emerged was of a student able to pass the assessed elements of the PS, but who had been unable to fully embrace a critical approach in his reading and writing. Although he could construct a basic argument in the writing tasks set in his PS course, his PS tutor did not see him engaging critically with sources in the way she expected that he would need to in his Master's course.

2.9   Assessing the value of pre-sessional courses

As a result of discussion around the feedback comments on the first formative task, one tutor recommended study skills guides, to help Peter understand how to write an academic essay This is an early indication that the writing work on his PS programme was of only a limited preparation for the writing expected of Peter in his department. Whether the marker was unaware that Peter had taken a PS course is

largely irrelevant here, since she certainly felt that he did not display an understanding of how to write an essay in the task that she marked[54].

In many ways, Peter's case seems to demonstrate the problems involved in attempting to develop academic skills in isolation and outside the specific disciplinary context in which the graduate student is to work. On the one hand, while he appears to have developed some technical writing skills on the PS, there were still issues that remained in terms of grammatical accuracy and 'fossilized errors'. The observation was also made that he had only partially developed an ability to construct arguments in his writing. On the other hand, strategies that Peter did adopt in his PS course for reading and approaching writing tasks did not seem to work for him on his degree course (see Section 5.2.2). The result was that he continued to struggle in writing for his audience and developing an argument.

The challenge for detached pre-sessional programmes to prepare students for writing in their disciplines was considered in Chapter 2 in terms of the debate over context-dependent or embedded approaches to teaching critical thinking and writing skills. Peter observed that friends who had not taken the PS course seemed to have experienced more problems with writing essays than he had done himself, but he then went on to make a very astute and telling comment. Initially suggesting that an 8-week course exclusively on writing might have been more useful to him than the PS course, he stated:

> Peter: …because the writing is the thing that we have to do for our mark and for me, although I studied in the pre-sessional course, but I still don't understand how the develop argument . I'm not sure if it is possible for us to understand the… develop argument in that stage or not… (P: I5)

Peter himself seems to imply that a detached PS course cannot provide the training in the kind of academic literacy needed in for his Master's course. Indeed, his comment corresponds with the view that critical reading and writing skills can only be developed in the true academic context within specific disciplines (Hyland, 2000). Set against this, the views of his two tutors seem to suggest that Peter's case is

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[54]The tutor was aware that Peter had done this course, but she did not question why he had not developed a knowledge of essay writing on his PS. Perhaps this is linked to a common perception on the part of academic staff that pre sessionals focus mainly on language.

heavily influenced by his background and culture, which had a significant inhibitory factor on his ability to engage with academic literacy in the way that was required of him.

2.10   Department tutor comments

Towards the end of the period of data collection, Peter's supervisor (Tutor A1), who also happened to be one of his main markers, was interviewed regarding the progress of students in this study. In the view of his supervisor, Peter had been "bobbing along" with his marks, making small improvements but not moving far above the pass mark. The tutor was asked specifically whether Peter had shown evidence of developing CAW:

> BS: Did you see any development in the students' academic writing performance? Specifically, did you see any evidence of development of critical analytical writing and the ability to develop effective arguments?
> TA1:   No, none at all, and that's why his mark hasn't changed, and I'm still having that problem with his dissertation …in the end we agreed on a fairly descriptive topic. (TA1:I2)

This quote seems to contradict Peter's own assessment that he improved most from his feedback in developing his critical analytical writing. However, it is worth remembering that Peter had arrived in the UK with little or no experience of the kind of criticality required in higher education in the UK. He clearly received feedback that repeatedly stressed the importance of critical analysis and argument in his writing, and he was increasingly aware of it as a problem. Although Peter could see his understanding developing in this area, it clearly was not to the level that his tutors expected.

Peter's supervisor and tutor A1 in the study, made the following remark in relation to the approach to reading taken by the two participants in this study that she was familiar with: "They tend to read for information only, as most of the class do…" (TA1:2). More specifically, in discussing Peter's work, she did not feel that he had made great progress with reading and understanding, stating, "I don't actually see a major increase in his understanding". The tutor felt that Peter's previous experience working in the Heritage sector helped him but that there was still a major barrier to overcome:

> TA1: His experience in the heritage sector gives him interest and knowledge
> …to continue doing the reading and trying to grasp new concepts, but it
> is so new and alien to him , in terms of …not subject matter …but the
> way we're asking him to deal with it, that I think he's just been too
> challenged by that.'(TA1:I1)

 This comment links well with the point made independently by the PS tutor on Peter's inability to 'challenge' texts. Tutor A1 made another observation relating to this inability or unwillingness to 'challenge' when extended to his tutors:

> T A1: Part of his problem is that (long pause) he performs at
> understanding because he doesn't want to be seen to not understand, so
> he doesn't say 'I'm just lost I don't know what you're talking about'….
> in particular, he doesn't want to argue back… he is not taking initiative,
> here's an assumption you don't question teacher' (TA1:1)

Peter's supervisor made clear her expectation that criticality required not only challenging published sources but also questioning lecturers. She saw issues with Peter's cultural and educational background influencing his ability to develop critical academic skills, a widely discussed theme in the literature (Durkin, 2008; Fox, 1994; Paton, n.d.). Peter's PS tutor's comments were echoed in the way his supervisor identified his being a mature, East Asian male, among mainly female students on his Master's course as an inhibitory factor, along with his being an 'older' student who had been away from academia for some years. As she saw it, Peter had not demonstrated the ability to engage critically; it is evident that he was not able to fully develop this aspect in the first two terms of assignment writing. Both the PST and academic tutor's perceptions can be linked to Fox's (1994) perspectives on the impact of L1 culture, educational background and personality in understanding the difficulties L2 graduate students such as Peter experience in engaging with critical analysis in academic writing.

2.11   Conclusion

What emerges from Peter's case study is the fact that educational and cultural background played a crucial role in the development or lack of development of CAW on his Master's programme. The case provides evidence that feedback processes can fall short, despite good intentions. Peter was a reasonably motivated student engaged in a struggle to understand, not only the content of his discipline but also the study processes and the writing conventions of his discourse community. Throughout the cycle of writing and feedback, Peter struggled to read the literature

in the critical manner his tutors' expected, which in turn hampered his ability to develop appropriate arguments in his writing. Although he was aware through feedback of these failings, he was not able to find ways to overcome them completely before reaching the dissertation stage of his Master's course. Arguably, Peter's status as a mature Asian student within an alien academic culture, made it even more difficult for him to engage fully with his work.

Peter's own modest perception of progress with CAW was not shared by one of his markers, but was compared with a very low starting point. In terms of his pre-sessional, Peter's PS tutor questioned the impact it had made on his approach to reading and writing, while Peter himself questioned whether it could prepare him for writing in his department. In terms of engaging with his feedback, a picture emerges of a student unsure of marking criteria and uncertain how to respond to feedback; Peter clearly attended to the more critical comments where marks were lower, but in the end he lacked sufficient guidance, or the inclination and ability to learn from what was offered to him in the feedback.

The case study raises questions surrounding the impact of pre-sessional courses, while raising other questions about the nature of the feedback process. Although several tasks offered formative feedback, written comments were presented with marks on a final product in a manner that was hardly differentiated from summative feedback. Whether feedback was formative or summative, opportunities to discuss it were often not taken up. Where discussion took place, it enabled clarification of procedural issues and fulfilled a diagnostic function, but was far less effective in guiding the student in terms of developing critical reading and writing skills.

Case Study 3: Paul

This case will take up the themes introduced above, complementing Paul's interview data with extracts from tutor interviews and further triangulating the findings with feedback analysis. The key themes explored include the influence of prior experience, engagement with feedback and the importance of disciplinary knowledge in developing criticality. Paul's case also picks up the issue of English language

proficiency and criticality, and serves as a warning against stereotyping students in terms of language and culture.

Despite having more advanced language skills and a grounding in western culture, evident from Table 3, Paul like Peter struggled to make progress with critical analytical writing (CAW). His interviews reveal the importance of his engineering background and introduce the issues of disciplinary writing differences. His experience highlights once again the importance of domain knowledge as a pre-requisite for CAW, but also touches on the complexity of relational issues and how feedback dialogue depends on developing trust and respect between tutors and students.

Age	Origin	English score	Previous writing (English)	First degree pre-sessional
26	Western European	TOEFL Ibt 109	Maximum 250 words (Coursework included articles in English but no written work in English)	No pre-sessional. Earlier undergraduate courses in Civil Engineering and Religion in his home country

Table 3: Paul background details

3.1   Progress - writing and feedback

Judged by his marks on the taught programme (see Table 5.3), Paul did not appear to make any significant developments in his assignment writing ability, with marks in the fifties for tutor A1's modules and two slightly higher marks in the low sixties for tutor A2's modules. In only one case did Paul improve on his formative mark with his summative submission (final summative for marker A2). The mark on his final summative essay in the summer term was the best of his marks from tutor A1, but slightly lower than other summative marks from tutor A2. Tutor A2 felt that Paul's "…writing style had improved…", but she did not see significant progress overall. She commented on the lack of improvement in Paul's final essay, stating, "...from what I can recall I don't see this as an improvement on what he did in the Autumn term ad it's mainly because he'd never come for a tutorial… well, he'd never come

to see me for a tutorial..". Paul's minimal take up of opportunities for discussion of his feedback will be returned to in Section 5.3.4 below.

In the second tutor interview at the end of the taught programme, I asked a direct question about the progress of participants in terms of their critical analytical writing in particular;

> BS: I was very interested ….to look at their development in terms of their critical writing, critical academic writing in terms of developing argument. What was your ….?
>
> T A2 Development of critical argument skills must have been a marginal improvement...nothing to say this is far better than the last one because the marks don't bear it out, do they? (TA2:I2)

As Paul's supervisor, tutor A1 was able to make a more detailed assessment of Paul's progress with critical analysis, commenting that she was not sure if his marks reflected progress in writing, but noted an increase in "...his ability to engage with the topic".

> TA1: He had come with a range of ideas and was presenting them without any critical engagement at all, that critical engagement has changed completely -he's a lot more open to things, aware of his earlier political naivety, trying to explore different points of view and ideas…he's tended to be a bit at sea with that but in terms of developing the skills he needs as a university postgraduate, I think he's getting there. (TA1:I2)

Analysis of Paul's feedback comments in Chapter 5 showed how he had received substantial amounts of feedback from both tutors, but also revealed a difference in focus in the marking of these tutors. Tutor A1 had provided very detailed marginal comments to support the formal feedback reports, while these were largely absent in marker A2's feedback. Paul responded positively to a question on whether the tasks in the essays were similar enough to enable improvement from formative to summative work. When asked in interview four to comment on any perceived differences between formative and summative feedback, Paul observed that both markers "took them [formative essays] seriously", but he stated that the "...feedback is the same, the way I approach them is different".

In his fourth interview, Paul revealed a strategic approach to meeting writing requirements, when he explained how he had not given much effort or focus to his

final formative essay (mark of 47), because he, "...wanted to do good on one essay..." , putting his focus on to the second formative essay. Paul here referred to time management issues, and made the point that three formative essays on the programme might have been better than four. The requirement to submit eight essays in two terms certainly constituted a heavy workload, particularly as each essay was a separate assignment on a different title.

Taking up this point of workload, tutor A1 in her first interview agreed that writing these essays was a source of stress for the students, but she also endorsed the value of the formative essays:

> TA1:   The formative idea at this university, I'd not encountered it before coming here, is wonderful, it gives them a chance to practise and to understand where their weakness are before they are actually marked so that's a really useful thing. It's stressful for the students but they can cope…yes there is quite a heavy writing requirement for the Master's. (TA1:I1)

Despite the 'value' placed by his tutor on the formative essay approach, it did not lead to significant improvements in marks or feedback for Paul. Analysis of feedback indicated a recurrence of similar comments from one feedback episode to the next. Perhaps recent studies suggesting an iterative feedback approach might be more effective in the light of such implications of overload; such studies could lower pressure on students, allowing them to use feedback to revise and re-work the same title before final submission (Vardi, 2012; Yang & Carless, 2012). Such an approach would have made essay writing demands more manageable in the two-term time frame operating in CHM at the time of this study.

3.2   *Prior experience with disciplinary writing and feedback*

Peter was an older mature student, and Paul could also be described as a mature student, in his mid-twenties with the experience of two undergraduate degrees, one in Religion and another in Civil Engineering. However, it was the Civil Engineering background that Paul focused on at several points in his interviews, referring to the way his training in scientific report writing hampered his development of essay writing skills:

> Paul: I'm writing essays here, which is slightly different to the way I'm used to writing stuff. I used to write papers with headings and a little chapter

> overview, so it was different but yeah I said goodbye to that style and
> now I'm using more of an, I guess English way of writing essays. (Pl:I5)

Research indicates that when making the transition to a new stage of education, students fall back on genres and practices from previous stages (Andrews, 2010), so Paul's difficulties here are not surprising. This was rather a knock to Paul's confidence, however, as he commented in the interview after his first formative tasks, "It felt a bit weird, doing a Master's and having to learn how to write an essay..". In fact, in her feedback on his first formative essay, Paul's tutor (tutor A1) and marker recommended that he read standard study skills text, advice that seems to equate to the study skills approach outlined by Lea and Street (1998), suggesting that Paul's writing issues were related to generic essay writing skills.

In her second interview at the end of the taught programme, tutorA1 recognised the disciplinary writing issues that Paul had faced:

> TA1: He comes from a more scientific background than we would normally
>   take on the MA so he's having more problems in developing a critical
>   argument... but I've managed to wean him from the sort of rigid section
>   by section approach to the essays where he was…
> BS: Report writing …?
> TA1: Yes, report writing and he's starting to weave things in a narrative
>   and an argumentative style...' (TA1:I2)

Paul referred at various points in interviews to the difficulty he perceived in moving from scientific reports to 'essays'. Lea and Street (1998) discuss the issues involved in one particular case of a student crossing courses and disciplines. They refer to the way superficial writing skill deficits were focused on, while in reality, the student lacked familiarity with content knowledge in the subject discipline. This point will be taken up again in Section 5.3.6.

3.3   Experience of feedback

When asked if his experience of feedback at first degree level was similar or different from what he had received before, Paul made the following points:

> Paul: You mean in the (home country)? Well, no...yeah you mean the pointers
>   they're giving me? There was nothing wrong with my (first language) of
>   course so that was not a problem... I was used to writing in a different
>   style, so also that wasn't really an issue, yeah it's complete different
>   feedback, definitely. (Pl:I5)

Paul also referred to the fact that he had not received such detailed feedback on his undergraduate courses:

> Paul: I used to get just a mark for my essays…my papers they were called. in (home country) you could talk to the teacher about it but no feedback forms there were such huge classes you couldn't do it. (Pl:I5)

What all of this suggests is that Paul did not begin his taught Master's programme with expectations of detailed feedback, and that like Peter and Katy, he came from a background that was 'mark' focused. A lack of knowledge about the purpose and point of feedback is linked to an inability to respond to it, a point highlighted in recent studies (Boud & Molloy, 2012; Nicol, n.d.; Price et al., 2011). Although related to undergraduate students, this important observation may apply equally to Master's students with no experience of UK university feedback processes. The following section will look more closely at Paul's experience with feedback criteria and his understanding of critical writing requirements through engagement with these criteria.

3.4   Criteria - developing an understanding of criticality

Peter's lack of awareness of published criteria for his modules has already been documented, and Paul remarked in later interviews on how little the use of a marking grid contributed to his understanding of the marking criteria. Tutor A2 consistently used the marking grid at the top of her feedback reports, while tutor A1 did not include them. Tutor A1 explained her feeling that the grid was a "shorthand lazy version of giving feedback". She felt that markers in the department were "…not consistent in the tick … for a particular mark", and commented on their lack of value to the student:

> T A1: It also essentialises the marking process in a way that the students obsess over because they like ticks and they like…students like them but they're not telling them very much. OK, so my introduction or whatever the box is telling them is 'excellent' but what does that mean, or it's 'very poor', what does that mean? (TA1:I2)

Even though tutor A2 used the marking grid, she also had doubts about its value and referred to the difficulty she often found in making a distinction between some of the headings.

Neither tutor A nor tutor B discussed or explained the marking criteria with the participants of this study. They both referred to a lecture given by a colleague in which the criteria were explained. When prompted on this issue of explaining criteria, tutor A1 made a telling comment about the lack of staff agreement on the meaning of the criteria:

> BS:　Do you think they get any kind of explanation of what these things mean?
>
> T A1:　No, I mean they have access to the criteria, X (colleague) goes through them in a lecture format. I don't think that they are otherwise told exactly what these things mean, and I don't think there is actually consensus in the department about what these things mean, I must admit that I don't use them heavily, I'll get a sense of what I think a particular band is …. (TA1:I2)

When asked in his final interview about the omission of the marking grid, Paul stated, 'I'm not missing it..." He admitted to understanding the terms in the grid 'maybe slightly, but "..not significantly better.." at the end of the taught programme. When prompted on this, Paul observed how a lack of engagement with these terms and criteria could render feedback unusable:

> BS:　Did you discuss the table with your tutors, in other words did you have those categories explained to you..?
>
> Paul:　No, no we didn't
>
> BS;　Did you feel you clearly understood these categories as you wrote your assignment?
>
> Paul:　No ...I came to the point where, I'm not actually sure what that means, and there's an overlap, maybe that has to do as well, .if you don't really understand what they're commenting about then ..it looks nice, it seems like I'm doing, in general doing good, it's fine but, yeah….you don't use it to improve yourself on whatever it says. (Pl:I5)

Paul's stated lack of understanding of the marking criteria is understandable, given the earlier tutor comments suggesting that academic staff themselves struggle to articulate them. This point tends to support studies in the literature that question the assumption that marking criteria can easily be made accessible to students (Haggis, 2006; Rust et al., 2005, 2003) and the difficulty in making tacit knowledge around assessment explicit may be at the heart of this problem (Higgins et al., 2001; Knight, 2010). Much has also been written in the literature about the importance of developing understanding of marking criteria and standards through dialogue (Carless et al., 2011; Nicol, 2010; Sadler, 2010), a point that will be explored in the next section.

3.5   Engagement with feedback and feedback dialogue

This section explores Paul's engagement in discussion of feedback with his tutor, and reasons behind his differential take up of opportunities to discuss feedback. The second half of the section focuses on the nature of Paul's engagement or otherwise in dialogue around feedback, and how this developed over his taught programme.

Paul remarked on the detailed marginal comments that tutor A1 provided at different points in his interviews, at one point referring to them as 'red' and stating, "I like it red... it's something that forces you to improve", and later expressing his preference for tutor A1 feedback, he stated, "I like it better with [tutor A1], it's completely wrecked but it gives you the realisation that you need to improve". Paul commented that other students did not find such an approach as motivating as he did, but remarked that "...after two days of pain, you realise it's actually helping you". Tutor A1 made the following comments about the way she used marginal comments to attempt a dialogue with the text:

> TA1: I think margin comments are really important and I have a conversation
> basically, with the essay, I will enter into.. this is a good bit…you need to
> do more of this. OK when you say X,YZ have you thought about the
> arguments of author whatever? or.."
> BS: So your approach is almost to have a dialogue with the text…?
> TA1: Yes,
> BS: And then the comments are kind of part of that?
> TA1: Yes that's right .In the overall statement at the end you can make all
> these, you know, you're weak here, your strength's here, but the students
> don' t necessarily always …. where is that, how is it actually being
> played out in the essay, so I like to be able to point to …exactly you
> know a specific issue in the essay, you know when I say your structure is
> weak this passage should have gone beforehand, or, or… whatever, or
> when I say your referencing is weak, here is where you should have put
> the references.Probably the most editing I do is where I put this where
> you need to put the references or whatever. (TA1:I2)

Paul clearly recognised differences in his tutors' feedback approach, attributing them in part to their different disciplinary focus:

> Paul: Maybe it's because.... she [tutor A2] has a scientific background, I'm not
> really getting new feedback from her, why she says stuff I might take
> with me but it's not structural. Well, [tutor A1] is really talking about
> where my flows..flaws are and developing an argument in this discipline.
> (Pl:I4).

Commenting on his first formative essays, Paul observed that tutor A2's feedback was more general than tutor A1's, and that the one comment for improvement that he

took forward from tutor A2's first feedback was a simple matter of presentation. He mentioned a discussion with a friend about a similar point in his feedback from tutor A2:

> Paul: A friend of mine went there and he actually said....because the one I scored low on was presentation, and when he went there he got, well they talked about his presentation of his essay as well, ...yeah I think I can improve that pretty easy, yeah so that wasn't really worth going. (Pl:I2)

While Paul recognised that tutor A2 had provided personal and specific feedback on his work, he clearly engaged far more with tutor A1's feedback. Not seeking even once to discuss his feedback with tutor A2, Paul allocated less time on tutor A2's final formative task, explaining that he did not seek to discuss it with her for that reason, stating "...if you didn't give a hundred per cent on your essay…. I don't know if you gave it your best and then discuss it then…it just seems more useful". He also gave two other reasons for his lower level of engagement with tutor A2's feedback: the fact that her topics and essay titles were "...not that brilliant", and the 'running joke among other students on the programme that it was only necessary to put in a little picture [graphic] to please her.

The importance of the relational dimension between the student and the marker has been stressed in recent studies on feedback (Handley et al., 2011; Rowe, 2011; Rust et al., 2003; Värlander, 2008) and the fact that tutor A1 was also Paul's supervisor made a significant difference. Paul recognised this when commenting on his final assessed essay.

> Paul: We know each other, she's my supervisor so it's easier I took the opportunity during [dissertation]) supervision to talk about my feedback. (Pl: I5)

Despite this useful dialogue, it was rarely around drafts. Tutor A1 explained that she gave the opportunity to discuss plans (but not drafts) of upcoming essays, and believed that Paul had only taken up such an opportunity on one occasion. A recent study (Ridley, 2004) of international students on UK Master's programmes found that the most valued form of dialogue for students and tutors was that provided on drafts before submission. A lack of opportunity for participants in this study to discuss drafts reduced opportunities to use feedback for revision. It is highly likely

that this also impacted on student readiness to engage in dialogue around their feedback.

The relational dimension in the feedback process is complex. It is clear that though tutors themselves often see the importance of discussion around feedback for it to be effective, (Price, Handley, Millar, & O'Donovan, 2010), studies on undergraduate students show them to be less likely to view feedback as a catalyst for discussion (Maclellan, 2010); in this study student perceptions of differences in tutor feedback contributed to dissuading Paul from using opportunities for such discussion. What is evident is Paul's perception of the limited value of one set of feedback. His reasons for seeking dialogue depended to a large extent on the nature of the feedback he received, with his perception that depth of feedback in marginal comments clearly provided him with the means to improve his writing, despite the 'pain' they caused. Paul's experience suggested that a number of factors influenced his expectations of feedback, but that relationships with his markers were central. As Handley puts it:

> Students have expectations about what they need from feedback; expectations about what feedback 'should' do (and what tutors 'should' provide), pedagogic capabilities for making the most (or not) of feedback; and an emotional willingness and confidence to do something (or not) with it. These expectations evolve over time, and are influenced by students' relational networks which may be formal or informal; institutional or social,
> (Handley, 2011. p. 553).

There is no doubt, however, that the personal relationship Paul built with his tutor contributed to his engagement with her feedback. He continually referred to how tutor A1 had higher expectations, and expressed his desire to improve because of this.

When asked about whether he had felt able to engage in discussion with his tutors around his work, Paul revealed that despite his strong spoken English language skills, he still perceived his position as a 'novice' holding him back:

> BS: You're kind of telling me that you don't feel confident enough…
>   confident to challenge or to question...?
> Paul: …they know things much better than me but that shouldn't make me not
>   want to get into a discussion… if I'm interested enough in my topic I will
>   get into a discussion with my tutor, but there's an obstacle I think you

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feel naïve because they know a lot, it's really hard to ask the simple
questions. (Pl:I5)

Paul gave an example of asking the question "what's the point of education?" in a
seminar, but he explained that even asking this simple question needed "guts". Later
still, Paul referred to his confidence and ability to engage with his tutor on his
dissertation topic:

>Paul: My teacher knows a lot about aborigines and about authenticity but not a
> lot about Afghanistan, so you can ask me a question about it and I might
> know the answer and that's a nice feeling. (Pl:I5)

When asked to what extent Paul and Peter had been able to engage in
dialogue around their subjects during the programme, their supervisor/tutor had this
to say:

>TA1: I'm probably more instructing than giving open dialogue with them…
> because of where I perceive them to be in terms of their academic
> abilities and their intellectual engagement with the topic. Last year, my
> feedback was entirely different and it was a lot more dialogue, …' have
> you thought about this..' you know a lot more in the sense of asking
> open-ended questions, because, one they could handle it, and two you'd
> got to the point where they could actually engage in debate and dialogue,
> and be secure that they weren't going to drown in …they weren't just
> going to get lost in that, they could take that as read and start exploring
> wider issues. (TA1:2)

Hyatt (2005) highlighted the lack of feedback comments in his study that engaged
students in dialogue using the sort of 'open questions' referred to in the extract
above, but tutors may gauge the practicality of such an approach, choosing in this
case a more directive approach to feedback based on close knowledge of their
students. Responding with a supervisor's knowledge, tutor A1 clearly judged Paul
and Peter (see Section 5.2.7) to be below the level that she felt was necessary to
engage in teaching of a less directive nature.

3.6   English language issues

What has not been considered so far is whether and to what extent Paul's English
language competence and skills impacted on his struggle to develop his writing.
Table 5.3 shows that Paul's English language score on entry to Bradfield was
relatively high, given that students were only required to achieve a TOEFL score of
100 as the equivalent to IELTS 6.5 entry, while Paul actually scored 109. There was

no requirement for Paul to take a pre-sessional programme. In fact, Paul's spoken English was very fluent and natural, and because of this, the data collected in his interviews often seemed to be richer and to provide more in-depth reflection than that of other participants. It should be pointed out, however, that although Paul had read quite widely in English on his undergraduate courses, they were all taught in his native language, so he had no experience of writing longer texts in English.

In her first interview, Tutor A1 identified several groups as having problems adapting to academic writing at Bradfield due to both cultural and language factors, but she qualified this in Paul's case:

> BS: Does their experience vary widely and does your expectation vary according to nationality?
> TA1: Yes. Often, some students, for example I have a [Paul's nationality] student at the moment. I've got no real cultural issue with them and the Norwegians I've taught as well, generally those issues that we need to overcome are the language ones. Whereas, with the Greeks I know and the Chinese students, they'll have different expectations about what an essay is to what I will have. (TA1:I1)

Despite his ability to converse comfortably in the interviews, Paul showed a certain amount of insecurity in his language ability throughout the study, a point that became clear in the final interview extract below:

> Paul: Because your English is limited, the words you choose are um, they're kind of bold, they're not very precise, You can't be very nuanced when you're speaking a different language so everything you say, you feel a bit insecure about it because you're not sure if it actually offends someone with that, or if it means exactly what you had in mind, .or if it is a little bit off and is therefore, you know offending someone'. But it's also when you're discussing anything academic it's a ... if you're very, very good then it's about the details I guess, and that's hard to express when you're doing it in a foreign language. (Pl:I5)

In her interview at the end of the taught programme, Tutor A1 expressed her surprise on this point, commenting that Paul was "... struggling with language issues that do hamper him…". When prompted to comment on Paul's obvious confidence in speaking, the tutor stated that Paul's writing was "…not what you'd expect from his background…his comprehension in class is lower than you would expect". In his final interview, Paul was happy to give me a copy of feedback on two of his

dissertation draft chapters, marked by tutor A1[55]. This feedback was presented in more than 1000 words of prose, organized into substantive paragraphs. Two of these paragraphs dealt with language issues specifically, and extracts below provide evidence of these:

> Expression. This is very difficult at times to follow. You will need to employ someone to edit your work. I cannot spend the time doing this as I read for content and structure. I started to correct your expression in the history chapter, but it was too big a task and a significant problem because I often could not understand what you were trying to say. ..Do not write in single or two sentence paragraphs, try to develop your ideas more fully. Tense is a problem, why are you writing in the present tense when you are discussing events in the past?

(Extract from tutor A1 feedback on draft dissertation chapters)

Extracts from Paul's interviews suggest that he was able to express himself rather well in English, but his tutor's feedback here, from the end of the taught programme, is evidence to support his stated insecurity with language in writing. It is worth noting, however, that draft writing may not be as carefully edited and crafted as the work submitted for formative and summative assessment on the taught programme. A closer analysis of Paul's first two essays for tutor A2 (see Section 5.3.7) reveal that only about ten per cent of her marginal comments focused on language issues as such, with no issues with tenses or paragraphing. This underlines the importance of understanding the context in which the writing is carried out.

In his first formative feedback, Paul commented on the amount of feedback on language issues that tutor A2 provided in marginal comments. On reflection, he commented:

> Paul: I love that…it's really good [annotations in feedback]…there's a lot more there and it's also about the grammar mistakes you make and the context, sometimes where it needs more referencing. I like that feedback better I guess. (Pl:I2)

Despite his preference for detailed feedback on grammar, punctuation and sentence structure errors, there is no suggestion here that he made major improvements in these areas, evidenced by the feedback on his dissertation draft. In his final interview, Paul admitted that he had not sought or received any help with

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[55] Data collection did not continue beyond the taught programme, but this piece of feedback was fortuitously provided and is included as evidence related to language accuracy in Paul's writing.

language issues, despite a clear lack of confidence. Paul was informed of the opportunities that the ELU offered[56], and during interviews I reminded him of these. However, he admitted that he had not taken any academic writing courses or sought any consultations, other than one consultation on referencing that I provided[57]. The consultation arose out of discussion in Paul's third interview, of a feedback comment identifying a problem of over quotation. It became clear that Paul would benefit from some focused work on this area. We discussed how Paul's insecurity with English could be a factor in his over use of quotations. I offered to help Paul with this, and I created a short handout based on examples and reformulations from his own texts.

When prompted in the final interview on his reasons for not accessing language support, Paul referred to his pride and felt that time management issues also came into play.

> BS: You knew that the service was there but you didn't really...
> Paul: Yeah, Maybe it's kind of like a ...too proud to do that, like, no come on
>   you can do this. And it might also be a time issue... (Pl:I5)

Paul also referred to the optional nature of language support as a possible barrier:

> Paul: I never liked special attention. If you had to go to an English course, then
>   it's not such a problem, but if it's something you can do... (Pl:I5)

Paul implied that he might have willingly attended a compulsory English language programme if it had been offered. In fact, the year of this study (2008-9) was the first that the ELU did not offer an optional, timetabled two-hour class in the City Centre site [58]. As language support classes at Bradfield were not credit bearing at the time of this study, it had never been possible to make them compulsory. Whether Paul or the other participants in this study would have taken up such

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[56] The ELU Open Access writing courses all focused on basic paragraph development and use of tenses, in addition to working on sentence level expression.

[57] After interview three, in response to ongoing issues with inappropriate use of quoting, I gave Paul a short consultation in the ELU using some short examples from his work to indicate strategies for back grounding authors and reducing direct quotation.

[58] The Archaeology Department is located in centre of Bradfield, not on the University campus.

classes, is unknown, but the reality was that a thirty-minute trip to campus was necessary for them to access English language support, something Paul also noted as an issue in relation to managing time. Peter's PS course focused principally on academic writing, which might explain why he did not take any writing classes; Katy and Peter took advantage of consultations with ELU tutors on their drafts, but none of the three participants took an academic writing course on offer in terms one and two.

In Chapter 2, the debate around embedding literacy teaching in the curriculum, as opposed to providing extra-curricular classes, was discussed[59]. The point was made that academic literacy issues are often left to EAP teachers in English Language centres (Andrews, 2010). Wingate's work (Wingate, 2006) also highlighted the problems with the UK 'writing as skills' approach, an approach taken by the ELU writing support programmes. Wingate's main argument is that generic skills approaches deal with techniques, but do not provide the essential understanding of how these techniques are used in the relevant discipline. It is evident that Paul's issues with language were bound up with understanding and developing academic literacy. The fact that Paul still required help in the second term around the areas of referencing and using sources indicated a need for work on academic writing conventions as employed in his discipline, rather than merely 'language fixing'.

3.7   Critical analysis and domain knowledge

In Chapter 2, it was established that an important step in the development of arguments involved wide reading in order to understand the territory under discussion. Andrews (2010) identifies the stage of 'generation of arguments' and points out that this leads to knowing the territory, what may also be referred to as the development of 'domain knowledge' (Geisler, 1994), which is essential for identification of the points of dispute that arguments hinge upon. In Paul's case, he perceived a relative lack of domain knowledge as an issue for him throughout his

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[59] See Murray, (2011) for a discussion of the Australian context that relates closely to that of the UK.

taught programme. When asked in his final interview how he had developed his ability to read and develop his arguments, Paul stated:

> Paul: Developing of the argument? No not really. The way I read wasn't right
> BS: You mentioned developing the argument...
> Paul: Yeah, that's something I really, not sure I mastered it yet, because my comments on my dissertation were pretty much the same, I need to develop an argument to put down all the different points there are made by the different scholars, where the discussion is right now, what's the debate, what's the status of the debate right now . You need to put that forward and then put your new stuff in...
> Bill: OK…
> Paul: I'm not sure if I did that in any of the essays. (Pl: I5)

Later in the final interview, Paul referred to his insecurity due to his perceived lack of expertise in his subject area, stating that "…these people really know their stuff… it's kind of a hard thing…I think I make relevant points but at the same time I know they're not original points". These statements can be linked to early feedback from tutor A1 that was critical of the way Paul 'asserted' points without evidence. While originality in argument at taught Master's level may rarely involve making completely new points, Paul, like participants in Poverjuc's (2010) study seemed to believe this was expected of him.

In the extract above, Paul seemed to finally recognise from his feedback that he had been unable to construct arguments in his writing. His realisation can be linked to the need for students to attain a "critical mass of knowledge in their field" before being able to engage critically (Hendricks, 2000, p.448). It is significant that at the end of his taught programme Paul seemed to accept that he had not used knowledge of debates and positions in the literature to make critical judgements and construct written arguments.

Paul also felt that the assignment writing process and accompanying feedback was not focused on assessing subject knowledge, or developing it. In the final interview, Paul made a telling response to a point about the writing and feedback process:

> Paul: (Reading from the schedule) The process of writing and receiving written feedback has given me a much better understanding of the content of my course, well (long pause).you just want me to give you a number

> BS: yeah, well if you feel really strongly that this is the case, then obviously it's, it's a low number...[60]
> Paul: I felt that it was more about how I write than what I write, so ... if you learn how to do that, that I felt, that doesn't mean you are getting more understanding of CHM. (Pl:I5)

In response to a different statement, "The process of writing and receiving written feedback has enabled me to challenge and question comments made by my tutors," Paul suggested that feedback was not what he expected in terms of its response to the content of his ideas:

> Paul: ... it has enabled me to challenge but again, I was angry, it was about how I wrote not what I wrote, I was not judged for my brilliant ideas but for my lack of writing skills... (Pl::I5)

Paul was angry that his 'ideas' were not better appreciated, but perhaps this followed from his misunderstanding the purpose of assignment writing, with its basis in evaluation of the literature to make valid arguments. Paul's feedback finally helped him to understand how he had been making assertions and putting forward his own ideas without support from disciplinary knowledge. Tutor A1 refers to this issue of students giving their 'opinions':

> TA1: For me the not understanding why you are referencing is, therefore, not understanding the development of argument, and I do get a lot of students coming back to me and saying. 'well this is my opinion' and I have heard my colleagues and (tutor name) as well telling the students 'we're interested in your opinions' and I think well no we're not interested in their opinions, we're interested in their judgements which is a different thing. It has to be based on evidence, it has to be based on reading and so on. Opinion is what you get from reading the Daily Mail. (TA1:I2)

Paul's complaint that his feedback focused on guidance on how to write, rather than what to write , may also reflect his assumption that writing skills were generic and could be taught without engaging with disciplinary content and ideas. Paul's insistence that his feedback did not engage with content and disciplinary knowledge can be checked against actual feedback comments. More than a third of all end comments he received in the sample analysed in Section 5.4.6 below were 'content' comments. Analysis of marginal comments on his first two assignments

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[60] In these interview schedules I gave a set of statements and asked students to rank them according to their level of agreement.

similarly do not entirely support Paul's conclusion that feedback was only about 'how to write' (see section 5.3.6 below). About twelve per cent of marginal comments in the first formative feedback were clearly engaging with content, while more like twenty per cent of his summative marginal comments were substantive points relating to content, not to 'essay writing' as such. Thus, it is evident that content-related comments did feature in his feedback, but the relative proportion of them may have led Paul to conclude quite reasonably that they were not the main focus of his feedback.

3.8   Marginal comments

Paul's first formative essay marked by tutor A1 contained seventy-six marginal comments ranging from simple indications to insert commas or corrections to detailed advice; in one comment about how to write an introduction, such advice constituted eighty-seven words. An example of the first fourteen comments is included in table 4 below:

1. This essay [*report*]
2. Debatable, what about Japan?
3. Relevance ?
4. Gender-avoid the use of gender specific language
5. What is the old approach..?
6. [Underlined sentence] meaning?
7. Not really, it is more complicated in multicultural societies and societies riven by class
8. [underlined- *in a World democracy*] does this exist?
9. [underlined *other approaches from different cultures must be heard*] why? Explain?
10. [underlined -*people will have more or less the same convictions on life*] will they?
11. [*hence the opinions about heritage will roughly be similar*] Not necessarily, not always, local geography is not necessarily an indicator of similarity

Table 4: Marginal comments on first formative essay

The summative assignment marked by the same tutor had thirty-nine marginal comments, of which eight were content related, but some of these gave generic advice, with examples such as the following on how to write the introduction:

> Introduction- What will you argue? The intro should not only define the aims and scope of the essay but must also summarise what it is you will actually argue/say in the essay.
> **(Paul- summative CHM1 marginal comment)**

Three comments advised the "need to argue not just assert". Only two marginal comments on the formative and one on the summative assignments were positive and praising in nature. Critical analysis comments were only about ten per cent of the first essay marginal comments, compared to closer to twenty per cent of Paul's overall end comments.

The relatively low number of comments that amplify or explain in feedback reports has been noted above, indicating a lack of depth. Paul's first formative marginal comments, however, show a much greater level of depth. About forty seven per cent of marginal comments in the first formative feedback were direct corrections, corresponding to Brown and Glover's (2006) second level of depth. Comments that explained were few, but almost twenty nine per cent of the marginal comments were short questions and statements that could be viewed as amplification at the level of examples. Many of these comments were also more directed, giving more information about the type of answer Paul needed to look for:

> [heritage nowadays is multi consume] What does this mean? What are the implications of multi vocality to heritage management and the idea of 'cultural significance?'
> (Paul formative CHM1- marginal comment)

These marginal comments do not completely support Paul's conclusion in his final interview that writing and feedback was about 'how to write' and that he did not receive feedback on his ideas. About twenty per cent of marginal comments in the first formative and summative feedback engaged with content. There was a notable depth of feedback in these marginal comments, and unlike end comments which are read out of context, they often indicated where the writing could be improved, and frequently gave guidance and hints on how this could be done.

At the same time, this close attention to specifics in the text, feedback at the level of the task, means that marginal comments often did not provide guidance that could be transferred to later assignments (feed forward-future developmental comments). Only about ten per cent of the formative marginal comments were interpreted as future developmental, a similar figure to that recorded for end comments for both Paul and Peter. It is necessary to bear in mind, however, that the term 'feed forward potential' is necessary here , as feedback only feeds forward

when the *st*udent understands it and applies it in future texts (Carless, 2006; Irons, 2010; Yorke, 2003). The repetition of points related to assertion in Paul's summative feedback is evidence of his difficulty in understanding and responding to them.

3.9   Conclusion

As one might expect, despite very dissimilar backgrounds in terms of language and culture there are a number of similarities between Paul and Peter's cases, which are also echoed in Katy's case (see Appendix F). All three participants struggled particularly to develop critical academic writing (CAW) and in one tutor's perspective Paul had only really begun to develop the degree of criticality required at Master's level. Both Peter and Paul engaged unevenly with discussion around feedback, and both seemed unable to improve significantly from formative to summative assignments. Like Peter, Paul also received abundant feedback on critical analysis, but much of this again did not go beyond indicating deficits.

Where Paul's case provides more insights, however, is in understanding student engagement with feedback. Paul's case highlights the importance of disciplinary background and the need to develop domain knowledge as a pre-requisite for CAW. The complex issues surrounding relational aspects of feedback were also highlighted, with Paul's clear belief in the efficacy of detailed, specific feedback leading to greater engagement with the tutor who provided it, despite evidence from marks and feedback that it was not particularly effective. This case study also provided insights into the complex issues around 'support' in developing academic literacy, and its relationship with English language proficiency and in-sessional English language support. Paul's background and personality, his pride and the nature of support provided by the institution meant that he did not seek or receive as much support as he might have done. The case also debunks language and culture stereotypes; Paul was a proficient English user from a European culture not dissimilar to that of the UK, but he struggled to engage effectively with feedback in very similar ways to South East Asians, Peter and Katy.

Appendix G: Targets for improvement

Anna	OM1 Mark= 69 (Good)	-Follow the in-text citation conventions carefully -Avoid using (very) long sentences
	OM 2 Mark = 75 (Distinguished)	-Look again at Cortazzi and Jin -Check how to use APA
	Methods Mark = 66 (Good)	-There are no obvious areas that need great attention. -Perhaps a little more reading and evidence in terms of references… -and a more general to specific information structure in the introduction is also useful
Betty	OM 1 Mark= 66 (Good)	-Make sure all aspects of your discussion are supported by reference to published literature -use more up to date resources **-Try to be more critical in how you interpret the research you present** **-Make sure you link the first and second half of your discussion: you are in danger of contradicting yourself if you do not do this** -Make sure the reference list is in alphabetical order -Make sure you understand the words you are using
	OM 2 Mark = 62 (Good	**-Make sure there are no contradictions in your argument**. **-Make sure the claims you make don't lead to implausible conclusions (e.g. that it is easier to learn grammar than new words)** -Don't use the semi-colon if you are not sure how to
	Methods Mark = 58 (satisfactory	**-Think about how to balance the discussion more appropriately (e.g. not spending too much time on one area, in this case defining 'task' at the expense of discussing other issues relevant to the topic** -Avoid emotive language like 'desperate'
Clara	OM 1 Mark= 66 (Good)	Specific points are made above- consider again **-Going into more depth with analysis, looking at the why and how a little more** -Develop points by making connections in the literature.
	OM 2 Mark = 69 (Good)	-To follow the in-text referencing format correctly and consistently
	Methods Mark = 66 (Good)	**-Make sure all aspects of your discussion are supported by reference to published literature** -Avoid 'always' using this word makes what you write seem like a generalization -Check how to use APA
Diane	OM1 Mark= 69 (Good)	- There are few real concerns here; - the issues with referencing mentioned above could be easily remedied with more attention to detail. -I hope you can continue to achieve this good standard in future assignments.
	OM 2 Mark = 45 (referral-fail)	-write more. It is not acceptable to hand in so little **-Engage with what you do write: description is not the same as analysis** -Do not waffle: write something substantive -Link your analysis more closely with the literature you cite in the first section **-Think more critically about the ideas you present** -Make sure it is clear to your reader which bit of your appendix you are referring to. Currently it is not always clear.

		-Also make sure you attach your appendices to your work -Read the student Handbook on how to present quotations and use APA referencing style-you should not be getting this wrong at this point of the term -Read your marked script for more specific feedback
	Methods Mark = 66 (Good)	**-Perhaps look at the analytical points and seek to develop them in more depth** -More attention to detail in terms of accuracy would help, and more attention to proof reading -At this point in the course, the rather sloppy mistakes in referencing are not really acceptable
Ethel	Option module 1 Mark= 66 (Good)	**-I sense there is a need for a more fully rounded critical engagement** **-and a little more awareness or explanation of the context in which debates about *Topic X* take place**.
	Option module 2 Mark = 58 (Satisfactory)	**-Aim to strengthen the complexity of your arguments without losing the clarity of your writing.** **-Experiment with the use of evidence to support your arguments**
	Methods Mark = 58 (Satisfactory)	-You will need to spend more time working out what the assignment task requires, reading around the topic **-and in planning the structure of your writing to add to the discursive nature and coherence of your writing.**
Flora	OM 1 Mark= 66 (Good)	**-Greater sophistication in your critical analysis**
	OM 2 Mark = 51 (Borderline pass)	-Write more- you say there was not space to discuss certain issues, but you had another 900 words available to do so. -Your introduction, however, needs to be shorter. **-Make sure what you write directly relates to the topic under discussion** **-Make sure all aspects of your discussion are supported by reference to published literature.** **-Avoid anecdotes or citing from your own experience as though your experience is universal.** **-Look at how to structure your assignment more clearly and logically-actually pay attention to the section headings you use and make sure what you write under each heading relates to that heading.** -Get your presentation right-by this point in the year you should not be making mistakes in APA and citations. -It *is strongly recommended that you read your marked script for specific examples of the feedback given above* so that you can ensure you can address these issues for your dissertation.
	Methods Mark = 30 (fail)	-Do more research. Read the student handbook on ho w many hours a student is supposed to complete for each module, which includes class time, research and writing assignments. -Use a wider range of sources and read more primary sources rather than relying on secondary sources. **-Answer the question set.** **-Do not just describe, analyse.** -Make sure all aspects of your argument are supported by reference to the published literature. **-Do not just make assertions without offering reasons as to the 'how' and 'why'.** -Write more: it is not acceptable in your conclusion to argue that

		you did not have enough space to offer fuller explanations when you had another 1200 words at your disposal. -Avoid unnecessary repetition. **-Provide a context for the discussion and do not assume** that your reader will automatically know you are thinking of TBL in a Chinese context -Label all your appendices, refer to them all appropriately and attach them to your assignment properly. -Label your sections properly and put a space between each section -Include page numbers for direct quotes. -*Read your marked script for specific feedback* on what needs to be improved.
KEY TO COMMENT CODING: OM1/2 = Option module 1/2 Explicit critical analysis (16) Technical reference (9) Use of sources (10) Language/syntax/punctuation (7) Structure (4) 67 total		

Table G1: Analysis of Targets for Improvement

Appendix H: Betty's case study report

1.0   Introduction

Betty progressed on to her Master's programme from the CELT 8-week pre-sessional, which she was required to take on the basis of her IELTS 5.5. speaking score, but Table 1 below shows that her writing score, was stronger (7.0). Betty had majored in English in her first degree but had not had the benefit of any teaching experience or other work related experience using her English.

Name	Age	Country origin	**IELTS**	First degree	Teaching experience	Pre-sessional	Scores
BETTY	22	Chinese	**Overall 6.5** R-7.0 L-6.5 W-7.0 S-5.5	Business English	N	8-week	OM1-66 OM2-62 CM-58

Table 1: Background information

1.1   Formative feedback

In the Formative mid-term task in her first term, the title asked for a summary of a specific article. Betty's feedback balanced three areas for improvement against two points to maintain for future assignments. The positive points were

1. You have made a decent attempt at summarising the main points of the article and provide clear evidence of trying to take a more critical stance
2. You did well to identify some of the key limitations (for example the weaknesses of the methodology)

The feedback uses the term 'trying' to take a more critical stance, and evidence of Betty's inexperience in critiquing academic papers can be seen in a point she makes on the structure of the paper:

Figure 1: Formative feedback matched to text

Assignment: Write a critical summary of the article 'Effective team teaching between local and native speaking English teachers'.	Marginal feedback comments
…it might have been better if the previous research had been put prior in the first paragraph, which demonstrates the brief aim and method of the research.	That's not usually how journal articles are organised.
…..the design of the research is not fully successful. For example, by reason that teaching and learning is a repeated behaviour, which means that it would take a long term rather than happen occasionally, therefore the data would have been more valid if the time of the observation had been longer.	(tick) good point

In the interview corresponding to this feedback, Betty made it clear that she did not really understand this comment and that she would seek clarification from her tutor about it. There were five comments in total of this rather directive type e.g., *It's not clear what this means, you don't write article titles in the text*.

Table 2 below shows how Betty understood that higher order concerns of critical analysis were the most important for her, as she reported in her second interview that the feedback focused on her ability to do a 'summary', and she placed her need to develop her language and referencing issues after this.

Betty	Point 1	Point 2	Point 3
Formative Task Feed forward	How to structure and write a summary	Vocabulary and language issues	More references and wider reading

Table 2: Formative task feed forward

Although the third feedback comment picked out a technical point, Betty understood that she needed to focus on wider reading and referencing:

> B: I think the first thing is how to write a summary because I'm not very clear about that, so I made some mistakes often,…or the structure and second one is to take more practice on the vocabulary and the language. And the other one maybe do some references and read more readings about these kinds of articles.

Betty had focused on the way the task demanded critical analysis, as when asked about the purpose of the task, she reported that it was "…how to think critically … how to take your own stance, …not just copy all quotations".

Betty expressed the intention to rewrite some of her assignment, "… I just rewrite some sentences not too many, I intend to write a whole passage". However, when asked whether she could use the feedback on language to make revisions, Betty seemed unsure, stating "Maybe it's still difficult because at the beginning I thought I have already expressed very clearly but then I got feedback saying it's not so clear, so I'm a little bit confused about it."

1.2   Linking formative and summative assignments

Betty reported that she had received some guidance on her draft for the first option module assignment and that she had e-mailed her tutor and received a useful reply. She reported that she had read her feedback three or four times, picking out points to discuss with her tutor, and she stated that she "… just made some notes, I didn't discuss with my friends". When asked if she remembered any focus on classroom discussion on assignment-writing criteria at the end of the module, she stated that she did not recall this. Betty received a mark of 66 for her first summative assignment and she felt that 4 weeks to return feedback had been reasonable, and when asked about the issue of relating feedback to the writing after this delay, she stated that she could "remember it because it takes me a long time...".

When asked to think back to the main feedback points from her formative task, Betty only partially remembered these, mentioning "…academic words.." and that she had not "… put the references in…". Betty felt that the first summative feedback largely dealt with different issues to the formative feedback, focusing on three main areas. These are summarised below:

a)   The need for more evidence to support ideas with more up to date sources
b)   The need to express herself more clearly to ensure readers understand her points
c)   Connecting topics with context

These three points are expressed in her marker's words in Table 3 below which contain the TFI section comments. It is significant that points a) and b) above were comments that recurred from Betty's formative feedback, indicating the way sources use and improvement of general expression may not be easily improved after one task.

	Targets for improvement (feed forward)
Option module 1 Mark= 66 (Good)	-**Make sure all aspects of your discussion are supported by reference to published literature** -use more up to date resources -**Try to be more critical in how you interpret the research you present** -**Make sure you link the first and second half of your discussion: you are in danger of contradicting yourself if you do not do this** -Make sure the reference list is in alphabetical order -Make sure you understand the words you are using

Table 3: TFI first summative feedback

Betty's response to questions around the feedback report format were generally positive, as she stated that she found the format "usable", and she could not remember receiving a positive/negative/positive feedback sandwich approach in earlier feedback. She referred to the comments under the 'analysis' heading as "...more detailed...more useful...". Betty also expressed a preference for marginal comments in the text rather than references to page numbers in the report form.

When asked if there was anything further she wanted to add at the end of the interview, Betty made the point that a subsequent discussion with her tutor had clarified the issues around a 'misunderstanding', where her tutor commented on a contradiction, but Betty was able to make clear that this had not been her intention and was a result of the way she had presented the point. She summarized her general understanding of the feedback in the following way:

> Betty: I think I should not just state the opinions in the literature, give my own
>   ideas and find evidence to support it…

Betty made the point that her marker on this module was also her supervisor, which meant that she had a discussion around the feedback as a matter of course:

> Betty: Personally I really feel lucky that my supervisor is the tutor because
>   written feedback is limited-she is also my module tutor…

When probed about this point, Betty went on to make a further comment:

> Betty: Sometimes the written feedback is really limited, if we just read it on
>   paper, I feel some points are really unclear… discussion is much more
>   better.

1.3   Analysis of summative feedback comments

Unlike Flora, Betty benefited from a total of twenty three comments on her first summative assignment. Her content comments were substantive compared to Flora's and she also received six comments in targets for improvement. Table 5 shows that almost half of all comments in two of these assignments related to critical analysis.

Summative Assignments	Words	Comments	Critical Analysis Comments
Term 1 option module	321	23	11
Methods module	214	21	7
Term 2 option module	184	19	9

Table 4: Summative assignment comments and word count

Analysis of actual feedback comments in Figure 3 show a reasonably even distribution of types of comment across Betty's summative feedback reports. Positive content comments were most frequent by type (16), with developmental future comments the second most frequent (14), followed by negative content comments (11). Total comments on language and expression were more frequent (10) than those on referencing and source use (6). Only three phatic comments were recorded and no comments came into the informational, non-evaluative content or the explicit justifying marks categories.

Figure 3: Comparison of summative comments
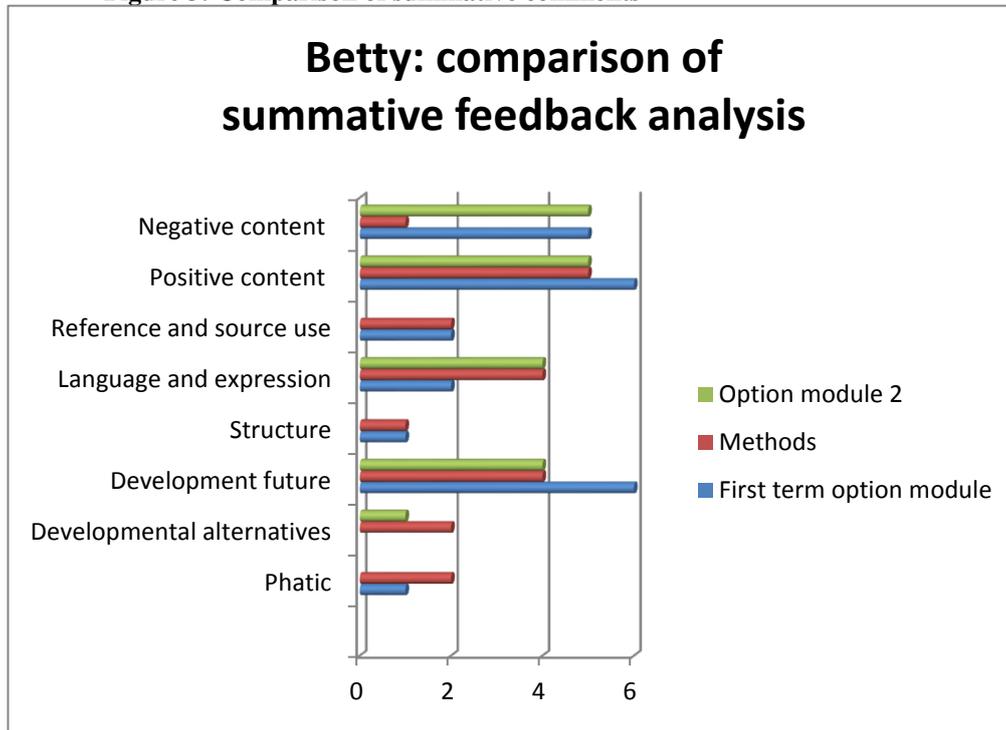
1.4   Feedback on second term assignments

Betty's marks for her second term summative assignments were 62 for her option module and 58 for her Methods assignment. She admitted that she had found the

option module "more difficult" because it was "theoretical" and she had spent rather more time on it. Betty made no reference to any guidance around specific criteria for the second option module, and there had been no formative task for it, but some general guidance around individual titles. Despite this guidance, Betty stated that she had e-mailed her tutor and received some extra help and guidance which was useful.

Matching end comments in the feedback report with concrete extracts in the actual texts can be difficult, since these comments are often general and marginal comments on these summative assignments were relatively rare or completely absent. The examples below, however, are chosen as representative of several CAW comments from her feedback report on the second option module:

Figure 2: Betty final assignment feedback and text

Text from Term 2 assignment (Discuss the role of age in second language learning.)	End feedback comments in report
(extract 1-from Introduction) The assignment proposes to argue that age is only an advantage for children rather than a determining factor, and even though, it could not be assured since adult learners might have prior formal instruction. Moreover, learning grammar will be cited as a main example to support the argument.	…there is a clear attempt to construct a sustained argument.
(**extract 2-from a section on 'Age effects on grammar learning'** The study by Dekeyser (2000) reports a series of obvious relationships between AOA and grammaticality test scores, which implies that there is a strong correlation between age effect and ultimate attainment, at least in the aspect of morphosyntax. Similarly, the test scores show that most of the subjects with an AOA earlier than 16 have higher scores. In other words, similar to Johnson and Newport's (1989) result, age effects do exist in SLA and 16 is the boundary. Dekeyser clams that what later learners lack is child starters' capacity of implicit learning and the utilization of analytical and problem-solving abilities are defined as the "only way" for adult learners to achieve native like competence (Long, 2007, p. 56)	You show ability to engage with the literature in some detail.
(extract 3 from the Conclusion) The discussion demonstrates that despite that ultimate attainment of SLA might relate to age factor; it does not mean that age factor is the determining factor. Precisely, age could be seen as an advantage for child starters……children may only have advantage in naturalistic contexts (e.g. emergency learning) while in formal instruction it is possible that adults could perform better…other factors apart from age might play significant roles in ultimate achievement, e.g., learners' L1, social factors.	Many points are valid, leading to a balanced conclusion. There were some problems with grammar, especially the use of the semi-colon.

In extract 1 above, Betty received praise for constructing an argument, and the text extract selected to accompany the feedback illustrates her signalling this argument, in a thesis statement revealing her stance (e.g., Wingate, 2011; Chang & Schleppegrell, 2011). Extract 3 illustrates the balanced nature of the conclusion referred to in the feedback comment. Extract 2 refers to a general feedback comment on Betty's engagement with the literature, and a representative stretch of text shows how she uses the literature to compare study findings and point to correlations which support her argument. Betty made direct reference (integral reference) to authors of two studies, while also providing a non-integral reference to a third study supporting or exemplifying her point. She established her points and paraphrased by using a range of report verbs (e.g., Davis, 2013) *show, reports,* and *claims*. However, the source for the final sentence appears to be from a secondary citation which is not presented appropriately. Betty also seemed to be aligning herself quite closely with the 'claim' made in this case, which indicated that she may have been unaware of the generally critical nature of the verb 'claim' in this context.

Extract 3 illustrates how Betty's writing at the final assignment stage could still be relatively inaccurate, with a number of missing articles, an issue with 'despite', a punctuation problem with the semi-colon, and inappropriate pronoun use ('it' used instead of this). The number of inaccuracies in a short section of text here did not seem to match the criteria of 'near perfect' language in the grade description for a 60-70 band mark, highlighting the issues of weighting and inconsistency in applying criteria discussed in Section 9.3.4. Against this, the content of Betty's conclusion was described as 'balanced' and her quite natural use of various hedging devices (*might, may, it is possible that*) help her to achieve this. Table 4 below shows her TFI comments for this assignment and among these was advice to avoid implausible claims, suggesting some issues of criticality in the assignment as a whole. These extracts provide some evidence for the way Betty's writing had developed over the taught programme, but also indicate the limits of this progress.

1.5   *Use of formative feedback in final summative assignments*
For her methods core module, students were given a classroom task to apply marking criteria to an extract from a student assignment receiving a distinguished

mark from an earlier cohort on the module. Betty commented in some detail on her reaction to this:

> Betty: I know I didn't get the right grade. When I first see the student's work. I know that paragraph, maybe she or he is critical. I think she didn't use much evidence to support his idea. I really freak out when I saw that it's distinguished. Maybe, different tasks, maybe different styles.

Students were only told of the grade after they had attempted in small groups to give it a mark according to the Department writing criteria. In fact, Betty's experience was not unusual. As the tutor for her group on the module, I observed that few students correctly assigned a 'distinguished' mark for the work. To some extent this was evidence of a continued lack of awareness of standards and quality at Master's level in the second term of the taught programme. Unfortunately, feeling under pressure for time to deliver the relevant content in the module, I did not provide other exemplars of varying quality to follow up this activity, something which is clearly identified as necessary in the literature (Handley, den Outer, & Price, 2013; Hendry, Bromberger, & Armstrong, 2011).

Betty also remarked on the value of the formative task for her Methods module, and she mentioned again the value of a one to one meeting on this with her tutor:

> Betty: I was really impressed by the feedback from the middle task. I remember you gave me a face-to-face feedback and I remember the most important task is the definition. I mean, I just state some definitions there and I choose one but I don't say why I choose this one. I remember you said I should I should be critical, and say why I choose this definition and give the reasons or even create my own definition. I think that is very useful, but unfortunately I spent too much time on the definition (*laughs*).

As Betty pointed out, however, she received positive feedback comments on the summative assignment relating to her treatment of definitions of the main concept, but unfortunately she had spent too much time on this, negatively affecting the balance of her answer (see feed forward in Table 4). Other than these comments, she picked out her failure to use materials to support her analysis and recurring issues with language, "...just some words, vocabulary." More than half of Betty's feed forward comments (6/11) were related to issues with critical analysis, and as can be

seen in Table 4, some of these centred on implausible conclusions, balance of discussion and connecting parts of the discussion.

	Targets for improvement (feed forward)
Option module 2 Mark = 62 (Good	-**Make sure there are no contradictions in your argument**. -**Make sure the claims you make don't lead to implausible conclusions (e.g. that it is easier to learn grammar than new words)** -Don't use the semi-colon if you are not sure how to
Methods Mark = 58 (satisfactory)	-**Think about how to balance the discussion more appropriately (e.g. not spending too much time on one area, in this case defining 'task' at the expense of discussing other issues relevant to the topic** -Avoid emotive language like 'desperate'

Table5: TFI comments final assignments

1.6   Reflection on the feedback process
In response to interview questions on the feedback process in general, Betty commented on the way she had used written feedback over the taught programme:

> Betty: For me it's useful because it's very general, not like face-to-face because face-to-face maybe after sometime I will forget it then because this is the written version, so I can read it again and again, and for me after I get feedback I will pick out the most important one and then I write down them on piece of paper or whiteboard and for the next assignment I will see like a general guide. I remember that.

Betty felt that on her final summative assignments she had shown "good understanding about topic and covered most areas" and that "to some extent it's relatively critical", but in terms of weaker points she referred to some contradictions and language problems, commenting that the latter was a problem "...through all my study of the MA programme".

Betty also reported that written feedback was effective in terms of mastering APA referencing, stating "it's very useful 'cos I think it's much easier to improve the APA than the critical analysis, something like that." She clarified the latter point when probed on the effectiveness of written feedback for developing critical analysis and argument:

> Betty: I can only say that it's like general guidance, it takes practice. I mean, I think to be critical is need to take practice, that's the most important thing, but the guidance is also very important to the practice.

In terms of improving grammar and expression, Betty was far less positive about the role of written feedback, and she gave the general nature of feedback as her reason, stating that it was "because in this feedback it's just general you have some problems in the grammar and vocabulary... I think for me it's really hard to improve the specific."

As a pre-sessional student, Betty was asked in the final interview if she felt the pre-sessional had helped her in her taught master's year. She mentioned criticality, stating that the "most helpful thing is how to use evidence to support your own idea," but she qualified this by saying that there was "not too much critical" compared with the formal year. She also referred to the "very different writing style" from her home country, particularly making notes and paraphrasing, and how the pre-sessional had shown how academic writing was different from IELTS. Betty was keen to point out that the pre-sessional had given her confidence with her speaking in particular. Finally, she referred to some small-scale research as useful "because the process, we learnt about that".

Overall, Betty felt that there had been two recurring points in her feedback over the taught programme, namely critical analysis and language problems, but she felt she had made progress over the two terms, claiming her critical analysis had improved compared with the first term, particularly in her final Methods assignment, which is evidenced by her mark. The short text extracts for her final option module also support her view that she had made improvements. She also remarked on how important the formative task feedback comments about using the literature to support her points had been.

1.7   Discussion: Reflection in member checking

Betty returned briefly to Bradfield in the year after data collection, which made it possible for me to carry out a member checking interview with her, and this will be referred to in this section[61]. Betty's IELTS writing score, like that of Flora, was

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[61] Due to my work pattern I was not able to carry out a complete analysis of the main study data until the following academic year, at which point I did not expect to have access to student participants who I expected to have returned to China. After completing her dissertation, Betty continued directly on to a Master's programme in Education at the University of Edinburgh, and when she returned to

actually a 7.0. She also lacked any specific teaching experience or work experience with English language. As in Flora's case, she experienced a similar downward trend in her marks over the programme, though these did not dip dramatically, dropping only slightly from a 'good ' band (66) to a lower mark in the 'good' category (62), with a further small fall in the core module mark to a high 'satisfactory' band score (58).

Unlike Flora, Betty benefited from comments relating to content, as analysis of feedback suggests, and first formative and summative feedback comments were more detailed, with three times the amount of feedback that Flora received. However, the point made in Flora's case, that content and challenge within each module can differ significantly, may be relevant to Betty's case, affecting her engagement, marks and feedback. Interestingly, Betty admitted that her perception of theoretical difficulties posed by the second option module led to her devoting substantially more time to this than her Methods assignment in term two. On the basis of this unequal effort, perhaps it is not surprising that she received a lower mark for Methods.

Three out of six feed forward comments in targets for improvement on Betty's first summative feedback were related to references and use of sources, though these issues were not a feature of later summative reports. It was established in Chapter 7 that task design has an important influence on the type of feedback that it produces and it should be noted that Betty's tutors set a formative term one task of a critical summary which did not force students to refer to multiple texts. Perhaps these reference issues might not have arisen in the first summative assignment had Betty been required to engage with them earlier. In her final interview, Betty also felt that written feedback had been effective for helping her develop technical ability with APA, so perhaps earlier feedback on this area might have been more effective.

In the member checking interview, Betty was shown her feedback from the first summative assignment and asked what she remembered about it and her reaction to it.

Bradfield early in 2011 for her graduation ceremony, she agreed to take part in member checking on her data with a 40 minute interview.

> Betty: Because at that time, even I get the feedback I can't notice those points. You know after this, the one year's practice, sometimes even now I will still go back to this assignments when I wrote in Bradfield, now I can notice.
>
> BS: But you couldn't at the time is that what you're saying?
>
> Betty: At that time, yeah I didn't notice that.

Betty seems to suggest that she was not able to take on board the feedback points after just one term on her first Master's course, but with one year more of study she was able to appreciate and understand them. This could be evidence that the interview method used led to an inclination for students to report 'understanding' of feedback, even though in reality they may not have been able to fully understand or apply that feedback in subsequent writing tasks. It also suggests that a longer time period with more opportunity to practice assignment writing and respond to feedback might be beneficial to international students such as Betty.

Betty also agreed that she had received more feedback on end-of-course summative work than on work during modules. However, when I suggested that her formative mid-term tasks were more memorable and useful than the feedback on the end of course tasks, Betty did not agree, stating that she could not remember saying this in the interviews.

In my follow-up interview a year on from data collection, Betty was able to remember that she had seen three exemplars for assignments in three of her modules, but she pointed out that marking criteria were rarely discussed in class and that she had done this herself in her own time. Other than one classroom marking exercise on an exemplar, Betty reported that classroom discussion around the Department writing criteria was largely absent. Outside of her feedback, Betty did not receive explicit guidance on what constituted good critical analysis in her modules.

In her final interviews around her summative feedback in term three, Betty identified language issues and the need to engage better with critical analysis as the two recurring points from formative and summative feedback over the taught programme. In fact, Betty agreed in the member check interview that she did not find written feedback to be very effective in developing critical analysis, but rather she felt practice was the key.

> Betty: For example in my Pre-sessional courses or in the first term I got
> Feedbacks...everyone focus on the critical but I may still forget to that
> but in second [Master's] or Dissertation it becomes much better because I
> have done more practice during the MA courses.

Betty also agreed to my statement that she had made progress with criticality but I suggested that this seemed contradictory, as she had just confirmed to me that she often 'forgot' or at least was not able to improve on these points. Her response to this is reminiscent of Peter in the preliminary study, who also felt he had made progress with critical analysis because of his very low starting point:

> Betty: Yeah but some of them maybe related to culture, because I have to say
> that when I came to the UK I really became more critical than I was in
> China but that's really different step to change you know, because.in
> China we are not encouraged to, seldom encouraged to be critical, have
> our own opinions if we have opposite ideas with the teachers or those
> journals. So it's hard to change that, but it become really better than
> when I compare how I was in China.

What was clear from the results presented above was the importance that Betty gave to face-to-face discussion around her feedback. As supervisors were given responsibility for discussing short draft outlines of upcoming summative assignments, Betty benefited when her tutor and supervisor were one and the same person. She also approached her first term module tutor to discuss feedback and her core module tutor to discuss formative feedback in the second term.

In the member check interview some months later, Betty took pains to emphasise the importance she placed on face-to-face discussion of feedback:

> Betty: I remember I told you that face-to-face interview was much better than
> writing feedback. I think I told you many times.

Perhaps a final point worth noting is a comment Betty made about the value of her In-sessional English support classes (ELS) in improving her writing. When asked in the follow-up interview to comment on the study skills sessions in the department, Betty made an unprompted reference to the ELS programme:

> Betty: I think it's useful [study skills] and especially the language courses
> during the two terms. The language courses most of them just focus on

these points and I think if we didn't have those it's really hard to complete the assignments. Sometimes I still read those handouts [on her current Master's programme].

1.8   Conclusion: A question of dialogue and practice

Betty's downward trend in marks did not suggest that she was learning and developing from feedback, but on the other hand, her later modules may have posed tougher challenges for her than her early assignment. Chapters 8 and 9 made reference to inconsistency in marking and to the situated nature of critical analysis. Like Flora, her strong IELTS writing score did not seem to give her an advantage or make a difference to her progress.[62] It is evident from her case that she was willing and able to engage in discussion around written feedback, and that she appreciated the need for such discussion. This discussion could be viewed as dialogue, though it remained largely on the level of clarification around poor expression or presentation of ideas.

Betty, like Flora, saw critical analysis as the fundamental point in feedback that she lacked. Betty remarked on the cultural barriers to developing this critical ability in writing, making a connection with Peter's case study in the preliminary study. By the end of her taught programme, she was explicit about the limitations of written feedback in developing critical analysis, and she confirmed in the member check interview that she had realized how important it was to practice. Betty had made progress and was able to appreciate this after a number of months in a different study context. She appreciated both her pre-sessional study and her ELS classes, making the point on her return to Bradfield that all this experience meant she was later able to help her fellow students in a different Master's programme. Betty's experience once again suggests the need for longer Master's programmes that allow time for a more effective, more iterative writing and feedback process.

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[62] In fact, Betty had to re-take IELTS in her third term to improve her score for a 7.0 overall entry score for the Edinburgh programme; she achieved the overall 7.0 score but her writing score dropped from 7.0 to 6.5.

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