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**Developing writing pedagogy and tertiary
learning advice in a disciplinary programme
at a New Zealand university**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

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Abstract

This thesis provides a summary and interpretation of a three-year action research study conducted by a tertiary learning advisor (TLA) at a New Zealand university (referred to in the study as NZU). The study investigated how a TLA, working as an informal writing consultant to staff and students in a disciplinary programme, could make positive contributions to writing pedagogy and TLA practice.

The main sources of data were a reflective journal together with interviews and focus groups with NZU students and staff. Interviews were also held with TLAs in other New Zealand institutions to supplement the limited body of relevant literature. Other data comprised classroom observation, recordings made by lecturers while marking student work and disciplinary and institutional documentation. Data was collected and analysed interpretively and subjectively on a continuous, iterative basis.

Significant contributions were made to writing pedagogy in this disciplinary programme. Progress was based on incremental 'small wins' through prolonged engagement with staff and students. This resulted in the provision of resources and workshops to support students in writing effectively within their disciplinary and professional context. Some collaborations had a formative influence on disciplinary writing practices themselves, particularly reflective writing. However, changes in writing pedagogy remained limited to courses in which staff had volunteered to participate and initiatives requiring substantial time and effort from them had limited success.

The main contributions to TLA practice were a greater involvement in classroom teaching and in the professional development of disciplinary teaching staff. However, two shifts in TLA practice which have been advocated in the literature were not supported in this context. Rather than supporting a shift away from one-to-one consultations with students, the study found that they contributed to TLA expertise and to the teaching and learning practices within the programme. The handing over of responsibility for teaching writing from the TLA to disciplinary teaching staff was also not supported; rather, continued involvement of the TLA in direct teaching was seen as consistent with the plurality of expertise and teaching roles which existed in much of the programme.

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Glossary of Terms

AD	Academic developer
AH	Applied health (pseudonym for an area of community health and educational support in which the BAH programme qualifies students to practise)
BAH	Bachelor of applied health (pseudonym for the four-year degree programme which is the focus of this study)
ESOL	English for speakers of other language
LTU	Learning and Teaching Unit (used to describe the institutional units in which TLAs operate. These are most often Student Learning Centres or Centres for Teaching and Learning, but other arrangements and titles are also found in tertiary institutions in New Zealand and elsewhere)
LTW	Learning to write (one strand of WAC / WID)
NZU	New Zealand University (pseudonym for the university in which the project took place)

PBRF	Performance-based research fund, administered by the New Zealand Tertiary Education Commission; 60% of funds are allocated to institutions on the basis of a quality review of the research carried out by its staff members. The remainder is allocated according to student completions and institutional success in generating external funding (mostly from industry).
PTF	Professional teaching fellow
TLA	Tertiary learning advisor
WAC	Writing across the curriculum
Wānanga	New Zealand tertiary institution with a Māori ethos
WID	Writing in the disciplines
WTL	Writing to learn (one strand of WAC / WID)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis documents an investigation of and response to a defining issue for tertiary learning advisors (TLAs): how to achieve a broad, formative influence on student learning despite the restricted, remedial roles typically assigned to TLAs within the tertiary institutions in which they work. I conducted this investigation as an action research project in my role as a TLA working at a New Zealand university (referred to as NZU throughout this thesis).

The problematic framing of TLA practice, which is the focus of this thesis, has been attributed to its origins as a conservative institutional response to the “massification” of the student body (S. Harris, 2005). This massification itself is a result of social and political pressures to expand and extend tertiary education as a key driver of what has become known as the knowledge economy (Grint & Nixon, 2015). In practice, this has involved the recruitment of large numbers of “non-traditional students” (e.g. Department for Innovation Universities and Skills (DfIUS), 2008; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1999; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007; Tertiary Education Advisory Commission, 2001) into tertiary education, within an increasingly corporatised culture (Kligyte, 2011) of accountability and measurable outcomes (Rowland, 2007, p. 10). As one means of helping institutions achieve these outcomes – particularly in terms of student retention and completion (Dunworth, 2010; Krause, 2001; Manalo, Fraser, &

Marshall, 2010) – TLAs have been employed to support non-traditional students in developing the academic language and skills required for successful tertiary studies (Baldauf, 1996).

The employment of TLAs can be regarded as a conservative response to widening participation to the extent that tertiary learning advice has occupied a marginal space (Crozier, 2007) where students perceived to be at risk of failure can be sent, thus, avoiding the need for fundamental reform of traditional teaching, learning and assessment practices within the academy proper (van der Meer, 2006). This patch-up approach to their perceived deficits has been increasingly problematic as non-traditional students have evolved into the new normal. TLAs have, in any case, from the outset, challenged the narrow, remedial institutional roles assigned to them, aspiring towards a developmental and integrated practice involving all students, not only those perceived as in need of remediation (Boylan, Bonham, & White, 1999; Chanock, 1995; Crookston, 1972; Manalo, 2007; Wingate, 2006). Indeed, rejection of the term “remedial” has become a defining mark of identity for emergent communities of TLA practice in New Zealand, Australia and the UK (M. Brown, 2010; Chanock, East, & Maxwell, 2004; Devlin, 1995; Lillis, 1999; Trembath, 2007).

In practical terms, TLAs have seen collaboration with academic staff as a means of achieving the desired transition from marginalised, remedial and selective practice towards an integrated, developmental and comprehensive one. Collaboration has been seen as an opportunity for TLAs to exert a formative influence on core teaching and learning practices within the curricula

of disciplinary programmes. This is consistent with a growing consensus that the teaching of learning and writing skills is more effective within discipline-specific contexts (e.g. Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 1999; Purser, Skillen, Deane, Donohue, & Peake, 2008; Skillen, Merten, Trivett, & Percy, 1998; Wingate, 2010). The disciplinary context is seen as a richer, more relevant environment for the teaching of the discourse practices specific to that discipline and its associated professions. Collaboration between academic writing and content specialists can help students become meaningfully engaged in critical reading and discussion (Rose, Rose, Farrington, & Page, 2008), and aware of discourse and epistemological features of their discipline (Lea & Street, 1998) within a supportive environment (Lillis, 2001) .

During the 1990s and 2000s, a number of models of tertiary learning advice were developed to conceptualise this process of “doing away with” generic learning advice, delivered outside the curriculum of specific disciplines (Wingate, 2006). One frequently-cited Australian model categorised TLA practices into distinct levels of integration: generic learning advice outside academic programmes was described as “adjunct”, while support provided within the curriculum was labelled either “integrated” (when provided by the TLA), or “embedded” (when provided by a faculty member responsible for the course) (J. Jones, Bonanno, & Scouller, 2002). This is a normative model based on working towards an ideal of disciplinary lecturers teaching academic writing alongside other disciplinary content and skills. This implies that TLAs will only have fully achieved their goal once they have handed over practices which were

previously their own responsibility to disciplinary teaching colleagues, in a continuous cycle of erasure of their direct involvement with students.

However, embedded development of learning and writing skills has proven difficult to achieve and sustain. One practical challenge has been the continuing volatility of the “accidental, discontinuous and heterogeneous” (Biggs, 2012, p. 113) tertiary environment. This has meant that collaborations have tended to be short-lived, with TLAs having constantly to rebuild professional relationships and the associated process of embedding the teaching of learning and writing skills within academic programmes. Moreover, the collaborative space into which TLAs have been trying to move is not an empty one. The responsibility for collaborating with academic staff to develop curricular, pedagogical and assessment practices has generally been institutionally assigned to other practitioners, variously known as academic advisors, academic developers, teaching consultants, etc (and referred to in this thesis as ADs). ADs have their own values and preoccupations, which are distinct from those of TLAs (Chanock, 2011a).

A lack of clarity regarding the scope of TLA practice within a volatile and contested tertiary environment has contributed to a perennial unease and confusion regarding TLA identity and expertise (e.g. Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008). Indeed, the term TLA itself is just one of a multiplicity of terms for the practice of (and practitioners in) supporting learners as they develop academic learning, numeracy and writing skills in tertiary institutions. The term “TLA” is used for the sake of consistency throughout this thesis, although the diversity in

titles, along with local variations in responsibilities, qualifications, contracts, institutional arrangements and practices, makes it difficult to say with any certainty who may or may not be regarded as a TLA (or equivalent).

The main reasons for adopting the term TLA here are that, within New Zealand, a national survey found that “tertiary learning advisor” was the most common job title (Cameron & Catt, 2008). The term has also been adopted by the national association of practitioners in this field (ATLAANZ: Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa / New Zealand). Overseas job titles for those working in student learning development include: academic language and literacy (ALL) advisors in Australia (Association for Academic Language and Learning, 2015); learning developers (LD) in England and Wales, (Association for Learning Development in Higher Education, n.d.); ASAs (Academic Skills Advisors) in Scotland (Godfrey & Richards, 2006); and learning specialists in Canada (Learning Specialists Association of Canada, 2015). Although there are significant national distinctions, particularly in relation to the boundaries of the role and the explicitness of its focus on academic literacies, the history of common participation in publications and conferences and the recent formation of a joint international umbrella group (ISAC) and annual symposium (ATLAANZ (Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand), 2016) are indications that practitioners do see themselves as forming a broad transnational community of practice.

1.2 The focus of the study

This study was based in a learning and teaching unit (LTU) at NZU between 2011 and 2014. The daily routine at the TLU revolved around one-to-one consultations with students from a wide range of different disciplines. While the TLAs were generally satisfied with the practice of consultations per se, there was persistent frustration with the constraints of the institutional context in which they took place. TLAs had limited knowledge of the practices and expectations within the disciplines in which the students were writing and could provide only limited formative advice because students tended to come in with complete drafts very near the deadlines for submission of assignments. Such frustrations are commonly reported in TLA literature and form a major theme of chapter 5.

As mentioned above, TLAs have attempted to address these limitations by seeking opportunities to practise in disciplinary contexts, in collaboration with faculty members. This was the case in the LTU towards 2010 when this project began to take shape (though disciplinary collaborations were still relatively uncommon and limited, in most cases, to single, one-off workshops). Having worked in the LTU for four years by this stage, I was no exception to this trend, having become increasingly conscious of the limitations of generic support, through both practice and reading. Therefore, I was receptive to an invitation to provide writing support for students of a four-year vocational degree programme, which, for reasons of confidentiality, I refer to in this thesis as the Bachelor of Applied Health (BAH).

This invitation (from the programme director) was initially limited to a one-off workshop for first-year students about the basics of academic writing in response to staff concerns about the numerous errors and weaknesses which were impacting on students' academic success (and future career prospects). However, the degree of staff engagement (several attending the student workshop, for instance) indicated that the BAH could become the basis for a more extensive collaborative project. In this way, the initial contact led to an investigation of teaching and learning practices within the first year of the programme, which comprised the reconnaissance stage in 2011 (chapter 6), followed by several collaborative initiatives through three annual cycles of action research between 2012 and 2014 (chapters 7 – 9).

1.3 Research methodology

I chose an action research framework for this practitioner project as I felt that this approach was consistent with the collaborative, emergent and pragmatic characteristics which I perceived in the project. Action research is a “recursive-reflective” process (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 165) based on cycles of problem identification and response, in which theory is inherently emergent (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Action research is commonly used by educational practitioners as its collaborative reflective practices and cycles of planning, action and evaluation are compatible with core practices within teaching and learning contexts (Beck, 2017; A. Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Tomal, 2010). In the current project, these cycles were aligned with the academic year (from February to October) so that each cycle could build on the

knowledge gained in the previous one. There is more detailed discussion of action research and its implementation in this project in chapter 2.

1.4 The evolving research question

The first step in an action research project is to develop actionable questions (Bradbury Huang et al., n.d.), which can function as the basis for practical learning relevant both to the specific context and to the wider community. This process of developing actionable questions took place during a reconnaissance stage in 2011 (described in chapter 6), which comprised observations of classroom instruction, analysis of marked student assignments, and interviews with BAH staff and students. Within an educational context, actionable questions typically focus on a gap between practitioners' principles and beliefs on the one hand and their practices on the other (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Because of the dynamic and emergent nature of action research, these initial questions are typically subject to modification as the project proceeds through the cycles. Indeed, it has been claimed that any action research project "begins with one pattern of practices and understandings in one situation and ends with another" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 182).

The initial research question which emerged during the reconnaissance stage of this project was relatively open:

What changes in perceptions and practice of tertiary learning advice

emerge from a collaborative approach to academic writing development between a tertiary learning advisor and staff and students within a disciplinary programme?

However, during the first action research cycle in 2012, it became clearer that the changes which were emerging from the project involved the development of an informal role of writing consultant for staff and students in the BAH programme. The purpose of this emergent role was twofold: to provide more effective support for student writing within this disciplinary context and, at the same time, address what I perceived as my marginalised status as a TLA within the institution. This clearer focus on acting as an informal writing consultant within the BAH programme is reflected in the final version of the research question:

Can a tertiary learning advisor, working as an informal writing consultant to staff and students of a disciplinary programme within a New Zealand university, contribute to positive changes in writing pedagogy and tertiary learning advice?

As explained above (and in further detail in the following chapters), embedding learning and writing development within a disciplinary context is nothing new in itself. However, embedding has generally been conceived in terms of formalised change of institutional status. In the Writing across the Curriculum / Writing in the Disciplines (WAC / WID) literature (discussed in chapter 4), embedding has been seen as the goal of practitioners with an explicit institutional responsibility

for writing development in a curricular context. Within the learning advice literature (discussed in chapter 5), embedding has been associated with a formal shift away from generic practice and towards a consultancy relationship with academic staff.

The original contribution of this study lies in its investigation of how far the widely-accepted benefits of embedded practice could be achieved without any formal institutional change in the role of the practitioner. Involvement in this collaborative project continued alongside generic TLA practice, in an institutional context in which TLAs had no official responsibility for writing development within any disciplinary context. Thus, the emergent writing consultant role was constructed through horizontal collaboration with BAH staff, rather than as part of institutional strategy. The value of informal, horizontal collaboration of this type is discussed in relation to organizational theory in chapter 3. This is another unique contribution of this study, since, despite a persistent focus on institutional change, explicit reference to organizational theory has been a significant gap in the academic writing and learning advice literature.

1.5 Data collection and analysis

The primary source of data for the project was a series of interviews and focus groups conducted with a range of stakeholders over a period of just over three years, supplemented by a reflective journal. These texts were analysed qualitatively on an ongoing basis, as codes were first identified and then grouped into themes relevant to the evolving research question. This form of

analysis has much in common with the constructivist form of grounded theory, although in this study, sampling of interviewees was governed more by issues of relevance and representativeness than by the requirements of a developing theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006).

The key quality criterion for this interpretation of evidence was the action research concept of “actionable knowledge” – expressed in terms of “a credible account of deepened praxis” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 86). Actionable knowledge is intended to be meaningful within its setting and also capable of contributing to knowledge and practice in the broader community (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Zuber-Skerrit, 2000; Herr & Anderson, 2005). This is discussed in more depth in chapter 2.

1.6 Thesis Organisation

Chapter 2 comprises a summary of the research methodology, sources of evidence and methods of interpretation used in this study. It is more common for a methodology chapter to follow the literature review in a thesis, but the methodology chapter has been included earlier in this study in order to introduce the collection and analysis of data from interviews with NZU staff and TLAs from around the country, which form part of the context of this study. This data is then integrated into the reviews of relevant literature which follow, in order to supplement the limited body of published research within a New Zealand context.

Chapter 3 discusses the sociocultural and institutional context of the study in the light of organisational theory and literature about tertiary education.

Chapter 4 is a critical summary of issues in and approaches to tertiary writing, drawing upon the literature on Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID).

Chapter 5 traces the emergence of the community of practice of tertiary learning advisors in New Zealand, with a focus on persistent tensions in TLA practice between disciplinary and generic approaches and between a remedial or developmental framing. It incorporates data from interviews with tertiary learning advisors from across New Zealand.

Chapter 6 describes the reconnaissance stage of the project, consisting of initial data gathering, identification of issues which emerged and proposals for collaborative actions to address these issues.

Chapter 7 is the first of three chapters presenting the findings of the project. It summarises the data on which these findings are based and describes and evaluates two initiatives during the first year of the project.

Chapter 8 is the second of three chapters presenting the findings of the project. It describes and evaluates the course-specific workshops which were the core initiatives in the project.

Chapter 9 is the last of three chapters presenting the findings of the project. It describes and evaluates the one-to-one support provided for BAH students and the workshops and individualised support provided for BAH staff during the project.

Chapter 10 is a discussion of the findings of the project in the light of themes arising from the literature reviewed in chapters 3 to 5.

Chapter 11 comprises a conclusion in which the themes which emerged during the previous chapters are summarised and recommendations are provided for further research.

Chapter 2: Methods

2.1 Introduction

As mentioned in chapter 1, this study took place within an action research framework and consisted of a reconnaissance phase in 2011 and three annual cycles from 2012 to 2014. The study fits most closely the first-person, or self-study, form of action research, since the investigation involved a practitioner seeking an enhanced understanding of practice (Dinkelman, 2003) and a realignment of practice with educational values (McNiff, 1988; Whitehead, 1989). The use of first-person action research to achieve this goal has been an increasingly common option for educational practitioners (e.g. A. Casey, 2012; Feekery, 2013; Roche, 2011; Vozzo, 2011), typically, as in the current study, conducted with a socioconstructivist paradigm. This paradigm incorporates a relativistic ontology (i.e., the acceptance of multiple interpretations of social experience), a subjective epistemology (i.e., a personal construction of interpretations) and naturalistic methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This chapter presents an explanation of the theory and principles which informed the research method and a summary of its implementation.

2.2 Action research methodology

Action research is characterised by “scale, diversity and complexity” (Cook, Cole, McTaggart, & Rauch, 2009, p. 128) which derive from its localised,

pragmatic character and wide range of influences. These include methodologies for practical problem solving, such as organisational change management and humanistic therapy, and social movements with emancipatory goals, such as labour organisations, anti-colonial liberation movements and feminism (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Eikeland, 2006; P. Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Both practical and emancipatory orientations can be discerned in work of the originators of action research, John Collier and Kurt Lewin, in the late 1930s and 1940s (Pasmore, 2001; Stringer, 2004). Their intention, from the outset, was to bring about positive social change, particularly for marginalised or disempowered communities, through a more engaged and collaborative researcher-participant relationship in which the traditional boundaries between research and practice were eliminated (Bargal, 2006; Neilsen, 2006).

The merging of theory and practice is seen in the goals which Lewin set for action research: first, to advance knowledge; second, to improve a concrete situation; and third, to improve behavioural science methodology (Bargal, 2006). These goals show the influence of early 20th century pragmatism, both in the form of the scientific tradition of Charles Sanders Peirce (Adelman, 1993) and the educational innovations of John Dewey, in which practitioners were encouraged to research their own practices (A. Burns, 2005; Helskog, 2013). Dewey's influence is also seen in Lewin's cyclical model of action research, consisting of collaborative analysis, fact-finding, planning, intervention and evaluation (A. Burns, 2005; Kemmis, 1980).

This model owes much to Dewey's conception of reflective thinking as progressing in a cyclical fashion from suggestion, through intellectualisation, hypothesizing and reasoning, towards testing hypotheses in action (Pasmore, 2001). Reflective thinking by practitioners on issues within their own practice has been the primary focus of action research within educational contexts, following the work of Stenhouse, Elliot, Kemmis and McTaggart in the 1970s and 1980s (McAteer, 2013). The continuing influence of pragmatism within action research can be seen in the more recent formulation of its primary goal as "actionable knowledge": knowledge which emerges from reflection on action and is shared with the aim of stimulating further practical change (P. Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This formulation expresses the symbiotic relationship between knowing and doing in action research, as "practice is influenced by and influences values (what we value) and logics (how we think)" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009, p. 9). It is also in line with Elliot's claim that "theories are not validated independently and then applied to practice. They are validated through practice" (1991, p. 1). Given the complex nature of social change, theorising from practice in contemporary action research may draw upon a range of theoretical perspectives, including systems thinking and complexity theory (D. Burns, 2015; Lichtenstein, 2015; Midgley, 2015; Stephens, 2015).

Lewin's goals and methods underlie Kemmis and McTaggart's widely-cited definition of action research: "a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are

carried out” (1990, p. 5). While it is commonly acknowledged that there is no single agreed definition of action research (e.g. Hammond, 2013), this definition incorporates three core elements: education, collaboration, and action (Gibson, 2004). This implies an inseparability of the action and the research activity, “such that the focus of inquiry arises out of, and its results feed back into, the activity concerned” (Hammersley, 2004, p. 165).

Action research projects need to be carefully managed so that the action and research develop in tandem and the project as a whole contributes both to knowledge and social change (Walters, 2013). This inseparability challenges the traditionally distinct roles of participant and researcher. As Herr and Anderson (2005, pp. 3-4) explain, action research can only be done “*by* or *with* insiders, but never *to* or *on* them [original emphasis]”. It is more common in action research, therefore, to refer to a unitary role of participant-researcher. The change which is the focus of the project may be in the situation, within the participant-researcher(s), or in both.

Knowledge can emerge at any point during an action research project, typically in the form of “transformational understandings” or “aha” moments (Stringer, 2004, p. 15). These transformational understandings are the basis of theory within action research, which is therefore inherently “emergent” (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006, p. 12), as participant-researchers ‘build their plane while flying it’ (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In other words, theory remains, in Geertz’s terms, ‘experience-near’ (1983, as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 53) in an “inextricable” relationship (McAteer, 2013, p. 13). Theory is not applied to

knowledge, but, rather, practice is theorised in context through reflection (McAteer, 2013). It is through this action-reflection dialectic that “knowledge is created and ... may lead to new forms of action” (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001, p. 76). Thus, action researchers are urged to keep in mind the twin questions: “Where’s the action in your research? Where is the research in your action?” (Bradbury Huang, 2010, p. 108): a formulation in keeping with Lewin’s own declaration that “there is nothing so practical as a good theory” (1951, p. 169).

Actionable knowledge, which is developed through participation in an iterative process, is a hallmark of all forms of action research. Yet, its pragmatic and democratic ethos has meant a proliferation of different varieties (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Somekh & Zeichner, 2009). In first-person action research, such as living theory (Whitehead, 2017) and developmental action inquiry (Marshall, 2001), a single practitioner investigates and seeks to improve his or her own practice, while second-person action research, such as co-operative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2001), focuses on pairings or teams of participant-researchers. These two forms of action research can also be classified as insider research, since they typically involved individuals or groups investigating their own practices (Coghlan & Shani, 2015). Third-person action research, such as action science (Argyris, 2003), appreciative inquiry (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001) and participatory action research (PAR) (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009), typically involves a researcher facilitating community or organisational development. However, regardless of the narrowness of the original focus, it has been argued that critical action research expands through

reflective practice towards broader, emancipatory goals (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Grundy, 1982).

This tendency towards broader and more critical framing of initial problems is driven by a search for congruence between values and practices in a unified praxis (Eikeland, 2015; Ledwith, 2017) which underlies all forms of action research. In action science, (a third-person approach) for instance, congruence takes the form of an alignment between espoused theories (which members of an organisation consciously hold) and theories in action (which describe the principles on which they actually behave) (Argyris, 2003). In co-operative inquiry (a second-person approach), a key aim is to achieve congruence between different ways of knowing and acting, “grounded in our experience, expressed through our stories and images, understood through theories which make sense to us, and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives” (Heron & Reason, 2001, p. 184). And in living theory (a first-person approach), striving for congruence is seen as the driving force of the project (Whitehead, 1989), resulting in the cultivation of practical virtues (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), or “living practices” (McNiff, 2015, p. 1).

This focus on seeking congruence between values and practices through critical action and reflection was the main reason for choosing action research as the framework for the current study. The study aimed at achieving greater congruence between TLA values (i.e., developmental and integrated) and practices (i.e., largely remedial and marginalised). The investigation therefore featured the twin (and inseparable) goals of action research: to seek to improve

practices and understanding of those practices within a social context (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1987; McAteer, 2013). In terms of approaches to action research, this study is most strongly-aligned with a first-person approach, since it involved a practitioner identifying an actionable question and then initiating and documenting a change process. There were also elements of co-operative enquiry, particularly as colleagues became involved in initiating and reflecting on their own change initiatives. And by framing the project themes within a broader institutional critique, informed by organisational theory, this study was also consistent with the shift away from narrow, technical preoccupations which have been common in practitioner research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

2.3 The socioconstructivist / interpretivist paradigm

In common with most first-person action research projects, evidence was gathered and analysed within a socioconstructivist / interpretivist paradigm. A paradigm is understood as a set of beliefs about the nature of knowledge (ontology), the relationship between the knower and the known (epistemology) and ways of constructing knowledge from experience (methodology) (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In the positivist paradigm, scientific knowledge is considered to be that which is obtained through objective means “from sense data that can be directly experienced and verified between independent observers” (Susman & Evered, 1978, p. 583). The transference of such methods from the natural to the social sciences rests on the assumption that “there is a method for studying

the social world that is value free, and that explanations of a causal nature can be provided” (Mertens, 2005, p. 8).

The socioconstructivist / interpretivist paradigm is based on the contrasting assumption that “reality is socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, p. 12) and that “facts flow from values; they are not separate from values” (Charmaz, 2004, p. 986). Hence, data is regarded as consisting of “meanings and interpretations” (Lazaraton, 1995, p. 105). The key characteristics of this paradigm are: “the socially-constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 8). Methods for gathering and analysing evidence therefore prioritise participants’ views of phenomena being studied, while theory is typically generated inductively throughout the research project, as questions evolve (Creswell, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2015). In order to address multiple perspectives on complex social interactions, a “bricolage” (Levi-Strauss, 1966) of different forms of qualitative evidence (journals, interviews, focus groups etc) is typically gathered (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) – as was the case in the current study.

Although some handbooks (e.g. Glanz, 2014) and published studies (e.g. Campbell & Filimon, 2018) suggest that action research may be conducted within a positivist paradigm, it is more common to find a rejection of the assumptions of positivism within the literature (Coleman, 2015). For Brydon-Miller and Maguire, it is no more than a ‘mask’ of “feigned neutrality and objectivity”, which supports the status quo of power and privilege (2009, p. 85)

and for Fals Borda, “a fetish-like idea” (2001, p. 28), while Gustavsen dismisses the earlier use of positivist methodology in action research as no more than “raids into reality performed to verify grand theory” (2001, p. 24). Associations with “schizophrenia” (Popkin, 1979, as cited in Ludema et al., 2001, p. 198), “crippling mutilations” (Whitehead, 1989) and “fragmentation and alienation” (McNiff, 2002, p. 1) underline the vehemence with which positivism has been rejected as a paradigm for action research.

This project, therefore, follows the mainstream of action research in adopting a socioconstructivist / interpretivist perspective to “make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). It is based on a subjectivist ontology that holds that “social reality is not something that exists and can be known independently of the knower. Rather, it is a subjective reality constructed and sustained through the meanings and actions of individuals” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 83). As McNiff and Whitehead (2009, p. 10) point out, this implies a shift from e-theories (external) characteristic of positivist research to i-theories (internal), based on the “emic” (Pike, 1954) understandings of members of a particular culture. Given that these understandings are constructed within “dynamic and complex” social contexts (Stringer, 2004, p. 55), and “embodied in language and common sense” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 121), it is a goal of action research to uncover and challenge any underlying power relations which have shaped or constrained them (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001).

The socioconstructivist / interpretivist paradigm has been widely adopted across the social sciences. However, one feature of action research which differs from some other interpretivist methods, such as ethnology, is its commitment to intervene in the situation during the research project itself. As Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 5) point out, while “traditional social science frowns on intervention, action research requires it”. Even where research methods are borrowed from qualitative research traditions, they may be used differently by participant-researchers in the context of active engagement in a dynamic situation. Interviews, for instance, are not only a way of building knowledge about the way things are, but of stimulating awareness and motivation to change them (Stringer, 2004, p. 64).

The socioconstructivist / interpretivist paradigm was followed in this project, not only because it is common within action research, but because the research question focused on attitudes and perceptions which are clearly socially-constructed phenomena. Moreover, as a piece of practitioner research, the study also featured a closely-intertwined relationship between the researcher and the object of research and took place within the situational constraints of generic TLA practice; these characteristics of focus, relationship and context are typical of research within this paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). At the same time, the action research framework for the project was reflected in the use of interviews not only for gathering data, but for reflecting on and planning collaborative actions.

2.4 Data collection

Ethical approval was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee for data-gathering during the three years of the project. Major ethical issues which needed to be addressed were informed consent and freedom from duress, given, in particular, the power-relationship of the researcher and the student participants from the BAH programme. In order to avoid any undue pressure to participate, students were invited outside class time and given several days to consider and return their consent forms. The interviews and focus groups were also conducted in a conversational tone to establish an informal atmosphere which was conducive for participant voices to be heard (Burgess, 1984; Kvale, 1996). The use of prompts during the focus groups performed a similar function by allowing students to comment on relevant themes with minimal pressure or direction (as discussed further below).

Interview data has long been the mainstay of data collection in the social sciences, featuring, it has been estimated, in nine out of ten research studies (Tracy, 2013). Interviews played a large role in the current project too: a total of 88 interviews with staff and students were conducted across the three years. These semi-structured interviews ranged from 25 to 75 minutes in duration, but most were between 40 and 50 minutes long. Fifty-six of these interviews were with participants from outside the BAH programme, who were members of relevant institutional and professional communities who could act as informants regarding TLA practices (33 with NZU staff and 23 with TLAs from a range of tertiary institutions in New Zealand). These participants were selected through

purposive sampling, which is commonly used in action research (Stringer, 2004). The aim was not so much to collect a representative sample of views on the role of tertiary learning advisors, as to gather a wide range of perspectives from relevant informants on aspects of the research question (i.e., writing pedagogy, disciplinary writing and TLA practices). The roles and institutional positioning of the NZU staff who were interviewed are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: *Institutional positioning of NZU interviewees (excluding BAH)*

NZU Sector	Total	Disciplinary Area
University academic leadership positions (e.g. pro-vice chancellors, heads of teaching and learning, etc)	6	
Student services and academic support staff (e.g. student success manager, academic developer, foundation programme teacher, etc)	12	
Disciplinary teaching staff from programmes other than the BAH	14	8 (Humanities, Social Sciences, Health) 5 (Business) 1 (Natural Sciences)

Note: One staff member from the business school was interviewed twice.

Where quotations or extracts are included in this thesis, they are numbered (in superscript) with reference to the list of participants provided as Appendix A. Although the list contains mainly pseudonyms or general indications of roles,

these numbers are intended to provide some contextual information and to allow the reader to trace multiple quotations from a single participant.

The other 32 interviews were with academic teaching staff and students in the BAH programme. These comprised 21 semi-structured interviews with 10 different teaching staff and 11 interviews with 13 students (including two paired interviews). Again, the sample was not representative of the staff and student body of the BAH programme in general, since participation was voluntary. Interviews were structured around open questions, such as “What topics, strategies, guidance have you used to work on your writing?” in order to collect evidence relevant to the research question while allowing participants to choose particular issues and experiences of interest to them.

The interviews with BAH staff are summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2: *Interviews (I) with BAH staff*

	2012	2013	2014
Maria	11	11	1
Stacey			1
Anne	11	11	1
Paula			1
Brenda			1
Diana			1
Theresa			1
Christine			1
Laura			1

This shows how data gathering initially focused on the collaborations with Anne and Maria (both of whom were interviewed five times in total), but incorporated interviews with several other BAH staff in the last year of the project, following professional development sessions which I had given during BAH staff meetings. Further details of these interviews and the staff involved are provided in chapters 6 to 9. Taken as a whole, the data represents views of most of the full and part time staff involved in teaching on the BAH programme.

The data gathered from students followed a similar pattern of expansion and diversification from an initially narrow base, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: *BAH student focus groups (F) and interviewees (I)*

	2012	2013	2014
Year 1 students	F F	F F	F I I
Year 2 students		F	F
Year 3 students		I I	
Year 4 students		I I I I	I I I I I

Data-gathering involved first-year students throughout the project, and comprised regular end-of-year focus groups, supplemented by mid-year focus groups in 2012 and 2013 and interviews with two students who could not attend the focus group in 2014. Focus groups were held with second-year students in 2013 and 2014, as the project broadened to include reflective writing

workshops. Because of their diverse schedules, it was easier to arrange individual or paired interviews with third and fourth year students, with whom I had begun to engage from 2013 onwards. In the rest of this thesis, students are referred to by pseudonyms and year level (e.g. Selene Y4), as listed in Appendix A, while focus groups are referred to by year of recording, year level within the four-year programme, and semester of recording (e.g. 2012 Y1 S2).

It is a truism of qualitative research that, as Mann (2016, p. 149) puts it, “interview talk is inevitably a co-construction between the interviewer and interviewee”. Interview data is not to be taken as an objective report of events, but, rather as stories of experience which are shaped by the emergent relationship between participants and the interviewer and, in particular, by the prompts and responses provided by the interviewer. There is, therefore, an inherent risk that participant stories might be excessively influenced by the interviewer, particularly in the context of unequal power relationships, which were a feature of my interviews with BAH students. Although the impact of the interviewer on participant stories cannot be eliminated, a number of strategies have been recommended to mitigate its effect and allow the participants a degree of discourse control. A non-judgemental stance (S. J. Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015) and the acceptance and encouragement of divergent responses (Tracy, 2013) have been seen as two essential elements of interviewer stance in these circumstances.

During the interviews, I was careful to try to maintain a non-judgemental stance in relation to writing practices. I did this by asking open questions, such as *If*

*someone asked you how to write in applied health, what would you tell them? At times, I also let students know that there were a number of valid opinions on an issue, in order to create a safe space for them to express their own. For instance, in introducing the topic of reflective writing in my interview with Harriet (a fourth-year student), I said *there's a range of feelings about how useful it is.* When asking a follow-up question, for clarification, I took care first to acknowledge the student's response, and to maintain the openness of the question. A typical example, from the interview with another fourth-year student, Marion, was *That's interesting. Why do you think you might have been more aware this time around?**

One indication that the students were not overly constrained by my role or prompts was that they expressed strong personal opinions which were not explicitly shaped by the way in which the question was framed. For instance, in response to an open question about what she had learnt about writing in applied health, a fourth-year student, Selene, responded, with a highly-critical opinion about assessment practices in the programme:

I have found that the writing requirements are quite subjective across the different lecturers, so in some of my writing, I'll get really good feedback and then I can submit almost the same kind of writing and be told that it's terrible. So I found that quite confusing about applied health. Because I've never been able to really work out exactly what they want, generally.

One type of response which was (predictably) missing from the interviews with students, however, was any criticism of my role or the services I provided for them. This was not only because I was conducting the interviews myself, but also because the interviewees were a self-selecting sample of students who volunteered to participate, possibly on the basis of satisfaction with the service provided. As such, the data from those students who participated in interviews (and focus groups) cannot be generalised to the BAH students as a whole, since it is highly likely that there were students with less positive experiences of or opinions about writing support whose voices were unheard.

Focus groups, rather than individual interviews, were the preferred means of eliciting data from BAH students in their first and second years of study. A focus group consists of “individuals who discuss a particular topic under the direction of a moderator who promotes interaction and ensures that the discussion remains on the topic of interest” (Morgan, Fellows, & Guevara, 2008, p. 31). From a practical point of view, focus groups were convenient for first and second year students, as they could be arranged for very specific times at the end of semesters when most of these students had come together and were free of study or exam concerns (as mentioned above, for BAH students in their third and fourth years, focus groups were less convenient, as their schedules were more varied). Focus groups are especially suitable for eliciting data from individuals who have shared experiences (Mann, 2016), as was the case with the closely-knit cohorts of BAH students in this study. The format tends to reduce inhibition and facilitate “insightful self-disclosure” as individual group members “learn from, and support, each other” (Tracy, 2013, p. 187).

One particularly important reason for choosing focus groups for this particular project was their potential to mitigate the influence of a researcher's position of authority over participants (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Within the focus group format, the meanings expressed tend to be socially-constructed through the interactions within the group (Ho, 2006; Li & Farrell, 2013), rather than heavily influenced by the interviewer's prompts. As these meanings "emerge from the participants' interests" in the context of group interaction, they may be considered as valid expressions of the perceptions of group members (Berg & Lune, 2017, p. 99).

Seven focus groups were conducted with BAH students during their first and second years of study, with participant numbers ranging from four to seven. This size has been seen as suitable for eliciting a depth of responses in relation to complex issues (though, at the potential cost of diversity of viewpoints) (Berg & Lune, 2017; Kreuger & Casey, 2000). During the focus groups, participants were provided with open-ended questions (similar to those in the interviews) – either printed on handouts or cue cards or written up on a whiteboard – in order to allow the interaction to develop its own momentum with minimal prompting, while keeping the discussion within the parameters of the topic, as recommended by several authors (e.g. G. Anderson, 1990; Bryman, 2008). This frequently resulted in students commenting on each other's contributions – either reiterating their opinions or developing them – creating what has been referred to as "complementary interaction" (Kitzinger, 1994) or "resonance" (Berg & Lune, 2017) among the group in relation to the themes under

discussion. The predominance of this form of discourse was evidence of the effectiveness of the focus group format in allowing for the expression of commonalities in these first-year BAH students' experiences and perceptions.

There were many examples in the focus group data of how the use of open prompts and minimal intervention allowed themes to emerge from interaction among the students, rather than being imposed upon them by the interviewer. For the focus group with first-year students at the end of 2012, for instance, I had written some topics for discussion on the whiteboard and simply invited them to talk about each one. The first topic was "differences in writing during the course (compared to your expectations)". This led to an animated sharing of experiences of what participants perceived as conflicting messages about writing expectations from the different BAH staff, and how they would be "told off" by one staff member for doing something that another had told them to do. In other words, students paid little attention to the part of the prompt which referred to "expectations", focusing instead on the issue of "differences" and linking that to their common sense of grievance regarding assessment which became a dominant theme within this particular focus group. This theme can be seen, therefore, as part of the group's collectively-constructed story of their shared experiences, rather than one which was co-constructed through interaction with a dominant research partner. After all, the theme was barely, if at all, present in the prompt.

Another example of the way in which meanings emerged from student interaction during focus groups, relatively independently of the direction of the

interviewer, was in the spontaneous expressions of admiration for their lecturer, Anne, by the first-year students at the end of 2013. In this case, the prompt was my observation that their positive experience of the assignment contrasted with the perceptions of students in previous years. My prompt made no mention of Anne, as the lecturer of the course, nor any reference to her support, but the first student response was *I think we got a lot of support from the lecturer*. Students then built on this theme, affirming and building on each other's responses:

She seems very personally invested in the paper.

She does.

Yeah.

Which is really good and really

I find it's motivating

Inspiring

She's inspiring

She is

Yeah

Like her passion for Applied Health makes you

Yeah

Yeah

Makes you want to go and change someone's life as well

Yeah

Like she obviously is so keen to

It was clear that, as the convenor of the group and provider of only a general prompt, I played a minimal role in the development of this theme.

Another form of data collection in which my role was minimised was verbal reports, which three of the BAH staff involved in the collaborative project (Maria,

Anne, Stacey) agreed to record. They were asked to select between three and five scripts (for which the students in question had already given informed consent), and to record their thoughts as they marked. This form of verbal report is known as “think aloud” (Bowles, 2010) and has previously been used to investigate the beliefs and practices of tutors marking tertiary assignments at a New Zealand university (J. Ryan & Gass, 2013) (though in that study, the think-aloud sessions took place in the presence of the researcher). As noted by Ryan and Gass, the texts produced by the think-aloud method cannot be taken as straightforward representations of cognitive processes during routine activity; they are, rather, a rich source of participant interpretations of practice and a form of data that is highly consistent with the constructivist paradigm within which the current study was framed.

One of the staff (Anne) in fact reconstructed the experience of marking the courses a week or so after she had marked them. In doing so, she produced another form of verbal report, known as “stimulated recall”, in which cues are provided to allow participants to verbalise an experience retrospectively – although not so long afterwards that the memory will decay (Gass & Mackey, 2000). A key to successful stimulated recall is that participants avoid commenting on the experience from a present perspective (Field & Burton, 2013), something which Anne managed to do by using the student text as a stimulus to reimagine (rather than comment upon) her experience of marking it.

Verbal reports were used in order to collect data relevant to the first part of the research question, which focuses on writing pedagogy in a disciplinary

programme. A secondary purpose, consistent with the action research ethos of the study, was to stimulate the staff members to reflect critically upon these practices and attitudes in the light of the changes which were occurring during the collaborative project. However, the unfamiliarity of the technique (as compared to, for instance, an interview) made it difficult for participants to engage. Both participants who completed the verbal reports commented on how challenging it had been; the third participant tried, but did not complete and submit any recordings.

Two additional forms of data collected during the reconnaissance phase were transcripts of segments of observed BAH lectures and sets of marked student assignments. The lecture transcripts were based on recordings I made during observations of brief segments of two classes during a course which was part of the second semester of the first-year BAH programme. The segments were chosen for recording because the BAH staff member (Sarah) used these slots – at the end of one lecture and the beginning of the next – to explain her expectations of a written assignment. This assignment was particularly relevant to this study as it was the first one for which students were required to collect and analyse data from an applied health context. These observations were expected to provide evidence of what aspects of assessed writing and tutor expectations were salient during instruction. The findings are discussed in section 6.3.2 below.

More evidence of the values and practices of BAH staff emerged from the analysis of tutors' comments on marked first-year student assignment scripts.

These assignments constituted the main assessed written work for three of the four specifically BAH courses during the first year of the programme (the other courses were in related disciplines and had no extended written assessment, except for one strongly-scaffolded laboratory report for Psychology). Altogether, 79 assignments were collected. These were written by most of the first-year BAH cohort (n=17) and represented the full range of grade levels. Tutors' comments were counted and sorted into common themes (such as objectivity, use of evidence and conciseness). The comments were made by the three BAH staff who taught the courses (Sarah, Maria and Stacey) – no other staff were involved in marking. The three staff were also interviewed about their perceptions of the value of BAH writing, the performance of students, and what role (if any) they saw for tertiary learning advisors. Common themes were identified in the analysis of comments on assignments and interviews and these form the basis of the findings discussed in sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.4 of the reconnaissance chapter.

Other data sources included the university webpage and learning management system, which were used to obtain information about assessed writing in the BAH programme. This secondary data was the basis for the genre analysis, which comprises 6.3.1 below. The collection of data from different stakeholders and through different channels is seen as enhancing the credibility of interpretation of qualitative data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and is consistent with the practice of methodological pluralism within action research (Midgley, 2015; Rowell, Riel, & Polush, 2017; Whitehead, 2017).

Alongside these forms of qualitative data obtained through interactions with staff and students, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the project. This journal comprised a range of entries, including comments on events, research activities, and emergent theoretical understanding, as is typical in the genre (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2001). During the initial stages of the project, up until the end of the reconnaissance (October 2010 to December 2011), I made 61 journal entries totalling 62,269 words – or just over 1000 words each on average – though word counts varied considerably from 50 (August 17, 2011) to 3125 (June 10, 2011). And during the three action research cycles which comprised the main study (January 2012 – December 2014), I made a further 76 entries, totalling 69,156 words. As in the reconnaissance, journal entries varied considerably in length and were prompted by a range of activities from professional practice (e.g. workshops and consultations) and research activities (e.g. readings and interviews) during the project. The entries in the last year of the project accounted for nearly half of the total word length (31,281), as I processed the greater volume and diversity of data from interviews, focus groups and readings in order to address the research question.

2.5 Data analysis

At the end of the project, I reanalysed the entries from the whole journal (including the reconnaissance period) thematically in relation to the parallel concerns of this study, writing pedagogy and TLA practice, following the procedures described below. This reflexive and iterative analysis of the journals was a critical element in the overall aim, consistent with its action research

ethos, of achieving a more congruent praxis (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Hammond, 2013; Postholm & Skrøvset, 2013). This consisted of reading and re-reading texts to identify themes which were relevant to the research question (Peräkylä, 2005). It has been argued that within a constructivist / interpretivist framework the whole process of interpretation is fundamentally idiosyncratic (Stern, 2007) or artful and imaginative (Wells, 1995), with a need to balance criticality and creativity (Thornberg, 2012). The resulting “flip-flop between data and conceptualisation” (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2002, p. 347) which characterised the interpretation of evidence from interviews, focus groups, verbal reports and the reflective journal has much in common with grounded theory.

For instance, I first highlighted key phrases and wrote memos alongside the interview transcripts (as in Figure 1 below) as I reflected on the ideas expressed and how they related to the evolving research question.

Memos	Transcript
<p>Enjoyment of ‘mot juste’ in TLA feedback – shared with whole family</p>	<p>But you still found it useful looking at those phrases? Absolutely. Cool. Fantastic. My favourite comment from you, and I had to tell the whole family this was, [laughs] I was using the phrase, ‘Jones et al demonstrated that ..’ and you said, ‘demonstrated’ is a bit dramatic, use ‘found’ usually. And I loved that, because I can get a bit dramatic. In the first year I was writing as if I was going to save the world with my examples. So I loved that.</p>
<p>Student has compiled her own writing portfolio. Would this be useful as a resource for students – a writing portfolio, with a checklist? – as Marion has done?</p>	<p>Anyway, is there anything else you want to add? [pointing to portfolio]. I’m very impressed with this. Is it just about writing? It started off with portfolio writing. But then I decided to include all the writing. So I’ve got my reflective stuff in there and examples of marked stuff.</p>

Figure 1: Extract from transcript of interview with a BAH student

When I had collected a number of transcripts from a specific group of participants (e.g. BAH staff), I went through them methodically, identifying and labelling themes of relevance to the research question (as shown in Figure 2).

Memos	Transcript
Self-critical regarding pedagogical and assessment practices	<p>If I don't know something or if I realise that's a whole flaw in the rubric or in what I'm teaching, then I have the humility to acknowledge that. And so that has developed with time.</p> <p><i>Do you see yourself as having a role in teaching students how to write within applied health and/or in general? Because that's an issue.</i></p> <p>It is.</p> <p><i>And you've got plenty of other things to do and one might expect that the students have been through school, and there are other people in this place whose job it is to help students with their writing.</i></p>
Accepting role of professional writing teacher	<p>Yes. And I do find it's a really hard designation of roles.</p> <p>Because I definitely didn't enter into being a professor of applied health anticipating I'd have to teach students how to write. Of course you don't even enter into a PhD thinking that you're going to have to know how to teach. So, again, there is this steep learning curve entering into academic work so that there's a lot of learning on the job. So I have become a bit more comfortable in providing some basic writing concepts.</p>

Figure 2: Extract from the transcript of an interview with a BAH staff member

The next step was to assign these codes to one or more of an emerging set of categories (as shown in Figure 3), by comparing new concepts to see if they

fitted in the same category (which sometimes needed revising) or whether a new category needed to be created (Bryman, 2008; Hood, 2007).

Category E: Professional and pedagogical aspects of applied health practice

no.	code
1	Influence of own experience
2	Blend of professional and academic career
3	Sense of mission
4	Unease with academic role: practice focus
5	Accepting role of professional writing teacher
6	Self-critical regarding pedagogical and assessment practices
7	Skills teacher rather than content
8	Diversity and change in pedagogy
9	Lacking big picture knowledge (of uni, course, services)
10	Openness to external expertise
11	Practitioners as helpers
12	Criticism of pedagogical culture within the BAH

Figure 3: Extract from summary of themes from interviews with BAH staff

This approach to analysing and interpreting data was informed by the constructivist form of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), in which memo writing is an especially significant practice as a form of reflexivity, as researchers seek to enhance their critical awareness of their own underlying values. I followed this practice most intensively at the beginning of the last action research cycle in 2014 through re-reading and writing extensive reflective summaries of the interview transcripts I had gathered so far. The purpose of this reflective process was to develop a situated understanding of perceptions of writing pedagogy and

TLA practice within the disciplinary context of the BAH, which informed the analysis presented in chapters 8 and 9.

However, there are two related aspects in which data collection and analysis in this study differed from standard approaches to grounded theory (e.g. Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Firstly, participant selection was guided by considerations of relevance to the research question rather than strictly theoretical sampling, in which researchers look for respondents to fit emergent categories (Hood, 2007; Skeat & Perry, 2008; Stern, 2007). Secondly, the end to data collection was (as in most action research) based on pragmatic, not theoretical, considerations. It was, to a large degree, predetermined by the cycles of actions and research based on the academic year. In grounded theory, on the other hand, data collection is supposed to continue until (and not beyond) theoretical saturation, which is the point at which “gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113). The absence of theoretical sampling means that the method of analysis and interpretation followed in this study is more fully consistent with what Maxwell (2013) terms “general inductive qualitative method” than with grounded theory.

2.6 Quality criteria

Academic research conducted within a positivist paradigm has been principally evaluated according to the criteria of validity and reliability. This involves strict control of variables and care to avoid contamination of the data, so that “results

relate to the variables in the hypothesis” (Tomal, 2010, p. 92). Within research conducted from a socioconstructivist / interpretivist perspective, however, a number of alternative criteria have been developed to avoid evaluating “one paradigm using the standards of the other” (Bradbury Huang, 2010, p. 104). The most influential of these criteria have been Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which are forms of social validation (Habermas, 1974).

Credibility is considered to be the foundational criterion for qualitative research and relates to the adequacy of the data from the field. This should involve different forms of evidence, gathered in different ways from different participants. Credibility can also be enhanced by evidence of prolonged engagement (Stringer, 2004) and, within an action research framework, is related to the degree to which the project “proceeds from a praxis of participation [and] is guided by practitioners’ concerns for practicality” (Bradbury Huang, 2010, p. 99). The credibility of the current study is, thus, based on evidence of a developing and deepening engagement in collaborative practice through the three years of the project and the amount, relevance and variety of relevant data collected (as described in the previous section). The dependability and confirmability rest on the clarity of the accounts provided here and in the findings chapters which follow.

Transferability means that understanding gained in relation to one situation is presented in such a way as to be useful to someone facing similar challenges in another situation. In educational research, this means that “readers can decide

for themselves” whether and how they apply the findings to their own context (J. D. Brown, 2013, p. 40). To facilitate transferability, qualitative researchers need to find a balance between the particularity of the situation they are investigating and the applicability to other contexts of the findings which emerge (Stake, 2003). Within action research, transferability is particularly important, given its change agenda. It is sometimes reformulated as actionability – i.e., the degree to which the project “helps to build capacity for ongoing change efforts” (Bradbury Huang, 2010, p. 99) or “catalytic validity” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, pp. 55-57) to indicate its dynamic quality. As Kemmis (1991, p. 68) points out, “the truth, rightness and appropriateness of the views and decisions of a participant group in an educational setting cannot be tested other than in action”. Transferability of the current study derives from the relevance of its outcomes to the TLA community, particularly the potential for achieving effective writing development support within constraints which are common within the field, but not typically addressed in extant literature.

2.7 Conclusion

The research framework, paradigm and methods were chosen in order to support a credible and evidence-based response to the research question. Action research was seen as an appropriate framework to support the goal of achieving positive change in attitudes towards and practices of writing development through informal and emergent means. This is because action research is a pragmatic and reflective process which lends itself to collaborative

projects initiated by a practitioner in search of congruence between values and practices.

This action research framework was consistent with an interpretivist / constructivist paradigm which informed decisions to collect data through a reflective journal, interviews, focus groups and verbal reports and to analyse this data thematically. As Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 86) point out, this method cannot be expected to result in the “concise explanation presented as propositional knowledge”, which is typical of positivist research; instead, it is intended to create the evidence base for “a credible account of deepened praxis” within its institutional setting which resonates with issues in the broader community of practice.

Chapter 3: Social and organizational context

3.1 Introduction

One common feature of the various forms of qualitative research is a focus not only on a phenomenon of interest, but on what Cicourel (1981, p. 99) described as the “local and external social conditions” in which it takes place. A contextual perspective is particularly relevant within action research, which seeks not only to understand, but to change social practices (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The change which forms the basis of the current project was the adoption of an informal writing consultant role by a tertiary learning advisor as a potential means of achieving positive impacts on writing pedagogy within the BAH programme and on my practice as a TLA within NZU. The social conditions which have shaped writing development and TLA practice arise from the turbulent growth and diversification of tertiary education, itself the product of broader sociopolitical forces. This brief chapter reviews literature on these contextual conditions, with a particular focus on the rationale for the use of informal collaboration as a means of effecting change in the current study.

3.2 Expansion and diversification of tertiary education

Widening participation in tertiary education at a domestic level has been accompanied by the internationalisation of staff and students, institutional diversification, and an increasingly vocational focus and online (or blended)

learning environment (Brew, 2010; Eaton, 2012; Gibbons et al., 1994; Higher Education Funding Council for England, 1999; The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators & The American College Personnel Association, 2004; Wilson, 2013). These shifts, radical in themselves, tend to be mutually constitutive: for instance, economically-disadvantaged students are more likely also to be part-time students, making increased use of online resources (Krause, 2001). The power and turbulence of this combination of change drivers are such that they have been conceptualised as a storm (e.g. Light, Cox, & Calkins, 2009; National Academy of Sciences, 2007) or a tectonic shift (ALDinHE, 2018).

These shifts in tertiary education have been actively supported by governments across the western world (e.g. Blunkett, 2000; Department for Innovation Universities and Skills (DfIUS), 2008; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1999; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007; Tertiary Education Advisory Commission, 2001). The outcome has been transformational: a university education, once mainly a privilege of a minority, who would go on to make up the learned professions (The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators & The American College Personnel Association, 2004) now serves a wide range of purposes for a substantial proportion of the adult population of Western countries.

This expansion is not a recent phenomenon, but a long-term trend (e.g. Bates, 2015; Burgess, 2008; Hanover Research, 2013; Mortensen, 2003), resulting in a 'massification' of tertiary education (Bhatia, 1999; S. Harris, 2005), increasingly

funded through a neoliberal “customer pays” model in the form of student loans. In New Zealand, expansion and diversification of the tertiary sector has been boosted by population growth. For instance, the Auckland population increased by 50% between 1984 and 2009 (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). Nationally, 350,000 domestic students were in tertiary education in 2013, with a further 40,000 students from overseas (Statistics New Zealand, 2013, 2015). Moreover, the process of widening participation is ongoing, with significant numbers of first-in-family students from the growing Māori and Pacific populations (Statistics New Zealand, 2013), who are still significantly under-represented at tertiary level (Curtis et al., 2012).

3.3 Approaches to organizational change

The same neoliberal trends which have funded widening participation through a shift from state to individual responsibility have also brought into university governance a more assertive, economically-focused approach known as managerialism. This has led to requirements for institutions to provide evidence of measurable outcomes in accordance with the political and economic priorities of funding bodies. These are typically retention, completion and graduate outcomes (i.e., socially and economically valuable skills) (Benzie, Pryce, & Smith, 2017; Biggs, 1994; Boden et al., 2015; Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2007; Wright & Williams Ørberg, 2008).

From a managerialist perspective, organizational changes (such as those accompanying the expansion and diversification of the tertiary sector) require

top-down, tightly-controlled management (Connor, Lake, & Stackman, 2003; Cummings, Phillips, Tilbrook, & Lowe, 2005; e.g. Kotter, 1996). Change is seen as complete when it is “anchored” in the corporate culture (Kotter, 1996), an outcome also referred to as “institutionalisation” (R. L. Jacobs, 2002). However, critics of managerialism have questioned the validity of its underlying assumptions of control and predictability in relation to the dynamic and complex tertiary environment (Barnett, 2010; Deem et al., 2007; Fanghanel, 2012; Newton, 2003; M. Parker, 1992). Alongside a central core of managerial control, universities feature aspects of informal and devolved organisation, such as fuzzy, shifting boundaries, small units, informal networks, ad hoc activities, and horizontal information flows (Weick, 2001), which limit the effectiveness of centrally-determined strategy at the operational level (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

At this level, the expertise and resources needed to effect change are distributed among parties with divergent interpretations, values and goals (Benzie et al., 2017; Kaats & Opheij, 2014; Kahane, 2010; McRoy & Gibbs, 2009). As a result, initiatives which are perceived as managerially-imposed may elicit avoidance and resistance among staff (Deem et al., 2007; Fanghanel, 2012; Pourshafie & Brady 2013), leading to what has been described as a “discursive discrepancy between the macro level of policy making and the micro level of practice” (Fanghanel, 2012, p. 48). The result, in the words of a respondent to a recent Australian survey, is “a situation where lecturers and students see each other as the problem, rather than seeing the problem as something that has been created by a sector business ethos which believes that quality is an outcome of centralised control” (Malkin & Chanock, 2018, p. A23).

The same features of the tertiary environment which make it resistant to managerially-imposed change create conditions favourable to informal collaborative change. The fuzzy boundaries, informal networks and horizontal information flows characteristic of the “postmodern and fragmented world of the academy” (Candlin & Plum, 1999, pp. 195-196) allow individuals flexibility in relation to their given roles (Horlick-Jones & Sime, 2004; Weick, 2001) and provide opportunities to “create new professional spaces, knowledges and relationships” (Whitchurch, 2008, p. 379). Unlike top-down strategies aimed at achieving predetermined managerial goals, boundary crossing initiatives (Midgley, 2015) tend to be emergent, focusing on purposeful action and small wins. This pragmatic, short-term focus is an adaption to the volatile environment that is typical of contemporary organizations. It is argued that professionals increasingly require “mobile personality characteristics” in order to “build a succession of short-term working relationships with a variety of others across a wide range of work settings” (Grint & Nixon, 2015, p. 306)

Within such an uncertain and dynamic environment, the process of devising and communicating plans is seen as more significant than their outcomes; they are, in essence, tools for engagement rather than control (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Weick, 2001). The initiatives which emerge may foster relationships of mutual interest, known as double interacts, which are nodes of coherence and stability within otherwise unstable environments (Weick, 1985). These informal initiatives are consistent with the action research ethos of the current study, drawing upon Levi-Strauss’s (1966) concept of bricolage – the process of creative making-do by using existing knowhow and familiar materials to solve problems, even if

some of them are not ideally adapted to the task. A change strategy focused on informal collaboration has been used successfully in a range of institutional contexts (e.g. Fanghanel, 2012; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007) including the embedding of academic literacies (Benzie et al., 2017), and was the focus of the current study.

3.4 Student learning in the contemporary tertiary environment.

Neoliberalism has not only impacted on the management of tertiary institutions, but on the curriculum, increasingly seen through the lens of market rationalism (Biggs, 1994) as a key link in the supply chain of the global “knowledge economy” (Barkas, 2011). This “vocational turn” in tertiary studies is manifested in a shift towards applied, multidisciplinary programmes, such as business studies, through which students seek to develop employment-relevant skills (Barnett, 2004; Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, & Watts, 2000; Cottrell, 2001; Stephenson & Yorke, 1998; Tertiary Education Advisory Commission, 2000). Within courses such as the Bachelor of Applied Health (the focus of this study) which lead to a specific professional qualification, these skills are represented as competencies which students are required to demonstrate in a range of assessments in order to practice. However, it has proven difficult to embed competency development and assessment within changeable teaching programmes (Ang, D'Alessandro, & Winzar, 2014) – an example of the inherent difficulty of securing sustainable systemic change within complex and turbulent organizational environments (e.g. Fanghanel, 2012; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

Another effect of the expansion and increased vocational focus of tertiary education has been a diversification of students, programmes, and forms of learning and assessment (Biggs & Tang, 2007). As highlighted above, students are spending less time on campus and engaging with much of their learning online, while working longer hours to reduce high levels of debt (Krause, 2001; Leese, 2010). The need to achieve results within such constraints has given impetus to calls for the constructive alignment of intended learning outcomes, practices and assessments within tertiary programmes (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Biggs & Tang, 2007). Recommended practices include intrinsically-rewarding goals, regular and authentic student performances, clear formative and summative feedback and an allowance for long-term, developmental learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Stephenson & Yorke, 1998; Tagg, 2003; Yorke, 2001).

These practices are seen as necessary to support successful learning among today's time-poor students who are no longer exclusively drawn from the minority of high-performing secondary students (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Cottrell, 2001). The recommended pedagogical practices and the underlying socioconstructivist approach to learning (Vygotsky, 1978) are highly consistent with best practices within writing development and learning support. Therefore, as constructive alignment becomes increasingly accepted, it creates opportunities for closer integration of developmental support. For instance, in the current study, constructive alignment informed initiatives related to assessment rubrics and feedback.

However, adoption of a more explicit, supportive and developmental pedagogy is made more challenging by the sheer number of other demands being placed on faculty members in contemporary tertiary education to incorporate content and practices such as student research (Healey, Jenkins, & Lea, 2013; M. McLean & Barker, 2004), digital literacies (Bates, 2015), internationalisation (Stets & Harrod, 2004; M. Taylor, 1987), indigenous knowledge (Benzie et al., 2017), and transferable skills (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006), while satisfying institutional demands to produce their own research outcomes (Cretchley et al., 2014; Hattie & Marsh, 1996). In the current study, competing demands on faculty time were a significant issue in relation to the development of collaborative writing development initiatives.

3.5 Student retention and success initiatives

Student retention and completion rates have been a major focus of concern in the context of greater accountability within tertiary education (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017; Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Whitmore, 2006; R. D. Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006). Within New Zealand, one study found that half of tertiary students were leaving without gaining their intended qualification (Scott, 2003), a situation described as the “fall-out” from “the “democratisation” of tertiary education” (Fanene & Day, 2008). The government response has been characteristically managerial – increasingly linking tertiary funding to completion rates (e.g. New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015).

Universities have responded through whole-institutional retention and engagement initiatives, particularly focused on the first year of tertiary study (Kantanis, 2000; Tinto, 2009; Trowler & Trowler, 2010; van der Meer, 2006). It has been claimed that the first-year experience accounts for the most significant cognitive development or general learning gains (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and that these comprise a foundational “literacy of learning” which is crucial for students to acquire in order to progress further in tertiary studies (Lander & Latham, 1997). To support the development of these foundational learning skills, it is argued that first-year programmes should be based on a transitional pedagogy (Kift, 2008; Nelson, Smith, & Clarke, 2012) in which student support is integrated within the curriculum, as a way of helping all students develop and adapt their existing strengths to meet the challenges of tertiary study, rather than focused on remediating perceived deficits in students identified as at-risk (Kift, 2009; Rowley, Hartley, & Larkin, 2008; Von Treuer & Marr, 2013). These broader trends are clearly reflected in the current study, particularly in its focus on support for first-year writing and in increased staff-student engagement.

3.6 Conclusion

Widening participation and diversification have been accompanied by a reduction in the autonomy of tertiary institutions and a shift towards multidisciplinary, vocational programmes of study which are expected to be accountable to both customers and government in the form of measurable, economically and socially relevant outcomes. This has opened up an institutional space for learning support as a means of contributing to the

attainment of retention and completion targets through managerially-driven student success initiatives. Within the complex and dynamic organisational context of tertiary institutions, such top-down, managerial initiatives are difficult to sustain, meaning that learning advisors find themselves typically consigned to a marginal, unstable institutional space. However, critical organisation theories see such indeterminacy as the rule rather than the exception of organisational life and as a state which fosters informal networking. The aim of this study, therefore, was to investigate whether informal collaboration could be used as a means of achieving changes in writing pedagogy and TLA practice which have previously been seen as dependent on formal changes in institutional roles and responsibilities.

Chapter 4: Tertiary Writing

4.1 Introduction

The first part of the research question for this study focuses on whether a TLA, working as an informal writing consultant, can contribute to positive changes in writing pedagogy within a disciplinary programme. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to summarise literature on the practice, teaching and assessment of writing in the tertiary sector. Student difficulties in tertiary writing arise from the inherent challenges of evidence-based writing at higher levels of cognitive complexity and of mastering disciplinary-specific forms of argumentation; these are complicated by the increasingly vocational and multidisciplinary nature of tertiary study, as a result of the trends highlighted in chapter 3. The challenges students face in producing evidence-based, disciplinary-specific writing were a major theme in the current project.

Research has also identified a number of common limitations in tertiary writing pedagogy. Faculty members tend to see tertiary writing as a responsibility of others – either the students themselves or of teachers of generic academic writing courses (Galloway, 2010; McIsaac & Sepe, 1996). They also tend not to provide informative and constructive feedback on student texts – particularly during the process of writing; instead there is a tendency to provide reactive feedback focused on mechanical accuracy (Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER], 2010, May; C. Taylor & Burke da Silva, 2014). Literature

summarising these issues forms the middle sections of this chapter and serves to contextualise the indications of such attitudes and practices in the BAH programme, which emerged during the reconnaissance phase of the current project (described in chapter 6).

In order to plan and implement positive changes in writing pedagogy within the BAH, it was essential to review literature on successful practices elsewhere in the tertiary sector. The main source of these practices was found in the literature which has emerged from the Writing across the Curriculum / Writing in the Disciplines (WAC / WID) movement. In particular, in-class writing activities, authentic assessment and collaboration with faculty were identified as key practices which could be adapted for the current project. A summary of WAC / WID, with a particular focus on these key practices, forms the last section of this chapter.

4.2 Tertiary writing practices

As the tertiary sector has expanded and diversified over the last century, so have the writing practices which take place within it. A North American study found that the average length of assignments written in first-year composition classes had more than doubled since the 1980s, in line with a century-long trend of increasing length and complexity (Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008). Students are also being required to write in an increasing range of both academic and professional genres (and blends of the two) as tertiary institutions incorporate more applied and vocational programmes of study, in response to the social and

political trends discussed in chapter 3. Competence in these genres has a significant and direct impact on student success since written performance continues to be the principal form of assessment in most university programmes (Emerson, Feekery, & Kilpin, 2015; Thinking Writing, n.d.).

Tertiary writing is part of a range of discourse practices which are commonly referred to as academic literacies (Lea & Street, 2000; A. Miller, 2015). Although there is considerable variation between and within disciplines, academic discourse typically features “informationally dense prose, a very non-narrative focus, elaborated reference, few features of overt persuasion, and an impersonal style”, which sets it apart from vernacular registers (Biber, Conrad, Reppen, Byrd, & Helt, 2002, p. 41). This means that written academic prose is not only linguistically challenging in itself, but “translating” between sources from different spoken and written registers, as university students are increasingly required to do, is a sophisticated, developmental skill. In addition to a complex and unfamiliar register, tertiary writing also presents students with new rhetorical challenges, involving enhanced notions of argumentation, persuasion and awareness of different audiences (Hyland & McDonough, 2005).

Responding to these challenges involves a multi-stage transition (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009) away from a novice preoccupation with gathering and compiling content from sources towards “discursive maturity” (Hays, 1983) in which students are able to identify and satisfy the information needs of their readers (Flower, 1979; Sfard, 2008). This is a social, affective and cognitive challenge (Hegbloom et al., 2017), in which students need to understand the

constraints and degree of agency they have within new and dynamic communicative settings (Candlin, 1998). Students can be supported through this challenging learning process by low-risk opportunities to become familiar with the genres which are required to satisfy the needs and expectations of readers (Bean, 1996). A high level of support during this transition is in line with the high expectations placed on students to complete complex rhetorical tasks (Devereux & Wilson, 2010; Elbow, 1983) – it is also highly consistent with calls for a comprehensive transitional pedagogy (Kift, 2010; Kuh, 1996; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005)

Familiarity with genres is an essential aspect of the transition to the communicative reader-focused orientation associated with discursive maturity. Genre is “both a social and cognitive concept” for groups of texts which share core features, representing “how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations” (Hyland, 2008, p. 544). Genres are the means by which individual intentions of writers are aligned with the expectations of readers. Because the relationship between emergent individual intentions and contested social expectations is dynamic, the genres which mediate this relationship are never stable (C. R. Miller, 1984; Sfard, 2008) but subject to ongoing change and hybridisation (Candlin & Plum, 1999; Cole, 2002; Rademaekers & 2015). This means that even in supportive environments, the “cognitive apprenticeship” (Collins, Seely Brown, & Halum, 1991) through which students become familiar with new and complex genres can be an uncomfortable learning experience; without such support, it is frequently a confusing and stressful one.

Because genres are means of satisfying social expectations, rhetorical competence does not easily transfer from one discipline to another, since disciplines are themselves social constructs with embedded values and expectations which are unique to them (Becher, 1989; Lynch, 2010; Rorty, 1979). The teaching and learning of these embedded values is mediated by literacy practices even in highly technical, numeracy-rich disciplines (Ivanic et al., 2009). However, the discourse features of disciplinary genres are frequently unrecognised or even denied by community members themselves – a phenomenon known as “disciplinary transparency” (Ball, 2003; Russell, 1991). Members may come to believe that their discipline is somehow discourse-free, as in the case of a tertiary teacher who claimed his Stock Control course was “all about numbers” (Ivanic et al., 2009, p. 69). A belief in disciplinary transparency leads to disciplinary teaching staff providing writing advice (if at all) in terms of universal ideals such as clarity, coherence and objectivity in the mistaken belief that these are commonly understood and realised in all disciplines (Bartholomae & Matway, 2010; Washburn, 2005).

Given the increasingly multidisciplinary nature of tertiary study, such advice can lead to confusion and resentment among students should they find themselves penalised for following rules in one course which were presented by teachers from another discipline as universally applicable (Ivanic et al., 2009; Lea & Street, 1998). In multidisciplinary contexts, these contradictions are almost inevitable (Rademaekers & 2015), given that common practices such as how often writers refer to themselves, the way and degree to which they attempt to persuade the reader, their citation practices and the verbs they use to describe

their activity vary according to discipline: “engineers show, philosophers argue, biologists find and applied linguists suggest” (Hyland, 2008, p. 553). These practices cannot be regarded as merely “innocent conventions” (LeCourt, 1996, p. 392), but derive from fundamental epistemological assumptions (McLeod & Maimon, 2000; Sfard, 2008; Wingate & Dreiss, 2009) upon which the discipline and its associated professions are constructed. For this reason, providing students with generic advice on, for example, how to argue, is likely to cause as many problems for students as it solves (Chanock, 2013).

In addition to dealing with the potential confusions of writing in a multidisciplinary context, students are also faced with complexities brought about by the vocational turn in tertiary education. One effect of this has been the increasing hybridisation of genres in which students are being asked to write (Bhatia, 1999; Candlin & Plum, 1999). This hybridisation arises from tertiary teachers trying to satisfy competing academic learning and vocational training goals in the same assignment, resulting in texts which are idiosyncratic blends of academic and professional genres (Wardle, 2009).

An example of this from the current study was the use of case study reports as a common form of assessment within the BAH. On the one hand, these took the general form of reports which applied health practitioners might write about clients; on the other hand, they were considerably longer, including a rationale and support from the literature, as required in the academic essays and literature reviews students were required to write for other courses. Students found it difficult to merge the professional and academic modes of writing and to

interpret the meaning of attributes such as conciseness in relation to the highly varied forms of report they were learning to write. This is typical of the challenge students encounter in “unpacking” the shifting writing demands across the varied, and sometimes contradictory, professional and disciplinary contexts of contemporary tertiary programmes (Lea & Street, 1999, p. 81).

Another effect of the vocational turn is the increasing requirement for students to submit reflective journals based on workplace experience. Reflective writing is seen as a bridge between the practical and theoretical components of vocational courses, as well as a professional skill which students are expected to continue to use as reflective practitioners in their chosen career (Schön, 1983). However, there has been a lack of clarity about the meaning, purpose and form which reflective writing should take (Donohoe, 2015; Smyth, 1992) and numerous studies have found that students struggle with the complex integration of description, analysis and critical engagement with theory which is in many cases expected of them (e.g. Chirema, 2007; Kember et al., 1999; Thorpe, 2004; K.Y. Wong, Kember, Chung, & Yan, 1995). Within the current study, the teaching of reflective writing emerged as an opportunity to contribute to writing pedagogy within the BAH programme, through engagement with both staff and students.

The rhetorical diversity of tertiary writing is made less apparent by the common practice of labelling a vast range of unrelated writing tasks as essays or reports, even if they sometimes differ markedly from models which students may have encountered in composition classes at university or at high school (Gardner &

Nesi, 2013). The rhetorical demands of writing diverse texts for different purposes and audiences (M. Cohen & Riel, 1989) mean that students need to develop high levels of information literacy to locate, select, interpret and integrate into their own texts the complex ideas they encounter in an increasingly information-rich environment (Adler-Kassner & Estrem, 2007). This was a major challenge for BAH students, given the high expectations of evidence-based writing from faculty, who saw this as a key professional competency.

Given these challenges, it is clear that learning to write successfully at tertiary level is a long-term process, as indicated by the use of terms such as apprenticeship (Collins et al., 1991) and maturity (Hays, 1983). As such, support is needed during the transition into tertiary studies (Krause, 2001) and throughout the student lifecycle, as students continue to be faced with novel and complex rhetorical demands (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009; Jolliffe, 2010; L. Palmer, Levett-Jones, Smith, & McMillan, 2014; J. Parker, 2002) and need to write in increasingly disciplinary-specific forms (S. P. MacDonald, 1994). In this respect, learning to write at tertiary levels fits within the broader concept of a transitional pedagogy (Kift, 2009). However, this transition is not limited to the first-year experience, since competence in disciplinary practices is associated with an ongoing alignment with the values and interests of the communities which students are slowly becoming part of (Roozen, 2015b) through “writing themselves into the discipline” (Ward, 2012, p. 56) throughout their tertiary programmes. It is unreasonable to expect this complex developmental process

to be error-free; indeed, research has found a predictable increase in surface errors in student writing as they attempt new genres (Land, 2015).

4.3 Concerns about the quality of tertiary writing

The preceding section has described tertiary writing practices as complex and challenging – and becoming more rather than less so, in response to external drivers of change in the tertiary sector. However, the difficulties that students experience in responding to these challenges are more often attributed to their presumed deficiencies than to the nature of the challenges themselves. One North American survey found that academics view most student writing as lacking in the desired qualities of "clarity" and "coherence" (Bartholomae & Matway, 2010), while a British study reported that up to 90% of academic staff were dissatisfied with the writing abilities of undergraduate students (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2004). This deficit view of student writing has proved resistant to attempts to introduce strengths-based, developmental tertiary writing initiatives (Neely, 2017; Richardson, 1996) and is consistent with a broader narrative of decline in literacy standards shared by government (J. P. Johnson & Krase, 2012b), employers (Brizee & Langmead, 2014; C. Jones, 2011), and even graduates themselves (Perelman, 2011).

However, the literature does not support the belief that there was a golden age of high literacy standards a few decades ago, when those who are now senior faculty members and policy-makers were themselves students. One study from that era reported fears that the literacy standards of graduates were already so

low that they were most likely incapable of meeting the communicative challenges of the workplace or citizenship (Faigley & Miller, 1982). Such concerns have been common enough over at least a century to have acquired the label “perennial literacy crisis narrative” (Ivanic et al., 2009, p. 13). The narrative has intensified at times of heightened anxiety, associated with social, technological and educational change. In the United States, this narrative led to the introduction of freshman composition courses during the first half of the 20th century (Russell, 1991) and the development of university writing centers and Writing across the Curriculum programmes (Maimon, 2006; McLeod & Miraglia, 2001) during the second half of the century.

Further evidence of continuity rather than decline in tertiary writing can be found in the analysis of student compositions over the course of the last century. Studies have reported that mechanical accuracy has not declined appreciably over time, with the increase in a few categories of error (such as complex sentences) attributable to the greater rhetorical demands of assessed work in the 21st century; spelling, notably, has improved, probably due to the emergence of spellcheck software (Connors & Lunsford, 1988; Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008). Meanwhile, tutor response to errors has remained consistent, with a long-term tendency to highlight the most obvious errors, conflating significant issues (such as word choice) with relatively trivial easy-to-circle errors, such as apostrophes and spelling (Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008). Research suggests that this practice is ineffective in reducing errors and, in any case, the persistence of a certain level of basic, mechanical errors (typically

referred to as grammar) does not necessarily impair students' overall rhetorical development (Haswell, 1988).

The preoccupation with grammar in the discourse of academics and social commentators has tended to overshadow the more significant issue of how tertiary programmes can support students' development of the relatively limited writing skills they can be expected to have on entry (Defazio, Jones, Tennant, & Hook, 2010; Emerson et al., 2015). Research from New Zealand and overseas has found that high school writing tends to be strongly supported by teachers and rhetorically simple. High school students typically receive explicit guidance and opportunities for revision and resubmission (Emerson et al., 2015; Foster, McNeil, & Lawther, 2012). At the same time, writing tasks tend to be limited in terms of integrating content and addressing the information needs of different audiences (Crank, 2012; Emerson et al., 2015). A national survey in the US found that high school writing continues to be largely literary and restricted to rule-bound, fixed genres, such as the traditional five-paragraph essays (Kihara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009).

It is uncommon for high school students to learn how to integrate multiple sources in a range of genres, addressing the information needs of different audiences, as they need to do in academic and professional contexts (Addison & McGee, 2010; Emerson et al., 2015). School writing also tends to be divided into either expressions of personal experience or objective summary of facts, rather than requiring a personalised voice or stance in relation to a body of knowledge, which is more typical of tertiary writing (Crank, 2012). Moreover, the

gap between secondary and tertiary writing may have widened, as tertiary writing has become more diversified, while there has been a pressure towards conformity in secondary writing due to the influence of standardised assessments (Kittle & Ramay, 2010). What secondary writing most lacks is opportunities to practise writing in a social context, making rhetorical choices based on purpose, audience and content (Smit, 2002). As it cannot be assumed, at least in the New Zealand context, that students enter tertiary studies with the necessary experience and skills, the responsibility for their development lies with tertiary institutions, programmes and teachers (Emerson et al., 2015), a responsibility particularly relevant to the current study, given the high proportion of school leavers among the first-year cohort of the BAH.

4.4 Academic writing courses

Within tertiary institutions in North America, and to a more limited extent elsewhere, the traditional approach to dealing with the skills gap between school and university has been through a generic first-year writing course, known as freshman (or first-year) composition (FYC) (Russell, 1991). The rationale for FYC is that it offers students an opportunity to focus specifically on the demands of writing in the context of critical and research-based tertiary studies (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015). NZU, where this study was based, offered an optional writing course for ESOL students, and two generic academic writing courses which were only compulsory for students in certain programmes and did not form part of the curriculum of the BAH, the focus of this study.

In any case, there has been a long history of criticism of FYC as a self-contained solution to tertiary writing development, particularly in the still common prescriptive and decontextualized form, known as the current-traditional approach (e.g. Berlin, 1982; Burhans Jr., 1983; Burke, 1965; Gillett & Hammond, 2009; A. A. Knoblauch, 2011; Russell, 1995; Tate, Taggart, Schick, & B., 2014; Weaver, 1983). These criticisms to a large degree parallel those made in relation to generic English for Academic Purposes courses in the UK and elsewhere (Lea & Street, 2000). The stand-alone, generic nature of these courses has been identified as a barrier to the transfer of writing skills to disciplinary courses (Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007; Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999; Driscoll, 2011) and professional practice (Beaufort, 2007). Studies have found that effective transfer of skills, particularly at higher levels of complexity, depends on regular meaningful writing opportunities distributed throughout programmes (Griffin, 1985; Haskell, 2000; Huijser, Kimmins, & Galligan, 2008; J. P. Johnson & Kruse, 2012b; Melzer, 2014; Perkins & Salomon, 1988).

4.5 Feedback on assessed written assignments

In addition to opportunities for meaningful practice, learning to write effectively at tertiary level is also dependent on the quality of feedback on their efforts which students receive from their tutors (Ramsden, 1992). Feedback has been described as “perhaps the most direct, specific, and personal way students receive writing instruction” (Szymanski, 2014, para. 1) at both cognitive and affective levels (Gravett & Winstone, 2018; Hegbloom et al., 2017; Ramaprasad, 1983; T. Ryan & Henderson, 2018).

It has been argued that feedback should not be limited to summative evaluation on completed assignments, but include formative guidance on students' plans and drafts (Ekholm, Zumbrunn, & Conklin, 2015). Formative feedback is integrated into teaching and learning (Torrance et al., 2005), helping students understand the developmental nature of writing and the need for revision of initial drafts (Estrem, 2015; Ferris, 2007; Roozen, 2015a; Russell, 2015), as well as enhancing their ability to process summative feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). A recent study found that formative feedback was seen by students as contributing more to their success as writers than any other teaching activity (Hegbloom et al., 2017). Engagement in a formative dialogue with students can also help tertiary teachers to see how their students are thinking about the topic (Levy, 2004) and to become more critically aware of assessment practices in general ("Embedded writing support at Liverpool Hope," 2010, June).

However, numerous studies have found that students rarely receive formative feedback from tertiary teachers during the process of writing, and that the summative feedback they receive on completed work is of limited benefit for student learning (e.g. Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER], 2010, May; Bartholomae & Matway, 2010; Bean, 2002; Brinkworth, McCann, Mathews, & Nordstrom, 2009; Carless, 2006; Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996; C. Taylor & Burke da Silva, 2014). Students complain that feedback is frequently minimal and generic – even illegible (Patton & Taylor, 2013), or difficult to comprehend (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2002; Nash & Winstone, 2017; Sadler, 2010). Students may also misunderstand the formative intention of writing tasks, particularly when grades (however low) are included in addition to

feedback (Timor, 2018). This is one example of how students' ability to engage with and learn from assessment feedback is itself a complex and developmental skill – known as “assessment recience” (and itself part of their broader assessment literacy) (Gravett & Winstone, 2018). So common are the reports of student difficulties with assessment feedback that it has been claimed that “the research literature abounds with the ineffectiveness of assignment feedback” (Deepwell & Benfield, 2012, p. 61). Ineffective feedback practices, combined with few opportunities for students to redraft their writing efforts, have been seen as a strong indication of an underlying lack of institutional commitment to writing development (Patton & Taylor, 2013) and as having the potential to impair students' future engagement with tertiary learning (Handley, Price, & Millar, 2011).

Student learning is limited by wide variations in feedback quantity, focus and style and the predominance of directive comments on lower-level concerns, such as punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, style and referencing (Bartholomae, 1980; Haswell, 1983; Mutch, 2003; Straub & Lunsford, 2009; Szymanski, 2014; Wingard & Geosits, 2014), even when this is inconsistent with teachers' professed beliefs or the stated learning outcomes of the course (Patton & Taylor, 2013). To contribute more effectively to ongoing learning, feedback needs to be “clear, comprehensive and sympathetic” (Bazerman, 2015, p. 44), with the teacher aiming to stimulate students to reflect on the meaning and effect of their writing (Bean, 2011b; Patton & Taylor, 2013; Straub & Lunsford, 2009; C. Taylor & Burke da Silva, 2014).

Effective feedback also needs to be clearly cross-referenced to assessment criteria (Nash & Winstone, 2017; Poulos & Mahony, 2008) and selective, since studies suggest that, when given opportunities to revise, students tend to make relatively few changes, regardless of the number of comments made by teachers on their original drafts; in other words, as for many other practices, assignment feedback is subject to the law of diminishing returns (Patton & Taylor, 2013). A selective and strategic approach to written feedback helps shift students' attention towards substantive, rather than mechanical issues – a shift which has been seen as an essential step in becoming an effective writer (MacArthur, Philippakos, & Graham, 2016). This approach has also been shown to elicit thoughtful revision practices among students (Wingard & Geosits, 2014). Indeed, opportunities for students to make revisions to drafts following formative feedback are a defining feature of courses which are designated as “writing intensive” as part of WAC programmes (Neely, 2017).

The literature summarised here informed assignment feedback initiatives (e.g. 8.2 & 8.7), which arose from the reconnaissance stage of the current project (as described in 6.4.1). In effect, I sought to assist BAH staff in adjusting their assessment feedback while performing a role of “interpreter” in helping BAH students to process and respond to it – a response which is in line with the recommendation of a recent study of TLA practice in this area (Gravett & Winstone, 2018).

4.6 Writing across the curriculum (WAC)

The most fully-developed and widely-implemented approach to writing development within tertiary education has been Writing across the Curriculum (WAC). WAC emerged within secondary education in the UK in the 1960's, but has flourished in tertiary education in North America since the 1970's (Russell, 1991). Outside North America, WAC has been implemented on a smaller scale, partly because of the lack of an existing infrastructure of writing development (i.e., writing centers and FYC) to build upon (Thaiss & Rutz, 2013). The introduction of WAC practices has been found to enhance student confidence and learning in a wide range of contexts (Crossan & Jacka, 2010; Emerson, 1999; Wingate, 2010) and disciplines, such as Education (B. Anderson, McLeod, & Orlandi, 2010), Chemistry (Stout, 2011), Nursing (Cipriano Silva & Thaiss, 2004) and Literary Studies (R. Johnson & O'Neill, 2000).

The main objective of WAC is the integration of writing into learning activities in two related ways: writing to learn (WTL) involves students writing inside and outside the classroom as a means of engaging critically and creatively with course content, while learning to write (LTW) involves students becoming competent in the genres and registers of specific disciplines and professions (Thaiss & Porter, 2010). A core principle of WAC is that WTL and LTW are most effective in combination (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975) and should be a focus, not just of the English department or support services, but of all academic departments and staff throughout the institution (McLeod & Miraglia, 2001; Perelman, 2011; Zawacki, Antram, Price, Ray, & Koucheravy,

2008). Fully-fledged WAC programmes tend to comprise “faculty development, curricular components, student support, assessment, and an administrative structure and budget” (McLeod & Maimon, 2000, p. 580). Despite this, programmes continue to be precarious and volatile (Anson, 2002; Brizee & Langmead, 2014; Gottschalk, 2011; Perelman, 2011; Thaiss & Rutz, 2013; Townsend, 2008; Young & Fulwiler, 1990) and reliant on continuous renewal of informal networks among staff (Tarabochia, 2013). In other words, sustainability of these programmes is subject to the effects of the dynamic tertiary environment, as described in chapter 3.

The most distinctive writing to learn practices are personalised journals and short classroom writing activities, practices pioneered as a means of developing ‘expressive writing’ in secondary education (Britton et al., 1975; N. Martin, D’Arcy, Newton, & Parker, 1976). These are seen as supporting knowledge construction because they facilitate attention, metacognition, decontextualisation, investment in and organisation of ideas (Bazerman, 2010; Bean, 1996; Farnan & Fearn, 2008; C. H. Knoblauch & Brannon, 1983; Tynjala, Mason, & Lonka, 2001). Journal writing supports individual construction of meaning, through the synthesis of concepts encountered during the course with students’ own experiential knowledge (Berthoff, 1987; Britton et al., 1975; Creme, 2002). Short classroom activities include free writing, writing games and mini essays or reports (Bean, 1996; Connolly, 1989; Kovac & Sherwood, 1999). These have been found to increase students’ rhetorical awareness (Hand, Prain, & Yore, 1991; Swales, 1990), their confidence in integrating source material without plagiarism (Bean, Drenk, & Lee, 1982; Farnan & Fearn, 2008;

Soven, 1996; *Thinking Writing*, n.d.), and their engagement with abstract concepts and processes (Connolly & Vilardi, 1989; Duncan, 1989; Hargrove & Nesbit, 2003; Kovac & Sherwood, 1999; McConlogue, Mitchell, & Clavering, 2008; Roozen, 2015b; Tynjala et al., 2001).

Resistance to WTL among disciplinary teaching staff is based on beliefs that they do not have the expertise and / or responsibility for writing development, or enough class time to fit it in (Galloway, 2010; Goldsmith & Willey, 2018; Mclsaac & Sepe, 1996) and scepticism regarding its pedagogical value (Klein & Aller, 1998), since empirical evidence for WTL may not be in a form which disciplinary teaching staff are accustomed to in their own field of research (Ackerman, 1993). Students may share some of these reservations, which indicates the need for ongoing support for the inclusion of WTL in tertiary programmes (Stout, 2011). As described in chapter 8 below, some of these barriers to the inclusion of WTL activities in tertiary classrooms affected the limited attempts to introduce it within the first year of the BAH programme.

The learning to write (LTW) focus of WAC aims to raise awareness among both students and staff of the discursive practices through which knowledge is constructed and disseminated in specific disciplinary communities (Farnan & Fearn, 2008; C. Jacobs, 2007; Paretti, 2011; Wrigglesworth & McKeever, 2010). One focus of LTW is to support faculty in aligning assessments with authentic disciplinary and professional genres (Peterson, 1992; Vargas & Hanstedt, 2014), allowing them to model the discourse practices they are already familiar with (Hand et al., 1991) and to focus their feedback on higher-level issues of critical thinking and effective communication (Szymanski, 2014), as opposed to

the more traditional preoccupation with mechanical accuracy (Faigley & Hansen, 1985; Fulwiler, 1984; Swales, 2001). Over time, participation in authentic disciplinary discourse, with constructive feedback, can support students in moving from their initial focus on reproducing and manipulating language and conventions to satisfy their teachers (referred to as “discourse for others”) to using disciplinary discourse confidently and creatively for their own purposes (“discourse for self”) (Sfard, 2008). In other words, it supports student induction into “the conversation of the discipline” (McLeod & Maimon, 2000, p. 579),

As the focus of programmes has moved towards writing-intensive courses and faculty development, the term WAC has been supplanted by, or used interchangeably with, WID (Writing in the Disciplines) (Hudd & Smart, 2010; Perelman, 2011; Thaiss & Porter, 2010; Young & Fulwiler, 1990), a shift consistent with the vocational turn in tertiary education (Brizee & Langmead, 2014). This has made the generic writing practice of traditional first-year composition courses seem increasingly irrelevant (Maimon, 2006; Perelman, 2011; Russell, 2006). The move from WAC to WID has also seen a more flexible engagement with specific departments and programmes (Brizee & Langmead, 2014) as they integrate communication skills into a competency based curriculum (Anson & Dannels, 2009; Bohr & Rhoades, 2010; Sharifi, McCombs, Fraser, & McCabe, 2009). The current study was consistent with this trend towards flexibility in the implementation of WAC practices, since my role as a writing consultant for the BAH programme was informal and emergent.

4.7 Conclusion

There is a strong consensus in the literature that “academic and disciplinary literacy should be taught within tertiary disciplinary studies since literacy cannot be separated from content, and must be engaged with at all levels of tertiary learning” (Emerson et al., 2015, p. 5). Academic writing is a cultural practice which embodies the values and beliefs of university, disciplinary and professional communities. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, these communities themselves are dynamic and complex; indeed, it has been argued by organizational theorists that all cultures are in a state of flux between co-existing “consensus, dissensus and confusion” (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007, p. 113).

These tensions and contradictions are manifest in two major themes which emerged during this chapter and were a major focus of investigation during this study (as discussed in chapter 7): diversification and reductionism. On the one hand, tertiary writing is undergoing increasing rhetorical diversification, as a result of the vocational turn in tertiary education and the fragmentation of traditional disciplines. At the same time, reductionist views on writing, which focus on its formal, rather than rhetorical features, persist and continue to inform attitudes towards instruction and assessment. These reductionist views provide a justification for academic staff to avoid incorporating writing development within their teaching and learning practices (since, as long as writing is seen in terms of generic, formal skills, the responsibility to teach it can be assigned to others). But even when staff do accept their responsibility for developing disciplinary and professional writing, their teaching practices seldom incorporate

writing to learn, and their assessment practices tend to prioritise formal, rather than rhetorical, features of student performance.

This chapter has highlighted resistance among faculty to incorporating writing development into their teaching and learning practices and a common tendency to transfer responsibility for writing development to others. These were significant issues in the current project, given its origin in an invitation to a learning consultant from outside the BAH programme to deal with perceived deficits in the writing of first-year students. The chapter also highlighted a number of issues which emerged as strong themes in the reconnaissance phase (discussed in chapter 6) and became the focus of initiatives during the action research cycles described in chapters 7 to 9. These include the need for regular, meaningful writing opportunities spread through the programme, selective and developmental feedback on student writing, both at formative and summative stages, and the integration of writing into classroom learning.

The literature on WAC provides a number of evidence-based strategies for effective writing development within a disciplinary context. However, much of this literature assumes the existence of a formal writing consultant role within institutions where writing instruction was already an established feature of the curriculum. In the context of the current study, the TLA had no formal role in relation to writing development – and learning to write did not feature as an explicit component of the BAH curriculum. Therefore, the themes described in this chapter informed the first part of the research question: whether a tertiary learning consultant – without any formal responsibility for staff or writing

development – could contribute to the adoption of some of the successful practices associated with WAC in a context where writing instruction was not an explicit part of the curriculum.

Chapter 5: Tertiary Learning Advice

5.1 Introduction

As outlined above, the goals of this study were to investigate whether a tertiary learning advisor, working as an informal writing consultant, could contribute to improvements in writing pedagogy within a disciplinary programme and in tertiary learning advice. The need for change in TLA practice has been a common theme in the literature since TLAs were first employed in the tertiary sector several decades ago. TLA employment has generally been in an extra-curricular role, with the task of remediating the perceived skills gap between what increasing numbers of students have on entry and what is required for successful completion of tertiary studies (Baldauf, 1996; Chanock, 2011b; Dunworth, 2010; Krause, 2001; Manalo et al., 2010). In other words, like other pastoral support services from which it emerged, tertiary learning advice has been essentially “bolted on” (Wingate, 2006) to the traditional teaching and learning practices of tertiary institutions. In this capacity, it has been principally conceptualised by institutions as a marginal space to send students perceived as at risk of failure (Crozier, 2007; Webb, 2001).

Working in a disciplinary context has long been seen as a way of addressing this marginalisation because it offers TLAs opportunities to reposition themselves as developmental educators within the tertiary curriculum, serving all students, not just the non-traditional students whom they were first employed

to remediate (Boylan et al., 1999; Chanock, 1995; Crookston, 1972; Manalo, 2007; Wingate, 2006); similar arguments have been a prominent theme in WAC literature during the same period (e.g. Maimon, 2006; North, 1995). However, repositioning TLA practice as curricular and developmental has proven challenging. In a UK context, Wingate (2006) attributes the difficulty to the persistence of a remedial discourse of study skills; in an Australian context, Percy (2014) and Benzie et al. (2017) focus on the inherent complexity of the objective, given the different perspectives and competing discourses of the stakeholders; while in a New Zealand context, Strauss (2013) (focusing specifically on postgraduate advisors) attributes their marginalised status at least in part to a lack of will on the part of TLAs themselves.

The roots of TLA marginalisation and the rationale for and barriers to disciplinary and developmental practice are the main focus of this chapter. Because of the limited amount of literature on learning advice in the New Zealand tertiary context, the review has been supplemented with data gathered from interviews with TLAs from tertiary institutions across New Zealand and with NZU faculty and administrative staff. This data also situates the current study within the broader perceptions of tertiary learning advice in the institutional context of NZU.

5.2 Data collection and analysis

This chapter draws on interviews with general and administrative staff at NZU and on interviews with 25 tertiary learning advisors from across New Zealand

(as discussed in chapter 2). This data was analysed thematically and integrated into the review of the literature, by extracting data relevant to the major theme of this chapter: TLA practice in its generic and disciplinary-specific forms.

5.3 Causes and effects of the marginalisation of TLA practice

5.3.1 The ad-hoc and reactive nature of TLA recruitment.

The marginalised status of TLAs derives in large measure from the way in which they have typically been employed with an explicitly remedial role, “to give selective assistance to the disadvantaged” (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998, p. 24) as a ‘bolt-on’ reaction to widening participation (e.g. Casazza & Silverman, 1996; Chanock, 2011b; Devlin, 1995; Tomlinson, 1989). This has been very much the case in New Zealand, since TLAs were first employed in the 1960s, in response to concerns about low rates of retention and completion (a problem referred to at the time as “wastage”) (Brailsford, 2011). Even in what was then a comparatively selective and homogenous tertiary sector, low retention rates were a concern, with as many as one in three students in New Zealand and Australia failing to complete their undergraduate degrees (G. Miller, 1970). The emergence of tertiary learning advice has been described as a “therapeutic intervention” (Percy, 2014, p. 7) as it arose from pastoral counselling services and evolved into an individualised support service for students with academic difficulties.

The ad-hoc employment of TLAs with a remedial role has become a familiar narrative in the decades since then (e.g. Spiller, 1998; Trembath, 1999). It was neatly summarised by one experienced TLA in an interview for this study:

If people's courses, or the survival of these courses, depend on getting students through, people are beginning to think, "What can we do to up students' chances? Provide some support and make sure they pass their assignments and pass their tests and exams and things like that"⁵⁶. (See Appendix A for a numbered list of all interviewees).

Typically, this process has tapped into the wider educational community, recruiting ESOL or foundation skills teachers, who have brought into TLA practice what Handal (2008) describes (in relation to academic developers) as "latent identities" from their previous educational roles. This was the case for another highly-experienced TLA, first recruited in the late 1980s:

I was rung up and they said the woman had walked out, saying this job was impossible: 'I don't suppose you could come in and finish the workshops?' I said, 'What do you have to do?' 'Just some lectures about punctuation and you can see some students individually and tell them what they're doing wrong'. I needed a short-term job, so it all fitted nicely⁵².

Recent examples of this scenario included a TLA who was offered work in learning support for a university business school which had experienced a

sudden influx of international postgraduate students. Her recruitment followed *speculative emails to the Director of Teaching*⁶⁴ and her role had no connection with the existing team of university-level TLAs (based in a nearby building). It was, moreover, on a fixed-term contract basis, which underlines the ‘bolt-on’ marginalisation of this persistent pattern of TLA recruitment.

5.3.2 The volatility of the institutional units in which TLAs practise.

The ad-hoc nature of TLA employment is reflected in the diversity of the units in which they work. Depending on the institution, these units may be “centralised or devolved, broadly discipline-based or embedded within disciplines” (Bartlett, 2007, p. 92). Although mergers of student learning centres with academic and/or professional development units into broader centres for teaching and learning (Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008) have been a feature of the last decade or so, the most common structure in Australasia and the UK continues to be a student learning centre (Murray & Glass, 2011; Pocock, 2010), often aligned with other pastoral services for students, which tends to underline its extra-curricular status and, from a managerial perspective, its cost to the institution (as a distinct debit item in the accounts, separate from the faculties, which are seen as generating the fee income). Their typically ambiguous institutional position tends to mean that TLAs need constantly to negotiate their place within the educational practices of the academic (S. MacDonald, Schneider, & Kett, 2013)

As costly services outside the core institutional structures of faculties and departments, student learning centres (or centres for teaching and learning) have been the focus of regular bouts of restructuring (Percy, 2014; Trembath, 1999; White & Schnuth, 1990). An Australian survey of centres for teaching and learning found that “volatility within the sector has been a consistent trend ... [which] is becoming more pronounced ... a probable principal reason for this is a lack of clarity regarding the core business of such centres and the contested nature of academic development” (Challis, Holt, & Palmer, 2009, p. 383). A follow-up article reported that 70% of centres were less than three years old in their current configuration, with another 13% due for imminent restructuring (S. Palmer, Holt, & Challis, 2011). As if to underline this volatility, the authors commented that within three months of their interviews with centre directors, more than half of those interviewed were in a different role. Volatility is a persistent theme in TLA literature, where it is generally seen as a threat to the sustainability of attempts to embed skills and writing development within disciplinary programmes (e.g. Thies, Wallis, Turner, & Wishart, 2014)

5.3.3 Low institutional status of TLAs.

Volatility and what has been termed “organisational peripherality” (Verity & Trowler, 2011, p. 243) of the units in which TLAs practise have been seen as major contributors to confusion and lack of awareness regarding their services. The Australian survey referred to above reported that for many faculty members the centres remain “peripheral and largely unknown” (S. Palmer et al., 2011, p. 812). And even a centre director at one Australian institution was seen as occupying “a low skill, support role” (Barkas, 2011, p. 6). This is both a frequent

and persistent complaint: one recent Australian study referred to the “invisibility” of the work of TLAs and other professional staff within the academy (Charlton & Martin, 2018).

The perception among TLAs that their institutional status does not reflect their contributions to student learning is a familiar theme in the literature (e.g. Devlin, 1995; Mitchell, 2007; Pourshafie & Brady 2013). One explanation for their low profile has been that there is a lack of hard evidence of measurable outcomes (Manalo et al., 2010; Moses, 1987), a limitation which may account for its virtual absence from a major review of tertiary student achievement (Prebble, Hargreaves, Leach, Naidoo, & Suddaby, 2005). The low profile of TLAs has also been attributed to the pragmatic nature of TLA practice which means that “the bodies of knowledge on which we draw to inform our practice often tend to become invisible, even to ourselves” (Percy & Stirling, 2005, p. 40). This sense of institutional invisibility is a cause of ongoing anxiety, as one interviewee pointed out: *there’s nothing more that’s going to guarantee our disappearance than if nobody knows who we are*²².

The persistent sense of low institutional status among TLAs has been encapsulated in many suggestive metaphors:

- “Field hands waiting at the back door” (M. Harris, 1996, p. 31)
- ‘A paupers’ wing’ added onto the Stately Home of Elite Education (Northedge, 2003, p. 17)
- A “precarious niche” (Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008, p. 45)

- “Fringe’ dwellers ... even if we have justified our existence and embedded ourselves to the n^{th} degree” (Trembath, 2007, p. 66)
- Mrs Mop and Florence Nightingale (Bishop, Bowmaker, & Finnigan, 2009)

Similar views were expressed by New Zealand TLAs in this study. One described TLA practice as like *little Dutch boys with our fingers in the hole in the dyke*⁵⁸. Another long-term TLA compared the appreciation and job security of a previous position as an LTU centre director unfavourably with a new role as a member of faculty:

*If I teach well, and produce significant amounts of high quality research, no one can really touch me. But when I was doing that in a student learning centre, I was still under threat. That’s the big difference. It’s less important, less valuable – everything less*⁵⁴.

5.3.4 Remedial perceptions of TLA practice.

An equally persistent complaint among TLAs has been that their practice is perceived as a narrowly remedial one, dealing only with the grammar or proofreading needs of “struggling” students, rather than the development needs of all students (Boylan et al., 1999; Carter, 2008; Chanock, 2011b; Crozier, 2007; Zeegers, 2004). This tends to reinforce the marginalisation of TLAs, since remedial services tend to be stigmatised (Barkas, 2011). One interviewee recalled how fellow staff in the English department where she first worked as a TLA *weren’t a bit pleased to have me; it didn’t make them look good having*

*someone who taught remedial students*⁵². Similar reactions have been reported among staff in an Australian Bachelor of Education programme to an initiative designed to lift achievement among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, amid concerns that this might mean a “dumbing-down” of standards (Thies et al., 2014). Another TLA⁵⁶ noted a common misconception among staff and students that TLAs were employed mainly to support students with learning disabilities, based on the assumption that the role was equivalent to special education teachers and support staff in high schools (a misconception also held by BAH students at NZU – see 7.5) The difficulty of changing this perception has been a common frustration for TLAs:

*My personal greatest challenge is getting academic staff past the notion that we provide a remedial service – we don’t. There is nothing wrong with the students when they enter their courses – all students have to become familiar with the expectations.*⁴⁴

The remedial framing of TLA practice is reinforced by the persistent practice of institutions funding initiatives on the basis that support is targeted towards low-achieving students, even when the philosophy of those involved in providing the service is developmental and holistic. This can complicate evaluation of the initiative, since the criteria of funders and providers are fundamentally different (Thies et al., 2014). At NZU, such remedial perceptions of TLA practice were a common theme in the interview data. One Humanities lecturer said he only referred students to TLAs when *they’re really struggling just in terms of basic sentence construction [and] it feels like it’s beyond me*¹⁵, while a senior tutor in

the Sciences felt that *only the students who struggle would go there, I suppose*¹⁹. One Business faculty member described the service explicitly as remedial, though without the negative connotations attached to the word by TLAs themselves:

*From the angle of student support, my role is to direct students there who need remedial work that I don't have the time to commit, or the expertise to be quite honest with you, without having a full understanding of learning pedagogies that you guys do. So remedial work for students – that's first and foremost what I see you guys doing – providing that valuable service.*¹¹

For a senior university academic policy-maker, the remedial nature of some TLA practice was simply a given:

*I would think that the reality is that some of the work that's done is remedial. It's just as simple as that. Some is extension and developmental. And that's probably unlikely to change*¹.

Rather than seeking to change the practice itself, she felt that TLA staff needed to *manage perceptions*¹ of their work among staff and students, something which has proven challenging to TLAs since they rarely have the opportunity to engage with those who have these perceptions. This highlights the limitations of TLAs' use of what Ransom (1997) refers to as a "reversal of discourse" strategy in order to transform their practice from remedial to developmental. Although

they themselves have long made the switch, the responsibility for and power over TLA practice remains in the hands of others who have not.

5.3.5 The association of TLA practice with one-to-one support.

Some have argued that the persistence of the remedial framing of TLA practice derives from what is for many TLAs a core practice: one-to-one consultations (e.g. Barkas, 2011; Wingate, 2006). In other words, by being “helpful” to their institutions by supporting “struggling” students in this way, TLAs are being “unhelpful” in relation to their objective of achieving integrated learning and writing development for all students within their disciplinary programmes (Crozier, 2007; Strauss, 2013). However, there was evidence in the interviews conducted for this study that the association of TLAs with one-to-one support was not necessarily negative, and, in any case, one-to-one support was a practice which many TLAs regarded as central to their roles and expertise.

The association of TLA practice with one-to-one support was clear in the accounts of some NZU faculty. One faculty member felt that this support role was valuable in complementing the work of disciplinary teachers, particularly in relation to skills development:

You fill in a huge gap that myself and many other lecturers can't fill in. We just don't have the time to have that one-on-one support for students. And it's not just support in terms of writing or study strategies, but motivation as well and getting the student to come back and keep going;

*and it's that pastoral care, pastoral support that's much needed, which we can't provide... You work one-on-one, which is really ideal for developing their writing skills.*¹⁶

This view is consistent with wider educational literature, particularly within the socioconstructivist tradition (Vygotsky, 1978), on the value of mentoring students in the process of learning new skills (e.g. Mercer, 2001). In a similar vein, a faculty director of teaching and learning felt that consultations gave TLAs *a unique perspective – you get to see where the students are having problems; you bring a learning expertise, but you also provide that connection to the student voice*⁶. This description is consistent with the claim that “facilitating learning how to learn” is the “core business” of TLAs (Manalo, 2007, p. 83) and a body of literature on the particular value of one-to-one consultations in providing students with a safe and supportive environment (Chanock, 2013; Cowan, 2013; Malik, 2000; Turner, 2011) in which they can progress through their own personal ‘stuck places’ (Huijser et al., 2008) which might otherwise block their learning.

Several TLAs pointed out that engaging in one-to-one consultations was not only helpful to students, but was the principal means by which they had constructed their professional expertise because they allow TLAs to see learning and writing issues from a student perspective: *over time, by close contact with the students, and by looking quite closely at their answers, we start to get an understanding of what underlies their problems, which lecturers don't generally have*²⁴. So critical are consultations to TLA expertise and identity, that,

according to another experienced practitioner, new TLAs, during their first year of practice, should focus almost exclusively on them⁵².

These arguments help to explain why many TLAs are reluctant to abandon one-to-one consultations. Despite institutional concerns about cost (Turner, 2011), and the association of one-to-one consultations with remedial support, they are also widely seen as the bedrock of TLA expertise, based as it is on “extensive and intensive interactions with the students they meet” (Pourshafie & Brady 2013, p. A171). As one respondent in a recent Australian survey commented, “If I am not working with students I believe I have diminished authority when I speak to academics about their students' learning needs” (Malkin & Chanock, 2018, p. A22). Chanock (2007) cautioned that as TLAs move away from one-to-one engagement with students towards embedded practice in classroom settings, there is the risk that they will become less familiar with how students frame their learning and writing problems – a familiarity on which their claim to make a unique contribution to tertiary learning is largely based. Those who advocate a complete shift away from one-to-one support to embedded workshops are advised that TLAs need to be “careful what we wish for” (Malkin & Chanock, 2018, p. A17).

5.4 Responses to marginalisation

5.4.1 Establishment of a professional community.

As there are no formal qualifications or registration for TLAs (Cameron & Catt, 2008; Crozier, 2007; Trembath, 2007), the practice lacks the exclusivity of traditionally prestigious professions (Grossman, 2003). That is why, in common with other informal and relatively “borderless” forms of work (Whitchurch, 2008), tertiary learning advice has been described as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), defined by members’ involvement in similar practices within a common (but not exclusive) domain of interest (Keenan, Kumar, & Hughes, 2010). TLAs have sought to consolidate this community of practice as a means of addressing their institutional marginalisation, using typical community development resources, such as newsletters, online forums and, especially, conferences (M. Brown, 2010; Spiller, 1998; Trembath, 2007).

One particular feature of the New Zealand community of TLA practice is that it has always encompassed practitioners from the whole range of tertiary institutions (including private tertiary providers, technical institutes, and wānanga) unlike the university-focused British and Australian TLA networks (Day, 1998). Conferences have allowed the disparate community of New Zealand TLAs to share best practice and develop a sense of common values (Fanene & Day, 2008). One long-standing member described how it was only at her first conference that she realised *there were other people like me*⁵², having worked as a solitary TLA for 11 years. By the end of the last century, this

networking process had led to the formation of a national association (ATLAANZ (Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand), n.d.). This stage was described as “critical to our growing awareness of ourselves as a group and to our understanding of shared concerns and problems” (Emerson, 2000, p. 59). Similar hopes were expressed a few years later when Australian practitioners formed their own association; in particular, this step was seen as a means of overcoming confusion about and marginalisation of academic language and literacy advising (Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2007).

Since 2000, New Zealand’s national association of TLAs has grown to just under 200 members (ATLAANZ, n.d.) and begun to have formalised relationships with partner associations overseas (Association for Learning Development in Higher Education, 2014). ATLAANZ has also been a focus for research (e.g. Acheson, 2006; Manalo & Leander, 2007; Manalo, Wong-Toi, & Henning, 1996; P. McLean & Webb, 2002) aiming to “identify, document and promulgate” (Manalo et al., 2010, p. 34) the difference which TLAs make to student success. This research orientation has been seen as a key community goal if TLA practice is to be “firmly established as a central, indispensable component of institutional teaching and learning initiatives” (Manalo, 2007, p. 85).

Conferences and publications have been a medium for TLAs to share their concerns regarding their marginalised status (e.g. M. Brown, 2010; Chanock et al., 2004; Devlin, 1995; Frederick, Hancock, James, Bowden, & Macmillan, 1981; Lillis, 1999; Trembath, 2007). Evidence of the persistent sense of

marginalisation and precariousness in the TLA community may be found in the periodic appearance of articles posing existential questions about TLA roles and identity, such as “Who are we?” (Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008, p. 40). Similar questions have prompted articles by overseas counterparts, such as “What is it we do, and why?” (Garner, Chanock, & Clerehan, 1995, p. 5) and “What’s the job and whose job is it?” (Radloff, 2006). The precarious nature of TLA practice, particularly in the context of a changing environment, has also been popular conference theme (e.g. Anchoring our practice, 2006; Walking the tightrope, 2007; Transformations, 2008; Shifting sands: Firm foundations, 2009; Navigating the river, 2011). As Chanock and Malkin observed in relation to Australian practitioners, “uncertainty about who and what we are, as a profession, has been with us from the beginning and persists today” (2018, p. A16). This preoccupation with self-definition is another feature which TLAs share with writing centre practitioners; in that context, it has been attributed to an underlying insecurity regarding perceived roles and status: “Since no one else recognizes or understands us, we feel the need to continually announce and invent ourselves” (Healy, 1995, p. 179)

Alongside these expressions of insecurity have been rallying cries to reject the remedial framing of TLA practice – literally in the case of the anthem sung at the 2000 ATLAANZ Conference: “ATLAANZ tutors reach the nation, students to the centres hasten, stamping out remediation, professionalism marches on” (M. Brown, 2010). One long-term ATLAANZ member spoke of avoiding “like the plague” the term “remedial”, with its associated focus on student deficits (Trembath, 2007, p. 66). However, the persistence of these calls is evidence in

itself of the continued remedial framing of TLA practice, which the community feels an ongoing need to resist. And, for at least one experienced TLA, the conference calls have not translated into concerted action: *the rest of the time there's absolutely nothing there*²². These calls might be seen not so much as strategic goals, but rather as a cultural practice of the TLA community in themselves: a community united (like many others), at least in part, by a common sense of grievance.

5.4.2 Calls for academic contracts.

At an institutional level, it has long been argued that the precarious institutional position and remedial perceptions of TLA practice could be resolved by TLAs having the same academic contracts as their faculty colleagues. This has been the case for a number of TLAs and their equivalents: up to 50% in Australia (Bartlett, 2007) and 60% in New Zealand (Cameron & Catt, 2008) during the last decade. These rates do seem to be in decline, with a recent Australian survey reporting only 39% of those surveyed now held academic contracts (Malkin & Chanock, 2018), although there was still a clear majority in favour of them. It has been argued that what the profession needs is to build on the existing (albeit, shrinking) base of academic status in order for TLAs “to overcome their own perception that they are second-class citizens” (Strauss, 2013, p. 11).

This argument received support from a number of TLAs interviewed for this study. For one interviewee, similarities between TLA and faculty roles are a strong argument for equivalent contracts: *We research and present. That's what*

we do as part of our work all the time. I think if we were classified as academic, it would open many more doors for us⁶⁰. Otherwise, as others claimed, you start being viewed as not as important and more disposable⁵² or a bit of a Cinderella⁵⁶. One TLA with an academic contract and job description felt that this put her on a more level playing field⁴⁴ with faculty. As another explained, the main reason [a collaboration with a faculty colleague] was successful was that she treated me as an equal. I had a lectureship; she had a lectureship. There was respect for my knowledge and contribution, and I similarly had respect for her.⁵⁰ Similarly, for another TLA, the academic respectability of an academic contract and title meant that she could talk with academic staff without them thinking, 'Who the hell are you? Why should I be listening to you?'⁵². The academic status was perceived as particularly important for a Māori TLA, as being an academic, being Māori provides a role model profile for Māori and Pacific students⁶⁶.

These arguments were echoed by several staff members at NZU where TLAs currently have general or professional (i.e., non-faculty) contracts. One faculty member¹⁷ found it *really problematic that TLAs did not have academic contracts* as these would give TLAs *the opportunity to be research-active about this incredibly important area of work* and give them *greater credibility ...as part of the academic business of the university*. A senior university manager²⁰ made a similar point, arguing that *to have credibility with the academic staff, it would be better for you folk to be part of the Academic and Research portfolio ... and you would have more opportunity to influence for what you're trying to say to be heard in the academic community*.

However, not all of the TLAs agreed that academic contracts or titles were necessary or appropriate for TLAs. One saw them as *purely for snob value*, stating bluntly: *I don't care if I'm an academic or not – it doesn't worry me in the least*⁵². One particular concern regarding a shift to an academic contract was that the obligation to produce research outputs would detract from core TLA practice. One experienced TLA had negotiated an alternative contractual arrangement as a professional teaching fellow (PTF). This type of contract is a manifestation of the vocational turn in higher education, having been designed to allow individuals with specific professional expertise (such as accountants or engineers) to teach within university programmes without being fully incorporated into the faculty structure with commitments to research under the PBRF scheme. The TLA felt that a PTF title gave her equal status in collaborations with faculty: *[PTF] implies an expert, with practical expertise ... there is no question that I must know what I am doing, which has been enormously useful. Just total acceptance*⁵². At the same time, she felt able to devote most of her time to student-facing classes and consultations, while doing research when she wished (rather than as an institutional requirement of an academic contract).

However, two other TLAs with PTF contracts at another institution did not feel that PTF status was sufficient to empower them within a deeply hierarchical tertiary culture: *We're seen as lower status ... When I first started, they moved me into a single office, and then they said, 'Oh you can't have that, because we're bringing a lecturer.*⁶⁵ For them, the main benefit of PTF status was its indeterminacy: it is *really broad and no one's quite sure what that means*⁶⁴. This

allowed them considerable agency in pushing the boundaries of their roles into curricular and professional development areas.

Overall, while academic contracts have helped TLAs to gain credibility in the eyes of faculty colleagues, some TLAs have found them inconsistent with the student-facing services they view as fundamental; at the same time, there has been little willingness on the part of tertiary institutions to change the status of TLAs. This was one reason for the decision in this study to follow an informal strategy to bring about positive change in TLA practice.

5.4.3 A shift to working in disciplinary contexts.

Regardless of their contractual status, TLAs have sought to work in disciplinary contexts, in collaboration with faculty, so that their practice can be integrated into the curriculum, and available to all students, rather than marginalised as an add-on option for those perceived as struggling (Bell, Broadberry, & Ayodeji, 2011; A. Harris & Ashton, 2011; Percy, 2014; Webb, English, & Bonanno, 1995). This is a strategy which they share with a number of other professional tertiary staff, notably librarians (e.g. Muir & Heller-Ross, 2010; Shumaker 2009; Shumaker & Talley 2010). As one experienced TLA explained, *the way to students is through the tutors*⁵⁶.

There are a number of examples of successful collaborations in the literature, in which TLAs have supported writing and learning development in disciplinary contexts, in some cases, helping faculty colleagues to modify their teaching or

assessment practices (Chanock & Tyrell, 1996; Chanock & Vardi, 2005; A. Harris & Ashton, 2011; Munn, Coutts, Knopke, Grant, & Bartlett, 2016; Murphy & Stewart, 1999; Sedgley, 2011; Stratilas, 2011; Tinberg, 2015; Veitch, Johnson, & Mansfield, 2016; Wingate, 2010; Wingate, Andon, & Cogo, 2011; Zapf, Jerome, & Williams, 2011). Similar success has been reported in relation to embedded information literacy, through collaborations between librarians and faculty members (e.g. Chung, 2010; Díaz & Mandernach, 2017; Hawes & Mason Adamson, 2016). The value of literacy development within a disciplinary context is also widely supported in educational and applied linguistics theory and research, as discussed in chapter 4 (e.g. Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith, & McKay, 2012; Godfrey & Richards, 2006; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 1999; Purser et al., 2008; Skillen, Merten, et al., 1998; G. Taylor et al., 1988; Wingate, 2010). Embedding academic literacies within the curriculum, it is argued, should “enhance students’ learning experience, and their understanding of the ways of researching, thinking, writing, questioning and practising in their discipline” (Thies et al., 2014, p. A45) .

This strong support for the integration of skills development into disciplinary teaching and learning has led to the emergence of normative models of learning development (e.g. J. Jones et al., 2002) in which TLAs not only collaborate with faculty, but aim to transfer responsibility for teaching learning and writing skills to faculty colleagues, so that TLAs themselves can then withdraw from direct involvement in teaching within the course. Only at this stage, it is argued, can learning development be considered embedded in the curriculum, since it is in

the hands of disciplinary teaching staff who will teach it together with the other content and skills which form part of the course.

This model has been particularly influential among Australian ALL (academic language and literacy) advisors (broadly equivalent to TLAs), for whom embedding has been described as, essentially, an item of faith (Moore & Hough, 2005) and one that has been enshrined in Australian national educational policy as Good Practice Principle 6 (Australian Government, 2009). The model continues to be a reference point for institutional initiatives for teaching or supporting academic literacy development in curricular contexts (e.g. Briguglio, 2014; Hoadley & Hunter, 2018). In the UK too, embedded learning development has been presented as standard practice; one influential handbook for practitioners confidently claimed that “remedial support” had been swept away by a “study skills revolution” during the 1990s, in which the focus had switched decisively to “how to map, deliver, teach and assess skills in terms of the general learning outcomes of a course” (Cottrell, 2001, p. 3).

Continued provision of learning and writing support outside of a disciplinary programme is criticised for perpetuating the misconception that writing and study skills can be separated from content knowledge, and, thereby, freeing faculty from a responsibility to provide appropriate teaching and learning resources and opportunities (Barkas, 2011; Lawrence, 2005; Lillis, 2001; Wingate, 2006). However, whether the responsibility for teaching these skills should be transferred to the faculty member (as argued by J. Jones et al., 2002) or remain with the TLA (albeit in a disciplinary context) is a matter of continuing

debate. One prominent study of the embedding of literacy and numeracy skills in vocational programmes found that this resulted in positive outcomes only when those skills were taught by specialists. When the vocational teachers were responsible for both content and skills, the gains were actually reversed. The authors concluded that “learners benefit from being taught by teams of staff, each with their own areas of expertise, working closely together” (H. Casey et al., 2006, p. 5). They also pointed out that embeddedness is a much a matter of perception as it is of practice; in particular, to what degree the students perceive the teaching of those skills to be a core element of their learning experience, closely aligned to the disciplinary and professional content and goals of their programmes.

New Zealand-based TLAs interviewed for this study agreed on the ideal of working in disciplinary contexts in collaboration with disciplinary teaching colleagues. For some, the disciplinary context did not fundamentally alter the generic nature of TLA practice, as one experienced TLA explained.

I see the main role of a TLA as teaching and supporting students in developing the skills necessary to learn and perform effectively in the tertiary education environment. I see that role as complementing the role of subject discipline teachers who provide the subject content instruction⁵⁴.

This view has also been expressed in New Zealand TLA literature (e.g. Pocock, 2010). However, most of the interviewees commented on the inseparability of

content knowledge and skills – and therefore the need to deepen their knowledge of the discipline in which they were providing support. One described this as the *lightbulb moment*⁵² of her career. The goal of transferring support to faculty was also strongly supported by one TLA: *the really successful [collaborations] are those where the discipline teacher takes over after the first iteration*⁵¹.

One experienced learning advisor commented that working in a partnership with disciplinary colleagues was *very collegial learning for all of us*⁵⁰; another felt that it has allowed her to accumulate a *body of knowledge about a number of core concepts*¹⁷ which gave her credibility in the students' eyes; and, as collaborations develop, this was seen as an opportunity for TLAs to deepen their disciplinary knowledge, moving *beyond just looking at written artefacts to actually how the discipline itself works; how knowledge is generated in the discipline itself*²⁴.

The difficulty for those TLAs who believed it was necessary to incorporate disciplinary knowledge was where to draw the line between their teaching role and that of their faculty colleague. One TLA saw her role as *to teach the kind of writing and sort of knowledge that underlies that discipline, but not the disciplinary knowledge itself*²⁴. This is a subtle philosophical distinction and some TLAs were concerned that their interpretation of the boundaries might differ from those of faculty colleagues, whom they saw as having the last word on what was or was not to be considered within the purview of the TLAs. A similar indeterminacy of role and identity has been reported in relation to writing

fellows working with faculty on WAC initiatives (Mullin et al., 2008) and in relation to librarians working in disciplinary contexts (Hawes & Mason Adamson, 2016; Shumaker & Talley 2010).

Alongside reports of successful collaborations among faculty and those engaged in academic skills support, there has long been a parallel thread in TLA literature describing effortful and one-sided attempts at collaboration, stymied by limited faculty engagement and institutional support (e.g. Frederick et al., 1981; Pourshafie & Brady 2013; Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2007). For several TLAs interviewed for this study, collaboration was seen as an effortful, incremental process of getting one's *foot in the door*⁶² in the hope that one will be perceived as *gently being useful*⁶² with the aim of gaining *traction*⁵⁶ with faculty. This is consistent with arguments in the literature that collaborations need to develop "organically over time" (Pourshafie & Brady 2013, p. A171), even among willing partners with institutional support. From the TLA perspective, one reason why collaborations with faculty members were seen as incremental was the need to develop disciplinary knowledge: *it takes a really long time at first, especially if the discipline is quite far outside your own experience. And disciplines differ vastly about what they want, in terms of their requirements.*²⁴

Some TLAs attributed the limited engagement on the part of faculty colleagues to a tendency to take for granted their specific disciplinary knowledge and skills, a phenomenon described in chapter 4 as "disciplinary transparency" (Russell, 1991). For example, one TLA found it impossible to obtain a clear idea of what

to include in a workshop he had been asked to provide students in a specific programme on critical thinking; he concluded that the faculty member had not *properly articulated, even internally, what he actually meant by 'critical thinking'*.²⁶ A lack of insight into or commitment to exploring the nature of disciplinary knowledge and skills on the part of faculty can be a significant barrier to the construction of the “shared mental models” which have been seen as a prerequisite of collaborative educational initiatives (Angelo, 1999, p. 7).

Other TLAs felt that faculty engagement was also limited by persistent remedial perceptions of TLA practice and an associated lack of respect for its practitioners (a common theme in the literature, for example: Blythman & Orr, 2006; Chanock, 2007; Craswell & Bartlett, 2002; Vance, 1995). A typical comment from TLAs interviewed for that study was that *collaboration needs reciprocal respect for roles and professionalism and academic standing – some teaching staff do not have this for TLAs*.⁴⁶ One TLA described the emotional impact of this perceived lack of respect: *I feel like I've been pulled in to do something and then flicked out when they've had enough of me*.⁶⁰ This need for mutual respect and understanding, as the basis for successful collaboration, has also been a prominent theme in the literature on library-faculty partnerships (e.g. Arp, Woodard, Lindstrom, & Shonrock, 2006; Díaz & Mandernach, 2017) .

Other barriers to effective disciplinary practice mentioned by TLAs were an already overfull curriculum and overstretched faculty colleagues – another common theme in the literature (e.g. Murray & Glass, 2011; Shahabudin, 2007). One TLA interviewed for this study felt that collaboration was perceived by

faculty colleagues as a *burden*, particularly in an institutional culture which prioritised research outputs: *that's where they get the points*.⁵² Limited involvement in decision-making could leave TLAs unaware of significant changes to course content or assignments which made their carefully-planned workshops redundant. As one TLA explained, *it makes us look stupid*⁶⁵. And even when TLAs have managed to establish productive collaborations, the turbulent tertiary environment means they can be difficult to sustain. One TLA, working in a business school, explained that the *good working relationship* they had worked hard to develop with faculty during the semester was now fading away, as those staff would not be teaching again until at least the following year⁶⁴.

The overall consensus among TLAs was that collaboration in disciplinary initiatives was not something they could necessarily drive forward themselves, but they were rather dependent on the variable willingness of faculty members to engage with them:

*I think there's a dichotomy. Some people who work more with us see us as colleagues, as part of the team, who have a particular expertise, in writing, who can help them; others see us as the band aid to send ailing students to get their fix-up.*⁶⁰

This is an indication that TLA-faculty relationships tend to have limited degrees of interdependence and collective responsibility, which are considered core elements of full collaboration (S. G. Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Gray, 1989). Indeed,

it has been argued that the complex differences of perspective, priorities and power differentials among the various stakeholders involved mean that there can be no standardised procedure for embedding skills development in the curriculum (Benzie et al., 2017; Thies et al., 2014).

5.4.4 Institutional networking

Given the difficulty of initiating and sustaining collaborations with faculty, TLAs have used a range of networking strategies to promote their practice and status, an approach also common among librarians for similar reasons (Heider, 2010; Kesselman & Watstein, 2009; Rudasill, 2010). The approach can include enlisting the support of “champions” in institutional positions of power (Dunworth, Drury, Kralik, Moore, & Mulligan, 2013; Leach, Zepke, & Hawarth, 2010; Radloff, 2006), a strategy referred to by interviewees as *institutional buy-in*⁶², *top-level mandate*⁶⁰ or simply *someone higher up who understands what the work involves and has to speak up for the practitioners*⁵⁰. However, Benzie et al. (2017) have cautioned against overreliance on top-down authority, given the distributed expertise and decision-making involved in collaborative projects such as embedding skills in academic programmes. Instead, they recommend using informal social networking strategies to engage with the whole range of stakeholders and to break down indifference or resistance from faculty.

TLAs interviewed for the current study used a variety of these informal strategies. One explained:

We try all sorts of approaches, from coffee and a shared kitchen; we do a lot of work around emails; we try very gently to not tread on their toes: 'Let us know if you want us to do anything.' And slowly they'll come to trust us⁶¹.

Some TLAs spoke of regular chats with faculty colleagues, in which new projects were mentioned; this could then lead to TLA involvement in shaping the wording and rubric of assignments. One used the experience of seeing poor presentations at a campus three-minute thesis competition, in the company of senior management, as an opportunity to offer public speaking workshops, which turned out to be highly valued by both staff and students⁵². Another used *warm contacts* in one department to create an initial opening and then *kept cranking it up*, explaining that *you have to get some runs on the board⁶²*. Such strategies are highly typical of informal, horizontal relationship-building within postmodern organisational structures, as discussed in chapter 3 (e.g. Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

However, as with other aspects of TLA practice, the instability of the tertiary environment means that these relationships need to be constantly developed and renewed, as one TLA explained:

One professor is on her third iteration with us, she really loves us and we have a very good relationship with her, but it's taken that long. So she knows exactly what we do. But some of the new ones have no idea.

*They're just told, 'Oh they deal with English problems.' So you've got to tell them, 'No, we don't just do that.'*⁶¹

5.4.5 Involvement in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Where TLAs have established relationships with faculty, opportunities can arise for them to contribute to changes in the assessed writing for which they are providing support. One faculty member commented that a TLA had helped her significantly in making her assessments more explicit: *I've asked her to review my assignments and to give feedback on them and to help with giving students that clarity of instruction. I suppose it's unpacking a concept*¹⁷. This was one of several references by faculty, students and TLAs themselves to their “unpacking” expertise. Some TLAs highlighted the benefit of a relative detachment from the discipline in doing so:

*So, in a way, I'm crossing over into the teaching consultant area, because we're breaking down the assignment into parts. ... What we are doing is taking 20 steps back from where the staff member is now to when they first started engaging with the discipline. We can do that.*²⁴

This ability to see disciplinary writing tasks from the student perspective and has been seen as a resource which TLAs can draw upon in helping “mainstream academics to see the strangeness of their familiar ways and the need for this strangeness to be explicated to newcomers” (O'Regan, 2005, p. 137); in other words, to overcome their “disciplinary transparency” (Russell, 1991). It has been

argued that their personal (and relatively equal) relationships with students (in particular, through consultations) can also enable TLAs to support students in engaging with feedback and developing their assessment literacies (Gravett & Winstone, 2018).

Another area in which TLAs were seen as being able to contribute to professional development of faculty was differentiated instruction – for instance, giving staff workshops on teaching Māori, Pacific or international students. One TLA⁶⁴ mentioned an involvement in formative peer review of faculty colleagues. Where disciplinary-teaching staff are also students themselves (for instance, completing their Master’s or Doctoral degrees – a particularly common situation in the non-university tertiary sector), the transition between student and staff support is particularly fluid; one TLA pointed out that *support offered at this level also improves their skills which provides greater understanding of their students’ needs*⁴⁴.

The involvement of TLAs in staff development has a long history; the first advisors in New Zealand worked with both staff and students in the belief that “improving staff teaching skills and improving students’ learning skills are two sides of the same coin” (Brailsford, 2011, p. 369). These functions were later differentiated, with academic developers (ADs) being recruited specifically to work with staff to develop curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. More recently, the formation of merged centres for teaching and learning over the last decade has opened up possibilities of closer integration of TLAs and ADs, given that

they are working side by side, as noted in a number of studies over the last decade (Allan & Clarke, 2007; Devereux & Wilson, 2010; Wingate et al., 2011). This integration was expressed as an ideal by a senior academic leader¹ at NZU through the metaphor of hands joined together with fingers interleaved.

However, as with other strategies for addressing marginalisation, TLAs have encountered difficulties in moving into the staff development space. Such a move is not always welcomed. Another senior academic policy-maker² at NZU felt that the TLA and AD functions are *not distinct enough*. Ideally, she saw TLAs working with students on an individual basis, with staff development *cascading down to a much wider collection of students* being the reserve of ADs. This implication that TLA practice has a relatively limited scope has been expressed by ADs too; one leading British academic staff developer, for instance, criticised what he saw as the “rather narrow preoccupations” of TLAs (Gibbs, 2009, p. 6).

One experienced TLA felt that ADs tended to relegate TLAs to an inferior, operational status within merged centres for teaching and learning:

Staff developers ... don't understand what the students require to develop into effective learners.... Often the staff development is the overarching thing and the student learning support is the sub-group ... it's the academic developers telling the [student learning service] what it should doing – it's not a two-way listening and conversation process, like, 'What do students need? And how can we pass it on to you? And what

are staff saying that students require?’ They will see it as an opportunity to have more resources. And what you have will be theirs⁵⁴.

It is notable that in this scenario, the TLA held a rare position with senior academic status but still found that the TLA voice was unheard. This challenges the assumption that the main reason for TLA disempowerment and marginalisation is a lack of academic status (e.g. Strauss, 2013). Rather, it indicates a difficulty for TLAs in articulating their student-facing practices in terms that make sense within the dominant, managerial discourse of institutional planning and control, which academic development (e.g. Biggs & Tang, 2007) is more closely aligned to. This fundamental ideological difference between the AD and TLA community has been seen as a major reason for the lack of collective action to address the marginalisation of teaching and learning within tertiary institutions (Chanock, 2011a).

5.5 Conclusion

TLA marginalisation has the characteristics of what is known in organisational theory as a “wicked problem” (Rittel & Webber, 1973). This type of problem resists clear formulation, and hence solution, as it is framed in different ways by different stakeholders. In the case of TLAs, they find their practice perceived by their institutions and colleagues as a remedial service because, in the context of widening participation, the skills they seek to develop continue to be largely viewed within a deficit framework. The marginalisation which comes with

working outside the core curricular and institutional contexts of tertiary education means that it has proven difficult for TLAs to engage collaboratively with faculty colleagues in order to change these perceptions; and where collaborations do occur, they are difficult to sustain within the “accidental, discontinuous and heterogeneous” (Biggs, 2012, p. 113) tertiary environment. The ad-hoc nature of their employment and their marginalised institutional positioning account for the “diversity, ambiguity and vulnerability” (Percy, 2014, p. 2) of TLA practice.

As is the characteristic of wicked problems, attempted solutions tend to founder upon underlying differences of perspectives and values. Professionalisation, through networking, conferences and publications, has undoubtedly helped to foster a sense of common identity and allowed for sharing of research findings and resources. However, the process has had a consolidating, rather than transformational, impact on TLA practice in New Zealand. It has allowed TLAs to recognise their common concerns (particularly regarding institutional marginalisation) without becoming a significant platform for change advocacy. At the same time, the process has also revealed fault lines within the TLA community, manifested in persistent debates regarding academic contracts, embedding and involvement in academic development. Each of these proposed solutions to the marginalisation of TLA practice has its champions, but none has yet proved to be sufficient or sustainable.

The data gathered for this project indicates that many TLAs (and some of their colleagues) feel that general staff contracts do not reflect their educational expertise and role, and reduce their credibility within the academic hierarchy of

tertiary institutions. Nonetheless, not all TLAs see traditional academic positions as an ideal alternative; for one experienced TLA, having such a position did not guarantee that the TLA perspective gained traction within the context of competing discourses of teaching and learning. Those few TLAs who had been given the status of professional teaching fellows felt that the very ambiguity of this institutional positioning was a better fit than either academic or general contracts, allowing them to transition credibly between student and staff facing aspects of their role.

The sense that TLA practice is drawn towards an indeterminate institutional positioning, in response to competing internal and external pressures, is also seen in relation to their involvement in one-to-one consultations with students. On the one hand, this service is seen as a distinctive contribution to tertiary teaching and learning, one which is complementary to other forms of instruction and can have a significant impact of student integration and progression. It is also seen by TLAs as the principal means by which they develop their multidisciplinary expertise in student learning and literacies. However, this practice is vulnerable to changes in institutional policy, since it does not align with significant trends towards upscaling and distance provision. One-to-one consultations have also been seen as sustaining the remedial framing of TLA practice, despite efforts to promote them as developmental.

This in-betweenness (Percy, James, Stirling, & Walker, 2004) of TLA practice, occupying space both within and outside disciplinary programmes (Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008), suggests that TLA practice might be framed not in terms

of the disciplinary-generic dichotomy, but as a form of inter- or multi-disciplinarity, a positionality also commonly adopted by library staff (Hawes & Mason Adamson, 2016). The inbetweenness of TLA practice was apparent in several comments from NZU staff:

I think that's one of the advantages that [TLAs] bring, the interdisciplinarity. You can make those connections. And you're not seen as affiliated with the science geeks, or the hopeless social workers¹²

[TLAs have a] breadth of knowledge of a variety of skills: academic, and how the university works; who to go to; what courses; and so on; because you have experience of dealing with students from different disciplines and see all their pieces of writing¹⁶.

A multidisciplinary understanding ... learning advisors need to be able to see the generic in the specific, if that makes sense, and understand the wide range of literacy that's required in a university environment¹.

The in-between character of TLA practice arises from its indefinite space within a highly dynamic tertiary environment. Existing proposals aimed at strengthening the impact of tertiary learning advice (e.g. by reconfiguring tertiary learning advice as a standard academic career, with reduced consultations and more fixed disciplinary affiliations) not only run into problems of sustainability at an institutional level, but raise concerns among some TLAs of a loss of the

interdisciplinary in-betweenness which is a defining aspect of their identity. As Percy (2014, p. 2) explained (referring to Australian ALL advisors):

Tensions ... keep ALL educators in an ambiguous state, floating between the margins and the centre, between the student, the faculty and the institution, between a liberal notion of equity and the values of the marketplace, between fixing a problem, changing the culture and constantly reinventing themselves.

The aim of the current study was to explore how far a TLA could achieve improvements in writing development and TLA practice, while still occupying this ambiguous space, floating between generic and disciplinary practice and between staff and student support without the changes in institutional positioning which have typically characterised change initiatives in the sector (e.g. J. Jones et al., 2002).

Chapter 6: Reconnaissance

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in chapter 1, at the time of the reconnaissance phase of the project in 2011, the research question was still an exploratory one, investigating whatever changes in perceptions and practice of tertiary learning advice might result from a collaborative approach to academic writing development within a disciplinary programme. The more specific focus of the final research question – on positive changes in relation to both writing pedagogy in a disciplinary programme and TLA practice – began to emerge through the data-gathering and reflection on the reconnaissance phase and the initial engagement in collaborative action during the first action research cycle in 2012.

At the beginning of the project, I had been working as a TLA at NZU for several years, having previously worked in English language teaching and teacher training in various countries. My primary responsibility as a TLA was to support students from non-English-speaking backgrounds; they comprised 80% of the students whom I saw during the 487 one-to-one consultations I gave in 2011 (the year of the reconnaissance). The majority of these consultations were for Management courses, given that these have high proportions of international students and require essay and report writing. However, I had very little contact with the disciplinary teaching colleagues responsible for the courses for which I was providing this support; requests from faculty for disciplinary-specific

workshops were infrequent and limited to occasional, one-off, generic sessions. Hence, an invitation from the director of the Bachelor of Applied Health (BAH) programme to become involved in supporting her students was a rare opportunity to work in a disciplinary context.

The BAH is a four-year programme, incorporating 32 academic and vocational courses, with an increasingly important professional practice component from the second-year onwards. On successful completion of both the academic and professional practice components of the programme, students are certified to practice (at novice level) within the field of applied health (the pseudonym used for reasons of confidentiality in this thesis to refer to a specific profession associated with health and education services). The programme has features of both the traditional and contemporary tertiary environment discussed in Chapter 3. The traditional element is its student population, comprising a high proportion of relatively high-achieving domestic school-leavers.

As acknowledged elsewhere, this atypicality restricts the generalizability of the findings of this study. However, the BAH also has a vocational focus and multidisciplinary content that is characteristic of contemporary tertiary programmes, incorporating courses from the natural and social sciences, as well as specific courses related to applied health practice. This vocational focus is reflected in the BAH teaching staff, most of whom are not on full-time academic contracts (i.e., those with a research component) and pursue parallel professional careers outside the university.

In the meetings leading up to the project, the director of the BAH programme expressed concerns about the quality of BAH students' writing. Too many students were failing specific courses (meaning they had to retake them the following year, becoming detached from their cohort in the process) or were passing with relatively low grades, which the director felt left them poorly prepared for professional practice. This initial engagement was the basis for exploratory fact-finding research during the second semester of 2011 to investigate attitudes towards writing among staff and students involved in the first-year of the BAH. Within an action research framework (e.g. Herr & Anderson, 2005), the aim of fact-finding reconnaissance of this type is to identify "actionable issues" (Bradbury Huang, 2010) which can become the focus of collaborative change. The findings are summarised in section 6.3 below and their implications for the two major concerns of this study (academic writing pedagogy and TLA practice) are discussed in section 6.4.

6.2 Data-collection

As explained in chapter 2, a number of forms of data were collected during the reconnaissance phase. The findings presented in 6.3 below and discussed in 6.4 are based on data from the BAH programme and its staff and students. This comprised details of BAH assignment tasks obtained from the university learning management system, transcripts of the assignment advice given by a BAH staff member in two classes, marked student scripts provided by her and two other BAH staff, interviews with these three BAH staff and a focus group

with first-year BAH students. This data is complemented by selections from the reflective journal entries made before and during the reconnaissance phase.

6.3 Findings

6.3.1 Analysis of assessed writing within the BAH programme.

As discussed in chapter 4, the vocational and multidisciplinary focus of programmes such as the BAH typically leads to a complex range of writing practices. Based on an analysis of course documentation, the written assessment tasks were categorised according to text type, as summarised in Table 4 below. Given the vocational focus of the course, it is no surprise that applied texts, such as case study reports, were the most common forms of assessed writing. However, from the point of view of writing pedagogy, there were apparent discontinuities as students progressed through the programme. First-year students encountered a wide range of genres. Some of these (case studies, for example), formed a foundation for assignments throughout the programme, with higher levels of complexity and expectation, in particular, as they began to combine academic and professional practice-related writing from the second year onwards. Nonetheless, given the importance of reflection in both of these practices, the lack of reflective writing assessment in the first year appeared a notable gap.

Table 4: *Text types of BAH writing assignments in 2012*

Genre	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
Case study reports ¹	1	8	5	1	15
Practical texts ²	1	0	3	2	6
Essays ³	2	1	0	2	5
Reflective journals	0	1	2	1	4
Literature reviews	2	1	0	1	4
Critiques	1	1	0	1	3
Research reports	1	0	1	0	2
Sets of short answers	1	0	1	1	3

¹ includes analysis and/or diagnosis, discussion and/or treatment plans

² includes artefacts, professional documents and presentations

³ includes theory-based essays based on scenarios, problems and cases

Such discontinuities are partly attributable to the fact that the content of written assessments was mostly decided upon by staff responsible for individual courses, rather than with reference to students' ongoing writing development throughout the course. Because of the multidisciplinary nature of the programme, the staff who decided on written assignment tasks were in some cases outside the BAH programme and must have had limited awareness of what the BAH students had been writing before, or what their ongoing needs were. For instance, the essays which BAH students wrote in Year 4 were for a cultural paper taught by distance by non-BAH staff. Although this straightforward-looking essay assessment may have made sense within the

context of the specific course, seen within the broader context of the BAH programme, it was questionable how much it contributed to student writing development at this stage of the course, as they transitioned into full-time professional practice.

6.3.2 Observation of instructions for a first-year assignment.

In the two observed segments from a first-year semester two course, the lecturer, Sarah, gave instructions for an assignment based on data which students had previously collected during an interaction with a client. This data and some initial analysis formed part one of the assignment, for which the students had already received Sarah's grades and feedback. Now, for part two, they had to write a report containing a more complete analysis of the data they had collected in relation to established norms (which they had been studying during the course and which were contained in their text book). The assignment brief specified which aspects of the client's performance needed to be commented on in the report, but in other respects it was quite an open-ended task: no word limit was given and students were also not provided with any models, because Sarah was concerned they might copy, rather than attending to the unique features of their individual case. As Sarah told them in class: *All of you have got different [clients], so ... there's no standard kind of form you can take.*

Sarah introduced the assignment, outlining some of the feedback she had given for part one and providing detailed advice about the further analysis required in each section of their report for part two. There was a strong emphasis on the

scale of the feedback she had already given them and on the task ahead. For instance, Sarah told them she had *made substantial comments; there are heaps and heaps of tables that you can go and look at for analysis purposes; there are lots of examples in your notes, examples in your textbook*. The focus of the initial instructions was on content, rather than writing, and information was given verbally (2500 words altogether), and mainly in the form of a monologue, rather than through comment and questions based on examples (for the reason given above).

In the second class, one week later, Sarah went over the instructions for the assignment in more detail, with a greater focus on writing. She encouraged students to learn from her feedback on part one of the assignment and reminded them that further support was available if necessary: *I've made comments, highlighted and said, 'wording, wording, wording'. If you continue to have difficulties with that, come back to me and I will go through it with you. As in her initial instructions, her advice was lengthy, but did not include specific exemplars of what kind of writing was required on the grounds that each client was unique: *it's difficult for me to give you a general idea of what to use because the content of the information is so varied*. Sarah's advice was also punctuated with warnings and exhortations, mainly expressed as imperatives: *e.g., be careful of using really ambiguous terms. Remember, you are analysing something; it needs to be specific*.*

Overall, I felt that the information which Sarah gave to the students about writing the assignment was limited in usefulness, despite her evident concern to help

them. Her discourse was strongly marked by an emphasis on difficulty and the need to closely follow expectations regarding precision, objectivity etc. However, her support for students in satisfying these expectations was constrained by her strong belief that she was unable to provide exemplars of the target features (because of the uniqueness of each client). The question which arose for me from this observation was whether I could help to resolve this dilemma, using my knowledge of academic discourse. For example, could I develop exemplars at an intermediate level of detail between complete models (which Sarah wished to avoid) and abstract advice (which I felt was likely to contribute more to students' anxiety than to their clarity about staff expectations)?

6.3.3 Analysis of written feedback on first-year assignments.

As explained in 6.2 above, I obtained marked student assignments from Sarah and two other BAH staff responsible for first-year courses, Maria and Stacey. The purpose of analysing these marked scripts was to find further evidence of the features of writing valued by BAH staff and to see to what extent the espoused values of the staff in relation to assessment were consistent with their feedback practice.

Like Sarah's oral instructions, the written assessment feedback of all three BAH staff was lengthy and punctuated by imperatives; it was also mainly focused on errors. There was a strong tendency towards multiple comments (mostly with accompanying corrections) on errors of punctuation, grammar and style, particularly on average and weaker assignments, where they were several times

more common than comments on substantive issues. On one assignment, for instance, Stacey corrected the same capitalisation error 17 times before adding a note that she would ignore it from there on, only to return to it again before the end. Comments praising students for content or writing performance were infrequent; one student's almost perfect reference list, for instance, received no acknowledgement apart from comments on one minor error (missing state initials for the city of publication). The general preoccupation with highlighting and correcting errors is shown in the comment by Stacey on the strongest assignment: *You are obviously a very good writer or a very thorough editor as I could really find no fault;* where faults could be found, on the average and weaker assignments, they were highlighted or corrected as a matter of course.

The large amount of written feedback is clear from Table 5 below (based on the assignment for which I had observed Sarah's instructions). The lack of a fixed word length for this assignment led to considerable variation, particularly among the weaker students, two of whom wrote over 8000 words, while one wrote under 4000. The number of written comments rose steadily as the student performance declined, so that students in the bottom half received more than twice as many comments as the top students.

Staff comments were lengthy – totalling several hundred words in some cases – including detailed corrections of content and style. For the top students, about half of the comments contained praise, while for students in the bottom half, over 80% of the comments were corrections, criticisms or questions indicating that the student's analysis lacked accuracy or depth or that their style was

inappropriate. This meant that the weaker students were receiving much more feedback on their writing, and much more of it was negative.

Table 5: *Analysis of Sarah's comments on student assignments*

	Word length of student assignments	Number of staff comments
	mean [standard deviation]	mean [standard deviation]
All assignments (n=15)	6312 [1369]	60 [18]
A grade (n=2)	6814 [133]	31 [2.5]
B / B+ grades (n=5)	6729 [838]	48 [13]
B-/C+/C grades (n=8)	5995 [1687]	67 [13]

6.3.4 Analysis of interviews with BAH staff members.

The issues which emerged from the observation of assignment instructions and analysis of assignment feedback comments were among the topics which I chose to raise in interviews with Sarah, Maria and Stacey held at the end of semester (as I was still completing my analysis of the other data). As I mentioned earlier, these interviews were primarily aimed at eliciting the espoused beliefs of BAH staff regarding writing and assessment, while, at the same time, I saw them as an opportunity to explore future engagement with the

staff on change initiatives (in keeping with the action research ethos of this project as a whole).

The importance which BAH staff placed on written feedback as their primary means of influencing student writing was apparent in the interview data. Sarah saw this feedback as highlighting the aspects of writing which BAH students needed to eliminate in order to write clinically: *they tend to want to write very dramatically and use a lot of adjectives, which they now have to drop because they're writing a clinical document*. It was up to the students to process and attend to this feedback: *I make comments and I expect them to read those comments and learn from them*. She felt that her feedback was not overly harsh, but clear enough to prompt the student to make the required changes: *I don't deduct a significant amount for their writing ... one student in particular ... was very incoherent [but] took everything on board [and] came up with a brilliant piece of work*.

These general views were shared by Stacey and Maria. Like Sarah, Maria used her feedback to *target, the most obvious, glaring issues, like structure, or spelling, or grammar* in the expectation that students would avoid these in future. If they needed help in improving their writing, they were expected to seek this outside the programme. As Stacey explained, *I haven't set aside time in the class to explicitly build up skills during the course. I guess I farm them out, and expect them to go to library tutorials to independently go and seek help elsewhere*.

It was also clear from the interviews that the reluctance to provide exemplars or frameworks was consistent with the professional beliefs and values of these BAH staff. For example, because the assignment for which the instructions were observed was based on a unique client, Sarah believed that students needed to attend to the specific details in their sample, rather than following a pre-determined model: *if they have a set form, they all tend to write the same, they all tend to follow exactly the table, exactly the format*. She felt that allowing students to view examples in the class (but not copy or take them home) provided sufficient support, while avoiding overreliance on a study based on a different client.

However, the use of exemplars was not wholly excluded from the BAH programme. Maria noted that they were commonly used during the professional practice component of the course, where standardised reporting was a major focus. Maria also expressed an interest in TLA support for her students, particularly in relation to grammar and referencing. Although this was a valuable opening to my further involvement in the course, its remedial framing proved to be limiting in relation to my overall aims of changing writing pedagogy and TLA practice.

6.3.5 Analysis of focus group of first-year BAH students.

Like the interviews with BAH staff, the focus group also took place at the end of the semester, just after students had completed their final examination. The seven students in the focus group were typical of the BAH programme (though

not of university students in general) in that they were all female, domestic students. The aim of holding the focus group was to elicit the students' views on their experience of writing in the BAH programme and of how they were guided and assessed in their performance. I could then compare these views with those of their lecturers, as part of the overall goal of the reconnaissance phase to identify actionable issues which could become the focus of collaborative change efforts during the following years.

Table 6: *Features of applied health writing mentioned by staff and students*

	succinct	clear	evidence-based	objective	tailored for audience	critical
Maria	Y	Y	Y	Y		
Stacey	Y	Y	Y	Y		
Sarah	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Students	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

The students acknowledged the importance of writing as a professional competency and readily listed the features of the scientific or medical register which they were having to conform to. The consistency between their account and those of BAH staff (as illustrated in Table 4 below) indicated that the programme had been successful in communicating the desired qualities of professional writing to its students.

However, the students were highly critical of the open-ended nature of the written assessment tasks (particularly the one for which I had observed Sarah's instructions) and the lack of guidance they received: *I felt like some of the tasks were actually writing tasks but without having any training.* They felt that the scale of the writing tasks, combined with a lack of clarity over what exactly was being asked of them, had affected the quality of their writing, since they were unable to revise their drafts: *I feel I wasted an awful lot of time where I could have been making my assignment better, just trying to figure it out.* They acknowledged BAH staff arguments for not providing them with models, but felt that this was inappropriate at first-year level, comparing this unfavourably with the detailed guidance which they received for writing lab reports in the Psychology course which they had also taken during the second semester: *it told you step by step, and basically what to put in every single sentence and I did that ... I found that it was helpful.* The following comment is indicative of their overall view of the experience of first-year writing in the BAH: *I learnt a lot but I felt I should have just known a bit more on where to start.*

The students' descriptions of first-year writing in the BAH were punctuated by frequent references to obligations and restrictions which they encountered in adjusting to a clinical register – something which staff and students agreed was a major focus of writing development at this level. Their common agreement on what they perceived as the rules of BAH writing is clear from the following excerpt (in which perceived obligations and prohibitions are underlined):

You have to cut out so much

Got to watch your wording

No assumptions.

Can't say, "I think you will". No.

(Loud laughs). Yeah (various voices).

You can't predict. Nooooo.

It all has to be observed.

Where student perceptions differed markedly from those of BAH staff was in relation to how well students were supported and assessed during the process of adjustment. The BAH staff felt that their grading and feedback practice was fair and informative, whereas students saw it as overly harsh. One student expressed her shock at the *terrible mark* for her first essay that she thought had been *the best essay I'd ever written*. Negative feedback on their first assignments was successful in raising their awareness of writing style and accuracy, but caused considerable anxiety: one described agonising over *how to word a sentence so I wouldn't get penalised*. Students felt that such errors were inevitable in the context of a first-year programme: *to me that's our learning process so I don't think that should fully go into our final mark*.

6.3.6 Selections from my reflective journal

The reflective journal which I kept throughout the project documents my growing understanding of writing development and TLA practice and to some extent also explains the reasons for my lack of clarity about how to move forward towards collaborative action to address the issues which had emerged in the

reconnaissance. The retrospective analysis presented here is based on an analysis of relevant themes in journal entries during 2010 and 2011.

As indicated by the selections in Table 7 below, these journal entries overall show a developing awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of TLA practice in terms of supporting students' writing development.

Table 7: *Reflections on writing development 2010 – 2011*

Themes	Example Reflections
<p><i>Potential for TLAs to provide formative feedback on student writing</i></p>	<p>We are also on the students' side. We don't give marks. We have access to that black box of essay writing before it's sealed and handed over to be evaluated by faculty (October 18, 2010).</p> <p>As Learning Advisors, we are inside the circle of trust. We get to read the mess (November 16, 2010).</p>
<p><i>Frustration with limited knowledge of disciplinary writing practices and expectations</i></p>	<p>[This was an] iceberg assignment – ie 7/8 of it were under the surface, out of my view. I saw part of the product and none of the process (June 7, 2011)</p> <p>How am I supposed to help – at this level, with such</p>

fragmentary knowledge of the expectations, the context, the totality of the information given about the assignment? (June 9, 2011).

The assignment was unclear and it was also unclear what advice she'd been given by the tutor. I was trying to discern these 'as through a glass, darkly' – the glass in question being the student's disordered and resentful perceptions of the task (August 30, 2011).

Concerns regarding the use of writing exclusively as an assessment tool

Writing is not the target of learning ... it's only noticed when it's wrong (May 26, 2011).

This coupling of writing and assessment is one reason why writing is underused, undervalued as a means of learning, as the primary means of construction of knowledge, both personally and collaboratively. The link with assessment can block both (June 24, 2011).

[A student's] constant refrain was: Will I get marked down for this (August 31, 2011).

As in the reflections on writing development, there was also evidence in my journal of complex and, to some extent, contradictory attitudes towards TLA practice, as indicated in the selections in Table 8 below.

Table 8: *Reflections on TLA practice 2010 – 2011*

Theme	Example Reflections
<p><i>Potential for developmental TLA practice</i></p>	<p>Perhaps [TLAs can be] a kind of intermediary – mentoring learning / teaching both on the part of learners and on the part of academic staff. Helping academic staff to be explicit about writing requirements as well as helping them to scaffold the learners through the process of developing the disciplinary writing knowledge / skill required.</p> <p>(October 20, 2010)</p> <p>I'm not seeking to escape from the remedial outhouse. I see this collaboration as an extension of the role – and also as a way of enriching the existing services, which do include those basic – and arguably remedial – writing and study skills.</p> <p>(August 26, 2011).</p>

In my experience, pretty much all the students who come to see me – a number of them A students – are developing in all areas – and benefit from structured guidance (September 28, 2011).

When I say long-term developmental advice, I don't necessarily mean just telling them what they should do, but more particularly, modelling certain ways of thinking or doing which I assume will benefit them as they go on with their studies. This could include breaking down questions, sketching out a plan for an essay or report, linking sentences together, modifying and supporting claims (November 9, 2011).

***Remedial framing of
TLA practice***

Students seem to come more for a fix-up of what they've done, rather than to learn skills for future use. More of a customer relationship – for after-sales service – than as a potential apprentice (October 20, 2010).

By focusing on making up in some way for perceived deficiencies in the student, we reinforce the status quo. We are a patch. We exist so it doesn't need to change (June 1, 2011).

Perhaps for many of our clients, the experience is actually like a visit to the doctor's surgery – they have to filter out the images and discourse of healthy living in order to get the drugs they need to kill the pain – so they can get back to getting by. Treat me – don't change me (June 16, 2011).

***Ambiguous
institutional
positioning
of TLA practice***

Learning support [can be seen] as a third space – somewhere between faculty and students (October 20, 2010).

If we are essentially academic writing tutors by any other name, we do occupy an ambiguous position within the academy ... in some cases, it's better not to shout about it – because there might be some concern that we – non lawyers, non-psychologists etc – are venturing into areas where we have no qualification / right to speak (April 12, 2011).

We, who see ourselves as primarily engaged in helping others develop autonomy, are not ourselves autonomous (November 25, 2011).

6.4 Discussion

6.4.1 Implications for BAH writing pedagogy

Although the programme had been successful in communicating writing expectations to the students, the expectations were expressed in terms of general rules and obligations. This is a practice which has been much criticised in the literature (e.g. Ivanic et al., 2009) on the grounds that it oversimplifies the diverse rhetorical situations and purposes which students and practitioners need to understand and adapt to in order to meet the information needs of the intended users (Hyland & McDonough, 2005).

One possible explanation for this lack of a rhetorical perspective is that writing practices in the first year of the BAH were relatively uniform, requiring little personal reflection or consideration of or adaptation to audience. It became clear only later in the project that these purportedly universal values, such as succinctness and objectivity, were most closely associated with what is known in the health disciplines as the medical mode of documentation. As my engagement with the BAH staff broadened, I learned that this is a contested practice within the field (as discussed in chapter 7).

BAH students' perception that there was a lack of relevant support and guidance in dealing with assignments which they experienced as highly challenging in terms of complexity and expectations was a clear indication to me that this was a space in which I could work within the programme – although at

the time I was unclear of my role in doing so. Student difficulties were compounded by the open-ended nature of some assignment tasks, with little use of exemplars. BAH staff justified this approach on the grounds that each client needed to be treated as unique – hence, exemplars based on other cases could be misleading. Though understandable in relation to the values and concerns of the profession, this approach is not consistent with a transitional pedagogy, in which first-year students are supported in the adjusting to new practices and expectations in teaching and learning (Kift, 2008).

I saw the potential for resolving this dilemma through an analysis of the structure and register of the required texts (Hyland, 2008; Swales, 2001) in order to develop frameworks which could provide students with the guidance and support they needed without distracting them with specific content about another client. WAC literature (e.g. Bean, 2011b) indicated that in-class writing activities could help to familiarise students with the required genre features.

The third area of BAH writing pedagogy in which I saw an opportunity for positive change was in staff feedback on student assignments. The analysis of marked scripts, and the interview and focus group data indicated that the process of assignment feedback in the first-year of the BAH was problematic. The problem was not that comments were minimal and generic, as reported by Patton and Taylor (2013) in their study of writing in Engineering courses. Nonetheless, the comments from BAH staff did have several features associated with ineffective assignment feedback in the literature (e.g. Deepwell & Benfield, 2012), such as a lack of focus on formative feedback, which has

been found to play a key role in helping students adapt to unfamiliar rhetorical situations (Estrem, 2015; Roozen, 2015a; Russell, 2015). Sarah felt that because the assignment was divided in two, the ample feedback they received on part one was playing a formative role. However, even though relatively few points were at stake, students still perceived this as summative, rather than formative, and felt it was unfair that they lost marks at this stage.

In order for the BAH staff's assessment feedback to have the desired positive effect on student learning, the literature suggests that it would need to be more facilitative (e.g. Bean, 2011a; C. Taylor & Burke da Silva, 2014) and selective (e.g. Patton & Taylor, 2013; Wingard & Geosits, 2014). Feedback practices in the BAH first year were particularly marked by the commonly reported tendency of tertiary teachers to highlight obvious errors (e.g. Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008; Szymanski, 2014). This is not only potentially overwhelming for the students, but tends to contribute to a perception that tertiary writing is mostly about achieving a high level mechanical accuracy, rather than rhetorical effectiveness. As Roozen (2015a) points out, what is assessed conveys to students what is of importance in the discipline. These considerations led me to identify a potential collaboration in helping BAH staff to reduce and refine their assessment feedback, while at the same time helping to increase the amount of formative feedback students received by offering more consultations.

My journal entries indicate that I perceived the institutional positioning of TLAs outside of the formal power structure of the academy as especially conducive to providing formative feedback on students' developing textual practices. This

may help to explain a certain ambivalence towards becoming more closely embedded in a particular programme. Yet, I also recognised that this positioning brings with it an inherent weakness – a lack of knowledge of writing practices and expectations within the academy, which impaired the quality of TLA support (expressed through imagery of darkness, hidden depths and fragmentation). This persistent ambivalence in relation to moving into the disciplinary space (and thereby, out of the apparently neutral and student-support focused space of generic consultations) underlay my difficulties in formulating practical action for writing development during the initial phase of the project the following year.

6.4.2 Implications for TLA practice.

My involvement in the BAH programme at the time of the reconnaissance was limited to a single presentation to first-year students during their orientation and one-to-one consultations with a few students. This is clearly inconsistent with best practice in writing pedagogy (as discussed in chapter 4), which recommends ongoing, low-risk opportunities for induction into new writing practices (Bean, 2011b; Thaiss & Porter, 2010). However, as indicated above, this initial fact-finding only revealed the espoused beliefs of those three BAH staff members (without indicating the contested nature of the medical mode of discourse). This limitation is a clear indication of the need for a broader, longitudinal engagement in order to develop a more nuanced and broadly applicable understanding of disciplinary discourse and its relationship to the values and practices of the community which use it.

At this early stage, my knowledge of disciplinary discourse and the relationships with BAH staff formed only a limited basis for claiming a more central and proactive role in writing development in the programme, characteristic of integrated or embedded TLA practice (Allan & Clarke, 2007; McWilliams & Allan, 2014; Skillen, Percy, Merten, & Trivett, 1998; Webb et al., 1995; Wingate, 2010). The only substantive outcome at this stage was the possibility of liaising with Maria on more selective and targeted feedback practice. Yet, how this might be implemented in a way which challenged, rather than reinforced, the remedial positioning of tertiary learning practice, remained unclear.

Complaints about remedial framing of TLA practice were frequent in the journal, as shown in the examples above. These were characteristically expressed through emotionally-laden metaphors – a feature these reflections share with many of those from TLA literature (as discussed in chapter 5). My reflections also reveal a concern that students tended to view the service as a fix-up for deficiencies of selected students (rather than developmental support available for all) – a concern no doubt magnified by the TLA and writing development literature which I was reading during this time. However, at this stage, my stance regarding change was essentially conservative in relation to existing TLA practice. As noted above in relation to writing development, this ambivalence affected my goal-setting and implementation of changes in practice during the project, despite clear evidence which emerged from the reconnaissance of the need and opportunities for more radical changes towards more disciplinary-specific and developmental engagement with BAH staff and students.

6.5 Conclusion

The reconnaissance phase of the project highlighted the features of academic discourse which were valued by BAH staff, based on the clinical and professional contexts for which they were preparing the students. The findings indicated potential areas for positive collaboration in writing development within the programme. One was in developing frameworks for assignments which could provide students with support for writing, while avoiding the risk of copying (which staff associated with models or exemplars). This also lent itself to the introduction of classroom writing activities to target issues of concern and to integrate learning of content and disciplinary discourse. Another potential area for positive collaboration was in supporting BAH staff in providing more selective assignment feedback and to make *more integrated and proactive use of the learning advisor* (as I suggested in a report based on my findings which I sent to the BAH staff in January 2012).

Chapter 7: Findings Part 1

Review of data and early initiatives

7.1 Introduction

One early indication that I lacked the necessary knowledge and relationships to adopt a writing consultant role in relation to the BAH programme was the fact that I sent my recommendations to BAH staff at a time when most of them were still on leave, having completed their planning for the new academic year during the brief 'window' between the end of the examination period in November 2011 and the Christmas break. By January 2012, when I sent my recommendations, course guides, including assessments, had already been sent to the printers. From my position outside the academic departments, I had been unaware of the brief, critical periods for engagement with faculty on teaching and learning initiatives.

The BAH programme director, Diana, did, nonetheless, invite me to talk about the issues I had identified in my report at the first BAH staff meeting of the new academic year, which took place in mid-February 2012, just before the start of the first semester. During the meeting, two staff members teaching on first-year courses showed an interest in collaborating on changes in relation to two of the three problems which I had identified during the reconnaissance. Anne, a newly-arrived and inexperienced tertiary teacher, said that she would like to collaborate on clarifying instructions for written assessments, while Maria, a

senior member of the BAH staff (whom I had interviewed during the reconnaissance), reiterated her interest in modifying her assessment feedback. I was able to meet both of them soon afterwards and plan some initiatives for the first semester of 2012, despite the limited scope for change (given that major decisions on course content and assessment had already been taken). I was also able to include some insights from my reconnaissance in the orientation workshop which I ran for new first-year students at the beginning of the semester.

This is the first of three chapters which summarise the collaborative initiatives which emerged during the project and their contributions to change in the teaching and learning of writing within the BAH and in TLA practice – the two strands of the research question. The rest of chapter 7 comprises an explanation and evaluation of two early initiatives which had a limited impact on the project goals. Chapter 8 covers the programme-specific writing workshops for BAH students, which were the central focus of the project and chapter 9 focuses on two features of the project which developed in tandem with these workshops: one-to-one support and staff workshops.

The reason for presenting the findings in this way, according to the category of initiative (rather than, for example, a chronological account of the project divided into three annual cycles), is that it allows for a description of how initiatives developed over more than one action research cycle and a consideration of the specific implications of each category of initiative for the two strands of the research question.

7.2 Orientation workshop for new first-year BAH students

7.2.1 Planning, implementation and development.

This workshop was the only BAH writing support initiative which was carried forward from the previous year. However, the previous year, my writing workshop had been part of my traditional, generic practice as a learning advisor; i.e., it was a one-off presentation which focused on general issues of academic writing, such as paragraph writing and referencing, not specific to the discipline. The 2012 workshop was no longer a one-off, stand-alone presentation, since I had been introduced to the students as part of the BAH staff team in the welcome ceremony earlier in the day, which I felt positioned me as an insider in the programme for the first time. The workshop was also no longer generic, since I incorporated a focus on the features of BAH writing which I had identified during the reconnaissance.

Despite these changes, I was not, at this stage, able to present students with a coherent programme of first-year writing support since my collaborations with Maria (7.4) and Anne (8.1) were limited and at this point only in the planning stage. Because I had little to offer as a follow-up, I felt that I needed to cover as much as I could during the orientation workshop, despite my concern that the information was still too separated from students' disciplinary learning and that the students were, in any case, overloaded with new information at this stage of the course. The fact that students did not mention the orientation workshop when prompted (during the end-of-year focus group) to say what had helped

them in their writing development was some indication that the workshop had not had a lasting impact on student perceptions.

By the 2014 version of this orientation workshop, its purpose and content had undergone a further shift. Through extended contact with students and involvement with more developmental writing activities, I had begun to feel that a heavy emphasis on the need for students to conform to strict requirements of clarity, conciseness, and accuracy (which I had picked up from my reconnaissance data) was inappropriate at this early stage – and was raising students' anxiety more than helping them to adjust or develop their writing skills. Therefore, I shifted the focus to raising students' awareness of their need to develop their skills and of the support which was by this stage available to help them to do so (as described in chapter 8). As part of this shift of focus, I provided students with an overview of their written assessments during the rest of the semester, including due dates and details of the workshops I had planned to support them. I felt that this early notice and the degree of integration of the writing workshops within the BAH programme accounted for the high attendance levels at the 2014 workshops.

I also included a writing self-assessment task, in which students had to tick *can do this already*, *needs development – will do it independently* or *needs development – will book a consultation* next to a range of study skills, information and academic literacies which I saw as relevant to the BAH programme:

- Organise time and deadlines for a written assignment
- Use the library catalogue to find relevant books

- Use library databases to find research articles
- Take relevant and well-organised notes
- Summarise concepts, theories, interventions and research findings in your own words
- Insert citations in your text to acknowledge the source of your theories etc
- Embed relevant quotations within your own text
- Use punctuation correctly (including commas, semi-colons, colons and full stops)
- Structure paragraphs effectively
- Structure and format essays and reports between 1000 and 5000 words in length
- Write in academic and clinical styles
- Edit your own and others' work
- Compile an accurate APA reference list

The results of this self-assessment (see Appendix B) indicate that, at this stage, students rated themselves confident in most of the necessary skills. The areas in which most students identified developmental needs were in more specific academic and professional writing skills: structuring and formatting essays and reports, clinical and academic writing, compiling an accurate APA reference list. But it was only in clinical writing that there was a clear majority who recognized the need for support through a consultation.

7.2.2 Implications for BAH writing pedagogy.

The results of 2014's self-appraisal survey, together with the lack of any apparent recall of the orientation workshops by previous cohorts of first-year BAH students, are evidence of the limited effectiveness of attempting to front-load writing advice, as is the case with the in-class writing workshops which TLAs are typically invited to give at the beginning of courses. Students cannot be expected to take in or recall writing advice until they have gained awareness

of their needs as they emerge in the context of disciplinary writing assignments during, rather than before, the course.

7.2.3 Implications for tertiary learning advice.

Orientation workshops, such as this one, are particularly open to the criticisms of generic TLA practice discussed in chapter 5, particularly on the grounds of decontextualisation and their typically deficit focus. These features were reduced by the third action research cycle in 2012 because of how I was introduced to students as part of the BAH staff and was able to follow this up with a comprehensive plan of their written assessments and associated writing workshops. The shift to a goal of engagement and reassurance meant that the session became more effective as an orientation – as evidenced by high levels of subsequent student engagement in workshops, consultations and formative feedback. In other words, it became an effective introduction to a series of writing support initiatives, rather than an ineffective attempt to provide one-off writing instruction to students who were not ready to receive and act upon it.

7.3 Assessment feedback and student referral

7.3.1 Planning, implementation and development.

One of the first two initiatives in which I collaborated with a BAH staff member was a change in the written feedback which Maria gave first-year students on their first assignment of the programme. As highlighted in the reconnaissance

data, Maria, along with other BAH staff, had tended to write multiple comments – mostly critical – and corrections on student assignments. I had seen this practice as problematic in the light of the literature summarised in chapter 4, particularly that highlighting the need for selective feedback focused on substantive issues (e.g. Patton & Taylor, 2013; Wingard & Geosits, 2014) in order to contribute to student learning.

To support Maria in reducing and targeting her written feedback on assignments, I designed a form for her to use while marking her students' first assignment of 2012. The form was designed to replace multiple corrections of or comments on writing errors of a particular type with a single tick indicating that the student had problems in this area of writing. The areas I included in the box for her to select from and tick were:

- Use of literature to support insights
- Coherent organisation of ideas in paragraphs
- Clear and concise sentences
- Accuracy of spelling, grammar and vocabulary
- Appropriate tone and style
- Accurate APA citations and reference list

The last four areas were chosen as they represented the typical mistakes which the BAH staff had been commenting on. I added the first two categories, which had not featured in the comments of BAH staff, in an attempt to focus the attention of Maria and the students on broader writing issues, rather than on the

largely word-level accuracy issues which had predominated in the examples I had seen of their assessment feedback practice.

Students received this form from Maria together with their marked assignment and an explanation of the meaning and purpose of the form. Students were offered the chance to make revisions to address the highlighted issue(s) and then to resubmit their revised assignment to Maria with the incentive of regaining some of the marks they had lost because of these issues. To support them in the revision process, they were also encouraged (but not required) to book a consultation with me. The rationale was to create an opportunity for engagement with first-year students who had writing needs but whose counterparts in previous years had not used the service. I felt this could be an opportunity to contribute to their broader writing development at an early stage in their transition into university, not only to fix the problems in this particular assignment. Therefore, at the end of the form, I included the sentence:

If you have addressed the issues satisfactorily, you may gain an improved grade. More importantly, making these revisions will help you gain the confidence and skills you will need for your writing on the rest of the course.

Maria was very positive about the practicality and impact of using this form, both in terms of modifying her own practice and in encouraging the students to learn from feedback:

I really liked it because it meant I didn't have to make a decision about, I'll mark once and then not the following issues, which I've tended to do in the past. You know, I've marked your incorrect plural or possessive here, therefore, throughout the assignment you should find them. And I know that many students don't even go back to that marking to learn from it. So, that way, it was twofold. It was quicker for me, and I could concentrate on the content. And two, it did then require the students to go back and learn from it (Maria, 2012, S1).

This reduced the overall number of comments on and corrections of errors of spelling, punctuation and referencing in Maria's feedback. Instead, she highlighted and corrected some of the errors and ticked the box to alert the student to the fact that this was a general issue she needed to attend to; the onus was on the student to do so.

Maria was keen to continue using the feedback form and referring students for consultations in subsequent years. Therefore, the arrangement continued in 2013 and 2014, with some minor changes regarding how much students had to change and what marks they could gain from doing so. However, Maria's belief that students needed to be made aware of and correct most writing errors resulted in a higher level of referral than I had expected. Maria indicated at least one problematic area on the assignments of about half of the first-year students during the three years of the project. I noted in my journal (April 16, 2012) that all of the referrals during that semester had been for issues of mechanical accuracy; the boxes which I added for "use of literature to support

insights” and “coherent organisation of ideas in paragraphs” were not selected at all. This tended to constrain any consultations which resulted from the referrals to the remedial space, since students were coming for consultations mainly in order to correct errors.

In the first year of the arrangement, I was proactive in reminding students to contact me to deal with the feedback and resubmit during the ‘window of opportunity’ provided by Maria. This resulted in six of the students coming in for consultations, while I sent feedback by email to another six students who had contacted me at the last minute and were unable to come in to see me in person. Altogether, through consultations and emails, I gave feedback to half of the students in the first-year cohort – and all but one who had received a referral. My journal comments indicate mixed results in terms of contributing to students’ writing development. During consultations, I sought to broaden the focus away from the strictly mechanical accuracy of the referral to more general, developmental issues, for instance, the overall structure of the essay and the quality and integration of sources.

However, I noted that student engagement in these discussions was variable; one student, who had performed well overall, seemed “highly satisfied” with the opportunity to learn more about the use of sources, while a borderline student, who actually needed the points on offer in order to reach pass level, seemed “impatient to get away” (April 17, 2012). In some cases, I felt that the errors which had led to their referral were minimal and unproblematic in the context of what was the students’ first university assignment. I asked myself if I was being

“painted into a correction corner” (April 18, 2012). I found the email interactions particularly limiting, given the lack of opportunity to stimulate the student to consider broader developmental issues; I described these as more about “apostrophes than epiphanies” (April 16, 2012).

In 2012 and 2013, therefore, I dropped the email feedback and also reduced the amount of revised text which students needed to resubmit to Maria to a single paragraph, with the revisions highlighted to make it easier for her to see that they had addressed the point at issue. However, this meant that I was seeing only four or five students – no more than half of those whom Maria was referring. I was concerned that several students were receiving negative feedback on their writing, which they did not necessarily understand and had little incentive to attend to and use developmentally. Therefore, the intention of using this arrangement as an opportunity to become involved in formative feedback for students’ writing was only minimally achieved.

7.3.2 Implications for BAH writing pedagogy

Rather than reducing the preoccupation with error which the multiple corrections and criticisms had been communicating to students, the referral form provided an alternative (albeit more efficient) medium for the same message. As Maria noted in our interview, she was willing to *let one or two go – they can be oversights* (2012 S2), but this meant that she was tending to correct and / or comment on errors in the work of nearly all the first-year students. There was further evidence of Maria’s focus on error in her verbal reports while marking

assignments in 2013. For instance, as she read one assignment, Maria discussed several errors in the formatting of references, before finally deciding that the student should resubmit and be referred to the LTU to *get some specific learning on this* (2013, V).

Student comments on the referral arrangement in interviews and focus groups were rare, which, in itself, indicates its relative lack of impact. The only positive comment on the arrangement was in the 2014 focus group (which was an overall more confident and satisfied cohort). One of the students expressed satisfaction with the explicitness of the feedback, which she viewed as formative in relation to her writing development:

I liked how we got it back and it had all the comment boxes. Because it's direct and it says what needs improving (2014 Y1 S2).

For this student, the initiative was achieving the goal of providing a clearer focus on what she needed to work on and an opportunity to make changes. However, most of the comments in focus groups and interviews with first-year students continued to be critical regarding negative assessment feedback, which they felt undermined their self-esteem without providing them with clear guidance on how they could improve. This was a particularly prominent theme in the focus group at the end of 2013. One student commented, *Could you tell me what I could have improved on rather than just saying, 'This sucked'?* (2013 Y2 S2) and several students contributed to the following animated exchange:

Understanding the feedback I found —

Pretty hard.

Yeah, because often they'll say, 'You didn't answer the question', and I'll say, well —

What was I meant to answer? What's a better example?

Or they'll just make a comment like, 'This is wrong' or 'This isn't right' but then, like, 'What's a good model? What IS right?'

Alongside this dissatisfaction with the lack of clarity in assessment feedback during their first year were continued complaints from students about a fault-finding stance on the part of their teachers. For instance, in their focus group at the end of 2012, the first-year cohort recounted being *told off and losing marks* for minor issues of style and referencing. One student felt that *if you make one mistake, then you lose the marks for it, whereas in other things we've done, if you make a mistake and then if you've worked it out for the rest of it, fine* (2012 Y1 S2). Clearly, from the point of view of these students, the shift away from a preoccupation with error, which had been a major reason for introducing the assessment feedback form, had not been achieved.

As the project went on into the third annual cycle in 2014, I began to accept that the preoccupation with error, which was so evident in Maria's practice (and that of other tutors in the reconnaissance data) was not something amenable to change through the kind of instrument which I had developed. Staff comments during interviews suggested that the preoccupation with error was deep-rooted in the pedagogical culture of the programme, deriving from their sense of

responsibility towards their profession for which they were preparing the potential new members who were currently under their tutelage.

As part of this broader professional duty, Maria felt she needed to prepare students for a demanding and prescriptive discourse environment. She pointed out that *they will be required to also formulate documents and reports at their employer's setting with THEIR structure. So, it's not a make-up-your-own-structure. At some settings employers instruct their employees what size font, and what font to use (2012 S1)*. She tended to view students' performance in written work during the BAH course from this future perspective. As she explained, *the formats of the assignments are also about teaching the students the standard of style and grammar, word choice, and structure of future assignments and, from my perspective, of the clinical documentation requirements (2012, S1)*.

It was this future perspective which continued to influence Maria's attitude towards error, even in relation to first-year student work, which she tended to evaluate with reference to the professional standards which students would need to meet in order to practise successfully. This explained her frustration with students' inability to apply what she saw as rules of writing, such as APA: *there IS no discretion. It's right or it's wrong. Learn it. I just cannot understand that (2012 S1)*. And it was clear from her verbal reports that she drew on rules of professional discourse in addressing issues in the writing of her students. For instance, she noted that some students had described an event in a video scenario using the present tense and commented that *when we report on an*

event that has occurred, we need them to understand that they must write in the past tense (2013, V). This first-semester assignment task was not part of students' professional practice but was being assessed in relation to those standards. The use of "we" indicates that in proscribing this non-standard feature, she felt she was making students aware of their need to abide by professional standards. As she explained, *It's important to nip issues like writing in the bud and prevent bad habits, but to steer the students onto the path of the expectation* (2013 S2).

7.3.3 Implications for tertiary learning advice

I had intended for the referral arrangement with Maria to increase the numbers of first-year students coming in for consultations and create opportunities for developmental conversations which went beyond the specific weaknesses for which they had been referred. In this way, I hoped that it would help to lessen the sense of "shutoutedness", which I commented on in my journal at the time of the initial discussions with Maria (February 29, 2012).

This intention was not fulfilled. The main reason for this was that the referral arrangement fitted very comfortably within the predominantly remedial framing of tertiary learning advice among BAH staff. They had already been referring students for help with the basic mechanics of writing and this arrangement served to amplify this practice. It became increasingly clear from student feedback that the remedial nature of the arrangement was not lost on the students themselves. Students in the 2013 focus group were particularly explicit

about the negative emotional impact of being referred, associating it with the stigmatised remedial help which had been available at high school for those whom the BAH students regarded as less gifted than themselves:

In all honesty, [being referred] kind of makes me feel a little bit stupid ... it would probably feel like you've got something wrong with you that needs to be fixed. Like most of us have never really struggled through school; always probably been fairly academic. The whole Learning Support and LTU equates in our minds to 'low stream' (2013 Y1 S1).

Such views indicate that the roots of stigmatization of learning support are deeper than the tertiary context itself and that students bring into university with them existing preconceptions of support which frame their engagement with TLAs. The practice of staff referral of students for learning support – a practice embodied within this first initiative – tends to reinforce these pre-existing notions, making it more difficult for TLAs to occupy the developmental, curricular learning space.

7.4 Conclusion

The project began in 2012 with the social recognition of my place among the BAH staff. However, I had not yet occupied this space by developing a writing consultant role through relationships and practices. The two early initiatives described here tended to reinforce, rather than challenge, existing notions of learning support; the orientation workshop initially featured an intensification of

the one-off approach to engagement with disciplinary programmes, while the referral arrangement with Maria emphasised the external, reactive and remedial function of the TLA in relation to students' errors in writing.

Chapter 8: Findings Part 2

Course-specific writing workshops

8.1 Introduction

Providing writing workshops for classes of students in a particular programme was not in itself a new practice within the Learning and Teaching Unit at NZU. However, previous workshops had typically been run with minimal liaison with faculty colleagues and had tended to focus mainly on generic writing issues, rather than specific disciplinary discourse. The materials tended to be only minimally adapted from those used for general workshops on academic writing. In other words, they had been conducted from the external, generic stance towards writing development and learning advice – the limitations of which have been widely discussed in the literature referred to in chapters 4 and 5.

The main innovation of the course-specific workshops in this project was to develop the materials in closer collaboration with faculty colleagues, incorporating disciplinary discourse and integrating the workshops within the curriculum of the programme. The methods used to develop and run these workshops and the degree to which they achieved this potential and contributed to the project goals are the focus of the rest of this chapter. As shown in Table 9 below, sections 8.2 to 8.8 comprise descriptions of the workshops themselves. These are followed by two sections, 8.9 and 8.10, which focus on their implications for the twin goals of this study.

Table 9: *Course-specific BAH writing workshops*

Sub-section	Workshop	First offered in	BAH course co-ordinator(s)
8.2	Critique and literature review writing for Year 1 students	2012	Anne
8.3	Case study report writing for Year 1 students	2012	Anne
8.4	Case study and reflective writing for Year 1 students	2013	Maria
8.5.	Essay writing workshop for Year 1 students	2013	Carmen
8.6	Reflective writing for Year 2 & 3 students	2013	Brenda & Maria
8.7	Research report writing for Year 4 students	2013	Paula
8.8	Writing to learn for Year 1 students	2013	Anne & Stacey

8.2 Critique and literature review workshop for Year 1 students

The first opportunity to develop a writing workshop to prepare students for a specific BAH assessment task was through the collaboration with Anne during the first semester of 2012. As mentioned earlier, Anne was an inexperienced tertiary teacher who had just arrived at NZU in February 2012, a few weeks before the start of semester 1. The main focus in developing these workshops for her class was on providing clearer guidance in response to student concerns expressed during the reconnaissance. Clear guidance was especially important for the assignment for Anne's semester 1 course as it was a challenging task for these newly-arrived students. They were required to write a literature review in which they had to synthesise evidence from peer-reviewed research on a health

condition, including its aetiology, epidemiology, impact, prognosis and treatment. I saw this as a highly challenging and unfamiliar cognitive and rhetorical task at this stage and, hence, meriting highly explicit and supportive guidance.

The context of the relationship I had with Anne allowed me to play a more proactive role in relation to the collaboration than in the referral arrangement I devised for Maria. Maria was an experienced, long-term staff member and teacher, whereas Anne was both inexperienced and unfamiliar with the institution and programme. She saw me as someone who had institutional knowledge she lacked and who was also experienced in academic writing pedagogy. Therefore, Anne was receptive to my views on BAH writing and accepted my recommendation to reduce the word limit for the literature review. I saw this as a small but significant step towards a more integrated role in relation to BAH writing, since it involved a contribution to decision-making regarding core assessment practices. Indeed, this discussion with Anne was my first experience of such a conversation with a disciplinary teaching colleague about an assignment before students had done it. This was an indication to me that Anne was allowing me to expand and shift my TLA practice into the disciplinary teaching space.

We arranged that I would give students a one-hour workshop during the first semester to help them prepare for the literature review. I included a summary and reflection on this workshop in my journal and in an email to Anne (March 8, 2012). In order to provide extra support and guidance, I handed out (and

uploaded to the course web page) an eight-page handout containing quite specific advice about structure, length, style and content for each section of the assignment. This was the first fruit of my reconnaissance research and set a pattern for future handouts and workshops in which I provided detailed recommendations on how to structure written assignments. Another aspect of this workshop, which also became a feature of my later workshops for BAH students, was the integration of selected disciplinary content and information literacy, which, again, was a shift away from the generic practice I had become used to. For instance, I modelled a database search for a health condition, advised the students on the type of articles to look for in order to complete their literature review and showed the students step by step how I had built up a paragraph of my own about this health condition.

The fact that this workshop took place during normal class time encouraged me to take this more integrated approach, as well as ensuring that nearly all the students attended. It also positioned me in more of a classroom teacher role than I had typically experienced as a TLA giving presentations outside the context of a course programme. In adopting this classroom teacher role, as well as including more disciplinary content, I felt more empowered to work *with* the students rather than to present *to* them – including, for instance, a paired awareness-raising task. The email which I sent Anne, summarising the session, was another departure from generic practice, and another step in establishing a professional relationship, since she responded positively regarding the workshop and shared her own concerns about the student writing and her own workload.

After she had marked the student assignments, Anne expressed to me her disappointment in the quality of the writing of some of the students. I noted in my journal (April 26, 2012) some concern that this might reflect badly on the quality of the guidance I had provided the students. However, in our interview at the end of each semester that year, Anne discussed the experience in terms of her own adjustment of expectations to working with first-year tertiary students, rather than in terms of concerns with student performance per se, or my role in it. As Anne taught the same first-year course in 2013 and 2014, with essentially the same assignment (apart from minor changes, such as a tighter word limit), and we both felt satisfied with the support provided through the workshop, I repeated the workshop, with minor adjustments, in the following years.

8.3 Case study report writing workshop for Year 1 students

In the second semester, Anne was taking over the course for which I had observed two classes and analysed students' assignments during the reconnaissance (when it had been taught by Sarah). The assignment task underwent several changes over the next two years, as Anne was in agreement with the suggestions which I made with a view to making it more appropriate for first-year students. The first of these suggestions, for the 2012 course, was to provide a word limit, as I had identified this as a source of confusion and anxiety among students during the reconnaissance. Anne made this change and we arranged that I would provide another workshop, similar to that in semester 1.

Because the course timetable had already been set – and was content-heavy – my writing workshop took place during a lunch time outside their normal class schedule and two-thirds of the students attended.

Once again, I prepared a handout providing quite specific guidelines for each section of the report. I went further in incorporating disciplinary discourse than I had done in the workshop for Anne's first semester class (8.2), this time, including sample phrases, for which I received some feedback by email from Anne before the session. Afterwards, I was also able to discuss with Anne some issues which had come up during the session and to make some further revisions the following year. One of the student queries had been about how appropriate it was to describe the behaviour of a client as "normal". Anne was able to explain that the word is avoided in favour of "typical" in applied health, as this is considered to a more neutral and objective term. This was one early example of how the collaboration with disciplinary staff and students was contributing to my growing familiarity with and knowledge of applied health discourse.

I repeated this workshop, with minor adjustments, in 2013. In 2014, however, I was presented with an opportunity to contribute to a radical revision of the assignment itself – and, therefore, to create a new workshop based on the revised assignment. The opportunity arose as a result of Anne's decision to leave NZU in the middle of 2014, which meant that she would be handing over the second semester course to Stacey. Stacey would have to teach the course in addition to her already heavy workload – and on a topic she was relatively

unfamiliar with. She was, therefore, highly receptive to any proposals to change the assignment which would reduce the heavy burden of marking the long and complex reports (each based on a different client) which students had been writing for this course. In addition, this was an opportunity for Anne to create a legacy of change.

I was invited by Anne to meet her and Stacey to discuss the assignment. Following this, I sent them recommendations to reduce the length and make it a paired assignment, in which students co-wrote most of the sections. This would reduce the load for both the course teacher and students and add an element of pairwork, which I had identified as a gap in the first-year programme. Another gap I had by this stage identified in first-year writing was in opportunities to communicate information to different audiences, and for different purposes. My interviews with staff and students had made me aware of the importance of this rhetorical awareness as a professional competence within applied health practice. Therefore, I recommended including a letter to the caregiver, in addition to the formal analytical report (which had comprised the original assignment).

Both Anne and Stacey reacted positively to these suggestions and changed the assignment along the lines I had suggested. I also wrote an assessment rubric for the revised assignment for Stacey. These major modifications were accomplished in a very short time frame; I recalled the scepticism expressed by Sarah when I first raised the possibility of changes to the assignment with her during the reconnaissance, three years earlier:

Generally we follow a structure and it's been the same last year and this year. Nothing has changed. Information's the same. Assignment is the same. All the same. And the year before and the year before that I believe, all the same. So it's standard. There's not much you can change in this course. Information stays the same (Sarah, 2011 S2).

It became apparent during the study that assessment practices were as changeable as the context in which they took place.

8.4 Case study and reflective writing workshop for Year 1 students

Having run two writing workshops during 2012 (8.2 & 8.3), which I felt had contributed towards my project goals, my aim in 2013 was to extend these to other courses in which students faced new rhetorical challenges. This extension was in line with my developing understanding of the literature of Writing across the Curriculum, in particular, the need to sustain writing development throughout a programme (WAC Clearing House, n.d.). The first extension was to create a workshop for the course for which I had devised the referral arrangement with Maria the previous year. As explained in 7.4 above, I was concerned about the remedial nature of the referral system and felt that the students would benefit from the kind of explicit guidance on style and structure which I had provided for the assignments in Anne's classes. Maria responded positively to the proposed workshops and found space for them in the already compressed course timetable for 2013 (and again in 2014).

As I had done for Anne's classes, I once again incorporated disciplinary content and discourse into these workshops. One further step I took to increase integration with the course content was the inclusion of a quiz on concepts which had been covered by Maria in the course so far. I saw this as a way of helping students to make connections with the course content and the written assignment in which they were required to apply it. In the past, during consultations, I had noted that some students had not made the connection. I also included a focus on reflective writing, having discussed with Maria the value of introducing this as part of the assessed work for her course, in order to fill a gap in the first-year writing curriculum and prepare students for the more complex reflective writing they would be doing later in the course. This was another example of the more proactive stance I was developing towards not only preparing students for assignments but also contributing towards modifications to those assignments, based on the knowledge base I had constructed through working with students on their writing during consultations.

Another indication of the collaborative way in which I was now working with BAH staff was that I also sent workshop materials to Maria for her approval before the session (as I had done for the workshop for Anne in 2012). Maria stayed in the class during the workshops, which meant that she was aware of what I had told her students and was also available to deal with queries. Given Maria's review of materials beforehand and participation during the workshop, this began to approach a co-teaching situation, albeit with the BAH staff member in an advisory role. Following the workshop in 2013, two students asked for an additional workshop in how to use the Endnote programme for their referencing.

I organised this for them outside their normal schedule, using examples from their course, and several first-year students attended. I took this as further evidence that students were now no longer looking on me as a person they might be required to consult because of problems with their writing, but as someone they could ask to teach them relevant writing skills as their needs emerged during the course.

8.5 Essay writing workshop for Year 1 students

The other first-year course for which I decided to offer a workshop in 2013 was one taught by an external consultant, Agnes. She visited the campus to deliver classes in intensive blocks of a few days each, rather than giving a weekly lecture and tutorial over a semester (which was the case with most other BAH courses). My rationale for the workshop was not because the type of assignment in itself – an essay – was new to students. It was instead – as in the case of Maria’s assignment (8.4) – based on my experience of consultations with students over previous years, during which I had realised that they were having difficulties with novel aspects of the task. In this case, their difficulties were mostly in relation to information literacy issues, such as where to find relevant sources and how to integrate these into their own argument. Students had also found it challenging to structure the essay as a whole, as it was much longer and more applied than essays they had typically written at school. Moreover, the course materials suggested that no class time had been set aside to explain the assignment.

My attempt to use the same collaborative approach which had worked well with Anne and Maria was unsuccessful in this case. I received no reply at all to emails to Agnes before or after the workshop, nor any comments on the slides and handout which I sent to her and uploaded to the course web page. Despite the lack of response, because I had access to all the course materials through the university learning management system and had developed a positive working relationship with the students, I went ahead with the workshop, outside course time, following the same methods I had used in previous workshops: modelling how to break down the question; suggesting how the essay might be structured; and showing students how to locate, summarise or quote and reference sources.

Just over half of the students attended (and all had access to the materials on the course website). Several also came for follow-up consultations on their drafts. Feedback from students was positive, so I repeated the workshop in 2014 – again, without any response from Agnes to emails, online postings or the course materials. I saw this as another example of diverse and idiosyncratic perspectives towards writing pedagogy and collaboration among BAH staff, to which I needed to adapt and develop tailored responses in order to work as a writing consultant in this context. In this case, the lack of input from the BAH staff member meant that I needed to hedge my advice to a greater extent than I had done for workshops for Maria's and Anne's assignments, for which I had been able to discuss the course teacher's expectations and receive approval and suggestions from them. However, I also saw it as a sign of my growing

knowledge of BAH discourse and expectations that I was able to offer effective support at all in these circumstances of minimal collaboration.

8.6 Reflective writing for Year 2 & 3 students

A more far-reaching extension of writing workshops in 2013 was to second and third-year courses in which the students were writing reflective journals based on their practicums. This was a form of assessment I had only become aware of through my interview with Maria the previous year. In order to develop knowledge and credibility in relation to reflective writing, I researched the topic and wrote a literature review, which I sent to the BAH staff, highlighting the evidence I had found for the value of explicit instruction. I followed this up with a short professional development workshop on reflective writing for BAH staff during the mid-year break. During the workshop, several BAH staff commented on the importance of reflective writing as a professional practice in applied health and expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of critical analysis shown in their students' reflective journals. As I pointed out, this tendency of BAH students to describe rather than analyse was one which the literature suggested was shared by most students across a wide range of professions and was evidence of the need for explicit guidance and instruction.

I was, by the stage, able to tell the BAH staff that I had already begun to provide this guidance and instruction through a workshop in semester 1 with a combined class of second and third year students (supervised by Brenda and Maria, respectively). Brenda was primarily an applied health practitioner who spent less

than two days a week on campus, and had had little opportunity for formal professional development. The opportunity to run this workshop arose because of a change within the BAH programme – the adoption of online portfolios – which meant that students were due to have a joint workshop on the online platform they would be using. On hearing about this plan, I offered to include a reflective writing slot, so that students would be learning how to improve their reflective writing at the same time as the technical skills for uploading and saving their journals. Maria, who had overall responsibility for the professional practice component of the BAH, once again responded very positively to this additional input on writing for the BAH students.

Brenda and Maria provided me with examples of student reflections to help me prepare my workshop. However, I found these student examples limited in depth of reflection, which I attributed in part to the strong emphasis on impersonal, factual description during the first year of the BAH programme (as discussed in chapter 6). For instance, students had a tendency to list their problems or issues in bullet-point form, rather than explaining them in terms of personal learning. As a result, I adopted more of a transformational than descriptive approach to writing pedagogy for this workshop. Rather than using the examples provided by BAH staff as a model to prepare my own materials, I instead created my own example texts based on a three-level model of reflective writing (descriptive, analytical, critical) from the literature (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Van Manen, 1977).

For the first workshop in 2013, the example text I wrote was adapted to the assignment requirements but based on a scenario I was familiar with, teacher education. As in my previous workshops, I included examples of appropriate phrases, this time emphasising those which would scaffold students' transition from description to analysis, which both my own experience and the literature had suggested was a key weakness in reflective writing. Phrases such as *I attribute this to ____, '____ may account for, in retrospect* were incorporated within the exemplar and highlighted in the workshops in both 2013 and 2014.

For 2014, the workshop was provided for just Year 2 students, supervised by Brenda (as the Year 3 students had attended the session when they were in year 2 in 2013). By this stage, I had learnt enough about the context of BAH practice (by talking to Brenda, reading examples of student writing and seeing students for consultations) to write an exemplar based on an authentic BAH scenario. A further step I made towards integration of BAH content was the inclusion of specific cross-referencing to professional competencies which the BAH students were required to demonstrate during the programme, in order to attain registration to practice. The more authentic context also made it easier for Brenda to use the exemplar as a guide as she assessed student work.

I saw this shift to a more authentic exemplar, developed in collaboration with the BAH staff member, as an opportunity to hand over responsibility for delivering writing workshops to her. I felt this was appropriate given the professional context of the practicums – and the supervisory and mentoring relationship which Brenda had in relation to the students. It was also another way in which I

sought to align my practice with normative models of writing pedagogy and TLA practice which I had encountered in the literature (e.g. Association of Academic Language and Learning, 2010; Cole, 2002; J. Jones et al., 2002).

Nonetheless, Brenda felt that there was an added value in terms of student learning if I continued to deliver the sessions (with her continuing to attend as an observer). Unlike those who argue for disciplinary staff to take over responsibility for teaching academic literacies (e.g. J. Jones et al., 2002), Brenda did not subscribe to a unitary concept of classroom teacher. Rather, Brenda she saw herself as a co-ordinator of a range of contributors, each with their own area of expertise. She explained that having a number of such contributors throughout the course increased students' enthusiasm and engagement and enriched their learning experience. It also allowed her, the course teacher, the rare opportunity of taking on the role of observer *trying to get a feel for what the students are experiencing and how they are taking that on board and making sense of it* (2014 S2). This increased my awareness of the multiple (rather than dichotomous) framing of expertise within the BAH programme, since a number of BAH courses positioned BAH staff as co-ordinators, rather than sole sources of content, with guest speakers contributing their own specific knowledge and experience in a similar way to what I had begun to do in my emerging role as writing consultant to the programme.

Brenda's acknowledgement that I had an expertise in writing influenced more than her decision to continue having me as a guest lecturer. During our discussions in 2013, she also expressed a wish to liaise with me in order to

develop her assessment practice. She devised a new assessment rubric closely modelled on the framework which I had presented to her students in the workshop and sent this to me for my feedback. She also sent me her initial assessments of student work in which she was trialling this rubric and asked for my comments. I saw this as a further step towards a collaborative approach to writing pedagogy, following on from my practice of sending my workshop materials for approval from Anne and Maria. The experience also increased my awareness that I could be more proactive in working on assessment rubrics with BAH staff, which I did for Stacey, Anne and Paula. This was an example of a relatively smooth transition from a learning to a teaching development role.

8.7 Research report workshop for Year 4 students

My knowledge of and support for writing development for fourth-year BAH students had been very limited before this study (and during its first year). These students spent relatively little time on campus, as they had substantial practicums in both semesters and studied some of their courses through distance or intensive block mode. They were also at the opposite end of the programme from the first-year students who had been the initial focus of the project. As a result, I had little contact with either fourth-year students or the staff who taught them.

This began to change in 2013 and, like other shifts of focus, the change was stimulated both by external (WAC literature) and internal (programme-specific experiential learning and relationship-building) influences. As mentioned above in relation to reflective writing workshops, my reading of WAC literature had

convinced me of the value of creating a writing pedagogy thread throughout the BAH programme. And my experiential learning, as in the case of other project initiatives, was grounded in the practice of one-to-one consultations with increasing numbers of students throughout the programme. As a result, I began to realise that student needs became increasingly diversified as they progressed through the programme. Some third- and even fourth-year students were still developing basic information literacy skills, while others, having mastered these, were working towards increasingly effective writing from the perspectives of disciplinary and audience expectations (for instance, in relation to conciseness and appropriate register). This diversification took place alongside greater expectations of student autonomy. This meant less instruction and more individual research and writing during the fourth year – a shift which some students found difficult to manage. Over a number of years, for instance, the few fourth-year students I had seen for consultations had typically come in for last-minute consultations on complex assignments, having found it difficult to cope with the pressures of increased workload and decreased contact with BAH staff.

The opportunity to engage directly with a fourth-year class arose, as in the case of reflective writing, from a staff development workshop (described in chapter 9). This was a further example of the mutually constitutive nature of the different strands of TLA practice during the project. Staff development workshops drew upon my one-to-one engagement with students, as well as my reading of relevant literature; these led onto engagement with staff and opportunities to provide writing development classes, which in their turn stimulated further one-to-one engagement with students.

In this case, a staff development workshop on assessment in mid-2013 led to an engagement with Paula, an experienced full-time BAH staff member, who had recently taken over a fourth-year class. This was one of the courses in which students were expected to work independently, under the supervision of a BAH staff member, on research projects which combined group and individual work. Each group researched a specific applied health intervention and then each member had to write a meta-analysis of ten quantitative research articles, focusing on issues such as validity and reliability, which had been covered in a research methods course the previous year. Paula was concerned about the impact of low grades for this paper on the future career prospects of these students:

When they're going for jobs, even to get an interview they need to have A averages nowadays, and when you're looking at the results of this fourth year paper, being so much lower than some of the other results, it takes the average right down (2014 S2).

Paula was, therefore, keen to provide more support, as she had already begun doing herself:

I felt that the only way, after having taught it the way it is, was to put more supports in, so I did a lot more around tutorials around the research methods (2014 S2).

In order to adapt my approach to the fourth-year context, I sought a balance between the kind of specific guidance I had been providing for first-year students and the greater individualisation and autonomy appropriate to this stage of students' writing development. I therefore began the workshop in 2013 by asking students to complete a self-assessment questionnaire (this was the basis for the one which I gave first-year students in their orientation workshop the following year, described in 7.2.2 above).

The questionnaire elicited a range of responses, which was consistent with the impression I had gained from consultations with fourth-year students of a high degree of diversification and self-awareness of writing needs. After the workshop, I emailed the students individually, including a summary of the self-assessments of their class as a whole and an invitation to discuss their writing development with me in a one-to-one consultation. These emails prompted several fourth-year students to book in for consultations – something which had been very rare in previous years. For some of these students, it was their first consultation in nearly four years at NZU. I was able to provide feedback on their specific issues and told them that my main role in relation to their drafts was to act as a critical reader. I saw this as a further shift towards a rhetorical and adaptive TLA practice – and away from the focus on remedial issues of mechanical accuracy with which I had begun the project. One student mentioned how she and some others had been surprised to see in the summary of their class responses that other students were struggling with the same things they were. I also noted in my journal my realisation of how isolated students can

continue to feel in their writing, even in the most favourable of circumstances (i.e., a small cohort together for four years).

The workshop itself, like previous ones, was based on an analysis of the question and exemplars. However, preparation was more difficult than for other workshops, as I lacked familiarity with how a meta-analysis of this type should be written and with many aspects of the quantitative approach which students were required to follow. I was also limited in the exemplars I had access to; Paula provided one example of an average student assignment and there was also an example of a published meta-analytical journal article in the course webpage. Based on these resources, and a reading of course materials, I produced a handout, in line with the approach I had used for first-year assignments: i.e., breaking down the task into sections and paragraphs, with suggestions for points to include and appropriate phrasing.

As I had done for reflective writing, I adapted the handout the following year, using my growing knowledge of the assignment and its content (gained through discussion with Paula, reading of course materials and, in particular, consultations with fourth-year students in 2013). The revised workshop included some discipline-specific guidance, such as how much detail to go into in certain areas, whether certain terms needed definition, how to group data in the meta-analysis etc. As in the reflective writing workshop with Brenda, I ran this workshop in a co-teaching format, with Paula staying in the class to see what the students were learning and to deal with specific queries. This not only helped to lend greater consistency and credibility to the writing development

advice for the students, but to deepen the professional relationship between myself and Paula (as had been the case with Brenda).

8.8 Writing to learn classroom activities for Year 1 students

All of the workshops which I ran during the course were within the LTW (learning to write) strand of writing development. They were all focused on a particular assignment task which students had to accomplish and in most cases also on developing a skill which students would need to demonstrate in other academic and professional contexts (particularly in the case of reflective writing). However, I did introduce one classroom writing activity which could be considered a WTL (writing to learn) initiative, and, therefore, a belated response to the third issue highlighted during the reconnaissance: the lack of any activities in which writing was used as a learning tool. For this activity, I prepared a micro-lesson for a classroom teacher to incorporate into her class tutorial in which students engaged in writing as a learning activity not directly associated with preparation for assessment.

As in other initiatives, this was influenced both by my reading of writing development literature (particularly within the WAC tradition) and by interactions with students and staff in the BAH programme. As part of her exploration of her developing pedagogy, Anne had expressed an interest in incorporating interactive tasks within her classes:

I do think, if there's some way to do more in-class interaction, where all students are involved and where I'm actively knowing what they know. So I understand, so I can adjust the expectations and say, you know, this was discussed, you should be aware of this and I know that you're aware of this. So, some in-class stuff (2012 S1).

I took this as an invitation to prepare short WTL tasks, of the kind which I had read about in WAC literature (e.g. Bean, 1996) and asked her to set aside some classroom time in her semester 2 course (see 8.3 above) in 2013. The form of activity which I prepared for her was familiar to me from one-to-one consultations: encouraging students to become critical readers of their own text and, in particular, to identify and modify any instances of inappropriate discourse.

However, the classroom activity which I initially proposed proved to be over-complex, particularly given that Anne was having to deal explicitly with discourse issues in the classroom for the first time. The activity was a game with cards based on the principles of BAH writing. Anne was to read out a text which violated a number of these principles (for instance, by being unnecessarily wordy or emotional) and students were to grab the card corresponding to the particular principle which was violated. The competitive element and the use of cards would, I envisaged, create an engaging and lively classroom atmosphere, which would in some ways mitigate what I assumed would be a lack of inherent interest in discourse per se among these students. It was an activity which I

could also imagine myself orchestrating – having managed hundreds of classroom language games during my years as an ESOL teacher.

Anne had no relevant experience of this type. She was, therefore, naturally reluctant to use this activity in her BAH classroom – a context in which games, in any case, were not the typical feature they were in the English language classrooms which formed my own pedagogical experience and culture. I therefore prepared a second, much more straightforward, activity which focused on a single attribute of writing (conciseness), and involved students working on a text in groups, rather than having Anne reading out the text to them. This gave her a clearer and more familiar role in setting up, monitoring and providing feedback on a relatively academic task. As a result, she was happy to use the activity, and passed it onto Stacey who also included it when she inherited the course in 2014.

It was clear from the feedback from students and staff that my assumption that engaging in a discourse-based task would not be inherently engaging was unfounded. Anne reported that the simplified task had gone *really well*. Students had been *very invested* in the activity: *Everyone was involved. They were furiously editing and re-writing! It was very cool to see* (2013 S2). And even Stacey, who had not, after all, been involved in developing the task, found that when she used the activity the following year, it was manageable and produced the intended interaction and awareness-raising: *They sat down and nitted out together... I think they were just quite a good bunch* (2014). Students also commented positively on what they had learnt from the exercise. One said: /

think practice makes perfect, so being able to actually cut that waffle out that shouldn't be there is really really good. Another felt that its general relevance meant that it might have been useful to have earlier in the year: *Because you can apply that to any of our assignments* (2014 Y1 S2).

Given the success of this one staff-led classroom writing activity, it is clearly a limitation of this study that it did not lead to a more consistent WTL strand within the BAH programme. One reason was the pressure which BAH staff felt in trying to cover the course content within the limited classroom time – this meant that a further activity I had provided for Anne's class was not used. Another factor, discussed further below, was the anxiety which the unfamiliar role and content evoked among the BAH staff. As they already felt under pressure, this was an additional strain which they were not keen to add to their existing workload. It was also a process which, for me, involved a greater degree of effortful collaboration and negotiation than preparing and delivering my own workshops. Overall, then, it was a practice which was somewhat unfamiliar and face-threatening for both myself and my BAH colleagues.

8.9 Summary of findings related to BAH writing pedagogy

8.9.1 Perceived lack of support for writing from BAH staff

Comments on the value of writing support provided through the workshops went alongside persistent complaints from students about the lack of explicit guidance and support for assessed writing from BAH staff; these complaints

were similar to those made by students during the focus group in the reconnaissance phase. Such complaints were not unexpected in relation to first-year students, given that they were mostly transitioning from the highly-supportive environment of secondary writing (Emerson et al., 2015). Their dissatisfaction with writing guidance from BAH tutors was a prominent theme in focus groups throughout the project. For instance, first-year students during the first semester of the project complained, *if we just had a proper question ... I wasn't quite sure what we were writing about* (2012 Y1 S1). The next year, a student explained that, *at the start of the year, I was waiting for the lecturers to talk about it more in class, because at school, they'd list our internals and all our assessments and as we got closer, we got more handouts. And when it came to the BAH, the instructions were just in the course outline* (2013 Y1 S2). In a similar vein, a student from the next cohort said that in her experience, *it's often unknown what the lecturers expect* (2014 Y1 S2).

Like those in the reconnaissance focus group, a number of students throughout the project attributed this lack of clarity to the reluctance of BAH staff to provide examples of the kind of writing that was expected: *Without any exemplars of what she wants, they're really ambiguous, in what they want in it ... the only reference we had for to go on were her notes and they were like just words* (2013 Y1 S1). However, as I had noted during the reconnaissance, BAH staff tended to view exemplars with suspicion. It became clear that this suspicion was not rooted in beliefs about writing pedagogy, but rather derived from core values in the broader applied health profession, such as the need for autonomy and the treatment of each client or case as unique. Brenda (2014), for instance, argued

against providing students with headings for their assignments on the grounds that this would be leading students into the error of applying interpretations based on a different case, rather than developing their own headings from the case they were analysing: *once you give them the headings, that's exactly what the students stick to.*

Fourth-year students, while acknowledging the ideological basis of the staff's unwillingness to provide exemplars, remained critical of the practice. They were able to point to the contested nature of the underlying professional values and the unintended impact of the practice on student behaviour. One fourth-year student, Josephine, noted that that the reluctance to provide models for assignments contrasted with the extensive use of models and frameworks during professional placements, while *for academic writing, we didn't have any instructions about how to write* (2014). And another student, Betty, pointed out that staff's reluctance to provide examples had resulted in student behaviours which were far from consistent with the espoused values of autonomy and individualisation which they were intended to cultivate. She recalled how in the first year, this refusal had led to her (and other students) relying on a weak example (borrowed from someone who'd done the course before): *I got marked down for the same stuff that the other student had done, but at least I had something to follow.* In this case, the result of denying students an example was not an increase in independence or attention to uniqueness, but a covert and unsatisfactory form of dependence.

8.9.2 Perceived value of TLA writing workshops for BAH students

Given the lack of explicit support for first-year writing on the part of BAH staff, it was not surprising that student feedback on the value of the writing workshops was overwhelmingly positive. The transitional function of the writing workshops was explicitly highlighted by one first-year student who explained that they had been *a good starter, since I was coming from school* (2013 Y1 S1). Other students agreed that the workshops had helped them to start their assignments:

There have been some essays where I literally had no idea how to begin them until we had a writing workshop.

You just looked at it practically. How to address and how to attack the assignment. Strategies on where to start, a logical way of looking at it (2014 Y1 S2).

As this last comment indicates, a specific way in which students felt the workshops had helped was in scaffolding the construction of their own texts. For instance, one first-year student noted: *we had the workshop with you, which was amazing because then we knew exactly, we had structure and we knew where to go from there as well.* Another explained that the handout struck the right balance between structure and flexibility: *I like ... the heading and then ideas to put in there, what sort of thing you should aim for, but if I have an exemplar you get stuck on thinking the way they've written it, instead of creating your own ideas* (2012 Y1 S2).

These findings on the value of transitional writing support are consistent with a substantial body of literature (e.g. Hardy, Römer, & Roberson, 2015; Kift, 2009; Zuber-Skerrit, 1982). What was less predictable from existing research was the impact of these workshops on student writing in later years of the BAH programme, particularly in relation to the professional skill of reflective writing. It was clear that the students relied heavily on the framework provided in the workshop to structure their own accounts:

I know when I did my reflective writing, I used your slides

Yeah [chorus]

I used them a lot

They were really, really useful. Without them I would have been an abysmal failure.

[laughs]

And then you, when you met with the lecturers and you put together

Templates

Templates, so we knew the structure, they were after

Yeah

And the content they were after, it was the most useful thing. So we really, really appreciate your help.

Yeah [chorus]

(2013 Y2 S2).

The comments also indicate that students saw the advice provided in the workshops as having been authenticated through the collaboration with BAH

staff. This perception was shared by fourth-year students for whom I had prepared the workshop and resources on writing a meta-analytical report. Despite their general experience and confidence in writing, these fourth-year students still perceived a need for support in addressing what for them was a novel and difficult rhetorical task, requiring high levels of information literacy. Selene (2013 Y4) explained that *learning to weave it into something that's coherent has been the biggest challenge and the biggest difference compared to last year*. Their feedback indicated that these experienced – and generally high-performing – students now viewed me as having disciplinary expertise, gained through collaboration with their course tutors, which I was able to make available to them through the workshops and resources to support their completion of these complex writing tasks:

It helped because you had an understanding of what the expectations of the assignment were. I know everyone's found the format really helpful and all your comments (Glenda, 2013 Y4).

Having you come in and talk to us was so helpful, and actually having that framework. Personally, I really benefit from knowing what's expected of me. And so I found that very, very helpful (Betty 2013 Y4).

The credibility which the resources had for the students shows the value of the increasingly collaborative approach I used in developing them. Although I created the materials independently, they were based on at least some examples provided by BAH staff and were approved in advance by Anne,

Maria, Brenda and Paula. Most of the staff attended workshops too and gave positive feedback during and afterwards. Paula, for instance, reported that much of her fourth-year students' writing was *brilliant*, noting that even in cases where the content was weaker, *the logical flow of their writing and presentation of their ideas was fabulous – really much better than I would have had before* (2014).

A common theme in feedback from staff and students was that the resources I prepared for the writing workshops were perceived as authentic examples of BAH discourse. For instance, commenting on the in-class writing-to-learn activity which I had prepared for her, Anne said: *One of the great things is that you set it up as a relevant excerpt based on the content of the class. That was good. It wasn't on how to catch eels and send them to a sanctuary* (2013, S2). This acceptance of these texts as authentic was also implicit in a student's comment on the exercise a year later (when Stacey ran it): *I thought, when I was doing that exercise, that I had cut it down quite well, but I probably ended up still with about 30% more than she was expecting. She really was making it very clear to us that she wanted us to get down to the basics* (2014 Y1 S2). This was an indication that although I had prepared the exercise and a plan of how it was to be used, it was perceived by the students as part of the course teacher's communication to them. As such, it fitted in seamlessly within the teaching and learning practices of the programme.

Anne felt that the workshops had not only had a practical impact on student performance, but had raised student awareness of the importance of writing as long-term developmental skill:

It's kind of added a level of showing them that we're serious and we do have expectations that they're going to be actively attempting to better themselves as writers and I have seen such huge leaps and bounds from that first semester to this second semester (2012 S2).

Her use of the first-person plural (“we’re serious”) also indicates that she viewed the workshops as a shared endeavour between her as course teacher and myself as TLA which communicated a common message to students. This differed fundamentally from the “shutout” context of generic or one-off workshops which had been my main practice in relation to classroom teaching before this study.

8.9.3 Transformational impact of TLA workshops on BAH writing pedagogy

There was some evidence that the writing workshops had a transformational impact on perceptions and practices among BAH staff and students. For Anne, the staff member with whom I collaborated most closely, they broadened her perception of her own teaching role: *I feel my role is not just teaching them the content, but teaching them to write, at a university level. I had to realise that my*

role is way larger than, and covers more area, because of that writing component (2012 S2).

The transformational impact of the workshops on BAH writing practices was particularly notable in the case of reflective writing. This practice was seen by both staff and students primarily as a professional skill, rather than a form of academic writing. As Brenda noted, *if you work in larger organisations, you're expected to engage in reflective writing (2014 S2)*. It was also seen as a key to development of the suite of professional competencies which BAH students needed to develop in order to gain accreditation:

You can't ... just assume that you're developing; you have to go back and reflect how it's going in order to target your development and get there by Year 4 (Maria 2014 S2).

My contribution to the practice of reflective writing was transformational insofar as it was based on a theoretical model of reflective discourse. This model – and the exemplars I produced – were not only provided to students during the workshops but also used by Brenda as the basis for assessment. Maria then went on to align her assessment criteria with Brenda's in order to strengthen the developmental progression between the two years: *because those Year Twos will move to Year Three and if they have the same expectations, it will cement for them what is a deep reflection (2013, S2)*. As such, the approach I had introduced became integrated into the programme.

The transformational impact of this contribution to writing pedagogy was shown in feedback from students, particularly those who had had the experience of trying reflective writing both before and after the workshop. There was a strong consensus among these students that they had not previously understood the nature of reflective writing and had felt unable to obtain the support they needed from the lecturer herself, another indication of the culture of autonomy within the programme:

Reflective writing? Brand-new. It's like, never ever done that before.

We've never had to, like, critique ourselves. So it was quite hard, I think, on everyone.

I don't think anyone is _

Fully understanding what you have to do, eh?

Yeah.

We had to ask a lot of questions to the lecturer and she seemed to think we just weren't listening in class.

When we didn't know what work she was talking about, she just thought that was because we weren't paying attention.

But we were. We just didn't understand.

I was clueless

(2013 Y2 S2).

It was not only the framework which scaffolded students' own writing, but example phrases which I had deliberately highlighted in my exemplar. One

high-performing student, Marion, used these phrases strategically to make her analytical reflections explicit to the tutor assessing her work:

A lot of us got quite poor marks after our first assignment back on our reflective writing and so that's when we realised that things had to change. We had the lecture with you and the feedback from all of our class was just, so grateful... what was most helpful was the phrases, having the phrases – we went through and highlighted them. So we knew exactly what the marker wanted and how to alert her to the fact that we are now talking about what we think may have caused the event or what we think we could learn from the event (2013 Y3).

This was another example of how the exemplars were seen as authentic ways of communicating within the disciplinary context of the BAH programme, as a consequence of the involvement of the course teacher – not so much in co-producing the exemplars, but in giving their explicit approval and using them as a reference point during assessment. As Brenda noted, *you actually took real examples, brought them into the lecture and shared it with the students, and they really got it. That was probably the winning point, having them so real* (2014). Such was the value of these resources for Marion that she collected them into a folder which she referred to throughout the programme and was able to show me in her final interview 18 months later, at the end of 2014.

8.9.4 Transformational impact of TLA workshops on BAH assessment practices

The most clearly transformational impact of the writing workshops on BAH assessment practices was in relation to the complex and demanding first-year report (see 8.4) which I had originally encountered during the reconnaissance. At that time, Sarah had seen no reason to change the task, dismissing student complaints as *just a glitch, it was just a kind of unrealistic expectation, fuelled by a student* (2011).

The changes which I suggested in 2014, transforming the assignment into a paired project involving both a formal report and a letter to a caregiver, were enthusiastically taken up by Anne, as part of her legacy to the programme she was on the point of leaving. Stacey, who took on the revised assignment, was less obviously enthusiastic about the changes, but commented positively both on their practicality (e.g. reducing marking) and on the performance of students: *there were some good ones where they used examples, good structure, well-organised*. Although Stacey agreed with the rationale of the letter, she expressed concerns regarding the appropriateness of students communicating results to caregivers at this early stage in their development – concerns which she noted that her colleagues shared. Therefore, she further modified the task for the following year so that it was more in line with expectations of professional practice in year one. As such, this was another example of a collaborative initiative drawing upon distributed expertise and resulting in positive changes to assessment practice.

Student feedback suggested that they understood the rationale for the changes and that the revised workshop and exemplars had contributed to their ongoing writing development. One student explained: *I feel that really taught me a lot, to see the difference between how you'd talk to someone in your field and how you'd talk to someone else and how hard it is.* The opportunity to work with another student to complete the revised assignment also provided an opportunity for peer feedback, as students were responsible for different sections of the same report. As one commented during the focus group, *reading her work and having her read my work is just a different set of eyes* (2014 S2). One student also commented on the value of the specific guidelines and framework which I provided during the workshop: *I think all of your workshops have been very useful, but particularly that one made the letter more professional, I think, rather than make up your own letter. So that has been very helpful* (Audrey, 2014 S2). This was another example of the value students saw in the explicit scaffolding they were now receiving for their written assignments.

8.10 Summary of findings related to tertiary learning advice

8.10.1 Alignment of TLA practice with social constructionist pedagogy

As described in the workshop summaries above, I was enabled to incorporate a more developmental writing pedagogy in the disciplinary context of these workshops, as compared to the one-off presentations which were more typical of the LTU at the time. This more developmental approach involved providing

self-assessment questionnaires and group problem-solving tasks, rather than seeking to transmit as much information about discourse and structure as possible within the limited timeframe of a one-off visit. This shift was particularly marked in relation to the orientation workshop, which became focused on engagement and introduction to the series of writing tasks and support workshops and resources now available to students. This more participatory pedagogy developed alongside the closer relationship with students, as a result of being seen as a member of their teaching staff (from the initial orientation)

and as someone to whom they could turn for support for their emergent writing needs; as one student explained: *I think the main point is that the lecturers and you, you are approachable, so if there is anything that we feel we need a workshop on, it's not as intimidating* (2013 Y1 S2).

8.10.2 Expansion of TLA practice into staff development

Apart from contributing directly to the development of writing and assessment practice in the BAH, the project also allowed me to play a role in professional development of BAH staff in these practices. There was some evidence that this expanded role was supported by students:

It would be lovely if you worked closer with the tutors. Guide them in writing their assignments. Give them some instruction 'cause when we sit down with you, you will point out, highlight, exactly what it is we need to write, so if you work more closely with them, then that would help (2012 Y1 S2).

One emergent finding was the need to be as responsive to the developmental needs of staff as to those of students. It became clear that they also needed scaffolding in order to adopt new practices and discourse challenges. For instance, Anne acknowledged that teaching writing in general had been a *steep learning curve* for her, having taken up her academic position without any expectation that this would be part of her responsibility. She was concerned that, initially, she had been overdependent – a common concern of BAH staff in relation to their students: *I felt it was a bit one-sided because YOU knew the past experiences, and YOU knew what needed to be done and so it was basically, it was based off of your suggestions the collaboration for this next semester is going to be way greater because I'll be in it* (2012 S1). As she accepted and practised this expanded teaching role, she became *a bit more comfortable in providing some basic writing concepts* (2013 S2), which laid the foundation for her more proactive stance towards writing guidance and assessment.

The need to adjust to staff's developmental needs in dealing with writing pedagogy was particular salient in relation to the WTL activity I prepared for Anne (and later, Stacey). My initial activity was overcomplex and unsuited to the pedagogical culture of the BAH classroom. Even the modified version proved challenging for both teachers. Anne said: *it was out of my comfort zone to discuss writing skills in a broader, general sense ... so I stuck to your instructions in my own voice* (2013 S2). And Stacey (2014 S2) referred to the anxiety of potentially having to field questions from students on language issues which she saw as outside her expertise: *you always worry that the stronger*

students, who nitpick, will want to know everything about this sentence down to the nth degree. This was one reason why the group format of the revised exercise worked better for the staff, since it shifted the focus of attention away from them. This was evidence of the challenges involved, and the need for careful negotiation, adaptation and support, in the process of passing over the role of writing instruction to disciplinary lecturers – particularly, in the more radical form of writing to learn.

There was also evidence of an informal effect of classroom workshops on the pedagogical practices of staff who were involved as co-creators and / or observers. For instance, by the end of the project, Maria was spending more of her own class time in preparing students for their written assignments:

I found that the issues that students had with the assignments could have been addressed more easily by working through examples in class. I was a bit stymied with content and time last year, and I've found additional time this year, and so that's what I've filled it with (2014 S2).

It was in relation to the professional practice of reflective writing that Maria felt my impact had been most transformational, both for staff and students:

Your support on students developing the skill of self-reflection and critically appraising their own development has been fantastic; it's exactly what we've wanted to develop with the students. We've needed your guidance to understand reflection more deeply in order to support the

students' development, but also in order to set assignments that are realistic for the stage that they're at. And then to mark, so analyse their development of reflection (2013 S2).

It was clear that Maria's perception of the role of the TLA and her own responsibility for writing instruction had shifted a long way from the initial limited, remedial role framed by our referral arrangement (7.4). This had been predicated on a kind of division of labour; essentially the arrangement involved the outsourcing of writing guidance from the course tutor to the TLA. As the collaboration developed, Maria was making space for writing instruction within her classes – both by the TLA and by herself – and also adapting her assessment practice closely to the model provided by the TLA (for reflective practice).

8.11 Conclusion

There were several drivers leading to a steady increase in writing development workshops during the first two years of the project. These included the influence of WAC literature, the findings of the reconnaissance research and experiential learning from ongoing consultations with BAH students, as well as their direct feedback in focus groups and interviews. It was notable that the writing workshops did not substitute for other traditional TLA practices, such as one-to-one consultations, but entered into a dynamic – and mutually-transformational – relationship with them. For instance, new workshops on reflective writing and research reports stimulated students to come to the LTU for consultations,

which in turn functioned as a source for greater familiarity with disciplinary content and discourse, which fed back into revisions of the workshop for the following year. This is another example of the systemic and mutually-constitutive nature of the change initiatives – as discussed in chapter 7 in relation to the orientation workshop (and in the next chapter in relation to one-to-one consultations).

This dynamic process of change in TLA practice, as a result of involvement in collaborative programme-specific workshops, was itself part of a broader institutional context of change. This change was generally not steady and incremental, but rather characterised by disruptive events. These included both the arrival and departure of Anne. Her arrival, as an inexperienced tertiary teacher with little institutional knowledge and a strong motivation to engage in collaborative change, opened up the possibility of developing course-based workshops. And her later departure created an opportunity for a completely new writing workshop based on a radically-reshaped assignment. In the case of reflective writing, it was the technological disruption – in the form of a switch to online portfolios – which created an opening for a workshop in conjunction with the one which students were already having in order to master the new technology. These examples indicate that change in TLA practice does not necessarily have to be driven by TLAs themselves; in these cases, it was more a case of establishing relationships and practices within the programme so that one could play a proactive role when change opportunities arose as an inherent feature of the dynamic tertiary environment.

Within this environment, the developing practice of writing workshops was a central driver in the construction of an informal writing consultant role. Rather than being first given a formal writing consultant role and then fulfilling it by developing writing resources, I received an informal invitation to provide writing support, and based on this, developed teaching practices within and in parallel with the BAH programme. It was through this emergent practice that I became recognised as fulfilling the role of writing consultant.

Chapter 9: Findings Part 3

One-to-one support and staff development

9.1 Introduction

Although course-specific workshops for students were the major focus of the writing support in the BAH programme during the project, students were also able to book one-to-one consultations at the LTU. In principle, they could see any of the four learning advisors to discuss their studies or assignments, but because of my growing involvement in the programme, nearly all the BAH students requested consultations with me. Consultations are a traditional TLA practice, but like other such practices described above (e.g. the orientation workshop), they underwent change over the course of this study as they became part of an integrated system of support for writing development in the BAH programme.

Another way in which consultations had a broader effect on writing development within the BAH programme was through their adoption by Anne as part of her teaching practice – and subsequently as part of a curricular thread of writing support during Anne’s first-year courses. These forms of one-to-one support – TLA consultations and what Anne called formative conferences with students in her first-year courses – are described in section 9.2, together with their implications for the project goals.

One to one was also the format of much of the engagement with BAH staff during the programme, acting as a means of mutual education. These interactions with staff had a similar mutually-constitutive relationship to the formal staff workshops as the one-to-one consultations with students to the classroom workshops. This involvement with staff development and its contribution to the achievement of the project goals are the focus of section 9.3.

9.2 One-to-one support for BAH student writing

9.2.1 Increased uptake of one-to-one consultations

One-to-one consultations for students from all disciplines and levels continued to be the main practice of learning advisors at NZU (including myself) throughout the period in which this study took place. While developing the writing consultant role for the BAH programme, I continued to see between ten and twenty students in most weeks, mostly in relation to planning or revising their written assignments. The majority of those who attended consultations were international students studying business; BAH students had traditionally been infrequent users of the service.

As Table 10 shows, this changed during the project; consultations with BAH students were consistently more than three times higher than they had been during the reconnaissance stage. In 2011, just one first-year student had come for a single consultation – and for the other year groups, the figures were inflated by multiple consultations with a few students who were struggling (and

had initially been referred by a BAH staff member). In previous years, uptake of consultations among BAH students had been even lower, with annual totals of BAH consultations in single figures.

Table 10: *Consultations with BAH students during the project*

	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Total
2011	1	11	4	5	21
2012	36	0	26	6	68
2013	18	12	10	41	81
2014	40	6	6	18	70

Significant increases in uptake of consultations tended to follow increased engagement with students, associated with new course-specific workshops (for instance, for Year 3 students in 2012 and Year 4 students in 2013). By 2014, a pattern of usage had begun to emerge which was consistent with the overall aims of the study: high usage of the service during the transitional stage of first-year study, followed by strategic use of the service by students facing specific rhetorical challenges during the remainder of the programme.

As pointed out in section 8.7, consultations evolved so that I took on the more responsive stance of critical reader of drafts in relation to fourth-year students. By this stage, evidence from staff and students indicated that these consultations were now seen as integral to the programme-specific support I was offering. As Stacey explained, *the students know where to go and know that they can get help if they need it ... I think that relationship, where they know your name and know where you live – that's useful* (2014 S2).

The role of one-to-one support was not restricted to consultations with a TLA in the LTU. Through the collaborative initiatives, it became normalised as a pedagogical option not only for students but also to some extent for BAH staff. In particular, Anne saw it as a practice which fitted her teaching philosophy and one in which she was willing to invest considerable time and effort, as she explained at the end of the first year of our collaboration: *working with you has provided insight into my teaching indirectly and directly ... I realised that what you're doing with them is one-on-one attention, specific to their needs, and so I felt that that's what teaching and learning is* (2012 S2).

All staff at NZU were available for students to consult at particular times, as part of standard teaching practices. Nonetheless, the culture of autonomy in the BAH programme meant that students were not proactive in seeking support from staff in this way. From 2013, therefore, Anne began to offer specifically timetabled one-to-one sessions, so that they were normalised as part of the course, with students opting out if they did not want to attend, rather than having to opt in for extra support if they were struggling. And this was extended in 2014, as part of

a component of the course programme, published in the course guide. This component of individualised support included tutorials, workshops and consultations which were offered alternately by Anne, as the course teacher, and by myself, as the TLA.

The idea for this more integrated form of individualised support emerged during our interview at the end of 2013, in which Anne expressed her concerns regarding the fragmented nature of her semester 1 course (described in 8.2), which was taught mainly by guest lecturers. The individualised support component took the form of a timeline with weekly research and writing milestones, linked to my workshops, her one-to-one support (which she called formative conferences) and with opportunities for students to book one-to-one or group consultations with me in the LTU at strategic points in their progress. One of the milestones involved students sending their draft reference lists to me for formative feedback. Nearly all of the students did so, which meant they were able to learn and make changes to their practice before submitting their assignments, rather than having multiple corrections and criticisms added to their summative feedback, as had happened in the past. It also gave me an opportunity to advise them not only about the accuracy of their referencing, but about the quality of their sources and how they could develop their research skills.

9.2.2 Implications for BAH student writing

Indications from the increased numbers of students voluntarily attending consultations that these were no longer perceived within a remedial framework were supported by feedback from BAH staff and students. Both Maria and Anne referred to the “normalising” of TLA practice as an effect of its integration into the BAH programme. Maria saw this as a particular benefit of the collaboration: *I think normalising the writing centre has been really helpful, normalising your role has been really helpful* (2014 S1). Anne explicitly associated this normalisation as a move away from the notion that consultations were principally a source of remedial support for struggling students, explaining that the initiative had *normalised the concept of going to the LTU rather than making it something for extreme circumstances ... it's productive, no matter what level of writing you're at* (2013 S2). In the course of the focus groups and interviews held with BAH students during the project, two specific impacts of consultations emerged: clarification of the assessment task and formative feedback on their drafts.

Students who had had consultations before working on their first draft found that it helped them to make a positive start:

I came and saw you once because I was just stuck on how to start (2014 Y1 S2).

I think the most helpful part was giving me strategies to attack the specific assignment (Evelyn Y2 2014).

Those who came in with their first drafts found that the feedback was positive and helped them to make improvements before submitting their final drafts:

Instant feedback. You don't hand in and wait three weeks and then you get a grade with feedback that you can't change any more. You get feedback and it's like, I could change all this and then it'll be so much better. I've really learnt from that (2014 Y1 S2).

I focused on the areas that you told me I need to focus on and I found that my essay presentation is more smooth, and [I was] able to write more concisely. What you gave us is some useful suggestions and if I have some problem, then I'll refer to the structure you taught us (Pearl Y1 2014).

When I came to see you, that was good because I'd just written it and I came to see you and you highlighted, and I wasn't even finished the assignment yet, so it was stuff I could change along the way. The first half, where I'd come to see you and I'd revised it and edited it down quite a lot, compared to the second half where it did not receive that much attention, there was a difference between the two. It's important to do quite a few drafts, which they tell you to (Harriet Y4 2013).

This last comment was one of several which indicated that the student felt the advice they received had had a transformative effect on their writing. As the following comments show, the effect was not limited to the specific piece of text which we had discussed directly during the consultation:

You suggested, which I thought actually was better, to pick out one framework, discuss it a lot more in depth; so I changed my whole essay. But I think I learnt a lot more from that There were a few sentences where they just weren't running very smoothly; and you just made me rethink: how should I write this? (Audrey Y1 2014).

It was amazing, the feedback. there were just a couple of sentences there, but it did change the whole way I approached my research review section and to my thinking, it just flowed all of a sudden, whereas it was staccato before that, but I wouldn't have been able to fix it (Marion Y4 2014).

In both these cases, the students indicated that suggestions made during consultations had stimulated deep learning, allowing them to attain an enhanced level of performance which they had been unable to achieve independently. As such, the effect of these consultations is highly consistent with the sociocultural concept of scaffolded learning (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). This close alignment between the practice of one-to-one consultations and the role of mentoring within a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning helps to explain its attraction for Anne, for whom this was a central element in her teaching philosophy. For instance, she drew explicitly on Vygotsky's related

concept of the zone of proximal development in explaining why she had chosen to ignore certain errors or omissions while marking student work; these were, in her view, *a bit beyond their ZPD* (2013, V).

Just as working in a disciplinary context allowed me to align my practice more closely with my educational beliefs and values, providing one-to-one support for student writing allowed Anne to align her teaching with her own developmental educational values, which she summarised in our interview at the end of the second year of our collaboration:

I do try to think bigger picture, long term: this is a first-year student entering into this very intense degree programme, and they're going to have to be doing more writing. I want to build them up as a writer; it's not my time to crush their souls as a writer and to instil in them self-doubt. I'd prefer to instil in them confidence, hope and some empowering thoughts of where they can go for assistance, or what they should focus on next: constructive thoughts (2013, S2).

Despite the considerable investment of time that this level of one-to-one attention required, Anne remained committed to extending it to her teaching as a whole. She felt that it satisfied her aspiration to play a supportive, mentoring role; for instance, it allowed her *to ease the nerves and to ease the anxiety of students and to respect their concerns as well. I don't feel we respect our students' concerns enough* (2013, S2). However, just as I noted that one-to-one consultations had a benefit not only for the students, but for my own practice, as

a source of knowledge-creation, Anne too found that it enhanced other aspects of her teaching, for instance, *functioning as kind of my reliability check on self, that I've covered what needs to be covered in class*. She interpreted student queries as meaning she had not covered something adequately and her response was: *either I should offer a bit more leniency when I'm marking or I should let the students know it's not expected that you cover it* (2013, S2). In this way, the knowledge she gained through one-to-one interactions with students played a formative role in relation to teaching and assessment, just as it did for myself and for the students.

Feedback from students supported Anne's impression that her personalized support for them was having a supportive and transformative impact on their learning. One student described her as *very personally invested in the course, motivating and inspiring* (2013 Y1 S2). Another pointed out how her formative conferences *really clarified a lot of things for people* (2013 Y1 S2) They especially appreciated the fact that the support was timetabled – which meant they did not have to specifically seek help as with other BAH staff. They felt that scheduled sessions helped them with meeting deadlines. Some students opted to have a shared appointment with Anne and found it an opportunity to learn from each other. This was another way in which the writing development initiatives interacted to form a coherent whole, since the change to paired assessment for Anne's second semester course (see 8.3) created more opportunities for mentoring peer learning through joint consultations. However, the extra investment of time which these one-to-one conferences required meant that they were discontinued when Anne handed over her classes to

Stacey on leaving NZU in 2014. Stacey, with an already full load of teaching and administrative obligations felt unable to commit the substantial amount of time required.

9.2.3 Implications for tertiary learning advice

From the students' perspective, the value of one-to-one consultations was clearly grounded in the relationships which I had developed through increased engagement with them and their tutors in the BAH programme. Their familiarity with me through workshops made it less of a face-threatening experience to come into the LTU for a consultation:

We're used to you now (2014 Y1 S2).

We've known for a couple of years now, so I feel confident enough to come in here about my draft, which is not very good, and you're aware that it's not good, and get it critiqued, whereas earlier on in the course, if you haven't got that, or if the relationship is not there, it's quite a big thing ... I would feel more comfortable seeing you (Evelyn Y4 2014).

At the same time, students' awareness of my relationship with BAH staff lent credibility to the feedback which they could receive on their written assignments in consultations:

It's quite useful if you've met the lecturer and you have a fair understanding of the assignment and then you can go over it (2013 Y2 S2).

I think it helped because you had an understanding of what the expectations of the assignment were (Glenda Y4 2013).

You have a connection with our lecturers as well, so you kind of do know what they want as well (Evelyn Y4 2014).

In addition to the halo effect of my association with lecturers, the credibility of my feedback was also enhanced by students' awareness of the knowledge I had built up of writing in the programme through my practice and research:

So we feel you have a more specific knowledge, like how to help us, and you know how busy we are. I would feel more comfortable seeing you, because I know that you've done some research on what we are doing and you know what we are going into, and you know our schedule, you know we are busy, so you understand what we are going through, rather than seeing someone else where it's general grammar mistakes, but not into how you can write this into a better research thing (Evelyn Y4 2014).

The reasons students gave for attending consultations were more related to developmental and substantive issues than remedial concerns, such as proofreading. This is particularly evident in Evelyn's comment, in which she

contrasts the tailored feedback she received from me, based on my programme-specific knowledge, with the generic feedback on language issues, which she received from other learning advisors. These comments indicate a shift in perception of tertiary learning advice on the part of students. As I learnt more about the programme, I was able to give students more disciplinary-specific advice and focus more on rhetorical issues, rather than on the correction of surface language or referencing errors. This shift was also prompted by my engagement with a broader and more representative range of students in consultations, for example, with fourth-year students, for whom (as mentioned in section 8.7 above) I was explicitly adopting the role of critical reader.

BAH staff too felt that I had developed knowledge of the programme through prolonged engagement. This was especially apparent in Maria's comments in 2014, since the project had begun with a referral arrangement for her students in which consultations played a distinctly remedial role (as described in section 7.4 above). By the end of the project, I was seen as someone with inside knowledge to whom students could be referred for broader educational support aligned with the developmental goals of the BAH programme:

I feel you're part of our team, because you've developed so much knowledge and understanding about our programme, what our programme content is and what our students look like when they first enter the programme, and where we want them to be, and look like by the time they leave. So it's developed my confidence in what you're

telling the students. I can talk to the student about the benefits of going to see you, and your knowledge, so it's not a referral without weight. I am able to talk about the advantages of seeing you. And assuring the student that it's about support, and not about a remediation of their work (2014 S2).

9.3 Staff development workshops and resources

9.3.1 Planning, implementation and development

As with other extensions of TLA practice during the project (e.g. reflective writing and in-class writing tasks), the adoption of practices with an explicit staff professional development objective was stimulated both by theoretical concerns arising from the literature and by specific issues which arose during my engagement with BAH staff and students. A staff development focus is a core element of writing across the curriculum initiatives (e.g. Bell et al., 2011; Maimon, 2006) and is also seen as a means of embedding TLA practices within programmes, as they are adopted by disciplinary teaching staff (J. Jones et al., 2002). In the context of this project, I saw staff development workshops as a way of disseminating ideas about writing pedagogy which I had gained through my reading of literature and research and as a way of establishing and consolidating relationships which could be the basis for further collaborative initiatives.

This was the case with both staff development workshops which I ran in 2013: the first on reflective writing (described in 8.6) and the second on assessment

feedback. Before each workshop, I sent staff a literature review on the topic to provide them with key ideas but also to build up my credibility as a writing teacher. For the sessions themselves, I provided tasks for discussion among the BAH staff. For instance, for the second workshop, they were presented with extracts of student writing and staff feedback, which I had adapted from real examples collected during the reconnaissance research the previous year. The staff were also provided with discussion questions prompting them to consider how to achieve an appropriate balance of negative and positive comments.

I felt that the workshops were well-received and that the staff were interested, motivated and open to critical reflection on their writing practice. After the workshop on assessment feedback, for instance, I noted in my journal that the questions and examples elicited *animated* discussion, and participants acknowledged their difficulty in *reining in their tendency to correct and how they have to be on their guard to prevent relatively trivial surface errors from monopolising their attention when reading student assignments*. My involvement with BAH staff in these workshops consolidated my ongoing collaboration with Brenda and Maria on reflective writing and with Anna and Paula on assessment feedback – particularly in relation to the use of rubrics.

Opportunities for further writing workshops of this kind were limited by the heavy workload of BAH staff and by the fact that several staff were only on campus for one or two days a week, as they combined their teaching responsibilities with research and professional practice obligations. Another year went by before the next opportunity to meet the BAH staff during one of their regular meetings. The

timing, during the mid-semester break of 2014, had the advantage of allowing a larger number of BAH staff to attend, since they had fewer fixed obligations at this time of year; this included Christine and Laura, with whom I had previously had limited contact.

Having by this stage extended support – through workshops and consultations – to students in each year of the programme, I decided to present a curricular view of BAH writing development in line with a WAC perspective. The approach I used was to express writing practices in the programme in terms familiar to BAH staff from the competency framework which they used to assess BAH students' professional skills development during the programme. The competency framework specified a number of different fields of applied health practice and competencies (such as assessment of clients' health needs and planning of treatment) which students needed to demonstrate in each field. I hoped that presenting writing in the BAH programme in this way would help staff to adapt assignments so that they aligned with the specific writing competencies and fields of practice in which they were preparing students to write – and to decide on appropriate instruction and support to help students achieve the desired competencies.

The four fields of BAH writing practice which I included in my BAH Writing Competency Framework were clinical, research, reflective and informative writing. For each of these fields, I provided some examples of the type of writing that could fit under each category, as shown in Figure 4 below:

BAH Writing Competency Framework Part 1: Fields of Practice

1. Clinical Writing

For example:

- Clinical notes
- Assessments and treatment plans
- Resources

2. Informative Writing

For example:

- Letters and reports to community members (e.g. clients, caregivers, whanau) and non-applied health professionals
- Leaflets, magazine articles, letters to newspapers, web pages designed to inform the public about applied health practice

3. Research Writing

For example:

- Essays
- Literature reviews
- Research proposals

4. Reflective Writing

For example:

- Accounts of placements
- Self-evaluations

- Personal plans and goals

Figure 4: Extract 1 from the BAH Writing Competency Framework

Clinical writing covered the documentation students recorded during their placements – and simulations of this, which were included in assignments. Research included essays and literature reviews. Reflective writing comprised the ongoing journals based on competency development during these placements (as discussed in 8.6). These three categories covered most of the assessed writing in the programme.

There were few examples of assessed writing within the fourth category of informative writing, in which I included texts such as letters, brochures, blogs etc, designed to convey information to clients or the general public. Nonetheless, my interviews with BAH staff indicated that this was a significant form of professional writing within the field – and, hence, might be included more within the BAH assessments. In this way, the categorisation was not purely descriptive, but also a form of advocacy for more authentic and diversified written assessment tasks, which allowed students to engage in the rhetorical complexities of addressing different audiences for different purposes.

The second component of the BAH Writing Competency Framework comprised five writing competencies (objective, succinct, professional, critical, rhetorical), which were essentially desired features of the professional register of BAH writing. As for the fields of practice, I included examples of how these features might be manifested in student writing, as shown in Figure 5 below.

BAH Writing Competency Framework Part 2: Competencies

a. Applied health practitioners can write objectively

- using precise and unambiguous language
- presenting descriptions that are factual, rather than emotional or speculative
- making claims which are appropriately hedged and evidence-based

b. Applied health practitioners can write succinctly

- selecting only details which are necessary to support claims or justify decisions
- avoiding unnecessary repetition and wordiness
- using punctuation to separate phrases and sentences into easily-understood chunks

c. Applied health practitioners can write professionally

- conforming to institutional requirements
- respecting ethical principles relevant to applied health language (e.g. person-first / strengths-based)
- presenting texts which are essentially error-free in relation to spelling, punctuation, grammar and referencing

d. Applied health practitioners can write critically

- summarising accurately both primary and secondary evidence
- evaluating evidence with reference to appropriate criteria
- developing logical conclusions and implications

e. Applied health practitioners can write rhetorically

- adapting style and format to meet the expectations and information needs of the intended audience
- linking sentences and paragraphs so that the reader can easily follow the developing description, analysis, argument or narrative
- switching appropriately between subjective and objective styles (for instance, in reflective writing)

Figure 5: Extract 2 from the BAH Writing Competency Framework

Like the fields of practice, this set of competencies was partly descriptive of existing expectations of assessed writing from students, and partly aspirational, presenting a broader and more functionally-based perspective on assessment criteria for writing within the BAH programme. For instance, I included accuracy of spelling, grammar, vocabulary, which did loom large in comments from BAH staff, within a broader, functional competence of professional writing. My intention was to help BAH staff to view accuracy as a developmental skill which students were working towards, rather than a generic and absolute precondition of their writing, even at first-year level.

For the competency of critical writing, I drew on the concept of evidence-based practice, which emerged in interviews with BAH staff as a highly valued foundational aspect of applied health. Rhetorical competence I saw as related

to the need to communicate in a context where multiple literacies were required to address the different purposes and audiences for BAH communication. This was supported by various comments by staff about the need for “code-switching” within professional communication.

Together with the BAH Writing Competency Framework, I produced what I called a writing audit form for BAH staff to evaluate the writing practices in their courses against the framework. As shown in the completed version (Figure 6), which I provided to the BAH staff as an example applied to one course, the form consisted of questions on:

- Type(s) of writing students need to do (e.g. essay, case study)
- Areas of practice and competencies involved
- Previous experience students have of this type of writing
- Aspect(s) of the written assignment(s) which are likely to be novel or challenging for these students
- Appropriate forms of support (e.g. workshop, model or framework, consultation or email feedback from TLA, in-class writing tasks)

As with the framework – and in keeping with the action research ethos which informed the project as a whole – this audit form also had an implicit advocacy purpose: to stimulate the BAH staff to consider how their assignments fitted in with the programme as a whole and how support might be integrated (in the same way as I had done for Anne’s first-year courses – as discussed in 9.2).

I presented the framework and audit form at the staff meeting and the programme director responded positively and sent it to all the BAH staff. As a result of this, I had follow-up interviews with four of the staff, and was also able to discuss it with Maria (who completed it for her courses).

Course Number and Title		xxxxx	
Staff involved		xxxx and xxxx	
Which type of writing do students need to do on this course? (Put an X next to one or more of the following; Put extra details below)			
Essay	Oral Presentation	Case Study Analysis	Journal entry
Leaflet / Letter	Assessment and/or Treatment Plan	Lit Review / Report X	Research Proposal / Report
2000-word research-based report on a disorder, including its impacts and treatment options.			
Indicate the range(s) of applied health writing and competencies which students will be developing through this written assignment.			
1. Clinical	2. Informative	3. Research X	4. Reflective
a. obj X	b. succ	c. prof	d. crit X
e. rhet			
What previous experience of this type of writing do the students have?	Limited or no relevant experience Online research mostly limited to Google, Wikipedia, Journalism Writing experience mostly literary		
Which aspect(s) of the written assignment(s) are likely to be novel or challenging for these students)?	Use of library databases Selecting and evaluating sources Reading and extracting data from research reports Summarising and organising notes Synthesising notes in coherent text Writing objectively and succinctly Writing professionally (person-first, APA Citations and Reference Lists)		
Which of these forms of support are appropriate for students in this assignment? (tick one or more of the following)			
Workshop X	In-class tasks	Model or framework X	
Formative meeting with applied health tutor X	Formative email feedback with TLA X	Consultation with TLA X	
Other (please specify)			
Any queries / suggestions / requests?			

Figure 6: BAH writing audit form

9.3.2 Implications for BAH writing pedagogy

The most immediate practical impact of the BAH Writing Competency Framework was on the revision of the first-year semester 2 case-study report assignment (as described in 8.3). The revised assignment involved students communicating to different audiences, which I saw as filling a gap in the competencies which first-year BAH students were developing through their assessed writing (i.e. what I described in the BAH Writing Competency Framework as writing rhetorically). However, beyond this, the initiative did not lead directly to changes in written assessment in the programme. One reason for this was the time-consuming nature of completing the audit form and incorporating some of the forms of support suggested.

Nonetheless, as a means of promoting a curricular view of writing among BAH staff, the BAH Writing Competency Framework and the audit form were relatively successful. A number of staff commented on how the framework of fields of practice and competencies gave them a whole-programme perspective on writing development, which they had not previously had. Theresa (2014, S1) focused on the value of the form itself:

That sheet you did, I really appreciated it because it really brought it together (Theresa, 2014 S1).

For Paula, the value lay more in its stimulus for discussion among members of the BAH teaching team:

We talked about our ideas of how to scaffold and what we might be building over the four years, that really helped me (Paula, 2014, S1)

And Christine pointed out the value of seeing how writing in particular courses for which they were responsible fitted into students' long-term development:

I feel that's the input you're giving us. It's that long, across the four years. I don't think we have a great understanding of that overall pathway through the programme, which you're helping us figure out, which is awesome (Christine, 2014 S1).

In several interviews with BAH staff which followed on from this workshop, it was clear that the framework was providing staff with a common language for discussing the purpose and roles of the written assignment they were setting. For instance, referring to one of her assignments, Theresa (2014 S1) said: *That one was very much the rhetorical because they tried to put a lot of information in and a lot of my comments were, 'Would that mean anything to a GP?'* She found the specificity of competencies particularly useful and felt it would help her to provide clearer advice to her students:

I'm all the time telling them, 'Succinct, clear', but they're just words. To actually see you unpick what that means, I found that really useful, because I thought 'Right now, I can actually say to them, 'When I say to you I want you to be succinct, this is what I mean'.

9.3.3 Implications for tertiary learning advice

As indicated by the number of interviews which followed on from staff workshops, these staff workshops played an important role in establishing opportunities for engagement with BAH staff and in raising awareness of my profile and expertise in writing – both in general and in relation to the BAH programme. In this way, they contributed to my construction of a role as informal writing consultant to the BAH programme, since even those staff who did not collaborate directly in terms of writing workshops engaged with me in this role through staff workshops and follow-up interviews.

Staff workshops were instrumental too in creating opportunities for collaboration beyond the first year of the BAH programme, particularly through facilitating contacts with Brenda and Paula. The degree to which they regarded me as a writing consultant, with a specific focus on and knowledge of the BAH programme, is clear from their comments. For instance, following on from my assessment workshop in 2013, I helped Paula to modify her assignment instructions. Paula commented very positively on this support in our interview the following year:

It's been just so good to have you there to talk that through. And actually reviewing that first assessment that I wrote up gave me the model for carrying on, even though I didn't quite get it right on my own in the first semester (2014 S2).

Like several of Anne's comments discussed earlier, this view aligns closely with a socioconstructivist view of learning; it is clear that Paula was framing our relationship as a mentoring one, in which she was striving towards independent performance of a skill which I, in the mentor role, had modelled for her. Interestingly, the skill she was seeking to develop was actually the ability to scaffold students' performance:

I now see how much easier it was with the extra support and scaffolding. After adopting a more explicit framework: they wrote it with much clearer structure, much better organisation, so I was thrilled with that (2014 S2).

Essentially, I was scaffolding her ability to scaffold her students' writing. It was perhaps no coincidence that those BAH staff members with whom I developed a particularly productive and explicit mentoring relationship (Anne and Paula) were those for whom mentoring was central to their teaching and learning philosophy; they were highly self-critical in relation to aspects of their own teaching which were at odds with their philosophical views and, hence, receptive to methods which could help them more closely align the two.

Indeed, although we had already been collaborating for over a year, the assessment workshop gave an added impetus to the mentoring relationship I had established with Anne. The area in which she felt she needed extra guidance and support was in developing complete and explicit assessment rubrics for the tasks she was setting her students. Previously, most of the BAH assignments had fairly minimal marking guidelines, which not only provided

limited support for staff in their grading, but also gave students little information about the relative weight of different components of the question as they planned their writing, and limited transparency when they received the grade on their performance.

Although Anne wished to provide her students with a more complete and transparent assessment rubric, she described the process of creating it as *out of my comfort zone*. Like her students, in facing similarly new rhetorical challenges, she admitted that she too had needed *that one-on-one guidance, the hand-holding and spoon-feeding of it all because, every time I tried to sit down and think about it, I just kind of dreaded it* (2013 S2). She was very satisfied with the outcome: *It was just so efficient in the end, and it felt really authentic, and it felt nice, it felt kind, it felt like a very humane way of marking, it felt like I wasn't holding all this power* (2014 S1). Her satisfaction is an indication of the alignment of this practice with her teaching philosophy. This was something she had been striving towards throughout the project, as shown in the concerns about harshness which she expressed in our first interview two years earlier:

I think I did a bit too much negative to positive. And I didn't keep in mind that they are first semester, first year. And so, my concept of constructive criticism might be a little too harsh for them at this entry level, where they're still developing as writers, or an entry level of development as university writers (2012, S1).

The interaction between staff workshops and individual engagement with and support for course tutors mirrors that between writing workshops for BAH students and individual support in the form of one-to-one consultations. Both cases show the mutually constitutive relationship between these two forms of TLA practice. Individual engagement was a basis for knowledge construction in relation to writing within the BAH programme. This basis of knowledge allowed me to identify topics for whole-group workshops; and these workshops stimulated other staff and students to engage with me on a one-to-one basis. It was through this cycle of engagement at group and individual levels that the role of writing consultant to the BAH programme was constructed.

9.4 Conclusion

By the end of the project, students were expressing highly positive evaluations of support for their writing:

What I feel is that we are being supported really well. I didn't expect that before I started, and it's really nice – especially the first year, you don't really know what to expect and, 'Oh Gosh, am I doing things right (2014 S2)?

Such views contrast markedly with the anxieties and frustrations expressed by students during the reconnaissance stage. Clearly, the 2014 cohort was made up of different individuals, but the support which they refer to was simply not

available to their counterparts three years earlier. As highlighted above, the mutually constitutive relationship between individual and group engagement with students had a strong parallel in the expanding area of staff development. In particular, as explained above, the workshops and materials provided staff with a language with which to discuss writing development across the BAH programme.

Positive impacts of individual engagement with BAH staff on their writing development practices are evident in a number of their comments. For instance, Anne explained: ... *I do think that working with you has provided insight into my teaching indirectly and directly* (Anne 2012 S1). An example of this was how Anne refined and focused her assessment feedback based on a comment I had made in one of our first meetings: *One thing I really want as their take-away message, that I really want them to walk away with, is definitely influenced by you suggesting 'they're really probably only going to change one thing'* (Anne 2013 S2). There was also evidence of positive impacts on the practices of BAH staff with whom there was no initial engagement, such as Paula, who made it quite clear that she was adopting writing development practices which she had encountered through our collaboration on one of her courses and transferring them to her teaching on others:

I modelled the work you did with me for the fourth year paper and I talked to you and asked if I could use that work for the third year paper (Paula 2014 S1).

As pointed out above, the impact was especially notable in the case of Maria. She also felt that the collaboration had been empowering in relation to BAH staff as a whole:

We also feel more confident in addressing the issues because of the additional support we've been given by you and the learning centre
(Maria 2013 S2).

In the case of my collaboration with Anne, there was a particularly marked complementarity in outcomes for our own personal journeys. Through adopting a classroom teaching role, I was able to shift from a dissonant teaching practice of transmission-based presentation, while Anne was able to align her teaching practice more closely with the educational values by adopting the TLA signature practice of one-to-one support.

This chapter has provided further evidence of how existing practices were transformed as they became incorporated into a coherent programme of disciplinary writing development. One-to-one consultations became less about mechanical issues of accuracy and more focused on the rhetorical effectiveness of students' texts. And as more experienced students began to come in for consultations, my TLA role shifted towards that of a critical reader. In this way, the project initiatives were not substitutional of, but transformational of, existing, traditional forms of TLA writing support, such as orientation workshops and one-to-one consultations.

Chapter 10: Discussion

10.1 Introduction

The research question which was the emergent focus of this study asked how a tertiary learning advisor, working as an informal writing consultant to staff and students of a disciplinary programme within a New Zealand university, could contribute to positive changes in writing pedagogy and tertiary learning advice. The contributions in relation to these twin goals are discussed in sections 10.2 and 10.3 below. The project was initially framed as a response to BAH staff concerns about basic academic literacy of first-year students. As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, such concerns have been a perennial feature of the tertiary landscape (e.g. Bartholomae & Matway, 2010; Ganobcsik-Williams, 2004; Ivanic et al., 2009) sustaining TLA practice while at the same time constraining it to a remedial institutional space (e.g. Baldauf, 1996; Dunworth, 2010; Krause, 2001; Manalo et al., 2010).

The project's aims were consistent with long-term aspirations among TLAs to move out of this remedial space (e.g. Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008) and to contribute to writing pedagogy as an integrated component of disciplinary programmes, rather than as a generic, add-on option for at-risk students (e.g. Kift, 2008; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 1999; Nelson et al., 2012; Purser et al., 2008; Rowley et al., 2008; Skillen, Merten, et al., 1998; Wingate, 2010). This

was difficult to achieve in the context of the BAH programme at NZU because of a number of constraints which have been discussed in preceding chapters:

- There was no explicit description of the writing skills which BAH students needed to learn and use.
- The programme was interdisciplinary, with students taking a number of courses outside of applied health. Some applied health programmes were also taught wholly or partly by specialist professionals from outside the institution. In these courses, writing expectations and practices were not necessarily consistent with those in the rest of the BAH programme.
- Most BAH staff only taught on a few courses, and had limited knowledge of how the writing students were doing during their course fitted in with that of the rest of the programme.
- BAH staff had limited time for teaching writing in addition to their other teaching, assessment, administrative and professional obligations. They also tended to lack confidence and relevant training in teaching writing.

These constraints are common within tertiary programmes and several are highlighted within the literature of WAC and academic literacies (e.g. Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001; Maimon, 2006). In addition to these general constraints, it was apparent from early on in the project that the teaching, learning and assessment of writing within the BAH was influenced by specific professional values held by BAH staff. In particular, staff felt a responsibility to uphold the high standards of their profession in regard to accurate documentation and therefore some felt they had an obligation to *nip issues like*

writing in the bud and prevent bad habits (as Maria put it). They also highly valued autonomy as a professional attribute, which meant that help-seeking tended to be regarded as, in Sarah's description, something which only "struggling" students would engage in. Moreover, the strong belief in the uniqueness of individual clients led to an avoidance of the use of exemplars. Together, these professional values tended to discourage a number of BAH staff from providing explicit guidance about writing while at the same time, they tended to feel the need to highlight and correct most errors in student scripts. Combined with the contextual constraints listed above, these professional values tended to complicate the establishment of a supportive, transitional and programme-wide approach to writing pedagogy within the BAH.

However, as the project went on, it became clear that there was a diversity in attitudes towards writing pedagogy among BAH staff, which created opportunities for change at course level, even if support for student writing development in the programme as a whole remained patchy. Anne, in particular, was keen to provide support for student writing and wary of focusing on error for the fear that this might restrict students' creativity and risk-taking. The diversity in staff attitudes and beliefs was not simply an individual variation but also a response to the steady – but contested – shift in the field from a standardised and prescriptive medical mode of applied health communication towards a more diversified and client-centred social mode.

This diversity, and its impact on writing pedagogy within the BAH, is further evidence of how discourse practices are not merely "innocent conventions"

(LeCourt, 1996, p. 392), but closely tied to contested values and positions within not only academic disciplines (as acknowledged by, for instance, Sfard, 2008) but the professions with which academic programmes are increasingly tied, through the vocational turn in tertiary education (Barnett, 2010; Brizee & Langmead, 2014). Given the contested nature of writing within the professional field of applied health, it is not surprising that there was not a consistent and coherent approach to writing within the BAH; lack of coherence within the programme was an adaptive response to a lack of external consensus in the fields of practice to which BAH staff belonged. This diversified and somewhat fragmented pedagogical environment shaped the progress of the collaborative initiatives and presented both barriers and opportunities in relation to achieving the goals of the project, as described in the sections which follow.

10.2 Contributions to BAH Writing pedagogy

10.2.1 Provision of writing instruction within the BAH

The contested and fragmented environment in relation to writing pedagogy in the BAH programme meant that the situation in which this project took place was lacking in the preconditions for a managerial approach to change. This is because such an approach assumes that change can be implemented top-down and anchored within a homogenous and durable professional culture, resulting in “institutionalisation” (R. L. Jacobs, 2002; Kotter, 1996). This assumption underlies the common aspiration within the field of tertiary learning advice to have academic skills development embedded within the curriculum (e.g.

Arkoudis & Tran, 2010; J. Jones, Bonanno, & Scouller, 2001). In other words, embedding is a form of institutionalisation and, subject to the same assumptions of stability and control, which were largely missing within the BAH, for the reasons explained in 10.1.

To a large extent, the pragmatic and relationship-based approach used in this project was not dependent on such assumptions, as it involved engaging with staff on an individual basis and over an extended period of time (particularly in the case of Anne and Maria). Changes – as discussed below – tended to be incremental and opportunistic. Such an approach is highly consistent with the so-called postmodern perspective on organizational change (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick & Quinn, 1999), which assumes a state of organizational flux in which stability and coherence are exceptions to the rule, and are typically achieved through time-limited partnerships of common interest among specific individuals – i.e. “double interacts” (Weick, 1985), as explained in chapter 3.

The pragmatic and incremental character of the project was clearly demonstrated in the two false starts which featured at the beginning of the project: the revised orientation workshop (7.2) and the assessment referral scheme (7.3). These two initiatives only made a limited contribution to writing pedagogy in the BAH. The orientation workshop for new first-year students at the beginning of the project was informed by the data I had gathered about BAH discourse practices during the reconnaissance phase. However, this initially resulted in the presentation of prescriptive principles of BAH discourse,

disconnected from any specific work assignments which students were working on and, in any case, limited to what I later came to identify as the medical mode of discourse, rather than, as I had initially assumed, applicable to applied health writing as a whole. The workshop was, in other words, a vestige of traditional stand-alone TLA interventions into programmes. It was only as I introduced a range of workshops and resources for students over the next two years, each with its own specific aim, that it was possible to revise this workshop so that it functioned as a more effective orientation to the BAH programme, with a shift of focus towards social engagement.

This is an example of how positive changes to writing pedagogy were achieved only through extended engagement over a number of annual iterations of individual initiatives. Support workshops and resources could be adapted for specific purposes as they formed part of an emergent system. In this way, the writing support provided by the project shifted from an initially narrow and reproductive academic socialisation stance towards a greater alignment with a more diversified writing in the disciplines and academic literacies perspective (Bell et al., 2011; Cipriano Silva & Thaiss, 2004; Lea & Street, 1998). The incremental, relationship-based process through which this shift was achieved also aligns with an academic literacies approach to writing pedagogy, featuring the “building of strong networks, the sharing of challenges and the collaborative development of solutions” (Lea & Street, 1999, p. 1).

My involvement in the teaching of writing in several BAH courses by the end of the project was notably more ambitious in scope than the first project initiative

(following the orientation workshop) – the assessment marking referral scheme which I designed for Maria (as described in 7.3). The main problem with this arrangement was that it reinforced the remedial positioning of student learning support, while achieving a relatively modest modification in assessment of student writing. This had been characterised by a strong tendency to highlight obvious errors – a phenomenon noted by researchers in other tertiary contexts (e.g. Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008; Szymanski, 2014). It was a practice, moreover, reinforced by the professional and disciplinary culture of applied health (as explained in 10.1), and hence, resistant to change.

Despite these inherent limitations of the tool I initially used in an attempt to effect change, it was clear from Maria's comments at the end of the project that her attitudes towards error had undergone a positive shift towards greater selectivity. By this stage, she had participated in a professional development workshop on error correction and collaborated on writing workshops for two of her courses (as described in 8.4 and 8.6). It was in relation to reflective writing, in particular, that Maria showed an especially strong willingness to embrace change, through adopting the assessment rubric which I had developed with Brenda. This is consistent with other findings that authentic assessments can help disciplinary teaching staff move away from a preoccupation with surface errors in student writing (Szymanski, 2014). Overall, Maria's shift in attitudes to error and more proactive assumption of responsibility for writing pedagogy are further evidence of the value of prolonged engagement with disciplinary staff in a range of different writing development initiatives.

Prolonged engagement in supporting writing pedagogy within the BAH also helped me to develop my own capability as a teacher of writing, and, thereby, to make a direct contribution to achievement of the project aims, even when collaboration was not feasible. This was the case in relation to the workshop I developed for the course taught by an external teacher, Agnes, who did not reply to any of my attempts to engage her in collaboration (as explained in 8.5). A knowledge of the assignment which I had developed incrementally through interactions with students helped me to both identify the need for writing support and to meet that need by providing a workshop and resources targeted at specific rhetorical challenges which students were facing. This workshop was evidence of the way in which I had developed a sense of agency in relation to my role in supporting writing pedagogy in the course – to the extent of providing writing instruction even in the absence of explicit approval from the person responsible for the course. By this stage, I saw the fact that she did not express any disapproval as creating the necessary space for my teaching initiative.

There has been persistent concern expressed in the literature of writing pedagogy and tertiary learning support that these practices are constrained, marginalised and downgraded if they are consigned to extracurricular times and places (e.g. Bell et al., 2011; Driscoll, 2011; A. Harris & Ashton, 2011; Webb et al., 1995). These concerns might well be raised in relation to the workshop for Agnes' course, delivered outside the programme of lectures, without any involvement of course teachers. However, the dichotomy between curricular and non-curricular space, which the concerns are based on, was not a marked feature of my engagement with the BAH, particularly in relation to Agnes'

course. This course took place in intensive blocks of two to three days and was taught by someone who was not part of the BAH staff and with whom the students had no contact outside these blocks. Furthermore, some of the course was taught off-site, in a community institution.

To a large degree, therefore, I felt that the workshop that I provided would not have been perceived as marginalised in relation to the BAH courses it was supporting. It took place in a library training room in which students had other writing classes and with a teacher (myself), with whom the students had, by this stage, an ongoing pedagogical relationship. This was not the case with the course itself, taught by an external professional (Agnes) in a block mode, unintegrated into the general routine of the semester. In other words, the course itself had features of marginalisation, while the support class I provided had features commonly associated with mainstream teaching (particularly in being taught by an institutional “insider”). This lack of a clear dichotomy of core / non-core teaching in the BAH reduced the potential for marginalisation of writing support classes. It was clear from student feedback that they were perceived as authentic and valuable sources of writing pedagogy, which students used to support, inform and structure the texts they wrote.

The main approach I used to extend my involvement in the teaching and assessment of writing during the project was a strategy of small wins. As mentioned in chapter 3 and 10.1 above, this type of strategy has been recommended as a means of achieving goals within dynamic and fragmented organisational environments (Weick, 2001). Although this strategy is radically

different from the managerial approach to embedding academic literacies which has been a prominent feature of TLA literature (e.g. J. Jones et al., 2002), it has previously been successfully used to build up a set of relevant writing support resources and workshops within a tertiary programme (A. Harris & Ashton, 2011). The strategy involves starting with solutions to small-scale problems (as happened in Year 1 of this project) and then using them as a basis for advocacy and extension of the scope of a change initiative.

Examples of this strategy included staff workshops on assessment and reflective writing, which were linked to individual engagement with Brenda (8.6) and Paula (8.7)). Brenda was keen to observe the reflective writing workshop I developed for her class, and this led to her adopting a new rubric and developing her use of this rubric in close collaboration with me. This was despite the fact that I held no formal role as a writing or teaching consultant. In effect, through engagement and staff recognition of the value of the small wins which were achieved, I became the writing consultant that BAH staff needed me to be in order to support their own development as teachers and assessors of student writing.

This was particularly the case in my collaboration with Anne over five semesters (as described in 8.2, 8.3, 8.8, 9.2 and 9.3). It was clear that Anne already held views about teaching and learning which were highly consistent with the socioconstructivist philosophy which underlay the changes which I was also seeking to achieve. As she explained, *I'd prefer to instil in them confidence, hope and some empowering thoughts of where they can go for assistance, or*

what they should focus on next: constructive thoughts (2013, S2). As discussed earlier, the most productive mentoring relationships which I developed during this project were with staff (Anne and Paula) who placed a high value on the mentoring relationships they themselves developed with their students. This is consistent with previous research findings that teachers with such beliefs about teaching and learning are more receptive to the introduction of supportive pedagogy and formative feedback (Cheng, Chan, Tang, & Cheng, 2009; Neely, 2017) and that this openness to change on the part of faculty is a precondition of successful pedagogical collaboration (Chan & Elliott, 2004; Neely, 2017)

The steady integration of writing support within Anne's first-year courses (8.2 and 8.3) provided opportunities for formative feedback. The value of formative feedback as an essential element of effective writing pedagogy has also been strongly supported in the literature (e.g. Estrem, 2015; Hegbloom et al., 2017; Roozen, 2015a; Russell, 2015) and, therefore, the increase in timely, formative feedback in the BAH contributed further to positive change in writing pedagogy. It meant, for instance, that students were able to send their first assignments for a reference check, providing them with opportunities to learn and revise their work before, rather than after, grading (as described in 8.2). Moreover, the engagement which this arrangement stimulated meant that they could receive feedback and guidance on substantive issues of information literacy, over and above the mechanical accuracy of the references themselves. A similar opportunity was created for fourth-year students who were encouraged to see one-to-one consultations as an opportunity to engage with a critical reader of their work (8.7 and 9.2). Opportunities were also created for formative peer

feedback through changing one of the first-year assignments from an individual to a paired one (8.3).

As well as allowing for adaptations to the needs and goals of individual staff, the flexibility of the small wins strategy used in this project also allowed for adaptations to disruptive change in the context of the BAH. These included the introduction of online portfolios (which led to support for reflective writing, as described in 8.6) and the departure of Anne (which led to changes to the assessment in the course which she handed over to Stacey, as described in 8.3). Disruption tends to be a major barrier to the achievement of planned, strategic change, but can function as an enabler to an informal approach based on small wins (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). The risk that this informal approach can lead to haphazard and fragmentary improvements is to some extent mitigated by the tendency of members of organisations to see order and sense retrospectively in sets of actions which were improvised responses to individual circumstances (Weick, 1995). To some extent, the development of the writing competency framework (described in 9.3 and discussed further below) was an example of this post-hoc ordering of messy initiatives. Another example of post-hoc orderliness was the compilation of writing resources by one of the students, Marion, into a folder which formed, for her, a coherent narrative of her writing development through the programme and a reference point for ongoing support.

The introduction of reflective writing workshops (8.6), initially prompted by the switch to the use of online portfolios, is an example of how workshops not only supported current writing practices, but had a positive, formative influence on

the practices themselves. Reflective writing was a practice about which the BAH staff and students were particularly explicit regarding their own uncertainties, uncertainties which have been frequently noted in the wider literature on reflective writing (Donohoe, 2015; Smyth, 1992; Thorpe, 2004; K. Y. Wong et al., 1997). The framework which I developed was derived from the literature, but over the course of two annual iterations, was made increasingly discipline-specific, incorporating cross referencing to professional competencies.

The relative freedom with which I was able to reshape reflective writing practices in this course is consistent with the view of genres as inherently unstable and subject to the agency of individuals (Cole, 2002). Brenda recognised the framework and accompanying exemplar which I created as an authentic example of BAH reflective discourse and based her assessment process closely around it. Similarly, students such as Marion also followed the framework closely in their own reflective writing. In this way, as for the BAH writing competency framework, the model of reflective writing which I devised and presented in the workshop received post-hoc authentication from BAH staff and students

10.2.2 The BAH writing competency framework

The fact that the set of writing support resources and workshops which I developed were not formally adopted as part of the BAH programme was a significant limitation in relation to their impact and sustainability. However, the development of the BAH writing competency framework (9.3) did go some way

to addressing the absence of an explicit statement of the specific writing skills which BAH students were expected to learn and demonstrate during the programme (as mentioned in 10.1). As Christine pointed out, the framework served as a reference point for BAH staff teaching individual courses to see how their written assessment practice related to students' *overall pathway through the programme* (2014 S1). Like the writing workshops, the development of the framework was also a long-term process, dependent on my incremental learning as I engaged with staff and students. For instance, the importance of reflective writing and of communicating to different audiences only gradually became apparent to me through meetings with various BAH staff, such as Maria, Brenda and Paula, during the first two years of the project.

The structure of the framework was a product of two kinds of personal learning during the project: practical learning from collaborative action and theoretical learning from reading and research. From my engagement with BAH staff, I learned about the professional skills framework which was used to assess BAH students in their clinical work. The two axes of this framework – areas of practice and competencies – were then adapted from BAH professional skills to writing skills. As such, it achieved at a programme level the explicit alignment of literacies and graduate attributes which has been carried out at whole-institutional level in major initiatives such as the Academic Skills Model at Griffith University in Australia (Charlton & Martin, 2018). In order to produce a framework which was accepted by BAH staff, it was necessary to spend extended time with them in discussion and joint initiatives in order to understand the professional and disciplinary values which, as a number of studies have

found (Kagan, 1992; Neely, 2017), inform writing pedagogy. The development of the framework was also based on my increased familiarity with WAC and academic literacies, particularly projects in which these were mapped against the curricula of tertiary programmes (e.g. Anson & Dannels, 2009; Bohr & Rhoades, 2010; Willison & O'Regan, 2007).

The framework contributed to the goal of bringing about positive changes in writing pedagogy because, in line with the action research ethos of the project, it was not just a description of existing practices but a means of advocating for further shifts towards a multiple literacies framing of academic writing. Students' need for accuracy – which had been the original concern among BAH staff – was acknowledged, but within a broader and more functional category of professional skills, while the category of informative writing was formed in the knowledge that there were few existing assessments which could fit within it; it was an avowedly aspirational category, which was accepted by the BAH staff and soon became the basis of change when the opportunity arose to revise the first-year case study report in the second-semester course which Anne was handing on to Stacey (8.3). The framework also allowed for the identification of gaps, such as the lack of pair work and of communication to different audiences, which the changes to the case study report addressed.

These changes created opportunities for students to begin to develop skills which they would need later in the course and during their professional practice – a developmental principle which is consistent with the theoretical frameworks of WAC / WID (J. P. Johnson & Krase, 2012a) and transitional pedagogy

(Devereux & Wilson, 2010; Elbow, 1983; Kift, 2010) which underlay the project. The fact that this change was so rapid and radical was particularly striking in the light of Sarah's description of the original assignment at the beginning of the project as something that was essentially given and immutable. This is further evidence of the value of an informal relationship-based approach to change which is supported by an emergent, theoretically-informed model of practice as a means of effecting fundamental changes when opportunities arise.

One major limitation of the BAH writing competency framework and the assessment changes which it stimulated was its relatively narrow evidence base of BAH writing practices. This became evident when BAH staff expressed doubts about the appropriacy of students writing a letter to a caregiver, given their lack of professional knowledge at this very early stage in their programme (as described in 8.3). Such concerns have also been discussed in the literature, in relation to requiring first-year students to engage in disciplinary or professional genres for which they do not yet have a sufficient knowledge base (Wardle, 2009). BAH staff were not involved in the development of the framework and there was not a sufficient follow-up collaboration to develop and implement the framework further. Its main, and limited, value within the project was as a stimulus for awareness-raising and relationship-building – a function seen as typical of the limited value of planning documents for collaborative initiatives within dynamic organisational contexts (Weick, 1985; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

10.2.3 Limitations of informal contributions to writing pedagogy

As explained above, the institutional conditions were not conducive to a larger-scale programme of writing development within the BAH. Although changes were made at points during the course, in collaboration with willing staff and in response to emergent opportunities, this did mean that large parts of the programme featured no TLA writing support at all – except for opportunities for individual students to visit the LTU for consultations.

Lack of time and resources particularly impacted the attempt to introduce WTL workshops (as described in 8.8). These were limited to Anne and Stacey's class and did provide students with some low-risk opportunities to become familiar with new genres, as recommended within WAC (Bean, 2011b; Farnan & Fearn, 2008). But it has been noted in WAC / WID literature that WTL requires a considerable level of ongoing support (Stout, 2011). As it was, the challenging nature of such tasks for the BAH staff and the lack of time on my part to develop the resources and provide the necessary support meant that students had very few opportunities to experience the potential of writing as a means to develop and organise their ideas within their classes – and this was a major limitation of the project from the perspective of WAC (Bean, 2011b; Creme, 2002).

Because the changes introduced into writing pedagogy were not supported institutionally, they were dependent on the availability and goodwill of individuals, within a pressured and dynamic environment. This has been seen as a major constraint on the sustainability of embedded learning support (e.g. Catterall, 2008; Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2007). The dependence on goodwill was

particularly apparent in relation to changes which imposed additional burdens on the highly-restricted time available to BAH staff. These included the individual student conferences which Anne had introduced, and which were a major element of the integrated support for the first-year course which she handed over to Stacey on her departure (9.2.2). Stacey had other existing obligations which meant she was unable to dedicate the necessary time to what, after all, was not her own initiative and was not part of the routine teaching activities in the programme. The same could be said of the project as a whole, which was similarly dependent on my continued employment and commitment to a degree of involvement in a programme which was not a formal responsibility of my role. As such, the writing support workshops and resources are unlikely to be continued at the same level should another TLA take over my role.

10.3 Changes in TLA practice

10.3.1 Adoption of a teaching role

The most positive change to TLA practice which emerged during the project was my adoption of a teaching role and practice within the BAH programme. My ability to fulfil this role was the product of incremental learning about the programme and its writing practices through class observation, reading disciplinary texts and texts written by students and, in particular, through conversations with a wide range of staff and students, particularly in the context of one-to-one consultations. The process has some parallels with what Lisa Emerson (2015) described as becoming an ethnographer of her campus in

order to investigate the role of writing tutor at a New Zealand university over 20 years ago. In my case, knowledge of the programme, active involvement in it and relationship with its community members grew in tandem. At the same time, marginalisation, both as a self-perception and as a perception of my role on the part of the BAH community, was much reduced.

One example of my growing assumption that I had a teaching role in the BAH programme was in relation to the block course taught by Agnes (8.5). I was able to identify a gap in terms of teaching for the specific type of essay the students were required to write and to develop a workshop independently, using my knowledge base, relationship with the students and repertoire of teaching methods which I had developed by this stage. This independent and direct pedagogical relationship with the BAH students was in marked contrast to the timid and reactive role I had originally fulfilled in relation to Maria's assessment practice at the beginning of the programme (7.3).

This practice of teaching *into a course* (as BAH staff described it) as a TLA is inconsistent with the ideal of TLAs handing over responsibilities for teaching disciplinary discourse to academic staff from within a programme, as the final stage in the normative model of embedded TLA practice (J. Jones et al., 2002). This ideal is based on the assumption that, as a leading handbook for TLAs puts it, disciplinary teaching staff are "ideally placed to make study skills relevant to the particular subject, through the way they teach, in the way they mark and give feedback, in modelling good practice, in the language they use, and the attitudes they reveal" (Cottrell, 2001, pp. 14-15). Indeed, embedded practice

goes further than “study skills”, in assuming that faculty members will make explicit to the students the epistemology and rhetoric of their discipline as they teach the content of the course (Wingate, 2006).

However, the implicit assumption of this model of embedded practice that a single faculty member has expertise and teaching responsibilities for a whole course did not apply to much of the BAH programme. On several courses, such as Brenda’s course on professional practice (8.6), the BAH staff member responsible was a co-ordinator of several guest lecturers *teaching into* the course from their own particular area of expertise. For Brenda, it made sense for the TLA to become part of this team, allowing both herself and the students to benefit from an enriched, diverse teaching and learning environment. In this context, my teaching in the BAH programme was no more “bolted on” (Wingate, 2006) than that of any of the other visiting lecturers in the course. Bolted onto what? Like the other teachers, I was contributing from a body of professional knowledge (in my case, of reflective writing) which the course co-ordinator perceived as complementary to her own and to that of the other professional teachers who she also invited. This shows how TLA teaching practice can be validated within a context of plurality of expertise, rather than being stigmatised, as in the normative model of embedding, on the grounds that its continued presence provides an inferior form of teaching to that which the faculty member could otherwise provide.

10.3.3 Contributing to the writing pedagogy of BAH staff

Through social integration into the BAH programme as an informal writing consultant, I was able to expand my TLA practice through direct and indirect contributions to the writing pedagogy of BAH staff. Expanding into the teacher development space has been seen as a challenge for TLAs, since this space is already occupied by academic developers (ADs): professionals with their own distinct values and preoccupations (Chanock, 2011b). The involvement of ADs with BAH staff during the period of this project was relatively limited and there was no institutional barrier to TLAs adopting a staff development role, at least in relation to writing development. The main difficulty was the fragmented nature of the BAH teaching team and the limited time they had to meet as a group; this meant that opportunities for formal teacher development workshops were limited.

Nonetheless, just as writing workshops for students boosted their participation in one-to-one consultations, the staff development workshops too stimulated individual staff to engage with me in their own development on an informal basis, as described in 9.3. This was the case in relation to Brenda, who, as a result, not only made adjustments to her assessment of reflective writing, but also sent examples of her own marking for feedback. Rather than providing a programme of staff development for the BAH programme as a whole, what emerged was instead a personalised and adaptive response to the needs of some individual BAH staff. In this way, individualised support for BAH staff performed a similar function to that provided to BAH students through one-to-

one consultations. Just as a number of BAH students appreciated the opportunity for feedback and support from a critical reader of their writing (9.2), so too did the BAH staff in relation to their teaching and assessment of that writing (9.3). The engagement in both cases was essentially an adaptive response to emergent needs of individuals. As Paula explained, *it's been just so good to have you there to talk that through.*

My most sustained professional development relationship during the project was with Anne. To a large degree, it was the longitudinal and iterative nature of the project which allowed me to move into a teacher development space in this relationship. As Anne herself explained, the quality of the mutually educational relationship which emerged was itself developmental; we had to learn how to learn together. I developed a mentoring role in relation to Anne's development as a teacher and assessor of BAH discourse in response to her need for someone to fulfil that function for her. The changes which Anne was making to her practice were incremental and effortful; even after two years, the most Anne felt she could claim was that she had *become a bit more comfortable in providing some basic writing concepts.*

However, it was clear that she was making changes to her practice and benefitting from one-to-one TLA support in the same way as her students. In devising assessment rubrics, for instance, she felt she had needed *that one-on-one guidance, the hand-holding and spoon-feeding of it all because, every time I tried to sit down and think about it, I just kind of dreaded it* (2013 S2). This was a similar experience of the facilitative value of one-to-one support to that of a

student, Marion, who found that the consultation helped unblock the flow of her writing. For both student and staff member, the interaction with the TLA had a galvanising effect on progress through a barrier which had previously been a source of anxiety.

The most significant impact of the project on BAH staff pedagogy was also the most indirect: Anne's exposure to one-to-one consultations as a form of TLA support for her students (as described in 9.3). This exposure made it available as a pedagogical option for her; and it was one she enthusiastically adopted despite the considerable investment of time and effort required. She even went as far as to describe this as *what teaching and learning is* (2012 S2). By incorporating one-to-one support, Anne achieved a more satisfactory alignment between her educational practices and philosophy in the same way as I had sought to align my educational practices and philosophy through incorporating programme-specific workshops.

10.3.4 Expanded and diversified one-to-one support

The adoption of one-to-one support by Anne and the strong demand for consultations from BAH students (as described in 9.2) was an unintended outcome of the project. The project had started as an attempt to shift TLA practice away from one-to-one support and into a classroom teaching role in line with a strong trend in TLA literature (e.g. Barkas, 2011; Wingate, 2006). One-to-one support has been seen as the main source of the remedial framing of TLA practice (Crozier, 2007; Strauss, 2013) and there was evidence that

students entering the programme did initially share these negative, remedial perceptions of consultations, based on school experiences. This indicates that students may be entering university to some degree pre-socialised into negative, remedial perceptions of TLA practice.

It became apparent during the course of the project that students' experience of TLA practice could either reinforce or modify these pre-existing remedial perceptions. The way in which students were initially referred for consultations by Maria tended to reinforce students' (and staff's) remedial perceptions (7.3). A more successful attempt to provide personalised support was through encouraging all the students in Anne's class to send their reference lists for feedback before they submitted their assignments (8.2). This initiative avoided remedial framing as it was included in the course timetable, alongside a set of regular formative skills development support services provided by both TLA and course tutor. As Maria pointed out, engagement with the TLA had become *normalised* as an option available for all students, *no matter what level of writing you're at* (2013 S2).

Student feedback indicates that consultations were a significant source of formative feedback. As students in a focus group (2014 Y1 S2) explained, it provided them with practical suggestions which they could apply in revising their drafts. The potential of consultations as a source of formative feedback was particularly recognised by fourth-year students, many of whom had not previously used any form of learning support during their initial transition into

university studies, but now saw the value of having an informed, critical reader of their drafts (as described in 9.2).

As such, the consultations were now seen as making a unique contribution to the teaching and learning options within the course, particularly as students had opportunities to develop relationships with the TLA over the course of four years, using the service in increasingly individualised and strategic ways to support their writing development. This indicates that, in the case of the BAH, remedial framing was not inherent to these TLA practices (as suggested by Barkas, 2011) but a product of their social context. Even students with distinctly remedial perceptions of TLA practice on entry to university could begin to frame it positively as an integral element of their teaching and learning experience.

10.4 Personal learning

Another finding of this study is the extent to which engaging in one-to-one consultations contributed to TLA expertise. During this project, much TLA knowledge of writing in the BAH arose from educational conversations with students during consultations; this formative cycle of action and knowledge was in line with the action research ethos (e.g. Herr & Anderson, 2005) of the project. It was through consultations that I became familiar with the structure of BAH assignment questions and how to break these down in ways which helped students understand and address the requirements. This expertise underlay the development of frameworks which were the key element in all of the writing

support workshops which I developed (starting with 8.2).

The formative role of one-to-one engagement with students in helping TLAs to develop their expertise and practice has been noted in relatively few published studies (Chanock, 2007; Pourshafie & Brady 2013), but was highlighted by several New Zealand TLAs interviewed for this study. They saw their expertise as emerging incrementally from this one-to-one engagement. Indeed, for this reason, as pointed out in chapter 5, one experienced practitioner argued that consultations should comprise the bulk of the first year of TLA practice⁵². The role they played in building my knowledge and capacity during this project lends some support to this view; although I was an experienced TLA in general, the false starts at the beginning of the project showed that I needed to learn a good deal more about writing in the programme in order to support it effectively – and the increased number of consultations during the project were a vital means for this to take place.

I did not gain sufficient knowledge of BAH writing through the research conducted during the reconnaissance, even though the amount of evidence of discourse practices gathered then was much greater than that which is typically available to TLAs when they design writing support initiatives for students in academic programmes. As discussed in 10.2, the limited body of evidence gathered during the reconnaissance led to an oversimplified and monolithic understanding of BAH discourse and to the unsuccessful attempt to convey this understanding to new first-year students through a stand-alone orientation workshop (7.2). This indicates the need for caution on the part of TLAs

preparing and delivering such one-off workshops; the risk is that the resulting guidance is oversimplified and divorced from the diverse contexts of discourse practice in which students will be engaging during their academic programmes.

Through ongoing discussions and joint initiatives with BAH staff, I learnt more about their needs and values and became better able to align my writing pedagogy contributions with these. My initial attempt to change assessment practice, through the referral form I developed for Maria, was unsuccessful, mainly because it provided a remedial channel for Maria's concerns about written accuracy (7.3). I gradually realised the importance for BAH staff of making students aware of the need for high standards of accuracy within the profession they were entering and was able to provide more effective pedagogical means by which this could be achieved – for instance, by providing formative feedback on the students' referencing (8.2) and by reminding students of the professional standards expected of them in all of my interactions with the students, including workshops observed by BAH staff (e.g. 8.4 and 8.6). By the later stages of the project, I was able to provide BAH staff with a range of tailored resources, such as the revised WTL activities (8.8), the competency framework and assessment rubrics (9.3), which were recognised by them as helpful, disciplinary-specific pedagogical tools.

At the same time, regular classroom engagement with BAH students during this project, in the role of a teacher, brought about a change not only in my knowledge of writing practices, but in my pedagogy. In my previous TLA experience, my involvement in a classroom teaching role had been mainly

limited to one-off presentations – similar to the initial orientation workshop I delivered in the first-year of the project. This style of presentation was not aligned with my espoused socioconstructivist philosophy of teaching and learning (Vygotsky, 1978); my stance as a visitor delivering content into a course lent itself to a transmission style of teaching.

As I became socially integrated as a member of the teaching team, I began to adopt classroom teaching practices more aligned with my philosophical beliefs, for instance, including self-assessment (8.7) and paired problem-solving tasks (8.3). Essentially, I felt more empowered to work *with* the students rather than to present *to* them. This is a further example of how opportunities during the project arose to modify and repurpose individual practices (like in-class presentations) as they became part of an integrated system of developmental teaching activities. The way in which these mutually-constitutive relationships among various components of TLA practice emerged and evolved during the project is consistent with systems thinking, which has been increasingly drawn upon as a way of interpreting change in action research projects (D. Burns, 2015; Lichtenstein, 2015).

10.5 Conclusion

This project involved the development of an informal role of writing consultant to the BAH programme. This role was informal to the extent that it involved no institutional change, instead comprising informal means of collaboration with BAH staff and students. This use of an informal, relationship approach is

consistent with the postmodern interpretations of tertiary organisations discussed in chapter 3 (e.g. Fanghanel, 2012; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007; Whitchurch, 2008) and with recent approaches to TLA practice influenced by these interpretations (Benzie et al., 2017; Gravett & Winstone, 2018). During the project, the writing consultant role steadily shifted from one which was principally supportive of existing practices towards one which helped to shape those practices – through contributing to significant changes to writing and assessment practices for some of the courses and to some shifts in attitudes away from a preoccupation with error. In this way, the project contributed towards greater congruence between my values and practices in relation to the BAH programme which is characteristic of action research, as discussed in chapter 2 (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

From the point of view of the WAC philosophy which it drew upon, the project had serious limitations, particularly its patchy coverage of the BAH programme, its limited engagement with BAH staff and the limited application of writing to learn (WTL) pedagogy. These are fundamental elements of traditional WAC practice (e.g. Bean, 1996; Britton et al., 1975; McLeod & Soven, 2006). It became clear that the informal, relationship-based approach to change adopted in the project meant that the necessary resources were not available for a more complete implementation of WAC in the BAH programme. This was particularly the case in relation to WTL, for which disciplinary teaching staff are known to require considerable ongoing support (Stout, 2011). However, more recent WAC literature acknowledges the need to work flexibly within institutional constraints, establishing horizontal relationships with faculty partners,

particularly in the absence of established writing centers (Tarabochia, 2013; Thaiss & Porter, 2010; Thaiss & Rutz, 2013). This study therefore contributes to this literature on initiatives informed by WAC and developed by individual practitioners within institutional constraints in diverse tertiary contexts.

In line with this recent WAC literature, improvements to writing development in the BAH came about through a growing understanding of the constraints and affordances of the social and institutional context, including disruptive change and contested discourse positions (in particular, between the medical and social mode of applied health documentation). As the individual initiatives became part of an emerging network of writing support, it was notable how they became diversified and specialized. One example was how it became possible to refocus the orientation workshop for new students towards social engagement, since the writing instruction component, which had previously been concentrated within this workshop, was redistributed across the new assignment-based workshops during the first year. This is an example of how coherent order can emerge from piecemeal, but co-ordinated, action within loosely-coupled organisations (Weick, 1985).

My early anxieties about how to drive forward the changes I sought were allayed by a slow realisation that change was inherent in the environment in which I was working. This realisation was based partly on experiences during the project, such as the unexpected departure of Anne, but also informed by the growing body of literature on volatility in the tertiary environment (e.g. Barnett, 2000, 2010; Biggs, 2012; Challis et al., 2009; Light et al., 2009; S. Palmer et al.,

2011). Instead of worrying about how to instigate change, I began to focus more on maintaining active relationships and responding to opportunities by producing tools (such as the reflective writing literature review, example rubrics, the BAH writing framework) to stimulate further engagement on the part of BAH staff in ongoing changes. These strategies are consistent with the postmodern approach to organisational change, referred to above and in chapter 3 (e.g. Weick, 2001). Relationship-building was facilitated by the discovery that several BAH staff members were, like me, searching for a closer alignment between a socioconstructivist philosophy of learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and their teaching and learning practices. In the case of the collaboration with Anne, this led to a high degree of integration of support for student writing within her first-year courses, in which we engaged in an exchange of expertise and practices.

In relation to marginalisation and low status of TLAs, important differences came to light in this study from the way these themes have been reported within TLA literature and practice (e.g. Crozier, 2007; Webb, 2001; Wingate, 2006). Marginalisation was a dominant theme early in the project, but became markedly less so as the collaborative initiatives developed and expanded. Through the collaboration, it became possible to effect change in several core elements of the course, such as assessment, and to adopt a mentoring and professional development role in relation to the BAH staff. This openness to TLA involvement on the part of the BAH staff may be related to their own professional identities as team members, with respect for the specific expertise of those with whom they work. The academic – support dichotomy which has

been seen as a barrier to effective TLA practice (e.g. Barkas, 2011) was not a major issue in the context of this multidisciplinary and vocational programme.

Another barrier to effective TLA practice discussed in the literature (e.g. Boylan et al., 1999) and raised in some of the interviews with TLAs reported in chapter 5 has been the remedial framing of TLA practices. This was an issue during the project, but more in terms of student than staff attitudes. For this reason, it was particularly appropriate that the focus of the orientation workshop changed from transmission of rules and expectations towards engagement with the students. Another positive response to my realisation of the depth of first-year students' remedial perceptions was an increased emphasis on engaging with students further on in their programme when it was apparent that these remedial concerns had very much lessened and they could benefit from the individualised attention which had previously been mainly targeted at first-year students.

Interviews with both staff and students at the end of the project indicated that these remedial perceptions of TLA practice had been substantially replaced by a recognition that the teaching I provided as a TLA was an integral part of the already diverse teaching and learning practices within the BAH programme. This shift was particularly marked in the case of Maria, who had begun the programme by referring her students for essentially remedial help. By the end of the programme, she was explicitly regarding me as a team member with specialised knowledge of BAH discourse to whom she could positively

recommend her students, assuring them *that it's about support, and not about a remediation of their work (2014 S2)*.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

The original contribution of this study lies in its investigation of how far the widely-accepted benefits of TLA support for writing development within a disciplinary programme could be achieved without any formal institutional change in the role of the practitioner, who functioned instead as an informal writing consultant to the programme. Involvement in this collaborative project continued alongside generic TLA practice, in an institutional context in which TLAs had no official responsibility for writing development within any disciplinary context. The value of informal, horizontal collaboration of this type was discussed in relation to concepts from postmodern organizational theory, in particular the work of Karl Weick (e.g. 1979; 1995; 2007). This is another unique contribution of this study, since, despite a persistent focus on institutional change, explicit reference to organizational theory has been a significant gap in the writing development and learning advice literature.

11.1 Research question

This study has presented a range of different evidence to show how a tertiary learning advisor, working as an informal writing consultant to staff and students of a disciplinary programme within a New Zealand university could contribute to positive changes both in writing pedagogy within the BAH programme and in his own TLA practice. In this way, the study achieved the general goal of action

research to bring about a “credible account of deepened praxis” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 86).

The evidence gathered during the reconnaissance identified gaps in writing pedagogy in the first year of the BAH programme. In particular, there was a lack of support for student writing in the form of frameworks and guidelines and assessment feedback practice was unselective and deficit-focused. During the project, workshops were introduced to provide students with relevant support for specific writing challenges, not only in the first year, but also at two other points during the programme. The first attempt to change assessment feedback practices, through a referral form, had limited success, mainly because it was framed within the same deficit focus as the practice it was designed to change. However, there was evidence that as a result of further collaboration and professional development workshops, some staff developed a more selective attitude toward the correction of errors in student writing and a more proactive role in instructing students about expectations of their writing, as recommended in the literature cited in chapters 3 and 4 (e.g. Galloway, 2010; Kift, 2009; Kuh, 1996; C. Taylor & Burke da Silva, 2014).

The TLA was also able to exert a formative influence on writing practices, as well as writing pedagogy, particularly in relation to reflective writing. BAH staff adopted a theoretically-grounded model (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Van Manen, 1977) which he introduced to them and to the students, which provided a structure through which students could achieve more effective analytical reflection on their professional experience. Another theoretically-based model,

the BAH writing competency framework, was used to provide BAH staff with a clear overview of the types of writing students needed to master as they progressed through the programme. These initiatives were the fruit of two kinds of learning: theoretical knowledge of discourse (e.g. Hyland, 2008; Ivanic, 1998; Lea & Street, 1999; J. Martin, 2010) and practical knowledge of the practices and values of the discipline, which were acquired incrementally through interactions with BAH staff and students.

Where changes to writing pedagogy were particularly limited was in relation to the use of writing as a learning tool by BAH staff within the classroom. As noted in chapter 10, this was a significant omission in relation to the WAC philosophy which informed the project (e.g. Britton et al., 1975; McLeod & Maimon, 2000). Providing the resources and support necessary for this more challenging aspect of writing pedagogy was not feasible for the TLA within the constraints of the project. Another limitation of writing pedagogy was the relatively patchy coverage of the programme and the limited involvement of BAH staff in producing some of the disciplinary-specific exemplars.

In relation to TLA practice, the main changes were the adoption of a teaching role within the programme which was not constrained by the remedial or marginalised perceptions traditionally associated with TLA practice (e.g. Barkas, 2011; Boylan et al., 1999). It was found that an informal, relationship-based strategy of collaboration (Benzie et al., 2017; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007; Whitchurch, 2008) with disciplinary teaching colleagues was an effective way of establishing a clear teaching role for the TLA within the programme. The way in

which the pedagogical beliefs of BAH staff both constrained and enabled change is consistent with previous research into collaborative initiatives involving writing consultants and disciplinary teaching staff (Neely, 2017). A continued, direct involvement in teaching was not seen as problematic in this context, as it is in the normative model of embedding and handing over responsibility for discourse and study skills teaching to disciplinary teaching staff (J. Jones et al., 2002). Within the diversified teaching environment of the BAH, the role of the TLA in “teaching into” the programme was seen as equivalent to the other professionals who also contributed to the programme from their own areas of expertise. This suggests that tertiary programmes which feature a high degree of distributed expertise (Benzie et al., 2017; Kaats & Opheij, 2014; Kahane, 2010) may allow TLAs to adopt teaching roles without their contributions being seen as remedial or marginalised in relation to disciplinary teaching colleagues.

The most unexpected finding in relation to TLA practice was the expansion and diversification of one-to-one provision. It had been expected that this would diminish as the TLA took on a teaching role, providing writing workshops to all students in a particular year group. However, the workshops stimulated, rather than substituted for, one-to-one support. It was noted, moreover, that in the broader context of the TLA’s teaching role within the programme, consultations were viewed by students as having a positive and formative impact on their writing, rather than being viewed as remediating basic flaws in their academic literacies. This was one of several examples of how specific elements of TLA practice changed in substance and perception as they became part of an

integrated system of pedagogical initiatives. These findings are consistent with the more positive framing of one-to-one provision in a number of studies of TLA practice over the last decade (Chanock, 2007; Cowan, 2013; Malkin & Chanock, 2018; Pourshafie & Brady 2013) in contrast to concerns that one-to-one provision marks TLA practice as remedial (Crozier, 2007; Strauss, 2013).

11.2 Contribution to research

This study showed the feasibility of using an action research framework to investigate and change writing pedagogy and TLA practice. In particular, it showed the value of the iterative nature of action research in bringing about and documenting incremental, systemic change (D. Burns, 2015), for instance, in how specific TLA practices (such as consultations) were changed in nature and perception as they became incorporated into a system of writing support available for BAH students. The research activities, particularly interviews, played a crucial role in establishing the professional relationships which were the focus of the change initiatives. This inseparability of action and research satisfies a core principle of the approach (Bradbury Huang, 2010). The project initiatives also acted as a source of mutual education, another core principle (Gibson, 2004). This study also supported the view that, over time, the scope of action research tends to broaden from technical to critical changes (e.g. Carr & Kemmis, 1986). An example of this is how the initial attempt at changing writing pedagogy relied upon a technical tool (the writing referral scheme) within an unchanged and relatively unquestioned remedial framing of TLA practice. By

the end of the project, TLA practice was playing a formative role in constructing the writing practices themselves and in providing tools not just for referral but for assessment itself.

At the same time, the investigation explored the social and professional context within which the contested writing practices within the BAH could be understood as adaptations, rather than unexplained contradictions. One crucial aspect of this context was the perceptions of students, represented throughout the findings in extracts and summaries from focus groups and interviews. This inclusion of the student voice addresses a significant gap in tertiary research and pedagogy (Cook-Sather, 2016).

Where the study contributed less to research was in the range and quality of empirical evidence which was gathered. For example, during the reconnaissance, direct evidence of assessment feedback practice was gathered in the form of marked student assignments. However, this data gathering was not repeated later in the project, which meant that the evidence base for changes in assessment practice was limited. Similarly, the verbal report data produced relevant evidence of the values and reasoning of BAH staff as they made decisions on what aspects of student writing were effective or were worthy of comment. Again, if this had been repeated later in the study, it might have provided further evidence of changes, for instance in Maria's practice to support the evidence of changes in her attitudes provided by the series of five interviews.

11.3 Implications for TLA practice

This study has a number of practical implications for TLA practice, at a time when the profession internationally appears to be entering another cycle of disruption and uncertainty regarding its role and value within the tertiary sector (Malkin & Chanock, 2018). As in the early days of TLA practice (Brailsford, 2011; Chanock, 2011a), tertiary institutions are once again seeking remedial and generic solutions to perceived deficits in students' readiness for tertiary study. The difference this time around is that study skills support is being outsourced to private companies, rather than provided through in-house student learning centres, as it was in the 1980s. This separates the provision of learning and writing support even further from the core teaching and learning practices of tertiary programmes.

It is timely therefore that this study provides evidence of the value of tertiary learning advice which is integrated within a programme, not in the form of generic, one-off presentations, but as a coherent set of instructional resources and activities which have been developed in collaboration with disciplinary teaching staff from a growing base of specialist knowledge of disciplinary and professional values and practices. Within this context, TLAs can contribute to the teaching of writing within programmes, both directly through classroom instruction and one-to-one support, and indirectly, through providing advice, resources and examples of teaching practices to disciplinary teaching colleagues. This study has shown the mutually-constitutive nature of these forms of TLA practice and of the theoretical and practical sources of TLA expertise.

The study found that these positive outcomes could be achieved incrementally through sustained engagement with staff and students. The degree of investment required on the part of the TLA does imply, however, that institutional resources will need to be made available in order for such engagement to be sustainable. Within the context of this study, my own commitment to the project, which was, after all, the focus of my doctoral study, meant that the issue of institutional resources was, to some extent, avoided. But this will not be the case for most TLAs working in less resource-rich environments and without the extrinsic motivation which doctoral study provides.

What did become clear was that neither resources nor motivation were required on the part of the TLA to drive forward change. Change is inherent and unavoidable in the contexts in which TLAs work, and, in this study, changes were opportunities for TLA agency. Examples included the opportunity to teach reflective writing and to radically restructure what had been seen as a problematic first-year assignment. The contributions to writing pedagogy in the BAH programme were not achieved through establishing and “embedding” the traces of completed initiatives within the curriculum, but through maintaining and renewing professional relationships with disciplinary teaching staff, which were the basis of positive responses to opportunities which arose in the normal course of the dynamic and disruptive contexts of tertiary education.

The study also suggests that TLAs should not necessarily feel an obligation to withdraw from a direct teaching role in contexts where the programme is built

upon the concept of plurality of expertise and pedagogy. Teaching within programmes can enhance the pedagogical contributions which TLAs can make and the credibility that they have among the community of staff and students with whom they work. At the same time, these direct teaching contributions need not be seen as detracting from the teaching responsibilities of faculty colleagues, since the team-based approach to teaching in this context accepts and validates distributed expertise.

Finally, the study has shown the value of a programme-wide approach to TLA practice. This, for instance, meant that the orientation workshop could be transformed from an ineffective attempt to inculcate new students with overgeneralised principles of BAH writing into a successful platform for ongoing engagement. The programme-wide approach meant that the TLA role within consultations could be adapted to the developmental needs of students as they progressed through the programme. In particular, provision of one-to-one support for fourth-year students meant that they could benefit from feedback from a critical reader of their work at a stage in their development when they had largely lost the remedial perception of learning support which had been a barrier to their previous engagement.

The strongly remedial perceptions of learning support which some of the first-year students brought into university from their high school experience are an indication that TLAs might need to exercise caution in referring students to this service, or encouraging other staff to refer them, at least until the students have adjusted to the new environment and understood the pedagogical role of the

TLA, as a specialist teacher within the university, rather than as a provider of remedial help for “struggling” students. Interviews with NZU staff indicate that TLAs may also need to make their pedagogical expertise and practice clearer to faculty and administrators in their own institutions if they share these remedial perceptions.

11.4 Limitations

This study was a first-person action research project which aimed to align educational values and practices within a specific tertiary context in New Zealand. Although a wide range of individuals have contributed to the rich data which was gathered, and a number of their voices have been included in the discussion, these participants participated voluntarily and are unlikely to have been representative of the general population of staff and students from which they came. In addition, the core experiences of the project and interpretations are personal and subjective. Therefore, the conclusions reached cannot be directly generalised; rather, they need to be evaluated in terms of their credibility, based on sustained critical engagement in the field and in terms of their relevance to other practitioners who find in them common issues and convincing explanations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Herr & Anderson, 2005).

There are limitations too in relation to the practicality and sustainability of the initiatives which made up this project. The BAH is a relatively small programme in terms of staff and student numbers and the initiatives required a high investment of time and resources. The amount of classroom teaching and one-

to-one support provided to BAH students means that this type of programme-level support is unlikely to meet the cost-benefit standards of increasingly budget-conscious tertiary institutions. These constraints were, to some extent, already present within the project, explaining, for instance, the limited uptake of the more resource-intensive writing to learn activities.

Another limitation is the unrepresentativeness of the context of the study. The BAH has a student population which is significantly less diverse and international than the tertiary student population in New Zealand as a whole. Therefore, the study may have featured a relatively narrow range of issues and practices. Some of the content of the programme was familiar to me – particularly, courses focusing on education, language and culture. The approaches used to develop writing support within this context, and the expertise required on the part of the TLA, may not be relevant to contexts where disciplinary knowledge and practices are less familiar. The context was also somewhat traditional, featuring a full-time, mostly face-to-face programme; the issues and approaches may not be relevant to distance or blended programmes.

11.5 Recommendations for future research

This study has reported on a three-year action research project (with an additional reconnaissance stage). This relatively lengthy period of time was necessary in order to trace the incremental processes involved in the construction of a writing consultant role and the development of expertise. It

also allowed for the impact of significant changes and disruptions in the tertiary environment. It is recommended that more long-term studies are conducted in this area in order to capture the cumulative effect of small events and the impacts of environmental turbulence on roles, relationships and practices. These studies should aim to collect relevant empirical evidence of practices (such as assessment feedback) over time in order to supplement the evidence of changing perceptions from interviews. In this way, future studies should be able to contribute more strongly to decision-making regarding allocation of resources to tertiary learning advice.

This study has also highlighted the complex nature of roles and identities in the contemporary tertiary environment. It cannot be assumed that courses will be taught by a single, specialist full-time course teacher within a unitary disciplinary programme. More research is needed into writing and learning advice within programmes in which there is a plurality of expertise; and within multidisciplinary programmes, where discourses and expectations of student writing may be complex and contradictory.

Finally, this study has found one-to-one consultations to be a key source of TLA expertise and a site of potentially transformative practice, challenging the claims that they are inherently remedial – and that they contribute to the marginalisation of TLA practice as a whole. More research is needed into TLA practices in one-to-one consultations, their impact on student learning and the perceptions of stakeholders regarding their value.

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Appendices

Appendix A People interviewed for this study

Appendix B BAH Y1 students' self-appraisal (2014)

APPENDIX A: People interviewed for this study

Staff at NZU

1. Natasha* – Senior university academic policy-maker and manager
2. Delia – Senior university academic policy-maker and manager
3. Kieran – University academic policy-maker and manager
4. Calum – University academic policy-maker and manager
5. Ray – Director of teaching and learning for one faculty
6. Simon – Director of teaching and learning for one faculty
7. Darren – Associate professor (Business)
8. Cynthia – Senior lecturer (Business)
9. Ben – Senior lecturer (Business)
10. Carla – Senior lecturer (Business)
11. Stanley – Senior lecturer (Business)
12. Liam – Professor (Social Sciences)
13. Alan – Senior lecturer (Social Sciences)
14. Vincent – Professor (Humanities)
15. Richard – Senior lecturer (Humanities)
16. Craig – Senior lecturer (Humanities)
17. Pamela – Senior lecturer (Health)
18. Jane – Lecturer (Health)
19. May – Senior tutor (Sciences)
20. Maisie – Senior university manager
21. Arthur – Student services manager
22. Bob – Learning advisor

23. Edgar – Learning advisor
24. Emma – Learning advisor
25. Jennifer – Teaching consultant
26. George – Learning advisor
27. Claire – Student success advisor
28. Gordon – Student advisor (within Student Services)
29. Melissa – Librarian
30. Norma – Librarian
31. Ivy – Librarian
32. Rhoda – Librarian
33. Colin – Foundation studies lecturer

Academic staff in the Bachelor of Applied Health

- 34 – Maria
- 35 – Stacey
- 36 – Sarah
- 37 – Anne
- 38 – Diana
- 39 – Paula
- 40 – Theresa
- 41 – Christine
- 42 – Laura
- 43 – Brenda

Tertiary learning advisors from other New Zealand institutions

44 – Felicity	Polytechnic
45 – Roger	University
46 – Caroline	Polytechnic
47 – Elizabeth	University centre manager
48 – Sylvia	University
49 – Dominic	Polytechnic
50 – Geraldine	University
51 – Susan	University centre manager
52 – Olive	University medical school
53 – Clarissa	University centre manager
54 – John	(formerly) University centre manager
55 – Yolanda	Polytechnic
56 – William	Polytechnic
57 – Patrick	Polytechnic centre manager
58 – Sean	University business school
59 – Derrick	Polytechnic
60 – Esther	University
61 – Mason	Polytechnic Māori learning advisor
62 – Ursula	University (also part-time lecturer)
63 – Alicia	Polytechnic
64 – Julia	University business school
65 – Eden	University business school
66 – Mahe	University Māori learning advisor

Students

67 – Sheila (2013 – BAH Y3§)

68 – Marion (2014 – BAH Y4)

69 – Harriet (2013 – BAH Y4)

70 – Josephine (2013 – BAH Y4)

71 – Selene (2013 – BAH Y4)

72 – Glenda (2013 – BAH Y4)

73 – Audrey (2014 – BAH Y1)

74 – Pearl (2014 – BAH Y1)

75 – Betty (2014 – BAH Y4)

76 – Dorothy (2014 – BAH Y4)

77 – Abigail (2014 – BAH Y4)

78 – Madison (2014 – BAH Y4)

79 – Evelyn (2014 – BAH Y4)

Student focus groups and paired interviews

BAH Y1 (2011, semester 2)

BAH Y1 (2012, semester 1)

BAH Y2 (2012, semester 2)

BAH Y1 (2013, semester 1)

BAH Y1 (2013, semester 2)

BAH Y2 (2013, semester 2)

BAH Y1 (2014, semester 2)

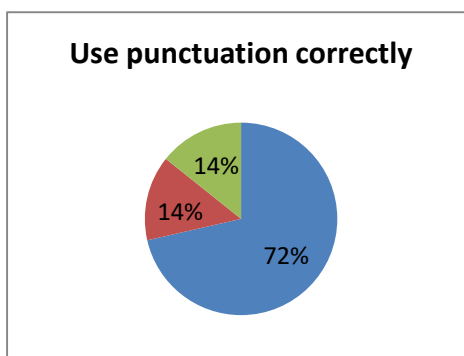
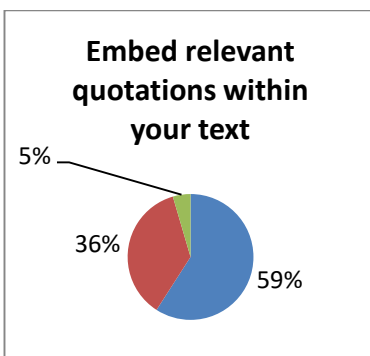
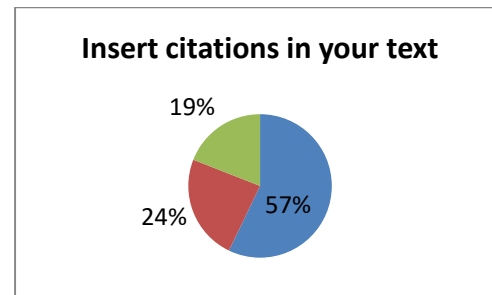
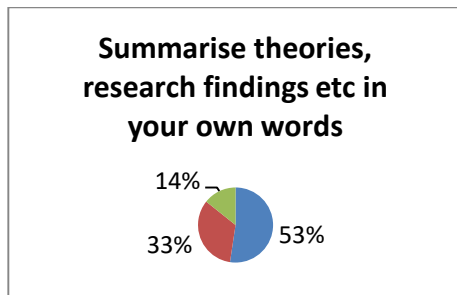
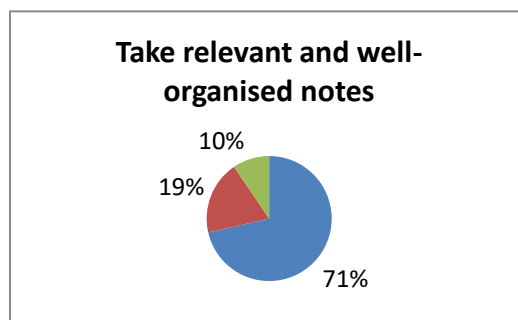
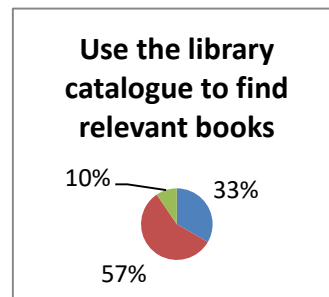
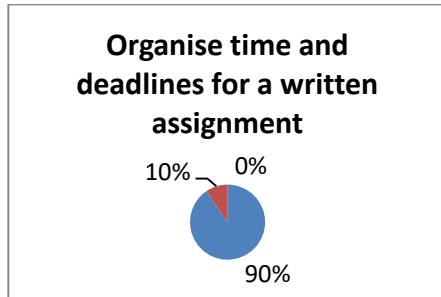
BAH Y2 (2014, semester 2)

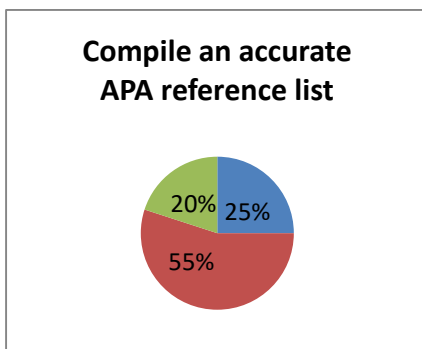
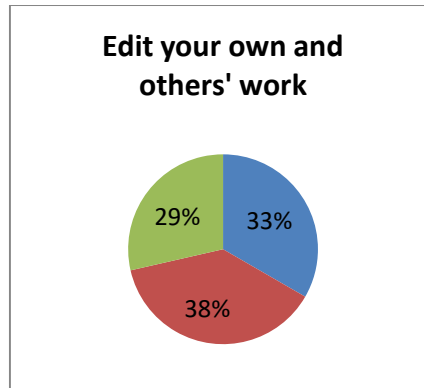
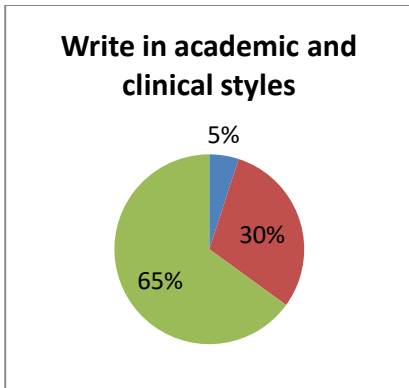
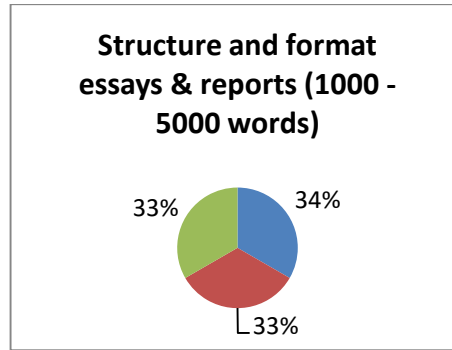
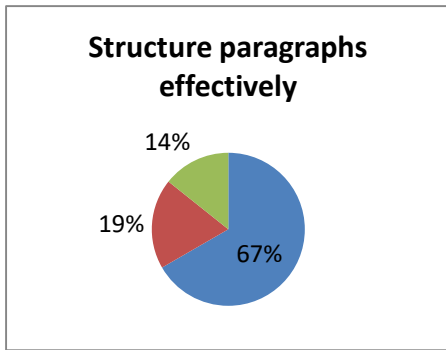
* pseudonyms used for all interviewees

§ i.e., interviewed in 2013, when she was in year 3 of a four-year BAH programme

Appendix B: BAH Y1 students' self-appraisal (2014)

CAN DO ALREADY DEVELOP INDEPENDENTLY BOOK CONSULTATION





Commentary

- Overall, the BAH Year One students are confident in their general study skills and writing abilities.
- Confidence levels are highest for general study and writing skills (Time Management, Note Taking, Punctuation, Paragraph Structure). More than two-thirds of the students feel they have those skills and only two or

three would wish to cover these in a consultation. The only general skill where confidence levels are mixed is editing; and nearly a third of the students would want to cover this in a consultation.

- Confidence levels are also high for research-based writing skills (summarising theory and findings, and inserting citations and quotations). Again, only a few students would wish to cover these issues in a consultation.
- For library research, over half of the students feel they do not have the required skills already, but would mostly prefer to develop those skills independently.
- For writing tasks more related to specific requirements of the BAH programme (structuring & formatting essays and reports, clinical and academic writing, compiling an accurate APA reference list), only a minority of students feel they currently have the required skills. For the more specifically academic skills, there's a fairly even split between those who would prefer to develop these independently and those who would want some support in a consultation. It is only in relation to clinical writing, where most students perceive a need for support in the development of the required skills.

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