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**Acquiring a new Discourse:
Using action research and sociocultural pedagogies to
explore how a study group is able to support mature-aged
open entry students in their first semesters at university**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English
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Prudence (Prue) Barclay Fry

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Abstract

This research explores how a study group concurrent with mature-aged open-entry students' first semesters on the campus of a research university could support those students as they acquired an academic Discourse. It addresses a gap in both research and practice for such students who very often arrive at university without academic preparation and must find support for their transitions through generic provisions rather than from interventions designed for their own particular needs based on the findings of focused research. Many of these students struggle to engage with the ways of being and doing within higher education, particularly with its expectations for teaching and learning, its worldviews, specialised language, and approaches to writing.

This study used action research to develop and trial an intervention informed by Gee's concept of Discourse incorporating a sociocultural pedagogy. As writing is a core component of an academic Discourse, pedagogy also incorporated a scaffolded genre approach to teaching writing. In line with action research, the intervention was continually modified in response to emerging data which were gathered primarily from participant observation and transcripts of study group meetings, the researcher's reflective journal, participant interviews, and student texts.

Findings suggest that while a study group does not replace academic preparation, it may provide something necessary and complementary for mature-aged students. The group provided a space in which many participants were able to identify expectations for teaching and learning they held and, through the reflection that was a core of the action research process, adapt those to something more appropriate for an academic Discourse. In the study group, students learned and practised specific writing process skills they did not have on entry which they then applied in their writing beyond the bounds of the group. Students also began to recognise themselves as legitimate participants in higher education.

This study concludes with the implication that transition for mature-aged students is a holistic process of acquiring a new Discourse by immersion in a social grouping. A study group such as the one in this research may provide an opportunity for acquiring a new Discourse.

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This thesis traces the development of a study group into a focused community in which participants began to take on the practices of a new, academic Discourse. Although I was the researcher, I made a similar journey. It just took me longer to take on the new practices. Many significant others helped along the way, and I would like to acknowledge them.

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Chapter 1 Perspectives

1.1 A personal perspective

I had never seen a student paper quite like the one I now held. It began with a capital letter at the top of a page and stumbled through a collection of jumbled ideas to finish at the bottom of the next page with a full stop. I was in my sixteenth year as a part-time tutor teaching writing courses at the university, unaware, as yet, that Emily was only one of many new mature students on campus that year, recruited from areas of the city not traditionally associated with tertiary-educated, professional families.

Emily had written that she was at university in order to become a social worker, but I wondered how she had come to be at university. That question was followed by others: how might I start to help Emily develop her writing to be able to pass her university courses, and how might I help her reduce the fear she displayed about writing for university?

Pondering my questions, as I walked back to the tutors' room after that first class, I heard a shout: "Prooo!" A Pasifika woman wrapped me in a bear hug. Maraea and I had been friends when our family had lived in a rural town north of the city. Our youngest children had been in the same class. She had led a women's group I had been a part of. Her youngest son had finished high school, and now, seeking a qualification that might open new areas of opportunity for her, she had responded to the university's advertising and enrolled for a degree in social work. She, like Emily, was in her early 50s. I knew she was a very encouraging person with great organisational and people skills; she would no doubt be an excellent social worker. But while I was delighted to see her, as she was to see me, I wondered, how could she, with very little academic background, having left school many years ago with no qualifications, learn to negotiate the very different culture she would meet at university? How would she, too, learn to write for university?

I saw Maraea often on campus. She was, as she said, "good at coffee". I saw her using her considerable people-skills, organising the group of new mature students enrolled in social work to meet and study together on the days they were on campus. While eating their lunch, they would work through their disciplinary essays, collaborating, sharing ideas, helping each other understand what they were learning. Maraea told me later that

the whole cohort of mature students commencing social work that year “stuck together” right through their degrees.

Maraea seemed to me to illustrate a huge strength of mature students. They may not all come from the cultural, economic, ethnic, or educational backgrounds traditionally associated with attending university – these mature students had not come to university because they had entrance qualifications or familial connections with university graduates; they had come because open entry for New Zealand citizens over 20 years old offered them a second chance at education. They were highly motivated and valued that second chance. All had plans for new careers making some contribution to society after adding value to themselves by gaining degrees. Despite the juggling each one of those women had to do with family and community commitments, they were able to use their life-skills, like the networking and resilience I had observed as they met regularly in their little study group, to help each other negotiate the maze of university and its various assignments.

Maraea was not in the academic writing tutorial I taught, but when I asked, she told me that the experience of learning to write had been very stressful. Her tutor, however, had been very nurturing and encouraging. Maraea had methodically worked through every component of the course taught at that time which emphasised facets of the writing process and explicitly taught different academic genres. She had applied the processes she learnt there to her essays for her other courses: how to start thinking about a topic, locating information, brainstorming, seeing connections between ideas, developing a thesis statement, constructing paragraphs, and structuring essays. She learnt to synthesise ideas, to incorporate sources, to use citations and to complete a reference list. When I spoke with her as I began the research for this thesis she was continuing to employ those skills as she completed her degree, adapting them to suit the requirements of whatever discipline or work situation she needed to write for. Most of all, although she had started out extremely apprehensive about writing, through the academic writing course she had gained confidence in her ability to write for university.

In my own tutorials, I watched the new mature students (Emily was not the only one). I mentally analysed what skills and genres these students were familiar with and what they most needed to do to develop those into academic forms. I wondered how we, insiders, could support these students’ transitions to academia. I also wondered why

people who had been successful in their previous lives so feared writing, and how we tutors could help them develop confidence, and the basic skills they did not seem to be aware of. I maintained set office hours, and encouraged students to come and talk or email at any time about their writing. School-leaver students did not often avail themselves of those opportunities, but the mature students did, often more than once, and, at times, in tears about their writing.

Gradually, most of the mature students gained some confidence with their writing. In tutorials, while they learnt from the collaboration in the workshop approach, they also contributed at times, sharing insights from their life experiences, particularly with the younger international students in the room. They did struggle with writing, particularly with organising their ideas into coherent essays, but they learned to write, and each one eventually graduated. But the stress that some of them experienced, because of the pressure they put upon themselves to succeed and their apprehension about writing, did cause me to wonder again, how could we support these students? I wondered how instrumental Maraea's small group been towards the success of her peers, affording collective scaffolding and support for them in an unfamiliar academic culture.

1.1.1 A third student

In contrast to the success I observed with Maraea and Emily and their classmates, some years later, teaching a different communications paper on the same campus, I saw another picture of mature students: the devastating cost for them of a lack of appropriate academic preparation and sociocultural incongruence between academic culture and what could perhaps be termed distant-outsider culture.

I met Manu early one morning outside one of the 'dungeons', the below-ground-level computer laboratories, of the university. With some younger fellow students, she had left her home in a low socioeconomic, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural area of the city at 6 a.m. in order to negotiate traffic and arrive on campus in time for an early morning test. Inside the lab, setting up the test, I watched as students logged on to their computers. Manu used one finger for her typing. That would take a long time to write an essay, I noted. She had recently joined the course and was not yet able to log on, so I started chatting. I found we had some interests in common, but the more I chatted, the more anger I felt that enrolment dollars had been accepted from a student whom I saw as doomed to fail. Manu had left school at 14, and was now in her 50s. She told me that

she had come to university to take a specialist degree that I knew required advanced levels of statistics, chemistry, biochemistry, and physiology, challenging courses for students of any age, even for those with a solid background in sciences in their recent schooling. Manu had not taken any science subjects at her high school, such a long time ago.

Manu was Māori. However, I did not see her looming problem as a matter of ethnicity, but of ethics and justice. In previous years, I had come across somewhat similar situations with international students who had failed all their courses because, although they had achieved the required English language level for entry to university, they encountered a need for new, unfamiliar ways of listening, thinking, reading, and writing, new ways of being and doing appropriate for a Western university. As Gee (2010) would describe it, these international students did not yet have the specific literacy, the ability to “participat[e] in social and cultural groups” (p. 165) to succeed in a Western university culture.

I was aware of conditions in the Code of Practice for international students (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2010). Although suggestions in the code particularly concern levels of language, they clearly indicate that institutions should ensure that prospective students be assessed to ascertain whether they have the necessary academic “competencies” to “participate effectively” before they are offered a place:

Where a course requires a level of English oral and written competency, prior learning, and/or any academic prerequisites for students to participate effectively, the signatory must assess the prospective international student and be satisfied on reasonable grounds that these competencies are met before making an offer of place to the student or accepting the student for enrolment. If these competencies are met, the signatory has discretion to offer a place to the student or to accept the student for enrolment. (p. 5)

In addition, the Code suggests personal advising which might direct students to more appropriate courses. I questioned why those provisions did not extend to other cohorts of students. Perhaps Manu could have been directed to some sort of bridging course, particularly for the difficult science subjects she was going to tackle, but also to introduce her to academic language and academic ways and to give her some familiarity with using a computer. She may have been able to develop some basic scientific

knowledge before enrolling in expensive credit courses for which she had little prior knowledge. In addition, perhaps a gentler introduction to academia through an appropriate preparation course would have enabled her to appraise whether university study and entering a culture so clearly unfamiliar was appropriate for her.

In Manu's case, the outcome was not good. She failed the test. She did not complete the first assignment, and she left the university.

1.2 An international perspective

While Emily, Maraea, and Manu's arrival on campus may have initially surprised me, it was entirely consistent with changes in Western higher education from an elitist system to massification. Schuetze and Slowey (2002), in an international survey, cite some reasons for changes in the student cohort: restructuring of universities, globalisation, the worldwide economic downturn, and a push from governments to increase numbers of citizens with a tertiary qualification. In New Zealand, as in other western nations, since 1984, successive governments have pursued market-led policies that have eroded many traditional jobs, particularly in the public sector. Here, too, globalisation and technological changes have contributed to limited job opportunities in clerical work, retail, and manufacturing. As Schuetze and Slowey observe, in the 21st century, people need to reskill or upskill and to gain credentials in order to participate in the knowledge economy.

Internationally, massification has contributed to a diverse student population, with students now attending university from ethnic, age, geographic, or socioeconomic backgrounds not traditionally associated with accessing professional qualifications. At first, the descriptor "non-traditional" (as in Schuetze & Slowey, 2002, p. 309) was applied broadly to these new students who differed in the above respects from the more traditional cohorts. Traditionally, Murphy and Fleming (2000) argue, students were "the children of the middle classes" (p. 78). While there may now be higher numbers of non-traditional than traditional students on many campuses, researchers in the field of the first year of higher education (FYHE) continue to apply the descriptor to students who are "older, ethnically diverse or those who follow alternative pathways to university" (O'Shea, 2014, p. 136). In this thesis, "non-traditional" has that application.

Mature-aged students now constitute significant numbers of the worldwide student population, perhaps, O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) suggest, between 40% and 60%. In

New Zealand, statistics show that at the university at the centre of this study, at the time the research began, they comprised 33% of the on-campus students (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2009). When distance students are included in statistics, they comprised 66% of the total enrolment at this university (see Appendix 2). Of course, some of those students will be graduate students, and not all will be completely new to higher education. Nevertheless, there are likely to be mature-aged students in many first-year courses.

1.3 A national perspective

While Emily, Maraea, and Manu's experiences fitted within this context of widening participation, the provision of open entry to university that allowed them to enrol, regardless of prior learning or educational qualifications (Whitehead, 2012) is almost unique to the New Zealand context of this study. It is perhaps only offered elsewhere at the Open University in the UK. In New Zealand, open entry was first made available for returning soldiers over the age of 30 after the First World War (Kingsbury, 2006); it was championed by such educational shapers as Beeby, an earlier New Zealand Director of Education who advocated appropriate free education at all levels as a human right (Healey & Gunby, 2012). It has long been an option for adults seeking social mobility through education and has thus contributed to a more socially just, egalitarian society (Choat, 2010). In the past few years, however, universities have cited pressure on enrolments, and failure, attrition, non-continuance and non-completion among open entry cohorts as reasons to sidestep the provision (Gerritsen, 2009; Healey & Gunby, 2012). At least four universities have raised entry standards for courses above the NCEA scores required for university entrance, effectively restricting entry for potential adult students with no qualifications (Gerritsen; Healey & Gunby). One university now directs mature-aged students to a preparation course which they must complete and pass in order to qualify for entry. Open entry has been maintained, however, by the university at the centre of this study, and was the means by which Emily, Maraea, and Manu entered university.

The justice of open entry as it is currently practised has, however, been questioned (Whitehead, 2012; Healey & Gunby, 2012). Whitehead demonstrates from a study with some open entry students at one New Zealand university that not all students start from an equal position in terms of access to the benefits afforded by a university education. Those who are disadvantaged educationally, socioeconomically, or socioculturally, as

were the students in his study (see 2.6), may not be able to access their course material or the considerable support offered by universities even when they are granted admission. Whitehead draws on the reasoning propounded by Rawls (2001), who argues that justice involves equality of opportunity, to propose that a truly just provision for open entry would include adequate preparation to enable students to engage with their learning.

Whitehead's (2012) comprehensive analysis of some of the multiple challenges faced by students in his study resonates with international studies focusing on a lack of congruence between some students' educational and sociocultural backgrounds and the culture of universities (for example, Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003). This is an area now recognised and well researched in FYHE, where determining effective pedagogies for such students has been the focus of a large Australian study (Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith, & McKay, 2012). It is also the focus of some UK studies (for example, Haggis, 2006; Northedge, 2002, Wingate & Tribble, 2012). The lack of cultural congruence Whitehead uncovered, along with his summation of students' literacy levels, echoes the position in which Manu found herself. Following that study, his colleague proposed a question similar to the one I had asked about Manu:

Are we doing a dis-service to students who come in without the required literacy skills? Do we give them a fair chance? (p. 400)

It would seem that educational, socioeconomic and sociocultural incongruence such as Whitehead (2012) observed are acknowledged in the approach currently taken with mature-aged students wanting to enter university in Australia. There, Alternative Entry Programmes (AEPs), usually free of charge pre-university preparation, are an integral part of the social justice package (Cullity, 2008, 2010). Cullity's comprehensive study of such programmes, many of which are sponsored by the universities, shows that students who participate on them are prepared for university academically, socioculturally, and attitudinally. In New Zealand, however, at the time this research began, most universities had outsourced pre-university preparation; in addition, it seemed that mature-aged students may not always have been advised of its value when they enrolled. Kahu (2014) found that to be the case for students in her study who had prepared their households and their finances, but had not considered preparing academically.

1.4 A research perspective

Pondering the different needs of the mature students I met in writing classes, I searched for any research about the cohort in New Zealand. Both studies I found, Barratt (2001) and Davey (2002), indicated that participants had struggled with writing, but neither gave details of that struggle. Navarre Cleary's (2008) US discussion of some specific ways in which mature students' writing needs might be addressed, particularly their need for skills and confidence, seemed to resonate with what I observed in my classrooms, although clearly the pedagogy employed in those classrooms was from a theoretical orientation not used at the university in this study.

This study, therefore, developed from a desire to bring about some sustainable change in the current situation by responding to the needs of mature students which were clearly different from the needs of school-leavers. It seemed that in a context of an absence of cohort-focused research, mature-aged students in New Zealand are offered the generic support available to all students rather than researched-based support specific to the cohort. My research attempted to go some way to addressing this gap.

Conceptualising the research, I surmised that involving new, mature-aged students in a study group similar to the one Maraea had organised with her classmates, but different in that it was led by a person with some understanding of university demands for writing, might provide support for those students as they learned to write for university. The research would go some way to identifying how such a group might provide that support.

1.4.1 A study group

The notion of a study group (J. S. Brown & Adler, 2008) is informed by social approaches to learning which conceptualise learning as a process of immersion and participation. J. S. Brown and Adler employ some of the language and concepts of joining a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as they explain the value of a social approach in study groups:

Mastering a field of knowledge involves not only "learning about" the subject matter but also "learning to be" a full participant in the field. This involves acquiring the practices and the norms of established practitioners in that field or acculturating into a community of practice. (p. 19)

They also suggest that as students collaborate in study groups they may be able to help others by teaching material they have come to understand.

Students in these groups can ask questions to clarify areas of uncertainty or confusion [and] can improve their grasp of the material by hearing the answers to questions from fellow students. (p. 18)

That process of acquisition and clarification and working toward mastery resonated with what was happening as Maraea and her classmates worked together. It seemed that providing a study group at this university primarily for mature-aged students in arts and humanities, who are required to write many thousands of words through each semester of their degrees, might support those students as they worked towards acquiring the writing practices of an unfamiliar academic community. I had a little familiarity with sociocultural approaches to teaching and learning and the notions of the zone of proximal development, collaborative learning and scaffolding, and a more capable peer (Donato, 2004; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978) from experience teaching English for Academic Purposes. The collaboration and support Maraea and her peers had gained from their group suggested that a social approach to learning, such as J. S. Brown and Adler (2008) suggested, would be worth exploring as a viable pedagogical framework for the group.

Developing a research question that included a writing pedagogy was more difficult. I was aware that skills-based writing pedagogy is eschewed by many in higher education because it tends to teach writing as an a-contextual skill rather than as a way of making knowledge (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001; Wingate, 2006), yet observations in my classrooms, and the little New Zealand literature, available suggested many mature-aged students needed some skills. I explored theoretical approaches to teaching writing and the associated debates from the US discipline of composition and rhetoric, and while these all had much to offer for students who had some skills and genre knowledge already, none of them seemed to fit with the literature I was reading through the reconnaissance phase of the research concerning an effective pedagogy for mature students. Through this process, however, a first research question to explore how a study group might support mature-aged students was developed:

How can we use a study group for mature-aged students, informed by sociocultural theory and approaches to teaching writing, to support their transition to writing for university?

1.5 Action research

Action research (AR) was selected as the most appropriate methodology to explore the question because traditionally it is a methodology which allows interventions to be developed, then tested and refined through iterative cycles (Berg, 2009). In this case, the study group itself was the intended intervention. As Chapter 5 demonstrates, however, there was no single approach to AR which could be adapted for this research project which sought to develop and trial an intervention informed by theory and then to modify that intervention in response to emerging data. Thus, AR in this research draws eclectically from different approaches.

Through the AR process of developing, evaluating, and refining, the research question defining this study was further developed (see Chapter 6). In response to emerging data, the focus broadened from writing alone to the more holistic focus of exploring how open entry students might acquire an academic Discourse (in which any academic writing is situated). The revised research question incorporated Gee's conceptualisation of Discourse in its theoretical framing:

How can we use a study group informed by sociocultural theory and approaches to teaching writing to support mature-aged students' acquisition of an academic Discourse?

1.6 Theoretical framework

Gee's (1989, 2015) concept of a Discourse, which embodies demonstrating membership in an affinity group or community (Gee, 2002) by assuming an appropriate "identity kit . . . complete with . . . instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognise" (1989, p. 6) explains the broadening focus of the study group. Writing and literacies are acknowledged as situated practices (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000), and Gee suggests that all writing and literacies are situated in Discourses, situated in particular, contextual ways of being and doing. As noted above, the first cycle of the AR suggested that students needed much more than an understanding of and practice with skills for writing, albeit situated in various

disciplines; they needed to understand the values and the mindset of the academic Discourse they had entered so that they could take on roles identifying as insiders and write from that position of identification. This theoretical framing informed the revised research question above. Writing remained a focus of study group activities, however, because of its integral relationship to its parent Discourse.

The concept of acquiring that identity kit, or entering a Discourse, affords an explanation of the pedagogy employed in the study group and of the process students in each cycle went through as they learnt to write for university. The concept of Discourse embodies the shift in identity which participants had to negotiate as they adopted the practices of the new community – its ways of thinking, teaching, and learning – and became more central participants, ultimately recognising themselves as legitimate participants in academia (Gee, 1989; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007).

Pedagogy in the weekly meetings involved guiding students collaboratively into an understanding of some of the values and the mindset of an academic Discourse portrayed in academia's valued artefacts, its texts. Texts were thus key cultural tools in the study group. Using them in this way operationalised Gee's (2001, 2002) claims that Discourses, like cultures (as in Lave & Wenger, 1991), display community values in their artefacts. Importantly, successfully producing texts for themselves would be a key way in which students identified themselves as members in an academic Discourse.

1.7 Contribution of the study

This study is situated at an intersection of different bodies of research. First, it sits within the expanding field of international literature researching the FYHE (for example, James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010), especially that researching practice with diverse students (for example, Devlin et al., 2012; O'Shea & Lysaght, 2010; O'Shea & Stone, 2011). Although these studies apply different theoretical lenses to the experiences of first-year students, they explore issues of inequality of opportunity and access for students disadvantaged by socioeconomic status, former education, age, social class, location, or ethnicity. In that field, Cullity (2008, 2010), Lawrence (2005), Willans and Seary (2007, 2011), and O'Shea (2014) focus particularly on the mature-aged cohort.

The research also relates to some UK studies which have looked at aspects of pedagogy and practice with mature students. Among these are, for example, the work of Haggis (2006), who advocates collaborative exploration of the nature of a discipline, and

Northedge (2002, 2003a, 2003b), who focuses on the socially situated nature of a discipline and recommends that instructors lead novices step by step into its language, knowledge and practices.

With its focus on academic writing, the study contributes to research with student writing, particularly to research with mature students. Researchers in the field of academic literacies (Lea, 2004; Lillis, 2003) have identified many of the epistemological challenges mature students face as they write for their various disciplines. This study differs from that field of research, however, in its development of a pedagogy specifically targeted for mature-aged students. Writing pedagogy in the study group applied principles from Wingate and Tribble's (2012) development of a scaffolded genre approach which, they argue, provides an effective introduction to academic writing for diverse students.

Primarily, this research sits in the New Zealand context of open entry to university for students over 20 years. It extends our knowledge about some of the particular needs of members of that cohort aged 25 or over in 2011-2013. Thus it adds to the studies of Barratt (2001), Davey (2002), Kahu (2014) and Whitehead (2012). As the purpose of the research was to develop a study group as an intervention which might address some of the needs that were identified among participants, this research might perhaps suggest ways in which open entry might be made a more effective provision for social mobility than it would currently seem to be.

Some of those bodies of research are surveyed in the reconnaissance phase for this research (see Chapters 2 and 3), but that survey indicates that this research differs from much research in FYHE in that it specifically looks at mature-aged students in their first semesters on the campus of a research university rather than mature students encountering academia in the intentionally nurturing context of targeted preparation courses.

1.8 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research context, beginning with some teaching experiences which aroused my interest in the particular challenges facing mature-aged students entering university after a long gap in their education. It has outlined the situation currently peculiar to New Zealand, in which such students are welcomed to university but, in many instances, without any suggestion that any preparation is

necessary. It has introduced the research question and indicated where this thesis may contribute to knowledge.

1.9 Overview of chapters

The structure of this thesis reflects the action research process which commonly begins with identifying a social problem that may be possible to address through a researched intervention and continues through a process of reconnaissance and questioning to determine an initial research question to explore the problem. This first chapter traced that process.

Action research then commonly involves reconnaissance about the contexts of the problem which may clarify the nature and design of the intervention. Chapters 2 and 3 cover the reconnaissance for this study, with Chapter 2 providing an overview of writing support available in New Zealand from transition/bridging programmes, academic orientation, full credit courses, and student learning centres. The chapter discusses features of a mature-student-specific preparation course under the auspices of one New Zealand university and then considers some broader international findings on providing support for writing to non-traditional students focusing in particular on two programmes. The chapter finishes with a New Zealand study that might suggest the importance of the kind of support developed through the AR in this study.

Chapter 3 is the second reconnaissance chapter, looking in particular at sociocultural, academic, and attitudinal characteristics and Discourses that might be shared amongst any group of mature-aged students in their first encounters with higher education. Because of the paucity of New Zealand studies on the cohort, this chapter draws mainly on international research, albeit from the context of pre-university preparation courses.

Chapter 4 provides the theoretical context for this research, placing the study within a sociocultural approach to learning. In presenting the conceptual framework for the study group, the chapter begins by discussing Gee's theory of Discourse. It then provides an overview of learning as a sociocultural process by which newcomers move to more central participation in a community as they take on its practices under the guidance of experienced insiders. A section of this chapter focuses on reflection which may have a key role with adult learners.

Chapter 5 discusses AR which was selected as the most suitable methodology for this research. It explains which features of different approaches within that methodology were appropriated for the project and outlines data collection methods and procedures for data analysis and ethical issues.

Chapters 6-9 overview the four cycles of the AR, with each chapter organised around the four overlapping stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection.

The final chapter provides a final reflection on lessons learned from the research in relation to the research question which drove the enquiry. It provides an overview of factors which this study suggests should be integral to an effective study group for mature-aged students. It considers the limitations of the study and indicates directions for future research.

Chapter 2 Contexts

Action research commonly begins with reconnaissance of the contexts of the research, which for this project included an examination of existing approaches to transitioning mature aged students into academic writing. As already noted in Chapter 1, in New Zealand, mature students may arrive at university without academic, or writing, preparation. Their transitions may therefore differ from those of academically prepared students. The inability of some of these students to engage with higher education has led some researchers to suggest that open entry may in fact be counter to notions of social justice (Healey & Gunby, 2012; Whitehead, 2012).

In the context of writing support for students, all New Zealand universities offer some assistance which might be seen as useful for the mature aged cohort. These include transition/bridging programmes, academic orientation, full credit writing courses, and learning support. This chapter explores this New Zealand context, using both an analysis of the literature and some primary research in the form of interviews with key providers. The chapter then considers some broader international findings on providing support for writing to non-traditional students, focusing in particular on two programmes. Finally, the chapter considers a New Zealand study that comes closest to providing the kind of support proposed in this study: Whitehead's (2012) work with a small group of open entry students to support their acquisition of academic writing skills.

2.1 Pre-university courses

Courses preparing students to re-enter education or to make up for missed credits in order to continue with education, usually referred to as bridging, are offered in New Zealand at different levels. This overview looks briefly at some bridging programmes, and then at courses marketed specifically for university preparation.

2.1.1 Bridging education

Bridging courses in New Zealand are marketed as ways of providing students with a gap since their previous education to re-engage with study (Bowl & Whitelaw, 2010). Some courses particularly target potential university students, and some target learners at lower levels who may have been early school leavers or disengaged through their schooling. Courses may be brief, perhaps three weeks (as in Fraser & Hendren, 2003), or as long as a year. All courses surveyed for this reconnaissance included a writing

component (Acheson & Day, 2006; Fraser & Hendren, 2003); one included basic instruction in numeracy (Fraser & Hendren, 2003). Offerings may also immerse students in essential sociocultural elements of an academic Discourse such as learning how to manage time and how to use computer applications.

Bridging courses may employ a non-disciplinary approach to writing (Bowl & Whitelaw, 2010), an approach particularly critiqued by academic literacies scholars because it tends to disregard the situated nature of academic writing, thus overlooking disciplinary differences in the way knowledge is made (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001). Empirical evidence from New Zealand, however, even deriving from short courses (Fraser & Hendren, 2003; Manalo, Marshall, & Fraser, 2010), aligns with Cullity's (2008, 2010) finding from Australia that students gain confidence and writing skills on such courses and build on those as they continue through in tertiary education. This observation is perhaps consistent with research that has shown that students draw on schemata they have when they come to write in any genre (Johns, 2008). It may be that even an a-contextual, generic approach to writing provides students with schemata on which they can later draw (see 4.4).

Some short bridging courses may sufficiently immerse participants in an educational environment to offer a realistic preparation for the dedication and habits required in order to study successfully. Acheson and Day (2006) identified considerable gains in confidence and skills for adults who attended a short intensive course as a precursor to study at a New Zealand university. Fraser and Hendren (2003) analysed long-term retention and success among participants from a three-week preparation course offered at the New Zealand polytechnic with which they were involved. The programme involved students from nine until five each working day for three weeks and students had homework. They wrote both an essay and a short report and with the pressure to meet deadlines were able to gain some idea of the intensity of full-time study. While there were no controls imposed on who enrolled for the course, and there was no way of determining whether those who participated were more or less motivated than students who did not enrol, Fraser and Hendren found that students subsequently adjusted more smoothly to their coursework, were more satisfied with their study, enrolled in further semesters and gained higher grades through their first and subsequent semesters than students who did not participate.

Bridging offered at polytechnics and other tertiary institutes in New Zealand, however, may not always be adequate for university preparation because often it is designed for students intending to study on courses well below university level. For example, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, a private tertiary institution offering post-school education in a Māori cultural context, offers bridging at Levels 1, 2, and 3 (equivalent to Years 11-13) on the New Zealand framework (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2016). In addition, because of the often more pragmatic nature of polytechnic courses, preparation offered in such institutions may not prepare students for the epistemology and critique valued at university as Bowl and Whitelaw (2010) identified from their study of an equivalent UK course. It would seem that preparation overseen by universities would be more appropriate for students entering higher education and needing to acquire a new, academic Discourse.

2.1.2 Certificate in University Preparation

A Certificate in University Preparation (CUP) was offered by six New Zealand universities before this research began. At the time of the research, these courses were outsourced to other tertiary institutions, but more recently three universities have reassumed control of their programmes, although they do not offer them on their main campuses. Although Cullity (2008, 2010), for example, has identified that appropriate preparation benefits mature-aged students socioculturally, academically, as Choat (2010) observes, pre-university courses are not currently recognised by universities as part of their core business.

A CUP may have much to offer mature-aged students as it may enable mature students to bridge sociocultural, academic, and attitudinal incongruences they may have. Bowl and Whitelaw (2010) researched an offering for mature-aged students at one New Zealand University and identified that it provided students with some essential familiarity with the university's expectations. First, the semester-long course contributed to bridging some of the sociocultural incongruence experienced by many mature-aged students by being held on a university campus; participants began to feel a part of the university as they accessed its facilities. Bowl and Whitelaw (2010) suggest that the close association with the host university enabled students to acquire some relevant cultural capital, particularly as at the completion of the course, the university would not be the completely unfamiliar place so many non-traditional students

experience (Read et al., 2003). To enrol at university, course graduates had to merely “walk across campus to the university registry” (Bowl & Whitelaw, 2010, p. 25).

Academically, the course introduced students to core components of an academic Discourse, to some of the ways of thinking, writing, accessing and using information needed in order to engage with academic study. Bowl and Whitelaw (2010) observed that the course was advertised as one which would introduce students to “analytical, critical and problem-solving skills” and “information literacy” (p. 17), and in their evaluation, it seemed to do that. It also prepared students for working in specific disciplines by offering electives designed in consultation with academics from the university. Some of the programme tutors also taught undergraduate disciplinary courses and introduced students to their specific epistemologies and some key vocabulary. Through immersion in the full-time, single-semester course, participants tasted the intensity of university study within a supporting environment. Attitudinally, participants gained confidence from the skills and practices they mastered on the course.

An observation about CUPs at the time of reconnaissance for this research, however, pertains to this study. CUPs do not seem to be marketed as common pathways for mature students’ access to university, even though they are welcome to participate. The CUP catchment is school-leaver students who narrowly missed qualifying for university entry in their final year at school, who must pass course requirements in order to qualify. Consequently, as Bowl and Whitelaw (2010) note, mature students who might benefit from such preparation must be persuaded that a semester’s worth of time and fees is a worthwhile investment. An additional caveat is that it is possible that, while universities may have retained some quality control over their courses, CUPs offered off-campus may not offer the same degree of immersion in an academic culture as courses held on campus.

While research, therefore, indicates that preparation is, indeed, a worthwhile investment (Bowl & Whitelaw, 2010; Cullity, 2008), at the time this study began only one university in New Zealand actually directed mature-aged students to preparation. That is discussed in the following section of this chapter.

2.1.3 Mature-specific preparation

Reconnaissance for this research included a survey of university websites to ascertain what interventions were available for mature-aged students. That search confirmed that

one New Zealand university has side-stepped the issue of open entry with its perhaps concomitant problems of student failure and attrition. It has raised entry-level standards for all students and instituted selective entry for many courses, and now directs most potential mature-aged students to academic preparation which they must complete and pass before enrolling in first-year courses.

The semester-long university-taster preparation course is held over one or two evenings each week and managed by that university's Centre for Continuing Education. Two options are offered, one for business students, and one for intending arts and humanities students. This reconnaissance explored the arts and humanities option as that reflected the context of this research.

On the course, participants are immersed in aspects of university culture, or, we could say, in an academic Discourse. They are introduced through lectures to 10 different disciplines. They encounter university ways of being and doing through lectures, tutorials and workshops. They access the library and learn to negotiate databases as they prepare assignments; they become familiar with the campus. Finally, they complete the course by sitting a written examination. The Programme Director emphasised that the focus of the programme is to prepare students to succeed, and that it has, over the years, "delivered some exceptional students" (personal communication (PC), July 5, 2011) into various university programmes.

The preparation course involves a similar cost to one university course and has a similar workload and pressure. Because students must pass in order to enrol in first-year courses, they develop some familiarity with university demands in terms of meeting assignment deadlines and with managing time and possible disruptions to their households during those times of pressure before they arrive on campus.

The Programme Director emphasised that participation on the course reduces the culture shock many mature students experience when they arrive at university with expectations that university will be similar to their experiences of schooling: "When they come, at least it's not foreign" (PC, July 5, 2011). She cited multiple benefits for mature-aged participants from the course, among them, particularly, that participants are introduced to new ways of thinking. She explained how tutors involved observe a regular phenomenon as students learn to write:

Every semester, there's a recurring pattern. . . . It's making them *think* differently. . . . It's trying to teach them to learn a new way of writing and thinking, which [they find] challenging, especially if they're not used to it – the analysis part. (PC, July 5, 2011, her emphasis)

In terms of learning to write for university, the Programme Director suggested that participants did not learn by following instructions or by being told about assuming a different mindset. They learn to write as “they get to practise it: I think they can only do it by experimenting” (PC, July 5, 2011). Students get that practice as they complete three assignments, including a researched essay, through a highly-scaffolded process. They work through multiple drafts which they revise in response to substantive, formative assessment.

Potential mature-aged students for that university are usually aware of the course before they need to be directed there at enrolment. It is advertised each semester in suburban newspapers, targeting students with a gap in their education. The Programme Director, however, suggested that as it is now very well known in the community, most participants learn about it “by word of mouth”. That publicity and awareness was in contrast to the practice at the university in this study, where the university did not sponsor preparation courses and its website had no clear advice about preparation or links to such courses. Short courses such as any sort of preparation that might have been available were not advertised in local papers.

Other mature-student-specific provision

An interview with a Director of Bridging at another university seemed to confirm the value of specific preparation for mature students, particularly its value in introducing them to a way of thinking required for academic writing. She emphasised that participants on that course had to enter into a

whole new way of thinking . . . critical thinking. . . . It's a fundamental thing of any university, what the whole thing's about. (Bridging Director, PC, July 4, 2011)

Despite the considerable documented academic, cultural, and attitudinal benefits to mature students offered by academic preparation programmes like these, mature students intending to study at other New Zealand universities may not be explicitly

directed to them. Kahu (2014) found in her research with mature-aged (although distance-mode) students that they had not been made aware of any need to prepare academically:

When asked before the semester what skills and experiences were needed for success at university, only a few participants mentioned academic skills, focusing instead on time management and self-motivation. (p. 136)

If mature students arrive at university without academic preparation, unfamiliar with the epistemology and approaches to teaching and learning of a university, and with no experience of preparing an assignment within time while attending to all their possible other commitments, they may not be adequately equipped for the pressures and intensity of full-time study that these pre-university interventions each go some way towards providing. Students must then rely on generic supports afforded by universities. These supports, however, may not have been designed specifically for their particular needs; nor may they afford the holistic introduction to academia that would seem to benefit mature-aged students.

Generic support is usually provided during orientation week (the week immediately preceding the first week of the semester) from Student Learning Centres. (These are denoted differently at different universities; for clarity, and anonymity, in this thesis they are referred to generically as ‘Student Learning’.) In addition, most universities offer credit-bearing writing courses.

The following sections of this chapter draw on a further stage in the reconnaissance process of the AR, a survey of existing writing and academic literacy support offered at New Zealand universities to students of any age. Data for these sections derive from an investigation undertaken in 2011 of seven of our eight university websites. One rural university, focusing on applied science courses, was not included in the 2011 survey. A follow-up survey in 2014 confirmed that most interventions available in 2011 continued, although perhaps in different forms. In 2014 the rural university offered writing courses solely for students whose first languages were not English.

2.2 Academic orientation

In 2011, all universities provided varieties of academic orientation through Student Learning, usually immediately before the first semester. From the 2011 survey,

common components of all those programmes, usually in single hour or 1.5 hour slots, were:

- Managing time
- Using the library
- Negotiating the timetable
- Accessing the electronic environment
- Refreshing academic writing requirements and referencing
- Familiarising students with the campus

It would seem, from the amount of time available for these introductions (for example, an hour and a half allotted to academic writing and referencing), that they are designed to remind students of already-held skills rather than to enable them to acquire new ones. We could note, too, that such brief introductions to writing and referencing – often referred to as “academic literacy” – might be problematic for new, mature students, if they are provided as their sole introduction to “academic literacy”. First, we could note that such refresher interludes are provided outside any specific disciplinary context and, very often, delivered as lectures, a transmissional teaching mode which might perhaps suggest to novices that any skills or genres presented are the only way to write (see 2.1.1). In addition, in such a brief introduction, a focus on referencing, often presented as a set of tick-box skills essential to avoid plagiarism (Hendricks & Quinn, 2000), may not introduce students to a concept of writing as a disciplinary conversation (see 4.4.4) in which they participate by synthesising the ideas of others (Chanock, 2008; Gaipa, 2004; Hendricks & Quinn, 2000).

An additional problem with such a brief time slot introducing academic writing is that novice mature-aged students may experience it as an abrupt “submersion” (Cullity, 2008, p. 10) under new language and concepts rather than a gentle introduction into them. Bamber and Tett (2000) argue that when novice students are introduced to material beyond their reach it serves to “undermine” (p. 73) their confidence rather than equipping them with necessary skills. Kahu (2014) observed this with at least one of the students in her study who attended the brief orientation. The student was alerted to the need to avoid plagiarism, something clearly integral to success in academic writing. However, the unfamiliar language and new concepts in the lecture emphasised to her,

two days before her course began, how little she knew about the practices of higher education. She lost all confidence for approaching her essays.

Six of the seven New Zealand universities surveyed offered a gentler introduction to academic writing by providing a more extended form of pre-semester writing support during orientation. In each instance that support focused on the process of preparing a researched essay. Four New Zealand university campuses offered short introductory courses over one or more evenings, and two offered two-day comprehensive academic writing courses. These courses incurred small fees. However, the campus of the university at the centre of this research did not offer such a course.

2.3 Writing support through the semester

The 2011 survey identified that the seven universities provided interventions through the semester designed to meet the needs of different student cohorts for writing support. Student Learning provided workshops (usually in the lunch hours) related to aspects of academic writing; they offered one-to-one writing support and provided hard-copy material. All universities had comprehensive, web-based (albeit generic) support.

2.3.1 Writing for specific cohorts

All seven universities surveyed provided writing courses for advanced learners of English, focusing on familiarisation with academic genres, acquisition of academic language, and socialisation into the ways of thinking required in a Western university (Chanock, 2004; Hyland, 2003). At least two universities offered academic writing courses beyond first-year for this cohort.

The universities also offered writing courses for their wider student population. Credit-bearing writing courses were offered at six of them, and the seventh provided short, skills-based, workshop/workbook modules, often on Saturday mornings. These introduced students to aspects of academic and information literacy and successful completion was noted on students' transcripts. (By 2014, however, this had been largely discontinued, though elements of the modules had been integrated into some specific programmes such as nursing.) One university offered compulsory writing courses for specific cohorts.

Writing courses not targeted for non-native speakers were housed in English departments at all except one university, which offered its writing course through its

language centre. One university also offered a course through its school of education. Stated desired course outcomes for the different offerings tend to reflect attempts to blend necessary writing process experience with writing skills students might need for their disciplines. One university embedded some literary critique into its course. Desired outcomes included critical thinking, practising academic reading, writing, and research, working for clarity (at the levels of sentences, paragraphs, and complete texts), writing for a specific audience, and focusing on the essay writing process while preparing essays in different genres.

The university at which this research took place provided four compulsory writing courses in 2011: one for BA students, one for some science students, one for students of information science, and one embedded into a first-year engineering course. That situation remained in 2014, along with other, non-compulsory writing courses and specific introductory disciplinary literacy courses for specialist qualifications such as nursing.

The science communications course was informed by Writing in the Disciplines pedagogy, providing students with opportunities to acquire literacy for different modes of communication in the sciences: developing a position paper, delivering a presentation, and collaboratively preparing a report for a client. Students attended two lectures and a two-hour workshop per week. The course for information science students focused on different means of presenting information in that field.

The compulsory writing course provided for BA students in 2011 involved two, two-hour workshops per week. It was rhetoric-based, with a writing-to-learn component, the 'Writer's Notebook' (WN) which required some reflective writing. Consistent themes through the course included:

- Writing is a purposeful, social activity
- Writing is a means of entering a disciplinary conversation
- Writing is shaped by expectations of readers, or audience
- Writing is successful if it fits its purpose, and
- Writing genres and styles may change over time as purposes change

No New Zealand universities offered specific writing courses for mature-aged students once they were at university. However, participants in this study would be likely to be enrolled in a compulsory writing course and all would have access to online support and

support from Student Learning. The study group was not intended to be the sole provider of writing instruction.

2.4 The international context

Internationally, mature-aged students entering higher education in countries which do not practice open entry usually have to meet certain academic criteria before they enrol. It would seem from the literature that, in every Western country except New Zealand, students are required to demonstrate some competency with writing in these criteria, most commonly demonstrated through successful completion of targeted preparation courses such as those provided in New Zealand (2.1.2; 2.1.3). In the US, mature students must have reached a predetermined score on a national entry test ('SAT'), which includes writing, before being accepted into a research university. Where that score has not been reached, students must complete some sort of preparation in a community college. Writing an academic essay is part of that preparation (University of California, 2016).

In the UK, similarly, students with educational backgrounds which do not provide traditional routes to university must complete some sort of academic preparation (referred to hereafter as *access* courses as that is a name applied to many of them) to gain entrance to university (Bowl & Whitelaw, 2010; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Reay, 2003). Access courses may comprise the equivalent of a year of full-time study.

Writing instruction varies on access courses. As noted above (2.1.1), the literature indicates that sometimes it is provided in an a-contextual, "study-skills" format (Lea & Street, 2006; Wingate, 2006). Bamber and Tett (2000) found this approach was not particularly helpful for their participants who were not able to relate the instruction to their as-yet unmet assignments. Those students found they learned to write as they prepared their assignments for their disciplines.

Along with their evaluation of a targeted university preparation course in New Zealand, Bowl and Whitelaw (2010) evaluated the efficacy of a study-skills approach to academic preparation conducted by a UK Further Education (FE) college. (A possible New Zealand equivalent to an FE college would be a tertiary institution offering pre-degree level courses.) From their interviews with students and staff, Bowl and Whitelaw concluded that the course helped students gain confidence, and, as its advertising suggested, equipped them with a skillset, conclusions which align with Cullity's

observations about the efficacy of study skills approaches to writing and preparation for mature-aged students noted earlier in this chapter (2.1.1). a major critique Bowl and Whitelaw offered about the course, however, was that it did not introduce students to a critical epistemological stance necessary for engagement with higher education.

Cullity's (2008, 2010) research involved a comprehensive survey of preparation courses in Australia. Students on those courses learned much more than writing; they acquired some academic literacy as they experienced a gentle immersion into academic culture, experiencing lectures, tutorials, workshops, and discussions with their mature-aged peers and with their instructors. They learned to research for their assignments and how to present that research in appropriate forms of writing. Cullity (2010) notes that the preparation courses introduced students to distinctly academic ways of thinking, reading, and writing. Common components of the courses she studied (including the study-skills approach) gave students experience with aspects of specifically academic literacies:

- Language, both generic and disciplinary
- Skills for reading and study
- Skills with using computers
- Navigation of the institutional website, the library, and the electronic learning environment
- Preparation and completion of an academic paper involving research, synthesising, and referencing
- Collaboration in group work
- Management of time and coping with incorporating study into their lives

In addition, courses held on university campuses allowed students to become familiar with key locations such as classrooms, laboratories, the library, lecture halls, and the cafeteria.

A key benefit Cullity (2008, 2010) noted for the targeted preparation courses she examined (which Bowl and Whitelaw, 2010, also observed in their study) is that tutors understood and accommodated the multifaceted academic, cultural, and attitudinal needs of mature-aged students. They developed students' writing confidence by offering specific feedback and encouragement to explore some points in greater depth. Whether the courses were discipline-based or skills-based, as participants developed confidence,

they came to believe that they could actually participate successfully in higher education.

Cullity's (2008, 2010) extensive research, however, does not extend to following the trajectories of preparation course graduates through university. In a study from Scotland, Bamber and Tett (2000) followed the trajectories of a group of non-traditional mature-aged students from their preparation through to degree completion. Participants in their study, from an economically and educationally disadvantaged, "low-participation neighbourhood" (p. 57) of Scotland, were admitted to a university through a scheme targeting "academically unqualified activists from working-class communities, disabled people and minority ethnic groups" (p. 57). The scheme was regarded as an "apprenticeship" (p. 58), a notion suggesting the support of old-timers in a practice working together with newcomers as they acquire new ways of being and doing in a community. Students in the apprenticeship scheme received considerable academic, sociocultural, and emotional support through their learning journeys; they were given access to a room in which to meet and study, to tutors, and the support of their peers.

Of particular interest to the initial design of the study group in this research, however, is Bamber and Tett's (2000) comprehensive summary of the needs of that cohort as they progressed through higher education. Their summary resonates with Whitehead's (2012) comprehensive analysis of the multiple literacy needs of some non-traditional New Zealand students (2.6) and the observations of the New Zealand bridging educators (2.1.3). First, Bamber and Tett (2000) note a need for new ways of thinking:

They need introductory level courses in order to learn to think sociologically, politically or critically. (p. 73)

Bamber and Tett (2000) also identify measures, particularly explicit teaching, which supported these students as they learned to write for university, observing that the students benefitted from:

intensive practice and tutoring in writing, comprehension and basic study skills and from extensive verbal and written feedback on draft work by tutors, and from coaching as to how to improve work prior to submission. (p. 73)

They also note what proved to be an effective pedagogy for the apprentices:

They favour interactive, rather than didactic, teaching styles, especially when coupled with opportunities to work collectively in small groups. (p. 73)

Bamber and Tett (2000) highlight some attitudinal characteristics of the apprentices, particularly that they were not confident learners and that they needed to meet texts at an appropriate level. They also note that the apprentices needed the opportunity to critically re-examine their prior experience through reflection in order to engage with their new learning environment and to re-negotiate their identities as learners. They observe, too, that most of the apprentices persisted with the scheme through to graduation and beyond to employment.

With relevance to the context of open entry in New Zealand, Bamber and Tett (2000) stress that access to higher education for these students did not come from merely being granted university admission; the students needed considerable support through the course of their degrees to re-negotiate their identities as learners, modify their ways of thinking and their attitudes to theory and practice in their social action, and also to learn to write appropriately for university.

2.5 An historic example of practice with mature learners

This reconnaissance did not identify any examples of study groups for mature-aged students. It did, though, uncover one example of practice with mature-aged students in a model which would seem to bring together many of the themes uncovered through this chapter. The model would seem to address possible academic and attitudinal needs in a group of mature learners who shared some of the incongruences mature students might experience when they enter higher education (see Chapter 3). The model suggests a holistic approach to learning which foreshadows the concept of Discourse framing this research, and the pedagogy employed points towards the sociocultural pedagogy employed in the study group in this research (discussed in Chapter 4). This example stood out as a model of practice which could well be emulated in the study group, albeit in a very different context and with very different students.

Mike Rose, now a professor at UCLA, was at one time employed to prepare a group of Vietnam War veterans for university (Rose, 1989). Participants in the programme were not among those who had been in the sorts of high school classes in which students were prepared for university. Like other mature-aged students in much of the literature reviewed for this research (for example, Bamber & Tett, 2000; Cullity, 2008;

Whitehead, 2012), the men were not confident learners; they lacked experience with any writing process and some lacked any sort of schema for academic writing. The peculiarly academic literacy practices of critique and analysis, its “habits of mind” (1989, p. 135), were foreign to them.

Rose was aware, from his own experience as an outsider in higher education, that difficulties experienced by many non-traditional students are not necessarily due to academic deficit; they arise from differences in values and attitudes in different sectors of society (Haggis, 2006). While Rose did not apply the concept of Discourse to these differences, he did apply his first-hand knowledge of sociocultural difference to the design and pedagogy of his course. In a pedagogy which would seem to operationalise the concept of enabling Discourses to communicate (see Chapter 4), Rose identified attitudes of enquiry, analysis and critique that the men would need to develop in order to engage with academia and he worked with them to foster those attributes. In his pedagogy he used language and concepts accessible to the men. He applied scaffolding, in the form of encouraging, probing questioning about texts they read; he modelled a learning process, collaborating with the men to read critically and to go beyond the surface meaning of the texts.

Rose intentionally based his pedagogy on Bruner’s claim that “Any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development” (cited in Rose, 1989, p. 184) His pedagogy began with “where they are [at]” (Rose, 2014), within the ZPDs of the men (4.2.5). Through the collaborative process, he guided them, as teachers who had been significant in his own education had guided him, to the place where they could, for example, identify the “central notion in an argument or the core of a piece of fiction” (1989, p. 138).

To help the men develop their writing, Rose provided time for practice with a writing process. He modelled writing with the students to develop their schemata and confidence for extended writing and gave them plentiful feedback through all stages of the process. His encouraging attitude was vital for these men to develop the confidence and the belief that they could succeed in education. Importantly, for men to whom academia was an alien environment, the group became a community through their shared engagement in purposeful academic work. An additional factor in this community was that when immersion in an academic environment caused very negative

memories to surface (2014), Rose was able to point the men concerned to the counselling services that might help them.

Principles in Rose's approach, of working in participants' ZPDs, of using accessible language, of providing scaffolded approaches to literacy activities designed to develop both knowledge and skills, of explicit teaching and practice with the writing process – including reading – and developing a sense of community, could well be incorporated into the study group. Reflecting on that programme years later, Rose (2014) noted a principle that would seem to confirm the value of using the holistic concept of Discourse to inform the study group:

The best programs work on multiple levels, integrate a number of interventions. Such programs emerge from an understanding of the multiple barriers faced by their participants, but also from an affirmation of the potential of those participants.

2.6 Some open entry students in New Zealand

We turn, now, back to the New Zealand context, to consider a study that closely aligns with the project explored in this thesis, and which provided key learnings for the approach that underpinned this project. What is significant about Whitehead's (2012) brief study is that it focuses on a small cohort of New Zealand open entry students and particularly on providing support for their writing during their first year at university. His context was four intensive workshops designed to give a group of students a second chance to pass a "core literacy" course which all had failed. Whitehead's workshops were designed to help them complete their unfinished assignments. His findings relating to his students' literacy levels provided a context for the possible needs of the students who would attend my study group: Whitehead found that his students did not know how to read strategically; they were unable to comprehend complex vocabulary in complex text; they had not had practice with extended writing, and did not know how to address written assignments. He concluded that the students were "functionally illiterate" (p. 392), estimating that they would need at least a year of practice to be able to learn to write appropriately for university.

His findings raise some questions concerning pedagogy and curriculum which were relevant to the development of the study group in this research. It is clear that Whitehead's participants had been unable to profit from the course they had officially

finished, but we could question whether that course had been designed at an appropriate level for them or whether the instructors had used familiar language to introduce students to the complex language they were required to read in order to complete their assignments. This has been done elsewhere, for example, by Northedge (2003a, 2003b) at the Open University, who has designed courses for students who may have some similarities to those with whom Whitehead worked. Pedagogy in Northedge's courses leads students into the discourse they need. Similarly, it is unclear whether the students in Whitehead's study had been taught, and practised, reading strategies, or whether the pedagogical approach of the course had been traditional (i.e. a set of readings and assignments to complete) or whether more modern approaches were used, such as approaching the teaching of academic writing as an apprenticeship into another set of cultural practices, with an instructor collaborating with students to work together on extended texts.

Nevertheless, Whitehead's findings resonate with other New Zealand studies: Kirkness and Neill (2009), for example, showed that other first-year students (in this instance, high-achieving school-leavers) in a different university struggle to comprehend complex texts. The overseas studies of both Bamber and Tett (2000) and Cullity (2008) identify similar difficulties with respect to academic texts.

Whitehead's (2012) analysis provided crucial details of some of the learning, sociocultural, and perhaps attitudinal needs of his students, which might be relevant to the development of the study group in this study, and his analysis opens up many questions about how those needs might be addressed through an appropriate pedagogy. Other preliminary reading for the research in this thesis confirms that pedagogy is a crucially important factor in enabling non-traditional students to enter an academic Discourse (Cullity, 2008, 2010; Haggis, 2006; Northedge, 2003a, 2003b). That reading suggests that an effective pedagogy might "lend" (Northedge, 2003a, p. 169) non-traditional students the ability to access complex texts and that explicit teaching and practice might help such students to acquire reading and writing skills (Bamber & Tett, 2000; Cullity, 2008; 2010).

Other factors Whitehead (2012) notes about these students demonstrate that they lacked experience with some of the multiple literacies necessary for tertiary study (Lawrence, 2005). They were not familiar with using computers for writing or research and they did

not have strategies for answering test questions, whether multi-choice or requiring short written responses. In addition, Lawrence argues that knowing how to access support is a key literacy needed by students, yet Whitehead observed that these students had not accessed the culturally appropriate mentors and support services provided for them by the university.

Finally, Whitehead (2012) also noted characteristics of these students which would suggest that their primary Discourses (see Chapter 4) were very distant from the “socially dominant upper middle-class white” culture (p. 387) they encountered at the university. All were first in their families to enter higher education; Whitehead notes that their “world views” (p. 387) had been established in lower middle-class Māori families. Students were clearly not familiar with the ways of being and doing of students (for example, attending class regularly and accessing support). In addition, some of the students had been dealing with traumatic life events while juggling study and other commitments.

While this mix of literacy levels and social factors might not translate to all cohorts of mature-aged students at all our universities, the writing difficulties that Whitehead attributes to those students seem to be replicated elsewhere. They resonate with Kahu’s (2014) observation noted earlier that many of the first-year texts she marked from mature students showed a lack of “core writing skills” (p. 1). While on the one hand these observations would seem to support Whitehead’s (2012) suggestion that, to ensure that open entry is a truly just provision, students should be provided with adequate preparation designed to enable them to engage with their learning, on the other hand they would seem to indicate a need for specific research with mature-aged students which might contribute to research-based pedagogy for the cohort to enable that engagement.

Exactly what might comprise adequate preparation, however, is yet another question. As Whitehead’s (2012) study demonstrated, that group of open entry students needed much more than reading and writing skills in order to succeed at university. They needed to take on new practices, to learn how to be students with disciplined study and attendance habits. They needed to learn how to seek help, and how to use computers effectively and efficiently, all features of an academic Discourse, and, as noted, all

practices with which students need to become familiar in their transitions to university (Lawrence, 2000, 2005).

In developing the study group for this research, Whitehead's findings, as well as the findings of Rose, and Bamber and Tett, suggest that the pedagogy and curriculum of this study group would need to be specifically tailored to the needs of the students in the group.

2.7 Chapter conclusion

This chapter exploring contexts has shown that policies concerning preparation for university differ between New Zealand and other Western nations. It has shown that in New Zealand, while only one university offered a comprehensive introduction to university for mature-aged students, all offered writing support in various forms for different cohorts. However, if we look at this information from the perspective of Whitehead's (2012) observations, that mature students who are not familiar with university practices may actually require much more than writing and reading skills, and if we then consider Bamber and Tett's observations about a group of non-traditional UK students, we might observe that courses focusing on writing may not offer the holistic support that would seem to benefit many mature students. A writing course alone might not be sufficient for incoming mature-aged students to acquire the additional, academic, Discourse they need in order to engage with their new learning.

Practice with mature-aged students in other Western countries would seem to indicate that there is some understanding of the academic, sociocultural, and attitudinal needs of many of these students, and those needs may be to some extent addressed through preparation courses which provide for a degree of immersion into academic culture. Rose's (1989, 2014) work with veterans would seem to embody these principles. Bamber and Tett (2000), however, demonstrated that mature students also benefit from comprehensive, apprenticeship-style support as they progress through their degrees. The study group was designed to go a small way towards providing both an immersion environment, albeit for students in their first semesters rather than before university, and apprenticeship-style support through their first semesters.

Immersion and apprenticeships are key principles for acquiring situated ways of thinking, reading, writing, and of being and doing, all components of a Discourse. The following chapter explores some of the Discourses identified among mature-aged

students in higher education, and then Chapter 4 explores Gee's concept of Discourse and sociocultural approaches to learning which informed the conceptual framework for the research at the centre of this thesis.

Chapter 3 Who are mature-aged students?

This chapter takes a different perspective from the reconnaissance of Chapter 2 and looks at some of the ways of being and doing, the Discourses, which have been associated with mature students encountering higher education. The paucity of research from New Zealand, however, means that the chapter draws primarily on literature from international studies, and that literature is predominantly from the context of pre-university preparation courses (for example, Cullity, 2008, from Australia, and O’Donnell and Tobbell, 2007, from the UK). A caveat to this reconnaissance, therefore, is that students in this study might differ in some respects from their overseas peers.

This chapter first considers factors that would seem to be peculiar to the identity of mature students: their age, their gap since school, and the often not straightforward circumstances preceding their enrolment. It then considers a bracket of sociocultural characteristics often connected to identities of mature-aged students, even though these may now be shared by increasing numbers of younger students. These constitute the juggling of commitments that many find necessary in order to take time to study. Familiarity with academic culture is a factor now recognised as possibly affecting students’ engagement; the chapter considers this as it may affect participants.

The chapter then turns to ways of being and doing which have been linked to mature-aged students, first considering ways in which they have been recognised by insiders to academia, and then providing an overview of ways in which mature students may have experienced education. This section draws primarily on the New Zealand context.

The wide-ranging reconnaissance in this chapter was a necessary preparation for the study group, because it has been recognised for some decades that, in order to teach effectively, we must be familiar with what our students know:

If I had to reduce all of educational psychology to just one principle, I would say this: the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly. (Ausubel, 1968, p. vi)

In a more recent argument that would seem to complement Ausubel’s observation, Northedge (2003b) emphasises that, “With a diverse student body, no fixed start point or end point can be assumed” (p. 19). We saw the characteristics of one group of New Zealand open entry students in 2.6 and noted that they resonated with some

characteristics of their overseas peers. Reconnaissance was necessary to indicate some broad start point for designing study group content.

Further reasons for the reconnaissance concern the need to identify possible connecting points between primary and secondary Discourses students might bring and the academic Discourses they will need, and the need to identify possible latent causes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), perhaps historical or social conditions operating at different times and in different places, which might affect students' transitions in some ways. Considering prior education was important in this process because methods of teaching and learning extant when participants were schooled will have shaped their Discourses of teaching and learning and perhaps their expectations for teaching, learning, and writing at university. In addition, educational experiences influence students' perceptions of themselves as learners which they may have retained (Jonker, 2005).

3.1 Age, a gap, and reasons for enrolling

3.1.1 Age and a gap

Perhaps the most visibly identifying feature of mature students is their age, which for this study would be anything from 25 years upwards. Along with students' age is their likely gap since previous formal education. Concomitant with those factors, mature students are more likely than school leaver cohorts to be financially independent (Schaefer, 2010); many may have dependants (Kahu, 2014), elders and/or children. They may have entered (or left) long-term relationships and long-term employment, or be juggling those with their study (Bamber & Tett, 2000); they may have extensive connections with their local communities (Kantanis, 2002) which may or may not include people familiar with academia. Age may also contribute to a general apprehension and uncertainty about re-entering education, particularly in an institution that seems to be heavily populated with young people (Bamber & Tett, 2000; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Age may contribute to a fear that they will not be able to cope with all the new learning (Navarre Cleary, 2008).

Other factors associated with students' age which may complicate transitions for the cohort include expectations for knowledge, teaching, and learning that have been shaped by very different educational paradigms from those they meet at university (Cadman, 2000; Chanock, 2008). Lillis (2001) and Wingate (2008) suggest this is the case for diverse students learning to write.

3.1.2 Reasons for enrolling

Mature students, by definition of their age and the gap since their schooling, have not made a seamless transition from high school to higher education. Some may have waited in anticipation for many years for family circumstances to reach a point where one partner could be spared from the workforce to take time to study, or for children to reach an age when they required less direct care (Schaefer, 2010; Stone, 2008). These students may have thought about their study for many years, and had time to prepare emotionally (Kasworm, 2008).

For other mature students, however, circumstances surrounding their enrolment may be more complicated. Many of the students represented in the literature identify that they have been thrust into university study by traumatic life events: redundancies or restructuring, relationship breakups, injury or health issues, relocation, or loss of a partner (Gallacher, Crossan, Field & Merrill, 2002; Kasworm, 2008; MacFadgen, 2008). Mature-aged students arriving under these circumstances may therefore experience multiple stressors: academia may be an unknown culture for them (Cullity, 2010), and they may bring as-yet-unresolved psychological and emotional issues, the “cultural baggage of their past and present lives” (Merrill, 2001, p. 7) and continuing “turbulent life circumstances” (Kasworm, 2008, p. 28) from those triggering events. Michie, Glachan, and Bray (2001), from their research on stress factors influencing re-entry students’ transitions to university, reason that, “It may be more informative to know that a student is recently divorced . . . than to be told they are 50 years old”.

These factors may well affect students’ engagement with the study group, or their decisions to continue in higher education. Gallacher et al. (2002) give an example of one student who arrived in difficult circumstances, who succeeded with his preparation course yet was unsure of whether or not to continue with his education:

I feel I have got a lot of baggage to get rid of in what happened in my past. . . . It is this internal stuff that always comes back and beats me up. (p. 506)

Other mature-aged students describe feeling the pressure of being compelled to engage with higher education because of changing economic and employment circumstances (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). Barratt (2001), in New Zealand, found 97% of her participants had felt they had no choice but to come to university in order to find a more challenging job in a new field, or to continue in their current field as a better-qualified

practitioner and O'Shea (2014) has identified a similar feeling of compulsion among some of her Australian participants.

Other mature students have been actively encouraged to participate in higher education as a part of social justice moves to widen participation by targeting students from ethnic or socioeconomic groups, or geographic areas not proportionally represented in the sector. In the UK (Gallacher et al., 2002; Yorke & Thomas, 2010) and Australia (Cullity, 2008) mature student numbers have increased through these initiatives. Participants in Bamber and Tett's (2000) UK study were selected to attend university following a regional social justice move to increase participation among working class, disabled, and minority ethnic groups.

There have been similar moves to increase participation for formerly under-represented groups in New Zealand, but the focus tends to have not been on the mature cohort unless they are also Māori or Pasifika. The New Zealand Tertiary Education Strategy currently encourages initiatives from universities to increase participation among Māori and Pasifika (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014). Students in Whitehead's (2012) study were targeted under that initiative.

While all students enrolling at university will have a network of circumstances surrounding their arrival, it may be that the unsettling nature of many mature-aged students' arrivals has an influence on their transitions to university and to academic writing. We saw from Whitehead's (2012) observations that direct entry to first-year courses when students' home Discourses are very distant from academic Discourses and when they are also experiencing tumultuous life events might not be conducive to successful engagement with learning.

Stresses mature students may be enduring may not be visible in university classrooms, but those stresses are likely to affect their academic engagement, their focus, and their ability to think and write coherently. As with the student in Gallacher et al.'s example cited above (2002, p. 506), life experiences prior to and surrounding arrival at university may "always come back and beat me up". The possibility that these characteristics might be replicated among participants in this research would mean that I would need to establish rapport with participants (see 5.4.5) and maintain an encouraging, non-judgemental approach in study group meetings (Cullity, 2010).

The next bracket of characteristics, while perhaps not shared solely by mature-aged students, are sociocultural characteristics which are recognised through the literature on transitions to university as complicating students' transitions and engagement (James et al., 2010). They, also, might well affect mature students' ability to engage with the study group.

3.2 Sociocultural factors

3.2.1 Finances

Maintaining financial commitments may affect many of the mature-aged cohort (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005), whether students have a mortgage or are contributing to keeping their household in rental accommodation. Kasworm (2005) cites one US mature student who indicates the non-negotiability of the multiple financial and relational commitments the cohort may bring with them to university. His statement indicates one way in which some mature students perceive themselves to be different from their younger classmates:

Adults' distractions are serious – making money, looking after your family, keeping your relationship, keeping your marriage, or whatever. We're playing with real houses. The [younger] students are worried about having fun. (p. 10)

Vanden Driesen, Cullity, Dinham, & Evans, (2008) noted that the participants in their research evaluated the cost/benefit ratio of taking time out to study very carefully before enrolling. Schaeffer, (2010) similarly, describes how students in her research had thought about study for many years, taking time to consider their household's financial circumstances and carefully evaluating whether they and their households could commit to a member engaging in study, particularly full time.

Financial considerations sometimes dictate that mature students continue in employment or find part-time work, which then intrudes upon their study time and into the mix of juggling commitments they must do (James et al., 2010; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008). Some students in the study group in this research may qualify for loans, perhaps even for allowances, but those are usually not enough to live on. In 2016, a married student with children was eligible for a maximum of \$375.20 a week, but that amount reduced in relation to the other partner's income (Study Link, 2016).

Financial considerations may also influence students' choices of modes of study. Kahu (2014) identified that one reason mature-aged students in her research opted for distance study rather than full-time attendance on campus was so that they could arrange their study around their work and family commitments.

3.2.2 Dependants

Many mature students are responsible for dependants. Some are parents of young children; older students may have aging or ill parents or partners, or contribute to childcare for grandchildren. Those in the middle decades of the cohort, perhaps 35-50 years, may have both younger and elder dependants with their different accompanying responsibilities (Cullity, 2010).

Dependants have been noted to complicate mature students' engagement in different ways. Students in Barratt's (2001) and Vanden Driesen et al.'s (2008) studies cited juggling family responsibilities – maintaining equitable relationships and giving children the time and attention they needed – as their greatest challenge as they engaged in tertiary study. Michie et al. (2001) argue that women, in particular, “are ‘juggling’ between two ‘greedy’ institutions (HE [higher education] and family) which both require attention to the exclusion of the other” (p. 459). Stress from this never-ending juggling may contribute to guilt feelings as students attempt to satisfy the two demanding sides of their lives, particularly the demands of their children. It may impact upon their academic engagement and ability to focus on study.

Specific complications that may arise because of the demands of dependants include finding childcare, the necessity of caring for sick dependants, or unpredicted, extreme reactions of children to the time their parent spends studying (Bamber & Tett, 2000; Reay, 2003). Kahu (2014) found, consistent with overseas studies (Bamber & Tett, 2000; Stone, 2008; Tones, Fraser, Elder, and White, 2009), that those students who were unable to negotiate shared care for dependants at times found their ability to study compromised.

Some parents of older children have found their children react unfavourably when a parent engages in study. Bamber and Tett (2000), Stone (2008), and Willans and Seary (2011) discuss instances of children developing serious behaviour problems, either in the home or at school, as they reacted to a parent becoming a student. In those cases, children's reactive behaviour when they perceived their parent was replacing time and

attention normally spent with them with time on study compromised the parent's study time and contributed to considerable guilt feelings.

Juggling responsibility for dependants with study and other commitments may cause enough stress to compromise mature students' academic engagement and perhaps contribute to decisions to withdraw from higher education (Reay, 2003; Scott, Burns & Cooney, 1996). Reay (2003) tells of two women who chose to leave their courses when dependants became ill and needed extra support. In her New Zealand study, Kahu (2014) found that 10 of her 19 participants either withdrew from study completely, or from one or more of their courses, overwhelmed by the pressure of juggling childcare, relationships, households, work, academic challenges, and community responsibilities. Navarre Cleary (2008) advises US writing instructors who have mature students in their classes that these students do experience conflicts between study and domestic responsibilities, and that, at times, children do get sick; students may require lenience with deadlines. All these factors needed to be taken into account as potential stressors for participants in this study.

3.2.3 Relationships

Mature students' relationships with others in their households, with partners or spouses, and with their local communities, impact in different ways upon their transitions to university (Merrill, 2001; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008). Relationships may contribute to the "turbulent life circumstances" to which Kasworm, (2008, p. 28) alludes, thus creating extra stress for students as they begin to study. In turn, study may contribute to turbulence in students' relationships. One of Kahu's (2014) participants describes this: "It is like a new person coming into your household. . . . Very much like another person coming into your home" (p. 138). O'Shea (2014) notes that, as this extra entity in the home, study affects relationships because of the time it takes to maintain "equilibrium" (p. 153). For some students, as Vanden Driesen et al. (2008) note, mixing study with family responsibilities becomes an exhausting "moral tug of war" (p. 13). We could surmise that time and energy given to maintaining relationships must particularly impact upon reading and writing, other time-consuming student activities.

Domestic relationships contribute significantly towards whether students continue at university or withdraw (Stone, 2008). Supportive home and social networks positively impact upon mature students' transitions and academic engagement enabling students to

ground their university experiences as they encounter the very different world of academia (Kantanis, 2002; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008).

Kahu's (2014) study confirms the value of support from home for mature students. She found that when whole households willingly made adjustments, translated into such practical areas as other members taking time to help with childcare or meals, allowing the student space and time for study, or taking time to listen to some of the struggles of the new student, the students' abilities to persist with study were enhanced. She cites an example of a supportive husband who was a farm worker. He took the children outside with him as he worked, giving the student quiet space for study.

Unsupportive home relationships, however, may be the greatest barrier mature-aged students face in their return to study (Davey, 2002). Scott et al. (1996) identified lack of support, even suspicion, from home as a major cause of attrition among mature women for whom the stress of adding study to a household may lead to decisions to end fragile relationships. O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) and Stone (2008) cite cases where fragile relationships collapsed from the additional stress of study; some students felt forced to evaluate whether continuing in study or continuing in a fractured relationship was more valuable to them.

Support from community networks also affects non-traditional students' transitions to university (Vanden Driesen et al., 2008). Willans and Seary (2011) note that positive social networks contribute to mature-aged students' ability to develop resilience and thus continue through the challenges and changes necessitated as they engage with higher education. This support may be particularly important for students from ethnic minorities. Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) observed that for ethnic minority students, support from the home community is a major contributor to decisions to continue in higher education. At the university in which this study took place, Māori students, identified as a cohort who may lack support from their home communities, have the opportunity to join an academic whānau ('whānau' is used here to denote a group brought together for a common, in this case, academic, purpose), which may go some way to substituting for that lack.

The literature surveyed for this reconnaissance indicates, however, that when people in students' community networks are antagonistic towards further education for any reason, or actively discourage study because of students' age or social, cultural, or

educational backgrounds, students face an additional stress (Michie et al., 2001). Read et al. (2003) noted this as a particular concern for students from working-class backgrounds entering academia in the UK.

The consequent isolation experienced by students with little social support may present a considerable challenge for mature students whose families and communities are not conversant with academia. Vanden Driesen et al.'s (2008) research confirmed that 73% of the mature students they surveyed ranked "isolation and lack of social support" (p. v) as their greatest challenge in their transition to university. Those students who receive constant disapproval and discouragement from family and community are more likely to withdraw. Others must develop resilience in order to persist. Bamber and Tett (2000), for example, cite a participant in their study who spoke of "breaking the mold and that's scary" because "people from my area don't go to university" (p. 67).

3.2.4 Familiarity with university culture

Lack of familiarity with academic culture is an additional factor which is documented as having a complicating impact on students' engagement with study (O'Shea, 2015). This matter is now a focus of much of the research in the FYHE, though that research often focuses on school leavers who face a concomitant sociocultural incongruence (Devlin, 2011; Devlin et al., 2012). It is, however, a factor which may also complicate mature-aged students' transitions to university and to academic writing, and to acquisition of an academic Discourse and its literacy.

Lack of familiarity with university culture, with its ways of thinking, being and doing, has particularly been noted by academic literacies scholars as a cause of confusion for mature students learning to write for university (Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis, 2001). Mature-aged students may have grown up in residential areas and have social networks from which few people have chosen to pursue tertiary education; they may be first in their families to enter higher education (Bamber & Tett, 2000; Findsen, 2006; O'Shea, 2014). Cullity's work (2006) suggests that among alternative entry students in Australia, the majority are first-in-family to attend university. In Whitehead's (2012) study (2.6), all participants were from backgrounds with few connections to academic culture, and some had considerable trouble adjusting to the lifestyle demands of being students.

A growing body of research in FYHE concerns sociocultural incongruence between first-in-family students' home backgrounds and university culture (Devlin, 2011;

O'Shea, 2014). Devlin (2011), and O'Shea and Lysaght (2010), particularly focusing on low socioeconomic status students in the Australian context, argue there is a need to bridge the incongruence such students experience. Interestingly, although Devlin argues on behalf of school-leavers, her argument draws on much of the UK literature focusing on mature students to which I have referred for this study, for example, Bamber and Tett (2000) and Read et al. (2003). That research clearly indicates that many aspects of academic culture – its Discourses – are unfamiliar to first-generation students who thus enter as “authentic beginners” (Gee, 2002, p. 166) to its practices and values. Authentic beginners contrast with “false beginners” (ibid), who enter a Discourse with some prior familiarity with its practices and values (see 4.1), an important point to note for study group design.

In some countries, first-in-family explicitly correlates with social class or ethnicity (O'Shea, 2014; Murphy & Fleming, 2000; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). In New Zealand, non-participation in higher education has been particularly associated with ethnicity, with Māori and Pasifika traditionally less represented (Findsen, 2006; Gerritsen, 2017; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014). Findsen (2006), however, observes that mature adults align with Māori and Pasifika as being less represented in tertiary education, particularly in universities, unless they have familial professional connections. He suggests, too, that there are areas of this country from which few students, particularly in the era of high employment, have chosen to further their education at university. Mature students from those areas, whatever their ethnicity, may not be familiar with university culture.

For students to whom academic Discourses are unfamiliar, the ability to identify with a group of similar, “like-minded” (MacFadgen, 2008, p. 99) peers, meeting for “academic interaction rather than social – we want intellectual engagement” (Vanden Driesen et al., 2008, p. 25) may be vitally important. Developing a sense of belonging in a university is one of the key components in Tinto's (1997, 2000, 2006) theorising on successful transitions; the lack of a sense of belonging is often noted as a cause of student attrition (Read et al., 2003). The study group would be intentionally set up as a community in which students might be able to develop a sense of belonging.

The following sections of this chapter consider some of the Discourses mature-aged students may bring to university: possible worldviews, ways of being and doing, and ways in which they see themselves and in which others recognise them.

3.3 Discourses of mature students

3.3.1 Recognition from insiders: Goal focus and motivation

First, as a Discourse involves a sense of identity, of being recognised as a certain sort of person (Gee, 1989, 2015), we could consider a Discourse ascribed by many insiders to academic culture to mature students. That is, that as a cohort they tend to be recognised for their positive characteristics of goal-focus and motivation (Merrill, 2001; Schaefer, 2010). Krause et al. (2005) report from their large Australian FYHE survey that mature students are “noted for their diligence” (2005, p. 26) and again, that they are “focused”, they have “clear goals”, and seem to have “no trouble with motivation” (2005, p. 73). Merrill (2001) surveyed academics at a UK university who used descriptors such as “highly motivated, enthusiastic and committed” (p. 13) for mature-aged students, and who welcomed them in their tutorials because they had usually completed the readings and they engaged in discussion. Mature students are frequently depicted as having very clear goals for their time at university, usually connected to their hopes for new careers or to achieve a more responsible position in a current work situation (MacFadgen, 2008; Merrill, 2001; O’Shea & Stone, 2011; Waller, 2006). Schaefer (2010) identifies that her participants had very clear goals for using their anticipated credentials:

If I had wanted to get promoted in the department, I was going to have to have that paper. (p. 80)

I know to do what I want to do; I need a piece of paper. That’s my driving factor. (p. 80).

Mature students also recognise themselves as a group of students whose commitment and their choice to come to university at this particular time may distinguish between them and younger students:

[A] *mature* student . . . makes a conscious decision . . . is someone who thinks, ‘I will do this, and I will do it to the best of my ability’. . . . That’s what sets us apart. (Waller, 2006, p. 125, emphasis in original)

The focus on study goals and the delicate juggling of commitments and responsibilities many mature students are compelled to do are factors which may distinguish them from school-leaver students and contribute to the strategising many undertake in order to juggle their multiple commitments. MacFadgen (2008) noted that participants in her study were able to appraise the long-term benefits from their study, and choose to “defer gratification and make sacrifices” and to put up with some “discomfort” (p. 99) in order to persist with their degrees. Motivation and goal focus may also assist mature-aged students to appraise the challenges they face and persist at university despite what could seem to be setbacks as Farrell and Mudrack (1992) and Fujita-Starck (1996) identified.

Time management

Time management may be closely associated with a goal focus. It is a component of managing the self, a key to a successful transition in Schlossberg’s transition framework (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Generally, mature students are represented in the international literature as very aware of the sacrifices their households are making in order for them to take time out to study, and are thus able to keep a firm goal in mind and strategise the necessary juggling of household and community commitments, family, relationships, and study. Many speak of limiting recreational activities during this time (MacFadgen, 2008).

Because of their necessary juggling of commitments, mature students are often represented in the literature as strategically managing their time, with some viewing their days at university like a full time job. Examples include those in MacFadgen’s (2008) and Vanden Driesen et al.’s (2008) research who report that nine in the morning to five or six at night is university time, just like their employment used to be.

We could note here, two observations from New Zealand. First, the non-traditional participants in Whitehead’s (2012) New Zealand research found the struggle to adapt to the disciplined lifestyle of being a student, particularly to commit to attending classes regularly, was too much of a lifestyle shift. Several students in that group, although they received considerable encouragement, extra time to complete assignments, and additional tutoring, were not able to adapt to the challenge. Another observation derives from Kahu’s (2014) research, which suggests that some mature students may discover that the time commitment necessary for study leads them to reappraise the value of university. Kahu identified that three of her 19 participants concluded they valued time

with their partners and families, their community activities, and the lifestyles to which they were accustomed and in which they felt comfortable more than the possible future benefits of study. They withdrew from their courses.

Clearly, while much of the international literature demonstrates that mature-aged students are recognised by their commitment to goals and consequent motivation and time management, the New Zealand studies suggest a more nuanced view. This may arise from the fact that most New Zealand mature students are not currently required to complete preparation courses before they arrive on campus. Were students required to participate in preparation with some degree of time pressure to complete an assignment, for example, that experience might enable them to appraise whether the time commitment and sacrifices necessary for successful engagement would fit with their lifestyles. They might enter university with a realistic concept of the intensity of first-year courses or decide to enrol in fewer courses than a full-time load in their first semesters. Some might consider that higher education was not for them, and choose not to go further with their study before making such a choice in the context of expensive first-year courses.

In terms of this research, however, it would seem that time management would be an essential component of an academic Discourse. In addition, time management might well influence students' ability to engage with the study group.

3.3.2 Discourses of learning and teaching

Students of all ages possess Discourses of teaching and learning, of what it means to engage, or, for many, to disengage, with learning (Gamache, 2002; Wingate, 2007). International studies with mature-aged students indicate that many bring memories of passive approaches to teaching and learning: "didactic and formal" (Merrill, 2001, p. 8) and, "Take what we give you" (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007, p. 320). Uehling (1996) suggests that adult students returning to education may bring a "learned passivity" (p. 65) from their previous educational experiences. While that pedagogical model probably did not work for them in high school, they tend to approach their university courses with an attitude of dependency on the teacher to be told what to do, and a determination to succeed this time around.

Research into educative practices in New Zealand during the era in which schooling focused on the School Certificate (SC) examination¹ suggests that mature-aged students in this country may well recall sitting passively under transmission methods of teaching, and the concomitant rote learning for high-stakes examinations (Jones, 1991; H. Lee, 2005). Jones (1991), for example, describes teaching practices in the eighties in a central city high school. In the lower-streamed class in her study, populated mainly by Polynesian students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students expected teachers to dictate content which they would then learn and regurgitate uncritically for examinations.

Jones (1991) makes a further observation about the practices of dictation and transmission teaching: these did not extend beyond the lower-streamed classes in that school. Students in higher streams, those destined for higher education and professional careers, enjoyed practices of discussion and critique with their teachers.

It would seem that many New Zealand students – and their parents – believed that passive, uncritical reception of knowledge and rote learning of content were the way to succeed in education. In a later survey, G. Brown (2002) identified beliefs about learning among Year 11 pupils from six different secondary schools across the socioeconomic spectrum. He found that all but three of the students who responded equated successful learning with passing their SC examinations. The strategies they

¹ SC, which dominated secondary education from 1943 until its final iteration in 2001, was originally provided as a terminal qualification to either grant or restrict free access to ongoing education (G. Lee & H. Lee, 1992; Strathdee, 2003). SC was norm-referenced and scaled to maintain similar pass rates from year to year, and until 1968 when single subject passes were recognised, required students to reach a 50% average in four papers to proceed to the sixth form. Strathdee points out that, initially, its approximately 50% pass rate seemed acceptable in a society which relied on a plentiful supply of non-skilled labour and in which higher education was almost fully funded by government. Later, however, strong arguments were raised against the mono-cultural bias and the hierarchical order of subjects within SC which favoured Pākehā students from professional and upper-class homes who possessed the dominant literacy (Treaty Resource Centre, 1984).

were going to employ for success were what he terms “surface” approaches to learning: “revision, re-reading, and reviewing of the year’s work” (p. 113). Moreover, despite their teachers’ efforts to foster a critical approach to learning by engaging with information and drawing connections between different ideas, students held to those beliefs and practices.

Memories of transmission education seem to remain pervasive through sectors of New Zealand society. As recently as 2011 the principal of an Auckland high school deemed it necessary to explain to parents that the practices of the SC era had been superseded. Note his explanation that modern assessment was not designed to test the non-critical practices of “rote learning”, “recall”, and regurgitating information”:

The emphasis in the last century on examining lower order thinking such as memorising and recalling information is no longer relevant. Rote learning and regurgitating information have been overtaken by an emphasis on the ability to process, analyse and evaluate information in a manner which demonstrates clear understanding of concepts and ideas. (Western Springs College, June 2011).

It may well be that participants in this research retain similar deeply-entrenched memories of what teaching and learning involve to those of the parents addressed by the Western Springs College principal and the students researched by G. Brown. They may have been students or parents during those eras. However, such a passive, rote learning and regurgitation approach to education is not likely to mesh easily with an academic Discourse requiring active learning. Haggis (2006), for example, observes that in contrast to this recalled didactic, transmission approach, universities have traditionally endeavoured to foster in their students a “more questioning, critical engagement with the world” (p. 524). A critical stance, and a questioning attitude towards knowledge are perhaps what Wenger (2000) would consider to be tacit understandings within an academic community, understood by insiders, those within the community, but unknown to newcomers.

All students in this research, except those few aged 25 or younger in 2011, would have been schooled during the SC regime. It may well be that the Discourses of teaching and learning they possessed remained those shaped by an education system focusing on examinations: practices of passive reception of knowledge, rote learning, and regurgitation. They may not be alone in their expectations for teaching and learning,

however, as Gamache (2002) argues that many of today's university students, of any age, struggle because they are expecting university learning to be "passive absorption" of an "external . . . body of facts" (p. 277) provided by teachers. Wingate (2007) extends Gamache's discussion to suggest that all incoming students need to be guided to understand "the epistemological aspects of learning in higher education" (p. 394) to counteract the effects of being "spoon-fed" (p. 397) through their schooling. And Chanock (2001), too, suggests that all new students would benefit from an orientation to academic culture. That orientation would need, in some way, to be a component of the study group content and practice.

3.3.3 Discourses of knowledge

Discourses of knowledge, understandings of the nature and structure of knowledge and how it may be approached, are fundamental to how students approach learning, shaping how they expect to be taught and how they expect to learn, read, and write (Wingate, 2007). We have seen how the SC regime in New Zealand education may have shaped Discourses of teaching and learning for many students; it may also have shaped their concepts of knowledge as certain, fixed, transmitted by experts – books or teachers – and memorisable. Gamache (2002) argues that the greatest, yet little-recognised, cause of student failure at university is an incorrect assumption of what knowledge is; approaching knowledge as certain, fixed, and transmitted, is not always a Discourse which mixes easily with successful university study.

Students' understandings of what constitutes knowledge, their epistemological understandings, have at times been depicted as personal, developmental stages on a hierarchy. On these hierarchical representations, an approach to knowledge as something fixed and non-negotiable – "monologic" (Chanock, 2008, p. 8) – is always placed at the bottom. An approach which recognises knowledge as uncertain and contestable is always at the top (as in Fruge & Ropers-Huilman, 2008; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; Palmer & Marra, 2004). Though those studies vary in the number of stages they describe, they all agree that the concept of knowledge as uncertain and contestable develops over time, and is primarily held by "advanced graduate students" (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997, p. 102).

Penrose and Geisler (1994), in a study situated in the US discipline of rhetoric and composition, demonstrated how these approaches to knowledge were worked out in

examples of students' writing. They contrast a freshman who made definitive claims, reflecting an understanding that knowledge is fixed, with an advanced student who demonstrated his understanding that knowledge is uncertain and contested. They identified two premises informing the advanced student's text: "knowledge claims can conflict" and "knowledge claims can be tested" (p. 507). In addition, they demonstrated from their study that the students' differing epistemological beliefs influence the ways they read texts, set goals for their writing, used "evidence" (p. 508) and presented very different understandings of the same topic.

In the context of the diverse students in this study, it may perhaps be more accurate and more appropriate to consider understandings of knowledge as embedded in different Discourses rather than as a hierarchy. These Discourses of knowledge may be associated with cultural groupings, or socioeconomic groupings, and may apply to students of any age. Cadman (2000) points out that students from non-Western cultural backgrounds may well discover that their concept of what is valued as knowledge differs from that valued in a Western university. Cantwell and Scevak (2004) identify that students entering an Australian university direct from practical or trades backgrounds tend to bring a concept of knowledge as fixed and non-negotiable. Tett (2004), in a discussion which echoes Cantwell and Scevak's finding, observes that working-class students may value practical knowledge and be wary or suspicious of theoretical knowledge.

A further Discourse of knowledge possibly relevant to this study is one which Merrill (2001) and Bamber and Tett (2000) ascribe to students who have experienced adult education classes. These students may arrive at university believing that their life experiences are a valued source of knowledge.

These different Discourses contrast with a concept of knowledge as something constructed and contestable which would seem to be the concept valued in western universities. Grappling with this possibly new concept may be integral to how students will address much of their academic writing (Cadman, 2000; Chanock, 2008; Haggis, 2006). Again, this mismatch may not be shared only by mature-aged students. Chanock (2008), from her experience as a writing advisor, observes that students of all ages may never have extended a dialogic concept of knowledge to "school" knowledge (p. 8). She explains that even though students may well know that people hold different

knowledge and multiple viewpoints about issues – family arguments and negotiations between children and parents are often over differing viewpoints – they may never have extended that understanding of dialogicity to school knowledge.

An understanding of knowledge as constructed and contestable may, thus, represent a particular problem for mature-aged students who may be required to evaluate or reflect or deal with different viewpoints in their writing rather than to repeat knowledge. We could also note that at the university at the centre of this study, many current first-year writing assessments require students to enter their disciplinary conversations and critique different viewpoints (Chanock, 2008; Gaipa, 2004). These assignments have embedded understandings that knowledge can be constructed, challenged, and contested. While these factors may present a challenge to students of all ages, they may present a particular challenge to study group participants who recall schooling under a very different epistemology.

This discussion of understandings of knowledge would suggest that incoming mature-aged students in New Zealand might well expect to be taught packages of knowledge which they will then “display . . . in assessment” (Haggis, 2006, p. 525), an expectation Haggis identifies among many mature-aged students in the UK. It may well be that practice in study group meetings would need to enable mature students to make a shift from understanding knowledge as something fixed and transmitted by experts to an understanding that approaches to knowledge, like writing and literacies, are part of the Discourses of different communities.

3.3.4 Discourses of selves as learners

Much of the international literature discussing mature students in higher education presents a contrasting picture to the Discourses of seemingly confident, goal-focused, motivated students discussed above (3.3.1). Many mature students attending preparation courses are depicted as students who identify with Discourses of early school leavers with histories of failure in school and remnants of a conviction that education is not for them, as, for example, in O’ Donnell and Tobbell (2007) and Willans & Seary (2011). Jonker (2005) suggests that school experiences may have a powerful effect on shaping learner identities; they may contribute to students’ long-held convictions they are doomed to fail in an educational environment in which they do not belong:

I was expelled from secondary school when I was fourteen years old. . . .
That was me. Finished with it. (Bamber & Tett, 2000, p. 67).

I had been told for so long that I wasn't very bright. (Stone, 2008, p. 272).

Clearly, these students have recognised themselves in the past as certain sorts of people – those who see little point in education – and they have been recognised as certain sorts of people – those who are not capable of achieving academically. For some students, those long-held attitudes preclude their continuing in education, even after successful completion of a course, as for this UK student:

I had problems with my self-esteem connected with my past educational experience. . . . The discouraging thing is really inside me. (Gallacher et al., 2002, p. 506)

New Zealand mature-aged students' learner identities would have been established during their schooling, many, as noted above, during the SC regime. As well as the 50% failure rate, another practice of that era would likely have contributed to their learner identities – the practice of streaming children into academic or professional, and manual or vocational streams.

Harker (1971) argued strongly from his observations of the practice of streaming in a city high school that it reflected the home literacy of students and the cultural capital they brought to their classrooms. In the school he studied, the professional or academic streams, which at that time followed an academic curriculum based on that of British grammar schools (H. Lee, 2005), were largely populated by children from professional or managerial home backgrounds whose home Discourses, likely to be Discourses “deeply affiliated with formal education” (Gee, 2015, p. 4), matched the education they received. These children were recognised in the school as those who were being prepared for tertiary education. In contrast, children from homes less affiliated with schooling and the resulting professional careers for any reasons, whether cultural, socioeconomic, ethnic, or geographic, generally populated the vocational or manual streams.

Streaming practices may have a powerful influence on learner identities, and perhaps, too, learner behaviour (Hornby & Witte, 2014). In their more recent research into streaming (which remains a practice in some New Zealand intermediate and high

schools), Hornby and Witte (2014) argue that streaming contributes to attitudes of hopelessness and behaviour problems among pupils, and stigmatisation of students in the lower streams by teachers. Reay (2003) has noted a similar attitude in overseas studies of working class women's previous disengagement with education.

The fact that students who participated in this study were entering university as mature-aged students may indicate that they were among those students whose families had few connections with higher education, who may have seen little purpose in continuing with education in an era of high employment. Students may have been placed in those streams deemed lower and stigmatised by teachers, or may have effectively self-streamed by choosing non-academic course options resulting in their being placed in bands or sets with others who chose those options (Hornby & Witte, 2014). We could note here, that while self-streaming, banding, and setting may continue to operate today, the educational climate is very different since the introduction of a qualification purported to acknowledge students' achievement (Strathdee, 2003).

Past educational experiences may explain Kasworm's (2008) observation that many mature-aged students "enter the classroom with an evolving and sometimes conflicted learner identity" (p. 28). Mature students have courageously made a decision to return to education and bring hope for a new future through educational qualifications, but they may also bring as-yet-unresolved attitudes from their educational pasts (Gallacher et al., 2002) contributing to considerable anxiety about how they will cope in their new educational venture (Cullity, 2008; Navarre Cleary, 2008; Willans & Seary, 2011).

Mature students' anxiety may derive from their low academic self-efficacy, their conviction that they are not good learners and not capable of succeeding in academic tasks (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Jonker, 2005; Pajares, 2003). Entrenched beliefs about learning ability may well have more effect on students' abilities to succeed than their actual ability (Pajares, 2003). These beliefs may also contribute towards students' decisions to withdraw and may contribute to students becoming overwhelmed by the challenges of higher education. Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) identified that confident students are able to perceive difficult tasks as conquerable challenges, but, in contrast, students who are convinced that they are not academically capable tend to regard such tasks as insurmountable obstacles.

These mindsets would seem to be characteristics shared by many mature-aged students, affecting their academic engagement. I have noted that Bamber and Tett (2000) pointed out that when students who do not yet have appropriate comprehension skills encounter complex texts, they may experience a considerable drop in their confidence as learners. Navarre Cleary (2008) observes that adult students' perceptions of their lack of ability may be exacerbated in classrooms containing young, seemingly confident students. For students with fragile learner identities, working with similar peers who provide positive social modelling has long been recognised as essential practice if they are going to be enabled to re-negotiate their views about themselves as learners (Bandura, 1993, 2012; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Habel, 2009). That social modelling would be available for participants in this study through the collaboration in the study group.

Much of the low academic self-efficacy mature-aged students bring connects to writing: Navarre Cleary's work (2008) suggests that many attribute their past failure in education, and their rationale for choosing practical careers, to their perceived inability to write. The following section gives an overview of how the literature has depicted attitudes mature students may bring to academic writing, another important consideration to allow for in study group design.

3.3.5 Discourses of writing

Discourses of writing with which mature students may be familiar would seem to be closely connected to their Discourses of knowledge and teaching, from their past education. Concerning writing, many may view writing as an isolated, a-contextual skill, with which they may feel they have never succeeded (Stone, 2008). This view of writing, as a "neutral, technical skill", or "a set of atomised skills" (Street, 2003, p. 1) which, once mastered, are always able to be transferred across situations (Brent, 2011) tends to equate good writing with the final product displaying good spelling, grammar, and style. In academia, this view extends to include mastery of specific genres such as an argument essay or a report (I. Clark, 2003; Parr & Jesson, 2016; Street, 2003).

For many years this product-focused perspective was the dominant view of writing in schools and universities. It was the perspective subscribed to at all levels of education in New Zealand (Parr & Jesson, 2016). Hawthorne and Glenn (2011) and Parr and Jesson (2016), summarising writing pedagogy in New Zealand, suggest that it maintained a formal, individualistic, textual focus until an emphasis on writing as a process was

foregrounded in the 1980s. Despite this shift in pedagogy, however, it would appear that a product-focused view of writing continued into the 1990s. Parr's (1991) research identified that in the early 1990s New Zealand high school students editing their writing continued to focus on surface errors and mechanics. She wrote:

An explanation of why children change words and not ideas is problematical. Research I have carried out suggests that students, up to late secondary, have limited internalised criteria for 'good' writing; they evaluate their work using these limited standards. (p. 5)

The view that technically correct writing equates to good writing may still be held by New Zealand students – of all ages. Wilkinson, Bowker, Deane-Freeman, and Rullan (2007) observe, from their work as writing advisors in a New Zealand university, that some students continue to hold a product-focused view of writing. Consequently, in their visits to Student Learning they expect that the surface features of their texts will be checked and corrected.

Disciplinary conversations within composition indicate that a focus on correctness is no longer the predominant emphasis in most writing pedagogy (Harrington et al., 2001). However, it is relevant to this research to understand that the skill-focused view of writing that was once dominant in New Zealand and internationally (Fulkerson, 1979; Hawthorne & Glenn, 2011; Parr & Jesson, 2016; Tobin, 2001) still contributes to widely-held ideas of what good writing is and how it can be taught. In addition, a technical view remains implicitly held by some faculty (Kreth, Crawford, Taylor, & Brockman, 2010; Paretto, 2011) and by some students (Wingate, 2006).

With the implicit emphasis that technical correctness is good writing, perhaps it is not surprising that mature-aged students are frequently represented in the literature as lacking confidence with writing, unfamiliar with academic writing practices, and apprehensive about writing because of its high stakes and their lack of writing skills (Navarre Cleary, 2008). Although only Gillam (1991), Lillis (2001), Navarre Cleary (2008), and Whitehead (2012) actually focus their research on mature student writing, almost all the literature surveyed for this reconnaissance takes time to elaborate on students' difficulties as they learn to write for university (for example, Bamber & Tett, 2000; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008).

In contrast to these observations of apprehension and lack of genre knowledge and writing skills, some mature-aged students are skilled, confident writers (Kasworm, 2008). These students, though, are likely to have been successful in their schooling, and therefore less likely to be found among the students encountering academia through access or preparation courses. Hence, they are less likely to be documented in the current literature.

Writing as process

Many mature students currently enrolling at New Zealand universities (particularly those in their 30s and early 40s) would have been schooled when the focus in writing pedagogy was on the writing process. This pedagogy, which filtered into some New Zealand schools in the 1980s (Parr & Jesson, 2016), shifted the focus from the writing product to students as writers (I. Clark, 2003). Tobin (2001) describes how for some years, when a focus on process was the predominant approach to teaching writing in US universities, teachers fostered writing as a “messy, organic, recursive form of discovery, growth, and personal expression” (p. 4). The approach also shifted the focus of the teacher from expert to facilitator (Fulkerson, 1979; Tobin, 2001), supporting that personal expression. However, among composition scholars in the USA, strong arguments were raised against the pedagogy, particularly that it did not teach diverse students the facets of a particularly academic discourse – language, tone, genres, and conventions – which they needed in order to write successfully at university. Bizzell (1982) argued that the pedagogy did not encourage students to critique, to conceptualise, or to generalise – all valued components of an academic Discourse.

It may be little surprise, then, that a focus on writing as a process was not assimilated unproblematically into New Zealand (or Australian) school classrooms (Hawthorne & Glenn, 2011; Parr, 1991; Parr & Jesson, 2016). As Bizzell (1982) was observing about the effects of the pedagogy in the USA, it may have contributed to a generation of students who experienced very limited practice with different genres and very little teacher intervention into their writing.

Martin (2009) describes “process writing” as it was practised in many Australian primary schools:

As implemented in Australia, this approach expected schools to set aside time for writing, on a daily basis where possible, in accordance with the philosophy

that people learn to write by writing. Students were encouraged to produce successive drafts, some in response to ‘conferencing’ sessions with their teachers; the writing process culminated in the ‘publication’ of a more formally ‘edited’ script. (p. 10)

In these classrooms, as in the US universities, where teachers played a “facilitating rather than a modelling role” (Martin, 2009, p. 11), many teachers believed that their place was not to advise students about their writing. One teacher, for example, apologised to Martin: “I know I’m not supposed to tell them anything, but after all, I *am* their teacher” (p. 11, emphasis in original).

A similar attitude of reticence towards teacher intervention can be detected in a New Zealand study of writing in schools in the process era (Philips 1989). Philips (1989) found teachers were reluctant to give formative feedback, believing, perhaps, that the purpose of writing was for children to develop their own ideas and their own voice. He noted that teachers tended to be

facilitative rather than interventionist. They extended this attitude to the treatment of more formal aspects of language use, such as spelling, punctuation and grammar. (p. 5)

Not all children’s writing thrived under this approach. Some children were reluctant to work through to ‘publication’. Philips (1989) notes, however, that the teachers he surveyed did offer “some additional encouragement” to such children.

Martin (2009) identifies an additional limitation of a focus on writing as process, noted earlier by Bizzell (1982). His observation of children in process-oriented classrooms, which may have some bearing on mature students currently arriving at university, was that children from non-middle-class families tended to use a very narrow range of genres, those with which they were familiar from their language use outside school. Australian researchers from the so-called “Sydney School” during the process era (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Martin, 2009) argue that this restricted range of writing, involving “short observations and comments on past experience, and recounts of unproblematic sequences of events” (Martin, 2009, p. 12), did not prepare students for writing assignments across the curriculum as they continued to high school; they certainly did not prepare students adequately for higher education.

Surveys of student writing during the process era indicate that New Zealand students may have focused on a similar restricted range of genres, with similar limiting results, just as many also experienced lack of specific teacher intervention into the mechanics of their writing. Studying data from an international survey of student writing, Lamb (1989) found New Zealand high school students were confident writing narrative, but not confident handling other genres; they were least familiar and least skilled with argument and reflection. He also noted that mechanics of spelling and grammar declined in relation to students' lack of confidence and familiarity with those genres.

Discourses of writing as an error-free product and writing as a process of self-expression may have left legacies for mature-aged students currently entering New Zealand tertiary writing classrooms which complicate their engagement with the writing they will need to do at university. A focus on product may contribute to some of the apprehension these students display towards writing for university. Students taught under a pedagogy focusing on self-expression, with perhaps minimal teacher interference, familiar with only a limited range of genres, might arrive in their university classrooms with few developed skills and restricted schemata for the writing required at university.

Writing apprehension

Mature students are represented in the literature as being apprehensive about writing. Perhaps the greatest fear many bring is a fear of failure because they attribute their previous failures in education to their writing (Navarre Cleary, 2008). Another cause of mature students' writing apprehension Navarre Cleary (2008) notes is their fear of "brain rot", that the gap in their education may have left their brains less plastic and able to cope with learning than traditional-aged students' (see, for example, Kasworm, 2005, and Read et al., 2003). That fear perhaps alludes to memories of cramming for examinations and learning by rote, but it may be exacerbated for many mature students because they remember very little of how to write extended texts, if, indeed, they have ever written any. The above discussion on process pedagogy would seem to support that many will have little idea of how to write for university.

Thus, another specific fear Navarre Cleary (2008) suggests mature-aged students bring to their writing classes is "fear of the unknown" (p. 115), a fear noted in other literature surveyed for this review (for example, Bamber & Tett, 2000, and O' Donnell &

Tobbell, 2007). The nature, style, and structures of academic writing may be unknown to these students – perhaps again recalling the effects of experience with a very limited range of genres during the process era. Mature students emphasise they do not know “the current university expectations for writing” (Vanden Driesen et al., 2008, p. 31). They are also aware that the writing they remember from school and any writing they may have done for work or pleasure during their gap years, writing on work-related courses or in any ventures into education they may have had, may not match writing needed for university. As Navarre Cleary argues, they are well aware that university represents a new culture, yet they have no specific concept of what writing for that culture might involve. Chanock (2001) and Tett (2004) both indicate that unless the expectations of university culture are made explicit for students, writing within that culture may remain what Lillis (2001, p. 68) has described as an “institutional practice of mystery”.

Practices embedded in academic writing, and its associated specific vocabulary, are another cause of apprehension for mature students (Cullity, 2008; Navarre Cleary, 2008; Willans & Seary, 2011). Cullity explains that taken-for-granted academic practices like critical reading and analysing, and instructions to “synthesise” or “cite” or “use Harvard referencing format” may be unknown to new, mature-aged students, as may be specific features of academic literacy, for example, instructions to “analyse, conceptualise and interpret knowledge” (p. 2). She, as do other scholars (Lawrence, 2005; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Navarre Cleary, 2008), argues that the language surrounding academic writing requirements should be demystified.

3.3.6 Discourses of digital literacy

A final Discourse to consider involves digital literacies, pertinent if we recall that literacies are situated practices and that mature students, as demonstrated through this chapter, may not have spent time in contexts using digital practices which match those required in higher education. Some may lack digital literacy (Kantanis, 2002); smart phones were not common in the early years of this research. Others may lack IT skills specific to academia (Devlin et al., 2012; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008). Digital literacy is now assumed by most university processes, from enrolling, to communicating with lecturers and peers, to accessing course information, researching library databases, and writing and submitting assignments. Some years ago, Kantanis (2002) reported that mature-aged students at Monash University identified lack of computer literacy as their

greatest hurdle; this situation does not seem to have changed, particularly for students older than 45 years who may be “disadvantaged” (Tones et al., 2009, p. 522) by their lack of digital skills. Vanden Driesen et al. (2008) argue that universities tend to assume that all mature students will be “IT savvy” (p. 33). In fact, many would seem not to be, as Whitehead (2012) observed.

Even when mature students may be somewhat familiar with using computers, the skills they used in industry or retail or for social networking may be very different from skills required for accessing learning management systems such as Moodle, and for negotiating Word documents. Finding “everything is on the computer” (O’Shea & Lysaght, 2010, p. 2) may surprise and challenge some mature students, and Junco (2005) argues that, particularly for older members of the cohort, learning academic IT practices represents a challenging learning curve. Furthermore, as Lawrence (2005) points out, different university departments, even different courses within the same department, may differ in their use of technology. Those students who are not familiar with an academic use of computers may well take a longer time to access research material and write their assignments (Tones et al., 2009), a likely additional challenge for study group participants.

3.4 Chapter conclusion

This review indicates that although it is often suggested that there may be little homogeneity in any mature-aged group on campus (Cullity, 2006; O’Shea, Lysaght, & Tanner, 2012), there may well be a range of sociocultural and academic factors, intertwined with attitudinal factors, which together distinguish mature-aged students from other groups on campus and contribute to their being authentic beginners in academia. The review also indicates that there may be similarities in some academic, attitudinal and sociocultural factors between New Zealand mature-aged students as depicted in the studies of Barratt (2001), Davey (2002), Kahu (2014), and Whitehead (2012), and their overseas peers.

It would seem from this survey that mature-aged students may arrive in higher education with considerable personal strengths, such as a strong focus on their goals, time management, and support from their families and communities, which might assist them with challenges they experience as they adjust to what this reconnaissance indicates is a largely unknown culture of academia. But the reconnaissance has also

indicated that some students have to negotiate multiple challenges which complicate their transitions to an academic Discourse: juggling non-negotiable commitments, managing lack of support from home communities, and overcoming past negative attitudes to being in an educational environment. In addition, the reconnaissance has revealed that many of the cohort will bring Discourses of teaching, learning, knowledge, writing, and of themselves as learners and writers which are incongruent with Discourses of modern, successful students. Many, too, may face an additional challenge from a lack of appropriate digital skills.

These factors are not new; institutions which recognise these multiple challenges for mature-aged students have already set in place interventions, as introduced in Chapter 2, to prepare these students for their first semesters and beyond. However, many of these interventions are not available, or not targeted towards mature-aged students in New Zealand. We could recall Ausubel's (1968) statement at the beginning of this chapter, that in order to teach effectively, we must know what our students know. We should be wary of assuming that mature-aged learners in our classrooms share characteristics with school-leaver students and will immediately be able to engage with their learning. This is a gap which the study group at the centre of this thesis was designed to address for mature students in New Zealand.

Chapter 4 Conceptual framework

Developing a theoretically-informed pedagogy and practice for the mature participants in the study group was a key part of this research. The core concept informing that development is that learning is a situated process (Lave & Wenger, 1991), a social process of participation in a community (J. S. Brown & Adler, 2008; Northedge, 2003a, 2003b). The concomitant view of teaching conceives of teaching as a process of enabling that participation (Northedge, 2002). Pring (2012), for example, discussing Stenhouse's (1975) theorising of teaching, argues that an effective teacher will facilitate access to a knowledge community by bridging the different knowledge cultures of students and the target knowledge community. Within this sociocultural framework, the tutor's role becomes one of mediating the practices of a community for newcomers.

Relating the concept of community to the context of this research, we may understand that universities embody, as Read et al. (2003, p. 261) and Cullity (2008, p. 1), suggest, an "academic culture". Reconnaissance from literature that preceded the action of this research indicated that they represent an "unfamiliar knowledge community" (Northedge, 2003, p. 17) to many students. As the reconnaissance chapters of this thesis (Chapters 2 and 3) indicate, it would appear that an overriding need of mature-aged students such as those enrolling at the university in this study, who may arrive at university with many life-skills but without the experience of targeted preparation, and with little familiarity with academic culture, is to become sufficiently acquainted with the worldviews and values and the ways of being and doing of academia to write as insiders to that culture. That identification with a worldview and with ways of being and doing are explained in Gee's concept of a Discourse (1989, 2001, 2015) which became central for informing pedagogy for the study group that is at the centre of this research.

This chapter first explores Gee's concept of Discourse and then provides a brief overview of key principles from sociocultural pedagogies and practice with adult learners that influenced the design of the study group.

4.1 Big D Discourse

Gee's notion of big D Discourse (1989, 2001, 2015), although it is a somewhat slippery concept, attempts to bring together notions of language use and practices, participation and membership in a social grouping, and identity and recognition as a certain sort of person who belongs to a social group and does things in ways appropriate for that

community. It embodies an understanding that language use and literacies are situated practices within an “affinity group” (Gee, 2000-2001, p. 100) which shares a particular world-view and that literacy is something people choose to do in order to position themselves and be recognised as a particular sort of person, an insider in that community (L. Bartlett, 2007).

Gee (2015) distinguishes his conceptualisation of a big-D Discourse from the notion of small-d discourse which is applied in various ways in different contexts. He explains one application for small-d discourse, when it is used to denote “language-in-use or connected stretches of language that make sense, like conversations, stories, reports, arguments, essays and so forth” (p. 171). In this thesis, discourse spelt with a lower-case d has that intended meaning.

A broader conceptualisation of discourse includes the social contexts and purposes of language-in-use among goal-focused groups of people. Swales (1990, 2016), for example, explicated this usage in the concept of a discourse community, which he described as “a largely heterogeneous, socio-rhetorical assemblage of people who broadly share occupational or recreational experiences, goals, and interests” (2016, p. 69). A yet further application uses the concept of discourse as a basis for textual analysis identifying implications of “the discursive reproduction of dominance relation between groups” (Kress, 1990, p. 84), whether according to gender, race, ideology, education, or politics. Kress (1990) and van Dijk (1995), for example, and Gee in other contexts (Gee, 2008) use the concept in this way.

Gee’s multifaceted concept of big-D Discourse applies on both social and individual levels. Concerning the social level, Gee has variously theorised a Discourse as a “social practice” (1989, p. 7), a community, or an affinity grouping (Gee, 2012). Discourses may develop around a shared interest or focus (St Clair & Phipps, 2008), such as internet gaming or hobbies. Gee (2015) also cites social groupings such as professions, disciplines, cultures, ethnic groups, activity systems, or communities of practice as examples of Discourses. People who belong to these Discourses identify themselves and recognise fellow members by their shared language use and social practices. They also recognise as outsiders those who do not share those ways of being and doing. Similarly, outsiders to a Discourse are able to recognise both outsiders and insiders by their ways of being and doing.

Gee points out that shared language conventions are a central component of social groupings, whether those groupings be referred to as “cultures (broadening the term), communities of practice, speech communities, discourse communities, activity systems, actor-actant networks, thought collectives . . . professions [or] . . . institutions” (2015, np). These groupings share language practices for the purpose, he suggests, of acting out an identity.

As social groupings, Discourses have incumbent worldviews, perspectives through which members view and interpret the world (Gee, 2012). Gee (1989) explains that the first worldview we all acquire is through our initial socialisation in homes and the earliest communities with which we associate: our primary Discourse. Within our primary Discourses, we acquire our knowledge of what is valuable in our community, along with its appropriate social practices.

The social practices, or ways “of being in the world” (Gee, 1997, p. xv) embodied in a Discourse are where the concept of Discourse applies on an individual level. They include language, along with “combinations” (Gee, 2015, p. 2) or “coordinations” (Gee, 1997, p. xv) of values, actions, and clothing valued within a particular community (2015). As a member of a community, we acquire “an identity kit which comes complete with . . . instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognise” (1989, p. 6). Thus, on an individual level, we can see that Discourses involve a sense of identity and belonging.

Through our lifetimes, Gee (1989, 2001, 2015) explains, we acquire numerous secondary Discourses by immersion in different social groupings, particularly, Gee argues, through such institutions as schooling. Each of these additional Discourses has its own specialised language, valued ways of thinking, being and doing, and perhaps specialised worldviews. We enter and leave different secondary Discourses on any day as we move between home, school, work, and recreational activities. When we function comfortably in any Discourse, speaking its language, knowing its values and behaviours, we have acquired its literacy.

Gee has defined literacy as “fluency in a secondary Discourse” (1989, p. 9). In our secondary Discourses we share a literacy, a specialised, distinctive way of “speaking/listening” and “writing/reading” and of engaging with “various objects, tools and technologies” with other Discourse members (Gee, 2015). This principle is

demonstrated in an example from the health care community (Northedge, 2003a) which indicates how specialised language use within a Discourse may complicate interpretations of text for outsiders:

The boundary between the medical and the social is a shifting one, constructed in complex ways that reflect both institutional and ideological factors. (Twigg, 1998, p. 227). (Northedge, 2003a, p. 171)

Explaining why this text may be misinterpreted by novices, Northedge elaborates on the words, “medical” and “social” which may have very different meanings in everyday discourse – perhaps indicating something to do with doctor’s visits and parties – from their meanings in the debates in the care sector. He points out that two concepts in the text, the “boundary between the medical and the social” and the “institutional and ideological factors”, make “immediate sense to experienced members of the care community” (p. 171) whose daily work takes place in the context of local and political disputes about funding, profiteering, and commercialisation. Northedge emphasises that for novices to the care sector to fully engage with texts like this requires more than a dictionary because of the exophoric references to the culture of care. For novices who do not yet have that cultural knowledge, such texts are almost meaningless.

Using the term Discourses for social groupings is particularly appropriate for this study because, Gee explains (2002, p. 170) Discourses may be “partly defined in relationships of alignment and conflict” with other Discourses. In these relationships, Discourses communicate, or discourse, with each other, as in the above example. This notion of communication, and perhaps contestation (Gee, 2008) between Discourses, was a key reason for incorporating the concept of Discourse as the theoretical framework for the study group rather than one of the other social groupings Gee mentions above.

In his theorising about Discourses communicating with other Discourses, Gee explains how some Discourses mesh more easily with schooling, and consequently with an academic Discourse (or Discourses), than others. This concept reflects a cultural distance between social groups that has been noted (and described in different terms) in different contexts. Haggis (2006), for example, from the UK, notes that applying a social model to the problems experienced by non-traditional students shifts the cause of perceived individual student deficiencies to an understanding that the difficulties these students experience arise from differences in and lack of familiarity with “values,

attitudes and practices” of society – in Haggis’s example, with academia (p. 526). Gee, perhaps, would suggest that these students are not yet familiar with an academic Discourse, with ways of being and doing in academia.

The notion of cultural or social incongruence has also been explored in FYHE circles in Australia where Devlin (2011, p. 939) uses the term “sociocultural incongruence” to indicate a lack of familiarity with academic culture and practices that many students from low socioeconomic families experience (see 3.2.4). Such sociocultural incongruence resonates somewhat with the concept of “cultural capital” as Lareau (1987) explains it, again alluding to characteristics of students whose home backgrounds provide little acquaintance with academic culture. Social or cultural distance has been acknowledged as a factor which may complicate some non-traditional students’ efforts to engage with academia (McKay & Devlin, 2014).

Gee (2015) expands the notion of incongruity between Discourses in terms of literacy practices. Particularly referring to school literacies, he draws on Heath (1982), to suggest that social groups who have close association with formal education incorporate schooling practices into their primary Discourses. He provides examples of parents in such homes reading with young children and seeking clarification and substantiation about claims those children made from their reading. He names this process as “filtering” (2002, p. 161), although more recently (2015), he has used Lareau’s (2011, p. 1) concept of “cultivation”.

Gee (2015) suggests that the practice of filtering (or cultivation) facilitates acquisition of school Discourses by children from homes which value formal education because it enables them to acquire ways of approaching text compatible with school Discourses. He extends the concept to students entering academia. Those who come to university with a literacy developed through a background of filtering or cultivation, and a consequential relatively smooth passage through schooling, may enter higher education as what he terms “false beginners” (see 3.2.4). Such students appear to be newcomers, but they already have some conversance with the language, values, and practices of the new culture; practices of the new academic Discourse link smoothly to their existing practices. In contrast, students who have not been party to such filtering or mediating enter as authentic beginners for whom the language, values, and practices of the new culture are unfamiliar and finding connections may prove difficult.

A lack of familiarity with academic culture has been identified as a characteristic many mature-aged students bring with them to university (3.2.4). This would suggest that study group participants might find it difficult to establish connections between ways of being and doing in their familiar Discourses and ways of being and doing in an academic Discourse. It suggests a need for a pedagogy within the study group which might replicate filtering (Gee, 2015), or cultivation (Lareau, 2011) or, in other terms, might mediate aspects of academic culture for newcomers. Participants would first need to become aware of characteristics of Discourses they bring, and then be enabled to draw connections between the familiar and the new. Some of the exploration within study group practice would be to develop such a pedagogy.

Importantly, for practice and pedagogy in the study group, Gee's conceptualisation of Discourse offers a holistic approach to contextual learning. It is possible, he argues, to acquire, or master additional Discourses. This point informed the selection and development of a pedagogy within the study group. In all his theorising, Gee (1989, 2002, 2015) argues that Discourses cannot be taught, they must be acquired through being situated, or immersed, in that Discourse. While immersion is a natural process, often slow, there are ways in which acquisition may be hastened. This, Gee explains, adds a "pedagogical bite" (2002, p. 125) to his theory. Referring to Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of a community of practice, Gee substantiates his argument: acquisition may be facilitated by insiders fluent in the Discourse apprenticing newcomers to its social practices and by instances of carefully selected explicit teaching:

Any efficacious pedagogy must be a judicious mixture of immersion in a community of practice (Lave, 1996) and overt focusing and scaffolding from "masters" or "more advanced peers" (Vygotsky, 1987) who focus learners on the most fruitful sorts of patterns in their experience ("fruitful for developing the cultural models that are used by the community of practice to which the learner is being "apprenticed"). (2002, p. 125)

As well as his reference to Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of situated learning within a community of practice (CoP), Gee here alludes to Vygotsky's notion of the "more advanced peer" who is able to unlock, or mediate, cultural models for learners (or apprentices) through a negotiated process in what he termed the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90) and the notion of scaffolding originating with

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976). The concepts of situated learning and collaboration with peers are also referred to by J. S. Brown and Adler (2008) (cited in 1.4.1) in their discussion of study group practice.

While these are broad sociocultural principles rather than specific practices, they were incorporated into the pedagogy of the study group. The following sections of this chapter develop these principles of situated learning of community practices, the role of a more advanced peer, the use of cultural tools, working within the zone of proximal development, and the practices of brokering and scaffolding, and indicate how they might be applied in the study group.

4.2 Learning as participation in community practices

Gee alludes to Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of situated learning within a CoP. A CoP is a group of people with a shared focus and a shared identity, as Wenger explains:

[A CoP] has an identity as a community, and thus shapes the identities of its members. A community of practice exists because it produces a shared practice as members engage in a collective process of learning. (1998, p. 4).

Study group workshops were predicated on the recognition that disciplines within academia are CoPs (or Discourses) and that ways of constructing knowledge through writing, and language use, are specific to different disciplines (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Hyland, 2008; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). We saw Northedge's example of specialised, disciplinary language use above (4.1). Writing is also recognised as specific to disciplines.

The notion of writing as a situated practice has been developed since Lea and Street (1998), using the descriptor 'academic literacies', demonstrated that rather than universities employing a single, generic "academic discourse" (Bizzell, 1982, p. 192), practices in academia differ across disciplines. Hyland (2008), for example, sums up this understanding: "It is now increasingly accepted that academic knowledge is closely related to the social practices of academic communities, and particularly to their discourses" (p. 1). Northedge (2002) maintains a similar argument, alluding to the knowledge-construction function of writing within disciplines: "I take higher-level knowledge to be constituted by the discourse exchanged within communities of specialists" (p. 252).

Disciplinary writing practices differ in the ways in which writers report knowledge, make their main points, support those points, and construct arguments (Bartholomae, 1985; Carter, 2007; Chanock, 2008; Hyland, 2007). Demonstrating this, Hyland (2008) explains differences in research articles from eight different disciplines. He discusses the social interactions involved in such features as hedging, authorial stance and engaging readers through assumptions and reference to other texts. Elsewhere (Hyland, 2003), he writes of the practice of “dialogicity”, authors “presuppos[ing] and respond[ing] to” an active audience (p. 23). In another text (Hyland, 2000), he analyses different ways authors carry out those interactions, showing how writers choose particular texts to cite for different purposes and that these different ways of writing and interacting with previous scholarship and with current readers are clearly specific to different disciplines.

Academic communities use forms, or genres, in different ways (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Hyland, 2008; Samraj, 2005). Considerable research in genre theory has built on Miller’s (1984) proposition that genre is social action, “typified rhetorical ways of interacting within recurring situations” (p. 153). Genres are recognised as texts responding to different situations, whose forms may be flexible, open to negotiation and to authorial agency (Paré, 2014). A report for one discipline may not take the same form as a report required in another because it serves a different social purpose (Carter, 2007). Carter (2007) observes that at the large US university at which he instructs, three writing “metagenres” predominate: “problem solving”, particularly used in the sciences and engineering, but also in business, marketing, and other disciplines; “empirical inquiry”, again predominantly practised in the sciences, but used in any courses requiring laboratory reports; and “research from sources” (p. 394). He shows that there are considerable variations in the ways these metagenres are used. Samraj (2005) focuses on research reports from two disciplines to demonstrate how, while they are superficially the same genre, they differ in form and structure because they fulfil different social purposes.

Study group participants, although mostly studying humanities and social sciences, would be students in diverse disciplines. Study group activities would need to draw from approaches to writing pedagogy that might alert them to the notion that academic writing is specific to disciplinary communities. Purposes, practices and forms vary, and,

perhaps contrary to students' anticipations, are not necessarily transferable from one course to another.

4.2.1 Community artefacts

The notion of community artefacts is central to sociocultural theory. Wenger (1998) theorises that as members of a community learn together, they use and produce artefacts pertinent to their community. Newcomers learn to produce these community artefacts under the guidance of experienced members who mediate appropriate practices through a process of negotiation and dialogue. The key cultural tool in this dialogic process is accessible language. In a functioning CoP, newcomers are recognised as legitimate participants as soon as they enter the community even though they are not yet experienced in its cultural practices and may require considerable assistance as they produce artefacts. This is the notion of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). One way of being recognised as an insider to a CoP is when new members produce artefacts for themselves, albeit initially with guidance and support.

L. Bartlett (2005) illustrates this concept from her literacy work in Brazil, clearly linking the concept of producing a cultural artefact with identifying as an insider to a community. She explains how a woman registering to vote made some important choices about the literacy she used in order to identify herself as a certain sort of person. Despite the woman's only-developing skill in forming the letters of her name, she declined to use a thumbprint, a badge of limited literacy, to enrol. She chose the more difficult task of writing her own name with a pen. Thus, she proclaimed her emerging acquisition of an additional literacy, and, with that, an identity aligned with the educated people in her country, a person with intelligence above that of the despised "donkey" (p. 63) of an illiterate person.

As consciously using community artefacts is closely associated with identifying as an insider to that community, it may involve a shift in identity. O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) applied this notion as they traced the process of mature students becoming more central participants in an academic culture as they began to "adopt and perform the valued practices" of that community (p. 315). They observed that the process of becoming an insider necessitated some re-negotiation of students' identities as they took on those practices:

In transition, the notion of identity is in the foreground because the new and strange practices force reconsideration of practice and therefore shifts in identity trajectories. (p. 315)

The need for taking on new practices and renegotiating identity resonates with the concept of a Discourse as a social grouping in which insiders consciously choose ways of doing things which identify them as insiders. In addition, understanding that academic writing was a cultural artefact which participants would need to produce in order to be recognised as belonging in academia was relevant for both practice and pedagogy in the study group.

Gee's statement that a community's values and culture are "instantiated" in its artefacts and its tools (2001, p. 720) suggested it would be valuable to use texts as both cultural artefacts and cultural tools (see 4.2.3) in the study group. As cultural artefacts, academic texts portray many of the values of academia in general and of specific disciplines. They embody knowledge being made in different disciplines (Chanock, 2008); texts may demonstrate first, that knowledge is constructed rather than something static to be repeated (Hendricks & Quinn, 2000). They are also likely to show how that knowledge is constructed (Hyland, 2008). Chanock (2008) suggests that academic texts demonstrate which topics have current interest-value in a discipline, and how those topics may be debated; in addition, they may present alternative viewpoints on contended issues in different disciplines.

Gee (2002, cited above) alludes to Vygotsky's (1978, p. 86) notion of a "more capable peer" (MCP) who may assist in the process of acquiring new practices. An MCP does this by using cultural tools to mediate the practices of the new community for newcomers, by providing scaffolding through the process, and by enabling newcomers to make connections between the known and the new by working with them in what Vygotsky (p. 90) termed the "zone of proximal development". These sociocultural principles are discussed in the following sections.

4.2.2 The MCP and mediation

Mediation is a concept central to sociocultural approaches to learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Wertsch, 1979/2008). As he searched for a social theory of learning, Vygotsky (1978) reasoned that higher mental functions were socially initiated by someone more knowledgeable in the culture, the MCP (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). In the

process of mediation, the MCP ascertains the developmental level of the learner and decides on a learning task currently impossible for the learner to achieve alone. She then mediates the activity using cultural tools or artefacts (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Wertsch, 1979/2008). Lantolf and Thorne (2007) explain that although the MCP initiates the activity, and learners, in the early stages of the process are dependent upon her support to enable them to complete the task, the intention throughout is that the learner will eventually internalise the process and be able to perform the task unaided; through this negotiated learning process, the MCP gradually shifts the locus of control for the activity to the learner until the learner can carry out the activity on her own.

4.2.3 Cultural tools

Sociocultural pedagogies involve the use of cultural tools which shape thought within the culture (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). Language, which must be understood in the same way by the learner and the MCP, is the primary cultural tool identified by Vygotsky (Wertsch, 1979/2008). Using language accessible to participants to mediate some of the language specific to academia would be a key feature of the study group. Lantolf and Thorne (2007) include numbers or visual aids as cultural tools, and other tools may be “objects, symbols, narratives, or images inscribed by the collective attribution of meaning” (L. Bartlett, 2005, p. 3). In the study group, academic texts, key shapers of thoughts and values in academic culture, as noted above (4.2.1), would also be used as cultural tools.

4.2.4 The ZPD

The dialogic, negotiated mediation of a skill takes place within a metaphorical space, named by Vygotsky (1978, p. 90) as the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Wertsch, 1979/2008). The ZPD, however, is a somewhat problematic concept because, as Kozulin (2004, p. 6) explains, Vygotsky did not theorise the notion. His references to it are imprecise, as a “space” or a “distance”:

The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

Despite the imprecision implicit in the notion of a space, in whatever way the ZPD has been theorised by different scholars it would seem to have some key components,

particularly the notion that within the space, development is initiated by an MCP and carried out through a process of collaboration and negotiated activity between the learner or learners and the MCP. Lantolf (2011) suggests that the negotiated activity itself is the ZPD, but also that in that zone, or space, or activity, “mediators do things *with* rather than *for* children” (p. 29, emphasis in original). In this study, I have used the concept of the ZPD as a space or gap in which negotiation takes place between what students can do on their own and what they can do with negotiated help.

Two other observations about the concept of a ZPD are applicable to pedagogy in the study group. First, the notion of a ZPD may be applied to both individuals and to groups (Kozulin, 2004). Kozulin (1998) conceptualises the ZPD in a school setting in a way that could be applied in a study group, as “a zone in which scientific concepts introduced by teachers interact with spontaneous concepts preexistent in children” (p. 49). A second notion is that development within any ZPD has an upper limit; where an “individual has no ZPD for the object of study, then mediation is useless” (Lantolf, 2011, p. 31). This latter point emphasises the importance of the ability of the MCP to identify the capabilities and characteristics of their students in order to help them make connections between what they know and can do now, and what they will be able to do with the mediation of the MCP.

Concerning study group pedagogy therefore, it would be important to identify the ZPD of participants and the group and then to work collaboratively in that zone. It would be essential to establish learning as a dialogic, negotiated process initiated by the MCP and to design activities to be just beyond the learners’ current skill levels. Most importantly, for learners who might be unfamiliar with even generic academic language, and with the specific language of academic writing and their other disciplines, it would be important to ensure that language, and the concepts denoted by it, were accessible to all participants. Finally, it would also be important to gradually withdraw the mediation afforded by the MCP in the study group, and to shift the locus of control for an activity from the MCP to learners as they developed in skill and confidence (Lantolf, 2011). Beyond the bounds of study group meetings, participants would assume control of their writing as they worked on their assignments.

4.2.5 Brokering

One sociocultural concept to which Gee does not refer, yet which would also be central to study group practice, is the practice of brokering. Wenger (1998) used the concept of a broker to describe a person who crosses community boundaries, moving between communities and able to interpret the values or practices of one community to another. He describes the job of brokering as one which “involves processes of translation, coordination, and alignment between perspectives” (p. 109). Those perspectives may be cultural or ethnic – or, as Gee (2015) might suggest, might arise from different Discourses. As Perry (2009) notes, brokers may bridge cultural differences. The desired outcome of brokering is understanding, particularly understanding features of a new culture. Papen (2010) indicates that brokers may contribute to that cultural understanding, as they “straddle different contexts . . . by writing, reading, talking, or acting”.

Brokering has also been practised in situations in which learners need to acquire an additional situational literacy, for example, when marginalised learners encounter new contexts requiring new literacies (Perry, 2009). Successful literacy brokering results in understanding which then enables learners to function in a new context. Brokering is often informal and spontaneous, as Perry describes from her experience with refugee language learners, a “process of seeking and/or providing informal assistance about some aspect of a given text or literacy practice” (2009, p. 254).

Although Perry and Papen researched in cross-cultural contexts, the concept of brokering is useful to apply to the study group since we have established that academia is recognised as a culture, or a Discourse (or as multiple Discourses). While the concept of brokering may seem similar to mediating, and at times, Papen (2010) seems to conflate the two concepts, in this thesis mediating refers to a purposeful process initiated by an MCP, with a desired outcome of independence for learners. Brokering refers to any process, possibly informal and unplanned, but perhaps formal, in which a practice may be interpreted or made accessible enabling understanding by another person or the group.

In planning the study group, I envisaged that that informal cultural or literacy brokering might occur during chat times (5.4.6), when study group participants would be able to introduce any issues currently topical for them. It would be likely that I, as the more

experienced insider to academic culture, would be the broker, but chat times would also allow opportunity for brokering from fellow-participants.

4.2.6 Scaffolding

The concept of scaffolding as a practice within the ZPD did not originate with Vygotsky, although Pea (2004) suggests the notion was foreshadowed in his concept of the ZPD. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) introduced the term as they described the assistance afforded by a tutor for a learner, particularly through such principles as keeping the learner on task and gradually withdrawing support as the learner becomes more independent.

Scaffolding is now widely recommended as a pedagogical practice, particularly for tertiary education, in the context of the FYHE. At times, as Pea (2004) explains, “It has become unclear in its significance” (p. 423) and been applied rather loosely, to describe any type of assistance, including web-based support or lists of instructions provided by an expert for a novice (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Wilson & Devereux, 2014).

Devlin et al. (2012) provide a broad explanation of the concept of scaffolded learning in the context of the FYHE, particularly noting its purpose of contributing towards learner independence:

The term ‘scaffolded learning’ takes its name from the idea of a support structure that is gradually removed as the central entity becomes strong enough to stand on its own. (p. 41)

Note that they use the word “tailored”, indicating the need for careful design:

Scaffolded learning refers to learning that is tailored to meet student needs, helps students reach their learning goals and provides the necessary degree of support to assist students in their learning. (p. 41)

Scaffolding that is not a good fit for a learner, for which a ZPD is too wide, is not likely to be effective; it may have disastrous results for non-confident learners. Navarre Cleary (2012) describes an instance of such non-tailored support provided for adult learners in an introductory writing course for returning adult students at a US university:

Sam’s assignment did attempt to scaffold her writing with a series of questions asking her to identify a learning experience, describe it, reflect upon it, and

generalize about it. The question designed to help her generalize asked about the “theories, ideas, concepts, or principles” informing her experience. Her teacher told her to “write a full paragraph. This is where you have to talk about the theory behind dance.” However, Sam had no idea what was meant by “theory”: “I don’t even know what those theories are. I don’t even know what they’re talking about.” (p. 367)

This example exemplifies important principles concerning scaffolding and non-traditional students. Navarre Cleary (2012, p. 367) explains that scaffolding was provided for Sam through the assignment instructions with clear commands to “identify”, “describe”, “reflect”, and “generalise”. However, it seems that in this instance, the instructor’s theory of the learner was possibly generic; the language of the scaffolding denoted situated concepts Sam had not yet met: “I don’t even know what they’re talking about”. Rather than supporting her learning, the intended scaffolding emphasised to Sam that she did not fit in an academic environment. Her anxiety about writing, which had already caused “mouth sores” and “muscle spasms”, increased. She dropped out of college before the end of her first semester. In the study group in this research, it would be important to ensure that scaffolding afforded for participants was at an appropriate level.

Concerning course design, van Lier (2007, p. 61) advocates designing scaffolding on three time scales in order to provide a framework through which students may achieve mastery:

- Macro: planning (a syllabus, a chain of tasks, a project, etc.) over a long term period
- Meso: planning the steps of a particular activity or task
- Micro: moment-to-moment interactional work

These levels would be incorporated into study group design. On the macro level of the content and structure of the study group I would be providing carefully designed, cumulative activities so that participants and I would be working in the ZPD. On the meso level, steps would be designed within each activity. On the micro, the informal or “contingent” level, scaffolding would be provided by questioning, encouraging, or

prompting that seemed appropriate at the time (van Lier, 2007; Wilson & Devereux, 2014).

Wood et al. (1976) suggest roles for a tutor (or, we could say, an MCP) in scaffolding:

- Acting as a “verbal prodder” (p. 95)
- Providing “direct interventions” into the process (p. 96)
- Modelling by means of “demonstrations, directions, corrections” or “explicit guidance” (p. 96)
- Confirming (p. 96)
- Directing by “marking critical features” (p. 96)

As with establishing the ZPD, so with scaffolding, it is important to understand the needs of learners. Wood et al. (1976) stress the importance of this understanding in order to construct the scaffolding at an appropriate level. They write of tutors “being able to generate hypotheses about the learner’s hypotheses” (p. 97) in order to tailor the learning experience: “the tutor’s theory of the learner is so crucial to the transactional nature of tutoring” (p. 96).

Other forms of scaffolding operating in the study group would be collective scaffolding and the co-construction of texts. Collective scaffolding is a perspective which recognises that in a collaborative situation in which learners support each other the group itself may provide the scaffolding and the mediation usually provided by the MCP (Donato, 1994). Co-construction may involve a group of learners, or learners together with an MCP (Wingate, 2016), working together to write a text.

Key scaffolding principles applicable to the study group therefore, were:

- Activities would be planned to develop incrementally over the macro time period of a semester.
- Tasks would be broken into teachable steps for the meso level.
- Activities would be designed at an appropriate distance from participants’ knowledge and skills, initially as indicated by reconnaissance through literature, to be within the ZPD of the group. Activities would be modified if emerging data suggested the ZPD had been estimated incorrectly.
- Tasks would be repeated to allow learners to achieve mastery.

I envisaged that the main forms of scaffolding in study group activities would be questioning, verbal prodding, and modelling. Students would be able to access other forms of scaffolding for their writing from the generic supports provided by the university. Most participants would also be enrolled in the major writing intervention, the academic writing course (2.3.1); in addition, they would be able to access the more permanent forms of support provided by their disciplines in study guides, or available on the university website or from Student Learning.

4.3 Reflection

In framing practice for the study group, it would be important to keep in mind Gee's suggestion that Discourses may be "partly defined in relationships of alignment and conflict" (2002, p. 170). Reconnaissance for this research (see Chapters 2 and 3) indicated that participants would be very likely to bring Discourses perhaps more in conflict with academic Discourses than aligned with them. The example from Rose (see 2.5) shows that he was aware of possible Discourses the veterans brought, and of Discourses of academia, and thus of possible areas of conflict and misalignment. His story (Rose, 1989, 2014) shows how he collaborated with the men to enable them to put aside inappropriate ways of being and doing and to take on new ones. His project, however, involved students attending classes full time for several months; an extended time that would allow areas of incongruence to emerge gradually. The study group would not have that extended time. Thus another facet of the exploration in the study group would be to find a way in which features of familiar Discourses might be identified. From there, we would be able to determine how those familiar Discourses aligned or conflicted with academic Discourses. One possible way suggested through the literature would be through practising reflection.

The process of reflection, widely practised in adult education (Mezirow, 1997), emerged through the literature as a possible method of enabling participants to identify features of Discourses they brought and then to then gain some distance from those Discourses as they acquired practices more appropriate to their new community. Zepke (2011) suggests that, through reflection, adult learners may be enabled to critique and deconstruct their previous educational experiences. Reflection may empower students to then adapt to different ways of learning and teaching and to take a more critical approach to their learning (Francis, 1995; Quigley, 1997). In a rather different setting, in which learners needed to re-negotiate their attitudes towards learning, Crowther,

Maclachlan, and Tett (2010) found that such reflection helped the adult learners with whom they worked to re-engage with learning in new contexts.

Reflection with adult learners may be practised in different ways. Crowther et al. employed a collaborative approach to reflection. Navarre Cleary (2011) encouraged her writing workshop students to practise reflection in their writing. Francis (1995), in a very different context of pre-service teacher education, suggests instructors guide students through stages of reflection to apply in their writing. Through those stages, students may progress from description through critique and into proposing action.

The identified benefits of practising reflection suggested that incorporating the stages suggested by Francis (1995, p. 232) might enable participants to identify characteristics of Discourses they brought which did not align with academic Discourses:

1. Describe – uncritically describe what happened.
2. Inform – what does this mean? Why might it have been like this?
3. Confront – how did I come to be this way? What is the broad social, historical context?
4. Reconstruct – how might I now do things differently? Are there other ways of doing things?
5. Challenge – with this new knowledge, what will I now do about this?

Collective reflection may also be a means of enabling adult learners to develop confidence. Francis (1995) suggests that as adult students pause to identify what they do know and the skills they have, they are able to identify that they are indeed making progress. Bamber and Tett (2000) and O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) write of the value their participants gleaned from times of collective reflection which allowed them to share difficulties they were experiencing with their writing and with negotiating wider aspects of academic literacy and academic culture. Students in those studies particularly valued finding they were not alone, nor unusual, in experiencing apprehension and difficulties with negotiating academic discourse, ways of thinking, accessing, and critiquing knowledge, and an unfamiliar culture. Collective reflection enabled them to learn from each other's experiences. Reconnaissance had indicated, too, that as many mature-aged learners do not have robust learner identities, the opportunity to succeed vicariously would be important.

4.3.1 Succeeding vicariously

One benefit of collective reflection which would seem to have direct relevance for mature students who may well bring fragile learner identities and lack confidence in education is that through it, students may appropriate others' success. Vicarious success, resulting from observing achievements of similar peers, is a recognised way of gaining academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993, 2012; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Similar peers provide social modelling (Bandura, 2012) through that process. As learners see others they deem to be similar to themselves gaining control of their emotions towards learning, and succeeding with new skills, they gain the confidence that it is possible for them, too, to succeed (Habel, 2009). For students with fragile learning identities, convinced since their schooldays that they are not good learners, the self-efficacy that may be gained through times of reflective discussion could be vital for their transitions to university. Chat times (5.4.6) would provide opportunities for collective reflection.

So far, this chapter has outlined the concept of Discourses as social groupings with particular ways of being and doing which identify practitioners as insiders, and it has overviewed sociocultural and pedagogical principles which might hasten the process through which newcomers immersed in a Discourse might perform as insiders. In order to support study group participants as they learned to write in ways that identified them as insiders, I also needed to identify a writing pedagogy that recognised literacies and writing as situated practices yet would provide explicit instruction in ways that participants might be able to transfer to their different disciplines. The pedagogy would need to be text-based, to allow us to analyse texts and identify the cultural values displayed in them. It would also need to employ the principles of working in the ZPD, of scaffolding, and the key role of the MCP through that process. While various approaches to teaching writing could be adapted to incorporate those principles, a scaffolded genre approach, such as Wingate and Tribble (2012) have developed, provided a model of writing pedagogy on which study group practice could draw.

4.4 A genre approach

An effective writing pedagogy, Johns (2008, p. 239) emphasises, is one which does not “train” students to follow a pattern, or “recipe” (Freadman, 1987, p. 42), but which “educates” (Johns, 2008, p. 239) students to focus on the purposes of their writing and organise their text in line with its purpose. One particular genre approach, a scaffolded genre pedagogy, initially developed in Australia, but now modified and applied in many

contexts and countries (Johns, 2008; Wingate, 2016; Wingate & Tribble, 2012), has been used effectively to educate students to develop awareness of purposes, forms, language, and conventions of different academic genres that they may use for their own texts.

A scaffolded genre pedagogy (Wingate, 2016) is one of a spectrum of approaches to writing emphasising genres or forms. At one end of the spectrum such approaches, perhaps particularly in study skills writing courses (Wingate, 2006), tend to emphasise training, teaching genres as recipes, or forms to fill with writing (Freadman, 1987). At the other end are pedagogies advocating no explicit teaching, but which encourage students to engage in research into types of writing used in their disciplines (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Hyland, 2003; Johns, 2011).

Whether or not to teach genre has become a contentious issue in writing pedagogies because, as noted in 2.1.1, students may then attempt to apply a single form – or recipe – to any writing which has been required rather than designing their texts according to their purposes (Artemeva, 2005; Freedman, 1999). Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) and others, for example, Johns (2011), have developed approaches to teaching genre which require students to research appropriate forms for their writing rather than teaching forms explicitly. However, while those pedagogies may be appropriate for students who have some experience with writing, they may not be suitable for students who arrive at university with little or no such experience.

If we consider how genres work in practice, we can see why a scaffolded approach is very suitable for newcomers to academia. Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) explain (as does Johns, discussed in 4.4) that genres work for students as they prepare their writing by providing schemata, including knowledge of characteristic forms and conventions, on which students may draw. Students develop schemata through repeated practice with particular forms. In this process, when a form such as *essay* or *report* is named, students recall, from their experience with that form, some of its characteristic features, and some of the purposes for which it might be used.

Johns (1997), however, in an observation which resonates with the reconnaissance for this research, notes that students may encounter difficulties with writing when their recall of genres is imprecise because of few previous experiences with particular text forms. Since reconnaissance indicated that mature-aged students may be unfamiliar with

requirements for academic writing, they may not have that schema knowledge upon which to draw. A scaffolded genre approach, however, assumes little or no prior knowledge of forms; thus, it was adopted as the most appropriate writing pedagogy for the study group.

4.4.1 The learning cycle

The scaffolded genre approach is based around a learning cycle developed by Rothery (1996) and widely used since at all levels of education (Wingate, 2016; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). The cycle progresses through stages of collaborative discussion of the purpose for a text, to deconstruction and analysis of the text, to collaborative co-construction of a text in a similar genre. The final stage, the aim of the cycle, is students' independent construction of texts in the target genre. This stage, for study group participants, would take place outside the context of the group as they wrote their assignments for their disciplines. Within study group meetings, we would work through the preliminary stages.

4.4.2 Applying the learning cycle

As Rothery (1996) proposed the cycle, it is not lock-step. Students may enter or leave at any stage, depending upon their prior knowledge; in addition, stages may be repeated where necessary.

In this study, stages of the learning cycle would be aligned with stages of a writing process and applied in the design of the study group. This is visualised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 The learning cycle as it was applied in study group pedagogy

Stage of learning cycle	Writing process	Concept	Interpreted into practice
Discussion of purpose for writing	Identifying purpose	Good writing fits its purpose – is a situated practice (Chanock, 2001, 2008; Henderson & Hirst, 2007; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001).	Examination of assignment prompts from different disciplines brought by participants. Collaborative mapping out of a possible structure to address one prompt.
Collaborative deconstruction and discussion	Reading strategies Evaluation of sources	Literacies are situated; different literacies encompass different values, ways of thinking, ways of approaching and supporting knowledge (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998).	Collaborative reading of passages from different disciplinary journals on the topic of mature-aged students.

Collaborative co-construction	Brainstorming, evaluating information, synthesising, inserting sources	Effective pedagogy is that in which a learning task is situated just beyond what students are able to do without assistance (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007), within their ZPD.	MCP will initiate a learning activity, and then mediate the activity using cultural tools or artefacts. The prime tool in the study group is accessible language (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Wertsch, 1979/2008).
Collaborative co-construction	Ordering information into a paragraph	Scaffolding is built in on the macro and meso levels and inserted on the micro level during an activity (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998; van Lier, 2007; Wood et al., 1976); Guided discovery pedagogy (Mayer, 2004).	Study group design to develop participants' key skills and experience with the writing process. MCP to use questioning, prompting, encouraging, probing.
Independent construction	Freewriting as a heuristic	Applying a process.	Freewriting on topic of mature students at university.

In the first stage of the cycle, discussion about purposes for texts would provide space for alerting students to differences between two texts superficially in the same genre but serving different purposes. Chanock (2006), for example, suggests that students should question their assignment prompts, asking “Why is this question being asked in this subject? What am I supposed to learn about (in terms of content), and what am I supposed to learn how to do?” (p. 5) Such questions would be incorporated into collaborative discussion in the study group.

In the deconstruction and analysis stage, it would be possible to alert students, through guided discovery, to ways in which superficially similar texts are organised, and to language and conventions texts share, as well as where they differ. These factors relate to the notions of situatedness of writing noted above; they would be appropriate for the study group in which students were enrolled in different disciplines, with different writing requirements, and thus would need to be educated, as Johns (2008) argues, to look for features of successful writing in those contexts.

The stage of co-construction would afford space for explicit teaching of elements of the writing process, from reading for information, to evaluating that information, synthesising it, and writing a new text. Talking about the writing process while practising it would form part of the process of co-construction.

4.4.3 A constructivist pedagogy

Constructivist pedagogies are learning pedagogies which promote student learning by enabling students to connect new knowledge to existing knowledge (Begg, 1999). Rose (1989, 2014) used a constructivist pedagogy with the veterans (see 2.5). The key to such an approach is a point echoed through this chapter: tutors must ascertain what the students already know and can do (Begg, 1999) in order to design activities at an appropriate level for learners to connect new learning and skills to existing knowledge and skills.

Scholars in the field of composition have argued for some decades that we must tailor our writing instruction to the students we teach; one method of teaching writing may not be appropriate for all students. Bizzell (1982) argued that to teach writing effectively we must know something of students' home literacies and discourses, with the implication that writing tutors must be able to help students make connections between those familiar ways and the discourses of academia:

If we were to go on teaching academic discourse, two things would have to change: our understanding of the students' writing processes; and the relationship between the [academic] discourse community and the students' discourse communities. (p. 193)

A scaffolded genre approach is, Wingate (2016) suggests, the most constructivist of all approaches to writing because of its dialogic process. For more general learning, an effective constructivist approach is guided discovery. In this, tutors have a clear aim for the learning objective and remain in control of the discovery process (Gaddis & Schoffstall, 2007). They design questions that will lead students to predetermined answers, but students must discover those answers and thus discover the targeted principle or concept (Begg, 1999; Mayer, 2004). Wingate and others (Wingate, 2007; Wingate & Dreiss, 2009) have applied these principles in the online courses they have developed in which students are guided to examine marked essays along with their feedback. Students come to discover appropriate academic writing practices such as critique and synthesising. Guided discovery learning could well be integrated with the scaffolded genre pedagogy in the study group as part of the process of alerting participants to some of the values of academic culture as well as to principles, skills, and language for academic writing.

4.4.4 Using cultural tools and cultural artefacts

A scaffolded genre approach to writing involves constant interaction and dialogue between learners and the MCP. Accessible language is a key tool in that process. The approach also uses model texts. Hyland (2007) suggests using good exemplars; Wingate and colleagues (in Wingate, 2016), however, found that good examples, particularly academic texts, may be beyond the reach of some students. They then trialled the pedagogy using some poor examples and found that students identified that as very useful to them for learning.

One further aspect of writing instruction which would be inserted into discussion in both the deconstruction and co-construction stages derived from a method developed by Gaipa (2004) to encourage students to join their disciplinary conversations. With reference to a first-year course he teaches in the field of literary criticism, Gaipa explains how he encourages students to grapple with existing scholarship on any given topic and enter that conversation. He encourages his students to engage with existing scholarship by introducing a metaphor of a ballroom. Through a staged, scaffolded process, Gaipa encourages students to identify and evaluate the major ways the novel has been written about from readings he provides for them. Students take their place amongst those contested viewpoints. Gaipa suggests (and visualises with stick figures) strategies for engaging with different scholars through agreeing or disagreeing with them, through taking their arguments further or pointing out limitations, or by attempting to reconcile differing views of the novel. Gaipa observes that through the seemingly light-hearted activities students learn much about writing scholarship and disciplinary contestation. They learn how they may take their own place amongst scholars and develop “authority” (p. 434) in their writing.

4.5 Chapter conclusion

The concept of acquiring an additional Discourse would seem to be very appropriate for framing the study group. It aligns with sociocultural approaches to learning which would recognise participants as newcomers in an unfamiliar culture. This concept allowed the researcher to fill the role of an MCP with participants, working with them to acquire new skills, and providing explicit teaching where that might be necessary. One advantage of viewing transition for non-traditional students as a process of acquiring an additional Discourse is that the process acknowledges that students are already members of many Discourses; they need not relinquish their membership in

those in which they function, from which they might depart each morning and to which they might return each evening.

In framing a pedagogy for the study group, it would be important to keep in mind Gee's suggestion that Discourses may be "partly defined in relationships of alignment and conflict" (2002, p. 170). Some of the research process would involve identifying ways in which students' existing secondary Discourses could communicate with academic Discourses and ways in which students might make connections between the known and the new. Practising collaborative reflection might enable participants to make those connections, particularly between Discourses of knowledge, teaching and learning, of selves as learners, and of writing, which reconnaissance indicated they might well bring to university (see Chapter 3), and those of independent learning, critique, and knowledge construction, embodied in new ways of writing which students would require. In addition, a scaffolded genre approach fits very well with both the concept of acquiring an additional Discourse through a mix of explicit teaching and scaffolded practice and with the Vygotskian principles of the MCP and mediation using cultural artefacts and cultural tools.

The following chapter introduces the action research methodology which enabled me to examine this problem in a New Zealand higher education context, and provided opportunities to design, trial, evaluate, and re-design the study group over three years.

Chapter 5 Methodology

This chapter discusses AR and outlines why it was the most suitable methodology for this research. It indicates which features from among the many models of AR were used and discusses matters of determining parameters for participants and recruitment. Following that, the chapter gives an indication of how the effectiveness of the study group might be evaluated and then outlines data-gathering methods that were identified as appropriate, ethical issues, and how data would be analysed.

AR was selected as the most appropriate methodology for this research because from its beginnings it has been a methodology focusing on implementing change in a situation through working with participants and trialling interventions through iterative cycles. AR also allows for multiple researcher positions which would be a feature of this research. Through each cycle, working closely with participants in each weekly study group called for a democratic, participatory stance. But the research also called for a more objective stance in that the effectiveness of the study group would need to be evaluated. In addition, where emerging data indicated a need for modification to the study group design, those data, in conversation with the literature, would need to be incorporated into study group practice and, in turn, would need to be evaluated. AR allows for that flexibility. Another feature of AR pertinent to this study is that it also allows for lone researchers.

5.1 Action research

AR methodologies characteristically emphasise implementing change in a situation through developing an intervention (Berg, 2009), refining it through iterative cycles (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011), involving participants through the process of change (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014) and contributing to knowledge through studying that intervention and its effects (Blichfeldt & Andersen, 2006). It has long been used for practitioner research in education (Cohen et al., 2011; Elliott, 1991; Kemmis et al., 2014; Stringer, 2008) both by lone researchers and by research teams.

Providing a definition of AR is not entirely straightforward, however, as the methodology has become a “family” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 10) of different approaches to research. It is a dynamic methodology, continually being re-theorised as new versions are developed. Piggott-Irvine (2009, p. 13) notes, “almost everyone who has attempted to define action research has also developed a model”. Acknowledging

that complexity, Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007) wrote, after meeting with a conference of action researchers:

Following intellectual debate and discussion, we concluded that it was impossible to arrive at a single, true definition of action research, because it depends on many environmental, situational, personal and organisational factors and multiple perspectives. (p. 415)

As the methodology has evolved, practices and definitions within the family have tended to become more specific but more distant from each other, reflecting researchers' particular ideological, epistemological, and research interests. This has perhaps contributed to some confusion about what AR is and how AR projects may contribute to knowledge.

Just as the breadth of approaches, which Dick (1993) and Piggott-Irvine (2009) recognise as a strength of the methodology, may preclude settling on a single definition to apply to a project, in practice, researchers may draw eclectically from different approaches as a project develops (Dick, 2007; Piggot-Irvine, 2009). Rather than attempting to define AR, it would seem to be more appropriate to consider how features present in most versions of AR, primarily as it has been used in education, map on to this research. The following sections consider those features: the natural setting of the research, the use of iterative cycles, researching for change and the flexibility in researcher positioning with the potential to use different kinds of knowledge to contribute to change, and the centrality of critical reflection throughout the process.

5.1.1 Natural setting

AR is contextual; research generally takes place in the natural setting of the problem, with the people who own the problem (Stringer, 2014). Action researchers tend to eschew measures which attempt to control factors that might influence the effects of an intervention, such as controlling for particular characteristics among participants or establishing control groups (Cohen et al., 2011). This research project would take place in the natural setting of students' first semesters on campus and be open to any mature-aged students (within the broad parameters established for the research – see 5.2.1) who elected to be involved.

5.1.2 Iterative cycles

Iterative cycles (Cohen et al., 2011) are an almost-definitive characteristic of AR, with most approaches drawing on Lewin's (1946) practice of refining an intervention through successive cycles. The number and length of cycles in any project, however, and the nature of the action within those cycles are matters of debate and discussion. Cohen et al. (2011) suggest a minimum of two cycles when an intervention is involved. But two may not be sufficient. Piggott-Irvine (2009) has developed a version of AR involving at least three cycles, and Poskitt (1994) used five cycles for her AR in a New Zealand high school.

Similarly, there is no specified length for AR cycles. In educational contexts, single cycles may be as short as a single school period, perhaps 40 minutes, (Stringer, 2008). Poskitt's (1994) cycles were each for a complete school term. In practice, AR may become a complex process of cycles within cycles. Wadsworth (1998, para 19) notes this complexity:

There are countless tiny cycles of participatory reflection on action, learning about action, and then new informed action which is in turn the subject of further reflection.

She notes that this process may be continual throughout the research.

This research was initially planned for two semester-long cycles, but as Chapters 6-9 discuss, the final project comprised four cycles over four semesters from 2011-2013. Chapter 6, in particular, shows that this research involved cycles within cycles, as almost every weekly meeting became a tiny cycle of action and reflection.

Lewin (Adelman, 1993; Lewin, 1946), acknowledged as a founder of the methodology, identified key stages in the research process within AR cycles. He noted the importance of first identifying a social problem that is possible to address and change through research (Adelman, 1993; Kemmis et al., 2014) as a precursor to a research project. A second preliminary stage was to then conduct reconnaissance about the problem (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Lewin, 1946). This reconnaissance may be carried out in the field through a preliminary cycle of AR (Piggott-Irvine, 2009); it may also be carried out through literature.

In response to the reconnaissance, an intervention is designed and operationalised in broad, probably overlapping, stages. These have been variously depicted as two stages, reflection and action (Dick, 2000), three stages, “look – think – act” (Stringer, 2008, p. 4) or most commonly as four stages of plan, act, observe, and reflect (P-A-O-R) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002).

The four stages of P-A-O-R have become almost definitive of the methodology, reified by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) in their widely-used guidelines for using AR in education. Lewin, however, did not insist that those stages formed a “linear sequence” (Piggot-Irvine, 2009, p. 13). Wadsworth (1998) explains that the stages cannot always be separated, and Stringer (2014) emphasises the absence of linearity when AR is practised by using a selection of active verbs to describe the flow of action within cycles: “working backward,” “repeating,” “revising,” “rethinking,” “leapfrogging” and “making radical changes in direction” (p. 10).

Despite more recent theorising and discussions of AR in practice, however, many handbooks and discussions of the methodology continue to repeat the four stages. Kember (2000), for example, provides them as an explanation of what AR is. He notes, however, that in practice the stages do not seem to be prescriptive and that the P-A-O-R may be neither clear, nor linear and there will be overlapping, and “shifting back and forth” (p. 27). Cook (1989), too, elaborates on this overlapping and shifting, describing her experience of “mess” in her practice of AR and her consequent struggle to write a coherent documentation of her research. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in their recent theorising, Kemmis et al. (2014) have moved away from describing AR as four-stage cycles of P-A-O-R to a position in which they view AR as a continual process of reflection and interrogation of practice. Cohen et al. (2014), emphasise the centrality of reflection in AR, placing it in the centre of an eight-stage cycle (see Figure 5.3 in section 5.1.4).

Despite these variations in practice, cycles are very often depicted as uncomplicated, equivalent iterations of P-A-O-R progressing linearly across, up, or down a page. Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) depict such a linear model, reproduced in Figure 5.1. This linear conceptualisation, however, may lead non-practitioners to perceive AR to be an uncomplicated methodology, something seldom borne out in the messy reality of many AR studies (Cook, 1998).

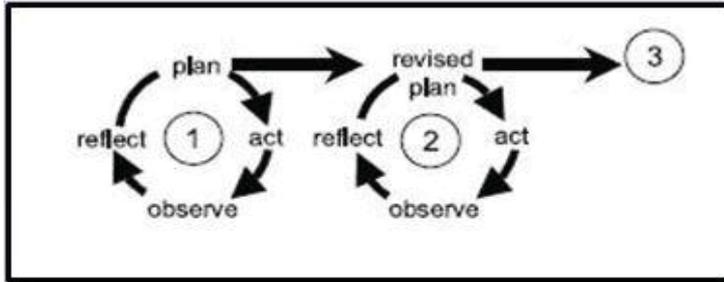


Figure 5.1 Representation of iterative cycles of AR. From Zuber-Skerritt & Perry (2002, p. 177).

Cycles within a project may have different foci, depending on the purpose of the research. AR may be used for gathering interpretive data to uncover the underlying nature of a problem in order to design and implement a more effective intervention which is then evaluated. Emerging data may lead to new themes as a project progresses (Dick, 1993). Acknowledging this, Cardno and Piggott-Irvine (1996) depict the first cycle of an AR project as an exploratory cycle (see Figure 5.2).

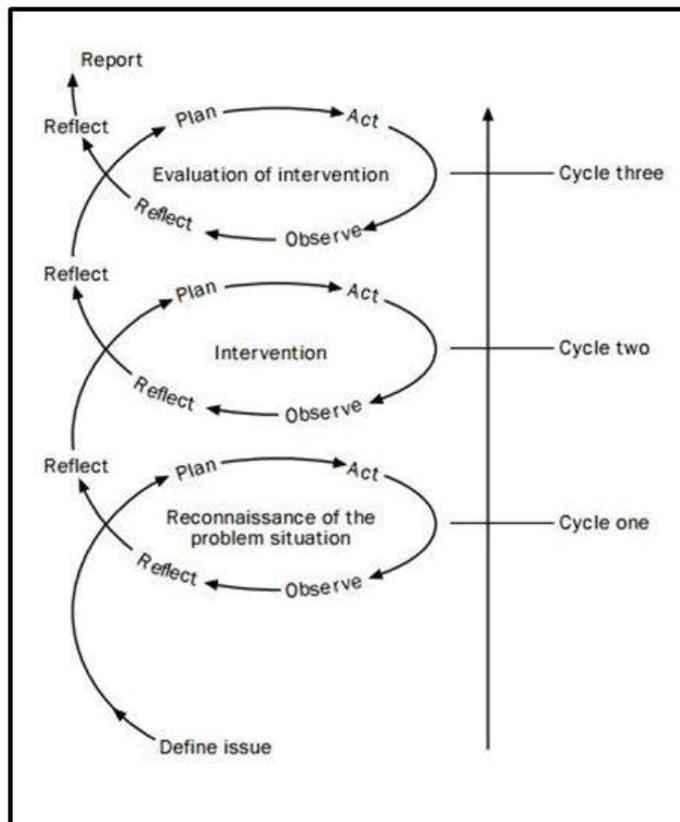


Figure 5.2 AR cycles as represented by Cardno and Piggott-Irvine (1996, p. 19).

In their conceptualisation, which progresses from bottom to top to denote a continual process of improvement, the intervention is placed in the second cycle. While this approach may allow an effective intervention to be designed in response to data

emerging from the first cycle, a more usual use of a first cycle, as in the research in this study, is to design an intervention which might go some way towards bringing about change in a situation, but to be prepared to modify it continually in response to emerging data (Dick, 1993). In AR, this process may involve a researcher or teams of researchers assuming different positions through the cycles.

Ways in which that process mapped onto this research, and its alignment with the purpose of the research and the different knowledge interests sought, are discussed in the following section.

5.1.3 Researching for change

AR is a methodology which enables researchers to work for understanding and for change at the same time (Dick, 2002), but how the change is to be worked out has led to different AR traditions. Understanding and change seem to be very different purposes requiring different kinds of knowledge: interpretive knowledge, contributing to deeper understanding of the situation, and critical, emancipatory knowledge contributing to sustainable change for both participants and the situation. While some action researchers within the critical tradition (particularly those following Kemmis et al., 2014) argue that a collaborative, critical approach fostering perhaps radical change is the only viable way to use AR, other experienced action researchers argue that change may well result from the understanding gained through AR (for example, Dick, 2007, and Piggott-Irvine, 2009).

Eclecticism, choosing among approaches, is appreciated by some action researchers as a strength of the methodology (Dick, 2007; Piggott-Irvine, 2009). Dick, an experienced action researcher from Australia, writes: “My approach is eclectic, borrowed from any version that suits” (2007, p. 401). Eclecticism is worked out in the various positions action researchers are able to occupy during a project, the sorts of data they gather, and the purposes to which they put that knowledge.

This research required different researcher stances. One key purpose was to bring about change by exploring how an intervention might ameliorate the currently somewhat unequal situation many mature-aged students find themselves in at university when they are admitted to courses for which they lack appropriate preparation. Developing and evaluating the study group required an ‘outsider’ stance from the researcher. But modifications to the study group content and design derived from both observing

participants and from feedback they provided about activities. These interpretive data were gathered while adopting more of an insider stance, working closely with participants.

This research project thus drew eclectically from several traditions. Because I was a lone researcher, it drew some principles from AR methodologies involving lone researchers. It also drew on the classical AR tradition as it was developed by Lewin, and from the critical stream following Kemmis et al. (2014). Principles from these approaches to AR as they mapped on to this research are discussed in the following sections on researching for change.

Change from lone researchers

In lone-researcher approaches, insiders to a context (very often a school) seek practical knowledge through researching their own pedagogy and their own sites for teaching (Kemmis et al., 2014). Lone researchers may assume different relationships towards participants through the research, as I needed to in this project. At times I worked with participants as a more competent peer (see section 4.2.2), scaffolding their entry into an unfamiliar community of knowledge (Northedge, (2002; 2003a; 2003b); at other times, I was an objective, outsider-researcher reflecting on emerging data.

As a lone researcher, I was aware of the cautions raised against such an approach, particularly those raised by Kemmis et al. (2014) who question the ability of lone researchers to research their own practice. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) advocate giving voice to all participants in a lone-researcher project, a principle embedded into this research. Giving voice to participants meshes with Elliott's (1991) practice of member-checking, and the concept that evaluation in qualitative research cannot be established by objective, measurable means (Elliott, 1991; Stringer, 2014) but that interventions must be judged by how effective stakeholders find them to be. Piggott-Irvine (2009) advocates triangulation of data as a safeguard for lone researchers (see 5.4.10), and McNiff and Whitehead (2011) advocate meeting with critical friends. That function was addressed by my supervisors who critiqued the development of the research in regular meetings.

As a lone researcher, I was mindful of the need for some reflexivity; I was mindful that I did enter this research with some concerns about the justice of the situation so many mature students seemed to find themselves in. I did desire to see some form of

sustainable change established for mature students at this university. These potential biases called for careful documentation and extensive reflection as I kept my researcher's journal and met regularly with critical friends.

Change through interventions

As noted above, AR has traditionally focused on achieving change through implementing and researching an intervention, often by researchers from outside the research context. In early approaches to the methodology, outsider-researchers introduced their interventions into a situation conducting “quasi-experimental tests” (Adelman, 1993, p. 7). Lewin, an academic, worked within such a framework. His students introduced interventions in factories in attempts to encourage workers to engage more democratically in their work situations; they then analysed the effects of those interventions. Berg (2009) seems to assume this outsider researcher approach by offering a definition of AR as a methodology enabling researchers to “test a particular intervention based on a prescribed theoretical framework” (p. 259). Similarly, Rossman and Rallis (2011) define AR as “a form of research that includes small-scale experimentation to change circumstances” (p. 15). In this outsider approach to researching interventions, data emerge primarily from reflective documentation of the research process in researchers' journals (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

The practice of researchers remaining outside the research context while researching the impact of their interventions has been critiqued by researchers working in other traditions of AR, particularly by those whose approach to the methodology is informed by critical theory. Kemmis et al. (2014) argue that this objective, seemingly positivistic approach promotes “an asymmetric, one-way relationship between the participant-researcher and the others involved in or affected by the research” (p. 15). An outsider researcher in this tradition remains in control of the research process throughout, maintaining what De Meulenaere and Cann (2013, p. 557) describe as a “colonial” attitude towards participants, or what Eikeland (2012, p. 11) describes as “othering”. Cohen et al. (2011) and Eikeland argue that this outsider research approach may be valuable for the researchers, but not necessarily for participants and not necessarily beyond the immediate research context. Furthermore, critical action researchers argue that such an approach may not work towards sustainable change in the research context because it does not involve collaborative critique of the status quo that caused the problem to arise (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Despite these critiques, however, at the beginning of this research project it was necessary to adopt an outsider position in relation to students who had not yet arrived on campus. Designing an intervention based on a theoretical framework, and evaluating its effectiveness through practice, was the core of the research. Reconnaissance from literature, from experience, and from colleagues, indicated that participants would be likely to know very little about academic culture and what their specific needs might be concerning writing for university in their first days on campus. Responding to needs that students identified as pressing might not lead to interventions that would enable them to make successful transitions to academic writing; nor might it contribute to participants' acquisition of an academic Discourse. Students' self-identified needs might well be for recipe-type writing skills (4.4). Hastily devising ad hoc interventions to address a strongly-felt need might not contribute to sustainable change for participants, nor to the development of a study group which would assist in their acquisition of an academic Discourse.

This research project, however, did attempt to explore and develop ways in which participants might be empowered to take control of their learning and of their selves as learners. That empowering required active, engaged participation and collaboration from the researcher and participants; both would need to work together, as a group of peers, albeit with the researcher as a more advanced peer (Eikeland, 2012). This purpose called for a more participatory approach to AR, one commonly denoted as participatory AR, or PAR.

Change through PAR approaches

In PAR approaches, projects again are commonly initiated by researchers from outside the context of the research, but the researchers then collaborate with insiders to the context to facilitate the desired changes (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Within this approach, however, are versions of AR informed by two very different philosophical stances: those seeking change through hermeneutic or interpretive knowledge and those seeking radical change through social critique and perhaps social action (Habermas, 1966; Kemmis et al., 2014; Stringer, 2014).

Change through interpretive knowledge

Rearick and Feldman (1999) write that hermeneutic knowledge contributes to understanding the underlying nature of a social problem which may then lead to

changes in the social context. Researchers collaborate with participants, working to facilitate understanding about the problem and, ideally, empowering participants to also develop that understanding. Brannick and Coghlan (2007, p. 63) argue that this may be promoted through “self-reflexivity”. Stringer (2014), who researches in this tradition, borrows a term from the critical researchers and proposes that emancipation develops through that understanding. In this study, understanding gained through interpretive knowledge contributed to continual modifications to the intervention and to the weekly activities through each cycle.

Change through critical knowledge

The other approach in which a research project may be initiated by an outsider researcher seeks more “radical change” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 31). Critical action researchers seek change not just in the research context, but change, or emancipation of participants from the effects of oppressive or unjust social structures which may have led to the situation (Kemmis et al., 2014; Rearick & Feldman, 1999). Thus, they seek emancipatory knowledge (Habermas, 1996). In this type of critical approach, participants make input into the research, taking increasing ownership of the research process. Freire’s literacy work was of this type, an approach more directly inspired by critical theory, seeking change and transformation beyond the research site (Habermas, 1966; Rearick & Feldman, 1999).

AR researchers in this tradition commonly view their researcher role as facilitator, encouraging participants through critical reflection to reach an understanding of structural and perhaps historical forms of oppression, of the effect of ideologies, current or historic, on their current situation, and the role of power relations within those (Habermas, 1966; Rearick & Feldman, 1999). Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 194) describe such an AR process as: “a deliberate process for emancipating practitioners from the often unseen constraints of assumptions, habit, precedent, coercion and ideology”. Kemmis et al. (2014) argue:

In critical participatory action research, the aim is to explore social realities in order to discover whether social or educational practices have such untoward consequences. . . . What is to be transformed in critical participatory action research is not only activities and their immediate outcomes (as in technical action research) or the persons and (self-) understandings of the practitioners and

others involved in and affected by a practice (as in the case in practical action research) but the social formation in which the practice occurs. (pp. 16-17)

Kemmis et al. (2014), who research in this tradition, cite examples of educational PAR used to redress issues of exclusion and alienation of students disadvantaged by gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, and students alienated from education by “curriculum and teaching practices that served the interests of other students” (p. 13), or who experienced mismatches “between school curriculum and pedagogies and the knowledge and the kinds of learning people encounter in their lives outside or beyond school” (p. 13).

Change in this project

The emancipatory purposes of PAR seemed very relevant to this study. Literature surveyed during the reconnaissance phase indicated that many mature students have experienced alienation and disadvantage because of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic location, and cultures of schooling (see Chapters 2 and 3). O’Donnell and Tobbell’s (2007) research, while not AR, shows that enabling the adult students in their research to understand how their educational, social and economic circumstances had been socially constructed had contributed to those students transforming their attitudes to education and renegotiating their identities as successful learners. Stone’s (2008) transformative (also not AR) approach to working with mature-aged students also enabled many of her participants to break free from the effects of their previous experiences in education.

This research, like all research in the PAR model, was initiated from outside the research context. However, it could not adopt a fully critical PAR approach. Primarily, it was beyond the scope and purpose of the study group to attempt to change social structures leading to disadvantage. Other cautionary factors in relation to adopting an emancipatory approach to AR for my research project included the need to wait for data to emerge to identify what particular social factors might be responsible for any oppression or disadvantage experienced by participants. While I might approach the research with concerns gained through reconnaissance and experience, emerging data would need to confirm or disaffirm those concerns. In addition, I did not know, at the beginning of the research, how to foster emancipation among participants. In a PhD project I would not be able to involve participants as complete equals in the research

process as critical PAR researchers do (Kemmis et al., 2014). A further caution pertained to the reconnaissance which indicated that as mature-aged students had chosen to come to university they were keen to engage with academic culture, albeit perceived as exclusive and elitist (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007), and to learn its ways (see Cullity, 2010). Participants would be joining the study group to find support for their writing. They may well be aware, from their life experiences, of injustices in a system with which they must now engage in order to gain the qualifications they sought. It may be, though, that recognising some of the structures which had prevented them from learning to write in the first place might then enable participants to transform their thinking, as O'Donnell and Tobbell's (2007) and Stone's (2008) students had been able to.

A further caution about adopting a critical PAR stance was that it may be very difficult to establish the success of such a project beyond the immediate context. Cohen et al. (2011), for example, express some doubts about arguments that social change may result from critical educational PAR. Consequently, while this research might seek a degree of emancipatory knowledge for participants, and would encourage participants in a process of collaborative critical reflection, it would not use a primarily critical PAR approach. The change that was sought through the action of this research was more in keeping with Stringer's more nuanced, less oppositional critical approach:

Change is an intended outcome of action research: not the revolutionary changes envisioned by radical social theorists or political activists, but more subtle transformations brought about by the development of new programs or modifications to existing procedures. (2014, p. 59)

Some of the change sought through AR is developed relationally, through researchers working closely with participants (Eikeland, 2012). In AR this close cooperation and collaboration with participants is not seen as contamination (Wadsworth, 1998), but rather, as Wadsworth argues, the researcher and her values are an essential part of the process of gaining the new understanding which will contribute to change. Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, and Wise (2008) argue similarly that PAR approaches are intentionally relational and suggest that, in the relationship-building process with participants, researchers may practise a measure of reciprocity. To practise reciprocity, researchers may invite participants to talk about their own concerns; researchers may

share their expertise with participants. This, they argue, is an ethical approach to research, recognising the contribution of participants.

We could note here that a relational approach fits very well with the concept of nurturing participants' acquisition of an academic Discourse through a scaffolded, dialogic learning process. To practice a measure of reciprocity in the research documented in this thesis, topics in chat times (5.4.6) were student-led; participants used those times to talk about their immediate concerns. When appropriate, those conversations led to opportunities for reciprocation through instances of brokering aspects of an academic Discourse. From time to time, particularly in the extra meetings in Cycle Two, I was able to reciprocate for participants' time and commitment to the research by sharing more of my time and expertise than I had planned for (7.4.4).

In this project I sought a combination of evaluative, practical, and emancipatory knowledge, a combination perhaps not commonly accommodated by a single methodology. However, the potential for blending paradigms within a single project was a consideration which seemed to be necessary for this research; it has precedence in the literature (Dick, 2007; Piggot-Irvine, 2009). AR allows for evaluating an intervention, building understanding, solving contextual problems, improving practice, and encouraging some emancipation of participants in a single project. Dick writes that AR

is capable of encompassing a variety of research and intervention methods. It is broad enough to include, as examples, the critical action research approach of Carr and Kemmis (1986), the soft systems methodology of Checkland (1981), and perhaps even the evaluation of Guba and Lincoln (1989), to name just a few. (2000, para. 14)

Chapters 6-9 show how the understanding that emerged through the AR process contributed to developing effective interventions which did enable participants to critique unhelpful attitudes and beliefs.

5.1.4 Reflection

Reflection, the 'R' of the P-A-O-R of the AR cycle, is acknowledged as central in all approaches to AR and an essential element in the knowledge-generation process. It is a key activity of the researcher throughout a cycle. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 355) visualise

its importance by placing it in the centre of their AR framework, reproduced as Figure 5.3. Placing reflection in the centre of the framework indicates how it influences every step of the research process, from problem identification, through reconnaissance, into decisions for possible interventions and their design, and through the implementation and evaluation of the project. It is not just an activity at the end of a cycle or between cycles as could be indicated by, for example, Zuber-Skerritt and Perry's and Cardno and Piggott-Irvine's visualisations of the cycles (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

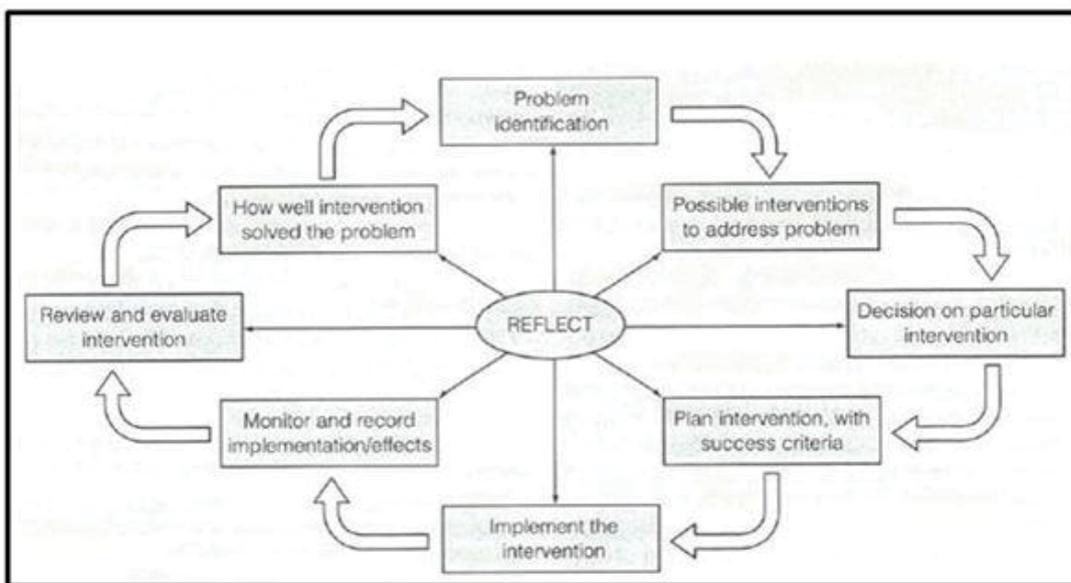


Figure 5.3 A framework for action research, from Cohen et al. (2011) p. 355.

Reflection contributes to the knowledge generated through the AR process. I indicated above how the researchers' reflective documentation of the effects of the interventions contributed to the knowledge generated by Lewin's experiments. In this project I kept a reflective journal, discussed in the data-gathering section below (5.4.1).

In many of the more recent participatory approaches to AR, collaborative reflection involving researchers and participants is an essential part of the knowledge-generation and the emancipatory purpose of that research. Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007) observe that participants in a PAR project become a democratic "critical community" in which all participants reflect on their own situations (p. 416). In that community, the PAR researcher's task is to facilitate a reflective process among participants. Kemmis and McTaggart, in their early theorising, described PAR as a process of "self-reflective inquiry" (2014, p. 2). In their 2014 revision they stress the importance of critique, arguing that critical PAR "should be actively and proactively critical" (p. 3) in order to uncover causes for aspects of injustice which may be oppressing participants.

Greenwood and Levin (2007) suggest that critique is worked out through dialectic as participants collaborate in reflection and that, through this process, insiders contribute their local knowledge of a context and researchers contribute their theoretical knowledge and analysis. They suggest that it is the reflection on the resulting dialectic which generates knowledge and which may contribute to a degree of emancipation for participants.

As noted, this research was not fully situated within a critical framework. However, also as noted, there was the potential through the AR to generate emancipatory knowledge contributing to a degree of empowering for participants. A time for collaborative reflection was built in to the structure of the study group in the chat time in each meeting; the extended chat times towards the end of Cycles Two and Four allowed further opportunity for collaborative reflection. Exit interviews also gave participants an opportunity to reflect on their first semesters.

The discussion through this chapter has placed the project within the AR tradition by focusing on themes present in most approaches to AR and demonstrating ways in which the eclecticism favoured by researchers such as Dick (2002) and Piggott-Irvine (2009) was operationalised:

- researching in the natural context
- employing iterative cycles
- researching for change by occupying differing researcher positions and by involving participants in different aspects through the research
- reflecting critically through every phase of the research, both as a lone researcher, and collectively with participants.

Ways in which AR worked out through this research are documented in Chapters 6-9. The following sections of this chapter outline the methods planned for the research project: the plans for its structure, for decisions about parameters for participants and how they might be recruited, for data-gathering, evaluation of the research, and ethical issues.

5.2 The research project

The initial research design was for an AR project incorporating six fortnightly meetings with mature-aged students from arts and humanities courses. In the initial plan, each 50-

minute meeting was to incorporate 25 minutes of chatting in focus group style, inviting discussion among participants on themes identified in the literature as common for mature-aged students. That time would enable students to reflect on their learning and provide an opportunity for collective scaffolding, social modelling, and a brief opportunity for purposeful social engagement. It would also yield valuable data to inform modifications to the study group. The second 25 minutes was to be spent on planned collaborative activities concerning writing. Participants were to be encouraged to bring any writing on which they were working to any meeting for collaborative discussion either during the chat time, or blended into the collaborative activities if they connected in some way. It was intended that there would be a second cycle the following year incorporating revisions to the intervention.

In fact, this initial design changed after the first meeting of Cycle One and then continually through that cycle (see Chapter 6). Study groups were held every week for ten weeks of a semester and discussion in chat times was on student-initiated topics. The focus of the group was broadened as data emerging early suggested that the most effective way to support students with their writing would be to design activities that might assist them to acquire an academic Discourse (see 4.1). To this end, the initially planned content and structure of all activities were modified.

5.2.1 Determining parameters for participants

Selecting parameters for participants in the research was important because of the New Zealand context in which students 20 years and over may enter university under adult admission. It was necessary to determine what “mature” indicated for this research, as the descriptors “mature students” or “adult students” are applied variously in different contexts. Internationally, despite western world changes in student demographics and a preponderance of older students on some campuses, students between 18 and 22 years old are still designated traditional-aged (Krause et al., 2005). Both Merrill (2001) in the UK, and Cullity (2010) from Australia, cite 21 years old as a lower parameter for adult students. Krause et al. (2005), however, focus on the break in the educational process as they assign descriptors to student cohorts; they define those students re-entering education aged between 20 and 24 as ‘younger’ non-traditional students. Certainly, the literature indicated that the break was a significant factor in mature students’ learner identities (for example, Bamber & Tett, 2000).

Two important observations influenced the lower age parameter for this research. First, Tones et al. (2009) identify possible significant differences in life-commitments between students above 25 years old and younger non-traditional students: the greater likelihood of committed partners, dependent children or elders, perhaps more community involvements, employment, and independence from parents. Secondly, Merrill (2001) notes that students above 25 years may not choose to identify socially with traditional-aged students, whereas those aged closer to 21 well may. Because of the acknowledged importance of similar peers (Bandura, 2012; Habel, 2009) and social engagement (Kantanis, 2002), and taking note of Merrill's observation about non-identification with younger students, I decided on 25 years old as the younger boundary. There was no upper age limit.

Other planned parameters for participants were that they were in their first year at university, or their first semester on campus, and studying courses with a significant writing component, primarily arts and humanities. Parameters were flexible, however. The university at which this study took place has a large cohort of distance students; some students who wanted to join the research had completed one or two courses by distance before their arrival on campus. They were welcomed, as was Ann, in Cycle One, who already had a degree gained more than 20 years previously but in another country and another language. Mature-aged students who had already spent three or four years on campus, however, who would have liked to have joined the research, were encouraged to network with participants but not to join the group because of its focus on beginning students.

5.2.2 Recruitment

Before each cycle, tear-off notices were placed in strategic places around the campus – public noticeboards outside the main lecture rooms used for the large arts and humanities introductory courses and departmental noticeboards (with permission from those departments). The research was introduced at the orientation meeting for mature students and in the introductory lecture for the compulsory writing course for BA students. In Cycle One, in an attempt to increase numbers of participants, mature students in business and science courses were also invited by email or by lecturers. Some Cycle One participants were enrolled in social work courses, but as the academic writing course was not compulsory for those students, in Cycle Two I also introduced the research at the introductory meeting for social work. The key recruitment strategy in

Cycles Three and Four was emailing invitations to potential participants in arts, humanities, and social work identified through the university enrolling system. Distance students studying arts or humanities courses and living within reasonable travelling time of the campus were also invited by targeted emails.

Notices and invitations advertised the research as involving entry and exit interviews, participation in six collaborative workshops, and allowing scrutiny of all written texts through the semester with approval from relevant faculty. Invitations suggested a total of eight hours of students' time (Appendix 3). These were repeated in all cycles, although in practice, in all cycles participants elected to meet weekly for the whole semester. In Cycle Ones and Two, the greatest response came from introducing the research in the first lecture for the academic writing course. In Cycle Four, the most effective strategy was inviting students by email.

Snowballing

Participants were encouraged to invite fellow mature-aged students they met in lectures or around the campus to join the research. This chain-referral method of recruiting, termed *snowballing* because of its similarity to a snowball gaining mass as it rolls down a hill (Berg, 2009; Cohen et al., 2011), built on the developing relationships engendered in the study groups (see 'rapport' below). It allowed for students beyond the reach of the main recruitment strategies, those not enrolled in the academic writing paper or who had not attended orientation week activities, or, in Cycles Three and Four, had not been invited by targeted emails, to participate in the study groups in their first semesters. Over the three years of the research, several students visited the study group through a first level of snowballing and four committed to joining the group.

5.2.3 Participants

Over the three years of the research, 33 students, 15 men and 18 women, aged between 25 and 63 years, attended study groups for six weeks or more in their first semesters. Twenty-nine of those participated for complete semesters. More than 40 students attended a single meeting but were unable to join the research because of timetable or travel clashes, or because their time was too limited. Demographics within each cycle differed, but over the period of the research comprised almost equal numbers (7-8) in the 25-29, 30-34, and 40-44 years age ranges. The median age of all participants was 36.

Brief details of participants' ages and study group attendance are given with the discussion of each cycle. Overall, seven students identified as Māori; two were immigrants, one of them, although English was not her home language, was a fluent speaker of English but a very apprehensive writer. The remainder were New Zealand Europeans. (Appendix 7 provides brief details of all participants' ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds).

As a bridge between these logistical factors and the data gathering and ethical issues, the following section of this chapter discusses the matter of evaluation of the study group. Clearly, it would be important to evaluate the study group as an intervention, but determining how to evaluate it was a key factor influencing the choice of AR, because the evaluation involves what counts as knowledge and thus the sorts of data gathered.

5.3 Evaluating the study group

Action researchers have grappled with a need for determining what might constitute success for a project (B. Bartlett & Piggot-Irvine, 2008; Elliott, 1991), with many arguing that success criteria should be established before embarking on a project (Cohen et al., 2011; McNiff, 2002). Establishing success criteria is integrally linked to epistemology, to what counts as knowledge, and therefore to what sorts of data will be gathered, so criteria had to be established for this research in order to decide on data-gathering methods.

The purpose of this research was to explore how a study group might support students as they acquired an academic Discourse, although throughout, it maintained a focus on writing as a core part of that Discourse (see Chapter 6). Evaluation would therefore need to consider the structure, content, and apparent success or not of the intervention as a whole and the activities within it, and begin to assess whether and how they had supported students. That sort of evaluation might suggest that this research sought the technical knowledge interest identified by Habermas (1966), particularly trying to establish some degree of measurement or cause and effect – relationships which are very difficult to establish in a social context (Blichveldt & Andersen, 2006; Eikeland, 2011). A seemingly objective criterion such as whether or not participants wrote essays deemed successful by their markers might suggest a degree of individual student success with academic writing and perhaps indicate whether they had begun to recognise themselves as insiders taking part in an academic conversation through that

writing. However, there would be little chance of establishing whether or not the study group contributed to that success.

Positivistic researchers may use control groups to establish cause and effect relationships. This is not, however, standard, or even common practice among action researchers. Kember (2000) points out that attempting to evaluate success of an intervention through positivistic techniques such as establishing a control group cannot be successful because of the many personal and contextual variables present. He also questions the ethics of using one group of students as a control group and another as participants in an intervention, particularly noting the matter of potential disadvantage for those not involved in the intervention. Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that cause and effect relationships are better discovered through qualitative methods than through any attempt at measuring.

Attempting to replicate an intervention with different groups in order to evaluate its effectiveness is also almost impossible, Kember (2000) argues, because of contextual variables. The local context, the participatory nature and natural settings of AR projects render them difficult to replicate (Mertler, 2012), and Kember argues that trying to replicate an intervention may preclude the responsiveness and fine-tuning that is a necessary part of developing an educational intervention. The responsiveness and fine-tuning are key benefits of using AR methodology with its iterative cycles.

Documentation has long been used in AR as data to support reasonable claims made about the research (McNiff, 2002). I have noted that in Lewin's more positivistic AR, the success of the interventions was established by referring to the rigorous, reflective documentation of the researchers. In those projects, researchers continually observed the action of the research, documenting the increased productivity and law and order that they determined arose from their interventions. Documentation continues to be used in AR, in researchers' reflective journals recording the research process, decisions made through that process, and reflections on those (B. Bartlett & Piggot-Irvine, 2008). Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that this rigorous documentation of the research may enable the researcher to attribute positive changes in a context to the research.

Researchers' documentation, however, tends to present the viewpoint and reflections of the researchers (Cohen et al., 2011; Kemmis et al., 2014). To meliorate this, Cohen et

al. (2011) suggest that in naturalistic approaches, such as this research, the viewpoints of participants should be included in order to gain understanding of a social situation:

The social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated. . . . Understanding of individuals' interpretations of the world around them has to come from the inside, not the outside. (p. 15)

To incorporate other viewpoints and add to understanding and achieve a measure of triangulation, in the more democratic AR approaches researchers gather qualitative data which may derive from interviews, participant observations, focus groups, and document examination (Piggott-Irvine, 2009; Stringer, 2014).

Many AR researchers also practice member-checking (Elliott, 1991), sharing the results of the research with stakeholders for their input. This again reflects the participatory, democratic nature of the methodology. Forms of member-checking have been practised in AR since the 1970s. Elliott (1991) notes that in the Ford Teaching Project researchers eventually abandoned any idea of establishing cause and effect and a measurable evaluation of success for interventions. Arguing that stakeholders were the most appropriate judges of the effectiveness of the interventions, the researchers opted for the findings to be presented to stakeholders for reflection and evaluation. This practice has continued into recent practice in AR as a contribution to the validity of the research:

The results of the research are valid and reliable if they are recognisable and authentic to the people involved in the research, even if not necessarily to others. (Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007, p. 423)

A further measure used to evaluate an AR intervention is to determine whether it results in practical changes and steps toward a resolution of the original problem (Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007). This resolution represents the "outcome validity" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 55) of a research project. Again, to some extent, outcome validity can be ascertained by stakeholders (Elliott, 1991; Herr & Anderson, 2005) through their reflection on the project.

It seemed that a degree of emancipatory knowledge might emerge for participants in this study as they began to understand how their present situation at university has been historically socially – or educationally – constructed for them. Kincheloe (2012)

suggests, like Stringer (2014) that reflection on interpretive knowledge may lead to emancipatory knowledge which may, in turn, result in sustainable changes, at least for participants. Perhaps recognition from the university that a study group for mature students should be established would be a practical change – but that is beyond the scope of the research.

These established practices of documentation and triangulation of viewpoints determined what would count as knowledge and therefore defined the selection of data-gathering methods for this research. Data would include the researcher's observations and documentation; interpretive knowledge and understanding of specific needs of mature-aged students that might be addressed through a study group would be likely to emerge from observation, but also from students' comments and reflections through their participation in interviews and study group meetings. A degree of critical, emancipatory knowledge may derive from the collective reflection on the interpretive data by the researcher and participants through the AR process. The following sections of this chapter discuss these data-gathering methods.

5.4 Data gathering

Data emerge continually in AR through the continual process of action and reflection (Dick, 2000). Cohen et al.'s (2011) visualisation of this process of continual reflection as it occurs over a complete cycle was reproduced in Figure 5.3. In this research, the continual process led to the countless tiny cycles within cycles noted by Wadsworth (1998) as each meeting became a mini-cycle of action and observation followed by reflection.

Researcher reflection centred on three main forms of data: my observations of the action in each meeting; documentation of each meeting in my researcher's reflective journal completed immediately after each meeting, and examination of transcripts of meetings.

5.4.1 Researcher's reflective documents

As noted above, I recorded my reflections on the action of the study group each week in an ongoing researcher's journal. This was a Word document kept in Dropbox so that I could access it from anywhere. Herr and Anderson (2005) recommend that reflective journals are a record of the change process, in the research and in the researcher:

If a researcher is the facilitator or instigator of a change process, part of the research documentation is the researcher's roles, actions, and decisions. . . . A research journal is a chronicle of research decisions; a record of one's own thoughts, feelings and impressions; as well as a document reflecting the increased understanding that comes with the action research process. (p. 77)

Elliott (1991) suggests researchers should include in their journals not just "bare facts", but "observations, feelings, interpretations, reflections, hunches, hypotheses and explanations" (p. 77). In my journal I recorded the bare facts – who attended the sessions, the activities, and participants' engagement with them, and any modifications made as the action happened. I added my reflections on that action, and why I thought activities were successful or not, noting whether or not they were worth repeating and ideas for how they could be modified for the next iteration. In cycles in which there were two iterations of the study group per week, Cycle One, particularly, when an activity used in the first meeting of the week was beyond the ZPD of the group (4.2.4), it was sometimes necessary to modify it, or perhaps discard it, before the second iteration. The implemented change was documented, along with whether it seemed to be more suitable for participants. At times, I revisited entries, noting developments on an issue or about a participant, or clarification I had sought from them about an issue. Sometimes I inserted emails received from participants or chunks of study group or interview transcripts for further reflection.

I returned constantly to literature – "in dialogue with the data" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 94) – and added key points and my reflections on those. Some of the literature in that dialogue was from fields other than the sociocultural theory, writing, and transitions on which the study was originally based. Consequently, my journal includes reflections on theory and practice in adult education, learning styles, constructivist pedagogy, literacy, and culture, along with thoughts about how aspects of these might contribute to the study group. Some of that reading is incorporated into the literature reviews in this thesis. In the journal I also reflected on meetings with supervisors, critical friends, or chance encounters with other researchers or practitioners with whom conversations seemed to contribute in some way to the research. The journal became an invaluable source of data during the writing up process.

I also maintained a series of hard-covered exercise books in which I wrote notes and reflections on much of the literature I read, notes from post-graduate workshops conducted by the university, and notes on theoretical issues. I used these books for brainstorming and drafting ideas for study group content. Later in the research process, I referred back to early volumes of these reflections.

5.4.2 Reflection from participants

Because critical reflection is so important in AR, at the time of designing the research, I planned to use students' writers' notebooks as a key data source. At that time of planning, BA students taking the compulsory academic writing course kept exercise books in which they contributed weekly entries reflecting on their developing understanding of the writing process and academic literacy. Unfortunately, this component of the writing course was changed prior to Cycle One by introducing set topics about which to write rather than inviting reflection. Thus, a rich source of data I hoped for was not available. For Cycle One, I considered asking participants to keep reflective journals, but acknowledging that mature students are time-poor, decided against that. For Cycle Two, as I had developed a greater understanding of the value of reflection, I provided participants with exercise books in which to record the weekly activities, but in practice, most participants forgot to bring them most weeks.

The need for reflection was addressed by reflecting orally and collaboratively; chat times (see 5.4.6) afforded some opportunity for this each week. A more effective form of collaborative reflection was instituted towards the end of Cycles Two and Four when I opened up one study group session as an extended chat time.

5.4.3 Participant observation

Participant observation was a key source of data. Facilitating the weekly meetings enabled me to observe how students engaged with each activity and gave insights into their points of view and specific struggles (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Hammersley, 2006; Stringer, 2014). There are degrees of participant observation in AR, however. To gain interpretive knowledge, Brannick and Coghlan (2007) advocate that researchers completely identify with insiders as an "observing participant" (p. 66). They suggest such a position yields rich, interpretive data, "understanding in use" (p. 66) from the researcher's "subjectively immersed role" (p. 66) in the research context. In the role of observing participants, researchers are participants first, and observers second.

The focus of this research, however, was to design an effective intervention rather than to complete a phenomenological study of mature students. This indicated that observations would be used for reflecting on the effectiveness of the study group, for modifying activities, or perhaps designing new activities to address emerging needs. It was more pertinent, therefore, to assume a more objective position – and to take care to maintain that objectivity, as Hammersley (2006) advises. I thus occupied a more peripheral observer role (Adler & Adler, 1987), a position aligning with the more objective, outsider stance of classical AR (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

Participant observation took place in the weekly study groups. Here, I endeavoured to look critically and objectively at what seemed a very familiar situation (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007), a tutor working with students. Kawulich (2005) advocates researchers maintain a non-judgmental attitude, listening carefully, and observing both what is happening and what is not happening through the observation process. So far as was possible, I endeavoured to do this, although the process was complicated by my active participation in the collaborative activities.

It was important to use understanding that emerged from observation as soon as possible to feed back into the study group design. At times, observation contributed to key changes in the research. Instances of these issues are discussed in Chapter 6 (the extreme stress participants were experiencing leading to a shift in focus for the research) and Chapter 7 (confusion over first essays leading to a decision to hold an extra meeting to collaboratively discuss how students might approach their first essays).

One warning DeWalt and DeWalt (1998) offer for participant observers is the need to set parameters for their involvement in the lives of participants with whom they work closely. Researchers may need to decide the extent to which they might intervene in participants' lives. While this may be more relevant in ethnographic research involving, for example, potential criminal activity (Berg, 2009), to an extent it was relevant to this research because of the bonding that developed between participants and friendships that were made within the study group that continued beyond its bounds and long after the research finished. At times, too, certain participants clearly had mental health or relational issues that would see them benefit from counselling; I had to weigh up whether it was an intrusion into their lives or a responsibility and in their best interests to refer them to professional help.

5.4.4 Transcripts of study group meetings

Meetings were recorded. The process of recording was introduced in the first meeting in light of the study group being a research project. Students were assured that they were free at all times to leave, should they choose.

Transcripts of study group meetings complemented the participant observation and became a valuable data source. Their analysis led to a deeper understanding of the research context from participants' viewpoints and they became the most extensively-cited sources of data in this thesis. Transcription enabled me to somewhat relive the experiences of study groups, confirming who had been the most active, who was silent or contributed very little. Some of my earlier observations were noted through the transcription process. Some particularly significant sections of study group meetings, after transcription, were entered into the reflective journal to match participants' actual words with my observations.

Other methods of collecting data in this research were participant interviews at the beginnings and ends of each cycle, chat times, and examination of students' texts.

5.4.5 Participant interviews

Gillham (2000) recommends the use of individual interviews where numbers of participants are not high and participants are accessible. Consequently, I planned semi-structured interviews with participants twice in each cycle: entry interviews in the first weeks of the semester as they joined the research, and exit interviews, conducted at times suitable for participants in the last week of the semester or in the break between semesters. Entry interviews were designed to build rapport with participants and to afford an opportunity to reflect on their process of getting to university. Exit interviews (see Appendix 5) were designed for participants to talk about their first semesters on campus and to share their impressions of the study group.

A note on rapport

As one of the key tenets of AR is its democratic approach to research, it was essential in this research to build rapport with participants. Rapport is essential for building trust between participants and the researcher (Ispa Landa, 2006; Kawulich, 2005). Kawulich (2005) suggests that good rapport enables participants to act naturally and lessens any effect of trying to do or say the right thing for the researcher. In addition, she observes that when rapport is successfully developed, participants feel assured that the researcher

will report information they share sensitively and accurately. In this research, good relationships and little power imbalance between participants and the researcher (Eikeland, 2012; Greenwood & Levin 2007) would be a key for their engaged participation.

Rapport may also contribute to developing relationships – perhaps a more appropriate word would be networking – with and between participants that might well continue after the research finishes (Glesne, 1989). Bath (2009) was very aware of that possibility through her research; she foregrounded ethnographical methodology as a way to explore her context and develop rapport with participants before she invited them to participate in her research. However, Glesne (1989) has noted that, in research that relies on democratic relationships and rapport between participants and researchers, friendships that develop may skew the objectivity of the research. That was something I needed to be mindful of, particularly for Cycle One participants who elected to continue to meet through their second semesters. As noted above, many participants, but particularly those in Cycle One, developed bonds which continued outside the university context. In the research context, however, the focus was necessarily on developing rapport as quickly as possible, to establish a friendly environment in which participants felt safe to work together.

To begin to establish rapport with participants, ‘getting to know you’ activities, which included identifying features different ones of us had in common (Ispa Landa, 2006) and brief sharing about how each participant had enrolled at university at this particular time, were incorporated into the first meeting of each cycle. In addition, in order to reduce power distance between me and participants, I was careful to dress casually, as I believed the other mature-aged students might dress; I was very careful to use accessible language from the world outside of university in all my dealings with participants.

Entry interviews

Rapport that was developed in that first group meeting continued into the entry interviews. For these, I prepared interview guides (Berg, 2009; Mertler, 2012) to gain some standardised information from participants. Interviews included questions concerning how participants had come to university at this point in their lives, what writing they might have done since school, how they had prepared themselves for

university, and any challenges they anticipated (see Appendix 5). As interviews were semi-structured, students were able to talk about anything they felt was instrumental in their decision to come to university at this point in time.

The guide gave some structure to the interviews, but as the interviews occurred after the first group meeting with its light-hearted ‘find someone who . . .’ exercise, I was able to approach them in a conversational manner, picking up on aspects of participants’ lives they had been willing to share. In the interests of establishing rapport, interviews were a time of sharing between researcher and respondent (Ispa Landa, 2006). Where it was relevant, I shared my fellow mature-aged student status, chatting about commonalities revealed in the introductory meeting and, as Ispa Landa (2006) suggests, where appropriate, sharing challenges I was experiencing that matched those of participants: encountering new vocabulary and negotiating different meanings attached to ordinary-sounding words, for example that writing could be “situated”, was one illustration of this. I tried to ensure the interviews were active, a time when researcher and respondent could collaborate to construct new knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) as I guided participants to begin to reflect on their paths to university.

Exit interviews

Exit interviews (Appendix 5) were also semi-structured, to ensure essential data for the research was collected. I invited students to contribute a final reflection on their semesters by sharing high points – “lightbulb moments” – and how they felt the semesters had gone. They were invited to comment on how they found the study group and, in an oblique way, to comment on issues that had been their greatest concerns by contributing any ideas they had, based on their first-semester experiences, that they felt would benefit future mature students. The invitation also contributed to further understanding of the cohort that could be incorporated into the next iteration of the study group as it provided a way for students to identify personal weaknesses – such as time management – they had stumbled with through the semester.

Although the focus of the research widened from writing to acquiring an academic Discourse, writing is such an integral part of that Discourse that I kept the same interview questions for each cycle. Study groups maintained a writing focus, and writing remained a concern for all new participants. In addition, I wanted to maintain some consistency in the data gathered for each cycle.

Interviews were primarily transcribed by me. A few were transcribed by outside transcribers who signed a confidentiality agreement. Participants were invited to read over transcripts and suggest changes if necessary.

5.4.6 Chat times

In this action research, chat times began every meeting. The synergy of the chat times afforded similar benefits for the research as focus groups. In addition, they afforded considerable benefits for participants in that they enabled opportunities for informal cultural or literacy brokering, collaborative reflection, and for students to learn vicariously from their peers (4.2.5, 4.2.6, 4.3.1). Towards the end of Cycles Two and Four, one meeting of the study group functioned as an extended chat time, providing rich, interpretive data.

A key aim in the interaction in the chat times was to achieve the “synergy of ideas” (B. Bartlett, Fletcher, Piggot-Irvine, & Zuber-Skerritt, 2008) available from focus groups. In focus groups, the interaction between participants may trigger new ideas or insights that the researcher might not have thought of (Stringer, 2008). Thus focus groups may function rather like group interviews (Piggot-Irvine & Bartlett, 2008; Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007). However, they differ from interviews in that the researcher relinquishes control of the interaction (Berg, 2009) and participants are able to bounce ideas off each other.

In some focus group practice, the researcher introduces a topic and then leaves discussion to participants (B. Bartlett et al., 2008.). In other practice, groups are unguided and topics arise from participants (Berg, 2009). B. Bartlett et al. (2008) suggest that leaving a focus group meeting open to participants might result in the researcher losing control of the data generated; however, in this research it would be important to develop contextual knowledge about mature students at this university that might then inform modifications to the study group design. I decided that leaving the subject of the chat open for participants to control might result in topics being discussed that I would not think to introduce.

A pattern for collaborative interaction was given in the second meeting of each cycle as I asked each group of participants an open question about how their first weeks had gone and invited students to contribute one by one. In every subsequent meeting, the discussion was left open for participants to control, to introduce topics relevant to them

at that time. Students would at times seek clarification from me if the discussion concerned an unfamiliar aspect of academic culture or literacy, and this provided an opportunity for brokering, as Perry (2009, p. 254) explains it, “providing informal assistance about . . . a literacy practice” (4.2.5). Often, students had walked together from classes to the study group and were already engaged in conversation about their immediate concerns, so these conversations continued into chat times when other participants were drawn into the conversation. The farm toys illustration discussed in 9.3 is one example of this.

My decision to use a whole meeting for an extended chat time near the end of Cycle Two (7.4.6) was for two main reasons. There had been no study group meetings for three weeks because of the mid-semester break and sick children which had kept the parents at home. During the break, several students had withdrawn from university or from the research. From this point in the semester, the two weekly iterations would become one weekly meeting with the remaining students from the two groups functioning as a single group. I recognised the value participants gained from being able to bounce ideas off each other, so an opportunity to join in a collaborative discussion would serve as a purposeful way for students to establish connections with their new peers. Of course, it also generated rich data about students’ particular challenges.

Before the meeting, I emailed participants:

Today in my new, small office, down the hall from the old one. Bring your lunch if you like. We’ll talk about whatever you like.

When students had met their peers and the interaction about the strangeness of academic culture waned, I contributed an invitation to talk about writing. This led to students almost outdoing each other as they shared their impressions about how little they had known about writing for university before they arrived; it then led to one student introducing her extreme fears about plagiarism – a topic that had not emerged so far through the group. The interaction contributed to understanding that confirmed Hendricks and Quinn’s (2000) argument that the practice of teaching referencing as a tick-box skill, with no understanding of actually entering a conversation, may lead to paralysing fear rather than successful writing. The topic called for some brokering of the understanding of plagiarism from the researcher – thus interrupting the focus-group kind of interaction.

5.4.7 The Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (WAM)

This test is a 26-item Likert-scale questionnaire developed in the 1970s by Daly and Miller to measure students' levels of writing apprehension (Daly & Miller, 1975). For this study, in order to eliminate any suggestion that there might be correct ways to respond to the questions, and to reduce any apprehension students might connect with sitting a test, the name was changed from 'test' to 'measure', hence WAM. Another change to the original wording was to replace references to 'composition', a term understood in the USA but not highly used in New Zealand, to 'writing'.

The measure takes five to ten minutes to complete by responding to statements (see Appendix 4). It indicates overall writing apprehension as well as particular areas of worry: fear of evaluation because of expected low grades, general stress about writing including freezing up before beginning to write, or fear of being unable to produce a good finished product. It also gives respondents a chance to identify their self-beliefs about their writing ability.

Although the test was developed when the approach to teaching writing focused on correct form, and although statement 17, "Writing is a lot of fun" seems unusual in a university context, it has not been surpassed as a measure of apprehension. For decades, researchers interested in helping students overcome their writing apprehension have used Daly and Miller's measure, and then devised strategies to help their students overcome their fears and improve their writing so they could successfully complete their college courses (D. C. Clark, 2005; Gillam-Scott, 1984; Gillam, 1991; Pajares, 2003). A recent example of this is Diane Clark, who completed a PhD from Arizona State University developing a theory of writing anxiety (D. C. Clark, 2005). Since then, she has developed courses specifically to "help apprehensive students with their writing" (D. C. Clark, PC, November 10, 2010).

My decision to use the WAM, even though it dated from a different era of writing instruction, was based on observations of mature students in academic writing classes over many years. Many of these students, as the literature has indicated (3.3.5), were almost cripplingly apprehensive about writing, very unsure of how to begin to write an essay, freezing up before they started, and requiring many hours of tutor-time as I worked with them through the writing process to enable them to write drafts of their essays. Diane Clark's assurances (PC, November 10, 2010) confirmed that the WAM

could indicate specific areas of apprehension and sources of anxiety which might then inform a teaching approach for the study group.

5.4.8 Practitioner interviews

As part of the reconnaissance phase for this research I was able to interview personnel involved with mature-aged students at other New Zealand universities. Interviews sought contextual information about mature-aged students at those institutions and the interventions provided for them, and contributed to the discussion of the New Zealand context in this thesis (Chapter 2). Contacts were established from university websites and emailed information forms about the research and the ethical approval from this university. Those who agreed to be interviewed were provided with information and consent forms before the interview and afterwards, copies of interview transcripts to comment on.

5.4.9 Personal communication

This research took place on a relatively compact campus; it was possible to see participants around the campus, in the dining hall, or in the library. Sometimes a participant would call into my office for a chat; sometimes participants would email or text. Some of these unplanned communications yielded rich data about participants' journeys towards or away from an academic Discourse, and, with their permission, were recorded in my 'logistics'.

5.4.10 Participants' texts

Other data included completed, marked essays (and drafts) and writers' notebooks (see 2.3.1 and 5.4.2) from participants who were taking the academic writing paper, some marked essays from writing-intensive papers taken by participating students where permission was given by lecturers and tutors, and copies of essay topics and course administration notes for those courses.

I had intended to incorporate analysis of student texts into final interviews with participants, to delve into why they had written in certain ways, and how much they had learned about academic writing through the semester. Unfortunately, however, by the time of final interviews, students had very little written work back; in addition, many felt they might need their disciplinary essays to revise for exams. Examining student texts later, though, enabled me to evaluate how far students managed to begin to write as insiders to a culture and to situate their essays in a disciplinary context.

Through these multiple data sources, I was able to gain a measure of triangulation (B. Bartlett & Piggot-Irvine, 2008; Berg, 2009): a collective perspective from recordings of study group meetings; a researcher perspective from my own observations and reflections on the action, and the individual perspectives of participants from individual interviews.

I used the same data-collection methods in each cycle, but sought different types of knowledge from those data. Mindful of the potential in AR to achieve both understanding and change (Dick, 2002) and that “solid action research leads to a deepened understanding of the question posed as well as to more sophisticated questions” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 86), interpretive data, particularly from Cycle One, contributed to broadening the focus of the research question. In order to design an effective intervention, it was necessary to understand the students’ specific needs concerning their transitions to academic writing. Interpretive data from Cycles Two to Four added to that understanding and tended to confirm the need for the specific interventions that had been developed. Through the successive cycles, I looked for data that confirmed or refuted findings from Cycle One. I also looked for indications of how participants evaluated components of the interventions within the cycles (Elliott, 1991; Stringer, 2014).

5.4.11 Coding of data sources

Where data are cited in this thesis they are coded as follows:

Formal sources:

- A1/2/3: assignment one/two/three
- En: entry interview: “En 1”: entry interview, Cycle One (second or third weeks of participants’ first semesters)
- Ex: exit interview: “Ex 1” exit interview, Cycle One (usually final weeks of first semesters, or very early in their second semesters)
- AG/LG afternoon group/lunchtime group meeting of weekly study group
- SG: transcript of a study group meeting; “SG1 AG.3” study group meeting Cycle One, afternoon group, 3rd week

- WN: the Writer’s Notebook used by students in the academic writing course “WN 2”, Writer’s Notebook, Cycle Two student

Informal sources:

- Email 1/2/3/4: email communication from participant in Cycle One/Two/Three/Four
- PC: personal communication: “PC 1” personal communication from participant in Cycle One

5.5 Ethical issues

5.5.1 A low risk project

I submitted a low-risk application to the Human Ethics Committee to involve mature-aged students in a voluntary study group. I proposed to gather data from the study groups, from interviews, the WAM, and examination of written coursework. To address the possible ethical concern that because I had been a long-term academic writing tutor there might be a conflict of interest as I met with students each week, I withdrew from teaching academic writing for the duration of the research. The planned research was evaluated by peer review and deemed to be low risk (see Appendix 1).

Later low-risk applications were approved when I needed to interview personnel from other tertiary institutions about their practice with mature-aged students, and when the research period was extended beyond a year.

5.5.2 Identifying potential areas of conflict

The coordinator of the academic writing course wanted assurance that designed study group activities would be different from activities usually covered in tutorials for that course, and Student Learning requested that study-group activities did not duplicate their lunchtime workshops.

Ethical issues might arise in naturalistic research when participants indulge in criticism of others. A potential area of conflict in this research was that students, in interviews or in study groups, might criticise staff or fellow students. Guidelines for study groups were discussed in the first meeting of each cycle, and the practice of maintaining a “respectful and open relationship” (Hooley, 2005, p. 77) between participants was agreed on.

5.5.3 Information and consent

I prepared information and consent forms for potential student participants and for tutors, lecturers, and coordinators of courses from which students would contribute their written work. All consent forms assured participants of anonymity and confidentiality and included an opt-out clause.

In the first meeting of each cycle I went over the information forms carefully with participants, explaining the research and its purpose. Students were advised to take the forms home and consider any implications before they signed them. This process was repeated individually with students who joined the research after that first meeting.

5.6 Dealing with data

As AR is an emergent methodology in which constant reflection and analysis of data are integral parts of the research process and necessary to contribute to modifications to the intervention being researched, data analysis began in the first week. Continual reflection in action and on action (Schön, 1995), during and after every study group meeting (Figure 5.3), indicated some immediate changes to content and structure of meetings had to be made. These are discussed in Chapters 6-9 of this thesis.

I had intended to approach data inductively, allowing themes that might contribute to understanding the situation of mature-aged students at this university and thus to the structure, content, and pedagogy of the study group to emerge as in a grounded approach (Charmaz, 2008). As Kelle (2005) points out, however, it is almost impossible to approach data without some sort of lens, some predetermined expectations, either from theory, from literature, or from previous experience. Cohen et al. (2011) alert action researchers to the fact that objectivity may be a particular challenge because of the democratic nature of the research – but Kemmis et al. (2014) would counter that by arguing that researchers' values are an essential part of the AR process. The critical friends mentioned above, and the practice of member-checking (5.3), go some way towards helping lone action researchers to be aware of bias as they analyse data.

In the process of data analysis, I was open to emerging themes, but the reconnaissance phase of the research had alerted me to some themes concerning student knowledge and characteristics which might emerge. Thus, I set up labelled folders for themes I expected, for example, factors which might complicate students' engagement, such as: 'juggling commitments'; 'seeking support'; 'finances'. Other folders which I expected

included 'writing apprehension' and 'what they know about writing'. Interestingly, because most participants had managed to secure student loans, 'finances' did not receive many entries. In contrast, 'what they know about writing' had to incorporate numerous sub-folders, some of which then became folders in their own right: 'digital literacy/computer skills', 'language' which then subdivided into 'disciplinary' and 'generic', and 'process'. Unanticipated categories included 'reading', 'reading strategies', 'brokering', 'relationships' and 'health'.

As I analysed data from each cycle, I cut and pasted from transcripts, or from my reflective journal, into the appropriate folders. I approached these data on two levels: the surface, or semantic level, and the below-the-surface, or latent level which would lead to a deeper understanding of the research problem (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Analysis is an ongoing process through an AR cycle, requiring revisiting data to identify latent implications. Herr and Anderson (2005) outline the process AR researchers will be involved in:

initial meaning making, including some decisions regarding directions for interventions or actions; and then a revisiting of the data for a more thorough, holistic understanding. The latter analysis takes the researcher beyond the initial level of understanding. (p. 81)

In an example of differences between semantic and latent levels in data in this research, one file that began to fill early in every cycle was labelled according to its semantic or surface level: "epistemology of the university". Herr and Anderson (2005) unpick what is necessary in such a situation:

In order to understand the local, one must understand how the local came to be the way it is. This will necessarily take the action researcher into an analysis that is social, historical, and economic. It will also provide a more complex understanding of where solutions are to be sought. (p. 68)

Seeking explanations for why this difficulty arose so consistently led me to investigations I had not anticipated, particularly into the former education system and economic conditions in New Zealand under which all but two participants were educated, but which all recollected. Some of these data are discussed in Chapters 6-9.

Braun and Clarke (2006) advocate memoing, taking note of important or recurring or curiosity-arousing themes which could prove interesting, but which might not immediately be clear. I noted such things on the back pages of my hard-covered exercise books and returned to them as they developed. Health and the latent effects of relationships past and present were some of these themes, perhaps not obviously related to the research question, but definitely affecting some students' ability to engage with the study group and also with their university experience.

Burnard (1991) suggests that during the coding process, researchers should make decisions about data extraneous to the aim of the research which he, drawing on Field and Morse (1985), refers to as 'dross' (p. 462). That step was necessary in this research as, in some instances, in responding to an invitation to talk about why they had come to university at this particular time, some participants seemed relieved to share aspects of their lives which they perceived to be significant in the process of their arrival at university. While those details enabled me to understand students as people, to see where they were coming from and why they had arrived on campus, they perhaps fitted under Merrill's designation of "the cultural baggage of [students'] past and present lives" (2001, p. 7), or Kasworm's "turbulent life circumstances" (2008, p. 28). As such, while participants clearly regarded those details as an integral part of their identity and important enough to share, even at times alluding to them in study group meetings, they are not recorded in this thesis. On the transcripts I noted a summarising phrase and "* * * [details given]".

I note, though, that such was the relationship of trust that developed between participants and the researcher that, even though I had not transcribed some of the material shared in the introductory interviews, since it was not directly relevant to the study, some participants referred to those data throughout their involvement in the research as if the shared knowledge formed a bond between us. In other instances, participants clearly assumed that I retained knowledge of that material. For example, two participants, one in a chance meeting three years after his involvement in the research and the other, similarly, four years after his semester on campus, referred back to that set-aside information from their introductory interviews as they explained their new circumstances.

When dealing with data, Dick (1993) advises AR researchers to seek to disconfirm findings from one cycle through literature and through subsequent cycles. In this research, however, while some data conflicted with literature, both semantic and latent meanings were very consistent across all cycles.

5.7 Terminology used in this thesis

This action research project eventually extended to four cycles over three years, with new groups of first-year participants in each cycle. To clarify which group, which year, and whether I am talking about the research project, one particular semester's iteration of the study group, or one single meeting, I have adopted the terminology as follows:

- “Study group” refers to the entity that was the subject of this research, the structure and content of a group designed first to support mature-aged students as they learned to write for university and then to become a focused community in which participants could be supported as they acquired an academic Discourse. In the context of discussing each cycle, “study group” refers to the group in that cycle.
- “Meeting” denotes a weekly study group meeting of one group of mature students.
- “Cycle One/Two/Three/Four” denote the research cycles in the first (2011, Cycle One), second (2012, Cycles Two and Three), and third (2013, Cycle Four) years of the research.
- In order to preserve anonymity, names given to participants are pseudonyms. Many are chosen by participants themselves. Māori names indicate Māori ethnicity where that was acknowledged by participants.

5.8 Chapter conclusion

AR is a methodology that would allow the study group intervention to be actioned and continually evaluated and modified in response to emerging data. AR was the most appropriate methodology for this research because it allows researchers to work closely with participants without fear of bias or contamination of the research and to assume different roles in different phases of the research. AR also allows researchers to select electively from different approaches and to seek different knowledge interests within a single project as it works for both change and understanding. Those features were applied in this project through four cycles of action and research which are discussed in the following four chapters.

Chapter 6 Exploring the terrain

6.1 Introduction

The first cycle of the AR was designed to discover how a study group could support mature-aged students as they learnt to write for university; it was primarily exploratory (B. Bartlett & Piggot-Irvine, 2008). Data emerging early in Cycle One, however, began to indicate that many of the students brought similar challenges with literacy as Whitehead (2012) had identified with another cohort of New Zealand participants (see Chapter 2.) Observations indicated that participants had arrived at university without an appropriate level of literacy, with little knowledge of academic genres and very limited or non-existent schemata for academic writing. It was clear, too, that participants had few connections to academic culture.

As these data emerged, I determined that the focus of the research needed to be more holistic than a focus on writing. The focus began to broaden to explore how a study group might enable students to acquire an academic Discourse. One of my key roles was to design activities, or interventions, that might begin to address the gaps that were becoming apparent between skills, literacies and Discourses participants brought, and those they needed. Then, each activity had to be evaluated to determine whether it was set at an appropriate distance for the ZPD of the group and of individual students, and whether it was accessible to participants. In that way, every 25-minute writing-focused activity became a mini-cycle of AR; Cycle One became, as Wadsworth described, “countless tiny cycles” (1998, np).

This chapter provides an overview of the first cycle. It tells a story organised primarily under the P-A-O-R stages characteristic of AR: implementing the planned action, observing and reflecting on the action, and responding to emerging data by re-planning. As will be clear from the chapter, and as is characteristic of the methodology, those phases were not linear; they merged and overlapped.

In this chapter, section 6.2 discusses planning and some initial action (which involved continual re-planning). Section 6.3 focuses on observation and reflection, and section 6.4 describes some of the key interventions which were designed in response to that observation and reflection. Section 6.5, forms the bridge between Cycles One and Two, reflecting on Cycle One and pointing towards the revised planning for Cycle Two.

6.2 Planning and initial action

The continual process of action, observation, reflection, and re-planning through Cycle One reflected Stringer’s descriptors of AR as a methodology involving “working backward,” “repeating,” “revising,” “rethinking,” “leapfrogging” and “making radical changes in direction” (2014, p. 10). From the first meeting with participants, it was necessary to amend initial plans, to rethink and revise structural factors of the study group.

Initial plans for the study group were for six, fortnightly meetings incorporating a social approach to learning as increasing membership in a community of practice, with the writing activities informed by the scaffolded genre approach to writing (4.4) and visualised on Table 4.1. I had envisaged that in these meetings, the researcher would function as an MCP, collaborating with participants in the learning activities and scaffolding their efforts. These planned meetings are shown on Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Initial Cycle One plans for six weeks of study group meetings

Week	Theme/activity	Purpose for participants	Relation to conceptual framework
1	Introduce research, ethics. ‘Getting to know you’ activity. Collaborative examination of course hand-outs; discuss what good writing entails and the importance of addressing the prompt; discuss purpose of first assignments.	Begin to establish a social network and identify with a group of peers through engaging in purposeful collaborative activities (MacFadgen, 2008; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008). Introduction to generic academic assignment discourse, also to the wider expected outcomes of their disciplinary courses (Chanock, 2006).	Begin to develop a sense of belonging in academia (MacFadgen, 2008) Begin to acquire ways of being and doing within academic Culture (Cullity, 2008; Gee, 1989, 2015). Stage 1 of the learning cycle involves identifying and discussing the purpose of texts (Rothery, 1996; Wingate, 2016).
2	Share a challenge they are facing with the group. Practising freewriting, sharing writing with peers.	Understand that mature students worldwide share similar challenges (Merrill, 2001; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008). Freewriting (Elbow, 1973) is one of many different ways of beginning to write.	WPA outcomes for first-year composition include knowledge of components of writing process (Harrington et al., 2001; Navarre Cleary, 2008). Low-stakes writing may develop confidence and fluency (Navarre Cleary, 2008).

3	<p>Discussion about university discourse (small 'd').</p> <p>Collaboratively evaluate sources brought by students; identify the main points of one source; consider a stance on issues raised.</p>	<p>Some words used in ordinary discourse have specialised meanings in academic discourse (Chanock, 2004; Cullity, 2008; Lawrence, 2005; Gee, 1989).</p> <p>Not all sources have equal value; sources are to be interacted with to 'enter the conversation'.</p>	<p>Academic discourse is an integral part of academic culture and is best acquired in a social setting (Gee, 2010; Lave & Wenger, 1991).</p> <p>Mediating the practices of an academic Discourse (Gee, 2002; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007); interacting with sources (Chanock, 2006; Gaipa, 2004); constructing knowledge by writing (Gamache, 2002; Wingate, 2008).</p>
4	<p>Any matters arising from transitions or writing?</p> <p>Co-construct a body paragraph synthesising material from the same sources as previous session.</p>	<p>Fostering group support and a sense of belonging (Tinto, 1997). Succeeding vicariously through observing similar peers (Bandura, 1993, 2012; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Habel, 2009).</p> <p>How to interact with sources, take a stance, synthesise and incorporate sources into writing (Gaipa, 2004; Gamache, 2002; Hendricks & Quinn, 2000).</p>	<p>Developing a focused community (Wenger, 1998).</p> <p>Interacting, synthesising, and taking a stance are essential components of academic writing (Bartholomae, 1989; Chanock, 2008; Harrington et al., 2001; Hendricks & Quinn, 2000).</p> <p>Co-construction of texts is a scaffolded, sociocultural practice (Rothery, 1996; Wingate, 2016).</p>
5	<p>Any matters arising from transitions or writing?</p> <p>Collaborative revision of a marked assignment, responding to feedback.</p>	<p>Fostering group support and a sense of belonging</p> <p>Writing is a recursive process modified by incorporating feedback (Harrington et al., 2001; Unsworth & Kauter, 2008).</p>	<p>Writing is a recursive process (Harrington, 2001; Sommers, 2006). Feedback is essential for learning, particularly for writing in specific disciplines (Navarre Cleary, 2008; Sommers, 2006).</p>
6	<p>Open for discussion.</p>	<p>Continuing to establish a social network and to learn by immersion in academic culture (Dalziel & Peat, 1998; Gee, 2010; MacFadgen, 2008; Tinto, 1997).</p>	<p>Nurturing a focused community of peers (Crowther, Maclachlan and Tett, 2010).</p>

6.2.1 Immediate need for re-planning

The plans depicted on Table 6.1, however, were almost immediately set aside, although they became the basis for a greatly extended programme. Students who came to the introductory meeting immediately made some input that led to structural changes.

The first modifications were to change the parameters for participation. All students who attended the introductory meeting were very keen to join the research, but four were not actually first-year. Two already had degrees, but in other languages: Ann, in one of the languages of her home country, and Tama in te reo Māori (Māori language medium). A third student, Lyn, had previously completed a distance course, but this was her first semester on campus. After consultation with my supervisors, these three students were welcomed to the research. Through the semester, Ann's and Tama's reflections on their current experiences of university culture and academic writing, and their efforts to contrast them with aspects of their former university experiences in very different cultures, provided clues for interpreting emerging data.

The fourth non-first-year student, however, gave quick, accurate responses to my questions, before other students had a chance to look and find answers for themselves. His confidence seemed somewhat threatening to the apprehension that seemed to be felt by the other students in the room. Discussion with him after the meeting ascertained that he was well outside the parameters for the research, with only two courses left to complete his degree. I encouraged him to network with members of the group, and he accepted my explanation that the group was designed for beginning students and did not join the research. His attendance, however, perhaps suggested a felt need to identify with fellow mature-aged students.

Two major structural changes were implemented in that first meeting in response to input from participants. First, students asked that the study group meet every week, assuring me they had time for such a commitment. As had been indicated in the literature (MacFadgen, 2008; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008), students clearly appreciated meeting similar peers. In that first meeting, as they introduced themselves, they identified with each other's stories as each told of struggles to overcome histories of failure and gather courage to enrol at university: "I'm one of those who failed School Cert. . . . Yet I am willing to take the risk" (Gwen, SG1 AG.1). Some identified with those who told of resentment and suspicion from family networks when they had decided to re-enter education: "My partner isn't very happy about it" (Tama, SG1 LG.1). They listened to similar peers expressing their fears about coming to university and particularly, fears about the demands of the unknown academic writing they would have to do. Students clearly appreciated that they were not school-leavers and that the complex processes involved in their arrival at university differentiated them somewhat

from their younger peers. There was a sense among them that perhaps, in a group of similar peers, they might find support that might not be available from their home networks. They seemed almost desperate to have an opportunity to meet again soon.

In response to their request, study group meetings were held weekly throughout the semester. In addition, to accommodate different timetables and days students came to campus, two iterations of the group were offered each week, one in a lunch break and one meeting at 3 p.m. The original plans became the basis for a broadened structure of meetings for a whole semester. This is shown on Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Eventual content of Cycle One study group meetings

	Theme/activity	Purpose for participants	Relation to conceptual framework
1.1	<p>Introduce the research, ethics.</p> <p>‘Getting to know you’ activity.</p> <p>Introduce course handouts from those who have them.</p>	<p>Begin to establish a social network: engage in purposeful collaborative activities, (MacFadgen, 2008; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008); identify people in the same courses.</p> <p>Identify ways of accessing and negotiating course materials.</p>	<p>Begin to develop a sense of belonging in academia (MacFadgen, 2008).</p> <p>Begin to acquire ways of ‘being and doing’ within academic culture (Cullity, 2008; Gee, 1989).</p>
1.2	<p>Share a challenge they are facing with the group.</p> <p>Examine course handouts.</p> <p>Analyse essay prompts.</p>	<p>Understand that mature students worldwide share similar challenges (Merrill, 2001; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008).</p> <p>Begin to build academic self-efficacy through social modelling (Bandura, 2012; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Habel, 2009) as they see similar peers mastering aspects of the new culture.</p> <p>Identify purpose of first assignments. Begin to understand how their writing assignments fit within the desired outcomes for their courses (Chanock, 2004; Wingate, 2006).</p> <p>Experience benefits of working collaboratively (Tobin, 2001).</p>	<p>Begin to negotiate the new culture of academia, to know how to ‘be and do’ within it (Cullity, 2008; Gee, 1989).</p> <p>Writing is situated; styles and formatting may be discipline-specific (Carroll, 2002; Chanock, 2004; Wingate, 2006).</p> <p>Stage 1 of the learning cycle involves identifying and discussing the purpose of texts (Rothery, 1996; Wingate, 2016).</p> <p>Knowledge is socially constructed (Wingate, 2006);</p> <p>Aspects of the writing process are social (Harrington et al., 2001).</p>
1.3	<p>Analyse different essay prompts from previous session.</p> <p>Discuss and plan possible</p>	<p>Identify purpose of first assignments. Begin to understand how their writing assignments fit within the desired outcomes for their</p>	<p>Stage 1 of the learning cycle involves identifying and discussing the purpose of texts (Rothery, 1996; Wingate, 2016).</p>

	essay structures to address essay prompts.	courses (Chanock, 2004; Wingate, 2006). Understand that structuring information is part of the writing process (Harrington et al., 2001).	Writing is situated and discipline-specific (Carroll, 2002; Chanock, 2004; Wingate, 2006). Collaboration is a valuable part of the writing process (Harrington et al., 2001; Tobin, 2001).
1.4	Reflecting on academic culture. Skimming and scanning.	Reading strategically and efficiently – skimming and scanning academic literature is part of the writing process (Harrington et al., 2001).	Reading strategically is part of the writing process (Harrington et al., 2001). Reading for information is a specialised practice and takes time to acquire (Kirkness & Neill, 2009).
1.5	Skimming and scanning. Collaboratively construct a paragraph incorporating source material.	Practise skimming and scanning academic literature, brainstorming, mind-mapping, structuring a paragraph (Harrington et al., 2001). Information can be organised into structured paragraphs (as described in the online writing support and in course material). Develop academic self-efficacy through working towards mastery (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Habel, 2009).	Heuristics, organising (Harrington et al., 2001) and synthesising information are part of the writing process (Hendricks & Quinn, 2000). Writing is a way of constructing knowledge (Chanock, 2001; Harrington et al., 2001). Develop academic self-efficacy through working towards mastery (Bandura, 1993, 2012; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Habel, 2009).
1.6	Collaborative guided analysis of section of literature review of an academic article.	“Understanding . . . how propositions and arguments are counterweighted, questioned, or supported. . . . The rhetorical processes in academic discourse” (Wingate, 2006, p. 463). Making the epistemology of university explicit (Hendricks & Quinn, 2000; Wingate, 2006).	Practical work with the ‘conversation’ in their disciplines (Chanock, 2008). Critical thinking and negotiating multiple viewpoints are components of academic literacy (Carroll, 2002; Harrington et al., 2001). Stage 2 of the learning cycle is collaborative deconstruction and discussion (Rothery, 1996; Wingate, 2016). The purpose of much academic literature is to advance knowledge (Wingate, 2006).
1.7	Collaborative revision of marked assignments.	Writing is a social and recursive process (Harrington et al., 2001); Feedback is essential for learning (Navarre Cleary, 2011; Sommers, 2006).	Writing is a social and recursive process (Harrington et al., 2001); it develops through active response to feedback (Sommers, 2006). Stages 3 and 4 of the learning cycle involve collaborative co-construction of texts (Rothery, 1996; Wingate, 2016).
1.8, 1.9	Discuss how to write a short text about mature students at university for student magazine. Co-	Consideration of audience and how to modify writing to suit (Chanock, 2006; Harrington et al., 2001).	Considering purpose, a different audience altering tone and style, are parts of the writing process (Harrington et al., 2001). Stage 1 of

	construct a text.		the learning cycle involves identifying and discussing the purpose of texts (Rothery, 1996; Wingate, 2016).
1.10	Chocolate biscuits and coffee to unwind before exams.	Time to reflect on how far they have come.	Identifying with a focused group of peers (Gee, 1989; 2015).

Through Cycle One we worked through these activities at a pace consistent with students' acquisition of new skills rather than according to a detailed plan. This flexible pace was important, as it provided an opportunity for participants to address issues with low academic self-efficacy.

6.2.2 Participants

In total, twenty students attended some meetings of the study group in Cycle One, but as students strategised about which days they would attend campus, or struggled with juggling their commitments, or withdrew from university, regular attenders settled at ten. Participants who attended three or more meetings and their age groupings are indicated on Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Cycle One participants

2011 Cycle One: Afternoon group			
25-29 years	30-34 years	35-39 years	40-44 years
Bruce	Lyn	Charlie	Ann*
			Gwen
*Ann had a BA from 20 years previously, from another country and in another language.			

2011 Cycle One: Lunchtime group			
30-34 years	40-44 years	50-54 years	60-64 years
Te Āwhina	Adam	Leigh	Mary
Tui*	Jane		
	Tama*		
*Both Tui and Tama withdrew from meetings early in the semester; Tui cited family reasons and Tama did not complete his course.			

All except Ann came from families whose children did not traditionally progress to university. Some had relatives or siblings, and Leigh and Mary had adult children who had degrees, but participants had not lived with those whānau while they studied. Most,

therefore, were first in their family in their generation to attend university. Gwen, though, had a little familiarity with academic ways as her husband tutored at the university in applied sciences.

6.2.3 Continual re-planning

While we followed a broadened version of the original plans, as indicated above, these plans were amended many times in response to observations and emerging data. If we take Stringer's verb "leapfrogging" (2014, p. 10) to indicate things that were passed over, or abandoned, leapfrogging was implemented for three main reasons:

- Limited time available for study group meetings meant we could only complete parts of planned activities;
- Emerging data demonstrated a more immediate need for a different sort of activity;
- Activities were set too far beyond the collective ZPD of the group; in addition, some activities were found to have too little relative value for participants to be retained in the programme.

One example of an activity that was leapfrogged was the planned evaluation of sources brought by participants. Although in the long-term this would be a worthwhile activity, it could be cast aside because students were provided with lists of appropriate readings in their course material. It seemed more important to address the considerable struggle all participants were experiencing with reading, and that required time that had not been planned for (see below).

I found that some activities had been designed at a level that was beyond the collective ZPD of the group. Participants who were already feeling out of their depth because of the difference in the skill levels they brought and what they in fact required in order to be able to begin writing, were not helped by trying to work quickly through an activity beyond that ZPD. As Table 6.2 indicates, writing activities initially designed for a single meeting were broken into component parts and worked through at a pace which enabled participants to develop some mastery in order to build up their confidence (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Habel, 2009).

An example of that extended process involved co-constructing a paragraph using information from shared reading, originally-planned activity for the third meeting (Table 6.1). This became spread over several weeks of explicit teaching and practising

reading strategies while gathering information that could be used for the co-construction, beginning in week two and continued through weeks four and five (Table 6.2). Repetition and practice, as noted, were important strategies to develop confidence and academic self-efficacy: “I find the repetition in your sessions is helping a lot” (Lyn, SG1 AG.5).

6.3 Action, observation and reflection

The process that developed through Cycle One as I observed participants while working with them in meetings, transcribed those meetings, and listened to their entry interviews resonates with Stringer’s phrase, “working backward” (2014, p. 10). Very early in Cycle One it was clear that most participants were experiencing extreme stress. This was somewhat surprising because most students had led successful lives before they entered university and had thought very carefully about their new venture. All participants had expressed some apprehension about the unknownness of what might lie ahead of them, but they had also expressed some positive excitement about their opportunity to come to university. Their initial excitement, however, was abruptly replaced by doubts, confusion, and visible distress, and it became necessary to search below the superficial level of these data for possible latent causes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A first, perhaps seemingly obvious, cause for the stress was a surprising observation from entry interviews: only one student had participated in some university-level academic preparation. Gwen had worked through the writing process to prepare an essay with an experienced tutor during the summer before the semester; in addition, her husband tutored in the applied sciences. She was somewhat familiar with academic culture and academic ways of doing things, and the only student who did not appear to be highly stressed as they found themselves immersed in what Adam described as a “foreign culture” (SG1 LG.3).

Other students had appeared reasonably confident in their entry interviews. Jane had completed a short skills module at a regional polytechnic before she embarked on a business course there the previous year. She emphasised that she had gained some confidence and necessary basic writing and research skills on the preparation module, and importantly, mastered some degree of time management, “It was a huge insight into

how it all worked” (En 1). However, at university, she found the difference in intensity from the polytechnic almost overwhelming.

Another observation from the entry interviews concerning preparation was that only Bruce had known that academic preparation was available. No participants had been directed towards preparation when they enrolled, and none had seen any advice for preparation or links on the university website to preparation courses. At different times through the semester, all except Bruce (“I’m too old; I’m 25 already” En 1) said they would have participated had they known, even if it had cost them money.

Participants were all in agreement, however, that they had prepared for university. In response to my query about how they had prepared, they told of preparing in ways that clearly arose from Discourses with which they were familiar: asking whānau about university study, organising households, finances, and work situations, and familiarising themselves with the campus:

I didn’t even know what a degree was till I asked my cousin. (Te Āwhina, En 1)

Made sure I had money in the bank; curtailed discretionary spending. . . . The key thing for me was to be organised and not let anything stress me out. . . . [I] asked many questions of friends [and] cousins [and] visited the campus over the summer [in order to be] familiar with where things are like car parking [and] the gym. (Adam, En 1)

For some students, the extreme culture shock and stress experienced in the first weeks led to an eruption of recurring health issues and a re-evaluation of decisions to come to university. Mary, for example, attributed an episode of dangerously high blood pressure to the stress she experienced in the first ten days of university; by her second week she was questioning whether coming to university was a wise decision: “Leave [university] now, or take a deep breath and go forward?” (WN 1). Ann, although a family situation contributed to her stress, and despite her previous degree, was overwhelmed. She withdrew from all but one course.

Reflecting on data emerging through the first weeks of the cycle exposed other factors contributing to the stress students were exhibiting which could possibly begin to be addressed by developing interventions for the study group. These are depicted on Figure 6.1.

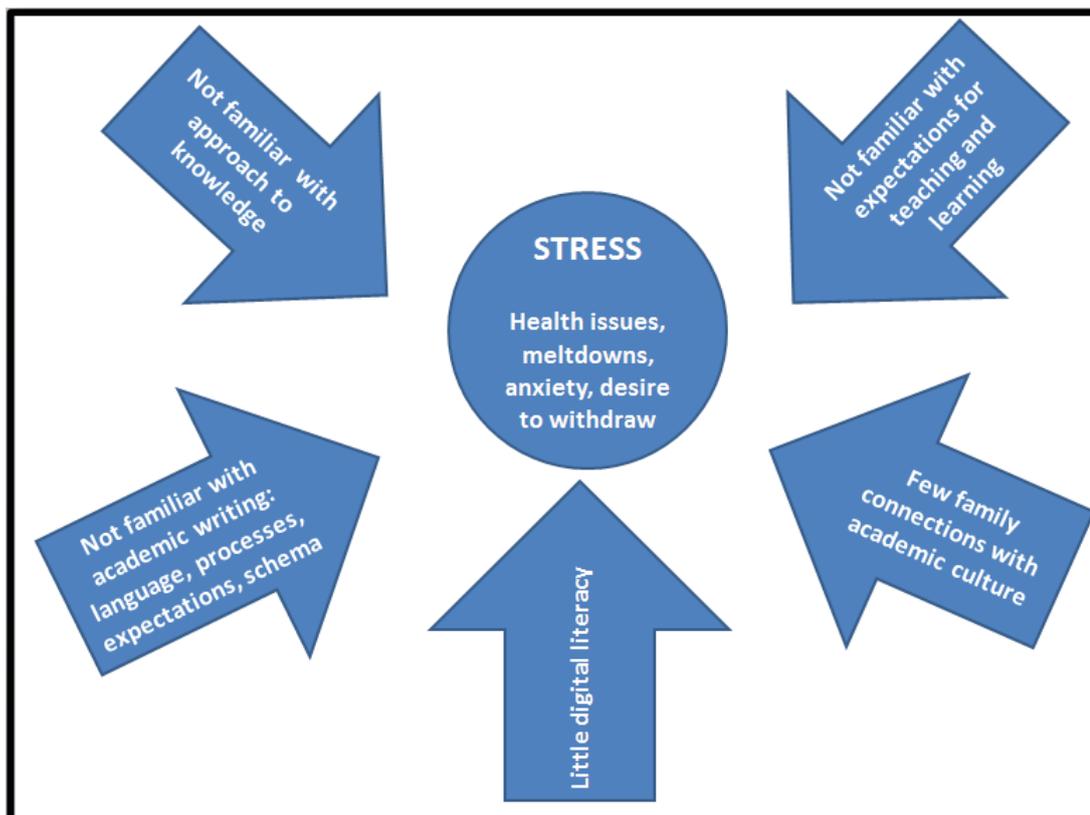


Figure 6.1 Factors contributing to stress experienced by Cycle One participants.

Perhaps the overall contributor to participants' stress was their distance from academic culture (3.2.4). In the context of Cycle One, lack of familiarity with academic culture emphasised the importance for participants of a study group functioning as a community of practice, in which the ways of being and doing, and some of the cultural values of academia could be mediated, brokered, discussed and reflected on.

Some aspects of the unfamiliar nature of academic culture were addressed through the interaction in chat times rather than through any specific intervention. Chat times provided opportunities for students to ask specific questions or discuss problems. Students heard here of finding things fortuitously on the university website, of Student Learning workshops, and of different courses others were taking which might be helpful or interesting as electives. Students shared feedback from assignments, and together we could discuss what it might mean (as in Lillis, 2001).

Causes for participants' stress resonated with some of the reconnaissance for the research, particularly concerning expectations for teaching and learning which seemed to derive from an outmoded approach to education (Merrill, 2001; Wingate, 2007) and to an unfamiliar epistemology (Cantwell & Scevak, 2004; Chanock, 2008). Other

significant stressors were attributable to a lack of schemata for academic genres (Johns, 2008; Wingate, 2016) and a metalanguage for writing (Cullity, 2008), to very little or no experience with almost every facet of a writing process (Navarre Cleary, 2008), and to having no strategies for effective, purposeful reading to identify key information (Whitehead, 2012).

An additional factor which all students except Jane identified, which may have somewhat contributed to their lack of knowledge about possible preparation courses, and which certainly added to their stress, was that, like their peers in other countries (Vanden Driesen et al., 2008), they were not familiar with using computers in any academic or educational setting. They did not know how to navigate the university website; their navigational efforts were further complicated because they did not recognise generic academic terms or any specialised ways in which more general terms might be applied on a university website. To them the website was like “the Starship Enterprise; you don’t quite know which button does what” (Leigh, En 1). Te Āwhina had located the orientation slot for mature students “by accident; surfing around the website” (SG1. LG.3); others, not so savvy with computers, had assumed that the institution which admitted them would provide for their necessary learning and information needs as their school teachers had done. Leigh said that through the summer she had assumed that she would “turn up to the university on the day, and they’ll show me my classroom” (En 1). Adam, who had familiarised himself with the campus, but had assumed that his previous polytechnic experience was adequate academic preparation, summed up the mood of the group when he announced that their attempts to prepare themselves for university were thwarted because, “We didn’t know what we didn’t know” (Adam, SG1 LG.4).

These factors combined to contribute to students being fearful and apprehensive about the writing they needed to do (Navarre Cleary, 2008). They also contributed to participants experiencing growing doubts about their ability to succeed in education, and to low academic self-efficacy.

The following section overviews some of these stressors which contributed to a revised focus for the research and to the development of specific interventions. Following that, section 6.4 overviews some of the interventions which attempted to address these issues through Cycle One.

6.3.1 Expectations for teaching and learning

Emerging data suggested that students were challenged and stressed by unfamiliar expectations for teaching and learning. It seemed that the Discourses of teaching and learning they brought were not congruent with those of the university. They had come expecting to “add to my knowledge” (Mary, WN 1). Instead, they told of being unable to negotiate lectures; the “information” (Mary, En 1) they had so looked forward to receiving, “that I thought I would enjoy the most” (Lyn, En 1) was a meaningless noise, “just banging on me; nothing’s making any sense so far” (Lyn, En 1).

6.3.2 Epistemology

Participants’ inability to negotiate lectures was closely linked to an unfamiliar approach to knowledge. Students found that some lectures and course material presented them with multiple viewpoints on or interpretations of a topic and they could not discern what was valuable from what they heard. Some were encountering an approach to knowledge as contestable, rather than absolute. Critique had been signposted for those who had attended the brief orientation meeting for mature students (I had been present at this meeting to introduce the research and meet potential participants). A learning advisor had announced that, “At university, everything is critical, critical, critical”. Similarly, in the collection of readings for one course, students were advised that they “might not agree” with all the material provided – but these statements appeared not to resonate. Much later in the semester I enquired from Te Āwhina, who had been at the orientation meeting, whether she had heard the learning advisor’s announcement. Her response may have been valid for all participants:

Because you are taking in so much, you filter out what you don’t need. There were a few things that I missed but other people heard. I probably thought I didn’t need it that year. (Ex 1)

An overwhelming impression gained from entry interviews and the first three study group meetings was that students were unable to detect a pattern in the way lectures were delivered. They were listening, but both Lyn and Mary spoke in their entry interviews about not being able to identify the valuable “information” they were expecting to hear. Mary “wonder[ed] if I am missing something important” (En 1).

As many of their course readings also presented multiple viewpoints, participants were also struggling to negotiate their readings. Ann identified a notable contrast with “this

critical, analytical thinking,” she detected in lectures and in her readings with the delivery of information she recalled from her previous degree:

When I did my BA degree it was much more, “This is the information; you go and learn it and give it back to us”. (SG1 AG.2)

Participants were recognising that they needed to “get into this new way of thinking” (Ann, SG1 AG.1), to “get . . . [their] thinking around” (Mary, SG1 LG). As the MCP in the study group, and as the researcher, I needed to find a way to guide participants to see what that new way of thinking looked like when it was applied in practice in texts.

6.3.3 Writing for university

Writing presented multiple challenges for Cycle One participants. Only three participants, Jane and Adam on previous courses at polytechnics, and Gwen over the summer preceding the semester, had any experience with extended writing. For Jane and Adam, however, their polytechnic experience seemed to have given them attitudes towards writing which needed to be adapted to be appropriate for university. Adam, who had completed an industry qualification, retained his conviction for his whole first semester, that the purpose of written assignments was solely to “portray my knowledge” (En 1), a very similar statement to Haggis’s (2006) observation that many mature students seem to believe that in writing they are required to “display” their knowledge (p. 525).

Jane had developed some confidence through her successful writing at the polytechnic, which she later admitted made her “a bit blasé” (Ex 1) when approaching her first assignment. Her failure in that assignment, attributable to not following the clear instructions provided in the study guide concerning what content should go in the introduction, how to organise paragraphs, what sort of information to include in each one, and how to ensure in-text references and the reference list were meticulously completed and checked, gave her a “wake-up call” (Ex 1), and an admonition to herself to, “Take it as starting afresh and relearning until you get it right” (Ex 1). (This unsuccessful essay, however, as Wingate (2016) identifies, became a valuable learning item in every subsequent cycle as new participants compared the instructions Jane had been given with her finished product – see 7.4.3, 8.4.3 and 9.2).

All other participants, except Gwen, were challenged by their lack of experience with academic writing, their lack of a metalanguage for writing, and their apprehension towards writing because of its high-stakes. Some participants were further hindered by their memories of failure and consequent conviction that they were poor writers. When they encountered the demands of their first essays, these students quickly became very aware of gaps between skills they were clearly assumed to possess and their actual skills; this awareness contributed to the stress they experienced: “It’s the writing; it’s the writing” Leigh exclaimed (Ex 1), to indicate the most challenging aspect of the first semester.

No schemata

Lack of experience with academic writing contributed significantly to the stress participants felt. Many did not recollect writing extensively at high school. Few had written anything beyond occasional letters since their schooling, although two spoke of having kept journals at various times and those who had worked in retail had filled in order forms. Consequently, participants did not have schemata for academic genres on which they could draw as they prepared their first essays. Leigh did not have a schema for a paragraph, asking on several occasions, “How long is a paragraph?” Participants’ lack of a metalanguage for writing along with this absence of schemata further complicated their ability to follow guidelines provided by online writing support or by their disciplines because they did not have a concept of what they were working towards as they wrote.

In their entry interviews, several participants explained their biggest felt needs for writing. Te Āwhina was the most specific: “I need to know how to write really.” Mary told that she knew “only what I am learning now, in the academic writing course” (En 1) about academic writing. She had a disciplinary essay to prepare which required applying key concepts from the discipline to a situation, incorporating technical language, synthesising sources with in-text references, and a reference list. The academic writing course, on which she was relying for instruction about how to write for university, began with a narrative, reflective essay. It did not provide a schema to guide her. While she achieved a good grade for her narrative, her first disciplinary essay was not successful.

This lack of a schema which emerged early in Cycle One was further borne out by a scrutiny of students' first essays after the cycle and was a cause for substantial reflection and re-planning before Cycle Two. Leigh's first essay was an example of a text clearly prepared by a person with little idea of what academic writing might look like. As Leigh had said, she had never opened a Word document until she arrived at university. Despite the comprehensive guidelines for working through the writing process in her course material, her text did not look like an essay. Basic university-essay-type ingredients were missing, very kindly indicated by the marker in extensive feedback: no title; no name, ID, or page number on any page; large spaces (up to three double spaces) between some paragraphs, and, despite clear instructions suggesting a length of 100-150 words for paragraphs, sentences were in singles or pairs spaced down the page. These were distantly linked through ideas, but not developed into coherent paragraphs with transitions to lead readers through.

Leigh's text was full of surface errors: sentence fragments, a liberal splattering of capital letters, and missing or inappropriate punctuation. In addition, she had used creative ways of in-line citation or had completely omitted citations. Both texts in her 'bibliography' had authors' names incorrectly spelt; the second entry was not listed under its authors, but under its non-italicised title. No publisher was acknowledged, and neither reference had indentations for lines below the first.

It seemed that, in the absence of any academic preparation, participants were trying to cope with many new skills to apply in their writing, all required immediately. It did seem that an intervention in which future participants could gain a schema for what a finished essay might look like, provided early in their first semester, would be a valuable study group activity. This was designed between Cycles One and Two, and is discussed in the following chapter.

Metalanguage

Cycle One participants did not seem to "have a handle on" (Jane, En 1) a metalanguage for talking about writing. Gwen had learnt some new language over the summer before arriving at university but commented: "I don't remember ever learning at school what a topic sentence was. So maybe they didn't teach that back then" (En 1). Other students became aware of their lack as they attempted to read their academic writing course guides or as they listened in their tutorials for that course. Others became aware of their

lack when they attended a Student Learning workshop and were not able to follow the discussion and the instructions:

I went to a Student Learning thing; they think that all students are straight from school and they know how to do it. It's a real big learning curve. (Charlie, En 1)

The content of the workshop was of limited use for the mature-aged students because they were not yet acquainted with the language of academic writing. It was largely beyond the upper limit of their ZPDs (Lantolf, 2011). In the study group, this was addressed through Cycle One. From Cycle Two onwards it was addressed intentionally in the schema activities, by introducing features of academic writing through accessible language which then enabled participants to make connections.

Effective process

As noted above, only Gwen, Jane, and Adam had experienced extended writing. This meant that most Cycle One participants lacked any effective process for producing extended writing and they did not have a schema for a writing process on which they could draw. Leigh's statement in her entry interview, "Getting started, I am finding really tricky", was echoed by Ann's question: "After all these theories here, where do I begin?" (En 1).

The academic writing course at the time of this research did not focus on teaching a writing process. Some aspects of a writing process were discussed in the course material and suggested as homework reading, but perhaps because of the unfamiliar language, for example, "heuristics", and a discussion of Young, Becker and Pike's Tagmemic theory, few participants engaged with that content. In addition, participants were already struggling to keep up with reading for their disciplines, which was essential background for the lectures they could not interpret. They judged that reading as having a greater priority. The process sections in the course material would no doubt have been valuable, but for those multiple reasons, they were inaccessible to participants.

In our first attempt to talk about a process for addressing an essay prompt (Table 6.2, meeting 1. 3), I attempted to elicit the collective knowledge of participants. My question about where to start met with silence. So did a question about brainstorming. Participants murmured in agreement when Bruce (who was 25 years old, but who had been schooled under the SC system) said,

You keep asking us questions, but we can't answer them because we've never learnt this stuff before. (SG1 AG.2)

It seemed that students' memories of writing resonated with the former paradigm operating in New Zealand schools described by Parr and Jesson (2016), with the truncated process described by Tobin (2001, p. 5): "think, then write". Concepts such as brainstorming or freewriting were unknown to them; they did not know how to begin their writing, and they seemed equally inexperienced with other elements of a writing process.

Some of the study guides for students' disciplinary courses included links to the online writing support or to extra reading which might have helped them structure their assignments. To these students, however, who perceived they were growing further and further behind their younger classmates, those supports represented more reading for which they did not have time:

All the papers I did had reference to [online support]. Some papers, the tutor [also] put up documents where you could download info on how to write an introduction and conclusion, which I didn't read. . . . I never read any of them. Once we got into the assignments, I just didn't have time to read the info. (Jane, Ex 1)

Participants did not understand the value they may have gleaned, had they been able to engage with the extra reading about applying a writing process. Once the semester started, and they were pressed for time to complete assignments, they felt, like Leigh, "That was just more reading, and I don't read" (Ex 1).

Complicated language

Participants' initial lack of fit in academia seemed to be further accentuated as they grappled with academic texts which seemed replete with unfamiliar, polysyllabic words, embedded in often complex sentences:

When I first started reading [the set readings], it was just a whole lot of big words which I didn't understand any of (Te Āwhina, Ex 1).

The realisation that this new, unfamiliar institution spoke a "different language" to the "real world" (McKay & Devlin, 2014, p. 1) caused further damage to students' confidence and added to their stress.

Reading

Keeping up with recommended reading, an essential part of a writing process, presented multiple layers of challenge for participants because of the volume of reading, the language used, and the complexity of texts:

I was still reading chapter one and others were finished and moving on, and I would read a whole page and not take any of it in. (Te Āwhina, En 1)

Finding meanings for isolated new words proved to be inadequate for piecing together what became scantily understood fragments of disciplinary knowledge. Te Āwhina, whose strategy was to “tackle each word as they come”, explained that her word-by-word translation approach did not give her an idea of what the reading was about:

I feel like I’m putting a jigsaw together without the picture that it’s supposed to look like. . . . I’m not putting the picture together yet; don’t know what it looks like. (SG1 LG.3)

The unanticipated challenge of complex vocabulary, not only technical, discipline-specific vocabulary, but also the semi-formal vocabulary common to many academic texts, along with complex writing structures, seemed to shake some of the confidence, even the sense of identity, participants had. Jane, for example, whose close family included politicians active through five decades of New Zealand history, who was accustomed to holding her own in conversations, was almost ashamed to admit:

I have a reasonable understanding of words, not a bad vocabulary, but with the readings for the papers, I have a dictionary next to me all the time; don’t know *that* word, look up *that* word. (SG1 LG.4, her emphasis)

Participants’ lack of experience with extended writing, their lack of schemata for academic forms, absence of a metalanguage with which to talk about writing, and lack of familiarity with reading strategies and the language of academic texts contributed to the stress noted above (Figure 6.1). Whitehead’s (2012) study was not published until a year after these observations, but it would seem that participants in the study group at this university, while they may not all have shared the same cultural background as students in his study, did share similar literacy challenges to those open entry students. These challenges contributed towards the apprehension most Cycle One participants felt for writing.

Apprehension

Students were apprehensive about writing for a variety of reasons, particularly a conviction they were not good at writing. Ann, despite her previous degree, emphasised, “I am very nervous about this academic writing. I am not afraid of the academic part of the work, but the writing part” (En 1). Tui explained that she had chosen to work on farms when she left school rather than to continue in education because she had lacked confidence for writing: “that was my whole thing in the first place. I didn’t have confidence in my writing” (SG1 AG.2). Bruce was adamant that it was something to be avoided:

I don’t like writing; I try and stay away from it. Mainly because I am unconfident, because I can’t spell. If I could make more sense of my writing, I would probably enjoy it. (En 1)

Participants’ responses to statements on the WAM (see Appendix 4 for a copy of the WAM) indicated strongly negative attitudes towards writing. Almost three quarters of them were apprehensive about writing, citing fear of its unknown nature, pressure they perceived because of the high-stakes attached to writing, and their conviction they were poor writers (almost one third). For each statement indicating students’ beliefs about their ability to write well (Q.3), fear of evaluation (Q.5), and feeling nervous about writing (Q.13) only one or two students responded positively; some provided neutral responses, but overwhelmingly, students responded negatively.

Students’ responses to statements about confidence demonstrated that they were not confident to write clearly. Two thirds of the participants provided the most negative possible responses and only a third believed they were good writers, a factor which has long been identified as having a more powerful influence on students’ writing than their actual ability (Pajares, 2003). Certainly, for these students, strong convictions that they were not confident or good writers contributed to their significant stress.

6.3.4 ZPD and academic self-efficacy

I quickly discovered, as noted above, that I had designed too many activities for a meeting – partly as a precaution so that we did not run out of things to do – but also because the activities I had designed were beyond the ZPD of the group. It was clear, too, that students were not confident in an educational setting; their academic self-

efficacy was low, with many doubting their ability to succeed. These attitudes were exacerbated as participants compared themselves with their younger classmates:

There were some people, young people who didn't seem to have a problem, and they got good marks, which made me feel down. (Te Āwhina, Ex 1)

Mary and Leigh both chose to write about “self-doubt” as a characteristic of mature-aged students when we used data from journal article extracts to write about mature students at university. Gwen (cited above) was not the only participant very conscious of earlier failure in education. This legacy tended to add to stress, because students were desperate to succeed in their second chance: “The pressure I put on myself to pass” (Leigh, En 1). The low academic self-efficacy experienced by so many, whatever their experiences had been in their years since school, was an important reason to progress at students’ pace through planned writing activities in an attempt to enable them to achieve mastery which might then enhance their academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1998; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

6.3.5 Academic literacy and an academic Discourse

Participants’ incongruent expectations for teaching, learning and epistemology, with the concomitant inability to negotiate lectures and academic texts, their challenges with so many aspects of academic writing, and the resultant stress they were experiencing, could perhaps immediately be attributed to their absence of academic preparation. Had these students participated in some academic preparation they might have been introduced, even implicitly, to the notion of a discipline as a conversation rather than a body of knowledge. They would be likely to have had an opportunity to develop some familiarity with generic academic discourse and some experience with strategies and processes involved in preparing an academic text. They may also have been introduced to some of the technical language of their disciplines. The preparation Gwen had completed over the summer preceding her first semester contributed to her being far less stressed than the other Cycle One students.

Yet the problem seemed to be more than one that might be addressed solely by directing unqualified students to academic preparation. Technically, even without the provision of open entry to university, neither Lyn nor Mary who had qualified for university entrance from their schooling, nor Ann with her previous degree, would be considered to need academic preparation. Yet these three students were the most vocal and

perceptive of all Cycle One participants as they talked about their about their discomfort in academia and their challenges negotiating their first weeks on campus. Ann emailed after the semester to say that she would have given up university completely in the first weeks had it not been for the study group.

Adam and Jane who had recently studied at polytechnics were hardly more comfortable than students who had been completely away from an educational environment for many years. Jane spoke of a “meltdown” (Ex 1). Adam was quietly struggling. As I reflected on this situation, in the fourth week of the study group I noted in my reflective journal:

I am thinking more and more that academic *writing* is a part of academic *literacy*, and it's the literacy aspect that is really bugging my students. . . . As I've read and thought, and as I've seen my students struggle, it's the whole wider academic literacy, Gee's 'Discourse', Cullity's 'academic culture', Chanock's 'academic purposes', hers, and many others' 'discourse community', the critical approach, that is really difficult for them. As Chanock says, these things are said in lectures, and written into assignments and handouts, but the students just do not see them – until they are really pointed out. (April 5, 2011, emphasis in original)

A study group meeting in the fourth week seemed to confirm that I needed to find ways in which pedagogy might be used to ensure that the study group could become a community through which students might begin to acquire that academic Discourse, with its literacy, which they did not yet have. In the fourth week, we were reading an extract from Cullity (2008) in which she states her finding that mature-aged students experience academic culture through participating in targeted preparation. Adam had become fascinated with the notion of culture through one of his disciplinary courses. As he connected this reading to his difficulty in finding a key to unlock academia, he announced:

For me it's this [reading from the text] “academic literacy” was the term. At the moment, I am severely academically illiterate. We wouldn't class ourselves as being illiterate, because we've had our life experiences – but in this culture, I might as well be in Beijing. (SG1 LG.4)

His observation resonated with other participants who took up the notion of cultural difference. Mary had lived for some years in France; she had experienced transitioning into a new language and a new culture. She identified with Adam's statement: "I see what you mean, quite foreign, really" (Mary, SG1 LG.4). Participants recognised that they did not yet have an appropriate literacy for functioning in this culture. That lack – and I acknowledge the word "lack" is being used frequently in this chapter, but it does seem to be the most suitable word for the situation students were in – of an appropriate literacy affected their ability to listen, to read, and to write. Furthermore, the lack of an academic Discourse meant that they did not yet recognise themselves as legitimate participants in an academic setting. As yet, they did they know how to be students.

Observations though Cycle One prompted more exploration into ways in which the study group might support students to identify as insiders in this seemingly "foreign" culture. The next section of this chapter discusses how these emerging data, in conversation with the literature, led to "data-driven" (Dick, 2002, p. 160) interventions through Cycle One.

6.4 Responding to data

6.4.1 Expectations for teaching and learning

It seemed that participants would clearly have been able to engage more readily with their lectures, their reading and their writing had they been able to alter their perspectives on teaching and learning. I attempted to talk with them about differences between university and school, but that talking did not seem to empower them to discern any differences in teaching methods from those they recalled. This may have been because they were approaching their lectures from the transmission-teaching paradigm with which they were familiar. As noted, too, participants tended to only hear those things with which they could identify, so admonitions to critique, for example, had been filtered out. An intervention was developed after Cycle One, for use in Cycle Two, to specifically address this incongruity and establish some connections between students' expectations and the reality of teaching and learning they experienced at university.

6.4.2 Epistemology

An inappropriate understanding of knowledge led to some of the confusion participants experienced in lectures and to their difficulty negotiating content of their course

readings. A text-based intervention in week six, inserted into the learning cycle (Rothery, 1996; Wingate, 2016), went some way to demystifying this for participants. It enabled some of them to conceive of knowledge as constructed, owned by different communities, and contestable.

The intervention represented what Stringer might describe as a “radical change in direction” (2014, p. 10) in the study group. We did no writing in that meeting. Instead, in an activity informed by the sociocultural concept that the values of a culture are instantiated in its artefacts (Gee, 2001), we analysed a short text to discern some of the values of academic culture. As was discussed in 4.4.4, academic texts are prime artefacts of academic culture. They display knowledge as socially constructed and contestable (Chanock, 2008), and demonstrate that scholars take a stance in their writing in relation to previously-constructed knowledge (Chanock, 2008; Hyland, 2002), building on that knowledge in different ways (Gaipa, 2004; Hyland, 2002).

As part of the deconstruction and analysis stage of the learning cycle of the scaffolded genre pedagogy, and using guided discovery to scaffold participants’ enquiry with simple questions in language they could understand, we read together another extract from Cullity (2008) (See Appendix 6). Students had by this time been introduced to using references in their writing. As we read, I enquired why they thought writers used references. Students provided answers they had heard elsewhere on campus, for example, “backing up what they are saying,” “giving support”. These responses, however, did not match Cullity’s use of sources in the text we studied. I encouraged students to examine the text in front of us more closely: “What is Cullity doing in this paragraph?” Repeating their phrases, I enquired, “Was she backing up what she had just written? Was she supporting something?”

In this extract, Cullity (2008) first identifies arguments made by different scholars against study skills preparation courses. Her citations match scholars with their viewpoints. Clearly, those citations do not back up the conclusion she came to from her research because in the next paragraph she develops her own stance on the topic: “Contrary to the concerns of some researchers” (p. 5). She continues by presenting a counter-argument strongly in favour of such courses.

Ann, in this session, identified a key aspect of current academic approaches to knowledge. As she studied the text in response to my questioning, she announced:

“There’s no right answer about this thing; there’s different views” (SG1 AG.6). Ann could see that, in this text, Cullity was first acknowledging the validity of one set of viewpoints about study skills courses, but then presenting an alternative view (Chanock, 2008; Gaipa, 2004) which she supported from her data.

Some students saw from this what the epistemology of the university might look like: the contentious nature of knowledge; disagreement among scholars on key issues; writers taking their own stance in a disciplinary conversation. They all saw, too, which side of the argument they would personally support, despite the “concerns” of some scholars.

From this exploration, Ann was able to make a connection to something she had heard in one of her courses, but not understood. She described how the concept of an essay as conversation had been explained to her social work class:

It’s almost like a dinner, and they invite all these people to dinner, and you’re there, but you’re almost there to – what’s the word? – to facilitate, and your analytical view is that facilitation. (SG1 AG.6)

Gwen, too, was able to connect to her understanding of taking a stance and inserting her own voice into her writing:

It’s your choice, so you naturally put in your own voice by what references you choose to include, how you choose to argue it. (SG1 AG.6)

Ann and Gwen were able to build on the limited academic literacy they had. At that time, however, the other participants in the room remained puzzled. Lyn queried, “Voice? Whose voice?” (SG1 AG.6). We had no more time in that meeting to help Lyn to understand a concept of writing as a conversation among scholars. The activity indicated, however, that some of the valued practices in an academic Discourse, critique, contestation, making assertions, and supporting them, could be explicitly identified in an analysis of texts as cultural artefacts (Gee, 2001). Those observations were entered into my reflections to be developed over the summer into an intervention to engage all participants.

6.4.3 Writing for university

In Cycle One, activities went some way to addressing participants' lack of familiarity with writing for university. As shown on Table 6.3, elements of the writing process were explicitly taught. Reading strategies were explicitly taught and regularly practised for mastery (weeks 4 and 5 on Table 6.3). Working towards mastery (Bandura, 1993; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Habel, 2009) was particularly important for students whose academic self-efficacy was very low, and self-doubt (Cullity, 2008) very high. Examining texts as cultural artefacts in the discussion and analysis stage of the scaffolded genre pedagogy and in the intervention discussed above went some way to helping students understand writing as a disciplinary conversation.

Students valued the explicit teaching of elements of the writing process. In study group sessions in which we collaboratively constructed paragraphs, as well as skimming and scanning for information, we practised heuristic techniques individually and collaboratively: brainstorming, mind-mapping, and freewriting. Participants found brainstorming enlightening, particularly when it was collaborative. "I enjoyed this part; it was very interesting and helpful getting different views and thoughts" (Charlie, SG1 LG.5). Charlie also valued learning reading strategies: "This was good; I will have to learn this art" (SG1. LG.5).

Freewriting was valued, both for its freedom from a focus on form and as a heuristic tool. Ann, who was apprehensive about her English, particularly appreciated the no-stakes aspect:

The thing that I really enjoyed was the freewriting. It was really nice to not worry about tenses or spelling or anything – that was a nice feeling. Just to let it go. It is a nice feeling to know that you are not being marked on anything. (Ex 1)

Leigh saw the usefulness of freewriting as a way to get started in the process of writing and to learn as she wrote:

You know that freewriting? It's like drawing a picture. You can't criticise, you can't critique it till you've actually got something on the paper. Write it down, and then you can knock it into shape. (Ex 1)

Students also valued the co-construction of texts:

I found it really valuable you sharing your knowledge with us on how to write and examples we went through on the whiteboard on how to write things and how to look at things. That was great. (Jane, Ex 1)

The second cycle would continue to apply the scaffolded genre approach to writing with its potential for negotiation, discussion, and explicit teaching of key elements of a writing process.

6.4.4 ZPD and academic self-efficacy

As noted in Section 6.1, Cycle One was an almost-continuous process of trialling and adjusting activities to ensure they were accessible to participants. Most students spoke of being helped by the repetition (Lyn, cited above), and of greatly increased confidence and skill resulting from that:

Another thing I learnt about which was helpful was paragraph structure, and skim reading and just reading the first sentence. I can do it now so much better than the first time I tried it. (Te Āwhina, Ex 1)

Chat times also contributed towards participants developing some self-efficacy as they saw their peers begin to master new skills and to succeed: “If she can, I can” (Leigh, Ex1); “Compar[ing] with others around the table” (Adam, Ex 1). Chat times would be continued for the many benefits they afforded.

6.4.5 Academic literacy and an academic Discourse

By the end of the semester, it seemed from analysing exit interviews and reading over students’ essays that only, perhaps, Gwen, Te Āwhina, and Ann understood that knowledge is, in many cases, socially constructed and contestable, and that in their writing they were often required to construct their own interpretations of knowledge (Chanock, 2008; Gamache, 2003). In addition, data from exit interviews indicated that many participants retained an understanding of writing as a skill, not as a practice situated in an academic conversation (Chanock, 2001, 2008).

As participants elected to continue to meet through their second semester, I had the opportunity to develop an intervention designed to work on multiple levels to address those observations. The intervention was designed to go some way to illustrate specific concepts:

- synthesising multiple viewpoints
- knowledge created through writing
- critique
- taking part in a disciplinary conversation

The intervention drew on Hendricks and Quinn's (2000) and Wingate's (2008) arguments that an understanding of referencing as solely a tick-box skill perpetuates an understanding of writing as an a-contextual skill rather than as a situated practice. Hendricks and Quinn (2000) argue that students may be encouraged to understand synthesising as a process of actually engaging with sources and taking their own place in a conversation. Reading Cullity's (2008) text (6.8.1) had been one way to mediate this concept, but I developed a tactile tool to be more explicit. The intervention was also informed by Gaipa's (2004) notion of a conversation in a ballroom (4.4.4).

The tool was developed to incorporate tactile and visual learning styles. Although debates rage about the validity of learning styles research and the commercial interests behind some philosophies, discussed, for example, in Ramburuth and McCormick (2001), many students identify that they prefer to learn by other means than solely listening to lectures. Te Āwhina and Tama, for example, were both adamant in their entry interviews that they were visual learners. Seeking an alternative way of teaching synthesising, I saw how children's toys could be used interactively to visualise features of an academic essay.

Participants laughed and relaxed as I introduced the toys (see Figure 6.2). I gave a brief explanation:

- The illustration would exemplify aspects of academic writing
- The greenery represented a crop, but also a topic
- Each toy represented a viewpoint about that crop



Figure 6.2 Toys arranged on the table.

Following that, I enquired, “What does the crop represent to the farmer?” “Money”; “Income” “It’s a source of income for his farm”. “And to the other people involved? To the contractor?” “It’s his source of income as well”. “To the tractor driver?” “Overall time spent working, which represents money.” “It’s his income as well.” A further question was, “What does the crop represent to the people in the city, represented by the silo, and to the cows?” “Food”. “Cheaper the better”. “And the context?” “The economy.” Then, pointing to the farmer and in turn to the other vehicles, I asked, “Is his opinion about the crop a valid one?” One response, to which there was general agreement, was, “In his mind he is.” For each vehicle, and the cows, I received similar answers. Participants could see that different people held different views, for different reasons, and each view was valid for that person.

Throughout this process, participants were engaged, nodding and murmuring assent as others gave answers to my questions. They understood the literal context and the concept of different viewpoints. Then I returned to the analogy to make the links with academic writing explicit. “So this [indicating the whole scene] is like the wider context, the discipline; this [crop] is one of the things that people discuss in the discipline, and these [toys] are some of the different viewpoints about that topic.”

Ann understood the purpose of the models: “That makes it so clear, about being able to use the different ideas.” Bruce clearly did too. He moved toys around, grouping and re-grouping them, and indicating different ones: “We argue the point that *this* one is all about the money; *this* one is doing it because he has to. Your voice is making the argument” (italics indicate his emphasis). Ann built on that: “Actually your voice is the way you choose.”

Then I asked, indicating one toy, “If you choose to support this view, what do you do with the rest?” When that question was asked, Adam appeared to understand at last, the concept of a conversation, acknowledging, “I’ve heard a lot about that”. He suggested he now understood where he had gone wrong with an essay he had just received back. In that, he had pursued an argument in which he personally believed rather than situating his essay in a context of debates in his discipline. His marker’s injunction had been to “Work on further integrating arguments throughout your essay.” With the new understanding from the intervention, Adam’s answer to the above question was, “argue against them”. A more appropriate answer may have been to “critique” or “evaluate” the other ideas, but it did seem that he was beginning to see that he needed to acknowledge different views in his writing, rather than to approach writing from his self-confessed paradigm of “displaying” his knowledge (Haggis, 2006, p. 525). The demonstration was repeated in each subsequent cycle.

6.4.6 Role of the researcher

Through Cycle One I filled many roles. To assist in the process of students’ acquisition of an additional, academic Discourse (Gee, 1989; 2015), I was the MCP, mediating some of the values of academic culture, particularly using the tools of accessible language and academic texts. In this role, I guided participants in a process of discovery of some of the valued practices of academia through the discussion and deconstruction stages of the learning cycle of the scaffolded approach to writing (Rothery, 1996; Wingate, 2016). To assist students to learn some of the literacy skills they needed in order to become fluent members in an academic Discourse, I provided explicit teaching of reading strategies and elements of the writing process. As the action researcher, I was the facilitator of study group activities, trialling activities, observing and evaluating them, transcribing meetings, and returning to the literature to try and ascertain patterns in what I was observing in order to develop new, theoretically-informed interventions.

6.5 Reflection

The study group had been initially designed to support participants as they learned to write for university. As this chapter has shown, it was widened in focus to support students as they began to acquire an academic Discourse. A key component of acquisition of an academic Discourse would be to be recognised as an insider in that Discourse, and for students to recognise themselves as insiders. One key way in which it seemed students recognised that they would be recognised as insiders was through writing appropriately.

Tama's reflections on engaging with a western worldview exposed some of the incongruence he was experiencing between his cultural background and that of the university as he grappled with taking on new practices. His comments indicate that he clearly recognised that these belonged to an academic Discourse.

Tama had a degree completely in Te Reo (Māori language). He was very aware that there were cultural differences in ways of telling knowledge; his experiences of writing in Te Reo gave him a baseline from which to critique the academic writing in English with which he now struggled. His observations of the thinking, language, and style of academic writing, and his desire to learn how to use "upper class" words and a more analytic style echo Delpit's (1992) observations of minority students in the US who recognise the cultural value of academic writing but who require explicit teaching for that acquisition:

It's hard to think in an analytical way, like a Pākehā. Māori ideas keep coming back in. . . . There are a lot of big words there, and I look through the dictionary to find some understanding. In general, when you are involved with a lot of academic people, these big words come up, and so when in Rome, do as the Romans do. So you learn these things. But when you start writing, you include these words which might not be appropriate. (En 1)

Tama's conclusion, to "do as the Romans do," demonstrates his awareness of the need to construct a "discoursal" identity (Ivanič, 1994) in order to be recognised as an insider in academic culture, a recognition shared by other participants.

Participants also seemed to understand the central importance of language in an academic Discourse although many struggled to engage with what they recognised as

the valued academic practice of using “big words”. Their efforts to express complex ideas sometimes resulted, as Tama said, in including some “which might not be appropriate”. For one assignment Te Āwhina did not pass, feedback from her tutor indicated that she had not understood the purpose of the essay. However, a close look at the essay in question suggests that, Te Āwhina had understood the purpose of the essay but her problem was one of struggling to incorporate academic-sounding words, perhaps to ‘invent the university’ (Bartholomae, 1985).

In this passage, Te Āwhina demonstrates her awareness that some of the content of an article she was analysing might be contentious in some sectors of New Zealand society. She wrote that the author, who may not be well-known, referred to the Treaty of Waitangi and suggested that by that reference he evoked a source all New Zealand citizens would respect: “Therefore it effectively ascertains immediate conviction of credibility” (A.2). She then discussed how the author demonstrated he was not alone in his political stance by using citations from well-known Māori writers to appeal to his audience:

The foremost benefit [of using citations] may lie in the reader’s recognition of a favourable author. Subconsciously then concurring to an overall opinion they may not have had prior to the recognition of that author.

It would seem that Te Āwhina was actually very aware that this author was consciously piggybacking on a well-known writer. But it would also seem that she used a dictionary or thesaurus or the ‘synonyms’ button on her computer to use much more scholarly-sounding language than she would normally use. She appeared to be striving to acquire the practices and language she had been associating with the academy (her reaction to her first readings, cited above, had been that they contained “a lot of big words”). She had unpicked the details of who the writer’s audience might be, and exactly how he was appealing to them, as her tutor had suggested, being ‘more specific’. However, her intent was initially difficult to decipher because of the language she chose.

The chat times, structured into each meeting contributed to that process of becoming an insider by offering a space in which students could ask questions or discuss problems. This process allowed other students to understand that their questions were not theirs alone; they could succeed vicariously as they heard how their peers overcame their challenges:

People coming along with a particular problem. Then everyone can learn from that. (Mary, Ex 1)

This identification with each other's difficulties provided opportunities for developing academic self-efficacy, important for feeling like an insider in an academic community. Even such seemingly small things as locating the correct classroom became noteworthy successes in negotiating an unfamiliar culture.

Chat times also contributed to the sense of community in the group of participants and to a sense of identification with likeminded peers. Connections that were made in meetings continued across the campus, and in their exit interviews, participants overwhelmingly spoke of the sense of belonging at university they had gained from being part of a group of similar peers:

Having that network that's now, like, when I walk into the dining hall you see Mary or you see Jane and you know them. . . . It just makes you feel part of the place. (Leigh, Ex 1)

It did seem that the intentional community building and the openness in chat times had contributed to a sense of membership. Several participants used the descriptor "like-minded" to describe their study group experience, for example, Jane:

Bonding was a great thing. Like-minded people, all going through the same thing. (Ex 1)

The bonding, the networking, and the like-minded peers, were the most highly acclaimed benefits participants identified from their involvement in the study group.

They also valued the focus on writing. Cycle One had confirmed Wingate's statement that academic writing is not an isolated, technical skill, but the end product of a "complex literacy process" (2016, p. 4), and Gee's suggestion that "all writing and reading is embedded in some Discourse" (1989, p. 11). Cycle One seemed to suggest that these students had arrived at university without an appropriate literacy and with little concept of components of an academic Discourse. This observation would seem to support the concept of a study group as a community in which participants could begin to develop an academic Discourse. That focus would be carried into every further cycle.

6.6 Chapter conclusion

Ongoing reflection through Cycle One, and after it finished, suggested some major changes would be important for Cycle Two, particularly specifically-designed interventions to address students' expectations for teaching and learning. It would be important to determine the ZPD of a new group of participants and to work within that space. At the end of the first year of the research I wrote in my reflections:

Giving a task that is beyond/too far removed from/too different from the ZPD of participants who have been away from education for many years is like starting at the deep end of a swimming pool with pupils who couldn't swim, throwing them into the deep end and hoping they will swim. On occasions I feel as if participants are desperately reaching for anything that seems even a little familiar (a piece of language, a familiar-sounding word), to grab, like a life ring, hoping it would carry them to safety at the edge of the pool. With students who have such long gaps in their educational histories and lack so many fundamental skills, we need to quietly get in the shallow end, hold hands, and walk together to the deep end, all arriving at the same time.

Interventions designed for Cycle Two would be designed to get in at the shallow end, and walk together. Cycle One had allowed some identification of skills and attitudes students might bring which would perhaps allow me to set the level of activities more appropriately than some of the early attempts in Cycle One. The following chapter gives an overview of Cycle Two, which focused on those new interventions.

Chapter 7 Focus on interventions

7.1 Introduction

The main purpose of Cycle Two, designed for the first semester of 2012, was to continue to explore how the study group might support students as they learned to write for university and how it might provide a learning community through which they could begin to acquire an academic Discourse. Academic writing, a key part of that Discourse, remained an emphasis in study group meetings, either to discuss or to practise.

Between Cycles One and Two, new interventions were designed in response to the specific challenges faced by Cycle One participants, and a key focus of Cycle Two was to evaluate the effectiveness of those interventions. This chapter first overviews the planning for the whole cycle and outlines some minor modifications that were made. Section 7.4, the ‘Action’ section, discusses each intervention in turn, covering the planning, execution, and students’ feedback. Section 7.5, ‘Observation’, considers some factors which differentiated Cycle Two from Cycle One. The ‘Reflection’ section reviews key learning from the cycle and looks at two students whose progress along very different trajectories suggested ways in which students began to work towards or resist acquiring an academic Discourse.

7.2 Planning

Through Cycle One I had seen the importance for participants of increasing their academic self-efficacy by experiencing some success as they mastered new skills. In response to this, I approached Cycle Two with only four meetings planned in detail: an epistemological reflection for the introductory meeting; activities designed to introduce students to schemata for academic writing for the second and third weeks, and the synthesising illustration using toys for the fifth week. While I now had a clearer understanding of the likely ZPD of the groups, based on Cycle One, it was important to be alert to the possibility that the ZPD of the two groups of students meeting for Cycle Two might differ from that of Cycle One. Thus the remaining weeks were less-specifically detailed, with an overall plan to follow the eventual content of Cycle One meetings, geared towards explicit teaching and practising writing process elements that had been identified as unfamiliar but valuable for the mature students in Cycle One: reading strategies, heuristic techniques, and co-construction of paragraphs. The study

group provided opportunities to practise these regularly for students to achieve some mastery.

Once again, action in Cycle Two responded to input from students. As in Cycle One, the study group met every week, in two iterations which accommodated most students' different timetables and commitments. By students' request, an extra meeting was offered in week two, a collaborative workshop offering extra scaffolding for students as they worked on their first essays (2.2E); an extra schema activity was worked through with all participants in week four, and collaborative workshops were offered in the semester break (2.7E), again for students to work on writing they were preparing. These are indicated on Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 Eventual content of Cycle Two study group meetings

	Theme/Activity	Purpose for participants	Relation to conceptual framework
2.1	<p>'Getting to know you' activity; overview of course materials.</p> <p>Collaborative critical reflection: how were they taught and how did they learn at school, or any time since?</p>	<p>Begin social and academic networking (as for Cycle One); identify people in the same courses; ability to access course materials.</p> <p>Introduction to a different epistemology (Wingate, 2007); four stages of reflection (Francis, 1995; Zepke, 2011).</p> <p>Collaborative critiquing, asking 'why?'</p>	<p>Intentionally developing a community.</p> <p>The university values a different epistemology from what students may have connected with learning (Cantwell & Scevak, 2004; Chanock, 2001).</p> <p>Critique and reflection are essential attitudes for study at university (Chanock, 2001; Wingate, 2007).</p>
2.2	<p>Schema for an essay: guided discovery looking closely at an 'A' student essay for higher order concerns, using everyday language to introduce essay parts.</p> <p>Collaborative discussion about first academic writing course essays.</p> <p>Skills of skimming and scanning.</p>	<p>Begin to develop a schema for an essay. Become acquainted with some of the metalanguage of academic writing.</p> <p>Study paragraph structure and P-I-E ('point, illustration, example') as used by the student writer.</p> <p>Introduction to skills of skimming and scanning.</p>	<p>The institutional practice of mystery surrounding academic writing needs to be clarified for students (Chanock, 2004; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Wingate, 2016).</p> <p>Non-traditional students need explicit genre (as in <i>form</i>) teaching (Hyland, 2002; Wingate & Tribble, 2012).</p> <p>Strategic reading is a part of the writing process (Wingate, 2016).</p>
2.2E	Extra workshop focusing on first assignments; collaborative discussion (Wingate, 2016) and peer and tutor scaffolding following examples of Rose (1983, 1989, 2014) and Navarre Cleary (2011).		
	Schema for an essay (continued). Looking closely at an	Continue to develop schema for an essay; become aware of the importance of addressing	Writing in academia can take many forms.

2.3	<p>unsuccessful student essay from a Cycle One student comparing it with its prompt.</p> <p>Practise skimming and scanning.</p>	<p>the essay prompt (Chanock, 2004; Lillis & Turner, 2001);</p> <p>Practising some of the metalanguage for academic writing.</p> <p>Practise skimming and scanning.</p>	<p>Begin to understand how writing assignments fit within the desired outcomes for particular courses (Chanock, 2004; Wingate, 2006).</p>
2.4	<p>Overview ‘A’ essays in different disciplines to further develop a schema for an essay. Study paragraph structure (how the students used P-I-E). Look at three of Read et al.’s (2003) literature review paragraphs.</p> <p>Freewriting on what makes a good essay</p>	<p>Continue to develop a schema for an essay and practise metalanguage of academic writing; become familiar with what P-I-E might look like in a student assignment.</p> <p>Practise skimming and scanning.</p> <p>Freewriting can be useful to get started with writing.</p>	<p>Writing in academia can take many forms; good writing is fit for its purpose (Harrington et al., 2001; Johns, 2008).</p> <p>Freewriting and no- or low-stakes writing for reflection is a way of learning (Elbow, 1997; Navarre Cleary, 2008).</p>
2.5	<p>Synthesising and taking part in a conversation: farm toys illustration and discussion.</p>	<p>Begin to develop an understanding of synthesising as constructing knowledge and entering a conversation (Chanock, 2008; Hendricks & Quinn, 2000).</p> <p>Practise skimming and scanning; collaboratively construct paragraphs.</p>	<p>Synthesising sources is a way of constructing knowledge and entering a disciplinary conversation (Chanock, 2008; Gaipa, 2004; Hendricks & Quinn, 2000).</p> <p>Co-construction is the third stage in the learning cycle (Rothery, 1996; Wingate, 2016)</p>
2.6	<p>Guided discovery of practice of dealing with multiple viewpoints from collaborative deconstruction and discussion of journal extract.</p> <p>Practise skimming and scanning; collaboratively co-construct a paragraph.</p>	<p>Deconstruction and analysis: what are some published authors doing with sources? Examine two paragraphs from Cullity, (2008)</p> <p>See how published authors ‘talk’ to each other in their writing (Bartholomae, 1985; Chanock, 2008).</p> <p>Using P-I-E</p>	<p>Synthesising sources is a way of constructing knowledge and entering a disciplinary conversation (Chanock, 2008; Gaipa, 2004; Hendricks & Quinn, 2000).</p>
2.7	<p>Sessions during the study break week, and in the following two weeks, became a series of collaborative workshops on the students’ assignments.</p>		
2.8	<p>No study group. Students’ ‘big’ assignments were all due so only the distance participant and an international student who only attended two meetings, both of whom had different timetables from most participants, were able to attend.</p>		
2.9	<p>This session was opened up into an extended chat time, reflecting on participants’ developing familiarity with the ways of being and doing at university.</p>		
2.10	<p>Collaborative discussion (with provision for revision) about current student writing.</p>		

2.11	Chocolate biscuits and coffee; Gwen from Cycle One came and shared with participants about how she had approached exams. She also explained where students could access previous exam questions and answered queries from participants.
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7.3 Participants

Eighteen students came to at least one meeting during the semester, but numbers settled at ten until the mid-semester break in week seven. As in Cycle One, most participants were first in their family to attend university, although Jimbob’s father, about whom Jimbob said, “He was never home”, (PC 2) had been a graduate, and Mac had two adult daughters who were graduates. As with Cycle One students, however, participants had not lived in the same households as the graduates in their families while they were studying. Three of these students had completed some academic preparation before their arrival: two at regional polytechnics, and one, responding to an emailed invitation from the community education department of the university in this study, had completed a two-week introductory course run by that institution. One other had participated on that course, but not completed the essay (7.5.3). All lacked familiarity with university ways and often, its terminology. Moana, for example, had needed to find out a little of what she was enrolling into:

I had no idea even what a semester was and [a friend] gave me the low down.
(En 2).

Students had worked in practical fields, the military, or retail. Zara had been a parent since leaving school. Only Mac spoke of writing in her years since school, and writing represented an area of concern for most of them (see 7.5.3 for a discussion of the difference academic preparation made for this). Students who participated in introductory interviews and at least six study group meetings are indicated on Table 7.2.

Table 7.2 Cycle Two participants

Cycle Two: Lunchtime group				
25-29 years	30-34	40-44	45-49	50-54
Zara	Rōhi	Tina*	Elle	Mac
	Jimbob			
*Tina was a distance student taking only the academic writing course as a double semester offering. She withdrew from university before the end of the first semester when she was offered a full-time job.				

Cycle Two: Afternoon group	
25-29 years	30-34
Murray	Linda
Hamish	Hapeta

Other participants who attended introductory interviews were Moana (25-29) who lived in a rural town some distance from the campus; she was only able to attend one meeting. Mara (30-34) attended only 2 sessions, but remained in loose contact through the semester and completed entry and exit interviews.

7.4 Action

7.4.1 Overview

Meeting structure remained the same as for Cycle One: a chat time followed by a literacy activity. In response to suggestions made by two Cycle One participants in their exit interviews, that the writing activities were very valuable to them, and that more time writing and less time chatting might provide more effective support for the group, I began Cycle Two by monitoring chat times to ensure there was time for the writing activity. However, I reversed that decision after the first three weeks. Cycle Two participants were considerably more apprehensive and less confident than those in Cycle One. They needed more time to talk with each other and learn from each other's successes, or to talk together about how a challenge might be tackled. Some of the less confident students needed time in each meeting to develop sufficient courage to share. Cycle One had demonstrated the value of chat times as opportunities for students to learn vicariously when problems and successes were shared; they had also provided space for students to provide collective scaffolding for each other. These were important factors enabling participants to increase their academic self-efficacy and build confidence and led to my decision to relax the monitoring.

The next sections give overviews of the main action of the cycle: the interventions designed in response to observations from Cycle One: the epistemological reflection,

the three exercises designed to introduce participants to schemata for academic writing, an extra workshop session, continual explicit teaching and practice with elements of a writing process, and using a meeting at the end of the semester as an extended chat time for reflection.

7.4.2 Epistemological reflection

This collaborative reflective exercise was introduced in the first meeting after the research had been explained to participants and after we had engaged in some getting to know each other activities. It was designed to go some way towards circumventing the confusion and stress experienced by Cycle One students by alerting the newcomers, as early as possible in their first semesters, to the possibility that they might find the approach to knowledge in higher education, and therefore its methods of teaching and learning, unfamiliar. It was designed for participants:

- To identify expectations they brought about knowledge, and therefore about teaching, and learning;
- To begin to understand their part as active learners, responsible for constructing their own knowledge;
- To perhaps begin to understand how their learner identities had been constructed under a very different educational paradigm;
- To work towards a sense of identity with and as a group of similar peers by “incorporating its members’ pasts into its history” (Wenger, 1998, p. 215).

Theoretically, the intervention incorporated principles from adult education literature (Mezirow, 1997; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Zepke, 2011). Its structure drew on Merriam and Bierema’s (2014) argument that one task of facilitators of adult learning is to help adult learners become “aware of the need to know” (p. 55). Merriam and Bierema suggest that in order to alert learners to such a need, facilitators can assist them to make connections between experiences that are familiar to them, and new “concepts, theories, and experiences” (p. 51).

The intervention incorporated critical reflection (Francis, 1995) as discussed in 4.3, a practice which Mezirow (1997) and Zepke (2011) argue may enable adult learners to take control of their learning. Zepke (2011) also suggests that a process of critical reflection may enable adult learners to re-negotiate their identities as learners.

O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) observe that this re-negotiation may be encouraged as adult learners begin understanding that those identities may have been socially constructed for them.

The critical reflection had two other very important purposes. It was designed with the dual purposes that Crowther et al. (2010) observed as they used reflection with a community of learners with whom they worked: on an individual level, as a contributor to a sense of identification with a group and on the group level, as a contributor to the development of the study group as a supportive learning community.

The reflection began with a focus on past learning experiences which Crowther et al. (2010) suggest may provide a baseline for students from which they might make connections from the familiar to new, as yet unfamiliar, practices. Thus, it may be effective on a personal level. As they point out, when that reflection is collaborative it may also contribute to community building and a developing sense of identity within a group of learners (Crowther et al., 2010; Wenger, 1988). Wenger (1998) explains that this sense of community may result from developing a shared history within the group, by:

incorporating its members' pasts into its history – that is, by letting what they have been, what they have done, and what they know contribute to the constitution of its practice. (p. 215)

Implementing the reflective exercise, I guided participants through the five stages of critical reflection outlined by Francis (1995) (see 4.3):

1. Describe: Uncritically describe what you recall of your learning at high school.
2. Inform: What does this mean? Why might it have been like this?
3. Confront: How did I come to be this way? What is the broad social, historical context?
4. Reconstruct: Are there other ways of doing things?
5. Challenge: With this new knowledge, what will I now do about this?

Participants were engaged throughout this process. Across all age groups they shared memories of transmissive educational practices, of teachers presenting knowledge in packages of certainty to passive students, with no deviation for discussion. Students

recorded their collective recollections on the whiteboard in a sketch with stick figures. In their entry interviews, participants reiterated their recollections:

Age group 25-29: “Teacher up the front telling you. You sit there, not really paying attention.”

Age group 30-34: “This is how it is.”

Age group 30-34: “There was no discussion.”

Age group 45-49: “Sitting there bored.”

Age group 50-54: “Taught by rote, learning by rote. Everything was set. . . . There was no discussion on it.”

When we discussed knowledge as they had experienced it, participants’ responses to my queries about who was considered to have knowledge and where knowledge might come from seemed to confirm that they associated schooling with an epistemology in which knowledge was structurally fixed. Good students could find knowledge for themselves in books; teachers dispensed it; knowledge came “from our elders” (Moana) who bestowed it on tamariki (children). They did not seem to have a conception of school knowledge as constructed or contestable.

In discussion, however, students did recognise that there could be other approaches to knowledge. Those with children, accustomed to negotiating different viewpoints on an issue, and those with connections to their marae, to the military, or with experience in other cultures or sports, knew implicitly that different communities approached knowledge in different ways. However, they had not applied those concepts to school knowledge (Chanock, 2008).

In their entry interviews in the first three weeks of the semester, and in times of collective reflection in study group chat times, all participants stated emphatically that the reflective exercise helped them understand that learning at university could not be approached the same way as it had been at school. They were beginning to understand that they would be required to be proactive, to participate actively in their learning, that this approach to learning represented a very different process from their previous experiences, and that the onus was on them to take an active part in their learning:

Here at uni we do have to think for ourselves but follow the guidance or the guidelines of each particular discipline to fit in with that. (Mac, En 1)

The reflection formed a starting point for participants to find out the unknown, both what was expected of them, and what they could expect of faculty. Rōhi spoke of becoming aware of their need to adapt the expectations they brought for teaching and learning:

It was good that we had that first up, 'cos even coming from the army, they would *teach* you, 'cos I was an instructor, and I would teach the test. They wouldn't even have to find the answer, 'cos I would tell them how that piece of equipment works. When I came to [university], I had to find out everything myself. (En 2, her emphasis)

Identifying a different approach to knowledge, to teaching, and to learning provided a foundation for some of the collective reflection in chat times and in the extended chat time in the ninth week of the cycle. Later in the semester, when we were co-constructing a paragraph about mature students at university, Linda alluded to the reflection, noting that at university, students:

need to take more control over their own learning instead of being . . . like containers to be filled. (SG2 AG.6)

Some of the benefit available for participants from that reflection was noted by Hapeta, who joined the research in the third week and thus had not been present for it. In his entry interview, Hapeta told of the confusion he experienced in his early lectures in words recalling the confusion of Cycle One students which had suggested the need for such a reflection:

That first lecture I had, I had no idea – I walked out of the lecture going, “What have I done? I’m going to be lost.”

As I worked through the reflection with him, Hapeta identified with the notion of an unfamiliar approach to education, recalling, like Rōhi, the teaching “for the test” he had experienced in the military. He talked again of his impression of his first lectures:

“Here is all this information. Take what you want!” And you are sitting there left boggled with, “What do I want? What do I need?” (En 2)

The intervention seemed to have a lasting effect for some participants. It seemed to have provided them with a baseline for comparison and awareness of difference, as had been

intended. Apart from Hapeta, who, as noted, had not joined the study group at the time of the reflection, students did not talk of being unable to negotiate their lectures. I decided to use the intervention again in a future cycle, but with one modification: instead of talking and writing about their experiences of school, with a collective sketch on the whiteboard, it would be more engaging, and perhaps add a little light-heartedness to the first meeting, for students in pairs or threes to sketch their own memories while talking about them with each other before joining in a whole-group discussion.

Another benefit from the reflection was its contribution to study group identity. This development was perhaps not noticeable to regular participants, as the group grew together into a collaborative, encouraging entity, but it was perceivable to students who visited the group occasionally. Mara, for example, had not been present for any of the getting to know you activities or the critical reflection in the first week, nor the first schema activity in the second. In the third week she visited the group. She commented later in a way that suggests she recognised the supportive collaboration that was already developing within the group: “They all seemed to know each other pretty well in there” (Ex 2). From the outside, she could recognise that this was already becoming a distinct “affinity group” (Gee, 2000-2001, p. 101) on the campus.

7.4.3 Developing a Schema

The schema exercises were developed to meet the clear need for students to have an idea of what they were working towards as they prepared their first essays. Most participants had been unfamiliar with all aspects of academic writing, from the macro features such as layout, what an academic essay might look like, to more specific features such as paragraph structures, inline referencing, and reference lists. The schemata activities were designed to go some way to addressing this gap. The interventions used familiar language to lead students to some of the metalanguage used in talking about academic writing that they encountered in the online support, in Student Learning workshops, and, for those enrolled in the academic writing course, in their coursebooks. Interventions incorporated principles from the stages of Rothery’s (1996) learning cycle involving collaborative discussion of the purpose of a piece of writing and deconstruction of a text. Scaffolding was afforded through careful questioning from the MCP, and collectively, as participants worked in pairs to find answers to some of the questions. Student texts used in these activities were used with permission of students and tutors, and anonymised.

Schema 1: Overview of an academic essay

In the first activity, designed to give participants a generic overview of an academic essay, I gave students a strict injunction not to read the words, but to look for obvious features they could see. They identified such features as “paragraphs”, “big paragraphs”, “a bold title”, “course number”, “APA” (which, in fact, was Harvard), and “a reference list”. Importantly, as participants realised that they did not require any academic knowledge or terminology to answer the questions, they relaxed. They realised that this introduction to an essay was at their level – within their ZPDs.

To continue the general overview, we then looked in more detail, first at the title. Students noted how the writer had put the question to be addressed at the top, giving readers a clear idea of the topic of the essay and what they might expect to read about. They noted that this gave the essay a clear focus. Scanning was introduced as a skill. The essay was from a history paper discussing distortions of history depicted in movies, and students then scanned the text for instances and variations of the word “distortion”. They found several, in the title, the explanation in the introduction and the final sentence in the introduction. These are indicated in Figure 7.1, which highlights key words in the prompt, the topic for the essay, and incidences of “distorted”.

Students identified variations on the word distortion throughout the essay, particularly in the first sentences of paragraphs. We were able to talk about how this repetition provided a clear idea of what the essay was about, and I introduced the word “cohesion”. We then looked in detail at the first paragraph and identified a pattern in its structure. Students could see that the introduction situated the text in a historical context. In an observation which indicated of how new some of the language associated with writing was to these students, but how the study group afforded a safe place for participants to try out what they were learning, Zara called out, “I can see the hook! Is that the hook?” She was referring to the final sentence of the first paragraph, using a term appropriated from her academic writing course which encouraged students to use a hook to draw their readers into a narrative. Rather than override her observation, I enquired of the whole group: “What *work* do you think this sentence is doing for the essay? Emphasising “work” was an oblique way of suggesting that a hook in a first paragraph might have a job for a particular sort of writing, but this sentence might have another; it was a different sort of essay addressing a different purpose.

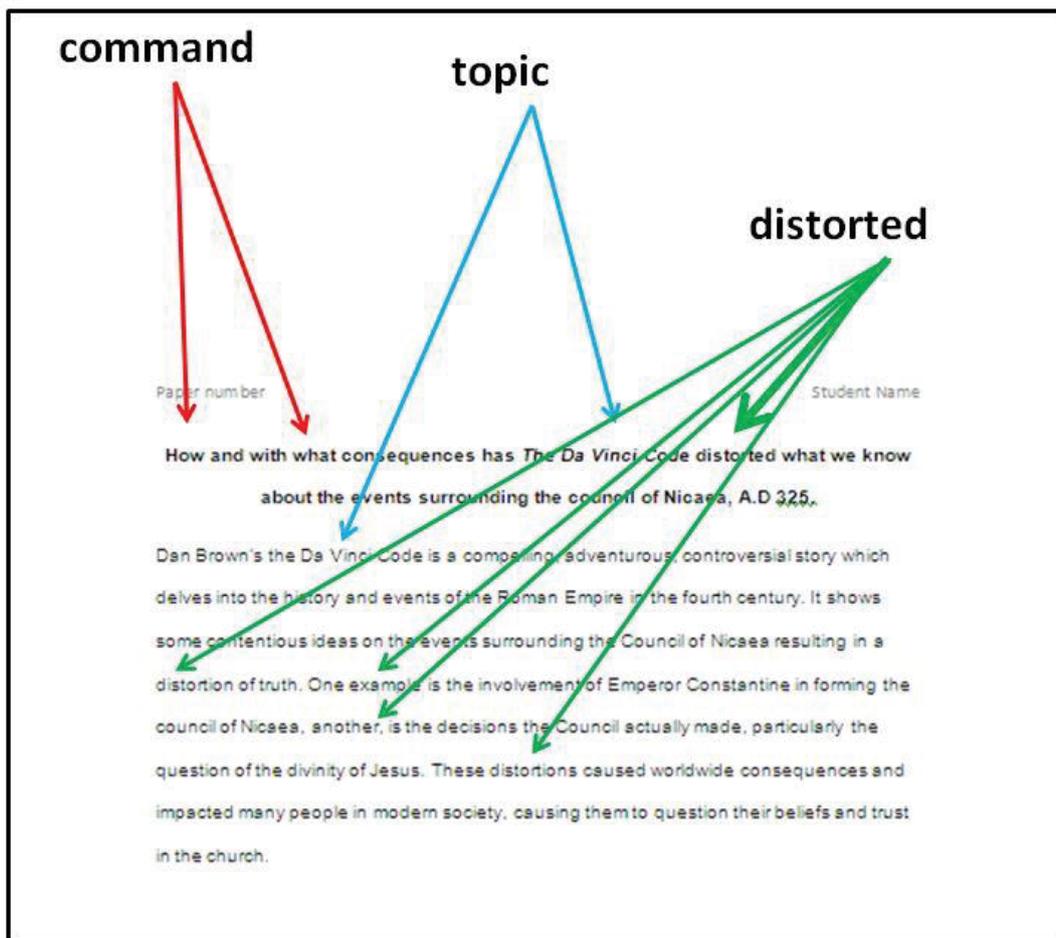


Figure 7.1 Overview of the title and first paragraph of a successful student essay.

Participants suggested functions for this sentence. Rōhi suggested it might provide a sense of direction: “You know where you’re headed, I guess.” After some discussion about its purpose, Hamish connected the discussion to something he had learnt on a two-week preparatory course on which he had worked through the process of preparing an essay. He had been introduced to some of the metalanguage for academic writing. He ventured, “Is this the thesis statement?”

There were little murmurs of recognition as Hamish ventured that. Students who had read some of the online support available for writing, or who had read ahead in their academic writing coursebooks, had encountered the term “thesis statement”, but as yet, none of them had an idea of what such a statement might look like, or even of its purpose, in an essay. This activity had enabled students to make connections from language with which they were familiar, such as “work”, to the new phrase they were hearing in their writing course but which most could not yet apply in practice: the

“thesis statement”. On the way, they had come to a more appropriate understanding of another new concept which they did not yet “have a handle” on (Jane’s comment from Cycle One): “the hook”.

We talked further about what the body paragraphs might be about, and then looked at the first of these. Here, we read the first sentence, and Zara ascertained that it “tells you what it’s about”. We saw how it echoed the last sentence in the introduction. We were able to develop an understanding of the acronym ‘P-I-E’. Rōhi had read ahead in her academic writing coursebook and seen the acronym as a suggestion for paragraph structure – point, illustration, example. She had had no idea what that meant in practice. After the activity, I noted in my reflective journal:

As I explained that the ‘P’ for ‘point’ was the same thing as a ‘topic’ there were sounds of understanding from participants who had not previously been able to attach that information to anything concrete. Rōhi’s “ahhhh!” as we saw the ‘P’ working in the text, was like switching on a light: “Now I *see* what ‘point’ is”. (March 6, 2012, her emphasis)

Students were then able to volunteer suggestions for what the following paragraph might be about, suggesting “another distortion”. They were encouraged when they found their answers were correct.

Schema 2: Addressing the prompt

A second part to the intervention, the following week, was designed for students to build an understanding of why Jane’s (Cycle One) first essay had not been judged as successful and to encourage them to practise some of the new metalanguage for academic writing. First, we read the prompt and the instructions together, and then participants worked in pairs to identify where Jane had not followed guidelines for structure and content. They found she had not applied the first instruction, to use specific disciplinary concepts. Several of her paragraphs contained only one sentence and were much shorter than the 100-150 words suggested in the guide; her referencing was inconsistently applied, and, in some cases, missing. In addition, students found where Jane had made assumptions for the reader with statements that did not provide context, for example, a sentence announcing “Three of the six key themes to emerge” without indicating the sources of the themes or their context.

Schema 3: Writing fits its purpose

As a precaution, to alert students to the concept that there is no single way to write an essay and that successful writing addresses its purpose, we worked through a third schema exercise the following week. This intervention gave students an opportunity to read a range of text types in an overview of successful essays from Cycle One participants from different disciplines. A key purpose of the exercise was that students might apply the learning from the intervention in their own writing. I purposefully included an ‘A’ grade essay of Jane’s so that students could see that failure does not have to be a permanent state.

These schema exercises seemed to help students, reducing a little of the apprehension they were feeling because of the unknown expectations for the sort of writing, genres, and conventions they might need for writing for university. In their entry interviews they consistently spoke of gaining a much clearer idea of what the expectations they had been so unsure of might be: “It’s given me an understanding of what’s expected” (Rōhi, En 1). Students also told that they understood more about how they might structure their essays. Linda, who had been very stressed about the two essays she was preparing, was able to say:

I knew that essays were difficult and that I would struggle, but in terms of how to *structure* an essay, [I didn’t have] much info so these sessions have been good. (En 2, her emphasis)

Rōhi also appreciated studying models for the insight they gave about how essays might be structured. She was working on an essay requiring students to compare two practices and relate both to a disciplinary concept. She had been unable to work out how she could structure it. One of the models, however, another ‘A’ essay of Jane’s, was a similar sort of comparison. Rōhi took careful note of the structure and modified it to fit her own assignment.

We’ve come here and you’ve brought, like, samples, and a lot of them have been from my discipline, and that’s given me an understanding of what’s expected. (Rōhi, En 2)

Participants seemed to particularly value the learning they developed from studying the failed essay:

When you read the essays and then read back on the instructions, it is easy to see where they went wrong and try and identify that in my essays and make it relevant. (Linda, En 2)

“Looking at those two different essays in the study group helped me by showing me how to write, in showing us what errors were there.” (Elle, En 2)

Through the semester I continued to receive feedback from students that guiding them through an overview of different essays had been very helpful, alerting them to matters of structure and layout and disciplinary differences, and to the notion that writing responds to its purpose rather than following a set form:

I found out every one is different. If you’re going to write an essay in a class, you need to do it [according] to what you’re asked to do. (Rōhi, Ex 2)

Once again, Hapeta regretted missing the first schema exercise, noting that it would have given him an idea of how to prepare his first essay. All he knew about writing for university was what he was currently learning from the academic writing course. There, he was expecting to learn structures and principles he could apply to his disciplinary writing, but the academic writing course began with a narrative. His first essay for another course required a critical discussion, incorporating synthesising and APA referencing, all unknown practices:

That [schema exercise] would have been gold because in [the] academic writing [classroom], I was like, “you’re supposed to be teaching me how to write an essay. Now, I have an essay due and I still don’t know how I am writing, and we are too busy talking about personal narratives.” That was okay, and it sort of had a little bit of structure to it, but I wanted to know how to write an *essay*. I needed to know how to write an essay because I had one. (En 2, his emphasis)

In Cycle Two, when we came to co-construct short texts and work through a writing process in meetings, none of the students who had been present for the schema activities declared, like Bruce from Cycle One, “We’ve never learnt this stuff” (SG1 AG.2). Now they had seen ‘this stuff’ for themselves. Importantly, apart from some laboratory reports – which I had not included in the examples – their first assignments, even Hapeta’s, had looked like essays, not a spread out collection of sentences as Leigh’s had been.

7.4.4 Extra session (2.2E)

Before the schema exercises, participants insisted they did “not know the expectations” (Linda, En 2) for writing at university. The chat time in one meeting became a collaborative examination of an essay prompt on which several participants were working and a discussion of how it might be addressed, Mac responded to that with an email: “Thanks for today. Clarified a lot”. Rōhi, Zara, and Linda, however, remained extremely unsure about how to address the prompts for their different assignments. Students were extremely apprehensive, as explained above, and I had observed their concerns about writing in the two meetings we had had. I had also seen Rōhi sitting just inside the main door of the building housing academic writing tutors, looking very miserable. Each day she waited for her tutor to arrive in order to question her about the requirements for the assignment. I knew Zara, too, had met her tutor for discussion several times to try and interpret the requirements. I noted in my journal after Linda’s entry interview, that she was, “almost in tears behind her glasses” (March 9, 2012) as she told of her confusion. I also pondered:

After three interviews today – then a study group – how could I just carry on with what was planned for the study group (or, with interview questions) when participants were almost in tears about how to write their first essays? (March 9, 2012)

In response to a direct request from Rōhi, and as a measure of reciprocity (Maiter et al., 2008) in return for students offering their time to participate in the research, I held an extra, collaborative workshop meeting on a Friday afternoon. In this extra session we discussed the purpose for the genre in which students had been asked to write, applying the first stage of Rothery’s (1996) learning cycle. Scaffolding was afforded through careful questioning as students identified ways in which they could address their prompts and collective scaffolding as I invited them to comment on each other’s ideas.

Zara’s essay prompt asked her to write about literacy and share a message for a general audience. She had chosen to address this by writing about reading to her son. Some discussion amongst participants did not seem to identify a message for a general audience, so I enquired, “How could you ask *me* a question so that I could see some point in your story, because my kids are adults? Zara began to think outside the bounds

of what she had written, to what could be a more general application of the story she was telling:

Well, I guess, it's "how do you connect with your parents? How did you connect with your children? What's that bond there?" Because everyone has an individual bond with their child.

Rōhi picked up that suggestion and added to it:

"How do you connect with a seven year old?" Maybe. Is that it? Asking someone? 'Cos that would make me think!

By the end of that extra meeting, after more discussion and a time of freewriting, Zara had developed a question with which many people could identify to begin her story:

My question was, "how vital is bonding to our existence?"

Through the collaborative discussion, students were able to work out how to relate the bits of writing they had already done to their prompts. They saw how that relationship could be worked out in an introduction that tied their writing to a purpose:

And then I can write the rest of my stuff, can match it in. (Rōhi)

That makes sense. I'm just thinking . . . how I can do it, and how I can incorporate [her previous writing] at the same time? That makes really good sense. (Zara)

The collaborative session seemed to allay some of the apprehension the students were feeling. I commented on the new twinkle in Rōhi's eyes, and she responded, "I'm like, I think I know what I'm doing". Those students left that meeting greatly relieved.

7.4.5 A writing process

In Cycle Two we continued to apply the scaffolded genre approach to writing, discussing purposes for texts, how to address prompts, and exploring values of academic culture as they were demonstrated in texts. Key elements of a writing process, from strategic reading, through brainstorming and heuristics, to co-construction of texts, were practised regularly, as indicated on Table 7.1. The intervention introducing participants to incorporating multiple viewpoints through synthesising using the farm toys was used in week five (2.5) to coincide with the researched essays many students

were preparing around that time. Mac, for one, internalised it, telling me how she recalled it every time she prepared an essay:

Just seeing where all the parts [sources] go. It's about drawing from all these different places. It's the visual concept of it all. I was able to go a part there, and a part there. . . . 'Cos just this guy here, that's driving the tractor; he's got one idea about how to do the job, and the cows might think, "You're doing it wrong", so they've got their opinion too. (Ex 2)

7.4.6 An extended chat time

One study group meeting, in the ninth week, was offered as an extended chat time, functioning like a focus group, for all remaining participants. The meeting came after a study break of two weeks and a week during which none of the parents could attend because of sick children. The first topic of conversation, introduced by Hapeta as students found only four participants in the room was, "Is this all that's left?" I queried whether they thought the study group had required too much commitment, but the consensus was that it had offered essential support at a level and delivered in ways that they could apply immediately. From there, the conversation was free-flow, during which time students discussed preparation courses, their own preparedness for university and for academic writing, what they believed their needs for writing had been and whether and how they had been met or not. Diverse other topics were introduced as students interacted with each other's responses.

I noticed that each participant in the room had reflected carefully through the semester; I noted their increased confidence at this end of the semester and the support they offered, "all this feedback we're getting" (Hapeta) for each other. I noted their genuine admiration of each other's successes, particularly for Linda's stellar 87% for an essay. Linda's continuing good marks, although she admitted she had trouble owning them because, "at school I was always a 'C' student", had increased her confidence since the beginning of the semester. She also noted that she preferred essays which seemed to her to have a clear structure to essays requiring her to discuss or argue:

At least if you've got, "You need to write about *this* and *this*, and then relate *this* to *this*," then OK, cool, easy. I can do that because you know what's expected of you. (SG 2.9, her emphasis)

Some of what I heard in that extended chat time could be acted on immediately. Students expressed doubts and questions about writing for exams. In response to that, I invited Gwen to come to the morning tea scheduled for the following week, again with an invitation extended to all participants from Cycle Two, whether or not they were still attending the group, to share how she had managed the exam process. Some topics participants chose to discuss – marketing of orientation activities, lack of advice about preparation courses at the time of enrolment, the possible availability of preparation courses at night – were outside the bounds of the research. One matter on which all students present agreed was the value that would accrue for mature-aged students from some sort of familiarisation with academic culture and academic ways before they arrived at university. That confirmed the thoughts I had already had about offering at least a full morning before the semester (see Cycle Four).

7.5 Observation

Cycle Two illuminated some of the complexity of transitions to university, and thus the acquisition of an academic Discourse, for the mature students in this study. As indicated in the respective sections of this chapter (7.4.2, 7.4.3), the interventions introduced in the cycle were effective in providing participants with some keys for functioning in academia – the beginnings of an academic Discourse – in that they introduced students to possible new ways of approaching knowledge, teaching, and learning, and to some of the language and some possible formats for academic writing. Students' positive responses along with my observations that most participants were alerted to a different epistemology from one they had previously associated with education, confirmed that those interventions should be included in every subsequent cycle.

Despite these seeming benefits from participation in the study group, as Hapeta had observed, numbers reduced by half soon after the study break. Five of the ten students who had attended regularly for the first six or seven weeks of the semester had ceased attending. Thus I questioned whether the study group had actually provided the support these students needed as they learned to write and participate in a community of practice, a Discourse. Had the study group been able to support participants as they began to adapt their familiar practices and take on new practices in order to become insiders in that Discourse? My questions remained until there was time to review all the data after the semester. This analysis clarified that the study group had provided valuable support in many ways for most participants, particularly providing a group

with which they could identify; however, it could not compensate for the combinations of factors that it seemed some students brought to their engagement with tertiary study. I entered some non-reflective freewriting in my journal:

The problem was not that the study group was no good. It was excellent – but doing a prep course *before* would address some of the writing problems – because the study group actually met other needs that were essential for students to be able to write – the academic literacy, academic Discourse thing. To write, they have to be literate.

As my venting continued, I made another observation:

And the problem with discontinuity was the “baggage” some brought, as well as sick kids, pressure of trying to cope with subjects they had no academic foundation for, self-efficacy. . . . (28 June, 2012)

A series of themes that emerged from the analysis were consistent with the literature on mature students and the juggling and necessary re-negotiation of learner identities that many must contend with (Kasworm, 2008; Willans & Seary, 2011). These themes contributed to key learning from Cycle Two; some could possibly be addressed in future cycles. Some factors, however, which affected participants’ engagement, both with their study and with the group, were beyond the ability of a one-hour a week study group to address.

Key observations from this analysis were first, that participants in Cycle Two differed from their peers in Cycle One in ways which affected their engagement; second, that academic preparation had made a significant difference to the ability of three students to be able to engage with their study immediately; thirdly, that some students were cripplingly apprehensive about writing at the beginning of the semester for a variety of reasons; and fourthly, that experiences of schooling (and in some cases, life) had left some students with baggage, a pervasive, negative legacy which would seem to require more than one hour a week in a study group to redress. These themes are outlined below.

7.5.1 Different students, different challenges

As shown on Table 8.2, participants in Cycle Two were generally younger than those in Cycle One; most brought less successful life experience, fewer life skills, and challenging family commitments.

- Six participants had school-aged children whose needs put pressure on their time:

It's really, really hard in the [school] holidays. I couldn't find the time to do it. Being around the children and stuff. (Tina, SG2 AG.9)

- Four of those six were sole parents who struggled to find care for their children during a chickenpox epidemic:

I've been having to share the care with their father and my mother and my sister, and they've actually taken days off work and allowed me to come in for my classes. (Rōhi, Ex 2)

- Most Cycle Two participants were first in their family to come to university.

When I first came here, I had no idea what to expect, how the teaching patterns were to be evolved. What I was expected to do, what I needed to do for myself. It's actually been quite a hard slog. Of course I have not come from an academic family. None of my family has been at university. I've had nothing to go on, from anybody. (Elle, Ex 2)

- Elle had arrived at university as an alternative to very disruptive circumstances elsewhere:

Things went pear shaped in [city name] for me. . . . I decided that for mental reasons I was not going to stay there, so came up here to be with my sister. I was determined to do something, and four weeks later here I am. (En 2)

- Some lacked support in their home communities for their new venture, which meant either that they struggled on alone, or that they drew on the support afforded by the study group:

I'm just struggling through things by myself again but that's pretty much been my life. (Elle, Ex 2)

I don't have that many people I can let off steam to. My partner gets the brunt of it sometimes. So to talk to other students who are actually experiencing what you're experiencing at the same time is definitely valuable. (Linda, Ex 2)

- One student left university when she accepted a full-time job as a teacher-aide which seemed to her to be a better proposition than the five or six years' part-time study for a BA, followed by the year of graduate study she required to become a teacher.
- Participants were considerably more apprehensive than those in Cycle One. Because this was such a significant factor for these students, it is discussed in a separate section below; some participants found it difficult to set aside legacies of their previous education, particularly extreme apprehension and fear, in order to engage with their course material and with study group activities. Elle, for example, by referring to the study group as "Prue's class", used language that recalled her unpleasant school experiences.
- At least one student seemed to expect that the study group would provide one-to-one support for assignments and was too apprehensive to enjoy working collaboratively.

This combination of attitudinal and academic factors contributed to some very different study group meetings from those in Cycle One. They made for a different ZPD from Cycle One and for a difference between the two weekly groups. It took very careful questioning to determine the zone in which we could negotiate to enable students to make connections between their current skill and knowledge levels, for example, what they understood of their essay prompts and how to address those prompts. In the extra meeting (SG2 2E) my question as to how Zara's essay might be made relevant to me was arrived at after some trial and error asking questions that did not seem to help clarify the problem. However, we were not able to have such focused small groups for every assignment that students wrote. At times, the ZPD was too wide. Zara, after leaving the study group, made weekly meetings with the peer tutors and found the focused one-to-one help she sought for her writing from them.

7.5.2 Writing apprehension

Many Cycle Two participants were considerably more apprehensive about writing than those in Cycle One had been. Linda, for example, gave the most negative response

possible to every Likert-style statement on the WAM, giving her the lowest possible score. Similarly, the single positive response Rōhi gave was to agree strongly that she felt good when handing in an assignment, which, as she indicated in the extra meeting (2.2E), was because she knew she would learn from feedback.

Completing the WAM was always voluntary; perhaps in an indication of their extreme apprehension, neither Zara nor Elle had done so. Both, however, by their own admission, were extremely apprehensive about writing. Among all Cycle Two participants, only Mac had ever enjoyed writing, and that had been at primary school. At high school, any enjoyment of anything to do with learning had been bullied out of her. She had, though, tuned to writing as a solace through some hard times in recent years, and had learned how to write in two academic genres when she participated on an academic preparation course.

Murray and Hamish had gained some confidence on preparation programmes (7.5.3), but other Cycle Two participants, similarly to their peers in Cycle One, had had very little prior experience with writing in their gap years apart from requisition forms for those in retail, or reports for the military. For the latter, however, as Hāpeta announced, highlighting a very different approach to writing, “everything I had to write was template. Didn’t have to think about anything; fill in the blanks” (SG 2.9).

Participants’ talk about their apprehension for writing echoed literature about the cohort over the last three decades (Gillam-Scott, 1984; Navarre Cleary, 2012; Rose, 1989; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008). In her Writer’s notebook, Linda eloquently described her apprehension, repeating some of the language from the WAM:

Writing makes me anxious so much that I try and avoid it. . . . I must have missed some basic skills along the way. . . . I feel as if I am trying to do something but without the tools to do it. I think I would rather go and get a tooth pulled without anaesthetic. I don’t know what it is about writing that I hate so much. . . . Did I miss this at school? I thought I was a conscientious student but maybe I was just fooling myself. I don’t remember anyone ever saying, ‘this is how you write an essay’ apart from basic ideas like ‘intro, body, conclusion’. I seem to be most afraid of failure, so if I fail from not submitting an assignment rather than poor quality, it’s almost not as bad.

Key areas of concern about writing among Cycle Two participants, as indicated in Linda's text above, were their perceived lack of skills, the unknown nature of the writing they would be encountering, their fear of writing, and concern about the high stakes attached to it. Because their apprehension affected their ability to feel comfortable in writing-based activities, it affected every study group meeting.

In their words, factors affecting Cycle Two students' attitudes towards writing are repeated below:

- Lack of skill, whether perceived or genuine: "I feel as if I have equal skills building a house that I do for writing." (Linda, WN 2)
- Absence of writing since school: "I have done no writing since leaving school [30 years ago]." (Elle, En 2)
- Doubt about whether they could cope with an unknown skill: "I don't know how I will cope with all the writing in uni. It is a complete unknown." (Elle, En 2)
- Ignorance of the expectations: "I don't know what to expect." (Rōhi, En 2)
- Knowledge that university writing is different from anything they had done before, but not knowing the nature of the difference: "Knowing that this is completely different from anything that I have ever done before so I don't know what I am supposed to be doing half the time." (Linda, En 2)
- Fear because of the high stakes attached to writing: "Writer's Block for me is most likely caused by stress and anxiety over grades + deadlines." (Linda, WN 2)
- Interpreting the topic: "It directly affects my ability to write, understanding the topic. I spend a lot of time reading, re-reading and trying to understand." (Linda, WN 2)
- How to address a prompt requiring 'discuss' or 'critically discuss': "I actually found that sort of thing really difficult because, it's like, well what do you write about?" (Linda, SG2.9)
- The language and shape of extended writing: "I didn't even remember introduction, body, conclusion." (Hāpeta, SG2.9)

Those participants who had taken part in academic preparation before arriving on campus were demonstrably more confident about writing in general, although still somewhat apprehensive about new types of writing. Through Cycle Two, the impact of

targeted academic preparation could be observed in all facets of students' engagement: in their confidence, their skills, and in their ability to manage their lives as they went through their first semesters. The following section discusses some of these factors which seemed to derive from adequate academic preparation.

7.5.3 The impact of academic preparation

Each student who had completed an academic preparation course, whether two weeks (Hamish), or one semester (Murray and Mac) had benefitted in the three areas Cullity (2008) attributes to academic preparation courses: academic, sociocultural, and attitudinal. Mara, who participated on, but did not complete, a preparation course, and Rōhi, who found a course at a much lower academic level than appropriate for transitioning to university, did not gain the same benefit.

In a cycle in which so many students were cripplingly apprehensive about writing, those academic, sociocultural, and attitudinal gains were very noticeable. First, students had gained confidence from acquiring some academic skills, particularly from working through the process of preparing an academic essay:

That essay that we did was really worthwhile. Good for confidence. (Murray, En 2)

Through that process, each one had learnt what they referred to as “basic tools” (Hamish, En 2) or “academic writing skills” (Murray, En 2) which they knew they did not have before they participated on the courses. Hamish believed his “basic tools” were what “I needed to start with”. They replaced the “nothing” he had known about writing when he had entered the course and, he suggested, kept him from being “lost” in his first days of the university academic writing course.

Because those students' preparation took place before they arrived at university, it was in what seemed to the students to be a relaxed environment. Hamish had appreciated what he perceived to be a non-pressured learning situation:

I found it incredibly helpful purely because I'd been out of school for 12 years. So to have two weeks with zero pressure and to just get a really good, comprehensive head start on how to form an essay, how to write an essay, how to research back into the [university] library, all that kind of stuff. It was just a huge weight off my mind to not have to stress on that as I walked into the

semester with all of the other students. I was able to feel comfortable on campus before everyone got here. That for me personally, was huge. (Ex 2)

Students did not have to cope with learning to use Word, search databases, reference, or handle multiple viewpoints at the same time as they were keeping up with their extensive first semester reading and writing. They had learnt these things already.

I learnt quite a lot about academic writing skills: note taking, paraphrasing, summarising, reporting. . . . We went through referencing, your basic structure of your introduction, paragraphs, with links in between that back up your introduction, and all those sorts of skills which are quite helpful for this sort of work. (Murray, En 2)

Mara, however, who attended the same course as Hamish, had balked at the need to engage with multiple viewpoints:

We did the Treaty of Waitangi – the whole course. People are sick and tired of hearing about the Treaty of Waitangi and stuff like that. And I did say, for someone coming in who's just learning to do an essay, the topic is too controversial. I know we are going to come across that and will have to learn to argue for and against. But I said, "You're making people feel uncomfortable before they even start writing the essay because the topic is too controversial". (En 2)

Mara's comment perhaps indicates that she had not really understood that academic argument is not necessarily adversarial; it may involve discussion and evaluation of different viewpoints rather than personal commitment to those viewpoints.

While all students who had completed preparation had developed some confidence, not all the preparation courses they had found were at an appropriate level for university study. Rōhi found a bridging course. Reflecting her considerable apprehension about re-entering education, and her uncertainty about how she would cope with learning, she had chosen the lowest level of course. That was Level One on the New Zealand framework, equivalent to a high school year 11. Rōhi later realised it had not been appropriate for enabling a smooth transition to university. She had not been introduced to writing at all:

[The course] just revised us on punctuation, stuff like that. No essay writing or anything like that. It was just these booklets where you had to read some of the information from the material they gave you and you had to answer the questions; or you had to go to the Internet [which Rōhi equated with Google] and research something, which I think pretty much anyone can do. (En 2)

Despite the absence of writing, Rōhi had gained a little bit of confidence from the course she completed:

[It] gave me confidence, but didn't help much, 'cos I came in pretty much blind. A lot of the stuff I experience now, I had no idea it was like this. (En 2)

The academic preparation courses Hamish, Murray, and Mac completed introduced them to some of the metalanguage for academic writing. This then enabled them to engage with the writing course at university.

I think if I had just come straight from nothing into [the] academic writing [course], I would have been lost. (Hamish, En 2)

They had also learnt to use an electronic environment:

We had to submit some blogs and things online. . . . So I think all those skills were quite good preparation for this sort of thing. (Murray, En 2)

An important benefit of the preparation courses was that they introduced students to some of the behaviours that comprise an academic Discourse. Murray, in his late 20s, was realistic about what he had needed to learn:

I know that I could have come straight in, being over 20, but I just thought that since it was such a long time ago since I was at high school [10 years prior], it would be wise to brush up on some techniques. Get a bit of study habits and learn some academic skills before jumping into uni. (En 2)

He had found that learning the ways of being a student took time to develop:

What I found was building a routine and setting aside time to do something, then have a break and do something else, get into that habit. I was able to do that in the weekdays; then I still had the weekends to get out and go to parties and do

silly things. But I had my time set aside and that took a while to get that routine going. (En 2)

Two of Murray's first semester courses were by distance education. The time management practices he had developed on the preparation course were invaluable preparation for the discipline he required to work through those courses.

Mara, in contrast, did not learn to manage her time through her short course. This may have been because the course was no-stakes. There was no compulsion to complete the essay, and Mara did not complete hers. At the end of her first semester she noted that time management, whether it had been caused by lack of confidence or procrastination, or both, had been the most difficult aspect of the semester for her. It required a very different discipline from her experiences in retail:

The main part I found quite hard was to sit down and make yourself read and study and stuff like that. I think as an adult student being out of it for a long time it's kind of hard to prioritise. . . . Even not having any children, I've still got stuff to do, like, you know, I do everything at home because it's just me. (Ex 2)

Mara suggested that she may have managed her first semester better had she assigned herself "blocks during the day where that's all you do; you sit down and concentrate on study" (Ex 2).

For Mac, academic preparation played a seminal role in her process of re-negotiating her learner-identity. She had experienced rejection through her schooling and had lost confidence as a learner at her high school:

I was very studious and very focused [at intermediate] but then I got bullied from my first day of 3rd form, and the same for the next two years by the same group and I turned into a rebel. . . . Bullying impacted on all aspects of my education; my attitude sucked; I lost confidence in my abilities. I avoided school as and when I could. (PC 2)

Years after high school, after Mac's life experiences had almost crushed her, she sought some counsel "with a career consultant with Careers New Zealand who reminded me of my capabilities" (En 2). She was pointed in the direction of a semester-long academic

preparation course at a regional polytechnic. Mac spoke of significant attitudinal changes she had made on that course:

My attitude for succeeding came through sheer will, determination and renewed self-belief. (PC 2)

The course also had academic benefits for Mac. She arrived at university with an understanding of its epistemology, with accurate expectations for its teaching and learning, and with some experience of a writing process. She had learnt that writing is not generic, one-style-fits-all, but was discipline-specific: “writing cannot be divorced from the subject content and knowledge” (SG2 LG.5).

Mac shared a feature of writing she had struggled with as a mature student:

I did social sciences as an elective and it was very, very hard because I’ve had a lot of life experience and what we were learning and writing about I could have written it myself, and it was very hard taking *me* out of that ’cos I could have put, “as quoted by [me]” as “personal communication” all the way through. (SG2 LG.5, her emphasis)

She had learnt that in academia, as mature-aged students elsewhere have identified (Bamber & Tett, 2000; Merrill, 2012), life experiences had little value as support for knowledge. For Mac, whose identity as a learner had been so damaged, completing the preparatory course, and receiving good grades, gave her the confidence that she could “actually enrol” (PC 2) at university. Once at university, she did not become fazed by difficult tasks because she now had the belief that she could work through them and succeed.

These three students had entered university still somewhat apprehensive and unsure of expectations. They all noticed a difference in standards between their preparation courses and university: “At polytech I was an ‘A+’ student; here, I started with Bs” (Mac, Ex 2). “From the point of view of the sheer workload, initially it was daunting” (Murray, Ex 2). However, those three students reiterated several times that the greatest benefit they derived from their academic preparation was attitudinal: “the confidence side of it was arguably the most important part” (Murray, Ex 2). For each one it had been learning and beginning to master essential skills that led to that confidence.

7.5.4 Baggage

My journal reference to ‘baggage’, recalling Merrill’s term for the “cultural baggage of their past and present lives” (Merrill, 2001, p .7), refers to factors that seemed beyond the scope of the study group to address in a single semester. Through Cycle Two it became evident that some students brought considerable baggage from their schooling and their life choices which affected their participation in the group and their ability to engage with their study.

- Five participants had very disruptive educational histories.
- All but three students brought very low academic self-efficacy and memories of a lack of engagement and lack of success in education which surfaced under the pressure of being immersed in an educational environment which was beyond their current reach.
- At least two students, as they explained in their entry interviews, brought legacies of acrimonious, not-yet-resolved domestic relationships which impinged on their time and emotions.

While all mature-aged students will have a break of some length since their formal schooling, and many have been early leavers and may have made unfortunate choices through their lives, not all bring such a persistent legacy of negativity as some in this cycle. Participants’ school experiences had shaped their identities as learners (Jonker, 2005), and in the pressure of a single semester, students were not all able to re-negotiate those identities. Jimbob, for example, told his impression of how he and his classmates in a low-streamed class, with interests in sport rather than academic success, had been perceived by their teachers:

We were all treated like loonies, and gonna go nowhere. (En 2)

Jimbob, in the fifth week, when the toys were put on the table, had said, in a way which seemed to acknowledge that his self-belief about his ability as a learner was re-surfacing, “This is more my level.” At that point, without using the word ‘Discourse’, but in an attempt to illustrate the principle that university was a different culture, with a different language and different ways of doing things, but that it was possible to acquire familiarity and comfort in these ways, I turned to the group and excused myself, and then said to Jimbob:

Jimbo, I wanted to nail a drop, but my boof wasn't big enough and I got stuck in the hole.

Jimbo had laughed, understanding exactly what I meant; he had been a kayaking instructor. Others sat there with no idea what was going on, so I asked Jimbo to interpret my statement for them. He did that confidently. The example may have temporarily brought some humour into a situation which was becoming quite tense because of all the apprehension and uncertainty among participants; it also illustrated to Jimbo and the others, the notion of being inside a Discourse, particularly understanding its language. However, it was possibly too late in the semester to help Jimbo and his apprehensive peers to feel comfortable with the language and ways of academia.

Elle had never felt she belonged in education. She had been present for very little of her high-schooling and had left as soon as possible:

As soon as I hit high school, I wagged most of the time. I just refused to go any longer. As soon as I turned 15 . . . I was gone. (En 2)

Although she had begun her first semester looking forward to what she might learn, she lacked confidence in this new educational environment:

I realised today that I get stage fright when asked a question in class. I freeze up and my mind goes blank. When asked about [something in a tutorial] today I couldn't get out what I felt. (WN 2)

Elle was reticent to contribute in study group meetings, often answering in monosyllables, or even questioning that anyone would consider asking her a question. Towards the end of the semester, when Gwen visited the study group, she suggested Elle should log in to the library website, Elle questioned, "Can I?" She noted: "Am not good at this being a student thing" (WN 2).

Zara was another participant who had not engaged with her schooling. She admitted:

I was quite naughty. I terrorised my [subject] teacher and I got kicked out of my class so many times, sent off, put in isolation. (En 2)

Ultimately, Zara was banished from that teacher's classes for a term, and it seemed that some of the long-term effects of her school experiences remained. At university, she struggled to believe in herself as a learner, revealing her fragile learner identity with statements such as: "I think it's really hard for me to start, for fear of being wrong. Like, I fear being wrong" (SG2 2E) and, "I don't take ownership of my good marks, only the bad ones" (SG2 LG.4). Zara's considerable apprehension for writing and her fear of being wrong made her reticent to contribute in study group meetings:

I have to get over all my apprehension; 'cos, like, there's a question I don't understand. It'll take me a while to figure it out. . . . I have to get over myself before I start. (SG2 LG.2)

In addition, Zara tended to perceive even formative feedback such as she had received from a Student Learning consultation, as "proof of something, my lack of ability" (SG2 2E). She admitted, "I get offended, really defensive with negative comments, 'cos I hate being criticised" (SG2 2E). Zara, as noted above, left the study group after the mid-semester break and found the help for writing that she looked for from the peer tutors.

Six of the ten participants had left school with no qualifications. They struggled to bridge their knowledge gaps. Several of them, with no high-school mathematics background, wanting to major in psychology, had enrolled in an introductory statistics course recommended for psychology majors. Their efforts to master content that was completely new took time from their attention to other courses and from the study group. Only Zara was able to pass statistics.

As a result of their previous failures in education, students were very focused on passing, "the pressure I put on myself to pass" (Zara, WN 2), yet their fears and apprehensions and gaps in their school knowledge obstructed their ability to engage with the study group, and perhaps with some of their other learning.

Other factors beyond the bounds of the study group also impacted upon participants' lives and their engagement, particularly for Jimbob who maintained a very complicated, disorganised childcare arrangement with his "ex", and who attempted to establish another relationship during the semester. His extremely complicated life took his time and focus away from study and eventually he dropped out of university and returned to the heavy transport industry he had wanted to leave behind him.

Analysing the data, however, showed clearly that many students, also apprehensive, also with gaps in their school knowledge, and some with complicated lives, had been able to use the study group to find support. As I reflected on data I understood that, despite the attrition, Cycle Two had provided valued support for participants. That conclusion led to my journal comment: “So was the study group helpful? Actually it was awesome” (28 June, 2012). By then, however, participants for a third cycle to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions with a different group of students had already been invited to join a study group through the next semester.

7.6 Reflection

Some of the key benefits afforded by participation in the study group included developing an identity with a group of similar peers, developing a social network at university which compensated somewhat for a lack of support from home communities, having the opportunity to address problems that might not be addressed in their other classes, and learning through the relational, collaborative, scaffolded pedagogy, particularly using accessible language.

Participants had developed a sense of identity with similar peers as they discovered that they were not alone having difficulty adjusting to university or struggling with an assignment. That understanding was crucial in their development of an identity as a successful student:

I liked the idea that I could come in and say, you know, “I am struggling here,” and what not, and then you would have someone say, “Oh, so am I!” So it’s like, “Oh, good, it’s not just me”. That was good; I really enjoyed that; it helped me a lot. (Hāpeta, Ex 2)

I personally felt your mature students’ study group extremely helpful as i met others that were struggling with the same issues as myself and with your help and encouragement i managed to overcome these. (Rōhi, Email 2)

As most students were first in their families from their generation to attend university, they valued the opportunity to talk with similar peers:

To actually talk to other students who are actually experiencing what you’re experiencing at the same time is definitely valuable. (Linda, Ex 2)

Students also valued the opportunity through the chat times to seek answers for challenges they were dealing with:

You could cover things that you actually wanted to cover instead of being dictated to about, you know, “You’re learning *this* this week.” And it’s like “Well, actually, I’d rather learn *this* because it’s more relevant to my assignment.” (Linda, Ex 2, her emphasis)

I did feel a little insecure among my class peers and so would go to the study group where i felt i could freely ask the questions and for help without feeling embarrassed or intimidated. (Rōhi, email 2)

They valued the collaborative approach to learning:

You’d say, have you thought about this? And then the whole group gets in and it becomes a discussion, and that’s how I learn. . . Why I liked it, you pretty much put it back on us and made us answer our own questions, made me understand it better. (Hāpeta, Ex 2)

They had appreciated the relational pedagogy:

It was a more informal way of studying. I felt more relaxed and . . . that I could actually ask questions instead of feeling like a real dork. It was a lot more relaxed atmosphere. (Linda, Ex 2)

The emphasis on using accessible language and concepts was helpful:

You say things in a way that I can understand. (Linda, SG2 AG.9)

Basically simplifying things, breaking it down. . . Coming to your group helped me get things I wasn’t getting in class. . . You have a different way of getting things across which makes sense. (Mac, Ex 2)

7.6.1 Becoming a Discourse

One observation that developed through Cycle Two was that the study group was beginning to become a Discourse, a focused community with a shared language and practices, recognisable by outsiders who were not in the Discourse. Mara’s comment, cited above, that within the group, people seemed to know each other pretty well, reflects that recognition of relationship and shared practices within the group. From the outside, she could recognise that this was a distinct community on the campus.

However, in order to be recognised as insiders in the wider academic culture, students, for their part, must appropriate its valued practices (L. Bartlett, 2005; Wenger, 1998). Cycle Two illustrated markedly how, while some participants seemed to be able to appropriate some of the valued practices of academia, others were not. The process of acquisition was particularly evident in their writing and their conversation, as the experiences of two students illustrate.

Vignettes: To be an insider or not

Rōhi was one student whose willingness to take on new practices, particularly in her writing, had a powerful effect on her perception of herself as an insider in academia, an identity that continued into her final year. In a chance meeting on campus in that year, Rōhi was very happy to say, “Everyone said it gets harder, but it doesn’t. It gets easier!” (PC 2).

Early in Rōhi’s first semester, during a chat time in which participants were describing their challenges with academic discourse, Rōhi had vehemently resisted some of the practices of academia, particularly using the language. She reasoned that academic language was not part of any Discourse she brought to university; that was not how she recognised herself:

“I’m not using those big fancy words, because they’re not in my vocabulary.”
(SG2 LG.4)

But Rōhi had been accepted into the social work programme and saw herself as a successful social worker at some time in the future. Although she struggled with writing, in a study group one day she wrote that it was important for her to master writing because she would need that skill as a social worker. In her exit interview, when asked if there were any “lightbulb” moments during her first semester, her response indicated a major turnaround in her attitude towards academia, and particularly to using its language:

I thought, “Oh, I’m gonna fail. I don’t even know what I’m talking about because I don’t understand what they’re saying.” [My lightbulb moment was] I think when I finally realised I knew what I was talking about. That [name of essay] was a big one, when I adapted myself. (SG2 LG.4)

Rōhi made this statement in the context of talking about the difficulty she had experienced with academic jargon:

I didn't know any of the terminologies and I didn't know what I was doing. Just to get that assignment back [where she used 'the terminologies'] really helped me out. I think it just gave me confidence; everything became easier.

Despite her initial resistance, Rōhi had “adapted” herself and incorporated academic “terminologies” in her assignment. By doing that, she consciously identified as an insider in academic culture (Gee, 2015), and particularly, as a novice participant in her chosen field.

Elle, in contrast, was one in Cycle Two who was not able to negotiate the shift in identity necessary to be recognised as an insider in academia (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Again, one way in which this became clear was through her language. Early in her first semester, in her third week, she noted:

I find being back at school so alien. I have no confidence in my learning ability. To see the answer plain as day and yet still doubt that I know the answer. (WN 2)

Note that she refers to university as “school”, not a common practice in New Zealand, but for Elle, perhaps, still a word with very negative connotations (7.5.4). Early in the semester, she almost apologised for making a shift towards using some of the generic vocabulary of academia: “I've just handed in my first – ‘essay’ – I guess you call it”. At the end of the semester, however, her language continued to reflect language of her schooling, with all its negative connotations. To her peers, she described the study group as “just another class”, (PC 2); in her exit interview, she again referred to university as “school”, with “classes” and to lecturers and tutors as “teachers”. About the multichoice questions in her exam, she said, “I did the ticking one, the ABC”. It would seem that, rather than adapting herself, as Rōhi had, and adopting some of the valued practices of academia, Elle had resisted them.

7.6.2 Role of the researcher

My relationship with participants in Cycle Two study group sessions was again multifaceted. As a participant observer I joined in the chat times and recorded how participants were engaging with the activities. As a practitioner-researcher I continually

reflected on that action and on the emerging data. Early in the semester, however, my focus on administering the interventions and evaluating their usefulness tended to produce an attitude within me that verged on the more positivistic stance of a researcher testing a hypothesis. It thus initially positioned me differently from Cycle One, in which I had been so conscious of working with participants to seek causes for their confusion and to ascertain the ZPD of the groups. Early on, it impeded the relational qualities, the ‘we’re all in this together’ of that cycle; it also, as noted above, restricted some of the free-flow of chat times because of my felt need to proceed to the intervention quickly so as to leave sufficient time to complete it. This was soon amended, as noted.

In the text-based activities, my key role was as MCP, determining the ZPD of the two groups and adjusting activities to be just beyond what I estimated participants could achieve without my support, modifying the scaffolding provided by questioning until it was within that zone.

7.7 Chapter conclusion

Cycle Two was not straightforward. However, as indicated through this chapter, it provided key learning for the development of the study group. The critical reflection, in which participants could share memories of something they had all experienced (Wenger, 1998), was perhaps the ‘getting in at the shallow end’ sort of experience I had hoped that a study group might provide. Developing shared language and practices and a shared history perhaps contributed to Mara’s observation that we all “seemed to know each other pretty well”. Her observation indicates that in the study group we were immersed in a community in which we were holding hands and walking together to the deep end. Those collaborative reflections did become a shared base from which we could all progress.

Cycle Two yielded key learning about practice which could be taken into further cycles: the interventions would all be repeated; the relational, scaffolded genre pedagogy involving discussion about purposes of texts and opportunities for exploring values of academic culture and explicit teaching and practice of elements of a writing process developed through Cycle One and continued in this cycle would continue.

The regular attenders, Hamish, Hāpeta, Linda, Murray, Mac, and Rōhi, enjoyed some valuable reflection on their first semesters and on the challenges of entering the unfamiliar culture of academia which, in each cycle, different participants identified as

“foreign”, explaining what they meant with statements such as: “It’s a thing on its own, really” (Hāpeta, SG2 AG.9).

Cycle Two participants networked with their peers outside the group. For example, Mac was introduced to Mary and Jane and other Cycle One participants closer to her age taking courses in common. Ann and Leigh from Cycle One joined with Rōhi to form a study group for a disciplinary course they shared.

The striking contrast between the three students who had completed academic preparation and other Cycle Two participants continued through their first semesters. The basic skills those students had developed, and their initial confidence that they were capable of mastering new learning made their first weeks and their first semesters very different from their peers. Reflecting on those differences contributed to further serious consideration about how the study group might provide at least an extended orientation, using the pedagogy and sharing interventions developed through Cycles One and Two, before their first semesters. A very brief introduction could not introduce participants to the study habits those prepared students had developed, or to the intensity of a full-time course, research skills, the digital environment, or even Word, but emerging data was indicating that attitudinal factors, particularly confidence and self-belief, had a significant effect on students’ ability to engage with their learning. It was also emerging from data that learning some skills and language and becoming aware of expectations before entering university contributed significantly to that confidence.

At the end of the cycle, however, I had not yet analysed all the data. While I had recognised lack of academic preparation, apprehension for writing, and stress among participants, I was not yet aware of the extent to which factors extraneous to the study group might have impinged on students’ engagement. Because of the attrition, I was questioning the value of the study group as a supporting entity; I made a decision to repeat the cycle in the second semester. The following chapter discusses that cycle.

Chapter 8 Continued focus on interventions

8.1 Introduction

This cycle was organised in response to the high attrition rate from Cycle Two with the purpose of providing more data for the approach taken in that cycle with a different group of students. Thus, no major changes were planned. In practice, however, two changes were made: a journal article overview was introduced in week seven, and a member-checking exercise in week nine.

This chapter follows the overall AR stages of P-A-O-R through Cycle Three. Because the focus was to provide more data on the interventions from Cycle Two, in this chapter, action and observation are combined into one section covering those interventions. The chapter then gives an overview of new learning that emerged which generally confirmed and strengthened findings from Cycle Two and contributed to the design of the final cycle.

8.2 Planning

As noted above, I intended to follow the pattern of Cycle Two, with the epistemological and schema interventions front-ending the semester. The content of Cycle Three meetings is shown on Table 8.1. Note that there are some gaps (weeks 3.6, 3.8, 3.10), when no participants were available. One amendment was incorporated into the epistemological reflection: participants, in pairs, sketched memories of their schooling and talked from those to the group (week 3.1).

Table 8.1 Content of Cycle Three study group meetings

Week	Theme/Activity	Purpose for participants	Relation to conceptual framework
3:1	Getting to know you; epistemological reflection.		As for Cycle Two
3:2	Schema activity 1 Skimming, scanning.		
3:3	Schema activities 2 and 3 Skimming, scanning.		
3:4	Reading for information; Collaboratively construct a		

	paragraph.		
3:5	Synthesising sources: farm toys illustration and discussion.		
3:6	Major essays due this week – no study group		
3:7	Overview of journal articles from different disciplines; look at different ways authors have written their introductions to ‘talk’ to their peers; Skimming, scanning.	To develop awareness that while many journal articles follow a similar format, within the overall genre of journal articles, different styles may be required for different journals within the same discipline, and across disciplines (Hyland, 2008; Swales, 1990). Look in detail at two journal article introductions (Hyland, 2009; Swales, 1990).	Writing is situated and discipline-specific (Hyland, 2008; Wingate, 2016). Genres respond to social purposes (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Johns, 2008).
3:8	No study group.		
3:9	Reporting to stakeholders (Stringer, 2014): Previous participants were invited to attend a presentation about the study group prepared for a conference.		
3:10	No study group.		
	Combined afternoon tea for available participants from all cycles.		

8.3 Participants

Traditionally, at the university in this study there are fewer new enrolments in a second semester, but responses to emailed invitations to first-time mature-aged students sent through the enrolling system indicated there could be ten participants, sufficient numbers to justify holding a study group. Several students contacted through the emails responded before the semester, introducing themselves, asking questions about university life, and one, requesting an evening study group so she could continue her full-time employment through the day.

Seven keen students attended the introductory meeting. All were first in their family to come to university and unfamiliar with academic culture, but highly motivated and excited at their opportunity to study. They all expressed interest in joining the study

group for the semester. However, by the fourth week, three had left the university; others had conflicting timetables or work commitments and the seven become two regular and four sporadic attenders. Some participants from earlier cycles attended from time to time. Despite the low numbers, I made a decision to continue.

Table 8.2 shows the six participants who attended at least one study group meeting and an entry interview:

Table 8.2 Cycle Three participants

25-29 years	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54
Andy ¹	Kurt ¹		Norman ²		Carol ³
Tim ³					Ken ⁴

¹ Attended on two disconnected occasions. Entry interview only.
² Was in frequent email contact before the semester. Attended one session, but withdrew from course because he felt he was not academically prepared for it. Provided entry and exit interviews and several emails.
³ Attended throughout semester; data comprises entry and exit interviews, written work, and recordings of some sessions.
⁴ Attended an entry interview, but no study groups until week 9, when he was directed to the group by a tutor.

8.4 Action and observation

8.4.1 Overview

In practice, it was once again necessary to adapt the overall plans. This tended to confirm Kember's (2000) observation that an AR intervention cannot effectively be evaluated by repeating it with a different group of participants because in naturalistic research there are too many variables involved. In this case, both the two regular attenders, Tim and Carol, although unfamiliar with academia and somewhat apprehensive about their new venture, were far less apprehensive about writing than their peers from earlier cycles. Their WAM responses identified them as the most confident of all participants in all cycles, more confident than the three who had completed academic preparation before Cycle Two. Neither had written extended essays, or written in any academic style or genre, but both had written during their gap since school. Tim had enjoyed writing at school, and in his seven years of travel since school had regularly emailed "long newsletters" (En 3) about his adventures; Carol, through her employment in a government department which she entered immediately she left school, had been required to do some writing. In addition, she had participated

through those years in organisational development and training courses. Both these students entered university with some confidence that, even though academic writing was an unknown, they should be able to acquire the necessary skills. Their experiences seemed to give each of them a basis to which they could more readily add new ways of writing. This contrasted with earlier participants, many of whose writing experiences had consisted of such things as “shopping lists” or texts – “I luv u” (Bruce, En 1). The difference in confidence and skill made for a very different group ZPD, and as the MCP and the researcher, I needed to be sensitive to that.

An additional factor, contributing to some readjusting of the basic plan for the cycle, was that both students achieved a degree of mastery of reading strategies quickly. This meant we could spend less time on that aspect of the writing process; it made time for a new activity, an overview of journal articles from different disciplines in week seven (8.4.1).

In place of an extended chat time in this cycle (8.4.6), an invitation for participants from all cycles to join those from Cycle Three as I shared a presentation I had prepared for a conference went some way towards providing an opportunity for member-checking and afforded an opportunity for cross-cycle networking. A further attempt to support the growing community of practice among past and present participants was to invite participants from all cycles to an afternoon tea at the end of the semester.

8.4.2 Epistemological reflection

The amendment to the epistemological reflection inviting participants to pair up and sketch their memories of their schooling was a significant component of this cycle. It generally confirmed that incoming mature-aged students seem to retain a view of education as a transmission of knowledge from teacher-experts to novices who will then learn it and repeat it in exams (see 3.3.2 and Western Springs College, June 2011). Students drew sketches of top-down teaching and talked about how they were allowed no discussion or digression from set content. Carol, in her 50s, recalled, “Listen to teachers, write down your notes, do what they tell you,” (Ex 3) and “We got the ruler” (SG3 1) if students attempted to introduce a discussion. Andy, in his late 20s, recalled trying to initiate discussion with teachers when he had different ideas about topics his class was studying, but his arguments had not been appreciated. Tim, in his mid-20s, admitted that his teachers may have had tried to introduce discussion and a different

approach to learning (he was the first year of the NCEA qualification), but a comment he made suggests that perhaps a lack of engagement with what was happening in his high school classroom might be why he primarily recalled transmission pedagogy:

At school I was the kid at the back playing cards, organising parties for the weekend. (En 3)

Two of the sketches are reproduced in Figure 9.1. Note that one teacher depicted has a book from which to dictate knowledge for the students, and note the seating arrangement which precludes discussion depicted in the other sketch. The students who produced these sketches were in their twenties and thirties.

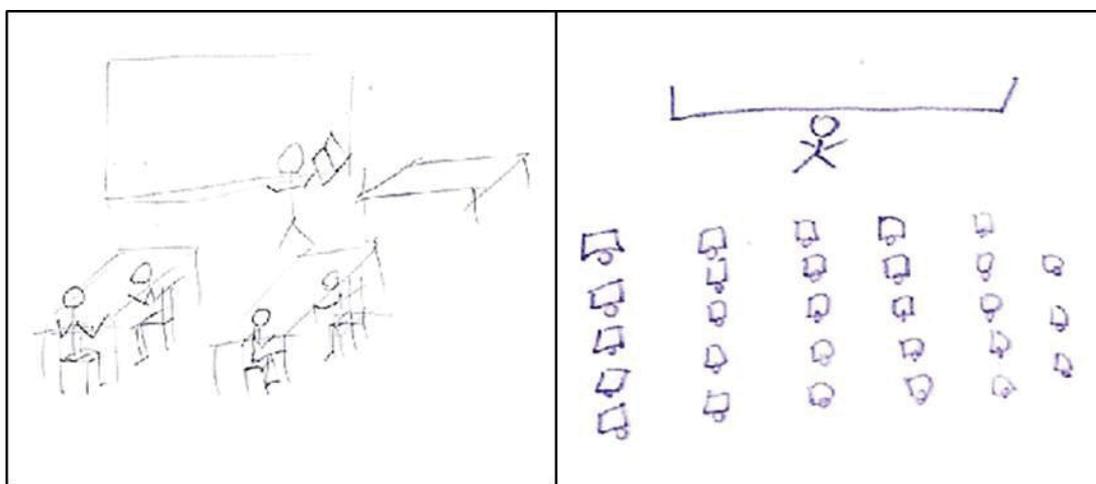


Figure 8.1 Recollections of schooling from Cycle Three participants.

Responses to this reflection from two of the participants demonstrated that they recognised a key purpose of the exercise: that it would result in their taking a different approach to their learning from what they might have been expecting. Tim believed it gave him a key to connect the familiar to the new, particularly relating it to his ability to follow lectures:

It was good to make a connection as to how the system at uni works. And that the learning part was up to me. I felt lost in lectures before becoming aware of this. (SG3 1)

Carol suggested that she would be able to transfer the critical, reflective process we had worked through to a reflective essay she was preparing:

Today was really good for me because you touched on the reflection stuff and you helped me identify more what I should be doing in terms of that because I wasn't quite on to it with that. (En 3)

Tim's careful attempt to match the discussion about expectations for learning in the epistemological reflection with what he was experiencing in lectures suggests an engaged attitude towards his learning. His comment also suggests he was actively contrasting the top-down teaching he recalled, and had perhaps expected, with what he was now experiencing:

I noticed yesterday one of my [subject] lecturers said, "These are the theories people put forward, and in science nothing is 100% accurate". So when you are writing something you are saying, "This person's idea is this; this person's theory is that; this is what this person believes". Not, "This is how it is". That [reflection and discussion] really rung true to me. That's such a good thing to know, because you think, "That guy knows what he is talking about, so he must be right". (En 3)

Carol did not adapt immediately to new ways of learning. Both she and Tim had an open book test some weeks into the semester. Tim prepared his answers for it during the several weeks it was online before he happily filled in his responses using an open book. Carol, however, while knowing it was an open book test, chose to answer it from memory. She told us she firmly believed that was a more challenging, correct approach to a test than the open book way.

8.4.3 Developing a schema

Discussion in the schema interventions, which once again were appreciated by participants, exposed some of the confusion students with very little background in writing might experience as they tried to connect their current understandings of genres with new ones they needed. The six students present for the second exercise, matching Jane's unsuccessful essay with the prompt she should have addressed, were all preparing a first assignment for their academic writing course. All six had very different understandings of what they should be doing. I noted in my journal:

Today our focus in the mature students' study group was on unpacking essay questions . . . The subject of the narrative essay came up. Some believed that a

narrative “wasn’t an essay”. It was a narrative or creative writing. One tutor had put “public import” on the whiteboard. Only one student picked that aspect up. . . . Some hadn’t even read the topic in the coursebook; they were just writing a story. (August 1, 2012)

Discussion became quite contentious as participants shared their different understandings of the purpose of the assignment. Their discussion was revealing. First, it indicated that they had heard what was familiar to them; they recognised “narrative” from stories in their pasts. It seemed they had perhaps then mixed what was familiar with what was new as their tutors introduced the assignments, with often confusing results. Some were focusing on the narrative aspect of the prompt; they talked of writing at great descriptive length about their experiences. There was also some discussion about whether or not the assignment was actually an essay; with no references required, it did not match any of the essays we had looked at in the two schema exercises. Andy clearly recognised that this writing was not the same as some of his other assignments; rather than calling it an “essay”, he referred to his “creative writing”. Kurt insisted, on what he felt was good authority, that the assignment was not to write an essay:

We were told in our workshops that, “You don’t have to have an introduction ’cos it’s not an essay”. [Long silence] “You don’t need an introduction; you don’t need a conclusion ’cos it’s not an essay. You’re not arguing the question.” (SG3 3)

Ana (not a regular participant) believed she had addressed the prompt, which called for drawing some relevance from personal experience with literacy for a general audience. That purpose was the reason Tim’s tutor had written “public import” on the whiteboard, a phrase Carol took issue with: she had recently worked for a logistics firm where “import” had a specific meaning. The phrase “public import” had no meaning connected with writing for her.

A further complicating factor was that neither Carol nor Kurt had noticed that “public” aspect of the prompt; furthermore, Kurt had not actually read the prompt. He was relying on what he had heard in his tutorial about writing a narrative. To try and settle the arguments, we checked the prompt in the coursebook. Kurt laughed as he read it:

Write a narrative essay [silence, followed by laughter] based on your personal experience. You should focus your narrative on one aspect of literacy (reading and/or writing), and you must use your narrative to share something of value to a public audience. (p. B-2)

That experience was somewhat salutary for participants. They had just spent time analysing why Jane's essay had not been successful because she had not followed her prompt, yet for their own writing, not all had even read the prompt. They had listened to tutors and listened to peers, but no student in the group had a complete picture of what the assignment sought. Perhaps that was another importation of old, familiar approaches to learning, in which students relied on teachers for everything rather than checking things for themselves.

Tim later commented that the schema activities were confidence-building, giving him more understanding of the importance of addressing the prompt and giving him an idea of suiting writing for its purpose: "From that point on, it wasn't such a daunting thing" (Ex 3).

8.4.4 The writing process

Working towards co-construction of texts through explicit teaching and practice of elements of the writing process was again useful for participants. Through this cycle, it became clear that it was the scaffolded pedagogy, with its process of collaboratively working through activities and discussing them as we went, rather than receiving information about them by top-down teaching or even reading about them, that enabled students to then make connections to material in coursebooks or available online. They had previously found this top-down form of writing support inaccessible:

People kept explaining it to me and I read it in the books they gave us but I just wasn't getting it; whereas when we all sat down, you, me, and Carol, and we did that up on the board, I finally sort of went, "Oh! Right! I understand that now".
(Tim, Ex 3)

At the end of the semester, Tim observed that he had been able to transfer principles learned in the study group to his writing in his disciplines. The synthesising illustration using farm toys again helped him visualise how to incorporate different viewpoints:

There were a couple of times halfway through essays where I thought, “Ah! I know how to do this now”. (Ex 3)

Students’ engagement with these activities and their positive comments about them confirmed the finding from Cycles One and Two that introducing elements of the writing process in tasks that were within the ZPD of the group then enabled students to independently access support available for their writing provided by the university through the academic writing course and the online support. It also confirmed that those activities enabled participants to develop some skills and increase their confidence.

8.4.5 Overview of a journal article

This innovation was made possible because the two regular participants mastered reading strategies much more quickly than their peers in earlier cycles. In Cycles One and Two I had substituted photocopied extracts of two or three paragraphs containing specific information we could use in our co-construction for whole journal articles as students had experienced considerable difficulty negotiating whole articles. Leigh had not understood the functions of the different sections: “Is the abstract the intro?” (SG1 LG. 4). Zara had found articles difficult to read because of the in-line referencing: “Look at all these references!” (SG2 LG. 4). With the focus on working towards co-construction of texts, it had seemed more important to allow students to develop their reading skills using extracts rather than to complicate that process by adding an exploration of journal article structures. As Cycle Three students were well on their way to mastering reading strategies, and we had already co-constructed texts, we engaged in a collaborative overview of a journal article.

The overview had embedded purposes (see 3.7 on Table 8.1):

- To look for commonalities in articles from different disciplines;
- To further establish students’ understanding of academic genres by discovering that within the overall genre of journal articles are some very different formats;
- To further their understanding that genres are responses to a purpose rather than fixed forms;
- To practise skimming, scanning, and reading for information;
- To learn about some of the values and ways of being and doing in academia by observing how scholars relate to other scholars through their texts.

Students identified common features such as reference lists, headings, and scholarly language. One article was from psychology, which both Carol and Tim were studying. When we looked closely at its introduction we were able to see how the authors acknowledged previous research, and then pointed out “how it falls short”; how “it doesn’t cover the topic completely” (Tim, SG3 7) so as to make a space for their own research. The structure of the article’s introduction was apparently exactly the structure provided in the textbook Carol and Tim had to follow for their lab reports, so there was some enthusiastic identification as they identified these features.

Tim responded very positively to this overview, relating everything that was discussed to what he had read in his textbook. Alluding to the methodology section of the psychology article he said:

I know that these articles are written for other [academics in the discipline], which is why they’ve got to follow such a strict standard. And then the other [academics in the discipline] can do your same assessment to see whether they get the same, or a similar result. (SG3 7)

We identified instances of authors citing other authors: “In psych we have to show that we’ve looked at previous research” (Carol), and of authors “acknowledging that they’ve learned from that person” (Carol). We saw ways in which authors identified one specific author and one piece of research to point out something they would build on, or a weakness in that research. Tim again related the practice to instructions given in lectures and in his textbook, saying he would follow that structure in his lab report.

The intervention seemed to be useful – Tim said, “very useful” (SG3 7); it would be repeated in a future cycle if students were on their way to mastery of writing process features.

8.4.6 Member-checking

With low numbers attending most weeks, more time was available for each student to give in-depth reflections on their learning processes in each meeting. There did not seem to be a need for an extended chat time. I took an opportunity to promote networking among students across all cycles, to further develop their sense of membership in a focused community on campus, by inviting them to share in a form of member-checking (5.3). I had prepared a presentation for a conference and invited

participants from all cycles who might be available to join with Cycle Three students to view this.

There was general agreement among participants that I had represented students' first semesters accurately. A week later, Ann (from Cycle One) emailed:

I really enjoyed last week as it was so good to reflect on those early experiences and you had it spot-on.

This opportunity for cross-cycle interaction was interesting for the opportunity it afforded for debating aspects of an academic Discourse. Language was a particular focus. Carol raised this issue, which I had listed on a slide as one challenge for new students. Recalling her argument against “public import” when the more commonly used word, “importance”, might have been used (8.4.3), Carol this time took issue with a phrase on one of the slides: “vicarious learning”. When I explained its meaning, and its implication for study group practice, she wondered why I could not change it to something more accessible – “to ‘observing peers succeed’ or something”. Then, she vented one of the frustrations she felt about university culture:

Why can't people use words in common circulation? It's all a plot to keep some people out. (SG3. 9)

Carol was in her fifties, of Scottish heritage. Her comments would seem to relate to a living awareness of the traditional restricted entry to higher education based on class or income (Read et al., 2003) experienced by many mature-aged students in the UK:

The words ... are one of the biggest frustrations that I find hardest about adapting to university. Because I've gone through my life, and just kind of worked in careers, and it's all been about “keep it simple, stupid” as far as the English language goes. So you don't use the fancy words that not many people understand. You make it simple so that people understand, and what I'm finding here is so much, in the articles you have to research, they're so hard to understand because they use all these fancy ***** words that nobody can understand. I just don't see the need for it. I just don't understand the ego that's attached to having to use those words. It's an inherited thing that's come down from the intelligentsia of old. The spoken language. The people who were down

here [indicating the floor], the lower classes, were *kept* in the lower classes, not given an education. (SG3. 9, her emphasis)

Carol may not have realised that she had just summed up some of the arguments for critical awareness of discourse raised by new literacies scholars (Gee, 2011) or for taking a critical discourse analysis approach with mature-aged students learning to write for university. Her tirade, though, was countered by Leigh (from Cycle One). Leigh was not unaware of structural inequality in New Zealand; she was an advocate for social justice. But in this context, her response to Carol suggests she was developing an awareness that students might go through some conflict in their process of acquiring an academic Discourse (Gee, 2002), that acquisition involves consciously adopting some of the valued practices of the new culture (Bartlett, 2005), perhaps particularly its language. Her response suggests she had concluded that in order to be recognised as an insider in academia – to “survive” – it is necessary to use its language:

You’re learning a different speak. You know, when you come to university, you’re not in Kansas anymore. You quickly work out how to survive in it. (SG3. 9)

The cross-cycle networking encouraged by that instance of member-checking was continued in the final week of the semester when participants from all cycles were invited to an afternoon tea. It, too, would be continued in the final cycle.

8.5 Reflection

Much of Cycle Three confirmed the value of the study group as an entity which would support students’ transitions to academic writing and their acquisition of an academic Discourse. The interventions were valued by participants for the initial alert they provided about possibly different approaches to teaching and learning and an understanding of knowledge as constructed and contestable. Once again, however, one of the greatest benefits participants attributed to the study group was the opportunity to identify with similar peers. Once again this contributed to bonding, identity, and a sense of membership in a community through sharing history and developing shared practices. As in earlier cycles, students affirmed the importance for them of meeting and identifying with peers whose apprehension seemed similar. Tim expressed his relief after the introductory meeting to find that his lack of familiarity with academia was shared by the seven students who attended:

To have that group there and see that everyone is fumbling around in the dark a wee bit at the moment has been quite good because it makes me feel a bit more confident. (En 3)

Tim also realised that on a large campus which he was experiencing as impersonal, and on which, as an older student he recognised his minority status alongside his lack of knowledge about how things worked, he would be able to ask questions about this new culture in a non-threatening environment:

I feel I can I ask if I've got a big question; I've got someone I can ask that can help me out with that and work through it. Very reassuring. (En 3)

Carol, too, was relieved to find similarly apprehensive peers:

I think it is really good to get the support in the study group and know there are others that are even going through more apprehension that you might be, more uncertainty than you might have. . . . It is probably the only group I've got at the moment that I can just talk to other students. (En 3)

As in Cycles One and Two, bonding that was initiated by meeting similar peers in the first meeting continued through the semester, even among those who did not persevere with meetings. Tim commented on this:

I think a lot of them seemed like when they first got there they were worried they were out on their own yet when they saw that there was a group to talk to about these things, some of them bonded really well together. Some of them may not have come back to the group, but I think they did make those connections. (Ex 3)

Carol had made a similar observation, assuring me that networking continued beyond the bounds of meetings even among the non-attenders.

The study group was developing into a community with shared practices. As the purpose of the AR was to explore how the study group might be developed to support students as they acquired an academic Discourse, the focus in meetings was on learning as a process of increasing participation in the practices of a community. It seemed that the benefit of the study group for participants developed from the collaborative process of reflection introduced in the first meeting and continued through the continual

collaborative reflection, discussion about academic practices, and incremental building of skills through the semester. Each meeting was an occasion of dialogue and discussion through which shared language and practices were developed. This resonates with Gee's suggestions about how Discourses can only be acquired by immersion in a community, by sharing its practices:

If you have no access to the social practice, you don't get in the Discourse, you don't have it. (1989, p. 7)

Cycle Three illustrated once again, perhaps emphasised by the low numbers attending each week, that participants who did not take advantage of the "social practice", did not get in the Discourse. Neither Kurt, in his late 20s, nor Ken, in his 50s, had been present for the collaborative reflection. I had worked through its content with each of them in their introductory interviews. Both had laughed and identified with the sketches drawn by their peers who had been at the meeting. However, a comment Kurt made in his entry interview suggested he had not really engaged with the critical phase as I had presented the reflection to him. He spoke confidently of his similar views of teaching as those depicted in the sketches:

Because I have been a teacher before in [a practical field] I know that everyone looks up to the teacher, the tutor. I have always believed, even in a workplace environment, you always have a team leader that you look to for the answers. I've always been a firm believer that your leader, supervisor, elders are the people that you learn from.

Although I attempted to alert Kurt to expect something different in his lectures, and that in an academic Discourse (without using that word), the way of doing things is for students to take an active part in their learning, it seems he did not grasp that. In Cycle Three, Kurt and Ken, as had Mara in Cycle Two, elected not to join a community. It would seem that none of those three was able to acquire an academic Discourse, to come to terms with the ways of being and doing in academia. I met Kurt in the city late one night, months after his experience in the study group, and he expressed bitter disappointment that, as he had experienced it, lecturers and tutors had not given him the support and one-to-one tuition he believed he needed. He had withdrawn from university.

It seems Kurt had retained the worldview with which he entered university, in which teachers are responsible for their students' learning. But had he attended study group meetings regularly, he might well have understood that one-to-one support from lecturers and tutors is not a part of an academic discourse. He would have heard, as other participants shared their experiences in chat times, that one-to-one support would be available from Student Learning and that part of the Discourse of being a student is to know how to ask for help (Lawrence, 2005). He would no doubt have received encouragement and support from within the group from his peers and the MCP.

Regular attendance at the study group could perhaps have made Kurt's university experience very different. Through the sharing in chat times he might have realised he was not alone in his struggle to decipher an unfamiliar culture. With the cross-cycle networking that was being encouraged through Cycle Three, he perhaps may have been able to meet with Murray (Cycle Two) who was taking courses in the same subject area and was willing to meet Kurt and encourage him. He had been waiting for Kurt to contact him.

These observations did not translate into direct action in the study group, but they contributed to data which suggested that mature students who had participated through the cycles were becoming a focused community of practice on the campus. Principles of cross-cycle networking would be continued into the final cycle the next year.

Before Cycle Three, only Mara (Cycle Two) had mentioned managing her time as a challenge, and, at the time, I had somewhat dismissed her admission, attributing it perhaps to procrastination – as Linda had observed, it might be better to fail through not handing something in than to fail because she was not good enough (7.5.2). After Cycle Three, however, Tim told of how he had struggled to manage his time because of his rather unstructured life travelling since leaving school. He had enjoyed the freedom to go wherever he pleased, taking each day as it came, earning enough money to live on, moving to the next town or country as erratically as he needed. He had found settling down to study was a struggle:

I've come from seven years of doing whatever I want every day. It's quite hard to think, "OK, I have to do this, and then I have to do that, and then I have to do this." I've really sort of had to learn how to structure things, and I didn't do it brilliantly. (Ex 3)

In the structured cycle of his first semester, Tim became aware that he had developed an annual pattern through those seven years. The time of year when he usually changed location came just before his final exams. He found that what he needed to do was completely out of rhythm with his usual pattern:

Come October, that's when I'd normally move on from a place. Because every six months I'd always gone somewhere else. And I was coming up to that point. Because I was hitting that, I was really struggling to get motivated, really struggling to do my assignments. (Ex 3)

Tim had a clear goal though. His travels had given him an interest in people, and he had enrolled in order to succeed in psychology and become a psychologist. His desire for success and a definite career, along with the study he put in early in the semester, did help him to get through his exams: "About three days before my psychology exam, I started studying like crazy" (Ex 3).

Cycle Three seemed to consolidate the learning from previous cycles. One factor which had become clearer through each cycle was that students need keys for entry into an academic Discourse in their first days on campus. Feedback from students confirmed that they perceived that the epistemological and schema interventions which front-ended Cycles Two and Three had been valuable for brokering some of the ways and assumptions of academia.

Considering the possibility of introducing mature-aged students to these interventions as early as possible led to plans to hold a fourth cycle, trialling an extended introductory meeting before the semester began. This would possibly afford many benefits for students and enable the study group to provide more effective support. Cycle Two had highlighted the considerable difference in confidence and ability to engage with their learning that most students who had completed even two weeks of preparation displayed. It seemed that a meeting before the semester might reduce some of the apprehension mature students felt.

Additional factors which had emerged through the first two cycles and were sustained through Cycle Three which suggested that a meeting before the semester would be appropriate were the reduced attendance in the weeks in which important essays were due and possible attrition because of mature students' complicated lives. Three weeks of

Cycle Three had no study group because no-one was available. Carol, although a regular attender, missed some weeks because of sorting out “family stuff” arising from her abrupt exit from a marriage and an immediate entry into university. As each cycle had indicated that participants attributed high value to meeting their mature-aged peers and to realising that their apprehension was shared, a meeting before the semester would enable students to make connections with some of those peers before they arrived in their classes. In addition, as incoming mature-aged students continued to be unaware of academic preparation, or to be directed towards it, or, if they were aware, they were unable for different reasons to take advantage of pre-university courses, taking one day immediately before the semester to introduce some of the benefits that seemed to derive from the first three interventions might go some way towards reducing apprehension in a new cohort of mature students. In addition, a meeting before the semester might contribute to the further development of a community of practice, particularly if previous participants were invited to participate.

A fourth cycle had not been planned for this research, but combining the learning from the previous three cycles led to a decision to run a further cycle of AR. Front-loading a semester with an extended introductory meeting would contribute to addressing the research question exploring how a study group might support students as they acquired an academic Discourse and learned to write for university. Consequently, plans were made over the summer for a fourth cycle.

Chapter 9 Acquiring an academic Discourse

9.1 Introduction

Cycle Four was the final cycle in the three years of AR in this project, bringing together the learning from previous iterations of the study group into a cycle that was made very different because of the extended introductory meetings. A specific aim of this cycle was to evaluate whether that front-ending might provide more effective support for students than presenting the same material through the first weeks of the semester.

This chapter overviews Cycle Four, once again under the loose organisation of P-A-O-R. It traces the development of the study group as an affinity grouping in which students, through immersion and collaboration (Gee, 1989; 2015) began to acquire an academic Discourse. The final sections of the chapter reflect on the cycle and briefly discuss the role of the researcher through it.

9.2 Planning

The first meeting was planned for the Saturday between orientation week and the first week of classes. It included the epistemological reflection and the essay schema activities in order to introduce participants to

- A possible need for shifts in their understanding of the nature of knowledge;
- A possible need for shifts in their expectations for teaching and learning;
- Some of the language, genres, and expectations of some first-year assignments.

The extended introductory meeting was also designed to intentionally develop a sense of community by including a team-building activity, a team treasure hunt. This was designed in response to the challenges students in earlier cycle had described about finding their way around the campus:

Driving round and round the ring road looking for the building. (Jane, En 1)

Late for class; went to the wrong room. (Mary, WN 1)

Trying to find stuff, like I walked past the [name of building] a few times . . . I just walked past it 'cos the buildings down there look the same to me and I got lost, . . . such a maze" (Zara, En 2)

Tim (Cycle Three) had commented in his entry interview that rather than sitting in a lecture room listening to an orientation talk before his first semester, it "would have

been good to have had a campus tour” (En 3). In the team building activity, therefore, clues sent teams to identify features of key areas of the campus that conversations in earlier cycles had indicated were necessary to know about but not always easy to locate: photocopiers in the library, Student Learning offices, the cheapest parking areas, the gymnasium, some commonly-used lecture and tutorial rooms, and a pleasant outdoor area for sitting and relaxing.

The introductory meeting was also designed to provide some encouragement for new students by giving them an opportunity to mix with any of their more experienced peers from previous cycles who were able to attend. The more senior peers were invited to share the morning tea (three of them prepared it) and to each talk about a key point about their first-semester with the new students. New students were encouraged to ask questions about their concerns. This interaction broadened the sense of community beyond first-year students; some students from different cycles found they would be sharing courses.

The programme, with its theoretical bases, is shown on Table 9.1.

Table 9.1 Cycle Four introductory activities and their theoretical basis

Session	Theme/Activity	Purpose for participants	Relation to conceptual framework
4.1	Introduce the research; getting to know you; epistemological reflection. Schema activity 1, Skimming, scanning.	As for Cycles Two and Three.	As for Cycles Two and Three.
	Morning tea, Team-building activity.	Developing a relational community (Crowther et al., 2010; Wenger, 2009).	Developing a relational community (Crowther et al., 2010; Wenger, 2009).
	Schema activities 2 and 3 Skimming, scanning.	As for Cycles Two and Three.	As for Cycles Two and Three.
	Time of sharing and questioning with participants from previous cycles.	Meeting more experienced similar peers; cross-cycle networking.	Developing a relational community (as above); social modelling (Bandura, 2012; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Habel, 2009).

The weekly meetings during the semester once again followed the basic pattern and principles established through earlier cycles. We continued to work through a scaffolded

genre pedagogy, applying the learning cycle to analysing, discussing, and co-constructing short texts. Chat times continued. The extended introduction, however, had a flow-on effect through the cycle. Structurally, it freed three weeks early in the semester previously used for the epistemological and schema interventions. Other activities that in earlier cycles had proved useful in the process of introducing students to an academic Discourse were moved into those timeslots, but modified to respond to the front-loading provided by the extended introduction. These were:

- Using the WAM as a pedagogical tool rather than a reconnaissance or data-gathering tool;
- Adding a more-developed version of the journal article overview that had been inserted into Cycle Three;
- Placing the farm toys synthesising illustration a week earlier than previously.

The flow-on effect from the introductory meeting was also discernible academically, socioculturally, and particularly, attitudinally, through the cycle. An introduction to possibly different ways of understanding knowledge and approaching teaching and learning, to some models of student writing, and to essential reading skills before the semester began, along with meeting a network of peers with whom they could identify, seemed to give Cycle Four participants much more confidence than their peers in earlier cycles. This made for a different group ZPD and allowed some modifications to study group content as will be clear through this chapter.

9.2.1 Participants

For Cycle Four I was able to introduce the research to students participating on the pre-university preparation course (the course on which Hamish and Mara had participated before Cycle Two). Incoming mature-aged students identified through the enrolment system were also invited. Thirteen attended the Saturday morning session, but some who had received emails had replied to say they were not available for the Saturday. To ensure that as many incoming mature-aged students as possible from arts and humanities had an opportunity to join the research, once again, it was introduced in the introductory lecture for the academic writing course on the first day of the semester. For students contacted in this way, the Saturday programme was repeated, without the treasure hunt, in the extended lunch break on the third day of the semester.

A further eight new students attended that meeting, along with some previous participants who had not been available on the Saturday. One of the newcomers, Di, had emailed that she was “returning to uni after a 15-year gap; my two teenage daughters have left school, so my time now”. Although she had completed some university courses, but not a degree, I had learnt that the gap in her study might contribute to some apprehension similar to that which first-timers might be experiencing; in addition, I now recognised that identifying with a community of mature peers seemed to be very important for mature-aged students as they acquired an academic Discourse. Di was welcomed to the research as Ann had been in Cycle One.

By week three, regular attenders had settled at eleven, four meeting in a lunch hour and seven in an afternoon group. Once again, all but one of these students had come from households which traditionally did not encourage their children to proceed to university. They had had successful careers in the military, in trades, or service sectors. Di’s background was different. She had attended university briefly before embarking on a successful career as journalist, and her husband lectured in applied sciences. She was not apprehensive about writing, but, at first, struggled to master unfamiliar genres and styles. She was as challenged as the other participants were as she encountered academic language, and by what she experienced as new ways of reading texts (see 9.3.2 below). Regular attenders and their age groupings are shown on Table 9.2.

Table 9.2 Cycle Four participants

2013 Cycle Four: Lunchtime group		
35-39 years	45-49	55-59
Kere	Di	Maarten
Maia		

2013 Cycle Four: Afternoon group				
25-29 years	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49
Sam	Robin	Tony	Hemi	Petra
David	Steven			

Other students who attended the introductory meeting, an introductory interview, and two or more study group meetings but who did not continue for various reasons were Njeri (aviation, 4 meetings); Barry (business, 3 meetings), Saara (veterinary, 3 meetings) and Annette (business, who intended to commit to the research but who withdrew from university in the first three weeks).

Four students who attended introductory meetings and some early weekly meetings were from science, veterinary science, business, and aviation disciplines (see Table 9.2). These students had all heard of the research on the preparation course and come to the Saturday introduction. Study group content, however, focusing on writing for humanities and social sciences, was not particularly relevant to their courses of study. Two ceased attending after three or four weeks. Annette, for multiple causes (see 9.4), withdrew from university.

Two other students outside arts and humanities disciplines chose to continue in the group, even though they realised that the strong focus on writing for humanities was not directed towards to their courses of study:

I'm really glad I signed up for this group as I was quite uncertain initially. Even though I didn't have the same sort of written assignments as most of the other people in the group I particularly enjoyed the conversations, interaction, and hearing about their experiences both as a mature student, and with their academic writing processes. . . . Having Prue and those people who I knew from the writing group to say hi to around campus made it feel much friendlier faster than I had imagined. (Robin, Ex 4, science)

It was just good to chat to people. There aren't many mature students in economics so I am generally just head down ass up most of the day. It was a good break in the week to just chill for an hour. (Tony, Ex 4, business)

Both those students clearly valued the sense of identity and belonging they gained from being linked with a group of similar peers.

9.3 Action and observation

9.3.1 Overview

The additional time available in the introductory meetings allowed for a much more relaxed start than in previous cycles, when time had been constrained by the need for students to locate their next class, catch a bus, collect children, or get to work. As noted above, the flow-on effect of the extended introduction pervaded the whole cycle. Although Cycle Four once again followed the basic pattern and principles established through earlier cycles, it was rendered different because of that flow-on effect. This

section discusses the interventions of the first meeting and then continues with an overview of the rest of the semester.

9.3.2 The extended introduction

Epistemological reflection

The first formal activity of the extended introduction was the epistemological reflection established during Cycles Two and Three. During this there were no dissenters as students across all age groups once again sketched pictures of transmission education and recalled a lack of discussion through their high school years. Even Sam, whose high schooling had been in the second year that NCEA operated, perhaps surprisingly identified with that pedagogy:

You couldn't, certainly, once you got to the 5th form at school [now year 11], you couldn't [ask a question]: "This isn't in the exam so we're not going to talk about it". (En 4)

As had other younger students in this study, however (for example, Tim, in Cycle Three), Sam later added a caveat to that remark suggesting his possible disengagement with learning: he had not stayed at school to complete his NCEA.

Many of the regular participants continued to refer back to this reflection and to a different approach to teaching and learning through the semester. In his exit interview, Hemi described how he had used it as a basis for understanding how this "new world, a foreign world" of university functioned:

The most important thing I got in the first week with yourself was understanding that it was a different process to learning, and because of that, I was starting to look for, that's where I got to the idea of a debate. (Ex 4)

Hemi had continued his reflection on the cultural differences in this new world through his first semester:

If you class a world as a culture, then [university is a] culture. . . . What I looked for was, "What are the rules?" "Where's the difference?" "How is it working differently?" (Ex 4)

The reflection provided a foundation from which most Cycle Four participants could manage to negotiate their lectures. The continual reflection and the scaffolded genre approach to writing and practice with reading strategies through the Cycle enabled them to apply principles of knowledge as constructed rather than received to their reading and writing.

This did not happen immediately. Students' understanding built incrementally through the semester. Even with their introduction to a concept of handling multiple viewpoints on a topic – Hemi's "debate" – participants were still challenged when they met this in their course reading. The first time we encountered it in a journal extract in a study group meeting, the same text in which Ann had identified, "there's different views" (6.4.2) Di, for one, with her journalism background, initially found an academic style difficult to negotiate:

I haven't a clue what she's saying. [Not the words]; this whole paragraph. I'm not reading it right. (SG4 LG 4)

As we analysed the text (from Cullity, 2008, see Appendix 6), Di was able to identify Cullity's summary of a commonly-held viewpoint and the stages through which she worked to then assert her own position.

Where this introduction to multiple viewpoints in an academic text differed for Cycle Four participants was that since they had been alerted to the possibility of difference, while they were challenged by new ways of teaching and a different approach to learning, to knowledge, and to approaching text, they did not become stressed as had some of their earlier peers. They recognised, for example, that "I'm not reading it right" and that they needed to take on new ways of doing things to enter an academic Discourse.

Some participants developed the content of the epistemological reflection further in a discussion of the "academic game" resulting from the farm toys illustration (see below), recognising that in this "culture", as Hemi would describe it, people do things in certain ways. Their concept of "playing the game" (Kere, SG4 LG.5) aligned with Carroll's notion of "rehearsing new roles". Those roles or ways might not apply in their homes, on their marae, in the military or the hospitality industry or in their current working lives, but they were part of an academic Discourse.

As in earlier cycles, once again, even with continual reflection through the cycle, not all participants appropriated the intent of the epistemological reflection. Three students, in particular, seemed to retain the worldviews and approach to learning and teaching with which they were familiar. Maarten, an older student, was one. He agreed that pedagogy during his schooling had been transmissive, and that the university seemed to value different ways of teaching and learning and a different epistemology from what he had expected, but he did not engage with that. In a meeting one lunch hour he explained his difficulty:

There are bits [of the teaching in his lectures] that don't fit my idea of which way's up, and I find myself sort of getting, am I expected to believe that? That's rubbish. . . . I have my own way of deciphering language. (SG4 LG.5)

Maarten attended study group meetings until near the end of the semester because "it's got a good atmosphere" (SG4 LG.5). He valued being part of a group with which he could identify, but seemed to retain his own way of learning:

That's my problem – everything I've learned in life so far I've learned by falling over, crashing. (SG4 LG.5)

Steven and David were other Cycle Four participants who found it difficult to come to terms with a very different approach to teaching and learning from what had been familiar. Despite considerable input from others in the study group, from me, and from Carol (see below), Steven remained confused by the ways of being and doing he experienced in academia, both of lecturers and of students. He eventually withdrew.

David, keen to study politics, and very sure that he knew how to write well, attended infrequently: "Sorry, Prue, I got into a political discussion. Missed the group" (Email 4). His essays from the courses he continued with show that he did not engage with the concept of handling differing viewpoints.

Developing schemata

Students collaborated enthusiastically in the activities introducing them to examples of academic writing, to skimming and scanning strategies and to some of the metalanguage for academic writing. On the Saturday programme, Gwen, from Cycle One, now a trained peer writing tutor, took half the group through the second schema activity,

learning from Jane's first unsuccessful essay. Students responded positively to the schema and reading activities in emails, and in their entry interviews:

Today was a really nice day and I got new tips on how to organise my work, I was enlightened on how to write a good report with a systematic flow, how to use the thesis sentences, skim reading and scanning and how the group interacted. (Njeri, Email 4)

I did find Saturday really helpful. It was excellent to actually pick apart an essay with an experienced person and have a sounding board and someone to bounce ideas off. (Sam, En 4)

Participants valued analysing different assignment structures and prompts. Their comments showed that they were thinking in terms of applying the process to their own writing:

It's like, interesting networking, and actually sitting down looking at an essay. It showed the structure; it's not a puzzle. If I think about it, I can understand the logic. (Sam, En 4)

They valued meeting some of the language of academic writing. Petra, who had searched around the university website for tips on writing available through the online resources and was aware of some as-yet-unfamiliar language and concepts there, recognised that the activities were a preparation for engaging with some of the new language they were going to meet:

I think it was really important to spend that time, because it's just a different language. (Petra, En 4)

Students were able to immediately apply some of the learning from the introductory session in their first week on campus. Petra used the reading strategies in an in-class writing assignment in response to a text:

The other part of [Saturday] I felt was really good was the scanning and the picking out key words which, you know, although I found really hard, I've used it, so I think that's good. (Petra, En 4)

Participants' application of their new learning continued through the semester. In her exit interview, Kere explained some of the benefit she had gained from being introduced to aspects of academic writing in the introductory activity:

I now know what it is that they expect from me, and that it takes time to put it all together. (Ex 4)

Also at the end of the semester, Hemi described how he applied the content of the epistemological reflection and the schema exercises to his assignments:

It took a while; I was starting to look for them [different expectations involved in each assignment]. You got me? What's required of this assignment? What's required of that assignment? But the key to it was to understand that it was a different way of learning. (Ex 4)

The guided discovery pedagogy, collaboratively exploring examples of student writing and using accessible language, was confidence-building for new students. At the end of the semester, Kere explained how that activity had initiated a new confidence for her:

When I was able to look at the difference between an A assignment and a C assignment and compare the two, I thought to myself on that very day that I *can* do this, and so far I have! (Ex 4, her emphasis)

This initial confidence seemed to be experienced by all participants, even though, as noted above, they experienced similar challenges as their peers in earlier cycles. The beginnings of academic self-efficacy from the introductory meeting seemed to enable these students to be able to regard those challenges as hurdles to overcome, "take it as part of the learning curve, just something else to learn" (Hemi, Ex 4) rather than as debilitating stressors (Zajacova et al., 2005).

A flow-on effect: increased confidence

Introducing the epistemological reflection and the schema activities before the semester seemed to make a considerable difference to Cycle Four participants' ability to engage with their study from the first week. In addition, knowing from their first days that there was a supportive network of peers on campus, and a place where they could ask questions, seemed to contribute to their having more confidence than their peers in earlier cycles.

Confidence from engaging with similar peers

Cycle Four participants spoke much more specifically about becoming confident in academia than students in any other cycle. From the start of the cycle, their affirmative verbal feedback suggested ways in which the extended introduction contributed to that development. For Petra, at least, the treasure hunt on the Saturday had helped in this process as it was a non-stress activity:

Thank you for a fun morning on Saturday. It was nice that the meeting was relaxed, with some fun bits thrown in (the treasure hunt). (Email 4)

As in previous cycles, students expressed their relief that derived from meeting similar peers and knowing they were not the only ones to be apprehensive. The difference, for Cycle Four, was that this meeting preceded their first lectures which students in other cycles had found so difficult to negotiate and which had then so undermined the rather shaky confidence:

Just like having, how many people on the Saturday? Thirteen of us, just sitting around listening to other people in the same situation kind of makes you feel a whole lot better. I think it makes everybody feel a lot better, to be honest. (Sam, En 4)

Like Sam, others took heart from realising that they were not alone in their fears and apprehensions for this new endeavour:

Just knowing that other mature students are feeling the same emotions, having the same concerns and feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the whole university process. (Petra, En 4)

Petra identified an additional aspect of confidence she began to develop in the introductory meeting. She had joined in a small-group discussion, using a skill she had not previously needed:

It gave confidence as far as being able to talk in a group situation, 'cos I'm not really used to that. I'm used to more one on one. So being able to be confident to say what you think or your views, you know, in amongst other people is quite hard. (En 4)

Some students in earlier cycles, for example, Moana, in Cycle Two, had noted a similar benefit from the scaffolded interaction in what they perceived as a safe environment in study group meetings:

This might sound funny, but in last week's study group, it was a couple of days later, but I actually spoke up in class and asked a question and I have never done that before. After I asked them I sat back and I thought, wow! It just came out and that is helping me a lot. (En 2)

New students also derived confidence from observing their more senior peers (Bandura, 2012; Habel, 2009). Each of those previous participants, on both the Saturday and the Wednesday, had briefly shared their greatest first-semester challenge and how they had overcome that. They spoke of developing the self-belief that they could succeed in education, of overcoming a fear of failure, of learning to write appropriately, and of learning to manage their time without the constraints of set working hours. Gwen, from Cycle One, again introduced herself as someone who had “failed School Certificate”, but since new students had met her in the second schema activity as a trained peer writing tutor, they recognised her considerable increase in confidence. New students gleaned some inspiration from observing the self-assuredness of their more experienced peers:

Is that how far they've come? That's something to aspire to!” (Kere, En 4)

The very different attitudinal quality of Cycle Four students made for very different study group meetings, particularly for the ZPD of the group as noted above. The flow-on effect of the extended introduction was also evident in the weekly activities, some of which were necessarily different because of the front-ending. It was most notable in the way we used the WAM in Cycle Four, in the extended journal article overview, in the use of farm toys, and in participants' developing understanding of a writing process. The following sections consider some of the flow-on effect through the first three weeks of the semester.

9.3.3 The first three weeks

The first three weeks of the semester, which in earlier cycles had been used for the epistemological and schema interventions, were used for modifications of activities that

in earlier cycles had proved useful in the process of introducing students to an academic Discourse. These, as noted above, were:

- Using the WAM as a pedagogical tool rather than a reconnaissance or data-gathering tool;
- Adding a more-developed version of the journal article overview that had been inserted into Cycle Three;
- Placing the farm toys synthesising illustration a week earlier than previously.

Using the WAM

Because some of the expectations for university writing had been addressed through the writing schema activities, there was no need to use the WAM for reconnaissance as in previous cycles. It was used instead as a focal point for discussion in the second week. It was notable through the interaction in this meeting that students were already able to reflect on their newly-developing confidence for writing. Tony, for example, was able to say, “If I had to answer this question before I did the activity, I would have been a 1 [indicating high apprehension] but now I’m a 3 [neutral] or even a 4 [moderately confident]” (SG4 AG.2). That confidence had yet to be worked out in students’ writing, but, as Pajares (2003) demonstrated, entrenched beliefs about writing ability have a powerful effect on students’ abilities to succeed.

It seemed that since participants had met their mature peers and identified that apprehension was almost universally experienced among them, and since they had heard from peers who had been successful in overcoming their apprehension, they felt confident to voice any continued areas of apprehension. They were also able to ask questions about any concerns about writing which arose from the interaction. It was notable, too, that the discussion provided a further opportunity for some vicarious learning and social modelling (Bandura, 2012; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Habel, 2009). Two students who had already completed a course by distance before their first semester on campus were able to share ways in which they had learnt aspects of writing for university. Maia, for example told her peers that she had taken the opportunity to access the one-to-one consultations offered by Student Learning. This encouraged the new students to realise that asking for help is a component of an academic Discourse; following her example, several participants were able to use that service effectively in their first semesters.

A significant cause of apprehension identified through the discussion was students' extreme anxiety about "committing" plagiarism. They had been to their first lectures, and heard there and read in their course guidelines that plagiarism was an unacceptable practice, but they had no clear idea of what it involved. They were terrified that they might be accused of it. Petra wondered whether, should she write a sentence which inadvertently happened to be the same as one in an academic text, if that would be counted as plagiarising.

At that point, students' anxiety was somewhat allayed what talking about the concept of entering a conversation (Gaipa, 2004). We were able to discuss how to acknowledge other authors' writing – which they had seen in the student essays previously. We were also able to talk about Turnitin, an online site for checking for plagiarism to which many students had to submit their assignments before they were accepted for grading. Students were very fearful about what that might mean. I was able to broker (Perry, 2009) the function of Turnitin for them, and after the meeting, to email links to Turnitin material which gave examples of plagiarism and suggestions for how it might be avoided.

Another cause for apprehension identified through those discussions echoed those of students in previous cycles: not knowing how to get started with their writing. After the WAM discussion, the rest of the meeting was used to introduce freewriting and brainstorming as possible strategies for getting started.

Journal article overview

Cycle Four included a journal article overview building on the one introduced in Cycle Three. The intervention had similar aims as its predecessor, but as it was earlier in the semester, in practice, it was different. Students had heard of journal articles, but not yet met them: "So this is a journal article!" (Hemi, SG4 AG.3). Key learning for participants seemed to be their introduction to some of the terminology of journal articles:

I noticed they all have something at the start describing something, sort of thing.
(Sam, SG4 AG.3)

I think it's kind of like they're beginning to tell you about what the article's about. (Petra SG4 AG.3)

This was an opportunity to introduce the abstract, and its function, which might be useful when students searched for potentially useful articles for their assignments. The need to introduce terminology for the different sections of an article resonated with Northedge's (2002) observation that universities can no longer assume any commonly held prior knowledge or frames of reference among today's diverse students.

Students identified in which sections of the articles the authors used references, and we discussed why. They noticed a different use of pronouns and voice in the different sections, particularly, in the psychology texts, between the literature review and methodology sections. As had Carol and Tim in Cycle Three, some likened this to instructions for lab reports in their textbooks.

The exercise also provided students with an opportunity to look for different ways in which authors used in-text referencing, and to distinguish between practices such as identifying particular authors and discussing or evaluating their ideas, using direct quotations, or inserting lists of authors' names at the end of a sentence. General comments from students as they left the room were that the exercise had been very useful.

Farm toys synthesising activity

In previous cycles, this activity had been in the fifth week, to coincide with students' need to use journal articles for major assignments. In Cycle Four I took the toys to the meeting in the fourth week. I had wondered if students would be ready for a synthesising activity, but, once again, because they had been introduced gently to differing viewpoints through the schema activities, they were. I noted in my journal:

In study group they were already talking about different viewpoints before I arrived, about writing essays incorporating different ideas – and the farm toys fitted admirably into their discussion. I wasn't sure if they would be up to the toys, but they were. In a different slant from previous times, because we have already looked at writers integrating different ideas, we applied the figures to their ideas, deciding who might side with whom, and how to relate that to an essay. (25 March, 2012)

Discussion ensued in that meeting about whether students were entitled to their 'own' opinion, or whether knowledge constructed through writing was their own opinion, or

was it part of the academic ‘game’? One of their course guides had suggested that “some of you may be experienced at writing essays, but for those of you new to the academic game . . .” Students had picked up on that statement and were applying it to their experiences in writing. All participants were occupied through the activity, mentally connecting ideas for their essays to the vehicles. Several students were working on an assignment requiring a comparison of two models of health, a biomedical and a social. Using the toys as holders for their ideas enabled them to conclude that the broader context for their essays, perhaps suggesting the ‘so what?’ for their texts, was the economy.

As in earlier cycles, feedback continued through the semester on the usefulness of the visual activity. Kere noted: “The toy tractor scenario helped me to understand the bigger picture” (Kere, Ex 4). Hemi explained how the illustration was useful in developing his thinking about an academic approach to writing. He had taken part in the activity, placing his fingers amongst the toys, and stating that here he was, a social worker, sorting out the different opinions represented amongst the different toys. At the end of the semester he said:

I finally realised, it’s a debate. . . . I was writing from the perspective of getting all the facts and information in. It took me half a semester to realise in a term that I understand, that it was a debate. . . . That input of when you brought out the cows and the bits I started thinking, well, OK, yeah, I don’t know the colour, the rules, of this engagement, this debate. . . . Once I got that concept in my head, my essays started improving in that not only were they structured but they had a point to them; they were going somewhere, and they had a conclusion, and they made sense.

As had students from previous cycles, some Cycle Four students continued to tell me that when they sit down to write, they think of “the barnyard” (6.4.5).

9.3.4 Through the semester

The writing process

In Cycle Four participants again valued working through the writing process towards co-construction of short texts:

Learning essay structures by writing paragraphs on the board together was extremely helpful to me. (Kere, Ex 4)

Having met some generic and specific academic language, and a schema for an essay before the semester seemed to enable some Cycle Four participants to engage with support offered by the university. Kere, for example, successfully accessed help available from the online support and from Student Services:

I have used [online support] and [Student Services] for help, and so far my lowest mark has been a B-. (Ex 4)

There were no comments in Cycle Four that help from those sources was beyond reach of the participants.

Although we did not spend very much time writing in study group meetings, no one suggested in their exit interview that less time should be spent talking and more time should be spent on writing. Discussions in meetings suggested that students seemed to realise that that they learnt to write outside the study group:

by doing it. It's like, you can talk to someone about driving a tractor, but they've got to get out and get on the thing and try to drive themselves. (Steven, SG4 AG.4)

In meetings we could explore values of academic culture displayed in writing, analyse ways in which writers used sources or discussed other authors' work, and collaborate in co-construction, but, as Steven said, students had to apply what we learnt in the group to their own work. The discussion process again enabled vicarious learning:

Listening to other people's issues relating to their assignments and the methods of how they overcame the problems they faced was helpful. (Tony, Ex 4)

In Cycle Four, all the essays that were collected as data at the end of the semester looked like essays. Most had achieved 'A' or high 'B' grades. Steven and Maarten, however, did not complete any essays.

Another noticeable factor in Cycle Four essays was that students seemed to understand much earlier in the semester than previously that multiple viewpoints were valued. Hemi, whose first essays demonstrated his willingness to engage in the debate that he

was identifying as a characteristic feature of academia, took the risk of inserting his own viewpoints on some issues into his writing. For one course in particular, Hemi identified which scholars proposed which ideas, but asserted his own, at times, different, stance based on his knowledge of his family history and his experience working in different countries. One assignment focused on racism which he had experienced in different ways working in other countries. He wrote a section of an essay from his experience, taking his stand. Interestingly, for that, he was not reprimanded, but accepted. His tutor commented: “This is an interesting idea – that I completely disagree with.”

Cross-cycle networking

The opportunity to meet with mature peers, both similarly apprehensive newcomers and confident former participants, continued through the semester and contributed to students’ recognition that they were legitimate participants in academia:

Seeing that the majority of students seemed to be fresh out of high school made me anxious about my age, but coming to the study group definitely helped me realise that I wasn’t alone and that I had every right to be here. (Kere, Ex 4)

9.4 Reflection

Presenting the introductory activities before their first semesters, or on their third day, seemed to result in Cycle Four participants being able to develop a more critical stance towards their transitions to academic writing and their acquisition of an academic Discourse than presenting the same material through the semester when they were stressed and struggling to prepare assignments and keep up with their readings. Participants seemed to be less confused in their new, unfamiliar environment and more able to reflect on it and make connections from the familiar to the new by having first encountered it in a relaxed environment. This seemed to enable them to take ownership of their learning process in a way not experienced by students in earlier cycles. There was much more reflection on their transition process, and their entry into an academic Discourse.

Cycle Four participants had many features in common with their earlier peers, although most did not recall the extremely negative experiences with schooling as for Cycle Two students. Some of them had coped with major life issues, but those issues only seemed to overwhelm two students. Only Di had chosen to enter higher education when she left school. Petra and Steven, at least, had been very early school leavers, although Petra had

engaged on an extensive process of re-identifying herself as a learner since school, by completing first School Certificate and then University Entrance as an adult correspondence student. Cycle Four students had arrived at the introductory meeting as apprehensive as their peers in other cycles. They had left the introductory meeting, however, with some fledgling skills, some understanding of previously unknown expectations, and a group of similar peers and an MCP and more experienced peers from whom they knew they could draw support. They also left those introductory meetings with an understanding that they would need to be active participants in their education, not passive receptors of it, and most, as has been indicated above, continued to reflect actively on their engagement and on university culture through their first semesters.

All Cycle Four participants had considerable gaps since their previous education; all except Di and Hemi were first in their family to attend university, and Hemi had been whāngaied out (cared for by family members other than birth parents) and had not been living with any members of his whānau at the time they had attended university. University culture and Discourses were unfamiliar to them all, even to Di who became particularly frustrated with some of the language used in academic Discourses:

Some of it's – so – “Let's have a vocab so we sound important!” (SG4 LG.5)

Di's facility with words had been a feature of her journalistic career; it was somewhat discombobulating to her to find that new words were one of her challenges:

I have trouble like learning new vocabulary. I've got to really ram it in there. I wander round the house yakking away to myself, “language domains” and all this sort of stuff. And if I can't fit what they're saying into a context that makes sense of what I already know, it just goes up the bush. (SG4 LG.5)

While Di's experience was somewhat de-stabilising for her, it was consistent with the experiences of many adult learners whose sense of identity and competence may be compromised when they encounter academia (Kasworm, 2008). For most Cycle Four participants, such challenges were not insurmountable as they had been to some earlier participants.

Cycle Four study groups were not perfect. Listening to transcripts of meetings, I hear that I sometimes spent too much time in some attempts to broker aspects of academic

culture. Reflecting on transcripts, I later wondered if some of those attempts had really helped students who had patiently listened to me. In one meeting I allowed one student to talk too much; when I timed his input from the recording, he must have talked for 80% of the chat time. While others possibly learned from his angst and his reflective process, it would have been more effective use of the time to curtail his input and bring others into the conversation. I noted that one student did not get an opportunity to talk at all through that chat time. After those reflections, I reprimanded myself to be aware of anything similar happening again.

Some Cycle Four participants withdrew from courses, and there was some attrition from the study group. Annette withdrew from university very early in the semester. Multiple challenges contributed to her withdrawal, consistent with the busy lives of many mature students managing their many commitments. She had done everything she knew to prepare for university. She had been contacted by email and invited to join on the two-week preparation course and had left her employment early in order to complete it. She had also attended the Saturday programme:

Thank you for the group. I'm impressed by how much we can learn from each other. (Email 4)

As it had with other participants, the preparation course had taught her to prepare an essay and introduced her to the library, to databases, the campus, and some academic discourse. Annette, however, was enrolled in business courses which required a mathematical background that she did not have. The stress of trying to address new content, with which she could cope because it was in her field of employment, but which took her extra time because of her inexperience at that academic depth, along with coping with a young teenager who reacted very negatively to his mother taking time away from him in order to study, was overwhelming for her. The juggling put too much pressure on her household, even though all except the younger son supported her in her new venture. In addition, she had a chronic health problem which tended to compromise her ability to negotiate lectures. In the third week she emailed:

I did not stay at uni. It had become too much for me to cope with.

Maarten did not manage to complete any assignments. David's attendance was spasmodic until he completely stopped attending; he withdrew from at least one course;

Steven withdrew from university. However, students who met regularly once again appreciated the opportunity to reflect and the sense of community they developed: “The fellowship that developed from that Monday group was amazing” (Di, Ex 4). That fellowship and sense of community continued to develop the study group as a focused affinity group, or community of practice (Gee, 2002).

9.4.1 Acquiring an academic Discourse

Cycle Four participants seemed to take a much more active role in their transition processes than previous participants. They met similar challenges as students in earlier cycles, particularly with managing the required reading and negotiating both disciplinary and generic academic language, and they were even more challenged than previous students when they found that all their course information was only available online. As in previous cycles, they found their digital literacy did not match what they needed:

My biggest challenge in the last four weeks has been computers, learning computers, how to open a document, how to create one, how to connect computers. (Hemi, SG4 AG.4)

Through the semester, in the chat times, students reflected on their learning and their position as mature students on campus. A statement from Tony towards the end of the semester indicates how he felt the study group was building on the baseline offered by the epistemological reflection: “We are identifying our gap” (SG4 AG.9). It did seem that the stress-free, relaxed, extended introduction before most participants were confronted with lectures in a seemingly strange language and an unfamiliar format had contributed to their ability to continue making the connections between what was familiar and what was new that had been initiated in the first reflection.

Hemi told of some of the connections he made concerning the language of academic writing. His comments indicate that he recognised that in an academic Discourse, words might have different applications from in other Discourses:

In different worlds that I’ve lived and worked in, discuss’ means ‘talk’, OK? In an academic sense, ‘discuss’ means ‘give a viewpoint’, ‘talk about the differences from different scholars’, OK? And ‘come up with a conclusion’. So

‘give examples of’, ‘draw on a whole lot of different information’; ‘bring a whole lot of information to your debate’. (Ex 4)

Hemi also commented on his new understanding for ‘argue’:

My definition of ‘argue’ is different. I’ve seen violence in its worst forms. (Ex 4)

The possible misunderstanding of academic words has been noted elsewhere (Cullity, 2008; Navarre Cleary, 2008). We could note that with government initiatives to increase participation in tertiary education for students from backgrounds not traditionally associated with higher education in this country, there could be a need to make the intention of some of the commonly used prompt words, particularly the need to “argue”, explicit.

9.4.2 A community of practice

Through Cycle Four, mature students on campus were continuing to identify as a focused community. Networking became a key feature as students from different cycles connected with each other both within the study group meetings and across the campus. New participants met former participants who were now trained peer mentors for difficult first-year courses. As I had in previous cycles, where possible I was able to introduce students sharing courses. Di became a study buddy with Gwen (Cycle One) in a course they took in common through this process; Petra shared some courses with Mary and Mac (Cycle One). This community of mature students perceived themselves to be more focused and more motivated than their younger peers, yet with distinctively different learning needs. They were a community who understood the particular challenges for mature students with few people in their home networks who understood how difficult it was to adjust to a completely new culture.

In this developing community, more experienced peers were able to support the transitions of new members by encouragement, or, in some cases, by providing explicit help. One example of explicit help across cycles arose from a chance meeting with Carol (Cycle Three) in the cafeteria. She told me she had received an ‘A’ grade for one of her summer school courses – a course Steven now struggled with. She agreed to give him an hour of her time to help him negotiate the first assignment. She later told me how she had guided Steven through the requirements of the topic; she had shown him

where she had addressed those requirements in her own essay – a strategy that sounded rather familiar. Her knowledge and experience with that course were invaluable to Steven, who texted “thanx 4 Carol. She was sent frm above”.

One feature of a community, or a Discourse as Gee defines it (2015) is that its members recognise each other by their shared practices; members are also able to recognise outsiders who do not share those practices. Len, a distance student who had attended the introductory Saturday came back to the campus one day in the semester “to see the lecture”. He visited the study group and made an interesting observation about the lecture he had attended. His observation suggests one now-identifying feature of Cycle Four study group members:

I’m thinking, “no one’s putting their hand up; they’re just taking as gospel what she’s saying”. And she said, “You don’t always have to agree with me; you can ask questions”. (SG4 LG.6)

I enquired, “What are people expecting if they’re just sitting there?” Maia’s response indicated some of the extent to which she had appropriated the intent of the epistemological reflection:

The knowledge thing; that it’s coming from the lecturers. You know, it’s a totally different system. (SG4 LG.6)

To which Kere added,

Constructing your own knowledge, playing an active part, all that sort of thing. (SG4 LG.6)

Apart from David, Maarten, and Steven, Cycle Four participants did seem to have grasped both the need to be active students, and to grapple with a new understanding of knowledge as contestable. Rather than defining their difference from school leaver students by their perceived lack of skills and confidence, Cycle Four students seemed to perceive that their active approach to learning distinguished them from some school-leaver students.

9.5 Role of the researcher

As I had in previous cycles, I filled multiple roles through Cycle Four: as the researcher, I was a participant observer and the person who analysed emerging data, the facilitator

in meetings and the person who could connect participants from different cycles who were enrolled in common courses. My key role in study group meetings, as MCP, was to be sensitive to the ZPD of the group and to work in that zone, to focus on enabling student learning. As MCP, I was able to informally broker aspects of academic culture, such as the function of Turnitin, and to mediate necessary writing skills in ways with which students could engage. These roles resonated with my roles in other cycles.

In Cycle Four, however, particularly with the continuing cross-cycle networking and the continued contact with former participants, I seemed to assume an additional role, not one I had chosen, and not one for which I felt fully qualified. I seemed to be regarded as a resource person to whom students might turn if they wanted to talk about changing or withdrawing from courses, or if they wanted references to support entry for new academic directions. Some had been asked by their disciplines to be peer tutors, and had not felt confident to agree without being able to talk over what might be involved, and whether I thought they would be capable. Ann had been offered a place on the Masters' programme in her field, bypassing completing an undergraduate degree at this university. Her lecturers recognised that she had a BA from elsewhere, and that she was a very capable student. Students would drop in to chat and talk about directions they were contemplating because they did not have people in their home networks with whom they could discuss these issues. This indicated that on this campus, at least, there was perhaps a need for a "one-stop-shop" (the phrase used by the Programme Director of the targeted preparation course for mature students discussed in 2.1.3) for mature-aged students' transitions to university.

9.6 Chapter conclusion

Cycle Four was the final cycle in the three years of AR in this project, bringing together the learning from previous cycles. This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the cycle differed in many respects from previous cycles, not in content, but particularly in the increased confidence of participants that was initiated by the understanding and skills available from the extended introductory meetings. As one aim of the cycle had been to evaluate that front-ending, the discussion in this chapter would indicate that the front-ending did contribute to a qualitative difference for participants' first semesters.

Chapter 10 Lessons learned and implications

In line with the AR methodology, each chapter discussing the cycles of AR in this research has ended with a reflection on the major learning from each cycle. This chapter, in focusing on the final research question, broadens the scope of that reflection to consider the concept and pedagogy of a study group for mature-aged students. It begins with placing this study in the broader research context and then outlines the reasons for the re-focusing on Discourse. The chapter then identifies key attributes of a successful study group that emerged from this study which may be of interest to universities considering introducing such a group for mature aged students. It discusses the weaknesses or shortcomings of the study group in this research, and finally points to the implications for the research community.

10.1 The research contribution

This study sits within three main research contexts: research in the FYHE, research concerning mature-aged students, and research concerning diverse students and writing. Those contexts constituted much of the literature reviewed for this study, and many of the findings from earlier, interpretive studies were confirmed in this study which identified that the New Zealand participants shared similar academic, sociocultural, and attitudinal challenges as their non-traditional peers internationally. Concerning the third context, research with diverse students and writing for university, this study confirmed the ethnographic studies of academic literacies researchers and the studies of Australian and UK researchers (Chanock, 2008, Cullity, 2008, Haggis, 2006; Lillis, 2001; Northedge, 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Wingate, 2007) which demonstrate that diverse students may not be sure how to write for university until they are able to negotiate its epistemologies and expectations for teaching and learning.

This study differs from much of the research in the FYHE, however, in that participants were all mature-aged. It also differs from much of the research with mature students in that the research purpose set out to design and trial an intervention which might enable non-traditional students negotiate those challenges. In building on Wingate and Tribble's (2012) development of a scaffolded genre pedagogy, it confirmed the value of adapting that approach for mature-aged students.

Writing had been noted in many earlier studies as a key area of challenge for mature students (see, for example, Bamber & Tett, 2000; Cullity, 2010; Whitehead, 2012), and

was to be the focus of the research. However, as this study progressed (see 6.3.5), it became clear that a study group with a sole focus on writing, albeit situated within the literacies and epistemologies of different disciplines (Lillis, 2001), would not be sufficient to enable mature students to write appropriately for university. It seemed that, to enable successful writing, participants needed to develop an understanding of the values and perspectives and particular ways of being and doing of the academic culture, or Discourse, in which their writing would be situated. The concept of Discourse, as theorised by Gee, then provided the major theoretical framing for a re-designed study group, and the research question was therefore revised to:

How can we use a study group informed by sociocultural theory and approaches to teaching writing to support mature-aged students' acquisition of an academic Discourse?

The major contribution this study therefore makes to the research is that the concept of Discourse provides both an understanding of the process mature-aged students go through in their transition to academia, and a blueprint for an effective pedagogy to enable that transition. A study group provides a space in which to operationalise the concept.

Why Discourse

While Gee's theory of Discourse was implicit in the initial planning for the study group in that it recognises that every piece of writing is situated within a Discourse and that literacy is "fluency in a secondary Discourse" (1989, p. 9), it became clear in Cycle One that, because the concept afforded a holistic approach to situated learning, it needed to be central to a broader conceptualisation of the study group as a learning community. Students' transitions might then be perceived as a matter of acquiring membership and fluency in an additional Discourse, with its worldviews, perspectives, and literacy.

The concept of Discourse as a "combination" (Gee, 2015) of using language and technologies and engaging in practices valued in a social grouping in ways that identify a person as a member of that social grouping – or culture – allowed some of the challenges experienced by participants to be understood as arising from Discourses with very different social and cultural values and practices from those of academia rather than as personal deficits. As Haggis (2006) notes, it is the "values, attitudes, and practices of society which create what is experienced as a disability" (p. 526).

Participants in this study felt very conscious that they were indeed entering a different culture with its own values, attitudes – or worldview – and practices (6.3.5). As one of them remarked, they were severely illiterate in this culture.

In addition, the concept of Discourse as a social grouping allowed the study group itself, in each cycle and across the four cycles, to be conceived of as a learning community or Discourse in which participants could find membership and a sense of belonging and identity (6.5; 9.3.4). Within that community a repertoire of shared language and practices was developed which enabled students to make connections to practices in their disciplines (9.4.1).

The concept of Discourse offered a “pedagogical bite” (Gee, 2002, p. 125) for the study group. A sociocultural pedagogy, which Gee suggests might enhance acquisition of a Discourse, fitted very well with the constructivist scaffolded genre approach (Wingate, 2016) to teaching writing and the participatory nature of AR.

Theoretically, this research therefore added to studies which have applied Gee’s concept of Discourse in different ways, for example, Harreveld (2002), Henderson and Hirst (2007) and Mackay (2003). This study identified that the concept of Discourse which framed the project allowed for a holistic immersion pedagogy and contributed to an understanding of why transitions for mature-aged students seem to be complex. It allowed for incongruences between students’ expectations and epistemologies to be viewed through a broader lens than perhaps a focus on first-in-family (as in O’Shea, 2015), cultural capital (as in Read et al., 2003) or socioeconomic status (as in McKay and Devlin, 2014).

A study group for mature-aged students

This research demonstrates that study groups such as the one developed through this action research would be a valuable support for mature students in their first semesters on a university campus. By using the holistic framing concept of Discourse, this research also suggests that any study group developed to support the successful transition of mature-aged students into university study should not focus on writing alone, but on introducing students to academia as a culture, or Discourse, with its own valued ways of being and doing. It suggests, too, that a sociocultural pedagogy which views students as apprentices in this culture, in which more experienced members do academic activity – in other words, model and collaborate in academic processes

(Haggis, 2006) – with them is an effective way to assist their own acquisition of an academic Discourse. Acquisition implies a sense of identity as a member of an academic community. Finally, this study suggests that an effective study group should incorporate some key factors:

- Knowing the students
- Building a learning community
- Employing a sociocultural pedagogy
- Practising reflection
- Front-loading the first semester

While these factors overlap to some extent, the following overview treats each one as a separate factor.

Knowing the students

The development of the study group through this study confirmed how important it is to be aware of the knowledge, skills, and Discourses, of the participating students (Ausubel, 1968; Bizzell, 1982). Knowing the students is a starting point for a sociocultural pedagogy (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978), and for constructivist pedagogies in which students add new skills and knowledge to their existing skills and knowledge (Begg, 1999; Wingate, 2016).

This research also suggested that some awareness of social factors impinging on students' lives, as has been identified in much of the literature (for example, Michie et al., 2001), may clarify different students' seeming ability to engage with study. Particularly complicating social factors that emerged through this research were the effects of recent, or as-yet-incompletely-dealt-with traumatic life events (Kasworm, 2008; Michie et al., 2001), or problems with dependants (Stone, 2008).

In terms of acquiring an academic Discourse, it is also essential to become aware of Discourses of teaching and learning and an understanding of the structure of knowledge which students bring in order to enable them to make connections through points of difference or similarity to academic Discourses. Participants in this study shared many characteristics with their international peers, particularly lack of familiarity with academic culture (Cullity, 2010; Read et al., 2003), with its epistemologies (Cantwell & Scevak, 2004; Wingate, 2006), its teaching and learning practices (Haggis, 2006; Merrill, 2001), its language (Kirkness & Neill, 2009), and writing practices (Chanock,

2008; Navarre Cleary, 2008; Wingate, 2016). Any effective intervention developed for similar students would do well to take note of these characteristics and find ways in which they might be addressed in order for students to engage with their learning.

A key factor concerning knowing our students that emerged early in this study is that, as research in academic literacies has suggested for many years, identifying students' epistemologies is a key to helping them learn to read and write for university. This study showed that until participants in this study were able to align their prior Discourses of knowledge, teaching, and learning with those of the university, their reading seemed like a "jigsaw" (6.3.3) and many approached writing as a skill and set out in their writing to display their knowledge (Haggis, 2006), rather than to construct knowledge. The study suggested, too, that a view of writing as a skill, albeit a skill embedded in a discipline, may not enable students to engage with their learning.

Cantwell and Scevak (2004) have researched complications in student writing arising from mismatched epistemologies held by many mature-aged students and suggest that students may take considerable time to alter their beliefs about knowledge in order to write appropriately for many of their disciplines. They argue that a first step is that students be willing to change. Findings from this study would tend to support that argument (7.6.1), but this study also showed first, that by practising reflection (see below) students could become aware of dissonances between their epistemologies and expectations and those of the university, and also, that in a community, when similar peers face similar challenges, vicarious learning may take place through social modelling (Bandura, 2012; Habel, 2009). As students see peers with whom they identify adapting their practices, they too may take on the practices of the new community (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Importantly, the problem becomes identified as a shared social problem rather than an individual deficit (Haggis, 2006).

Another factor concerning knowing our students builds on a suggestion made by Devlin et al. (2012) concerning younger diverse students. They argue that universities may not be able to assume any common skills among new students. While among study group participants there seemed to be little connection between their ethnicities or their socioeconomic levels prior to entering university, and their skill levels, it was very clear in each cycle that most participants had not fully engaged with effective writing skills through their schooling, if, indeed, they had ever had the opportunity to "[learn] this

stuff' (6.3.3). Yet mature students must have those basic skills in order to be able to engage with their study.

A final factor which emphasises the importance of knowing our students is that this study confirmed, as earlier research has shown (Haggis, 2006), that there seems to be little connection between mature students' earlier lack of achievement in education and their ability to succeed in higher education; their initial inability or difficulties, in academia derive from lack of familiarity with academic practices – those misaligned expectations and Discourses. This emphasises the importance of shifting our view of such students as in deficit (Lawrence, 2005), towards one of recognising that acquiring an academic Discourse is a key to transition.

These factors would suggest that, to be successful, any study group must know the characteristics of its participants. Only then can interventions be designed at an appropriate level, incorporating accessible language, and enabling students to connect new material to existing knowledge. The pedagogy that was developed in this study group (see below) took the above factors into account, and attempted to enable students to make connections between what was familiar to them and what was demanded within an academic Discourse. In addition, the scaffolded genre approach to writing modelled a knowledge-construction process with students which enabled them to learn necessary writing skills.

Building a learning community

This study confirmed observations of earlier researchers who have noted that many factors, particularly the lack of familiarity with academic culture mentioned above, and including limited time, already-established social networks outside the university, and the likely absence of university-experienced peers in those networks (MacFadgen, 2008; Vanden Driesen et al., 2008) contribute to mature-aged students valuing meeting with similar peers in focused interaction on campus. This research suggested, however, additional benefits for students from participating in a focused learning community. Through the AR cycles in this study, the study group developed into a Discourse in its own right, a social grouping with its own shared language and practices. From within that Discourse, participants could then become aware of features of their prior Discourses and of the new, unfamiliar Discourses of academia (4.5). Collaboratively

exploring academic texts as cultural artefacts played a key role in raising this awareness (6.4.2).

To some extent, by raising awareness of features of other Discourses, the Discourse of the study group served a filtering or cultivating function such as Gee (2015) describes (discussed in 4.1). As a Discourse, the study group communicated both with students' prior Discourses and with Discourses within academia; that communication then enabled participants to forge links to the different Discourses of their disciplines.

Practices in the study group at the centre of this research which contributed to its development as a Discourse were discussed in 9.4.2, but key principles to note in this process were "incorporating its members' pasts into its history" (Wenger, 1998, p. 215) and developing a repertoire of shared language and practices. Reflective practice, beginning with the epistemological reflection (see 7.4.2), and some of the chat times provided opportunities for participants to share aspects of their lives that contributed to developing respect for where each had come from and why each one was at university at this particular time. This resonated with the experience of Crowther et al. (2010) who developed a sense of community with a group of adult learners in the UK.

Involving former participants also contributed to a sense of membership in a community that extended across disciplines and levels of study, particularly when some of those participants were also employed by the university as student mentors for challenging first-year courses, and had clearly become MCPs in their own right. Other factors, for example, seating around a table with no obvious head, and the relational, sociocultural pedagogy also contributed to participants' sense of community and identity.

Another key benefit that derived from a focused community of peers, resonating with Habel's (2009) observations, were the potential within that community for students to learn vicariously from each other's success and thus to develop academic self-efficacy. In a group in which so many students brought rather fragile learner identities that, as with their overseas peers, were often threatened when they encountered difficult texts (Bamber & Tett, 2000) or shared classrooms with younger, seemingly confident and competent students (Navarre Cleary, 2008), being able to meet with similar peers and collaborate in a negotiated learning process was an essential component in being able to acquire an academic Discourse.

Employing a sociocultural pedagogy with an MCP

This study suggests that a study group employing a sociocultural pedagogy, in which learners are recognised as apprentices (4.1) and scaffolded activities are designed to be within the ZPD of the group (4.2.4) allows a study group to become the immersion situation (or Discourse) which allows people to acquire an additional Discourse. In addition, the relational, negotiated process of operationalising the scaffolded genre approach towards co-construction of short texts modelled academic activity (Haggis, 2006). Through this process, using accessible language was the key cultural tool, and much valued by participants (7.6).

Sociocultural pedagogies place a great responsibility on the MCP as the one who initiates learning and moves students through to independent mastery of skills (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). Through this study it was clear that the role of the MCP is pivotal in the success of a study group for mature-aged students. That does not mean that the MCP in this study made no mistakes. Rather, it meant that I needed to address mistakes I made that were identified as I analysed meeting transcripts – for example, allowing chat times to go on too long, or cutting them too short, allowing one student to dominate, or indulging in too much teacher-talk – by reforming my own practice.

The role of the MCP needs to be multifaceted, designing and mediating new skills at an appropriate level, intentionally building community, maintaining sensitivity to the characteristics of participants, and crossing the boundaries of Discourses. This complex set of skills may raise questions about what sort of person might be able to fulfil the MCP role. Ultimately, as Vygotsky theorised the role, the MCP works towards learner independence, gradually relinquishing the support provided until learners are able to perform tasks independently (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). While a peer, such as Maraea, in Chapter 1, might well be able to lead a support group, as she did, holding the group together, learning collaboratively, providing a space for mutual support and encouragement and affording some collective scaffolding, an equal peer such as she was would not have the theoretical understanding of entering an academic Discourse to mediate its values and practices for a group. Maraea would have been very sensitive to the learning needs of her peers, but she was learning to write along with them; she was not able to provide any necessary explicit teaching on writing skills or mediate an understanding of an academic Discourse.

This study suggested that some of the success of the study group emerged from the key role of the MCP as a boundary crosser, able to straddle two Discourses (Papen, 2010). The MCP was a fellow mature student, juggling similar academic challenges and family and community responsibilities as many of the participants, but the key attribute was her insider knowledge concerning academic writing and some of the values of academia. In the boundary-crossing role of a broker, the MCP was able to help participants make links between language and practices with which they were familiar, and language and practices of academia.

Some study group participants were appointed peer mentors for disciplinary courses in their second or third years. They crossed boundaries for their less-experienced peers as they mediated the knowledge of those disciplinary communities for them. Gwen, for example, was able to straddle the boundaries between being a mature student and a skilled peer tutor of writing through her role as a peer writing tutor. I therefore invited her assume the role of co-MCP in Cycle 4 for an introductory schema activity – an exciting initiative which showed how the study group might be sustained and evolve over time.

A thorough understanding of appropriate pedagogy, however, was a key in the MCP role. It was interesting to note, in this study, different occasions when a participant brought a new student to the study group. In one instance, rather than mediating the schema activity for the new student, I asked the participating student to explain to the newcomer what we had covered in the schema activity. The student immediately took up a “this is how it is” stance, pointing out different features of a successful and an unsuccessful text rather than guiding the newcomer to find features in the texts. Similarly, on occasions when I asked a participant to go over the farm toys example with a student who had not been present, a top-down pedagogy was assumed. Pedagogy in the study group contrasted with those examples; this tended to confirm that students were able to acquire an academic Discourse through an apprenticeship process, through working together, with an MCP in a strongly guiding role.

Practising reflection

This study confirmed that reflection is a valuable practice with mature-aged students and should be incorporated into any study group practice. Reflection may be empowering for adult learners in multiple ways. As noted above, this study built on the

experience of Crowther et al. (2010), who practised reflection with a group of adult learners and found that it enabled those learners to gain some distance from their previous negative learning experiences. Practising reflection also intentionally actioned O'Donnell and Tobbell's (2007) suggestion that when adult learners who have had previous negative learning experiences are able to recognise that their learning identities have been constructed for them through those experiences, they are empowered to engage with learning in a new environment in new ways and renegotiate their learner identities through their transitions to university.

This study found that reflection went some way towards affording those benefits for participants in this study. It also found that in the process of reflection, participants were able to identify features of prior Discourses they brought (discussed above) which had contributed to mismatched expectations about ways of being and doing in academia. Once those features had been identified in the epistemological reflection exercise (7.4.2; 8.4.2; 9.3.2) they provided a basis from which students could begin to identify expectations for teaching and learning and the nature of knowledge they were meeting in academic Discourses. This identification of factors of familiar Discourses through a process of reflection resonated with Gee's (2008) suggestion that we may be unaware of the features of Discourses we have acquired by immersion unless we have reflected critically on them.

It emerged through this study, however, that the process of reflection should be continual if it is to afford maximum benefit for adult learners. The introductory epistemological reflection (7.4.2; 8.4.2) was initially empowering for participants, but some of its effect seemed to diminish through the stress of each semester as some students, under pressure of addressing assignments and managing their many commitments, tended to resort to their more familiar Discourses. They recalled the content of the reflection through the semester, but seemed to emphasise content rather than practice. This may have been because a focus on content aligned more with the epistemologies they brought. In Cycle Four, in which the initial reflection was conducted in a less-stressful environment before the semester, participants were able to engage with both the content and the process and an emphasis on the process of reflection was maintained through the semester. This continual reflection contributed to a sense of ownership over their transition processes (discussed in 9.3.2 and 9.4) that had not been evident in earlier cycles. It would seem from this, that engaging in continual

critical reflection, albeit guided by an MCP, has lasting benefits for mature-aged students.

Front-loading the semester

Literature surveyed for this study, particularly Cullity's (2010) comprehensive Australian survey, indicated significant sociocultural, academic, and attitudinal benefits for mature-aged students who complete targeted university preparation courses. The work of Willans and Seary (2007, 2011), in particular, attests to the value of addressing student confidence and re-negotiation of learner identity among mature-aged students during targeted preparation. A more recent Australian study suggests that an intensive, one week long course carefully designed to introduce participants to a specific disciplinary literacy had a significant and lasting impact on student confidence, academic self-efficacy, academic success, and retention. Its positive effects were traced through subsequent semesters (Ford et al., 2015).

In every cycle of this research, almost every participant exhibited similar anxiety, apprehension, and fragile learner identities as their international peers (6.2.3; 7.5.1; 7.5.4). By the fourth cycle of the AR, the study group in this research was able to incorporate a little of the benefit attributed to targeted preparation by front-loading the semester with a relaxed introduction to the research, to three key interventions, and to the campus, before the semester began. That is discussed through Chapter 9, covering Cycle Four. This study suggests that the lasting effects of that front loading should be replicated, even expanded, in any study group designed for mature-aged students.

10.2 Using AR in this research

Action research was used in this study as a research method, and as a way of developing the study group over a series of cycles – and, indeed, those two aspects were so closely interwoven as to be almost inseparable. AR allowed the researcher to design, trial, and evaluate the study group, and to critique its development within a research context. It allowed for generation of interpretive data which were incorporated into the design and content of interventions which could then be trialled, evaluated, and re-trialled (Dick, 2002). AR also allowed for the systematic generation of interpretive data which were incorporated into the design and content of interventions which might work for sustainable changes for mature-aged students on university campuses (Piggott-Irvine, 2009; Stringer, 2014). Also, since I was a lone-researcher, using AR allowed me to

reflect critically on my own pedagogy even while searching to develop an effective pedagogy for the group (McNiff, 2002).

At the same time, action research provided me with a context in which to work very closely with participants and foster the relational pedagogy of the group. AR allowed me to make decisions on the spot when an activity, particularly in Cycle One, was clearly inappropriate for some reason (Schön, 1995). The collaborative, participatory aspects of AR dovetailed with the dialogic scaffolded genre approach to writing and the sociocultural pedagogy. It also provided me with a role which incorporated researcher and MCP, a role which required me to be flexible and versatile and responsive to student needs.

However, using AR was a learning curve for me as a researcher. First, because the main focus of the research was to develop an intervention, the pressure I felt to be able to design and evaluate the intervention led to me, at times, assuming a more classical, outsider approach (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) to the research. This was particularly noticeable early in Cycle Two, when my keenness to present and evaluate the interventions meant that I strictly monitored chat times. While this approach might have benefited me, as the researcher (Eikeland, 2012), I also experienced the “othering” (Eikeland, 2012, p. 11) that such an outsider stance might lead to, the colonising (De Meulenaere & Cann, 2013), “asymmetric, one-way relationship between the participant-researcher and the others involved in or affected by the research” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 15). Perhaps participants experienced that too. After the first few weeks of Cycle Two in which I assumed that stance, I noted in my research journal that I felt “like a doctor administering some medicine” (March 14, 2012). That stance may not have helped that particular group of participants who were so highly apprehensive. After reflecting on that action (Schön, 1995), I was able to revise my approach.

While action research, as practised in this study, was successful, in that it allowed for both the development and research of the study group, and provided rich data with which to answer the research question at the heart of this study, it does have its limitations. An outsider researcher, such as an ethnographer, observing and documenting a study group for mature aged students facilitated by an MCP might yield new and interesting data about mature aged students’ transition to an academic Discourse, the role of the MCP, or the function and activities of the study group. In

some contexts, a more quantitative, perhaps long-term study might be valued, perhaps attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of such a study group by following the retention and trajectories of participants as in Fraser and Hendren's (2003) analysis of their toolbox preparation course, or a mixed-methods evaluation, such as Ford et al.'s (2015) long-term evaluation of the single week Australian course mentioned above. However, the matter of quantitative evaluation was discussed in 5.3, with the conclusion that it is very difficult to attach quantitative results to any sort of naturalistic research. It would be very difficult to ascertain the impact of a study group quantitatively, particularly since this research has confirmed overseas studies which indicate that many mature-aged students have rather complicated life circumstances. In addition, an outsider evaluation does not have the strengths of action research, which allowed the researcher to also embrace the role of the MCP and enabled her to design and redesign the study group in response to the needs of the students through a process of continual reflection.

Finally, while this thesis uses action research as a method, not as a focus of the study as in Poskitt's (1994) research, an interesting question to consider is whether this study has produced any findings about action research as a method. There are a number of possible answers to this question. One straight forward response is to say that action research, as practised in this study, is an effective approach to developing and researching a study group for mature-aged students. But, beyond this, we might point, speculatively, to another attribute of the study that would be of interest to action research scholars. In most lone AR, the reflection point(s) in the cycle is completed by the researcher, in the light of collected data. In this study, while the final reflection was completed by the researcher, ongoing group reflection (in the chat times, and particularly in Cycle Four) was an essential aspect of the research. In that respect, the study group became more like a PAR project, in which all participants become a critical community, reflecting on their own situations (Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007). This study, then, highlights the value to the lone researcher of integrating group reflection throughout the project as a powerful form of data and learning.

10.3 Limitations of the study group

One limitation of this study group would be a factor with which any researcher might identify: I did not know at the beginning what I learnt through the cycles. Had I known at the beginning what I knew at the end, about the importance of knowing the students, of developing community, of immersing students as apprentices in academic activity, of

the potential within reflective practice, and the possibility of front-loading the semester, every cycle might have been like Cycle Four. However, we began with the knowledge we had.

A further limitation was that, apart from Cycle One, in which students elected to meet with me through their second semesters, the study group only continued through students' first semesters on campus. Previous participants at times visited my office to seek some advice for their writing or their study choices. These visits, and chance meetings with previous participants in which they elaborated on some of the continued challenges they were having in academia, suggested that a study group continuing for the first year, perhaps functioning more as a collaborative writing workshop (Navarre Cleary, 2011) in the second semester, would provide further situated support for mature-aged students.

Other limitations of the study group would seem to pertain to the needs of participants. On this matter, it is important to recognise that a study group for mature aged students, even one designed with the characteristics discussed above, cannot meet the needs of all mature aged students. While most students who participated for their whole first semesters passed all courses, some students, for example, as indicated in 7.5.4, brought too many complicating factors from schooling and life events for participation in the study group to be able to address the gaps in confidence and skills they brought. Some sought one-to-one help which was not the purpose of the study group (7.5.1; 8.5). Others tended to visit only occasionally and so missed the cumulative development of language and skills (8.5); they did not experience academic activity, or immersion in the Discourse of the study group. Still others seemed to cling to the familiar epistemologies and expectations of prior Discourses (7.6.1; 8.5).

Nor could the study group compensate for gaps in prerequisite knowledge which some students encountered without prior warning. The experience of some students enrolled in statistics was discussed in 7.5.4. Lack of background knowledge was a major or direct cause of withdrawal from university for at least two students and from particular courses for at least three. It contributed to considerable stress and additional workload in making up for missing knowledge and skills for many participants. For students enrolling in courses which assume very specific prior knowledge, for example, statistics, and some business courses requiring a substantial knowledge of mathematics,

it would seem that first, students need advice about that prerequisite knowledge, and second, discipline-specific preparation is required as well as (or instead of) a study group such as that described in this study.

These limitations, however, concern individual students rather than the group as an entity. This study suggests that a study group could not replace the benefits of targeted or discipline-specific academic preparation, nor does it obviate the need for preparation. Overall, however, this study suggests that a study group concurrent with students' first semesters may provide essential, valuable support as students come to recognise themselves as rightful participants and members in academia, particularly when such a group attempts to provide an immersion situation in which the MCP is involved in collaborating in academic activity with participants. In this respect, a study group may provide something not afforded by pre-university preparation courses. Conducted in such a way, a study group affords an opportunity for mature students to acquire an academic Discourse.

Limitations of the research

As with all research, there are limitations to this study. First, numbers of participants seemed to be low, despite Ministry of Education statistics suggesting that one third of the students on campus at this university are mature-aged (Appendix 2). Those statistics do not indicate, however, how many of those mature students may have completed distance courses before enrolling in internal courses, nor what proportion of the mature students might be graduate or post-graduate, and in what courses they are enrolled. This research focused on recruiting new students from humanities and social sciences, with one or two science or business students in each cycle.

Seemingly low numbers need not be a problem in research such as this, which was not positivistic and did not seek to establish generalisability (Cohen et al., 2011). The usefulness of this research for other contexts will derive from practitioners or researchers in those contexts identifying areas of similarity between the context and participants in this research and their own contexts and students. The study did establish, however, that participants' academic and attitudinal characteristics mirrored those of their international peers. That would indicate a wider applicability for the research than its present context.

Another possible limitation of this research may be because the study group was voluntary it thus only attracted the most unprepared students. It is also possible that some students, as was the case for at least two who joined this study part-way through their first semesters, did not think they would need such a group. However, because the course coordinator and tutors in the academic writing course and for social work courses supported the study group, and encouraged their eligible students to attend, most first-year mature-aged students from those courses at least visited the study group and most joined the research. Some could not, because of timetable differences. As it worked out, too, approximately five students in each group was an ideal number to sit around a round table and action a collaborative immersion pedagogy. More students might have made the pedagogy more like a workshop approach.

Implications for further research

This study has suggested some areas for further research. First, the effectiveness of the study group suggests that such a group might be useful to other cohorts of diverse students perceived to be at risk, such as transitioning students from low-decile schools, particular ethnic groups, or post-graduate students from other cultures studying in New Zealand. The effectiveness of such a group might then be evaluated using a different methodology.

This research contributed to our knowledge of mature-aged open entry students at New Zealand universities. The greatest numbers of mature students, however, study by distance. A very important area for a future project could be to evaluate the impact of a study group such as the one described in this thesis made available for distance student such as those in Kahu's (2014) through appropriate technology.

A final word: Walking to the deep end

In 6.6 I cited an extract from my journal in which I mentioned that I needed to identify a pedagogy which would enable us to “quietly get in the shallow end [of a swimming pool], hold hands, and walk together to the deep end, all arriving at the same time.” For most participants, collaboratively doing academic activity (Haggis, 2006) in study group meetings enabled them to do just that. The community, though, that developed through doing things together from Cycle One onwards, within and across cycles, has continued for some participants and the MCP long past students' involvement in their respective cycles. We have celebrated successes together – many diploma and degree

graduates, a student of the year in her field, some university scholars, some first-class honours students. We have followed some of the life events of participants who decided to leave university. Some of us who met through the study group have remained loosely connected through community connections, social media, coffee occasions, or recreational outings, and particularly through the bonding that has developed through sharing aspects of our lives. Some of that bonding has tightened as participants have supported each other through traumatic family crises, relationship breakups and consequential relocations, and through deaths. Mary's long-term partner died in her third semester. Leigh, who drew so much support from her participation in the study group and contributed so much to it through her reflections, collapsed very suddenly in the study break in her sixth semester and died shortly after. Students from two cycles and some staff attended her funeral along with me.

The implications of this study concern the need for ongoing situated support for mature-aged students at university. I am sure that participants would hope that the university and individual courses within it would heed their voices and recognise them as a unique cohort, highly motivated and determined, but with some particular educational and attitudinal needs which must be met, and are able to be met, with perhaps no more cost than hiring an extra tutor as an MCP, if they are to succeed at university. I would like to finish this thesis with the suggestion Te Āwhina offered in her exit interview for future cohorts of mature students: "Tell them to have a group like this".

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Appendices

Appendix 1: MUHEC Approvals



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

17 December 2010

Dear Prudence

Re: How Do We Best Support Mature-Aged Students' Transition into Academic Writing?

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 16 December 2010.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research."

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz."

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

John G O'Neill (Professor)
**Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Director (Research Ethics)**

cc Assoc Prof Lisa Emerson
School of English and Media Studies
PN241

Dr John Muirhead, HoS
School of English and Media Studies
PN241

Dr Sharon Stevens
School of English and Media Studies
PN241

Massey University Human Ethics Committee
Accredited by the Health Research Council

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise

Massey University, Private Bag 11222, Palmerston North 4442, New Zealand T 06 3505573; 06 3505575 F 06 350 5622
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz; gtc@massey.ac.nz www.massey.ac.nz



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

22 September 2011

Dear Prue

Re: Does a Targeted Study Group for Mature Students, with Content Informed by Literature on Transitions to University and Approaches to Teaching Composition, Help Mature Students Learn to Write for University?

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 19 September 2011.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

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Yours sincerely

John G O'Neill (Professor)
**Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Director (Research Ethics)**

cc: Assoc Prof Lisa Emerson
School of English and Media Studies
PN241

Dr John Muirhead, HoS
School of English and Media Studies
PN241

Dr Gillian Skyrme
School of Linguistics and International
Languages
PN231

Prof Cynthia White, HoS
School of Linguistics and International
Languages
PN231

**Massey University Human Ethics Committee
Accredited by the Health Research Council**

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise

Massey University, Private Bag 11222, Palmerston North 4442, New Zealand T 06 3505573; 06 3506575 F 06 350 5622
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz; gtc@massey.ac.nz www.massey.ac.nz

Appendix 2: Enrolments at New Zealand universities, 2008.

Figures from the New Zealand Ministry of Education show enrolments in 2008 for students over 25 years at Massey University (although some of these would be graduate or post-graduate students) were higher than those for 20-24 years.

Provider	under 18	18-19	20-24	25-39	40+	Total
University of Auckland	334	8741	16760	8217	4499	38551
University of Waikato	125	2319	4847	3125	1768	12184
Massey University	204	3527	9348	12740	7801	33620
Victoria University of Wellington	145	4866	8681	5668	2572	21932
University of Canterbury	104	3849	7394	3990	2038	17375
Lincoln University	33	606	1344	927	274	3184
University of Otago	166	5326	9580	3610	1962	20644
Auckland University of Technology	442	4673	9196	5960	2976	23247
Total	1536	33578	66213	43642	23647	168616

- Data includes domestic and international students
- Data relates to students enrolled at any time during the year with a tertiary education provider in formal qualifications of greater than 0.03 EFTS.
- Students who were enrolled in more than one provider have been counted in each provider. Consequently, the sum of each provider may not add to the total number of students.

Source: information.officer@minedu.govt.nz

Appendix 3: Students' information and consent forms



School of English and Media Studies College of Humanities and Social Sciences

How can we support mature-aged students' transition to academic writing?

STUDENTS' INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Prue Fry, and I am a PhD student at Massey University. I have been a tutor at Massey since 1993, teaching many of the different writing papers for both first and second language students, and arts, graphic design, science, engineering and technology undergraduates. For my PhD I hope to identify the best ways to support mature-aged students in their transition to university, particularly their transition to the academic writing needed for university. My supervisors for the project are Associate Professor Dr. Lisa Emerson, and Dr. Gillian Skyrme.

Participants

I'm looking for students who could attend a study group which would meet at lunchtime or another time suitable to them who would also allow me to collect their assignments and interview them about academic writing. The study group would run for 50 minutes. In this group we would spend some time in workshop activities designed to help your writing. We may also discuss topics that mature students world-wide have identified as relevant to their transition to university and concerns that you experience that are important to your transition. The time commitment here is for up to 12 hours over the semester (50-minute study group meetings, plus 2 x 30 minute interviews, plus the time to deliver assignments to me).

Students who participate at this level will receive supermarket vouchers for at least \$20 at the end of the semester, to help compensate for time taken.

Participation is voluntary. To protect your privacy, any data collected from you that might be discussed in the research would not be able to be identified as yours. Your confidentiality and

anonymity are assured. Any data collected would be kept in a locked file and destroyed after five years.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher and supervisors named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

If you have any queries about the project, or would like more information, please contact me:

Prue Fry Room 2.33 (until June 28, 2012)
Sir Geoffrey Peren Building
Phone: 06 3569099 ext. 7304; mob. xxx
Email: p.fry@massey.ac.nz

Alternatively, you may contact one of my supervisors (addresses current until June 28, 2012):

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lisa Emerson
Room 2.38
Sir Geoffrey Peren Building
Phone: 06 3569099 ext. 2601
email: L.Emerson@massey.ac.nz

Dr. Gillian Skyrme
Room 3.13
Sir Geoffrey Peren Building
Phone 06 3569099 ext. 7754
email: g.r.skyrme@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 4: Writing Apprehension Measure

I have read the Information Sheet and understand that the Writing Apprehension Measure is a measure of my writing apprehension. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to do the Writing Apprehension Measure.

I agree/do not agree to information from the Writing Apprehension Measure being used in the research

I wish/do not wish to have data placed in an official archive.

I would like/would not like a summary of the information pertaining to the Writing Apprehension Measure. My email is below:

This is a measure of writing apprehension-how unsure you feel about aspects of written assignments. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Please could you provide the following information, and if you would like feedback about your level of writing apprehension, please give your name and email.

Age group (please circle)

17-19 20-24 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44 45-49 50-54 55-59 60+

Years since involvement in formal education-school, tertiary course, adult education, work courses (please write brief details if necessary)

1. Was at school in the last 2 years
2. 3-8 years ago
3. 9-14 years ago
4. More than 15 (specify approximately how many)

Name _____ ID _____

Directions: Below are a series of statements about writing. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. While some of these statements may seem repetitious, take

your time and try to be as honest as possible. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by circling whether you:

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
strongly agree	agree	are uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 1. I avoid writing
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 2. I have no fear of my writing being evaluated
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 3. I look forward to writing down my ideas
- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 4. I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated
- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 5. Taking a writing course is a very frightening experience
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 6. Handing in an assignment makes me feel good
- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 7. My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on an assignment
- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 8. Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 9. I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 10. I like to write my ideas down
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 11. I feel confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas in writing
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 12. I like to have my friends read what I have written
- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 13. I'm nervous about writing
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 14. People seem to enjoy what I write
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 15. I enjoy writing
- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 16. I never seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 17. Writing is a lot of fun

- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 18. I would expect to do poorly in writing courses even before I enter them
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 19. I like seeing my thoughts on paper
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 20. Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience
- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 21. I have a terrible time organising my ideas in a writing course
- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 22. When I hand in an assignment I know I'm going to do poorly
- (-) 1 2 3 4 5 23. It's easy for me to write good assignments
- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 24. I don't think I write as well as most other people
- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 25. I don't like my assignments to be evaluated
- (+) 1 2 3 4 5 26. I'm no good at writing

Appendix 5: Interview Guides

Entry interview

1. Tell me about how come you are at university this semester
2. How have you prepared yourself to come to university?
3. How are you finding it so far?
4. What kinds of support do you have for your time at university?
5. [If relevant.] In the introductory study group you mentioned [. . .]. Would you like to tell me a bit about that?
6. What goals do you have in mind for your time here and after study?
7. What sorts of writing have you done since leaving school?
8. What do you know at the moment about writing for university?
9. 8. [If applicable.] I noticed that on your writing apprehension measure you indicated [. . .]. Would you like to tell me more about that?
10. Is there anything in particular that you would like to get out of the study group?

Exit interview

1. How has the first semester gone?
2. Tell me about what was your biggest challenge
3. Tell me about your greatest success – any ‘lightbulb’ moments?
4. Have your ideas of academic writing changed over this semester?
5. How did you find the study group?
6. Is there any advice you would like to give to future mature students?

Appendix 6: Extract from Cullity (2008, pp 3-4)

This short text demonstrates some contested viewpoints about study skills programmes for mature-aged learners.

Criticisms of study skills-based AEPs suggest that these courses compensate students for their limited understanding of academic culture (Clarke et al., 1997; Gale & McNamee, 1995; McNamee, 1993). Study-skills workshops it is claimed (Ramsden, Beswick, & Bowden, 1986) foster a 'surface' as opposed to a 'deep' approach to learning (see Biggs, 1991; Gibbs, 1992). Ramsden et al. argue that academic skills courses provide students with practical strategies to complete short-term learning or assessment work. On the other hand, deep learning occurs when students engage in "the task appropriately and meaningfully" and where students implement "appropriate cognitive activities for handling it" (Biggs, p. 16). To encourage students to develop deep learning practices (i.e., critical, conceptual, and reflective thought), Ramsden et al. contend that discipline- and academic skills-content should be embedded in disciplinary knowledge.

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Contrary to the concerns of some researchers, empirical evidence suggests that the literacy/academic skills component of AEPs has assisted mature-age learners to participate successfully in undergraduate study (Cullity, 2005; Abbott-Chapman et al., 2004; Archer, Cantwell, & Bourke, 1999; Murphy, Cobbin, & Barlow, 1992; Rutledge & Blackford, 2001). For instance, a review of the Unistart program (a non-compulsory academic literacy course for alternative entry mature-age students) shows that students improved their academic confidence, developed research and writing skills, and formed peer support groups. Abbott-Chapman et al. (p. 168) concluded that UniStart participants had: "better retention patterns and were more likely to have 'satisfactory' academic records than [alternative admission students] who did not attend the Unistart program."

Appendix 7: Participant Brief Biographies

Cycle	Name/ age bracket	Brief background	A key statement from their first semester	Where now? (If known)
1	Adam 40-44	Single, ex-military trades, but with military re-structuring now part-time in a business.	“You just knew that you were writing the essays for the tutor – you had to demonstrate that you knew what they were looking for so that they could tick off their boxes.” (Ex I).	Graduated with diploma.
1	Ann 40-44	Married, two older teenaged children; fluent speaker of English as a second language with a degree from her home country, in her home language, from 20 years ago.	“I am not too sure if it is because of the time period, but there is definitely a different way. When I did my BA degree it was much more, ‘this is the information; you go and learn it and give it back to us’.” (En 1)	May 2017 graduated with Masters in her field with first-class honours. During her years on campus Ann was made a peer tutor for a difficult first-year course. Now working full time in field relevant to her degree.
4	Annette 40-44	Had worked in clerical positions for years; now sought a business degree.	“I did not stay at uni. It had become too much for me to cope with.” (Email, 4)	Unknown.
1	Bruce 25-29	From a rural background. Since leaving boarding school mid-way through year 12 had interspersed travelling extensively, with working in Australian nickel mines to fund his travel.	“I’m not 100% behind university education unless you want to be a doctor, scientist or something specific. Degrees are just a piece of paper saying you did three years doing essays etc.” (En 1)	Transferred to a polytechnic, completed a course in broadcasting, now making TV documentaries.
4	Carol 45-49	Arrived at university rather abruptly after walking out of an abusive marriage relationship. Had worked very competently in HR; sought a new career using a degree in psychology.	“Why can’t people use words in common circulation? It’s all a plot to keep some people out.” (SG3.9)	Completed her degree in less than three years; took a semester off, has completed a graduate certificate and been accepted into a post-graduate degree.
1	Charlie 35-39	From a small town about an hour from the campus. Clerical work, mostly in accounting, since leaving school. Realistic aim to become a chartered accountant.	“You think differently now, and I think the study group helps.” (Ex 1)	Adopted a ready-made family; took a year off university; has now resumed study part-time.

4	David 25-29	Had been a farmer; was desirous to enter politics so was taking courses in that area.	“Really sorry Prue. I started chatting with someone from my politics class about politics and completely forgot about the meeting until later.”	Attended only sporadically; current whereabouts unknown.
4	Di 45-49	Had enjoyed a successful, award-winning career in print journalism; now seeking a new direction after completing a degree she had begun many years ago.	“I haven’t a clue what she’s saying. [Not the words]; this whole paragraph. I’m not reading it right!” (SG4 LG.4)	Continuing to study successfully.
2	Elle 45-49	Elle had enrolled in a tertiary course to study counselling in her home city, but made a sudden decision to move to the city where the university in this study is. She brought a history of very disrupted engagement with education and some not-yet-resolved relational problems which complicated her engagement with study.	Elle left the study group after five weeks because it proved too confusing for her. “Am not good at this being a student thing.” (WN 2)	Passed two papers in her first semester. Enrolled for a second, but course content was too far beyond her ZPD. Withdrew, and eventually moved to another city.
1	Gwen 40-44	Had failed School Certificate, worked in clerical jobs, later homeschooled her two children for much of their schooling. Most recently before enrolling at university had been a teacher-aide in a primary school. Entered well-prepared, with the realistic goal of primary school teaching.	“I think I’ve started [on the ‘road’ to academic literacy]; still a long way to go; I feel I’m more in the thinking, analysing things. . . . It’s the first time that I’ve really felt that I was OK to go to university, that I could cope with that kind of thing. I never thought that I could. It’s an amazing feeling.” (Ex 1)	Became a peer writing tutor. Graduated BA with a university scholarship which supported her as she completed a graduate diploma in early childhood teaching. Now running a pre-school attached to a primary school.
2	Hamish 25-29	Qualified, successful chef, seeking a new career in planning.	“I think a lot of people who make that decision to come back to university at a mature level, they’re quite practical people, so when you put down the barnyard animals with tractors and then relate it to life, it makes a huge difference.” (Ex 2)	Has graduated.
2	Hāpeta	Ex-military. Left school with no	“I was one of those people who thought, “I don’t need	Has graduated from his 4-year degree and is

	Māori 30-34	qualifications; forestry worker then military. Realistic aim of school teaching.	to [join a study group]. I am coming from a job as a [**]. I know how to write; I know how this works; I can study; I learnt legislation, so I can anything else.” ... And then you get there and what a wake up!” (Ex 2)	employed in his new field.
4	Hemi Māori 45-49	Had worked in various fields including insurance and security in both New Zealand and Australia. Came to university to seek a social work degree.	“I was starting to look for – that’s where I got to the idea of a debate. What I looked for was, what are the rules, where’s the difference, how is it working differently?” (Ex 4)	May, 2017 graduated with first-class honours. Is working in his chosen field. “Not bad for a WINZ [security] guard” (PC, February 7, 2017).
1	Jane 40-44	Left school early to “be the big adult”. Working life largely in clerical and personnel. Completed one year of a business course in a polytechnic before enrolling at university.	“Very much don’t be blasé and presume that you know things. Take it as starting afresh and relearning until you get it right.” (Ex 1)	Elected ‘student of the year’ by peers and faculty in her chosen field in her final year; graduated with honours, now working in her chosen field.
2	Jimbob 30-34	Left school with no qualifications; perhaps unrealistic aim to become a clinical psychologist but faced multiple complicated relational, social, and academic challenges.	“This is more my level” (SG2 LG.5) when the toys for the synthesising intervention were laid out on the table.	Has returned to the heavy transport industry.
3	Ken 55-59	Successful sports coach; sought a sports management and coaching qualification.	Came for an entry interview, but did not attend study groups until sent by a lecturer close to the end of the semester. Did not understand the approach to learning taken by the science communications paper, which he failed.	Continues to study successfully, but to complete his degree he will have to succeed with the communications paper he failed in his first semester.
4	Kere Māori 30-34	Came to university to study to be a social worker after a successful career in the hospitality industry.	“Coming to the study group definitely helped me realise that I wasn’t alone and that I had every right to be here. . . . One of the hardest things to adjust to was starting from the bottom. I had come from a hospitality background where I had worked my way to the top . . . so going from confident and successful to an	Continues to study successfully.

			environment where I was of a minority group, learning a new set of rules and language, and being outnumbered by the younger students made me feel like, ‘shit can I do this? I hope I pass’.” (Ex 4)	
3	Kurt 25-29	Had worked as a qualified chef, driving school instructor, and most recently as a security guard and teacher of security guard qualifications.	“I am here on my own accord for my benefit. This is for me to go into the government sector. I am doing things like border security and international terrorism. It is going to help me get to an industry I enjoy working in.”	Withdrew, very disappointed, before the end of his first semester. Current position unknown.
1	Leigh 50-54	Left school early to take a ticket-writing course in another city. Some years later completed ‘Fine Arts Prelim’ which would have qualified her for art school. Successful working career in retail in the music industry until a marriage breakup, family bereavements and economic restructuring contributed to “five years of taking knock after knock takes its toll” and spending time in rehab.	“Having that network, that’s now, like, when I walk into the dining hall you see Mary or you see Jane and you know them. . . It just makes you feel part of the place.” (Ex 1)	Completed one course for each of 5 semesters. Collapsed and died during the mid-semester break during her 6 th semester. Was posthumously awarded a certificate in her field of study.
2	Linda 30-34	Had completed a polytechnic course in graphic design but had chosen to work locally, because of commitments in the community which meant a job in retail, rather than pursuing a career in design. Came with the firm aim of becoming a primary school teacher.	“At least if you’ve got, ‘you need to write about <i>this</i> and <i>this</i> , and then relate <i>this</i> to <i>this</i> ’, then OK, cool, easy. I can do that because you know what’s expected of you. (Linda, SG2 LG.9)	Continued to study for two years; currently living in a remote part of New Zealand and not studying.
1	Lyn 35-39	Sole parent, three teenage children, had been a successful national manager in different companies.	“PIE, PIE, PIE” (Ex 1) (“PIE” is the acronym for “point, illustration, example” as a model of paragraph structure taught in the academic writing	Traumatic relationship breakup contributed to decision not to enrol for a second semester; now working in national distribution in another

			course.)	city.
4	Maarten 60-64	Sought a new career as a counsellor	“There are bits that don’t fit my idea of which way’s up, and I find myself sort of getting, ‘am I expected to believe that? That’s rubbish!’ . . . I have my own way of deciphering language.” (SG4.LG.5)	Did not complete his first semester; did not engage with academic culture. He continued to attend the study group until near the end of the semester because “it’s got a good atmosphere” (SG4 LG.5), but valued his own way of learning.
2	Mac 45-49	Sole parent, one adult family, one high-needs younger child. Aim, to find satisfying work in a caring capacity.	“I am here because I had a sudden realisation that I can do it, and at 50, with a child with needs, I need a career to be able to earn an income to be able to help him more. . . . Plus I finally found my passion.” (En 2)	At times, when she recognised her stress levels were rising too high, Mac took a semester off. Has now graduated with the diploma she sought.
4	Māia Māori 35-39	Studying social work.	About writing essays: “It’s just playing the [academic] game”. (SG4 LG.3)	Unknown.
2	Mara 35-39	Working life had been in retail. Long-term partner had been killed in a tragic accident the year before she arrived on campus. Mara attributed much of her inability to study to continued grief from that event.	Reaction to an ‘F’ grade for plagiarising: “At least take in to account that it’s a first fricken essay ever, you know!” (Ex 2)	Not at university. Has found a new life with a new partner.
1	Marijke 35-39	Extramural, full-time worker, partial participant. Marijke had announced to a high-school teacher when she turned 15, “I’m going to leave school, get pregnant, and go on the dole” (En 1) – all of which she had done.	“Thank you for the chance to reflect on the semester. . . I think I did well. I got a score of 80 out of 100 and most of the marks I failed to obtain were through faults with referencing. I must’ve read the guide wrong.” (Ex 1)	Withdrew in her second semester; continuing to work full-time locally.
1	Mary 60-64	Mary had finished school in the 1960s with University Entrance. With no family connections with university, she had gone to a business college and then worked in clerical jobs for many years: “Be	“For me, it’s been huge to do that academic writing course. It is quite intense, a lot of extra work. You begin, then you do a draft, then away you go again, researching. So you can say, this is what is, but this and this and this. Substantiate. That is what I	Despite her entrance qualification, Mary failed more courses than she passed, attributable largely to the juggling she had to contend with. Her long-term partner died part-way through her third semester. She continued to study for a

		home and be a mother, or be a teacher, nurse, work in a shop. There was not quite the same vision then.” (En 1) Most recently before enrolling, she and her partner had worked abroad managing estates.	have got out of this. Substantiate what I was saying.” (Ex 1)	while, but now her energies are taken up with after-school care for her grandchildren.
2	Moana Māori 25-29	Sole parent from a rural town about an hour from the campus; was unable to attend study groups because of commitments in her community and no other need to attend campus on study group days.	“In the study group, just being able to meet a lot of first time mature students and talk[ing] about what we’d done before and things like that made me feel I wasn’t alone.” (En 2)	Unknown.
2	Murray 25-29	Had worked in landscaping since leaving school; now sought a career involving defence and security studies. Attributed great value to the semester-long preparation course he had attended.	Advice for future mature students: “Have a career in mind. Maybe it’s not too important to be absolutely sold on what it will lead to but have some idea of the path it’s going to lead to is worthwhile I think.” (Ex 2)	Has graduated, found a job, and bought a house in the university city.
3	Norman ?perhaps 40-44	Entry to university was encouraged by his employers, a high-profile local business, seeking to upskill their staff.	“That’s where it is so important <i>for them</i> [the university] to say, ‘Hey, look, this is what you need to do now’.” (Ex 3, emphasis his)	Was very disappointed with his brief university experience, before which he attempted to find out what he needed to know to prepare for his course. That search was fruitless. Norman withdrew and at that time was still working with the local business which had employed him for some years.
4	Petra 50-54	Had left school early with no qualifications, but put herself through School Certificate and University Entrance. Successful careers in a bank and in her husband’s business. Came to university to study environmental health, hoping to	“I came there thinking, “Yeay, I’m going to do a degree! “And, you know, I didn’t have any kind of real idea about what was involved and she [an advisor to whom Petra spoke before enrolling] was quite sensible and said, ‘Well, you haven’t been in a learning situation	Graduated with diploma; went on an overseas trip, current whereabouts unknown.

		develop a new career.	for such a long time, take it quietly, start with the diploma and then, see how you feel'." (En 4)	
4	Robin 30-34	Science student; previous successful career as a chef; sought a new career perhaps in human nutrition.	"Meeting with a bunch of mature students each week gave me something to look forward to. Even though I had so little writing in my first semester, I hope that I will be able to use the information shared in those groups for my psychology paper next year. Having Prue and those people who I knew from the writing group to say hi to around campus made it feel much friendlier faster than I had imagined." (Ex 4)	Has graduated; was unable to find a satisfactory job, so has returned overseas.
2	Rōhi Māori 30-34	Sole parent; ex-military, seeking to be a social worker.	"I thought, 'Oh, I'm gonna fail. I don't even know what I'm talking about because I don't understand what they're saying'. . . [My lightbulb moment was] I think when I finally realised I knew what I was talking about. That [name of essay] was a big one, when I adapted myself." (Ex 2)	Took time out from her degree to "have babies" after she married the father of her children. Continues to study part-time while working part-time in her new field.
4	Sam 25-29	Psychology student, former career in insurance industry	"Having 13 of us, just sitting around listening to other people in the same situation kind of makes you feel a whole lot better. . . Actually sitting down looking at an essay. . . It showed the structure. It's not a puzzle. If I think about it can understand the logic." (En 4)	Continues to study psychology on another campus of the university.
4	Steven 30-34	History of unsuccessful engagement with schooling. Worked in another area of the university who were prepared to pay for him to study in a related area, but Steven chose to study a paper he thought would be of personal interest.	About learning to write: "It's like, you can talk to someone about driving a tractor, but they've got to get out and get on the thing and try to drive themselves." (SG4 AG.4)	Withdrew mid-way through the semester. Continued to work on campus after involvement in the study group and at one time completed a course more relevant to his field of employment. Now employed off campus in another area.
1	Tama	Had a degree in Māori language and a	"In Māori, writing in the old days was like carving,	Was not supported by his partner; withdrew part-

	Māori 45-49	graduate diploma in Māori language teaching; seeking to begin an MA which would be written in English.	tukutuku panels, paintings, kowhaiwhai, patterns So when I see something like that, I can speak to it. It is through a story or songs or incantations, through pictures we can tell our story. That is the sort of structure that I use orally and in writing – writing in Māori. But in English, it is the <i>whole</i> structure that I have seen. . . . When it comes to writing in English, there is all this structure that you have to remember.” (En 1)	way through the semester.
1	Te Āwhina Māori 30-34	Clear aim to find work in Māori mental health.	“Tell them to have a group like this, because then you won’t feel like “my brain is too old” You won’t [panic] because you will have other people to compare it with.” (Ex 1)	Was made Māori student mentor for a first-year course; graduated BA; was recently teaching te reo part-time.
3	Tim 25-29	Came to university after seven years of travelling the world. Aimed to work in psychology.	“To have that group there and see that everyone is fumbling around in the dark a wee bit at the moment has been quite good because it makes me feel a bit more confident. I feel I can I ask if I’ve got a big question; I’ve got someone I can ask that can help me out with that and work through it. Very reassuring.” (En 3)	Did a study abroad semester and then returned for another semester on campus. Current whereabouts unknown.
2	Tina 40-44	Distance student taking the academic writing course with a view to gaining a degree and then undertaking teacher-training.	About the study group: “People contact for me, feeling a part of the paper.” (En 1)	Withdrew before the end of the first semester when she accepted a full-time job as a teacher-aide, which she perceived to be more realistic than the degree she was aiming for in order to teach.
4	Tony 30-34	Had enjoyed a high-pressure job in the military, now studying for a business degree to seek a new direction for his life.	There aren’t many mature students in economics . . . so it was a good break in the week to just chill for an hour. The little gems Prue gave were invaluable. Listening to other people’s issues relating to their assignments and the methods of how they overcame the problems	Has graduated and is now employed in another city. Was made a peer mentor for a difficult course during his time on campus.

			they faced was helpful.	
2	Zara 25-29	Sole parent and beneficiary since leaving school.	“I don’t own my good marks; only the bad ones.” (SG 2.2E)	Continues to study part-time; has decided to change her area of study