

Pedagogical Research Fund
for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies in Higher Education
Phase 3 (2007/08)

Project title

Socialisation And Identity in Learning in Applied Linguistics (SAIL)

Final report

Dr Richard Kiely
Jim Askham

Abstract

This report presents the research design and methodology, the approach to data analysis and interpretation, and the pedagogical implications of this small scale study into the learning experience of FT international students on a Masters programme in the TESOL Applied Linguistics field. The focus of learning is the wider curriculum, constituted by optional activities, interactions and opportunities for learning in a research oriented department. The findings indicate that students in general manage their learning effectively: they make decisions based on personal dispositions and strategic factors. There is much variation in both learning trajectory and outcome. Such variation appears due in part to learning identity, already well-formed at the start of the programme, and in part to the extent to which socialization processes are invested in. The pedagogical implications for tutors on this and other programmes relate to the roles of tutors and students, the use of VLE (Blackboard), and the value of opportunities to reflect and interact as components of learning.

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Summary – Pedagogical Implications

From the findings of this research study some pedagogic principles can be derived and set out as contexts for discussion with programmes on ways of creating more effective learning opportunities within programmes such as this. These in summary form are as follows:

- In the taught spaces of the programme, emphasise the role of the tutor, particularly mapping knowledge and modeling analysis and argumentation procedures. Where student collaborative work is used, consider whether tasks are appropriately structured for students to progress their understanding and skills (See 3.1).
- Promote learning groups (or reading groups) but ensure students are responsible for organizing them and establishing specific topics for discussion. Expect such groups to evolve and fade as students become more involved in individual study projects, and friendship groups take over from more formally organized meetings (See 3.2).
- Promote attendance at extra-curricular events such as research seminars and talks. Advise students of the value of learning from observation about how such events are structured and managed, and how presenters construct positions, questions and arguments (see 3.3)
- Decide whether Open Learning Environments such as Blackboard are intended to support learning as a transmission facility (announcements, readings and learning materials), or a context for learning through interaction, such as exploration of issues through the Discussion Board (DB). If the latter, then it is likely students will understand the DB as part of the 'taught space' of the programme, and expect participation by tutors. Where students want interaction or clarification without tutor involvement they will use other media (phone, MSN, etc.). These considerations need to be part of the overall policy framework for the integration of ICT resources into learning (See 3.4).
- Integrate reflection into coursework assessment, but work with awareness of students' understanding of the nature and role of such reflection, and how the self-assessment implicit in this is different from the assessment by tutors. While reflection may be a required part of an assessment format, it is worth considering how reflective text prepared for an audience and specific assessment purpose may skew the opportunities for learning intended for such activities (See 3.5).
- Students value participation in research activities which allow them to describe, analyse and reflect on their learning experience. The Ejournal strategy in this study constituted an effective means for many of the students in this study. There are other ways in which such opportunities may be constructed within programmes, for example, personal or welfare tutors/advisors, focused evaluation within the programme or group of programmes. Tutors and coordinators should explore ways of engaging students in active sense-making of their experience of learning (See 3.6).

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1. Introduction

This pedagogical research report describes the implementation of the SAIL study and the issues arising which have implications for both pedagogical action and further research. *Section 2* focuses on research implementation issues: the key sections from the original proposal are set out with a commentary detailing amendments and changes which occurred in carrying out the research. *Section 3* sets out some findings of the research and *Section 4* presents a discussion of pedagogical implications. *Section 5* concludes this report, with a discussion of pedagogic implications and areas for further research. The *Appendices* include the full research proposal, documentation on data collection procedures, a list of dissemination events, and a Powerpoint presentation which is a composite of different presentations which address the theoretical, methodological and pedagogical issues.

2. Research implementation

2.1 Project aims and objectives

This study aimed to document the student learning experience in a contemporary interaction-rich and technology-aware Higher Education (HE) curriculum in Applied Linguistics and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and understand this experience in terms of current theoretical accounts of identity and socialization in learning. The aims were articulated as follows:

- A. To explore postgraduate learning in Applied Linguistics from a socialisation and identity formation perspective;
- B. To document the particular experiences of international students on a one year HE programme;
- C. To inform on the design of the wider postgraduate curriculum and strategies for its effective realization.

These aims translate in five specific objectives which detail both the research process and the links to specific pedagogical strategies.

2.2 Specific Objectives

- i)* To construct a database of processes of learning in a FT Masters programme with particular reference to collaborative learning with an academic community;
- ii)* To analyse these data from socialisation and identity perspectives;
- iii)* To inform in particular to learning in four areas:
 - skills in academic language uses (including advanced language skills);
 - skills in being a postgraduate student in the electronic information age;
 - skills in Applied Linguistics research; and

skills in English language teaching

iv) To construct rich accounts of individual learning experience to document the learning trail leading to completion of a dissertation as an individual, independent study, with particular reference to:

- Collaborative learning in class
- Participation in non-programme specific research seminars
- Informal learning groups organised outside of class
- Use of virtual learning environments
- Shared reflections with other students on tasks and challenges
- Participation in this dialogic research

v) To present these accounts as case studies which can be used as workshop materials for HE teacher development (with particular relevance to international students, and to postgraduate and research programmes in the social sciences), and for student orientation purposes.

2.3 Research design and methodology

The aims and specific objectives have also enabled the research to be carried out as planned. The data collection summarized in Table 1 below, allowed for construction of extensive data bases, some which have been analysed so far, and some which can be explored further as time resources allow.

Stages	Learning Focus	Data Collection	Data Analysis
Stage 1 Term 1 Oct-Dec 2006	Induction Understanding the learning task Engagement with the academic community	E-journals Base line documentation (Application data and orientation assignment)	Review of baseline and e-journal data to generate Interview and narrative workshop 1 focus
Stage 1 Term 2 Jan –May 2007	Consolidation Honing strategies for successful learning Increasing independence in learning through community membership	E-journals Interviews Narrative workshop (Feb 2007) Documentation on assessment	Identification of themes to explore in ongoing individually-oriented e-journals and interviews
Stage 1 Term3 Jun- Sept 2007	Realisation of learning goals Achieving independently in the context of dissertation writing	E-journals Interviews Documentation of dissertations	Follow-up on issues emerging from earlier stages Compilation of 2 detailed case studies.

Table 1: Summary of research design and data collection

2.4 Participants

Profiles

The seven student participants invited to participate in this research study were randomly allocated to an accessible 'tutor group'. They were invited to participate in two stages. First they were informed by email of the project and invited to attend a briefing meeting to discuss further. All seven responded enthusiastically and agreed to attend the meeting. Second, at this meeting the nature of participation was set out, and there was extended discussion of the kind of research involved. The consent letter was explained and they were asked to sign and return it within a week if interested in participating. To ensure that there was no pressure, it was explained that they should not sign it immediately, and that participation would not be discussed again if the consent letter was not returned. All seven students returned the letter within the week. The profiles of the seven participants, all referred to using feminine pronouns here, regardless of actual gender, are set out below.

Chi – A very insightful and articulate private language school teacher. She became a kind of spokesperson in the narrative workshop, a role she played in class and seminars generally. Her background is that of positive learning, with a personal expectation that she would be successful which was supported at every stage in her social environment: parents, teachers and colleagues all expected her to do well, she believed she would be successful, and she fulfilled these expectations. She showed an ability to grasp meanings

through reading, listening and discussion, and seemed keenly aware of the 'other' in learning interactions. This was evident in the data collection procedures – group discussion and interviews – where she was always focused and articulate. Her writing was characterized by a strong sense of audience, which is likely to have contributed to her consistently strong performance on courses and at the dissertation stage. In Chi's reflections on her learning experiences, potentially diverse roles are braided together:

Chi: Well, in terms of academic as I mentioned, it's a preparation stage for me, you know, to go on to the next stage. In terms of teaching, I think now I'm more equipped with the radical back-up from research [...] [...] as a student I think the experience here, you know, explores my relationships with others, for example, I'm now associated with more people, people from very different countries.

(Interview Month 8)

Ilan – A high school teacher who is very analytical and insightful. She spent a year in primary school in an English-speaking country and since then has been a successful English language learner, scoring high grades through her university studies and teacher training programme. She proved systematic and thorough in her approach to tasks, and liked working alone. She focussed on the key aspects of learning, such as core reading and assignment writing, and tended to avoid other optional activities. She participated in a learning group, working particularly closely on specific projects with another student, less so than Ilan. Ilan described this activity as product-focussed: each student read chapters and made notes which were shared. Her faith was thus less in the processes of interaction than in the outcome of the shared reading enterprise. One motivation here may be Ilan's wish to control the context of her learning, a strategy which aligns with her preference for monologue rather than dialogue, for private study rather than collaborative work. Related to this is a faith in tutors and learning based on expertise and transmission:

Ilan: But [...] sometimes I find it actually very difficult [...] to discuss something about academic issues with your classmates because we lack of this experience in Taiwan. Actually, [...] we don't have much training on discussion on academic topics issues, so it's even harder for us to discuss it in English.

(Narrative workshop Month 5)

Kai – A recent English graduate whose motivation for this programme was access to a PhD programme in an area of particular interest in Applied Linguistics. She has always been a strong student, with a prodigious capacity to read and remember: she tends to come across as encyclopedic, with little reference to actual practice in research or professional areas. Her interests are focused, and while she is not very interested in other aspects of Applied Linguistics, she is aware of theoretical positions on the role of autonomy, technology and assessment in the field. Her writing style did not develop as expected during the course: it was characterized from the start by a lack of reader engagement, both in clarity of argument and in presentation aspects such as proof-reading. She tended to serially set out facts and frameworks, and partly for this reason she did not progress as might have been anticipated at the outset. Her performance in many aspects of the programme seemed to have a display motivation: her participation in class and seminars, as well as the data collection procedures, was characterized by demonstrating the extent of her knowledge, and her participation in additional activities such as seminars seemed to relate either to specific academic interests or to a desire to being seen there. The lack of a strong listening element in interactions may have contributed to a disappointing performance at the dissertation stage: Kai according to her tutor seemed not to take on board key advice in the development and presentation of the dissertation study.

Lin – A university English teacher, Lin had a learning background marked by struggle. She found learning hard, but always succeeded, through perseverance, and through insightful analysis of requirements of the situation. She is socially motivated to succeed, both by her parents, and by peers. This motivation was articulated by not failing or being seen to fail. A good deal of her energy on the course was ensuring her peers were unaware of the difficulties she encountered. This led to abandoning her learning group (see below). After a crisis of confidence which impeded progress on her dissertation over many months, she was motivated by a deadline which determined her graduation ceremony date: she completed a strong piece of work in a very short time in order to be included in the ceremony with her cohort.

Peng – A high school English teacher who loved English as a subject (language and literature) since primary school when she was encouraged by an inspiring teacher. She was strongly professionally motivated, seeking to improve her teaching skills and build on the various teacher development courses she has taken in communicative language teaching. She liked discussion and collaborative learning but found the academic aspects of the programme – reading and writing – very challenging. A part of her frustration with her learning was familiarity with a teacher's perspective on communication and interaction in language

learning and teaching, but limited understanding of, or interest in the theoretical bases for these notions, and the ways in which research develops such perspectives. The affective aspects of learning proved particularly significant for Peng – she appreciated social engagement and interpersonal rapport with student colleagues and tutors, and when this was missing, she found it hard to engage with the reading and assignments. She gradually fell behind in her coursework and for a combination of reasons, personal and financial as well as learner identity factors, she does not complete the programme.

Sen – Qualified as a teacher, she did not like this work, and became a materials developer for a company producing CD-based materials for English language learning. Her problem with teaching was its social nature: as a shy person, Sen preferred to work individually, even in isolation. She said little in the narrative workshop, but participated actively in the ejournal element of the study. She saw her learning in a historical perspective: she was a product of her culture and history, and was comfortable within this identity. She did well in assignments and in the dissertation and succeeded after the course in attaining a promoted post, due to the innovative perspectives into learning which she developed during the course. She is thus an example of a self-directed, autonomous student who on the surface may not reflect such a profile. She was aware of her learner identity, and based on this awareness, successfully negotiated a learning trajectory which was right for her:

I am used to sitting in a quiet place and thinking independently. I know that if I can use my words (one or two sentences) to summarize the whole chapter, then that means I've caught the main idea. There are some details that I have to check for sure, but I think it will be much more efficient to get correct and complete answers from books than from peers.
(Ejournal Month 2)

For Sen negotiation was not evidenced in actual interactions, but related effectively to 'the meanings of experience of membership in social communities' (Wenger 1998: 145). Sen had a clear understanding of the nature of the learning required of her, and her own personal strategies to achieve this.

Tian – A private sector English teacher, she had attained a seniority in this field. In addition to teaching she had responsibilities in course organization and teacher training. She was not a confident learner: from childhood she found it difficult, and always achieved against the odds. She spoke of herself as a weak student, and lived this identity in class and in the narrative workshop. Her learner identity was oriented to the view of significant others – her parents, in earlier learning experiences, and tutors and classmates on this course – and framed by a view of barely achieving the goals set by others. This view often left her silent: she agreed with other students on many issues, and in interview had little analysis on her learning to set out. Due to family problems she did not complete the programme according to schedule.

Table 2 below sets out additional profile data: the age, learning experience, language proficiency (on entry to the programme, and the grades received for assessed work on the programme). The attached Powerpoint presents two more developed cases – Chi and Lin.

Name	Age	U/G exit profile	Lang Profile (IELTS or other)					Progression (6 taught units + dissertation) (Three pass levels – A, B, C)						
			O	L	R	W	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Diss
Chi	24	90.5	7	7	7.5	7	7	A	A	A	B	A	A	A
Ilan	26	87.11	7.5	8.5	7.5	7	7	A	A	A	A	C	A	A
Kai	20	3.20/4.0	TOEFL 603; TWE 5					C	B	B	C	C	C	C
Lin	22	80 (top 15%)	6.5	6.5	6.5	6	7	C	C	C	(C)	C	C	B
Ping	27	2.54 (cl 2.2)	7.5	7	7.5	8	7	B	C	B	B	-	C	-
Sen	26	3.46 (MA)	TOEFL 253 TWE 4.5					B	B	B	B	C	C	B
Tian	30	GA:66.31 (fair)	6.5	6	6	6	7	C	C	C	C	C	D	-

Table 2: Profiles of SAIL students

2.5 Identity and socialization

The two overarching themes of this study, identity and socialization, are both reflected in these profiles drawn from the interviews and other data. All have an identity as a successful language learner, something which might be assumed from their successful application for a place on this postgraduate course, and from a previous study of international students in this context (Rea-Dickins et al 2007). This identity however does not always mean a strong learner identity more generally, or a strong identity for learning in the successful foreign language (here, English). Many of the students – Chi, Lin, Peng, Ilan and Tian describe salient childhood moments where a sense of achievement and English language learning converge to construct a sense of personal fulfillment and realization through English. The data from initial statements on learning during the one-year postgraduate course reflect expectations that the ‘immersion’ element would lead to strong language and culture learning. While the students did not express it in terms of socialization theory, there was a clear view that their successful classroom-based learning of English over many years would in the context of living ‘in English’ for one year be further enhanced. As Sen put it in an Ejournal entry, the learning aspiration is ‘native-speaker level’:

As for the degree of the development of my English, I think it is still challenging for me to understand English naturally within half year. For example, I understand because I pay attention and I am energetic. If I am in a state of low spirit, I cannot even understand a word. I think that is one of the differences between a native speaker and non-native speaker. If one day I can understand English without noticing, I think my English to some extent is achieved to native level.
Ejournal Month 6

In addition, a motivation for joining the particular course was the research reputation and research culture of the department in which it was located. Kai, in an early journal entry, makes clear that the reputation of the institution and programme are important:

I want to have a deeper mastery of the knowledge in these areas which will do great help to my future study and teaching work. In my view, MSc TESOL in University of Bristol is a good place for postgraduate study, from which I can enlarge my understanding in Language Analysis, Pedagogy, Research Methods, Language Testing, etc., and I deem that I can lay a good academic foundation for the research from the courses.
Ejournal Month 1

It is reasonable to infer therefore, that the learning experience of individual students would be influenced by their learning identity on the one hand, and their engagement with and participation in the range of activities which characterize a research-led department. The twin frameworks of identity and socialization thus facilitate an analysis of learning experiences, both within the specific programme and in the academic and social community where this located. Table 1 above and the PPT appended to this report document the learning experience on these students. The learning patterns and issues have pedagogical implications: teaching effectiveness is not just effective transmission, uptake and reproduction of new information: rather it is the framing of a strong learner identity and supporting negotiation and interaction so that the learning is both transforming and affirming. Such a pedagogy connects with students’ learner identities, and supports investment in learning practices which may be familiar or novel, recognizably successful, or initially inefficient, and which are recognized as means for achieving personal goals. Section 3 of this report explores the pedagogic issues in greater detail.

2.6 Instrumentation

The instrumentation developed for this research is included in the appendices as follows:

Appendix 3: Consent letter

Appendix 4: Ejournal initial guidelines

Appendix 5: Narrative workshop topic areas and guiding questions

Appendix 6: Interview schedule

Appendix 7: Writing rating form

Appendix 8: SAIL Dissemination activities

The volume of data generated through these procedures was extensive: All the students were keen participants in Stages 1 and 2, and 4 continued to provide ejournal data in Stage 3. All participated in the

narrative workshop and in individual interviews. Only one narrative workshop was held: this was because we felt that this workshop was successful in achieving a rich depiction of shared experience, but a deeper more Individualistic perspective could be developed more effectively through interview and ejournal dialogue. An additional data capture involved the close scrutiny of students' texts which they submitted by two experienced second language writing tutors and assessors. This assessment process was further augmented by a recorded workshop run by the lead researcher where the tutors discussed the factors informing their assessment.

Ejournals

The ejournal strategy was devised to allow students a space to describe their learning experience. It was managed by the lead researcher. Students were asked to respond to an email which had specific queries (see Appendix 4). Two such emails were sent, one in Month 2, soon after students agreed to participate in the study, and again in Month 4, when students had completed initial core modules and assessments, and were embarking on specialist study modules. In the first email students were asked to comment on past experiences of learning and current expectations. In both initiating emails students were asked to comment on their experience of a range of curriculum components:

- Individual learning
- Blackboard
- Classmates
- Writing assignments
- Lectures and seminars
- Tutorials

All students replied, some briefly and some at greater length. Some were expansive and insightful, for example Sen, while some were analytical but impersonal, for example Ilan and Kai; minimal and somewhat descriptive, for example Lin and Tian. These responses changed over time: some students did not reply or replied minimally to further queries, others took this opportunity for dialogue very seriously and set out in detail the frustrations and difficulties they were experiencing and accounts of the factors which might explain these. Two students at the end emailed the researcher to comment on the therapeutic value of the research participation in general and the ejournal in particular in sustaining them through difficult periods in their learning.

Narrative workshop

The narrative workshop was carried out Month 5. Jim Askham led the workshop, which he audio-recorded and transcribed. The cues were set out in a Powerpoint presentation, which in the room became a second focal point (in addition to Jim, the facilitator). This distribution of focus was intended to avoid each participant answering the researcher's questions. This strategy was successful: Jim was able to remain silent for an extensive part of the workshop as the students explored the issues. The participation levels varied extensively: Chi quickly emerged as a spokesperson, and further comment was often framed as support for the points she set out. Some students participated minimally, in some cases only when specifically prompted by Jim. However the discussion proved revealing, particularly in relation to the use of the Discussion function of Blackboard – the Open Learning Facility for their programme. A discussion of this data is set out in Section 3.4 below. After the workshop all students were invited to another lunchtime gathering where the lead researcher discussed the transcribed discussion. All took up this offer, and while it did not lead to much additional data, it was considered valuable by the students as a data analysis workshop.

Interviews

The approach to individual interviews was based on Kvale's (1996) InterView perspective: we sought to develop a co-construction of each student's learning experience. Two particular strategies were employed to achieve this focus: first each interview was loosely structured (see Appendix 6) around developmental themes, with the depth of the probe into the ordained topics determined by what the student had to say. This strategy succeeded in generating nuanced descriptions of events and processes constructed as significant by the interviewees. Second we used artifacts to support a task-based interview approach. One task was to show each student a book – *Speaking* (Bygate 1987) – and ask how they would refer to it in conversation with a classmate. Where they use the name of the author, or the name and date, this would reflect socialized learning, since it is normal in academia to refer to publications in this way. Where the student used the title of the book, it would represent a referencing strategy which the student had come with. (The rationale for this task was based on our observation over many years that some students who are effective learners through observation of academic practices adopt the name and date form of reference, while others appear not to notice the academic practice. In this research the systematic data collection through this task would provide the beginning of a basis for theorizing that learning is supported strongly by observation of social practices as a peripheral participant in a new community). The second task involved asking students in

interview to comment on the language and academic style in Month 8 on a text which they had written seven months earlier. In each case the text selected was an initial assignment on the course which was not formally assessed and was not credit-bearing. The rationale for this activity was the value of capturing student perspectives on text which might be considered to reflect an earlier stage in their academic development. Where there had been successful learning on the programme (as evidenced by assignment grades) this strategy was particularly effective: Chi for example was able to identify a metaphorical expression which she regarded as not academic in style and would no longer use:

In this task I think my writing is not so academic, it's more close to creative writing, I would think about rhetoric, or I would use the words, for example I 'found the engine that propelled me in language learning' [reading from assignment, page 3] but now probably I won't use a sentence like that. [...] that helped me to become a successful language learner'

(Interview Month 9)

This is revealing: there is no specific guideline to students to desist from using metaphorical or idiomatic expressions which might be characteristic of Undergraduate programmes in EFL, English Literature and Creative writing. However such expressions might be considered rare in functional, ascetic academic prose. Successful students within the socialization framework observe such practices and make sense of the meaning system the practice is part of.

Through these tasks, the interviews captured aspects of 'performance' which reflect learning as well as attitudes to the programme and reflections on experience. The tasks also serve another purpose: they engaged the participants through a focus on something other than the interviewer and his agenda: they presented a context for talk which involved the students in examining their own learning achievements, and in exploring the factors which influenced these.

Document analysis

A range of documents were accessed, with specific student consent, as part of the research. These included:

- Admissions documentation for previous learning achievement levels, language scores, and motivation statements;
- Assignments and tutor feedback;
- Periodic review forms (these were optional and not all students completed them);
- Electronic data from the discussion board of Blackboard and emails.
- Researcher observation notes based on unrecorded discussions, lectures and seminars.

In addition to the planned activities, we also explored the texts produced by students. Two raters agreed to rate the writing quality of i) the orientation assignment (written in Month 1), and ii) the opening chapter of the dissertation (final draft – Month 12). They looked at 7 orientation assignment and 4 dissertation chapters, rating and commenting on academic writing quality – as set out in Appendix 6.

3. Some findings and pedagogical implications

In this section the finding related to the pedagogic themes outlined in the research proposal are discussed. The starting point in each case is the Narrative Workshop data, which is augmented by interview and other data. Key findings here which have wider pedagogic implications are explored further in Section 4.

3.1 Collaborative learning in class

Overall the views of students reflect some hesitancy about collaborative learning in the classroom. In the narrative workshop there is an overall positive evaluation but with reservations, for example 'quite good' (Ping). Generally students regard it as useful, efficient, and teacher-led. Its effectiveness is limited due to difficulty which has three sources i) it is a new type of activity in which the students have 'no training', ii) the 'academic issues' are unfamiliar and challenging, and iii) the fact that the discussion is in English (Ilan, with others – Kai, Chi, - agreeing). The hesitation about this form of collaborative learning is further evidenced in course evaluations where the tasks and structure of seminars has been the context of low satisfaction ratings. In pushing for an explanation of why these activities do not work very well, Chi comments on the separation of 'thoughts' and 'topic' (internal/subjective and external/objective perspectives). She notes the benefits of collaborative work *after* instruction, and also having the problem-solving modelled by the tutor, for example in relation to data analysis tasks: 'we like to see the tutor tell us where it fits and where all the categories should be put'. Ping becomes more enthusiastic contrasting collaborative with individual work which is 'lonely'. She is familiar with collaborative work, but in setting out three requirements for successful

learning: i) goals, ii) participants; iii) managing the process, she emphasizes the fact that such activities cannot be considered to be automatically successful. Ilan agrees noting the need for 'proper guidance from the teacher'. Students seem to like convergent tasks, where the conclusion is self-confirming, rather than divergent, which can be open and undirected or just an exchange of opinions. Sen emphasises the need for reading as the basis for having something to say. Ilan notes that presentation is better than discussion – because it is controlled – 'prepare in advance' and 'a time limit'. Kai emphasises autonomy, but this is on the basis of what a previous teacher told her.

This part of the discussion in the narrative workshop is very revealing: the students have an expectation that time and activity in the taught space of the programme will focus on the contribution of the tutor. They are aware that they as learners have a substantial contribution to learning – and as discussed below, this varies from individual to individual. The key issue discussed in the next section as an implication for pedagogy relates to task design and structure. They see little value in collaborative talk where tasks are loosely designed, and there is no teacher modelling of how to complete the task. These views should not be construed as support for traditional teacher-led teaching, but rather for understanding the student perspective on the 'input' or taught space of a given programme.

3.2 Informal learning groups organised outside of class

In the narrative workshop this topic generated a lot of discussion. As Chi noted, 'we all have the experience of informal discussion'. All students articulated benefits: Tian notes that it is beneficial for 'lower' students – an identification marker for her own status in the group. Kai reframes this in a kind of mutual, level-free way. Ilan commented on the efficiency in learning; Chi observed that such groups, and the negotiation of course input they involved, constituted 'affective support'; Peng mentioned 'developing autonomy'. (Peng). Chi described the process – her group was organised with a revolving chair, and was supported by regular telephone contact. Chi described learning in informal groups as one of three contexts of learning: i) in class; ii) private study; and iii) collaborative work with others outside class. *In class* seemed to be the taught space, characterized by the role and responsibility of the teacher. *Private study* was the responsibility of each individual. *Collaborative learning groups* (or reading groups as some participants referred to this category of learning activity) involved shared responsibility, which in turn requires someone to assume a leadership role. Others seemed to agree with this analysis: where students control and own, they seem more engaged and committed. And the requirement for this is not having the tutors involved – when they are, as in the taught space, a different set of criteria kick in: it is about teaching, not about learning.

The two cases developed in detail within this study provide different perspectives on learning groups: For Chi, learning groups are an opportunity for her to interact and further her own understanding of the particular topic:

Classmates: They are almost as important as my own reading. We had so many discussions everyday. No matter it is on the way to lecture or during lunch break. It is great to have someone who is doing (and also worrying) the same thing as you do. And by these discussions, many confusions and doubts were solved.
(Ejournal Month 2)

For Lin, group learning is something she tries, but then drops in favour of individual study:

Some studying ways have changed, that is, recognizing the importance of group discussion deeply which can burst into sparks in thought in many occasions and promote understanding [of] theory
(Ejournal Month 1)

Lin: [...] we cancelled the group because [...] we haven't the class time, that means we all should have studied by ourselves. In this way, everybody has his or her private time [...] and secondly maybe as the time goes on we think we have a, how to say, the higher ability to do things to think things by ourselves so we think maybe is less essential for us to have to discuss together maybe.
(Interview Month 8)

While her experience may relate in some ways towards the particular difficulties Lin experienced during the course, the decline of learning group activity is part of a wider pattern. A key feature of the curriculum structure for this course was a foundational stage at the start where all students undertook the same modules, reading and assessment, followed by increasingly varied patterns of study as students take specialist modules, and culminating in the individual dissertation. This structure may mean that learning groups, organized as such, are appropriate at the start, but less so later on. They may transform into smaller

friendship relationships where students support each other, though not through organized collaborative tasks.

3.3 Participation in non-programme specific research seminars

In the department and institution where this research was carried out, there was a range of seminar and presentation activity. These were organized by research centres and networks, covering a range of Applied Linguistics issues and related educational and international issues. The students in the narrative workshop were hesitant about the benefits of these extra-curricular activities: most had not attended many, for different reasons: difficulty of seminars (Peng); the seminars were not embedded in course, and there was nothing to read in advance (Ilan); interest in the seminars depended on 'academic interests' (Kai). Chi describes an experience of a research seminar which was very difficult: – 'we cannot follow the thinking in that'. Tian had never attended. Peng described getting more from seminars as year progressed, but notes that they benefit those interested in research rather than in teaching. Lin notes that research is the cutting edge: very new information. Chi described the seminars in Applied Linguistics she attended as different from class: 'less formal, more relaxed'. Her experience in particular clearly reflects learning in a Community of Practice (Wenger 1998) framework: she described the seminar as 'a convention in the academic area', and students are 'beginners in this area'. The potential for learning was in observing the process: 'how people present, how people sitting down ask questions, how they respond to the presenter. So I think it is like a demonstration for us'.

Kai in interview relates how her selective interest in the seminar programme is directed by her own immediate research needs:

My dissertation and also my research design for the testing unit assignment is on the portfolio and this is kind of interesting, is giving me some more information although the context is different, I will do the study in China and this is in Korea and here is introduced some electronic portfolio [...]. So I think from this point of view it's helpful'

(Interview Month 8)

There is evidence here of opportunities for learning, particularly where students are aware of the benefits of being an astute observer of social practices like Chi, or strategic and selective like Kai. There are also challenges in getting students to access this wider curriculum, particularly in the initial stages of the programme when seminar topics and discussion seem difficult, abstract and unrelated to assignments. These challenges are discussed further in Section 4 below.

3.4 Use of virtual learning environments - Blackboard

Blackboard was used as a learning tool on all courses of the programme. It was the database for all learning materials (Powerpoints; handouts; references, etc), the definitive noticeboard for course administration. Beyond these transactional functions, the Discussion Board (DB) function was promoted as interactional support for learning within a supportive learning community (Salmon 2000, 2002). The students were generally positive about different aspects of Blackboard, particularly in relation to the database and noticeboard functions: they appreciated the opportunity to check for administrative notices (Chi); see class materials in advance (Lin); to review session materials and slides (Kai) download materials (Tian). At the time of the narrative workshop the DB was not very active on all courses. This reality, while not the focus of this workshop topic, seemed to have influenced the direction of discussion. In relation to the DB there was little enthusiasm: Peng stated that she 'quite liked it'. Some mentioned that 'time' was the limiting factor. Chi ventured a community of practice explanation: as novices in the subject area, they found it difficult to ask questions, and feared 'looking a little bit stupid' (Chi). Peng suggested an identity explanation: they interacted less because they were Asian students, characterized by a lack of autonomy. She suggested that they should be 'forced by our tutors' or have it integrated into assessment: 'ten per cent of marks for participation in BB'. Chi counters by saying that as a student in Taiwan, she used such interactive forums in the past, and many Asian students are very active participants. Ilan agrees, going on to say that the critical issue is participation of tutors: the DB is considered part of the taught space of the programme rather than the informal student managed interaction opportunities. Thus, there is an expectation that the DB is for teacher-student interaction, and is successful where there is opportunity to observe interaction and discussion as a prelude to participating.

These views are supported by the ejournal data, where students are positive about the idea of Blackboard, but in the main note that they are readers not posters. In interview, Sen describes using Blackboard as a resource to manage the academic reading workload:

I can get some information for some I can read [...] what I learnt in class from the Blackboard. [...] from the Blackboard I can find some questions and also I know how maybe I know I can get the key words to find the solutions.

(Interview Month 8)

Ping's evaluation of the opportunities for learning provided by the DB is marked by reservations over the essential quality of the interaction:

Actually, at the beginning I was quite excited about using a Blackboard, and actually I was very willing to involve in Blackboard, and sharing my point of views or what. But, I don't know, maybe it's a kind of interaction, I think the interaction is not really attracting me, so finally I stop, I seldom post a message, but at the beginning I do want to do that.[...] I don't know, maybe the interaction is not really isn't really good.

(Interview Month 8)

Chi describes how she was able to manage DB limitations on interaction opportunities:

I think it would be helpful if sometimes we posed our doubts or, you know, the questions you have on Blackboard, but I did that in the beginning of the first term but, I don't know, because there are few responses there and gradually I began to call a classmate and discuss that on the telephone. And by talking on the telephone you can get a more immediate response, especially when you are reading and you have found something difficult, it's more helpful.

(Interview Month 8)

There are important pedagogical implications for the account of VLEs presented here. In policy terms, programmes might consider whether such a tool is for transactional purposes only, or whether it is a platform for interactively-supported learning. In the former case, limited teacher participation will not impede success. In the latter, however, learning through interactive, mediated discussion is unlikely to occur unless it is teacher-mediated, and supported by appropriated tasks and discussion frameworks. These are discussed further in Section 4 below

3.5 Shared reflections with other students on tasks and challenges

The idea of reflection as a tool for learning was introduced in this programme in two ways. First as an element of portfolio assessment on some courses, students were required to self-assess, and comment on their learning process and experience. Second, to develop skills in this activity students were encouraged to 'share reflections', so that through talk, they become more aware of factors aiding and constraining their learning. In this sense reflection was part of the sociocultural learning theory underpinning the programme as a whole. In the narrative workshop it was clear that the idea of reflection for learning was a strange one initially. It was recognised in a general way as relevant to learning, a point more clear when it was linked to evaluation and self-evaluation. Peng liked to 'talk to my tutors and to discuss deeply'. Kai emphasised autonomy and self-assessment. Ilan supported these views, but set out a more monologic view of reflection – she suggested that each student should be required to write one or two sentences after each session. She recognizes that a great deal of learning is achieved through the processes of assessment – preparing for and writing assignments. A consequence of this however may be that what is not clearly part of each assessment is not really engaged with. Where reflective analysis is part of an assessed task, it may be done simply to meet assessment criteria with limited transfer to learning for and through other assignment formats, and benefiting from the wider curriculum. Throughout the discussion, the students articulated their novice status in terms of good academic and related learning practices. Peng noted that the idea of 'shared reflection' in new – 'quite odd for us', a point supported by Ilan: 'we work together on our courses, not on our performance'. It may be that the learning / assessment link is more complex for students than teachers think. The link may be seen as involving a switch in roles – requiring students to undertake what they consider to be the teacher's task, but on terms they are not familiar with, that is, the teacher's assessment criteria. Ilan noted 'we have to be more familiar with the style of teachers' marking' illustrating this construction of reflection and self-assessment. One opportunity in the development of the reflective component of the curriculum might be to construct reflection and self-assessment as different from tutor assessment: they may be based on different performances, for example, personal practices in learning rather than the final version of a written or oral assignment, and leading to different outcomes, for example revised task management and learning strategies rather than grades and evaluative comment. The implications here for pedagogic development are discussed in Section 4 below.

3.6 Participation in this dialogic research

It was clear from the students' reasons for agreeing to participate in this research study that they expected it to benefit their learning in some way. In the narrative workshop there was agreement of this point: they all agreed that seeing a research process was valuable for them. In addition there was a benefit in the reflection supported by the study: Ian articulated this point as 'talking to learn' and 'verbalising the learning process'.

Three students found participation in SAIL helpful in different ways: Sen used the ejournal extensively to reflect on her personal development, and reported at the end of the course how helpful this had been. Tian had personal problems which distracted her from her study and she commented in a meeting that discussion of how such matters which were interfering with her learning was helpful in understanding the factors on which her progress depended. Lin who had a difficult period in the dissertation phase noted at the end how the communication facilitated by the ejournal helped her to persevere and finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. These impacts reflect the learning benefits of participation in other diary studies (Bailey 1990, 1991, 1996). There are pedagogical implications here, particularly in relation to the ways in which involvement in research can be a means of increasing the learning value of the postgraduate course experience. This is discussed further in the next section.

4. Implications for pedagogy

From the findings set out in the previous section some pedagogic principles can be derived and set out as contexts for discussion with programmes on ways of creating more effective learning opportunities within programmes such as this. These in summary form are as follows:

In the taught spaces of the programme, emphasise the role of the tutor, particularly mapping knowledge and modeling analysis and argumentation procedures. Where student collaborative work is used, consider whether tasks are appropriately structured for students to progress their understanding and skills (See 3.1 above).

Promote learning groups (or reading groups) but ensure students are responsible for organizing them and establishing specific topics for discussion. Expect such groups to evolve and fade as students become more involved in individual study projects, and friendship groups take over from more formally organized meetings (See 3.2 above).

Promote attendance at extra-curricular events such as research seminars and talks. Advise students of the value of learning from observation about how such events are structured and managed, and how presenters construct positions, questions and arguments (see 3.3 above)

Decide whether Open Learning Environments such as Blackboard are intended to support learning as a transmission facility (announcements, readings and learning materials), or a context for learning through interaction, such as exploration of issues through the Discussion Board (DB). If the latter, then it is likely students will understand the DB as part of the 'taught space' of the programme, and expect participation by tutors. Where students want interaction or clarification without tutor involvement they will use other media (phone, MSN, etc.). These considerations need to be part of the overall policy framework for the integration of ICT resources into learning (See 3.4 above).

Integrate reflection into coursework assessment, but work with awareness of students' understanding of the nature and role of such reflection, and how the self-assessment implicit in this is different from the assessment by tutors. While reflection may be a required part of an assessment format, it is worth considering how reflective text prepared for an audience and specific assessment purpose may skew the opportunities for learning intended for such activities (See 3.5 above).

Students value participation in research activities which allow them to describe, analyse and reflect on their learning experience. The Ejournal strategy in this study constituted an effective means for many of the students in this study. There are other ways in which such opportunities may be constructed within programmes, for example, personal or welfare tutors/advisors, focused evaluation within the programme or group of programmes. Tutors and coordinators should explore ways of engaging students in active sense-making of their experience of learning (See 3.6 above).

4.1 The programme context

The one-year fulltime Masters is a challenging pedagogic construct for three reasons. First such programmes constitute a 'hybrid' between the cohort-managed undergraduate programmes, and the individual-oriented postgraduate programmes such as PhD. The expansion of postgraduate student numbers in UK universities over recent years has in some ways been accompanied by a shift from the former to the latter. Thus the student role in learning may be constructed as a consumer and re-producer of knowledge in much the same way as an undergraduate, or as an apprentice academic, or peripheral member of a community of practice. The second reason relates to the background of students and the focus of learning in the postgraduate programme: the programme may be in a subject area different from the undergraduate study of the students. In the programme in this context for example, the subject area in Applied Linguistics and language education (Social Science), while the discipline background of many students in foreign language and literature study (Arts and Humanities). Thus the focus and frameworks for academic study may be new to students in ways where postgraduate students continue in the same subject. Third, in programmes where there are many international students, and additional layer of learning complexity is added: international students who are new to the context and culture of learning may find it difficult to acculturate to the requirements and expectations of learning in the UK university environment. The newness of the programme experience may lead to their considering themselves and being viewed by others as novices rather than as skilled graduate learners. Both of these reasons for seeing one-year postgraduate programmes as pedagogically challenging may be exacerbated by programmes having a conversion element, where there is a disciplinary shift from the field of undergraduate study. The implication for pedagogy here may be framed in three sets of questions for curriculum designers:

To what extent are students managed as a cohort, and as individuals studying with an advisor? Where there is a transition from cohort-based learning and progression to more individualized provision, how is this managed? Are students aware of institutional, programme and tutors views of their role as part of a cohort, and as an individual research student?

How are graduate learning skills and a graduate identity assumed as part of the learning programme? How does this relate to students for whom it is a 'conversion' course? How are fundamental philosophical and conceptual aspects of the new discipline area introduced?

How can the graduate learning identity of international students be developed and established as a basis for postgraduate learning? How is their experience of study (and work) in other cultural contexts engaged and built upon? To what extent is induction to the UK academic culture supported. Where students are studying in a second language, how is this aspect of their learning supported and progressed?

4.2 Tutor mediation

The discussion of the findings in relation to the virtual learning environment (Blackboard), collaborative learning in and out of class, and reflection as a tool for learning above point to a complex role for tutors in postgraduate programmes. They are sources of information in a way that is complementary to books and readings, advisors at particular junctures of the course, and providers of personal and learning support as learning trajectories are negotiated. These roles overlap in complex ways with the taught and learning spaces of the programme which affect the control and agency of the participants. In the taught space, students expect the tutor to be the key mediator, mapping concepts and theories, facilitating access to beneficial learning opportunities and projects, and in assessment, providing feedback to construct the way forward in learning (Tunstall and Gipps 1996). In the learning space, students take responsibility, show agency and autonomy, and bring projects – coursework assignment to fruition. The student call for a stronger tutor role, for example in classroom sessions and in the Blackboard DB should not be understood as a deficit in agency and autonomy: rather it represents a fundamental requirement in a new and complex learning context essential if students are to feel equipped and ready for the responsibilities of postgraduate study. This perspective is supported by the fact that in the data for this study (see section 3 above) the two highest achieving students – Chi and Ilan – were those most articulate on the need for greater tutor involvement in their learning. Chi framed her view in terms of how much she had learnt from tutors in different contexts, while Ilan was more direct in specifying the kind of tutor role which she saw and particularly helpful. Further support for such a role in learning for tutors come from neo-Vygotskian sociocultural theory (Wertsch 1991; 1998; Wenger 1998; Lantolf and Thorne 2006) which posits that learning occurs in social contexts, and through observation of and experimentation with new practice and concepts.

4.3 The middle period

This study was carried out in the context of a one-year masters programme. Those students who encountered difficulty in the learning and progression did so in the middle period: months 5-9 were difficult for many. This finding reflects a phenomenon observed in a previous study in this context (Rea-Dickins et al 2007). One explanation may be the transition nature of this phase of the one year programme. The current programme is set out in three phases:

Phase 1

This is an intensively-supported learning experience, designed to meet the needs of students from undergraduate study fields other than TESOL /Applied Linguistics, and those new to the UK cultural context of learning. Support mechanisms include electronic resources (Blackboard) and formative assessment in the development of portfolios of tasks. Assignments will facilitate a focus on the particular elements which are essential for effective graduate learning: critique of published research studies; focused literature review; specification of contextual factors which shape language learning and teaching, and data collection and analysis.

Phase 2

This is a transition phase where the learning experience is increasingly self-directed, and through study in the specialist units (options), increasingly oriented to individual learning goals. In this phase students will initiate and develop dissertation projects to be completed in Phase 3. Assignments will typically be negotiated by students, shaped by individual learning plans related to research and professional practice and include a reflective element.

Phase 3 (Dissertation phase)

The learning focus in this phase will be the dissertation. Each student will work in an autonomous and self-directed way with an advisor to complete the dissertation.
(From The Programme Handbook)

The 'intensive' support in Phase 1 ends with what is a transition phase to the kind of learning which most characterizes postgraduate learning. As stated above, this may involve a shift from cohort management of learning activities to a more individual and self-managed approach. Tutors and programme leaders need to understand the demands this transition places on students, and which students are likely to be affected. Then they might consider how these students can be better prepared for the transition, and how they can be better supported.

4.4 Language development – evidence of socialization and resistance

The data presented in the two case studies in Appendix 2 suggest that English language development may be a key area of learning (the case of Chi), or may be a slow and difficult process (the case of Lin). The data collected and analysed for this study do not provide firm findings on the nature of and reasons for different routes to development. However the findings do contribute to our understanding of variability in language learning achievements among advanced learners in three ways. First, the nature of variability is complex. Larsen 1996 shows that in instructed settings, advanced learners progress very differently. One might expect therefore in contexts such as this, where the language learning is through language use for study, observation and informal encounters rather than lessons, the variability would be even greater. One reason for the variability among advanced learners is the observation of Ellis and Larsen-Freeman:

The very things that make a known language easy make a new language hard; contrariness will out. (2006:568)

The advanced learner is no longer working with rules and patterns which can be applied with some degree of confidence; rather she is engaging with example of use which are context-specific, co-textually nuanced and idiomatic in construction. The learning challenge lies in observing a novel instance, analysing its meaning and pragmatic function, and confirming this analysis. Chi provides an example of this kind of processing when a novel instance of language is encountered:

For example, things such as 'Ash Wednesday' and 'Shrove Tuesday'. I saw these terms on the calendar, and did not know what they meant. So I checked the explanation on Wikipedia website. Some days later, I met my Irish flatmate frying pancakes, I talked to him about what I've found out on the website (and had pancakes, lucky me!). This is usually how I learn things related to cultural or religion here: check Wikipedia and then talk to native speakers.
(Ejournal Month 8)

Lin however does not reflect this kind of learning based on observation analysis and confirmation. As is clear from data from Month 9 of the course, she is still working with rules from her previous context of study:

Int: Have you learnt things about your writing style from the feedback?

Lin: I think one point is I like to write the long sentences [...] we have I have the kind of impression that as for the sentence the longer the better [...] I think I learnt it from the teachers [laughter] if you can make the sentence structure more complex, if you can use more complex vocabulary or words you will get the high points in the writing task.

Lin is still working with rules and has expectations of them that do not align with the ‘contrariness’ feature referred to by Ellis and Larsen-Freeman. Second, and complementing this challenge to language development which has its sources in the nature of language, is a challenge relating to the learning identity of the student. The key aspect of this learning identity is *investment* in learning (Norton 2000; Morita 2004). Investment here reflects both motivation and anticipated benefit from the effort of learning which are dimensions of the ‘socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it’ (Norton 2000:10).

Students like Chi, who are effective investors, are characterized by a sense of furthering personal learning goals through active and constructive engagement with a range of stakeholders in the learning context. Chi’s profile (see above and Appendix 2) shows her to be a student whose biography reflects engagement with opportunities for learning. She is positive in outlook, flexible in responding to opportunities to learn, and confident that she will be able to get it right. Lin on the other hand is characterized by a similar drive to learn, but without the interactive and flexible dimensions. She feels more comfortable learning in isolation, is ambivalent about, even resistant to being a different kind of language user, and has an expectation of struggle. Where the investment is strategic and effectively managed, language development can be transformed, success engendering success in a virtuous cycle. Where it is not, there is a risk of fossilization, stasis in the language system deriving from the rule-based norms of language learning of earlier stages, and minimal observation, analysis and confirmation. There is a challenge here for programmes which accept students who will be studying in a second language: to what extent is their language development supported on the programme? What kind of support is offered? In the further research section we revisit this issue, in particular, the kind of students who might be assisted in developing better language development practices in programme contexts such as this, and what kind of intervention might be appropriate for their needs

Third, there are positional and methodological issues in establishing language use effectiveness in academic contexts. Tests typically used to determine proficiency levels for admission to programmes, such as IELTS and TOEFL reflect ‘readiness’ rather than competence in the specific skills required. These skills particularly in the context of writing, may be viewed differently from different cultural perspectives. An attempt to understand academic writing skills development in the context of the two cases examined in detail – Chi and Lin – illustrates the challenge of investigating learning processes and outcomes in this area.

Among the documents collected as part of the study were texts by students. These included a piece of non-assessed writing undertaken in the first weeks of the programme, and a chapter of the dissertation completed in Month 12, that is at the end of the programme. The examine changes here, two experienced teachers of English, one Chinese (Rater 1) and one British (Rater 2) who have assessed writing skills in a range of contexts agreed to rate the texts. To facilitate completion of the rating task, the raters were given three criteria:

Sentence-level accuracy: e.g. word choice; use of articles; verb-phrase grammar;

Paragraph effectiveness: e.g. appropriate paragraph division; clear focus; development of ideas;

Overall impression: Readability, in terms of ease of comprehension, clarity of key points, and smooth flow of information; and adequacy as a response to the task set.

They were asked to give each text (anonymised) a rating of 1-10, so that each received a total out of 30 (see Appendix 7). The ratings for Chi and Lin are set out in Table 3 below.

Assignment Orientation Assignment Mon 1		Sentence-level accuracy	Paragraph effectiveness	Overall impression	Overall rating (/30)
Orientation Assignment Month 1					
Rater 1	Chi	9	9	10	28
	Lin	6	8	7	21
Rater 2	Chi	8	9	8	25
	Lin	7	6	6	19
Dissertation Ch 1 Month 12					
Rater 1	Chi	8	9	7	24

	Lin	10	10	10	30
Rater 2	Chi	8	8	8	24
	Lin	6	5	5	16

Table 3: Rating of Chi and Lin's texts

There is a measure of agreement among the raters evident in the table. There is however, one major disagreement: the rating of Lin's dissertation chapter. As the raters had provided little justification for their rating, they agreed to discuss the texts (and to have the discussion recorded), and to talk about their strengths and weaknesses. The key point was the perception of effectiveness of Lin's text, and the discussion revealed cultural perceptions.

Rater 1: I gave Text B [Lin's] a very high mark because I think it is a very clear articulation [...] the way of thinking of the writer is very close to my way of thinking [...] I can know this student is from mainland China [...] Particular example: focus on the background of the study, for example the first sentence gives us the purpose of IELTS, and then this is followed by 'In order to', this is the content of IELTS, or the requirements of IELTS. Then it gives the basis or foundation of the IELTS. [...] I think if I want to cover the same idea, I will follow this way of thinking. This way of doing that gives me no pressure as a reader. [...] No difficulty in understanding.

Later in the context of a discussion of 'topic sentences' as key requirements for effective paragraphs, Rater 1 explained her view:

Rater 1: I am not so sure the topic sentence is quite so necessary for academic writing. In the academic writing books they say it is important to direct the reader, but I don't think I need a topic sentence like that when I am reading [...] I think it is a different way of thinking between Chinese and English [...] While I'm reading an article I don't try to find the topic sentence. Because Chinese people like to list all the facts first of all and come to a conclusion if it's possible. But in Chinese teaching of writing now, we encourage the students to follow the native speakers' way of thinking, to put the topic sentence in front, but we cannot always do so, because we are guided all the time by the Chinese way of thinking.

This small data set on the effectiveness of the writing skills of Chi and Lin may suggest that Chi has accommodated to the requirements of academic style of the context of study, while Lin has retained what might be considered the style she came with. This conclusion is supported by the evidence of processes of socialization in the accounts of learning of these students (See Appendix 2). The good thing is both have been successful in their study while learning in a transformative way and developing a student identity which has coherence with their personal characteristics and social affiliations. Less positive perhaps is that the compliance evident in the performance of Chi ensures recognition of her achievements, while the resistance of Lin risked a less successful outcome for her.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Pedagogical implications

This study has focused on the wider curriculum as a set of opportunities for learning in a Masters in TESOL programme. The wider curriculum is the range of learning opportunities which complement set curriculum - required classes, reading, assignments – and which characterize the learning culture of the research-oriented department in which the programme is located. The findings show that the students negotiate learning trajectories which involve the wider curriculum in varied and complex ways. They show awareness of the place of autonomy in learning; largely in 'spaces' not shared with tutors. They also specify a clear role for instruction, where tutors demonstrate analysis and argumentation processes. The more successful students are keen observers and reflective learners: through observation they drive a viable analysis of what is required of them, and through reflection, they harness personal resources to achieve goals. These general strategies apply to language learning as well as to curricular content.

The discussion in this study profiles the challenges of learning in a one-year masters, which may require both introductory and advanced engagement with the field of TESOL Applied linguistics. The time is short, and the transitions steep: students start with foundation modules, which are characterized by lectures, seminars, set readings and assignments. The end with completion of an empirical research study, drawing together the skills embedded in the various modules and a range of personal resources. The learning challenge and achievements depicted in this study illustrate the importance of the guiding themes of the research: identity and socialization.

The characterization of 'identity' set out by Etienne Wenger has guided this study:

Building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities. The concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other. It avoids a simplistic individual-social dichotomy without doing away with the distinction. The resulting perspective is neither individualistic nor absolutely institutional or societal. It does justice to the lived experience of identity while recognizing its social character – it is the social, the cultural, the historical with a human face.
(Wenger 1998: 145)

The 'lived experience' element reminds us that previous life and learning experiences are important. The two case studies developed in detail in this study – Chi and Lin (see Appendix 2) – show that childhood and schooling experiences 'shaped' them as learners. These experiences positioned them to *negotiate the meanings* of their *experience of membership* of the masters programme *social community*, albeit in different ways and timeframes.

This learning process has been one of socialization. As depicted by Watson-Gegeo and Neilsen (2003) and Shi (2006), socialization is learning both language and culture, through observation, action and reflection, and engagement with gatekeeping forces and unequal power relations. This process facilitates understanding of the meanings of the new community of practice, the principles and practices which are not explicitly set out as a curriculum, but which are pivotal in each individual student's progress in the programme. The two case studies set out in Appendix 2 – Chi and Lin – suggest that processes of socialization vary: Chi seems engaged from the outset, whereas Lin appears to resist: she persists with assumptions and practices which were successful in the past. In the end however, it is perhaps the focus and perseverance built into her earlier learning identity which enabled successful completion of the course.

5.2 Further research

This is a small scale study. The initial scoping proved somewhat unsustainable as the students were eager participants, keen to provide data on their learning experience, and develop opportunities for learning about research procedures. We suggest that further research is needed to guide curriculum development in this area, and to understand the impact of social and informal opportunities for learning which characterize postgraduate study. We also suggest that such programmes are appropriate research sites for exploring more theoretical issues of learning, for example identity and socialization process within the broad framework of sociocultural theory. In particular we see three specific areas for further research:

- The development and evaluation of pedagogic strategies designed to create access to and uptake of learning opportunities afforded by the wider curriculum as conceptualised in this study;
- The examination of the construct of student identity (Rea-Dickins et al 2007), with a view to relating its key components to pedagogic and awareness-raising strategies so that those students who do not have a natural intuition to such learning might be appropriately guided;
- The ways in which the identity building and socialization processes described in the case studies set out in Appendix 2 impact on academic literacy awareness and writing skills.

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Appendix 1

SAIL Proposal

Pedagogical Research Fund
for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies in Higher Education
Phase 3 (2007/08)

Proposal Form

Please read the rules for Phase 3 bids carefully before sending your application form in.

Lead institution	University of Bristol				
Name of project leader	Dr Richard Kiely				
Other staff involved	Mr Jim Askham				
Brief description of current role and responsibilities of project leader.	Senior Lecturer in Education/Applied Linguistics Graduate School of Education Programme leader: MSc TESOL Coordinator: Centre for Research into Language and Education Coordinator: Doctoral study in TESOL/Applied Linguistics				
Address	Graduate School of Education University of Bristol 35 Berkeley Square BRISTOL BS8 1JA				
Telephone	0117 928 7032	F a x	0117 925 1537	E- mai l	R.Kiely@bristol.ac.uk
Strand	A (max £4000) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Strand B (max £1000) <input type="checkbox"/>		
Funding sought (£)	£4000				
Area	Languages <input type="checkbox"/>		Linguistics <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Area studies <input type="checkbox"/>

Brief CV of project leader (please include university level qualifications and publications)

Dr. Richard Kiely

Extensive experience of pedagogic research generally, and into the experience of students in Higher Education in particular. This research has on the one hand led to innovations in specific programmes, developments across institutions, and through publications in professional and academic journals, dissemination to national and international constituencies.

Academic Qualifications

PhD Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick

MA Applied Linguistics, University of Essex

Current Position

Senior Lecturer in Education and Applied linguistics University of Bristol

Previously: Senior Lecturer University College Chichester, Senior Lecturer Thames Valley University

Research Interests

Language Programme Evaluation, Identity and Learning in Applied Linguistics, Language Teacher Learning and Development

Selected Evaluation project Experience and Consultancies

PRO-CLIL Evaluation of a COMENIUS-funded project to develop Content and Language Integrated learning in four European countries

Bologna Process Quality Audit, a British Council/TEMPUS review of procedures at Immanuel Kant State University of Russia, Kaliningrad

Enhancing Learning on the TESOL Blackboard (with Sue Timmis) An evaluation of a series of elearning initiative on a postgraduate programme in a UK university

Student Identity, Learning and Progression (with Professor Pauline Rea-Dickins and Dr Yu Guoxing) A research study into the impact of the IELTS test on successful test-takers

Teachers into Researchers, (with Professor Pauline Rea-Dickins, Helen Woodfield, Dr Catherine Walter and Gerald Clibbon) An evaluation of the learning experience of Postgraduate students learning to carry out research in Applied Linguistics

DATA Project (HEFCE-funded FDTL project) (Professor Peter Skehan, Celia Roberts, Dermot Murphy and Anne Fraenkel) Evaluation of a materials-development project arising from the successful Teaching Quality Assessment in Linguistics

PRINCE A evaluation and development consultancy to identify development needs of three new English Language Teacher Education Colleges in Poland

Area Studies and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Curriculum Development Fund , Thames Valley University, An Action Research project (with Alan Fortune and Rose Clark) to evaluate innovative integrated. Funding: Buy out from teaching.

Selected recent publications

Books

Kiely, R. 2006 (forthcoming) (with P. Rea-Dickins H. Woodfield & G. Clibbon,) *Language, Culture and Identity in Applied Linguistic: Studies in Applied Linguistics 21* London: Equinox

Kiely, R. (with P. Rea-Dickins) 2005 *Program Evaluation in Language Education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (Series editors Chris Candlin and David Hall)

Chapters in edited books

Kiely, R. (2006 forthcoming) Teachers into Researchers: Learning to research in TESOL. In S. Borg (Ed.) *Language Teacher Research in Europe*. Virginia: TESOL Publications

Kiely, R. (2006) 'In fact I can't really lose': Laure's struggle to become an academic writer. In S. Trahar (Ed) *Narrative Research on Learning: Comparative and International Perspectives*. Symposium: Oxford pp. 183-198

Kiely, R. 2004 A Materials Approach to Trainer Training. in D. Hayes (Ed.) *Trainer Development – Principles and Practice from Language Teacher Training*. Melbourne: Language Australia pp. 179-198

Journal articles

Kiely, R. 2004 Learning to critique in EAP. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes Vol 3* No. 3 pp 211-227

Kiely, R. 2003 What works for you?: A group discussion approach to programme evaluation. *Studies in Educational Evaluation Vol. 29* No.4 pp. 293-314

Kiely, R. 2001 Classroom evaluation - values, interests and teacher development. *Language Teaching Research Vol. 5* No. 3 pp 241-261

Kiely, R. 1999 Syllabus Design for advanced learners: the British Studies solution. *Network - A Journal for English Language Teacher Education. Vol. 2* No. 1 pp. 53-61

Kiely, R. 1996 Training the trainers - a materials writing approach. *English Language Teaching Journal Vol 50*. No. 1

Project title

Socialisation And Identity in Learning in Applied Linguistics (SAIL)

Project Aims (max. 300 words)

This study aims to document the student learning experience in a contemporary interaction-rich and technology-aware HE curriculum in TESOL/Applied Linguistics, and understand this experience in terms of current theoretical accounts of identity and socialization in learning. The aims can be articulated as follows:

- A. To explore postgraduate learning in Applied Linguistics from a socialisation and identity formation perspective;
- B. To document the particular experiences of international students on a one-year HE programme;
- C. To inform on the design of the wider postgraduate curriculum and strategies for its effective realization.

These aims translate in five specific objectives which detail both the research process and the links to specific pedagogical strategies.

Specific Objectives

1. To construct a database of processes of learning in a FT Masters programme with particular reference to collaborative learning with an academic community;
2. To analyse these data from socialisation and identity perspectives;
3. To inform on learning in four areas in particular:
skills in academic language uses (including advanced English language skills);
skills in being a postgraduate student in the electronic information age;
skills in Applied Linguistics research; and
skills in English language teaching;
5. To construct rich accounts of individual learning experience to document the learning trail leading to completion of a dissertation as an individual, independent study, with particular reference to the following *recommended but not required* curricular activities:
Collaborative learning in class;
Participation in non-programme specific research seminars;
Use of virtual learning environments;
Informal learning groups organised outside of class;
Shared reflections with other students on tasks and challenges; and
Participation in this dialogic research.
6. To present these accounts as case studies which can be used as workshop materials for HE teacher development (with particular relevance to international students, and to postgraduate and research programmes in the social sciences), and for student orientation purposes.

How will the outcomes benefit the languages, linguistics or area studies community?

Research into processes of learning in recent decades has been characterised by a focus on social and contextual factors to complement the task of explaining learning processes in cognitive terms. Watson-Gegeo and Nielsen exemplify this position:

The learning of language, cultural meanings, and social behaviour is experienced by the language learner as a single continuous (although not linear) process. Learners construct a set of linguistic and behavioural practices that enable them to communicate with and live among others in a given cultural setting (2003:157).

All students new to study in higher education might be considered to experience such learning. Students from other countries, engaging with academic study in English for the first time have to negotiate the complex challenge of learning cultural meanings, social behaviour, and the mix of academic and social language resources in which these are framed. Learning as the negotiation of such challenges has been extensively explored in identity frameworks (Wenger 1998; Norton 2000; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). Pavlenko and Blackledge examine 'negotiation of identities as situated within larger socioeconomic, sociohistoric, and socio-political processes' (2004:3), and explore how:

individuals are agentive beings who are constantly in search of new social and linguistic resources which allow them to resist identities that position them in undesirable ways, produce new identities, and assign alternative meanings to the links between identities and linguistic varieties (2004:27).

The approaches to understanding identity of Norton (2000) and Wenger (1998) build in particular on the relevance of negotiating identities to learning. Their accounts illustrate in detail the way the agency set out in Pavlenko and Blackledge is harnessed to the direction and support of learning, of imagining and realising the performance in context which both constructs and represents learning achievement.

In the higher education context there is extensive support for such a broad account of learning. Laurillard (2002) established a principled pedagogy based on technology and autonomy, agency and engagement in learning communities. Gibbs (1992; 1995) set out a broad pedagogical strategy for the realisation of this pedagogy, with particular emphasis on techniques for collaborative learning and structuring assessment formats to guide learning. In the specific area of e-learning, Salmon (2000; 2002) has developed a pedagogy based on the same principles of participation, engagement and community.

Taught postgraduate programmes in Applied Linguistics fields (as across the HE context) have been the focus expansion and development in recent years. Key stakeholders in this expansion are international students and their tutors. International students represent a coming together of the key themes of this study: socialization into novel learning practices and outcomes; identity formation in new learning communities; and being a second language user and language learner in demanding and complex ways.

There has been little research, however, into the ways in which international students construct, shape and benefit from the range of learning activities in contemporary interaction-rich and technology-aware Applied Linguistics curricula. Recent research has focused on the development of identity and socialization theory, with recommendations for pedagogic action tentatively appended. Some studies in the specific areas of the curriculum such as learning to research in postgraduate programmes (for example Birbili 2003; Kiely et al 2003; 2006) suggest successes in learning are generated by a diverse range of factors and experiences which often relate only tangentially to the set curriculum (that is, research methods courses). Research in the area of language learning in the context of HE study has typically focused on testing (e.g. Green 2004). One study which has looked at learning and identity formation in the context of an IELTS consequential validity study (Rea-Dickins, Kiely & Yu 2005) documents learning as a formation of identity process within communities of practice, and is a key reference for both the focus and methodology of this study.

This study then, will benefit the Applied Linguistics pedagogic community in three ways. First, it will examine the utility of current important themes in learning theory (socialization and identity) for understanding curricula in our field. Second, it will in this theoretical framework draw together the following strands which shape pedagogical action, and identify ways in which a range of pedagogical resources and strategies might be developed in programme contexts:

Collaborative learning in class

Participation in non-programme specific research seminars

Use of virtual learning environments

Informal learning groups organised outside of class

Shared reflections with other students on tasks and challenges

Participation in this dialogic research

Third, the longitudinal data capture, and analysis of rich data sets as case studies will inform of issues of pedagogical concern such as advanced language learning and EAP skills development; developing research skills and a researcher identity in Applied Linguistics, and developing professional skills for language teaching. The combination of a distinct theoretical focus, data collection in relation to practical pedagogic strategies and longitudinal data capture – the full duration of a one year programme – will render this study particularly relevant to enhanced understanding of learning and improved pedagogical practice in our field.

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Green, A. (2004). Making the Grade: Score Gains on the IELTS Writing Test. *Research Notes (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate)*, 16, 9-13.

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Evidence of existing achievement in the proposed area of activity

The lead researcher, Dr Richard Kiely has already completed an LLAS LTSN pedagogical research project – Teachers into Researchers (2002-03). This study has led to:
Four international conference presentations (British Association of Applied Linguistics, Cork 2006, American Association of Applied Linguistics Annual Conference, Montreal 2006, IATEFL Annual Conference, Liverpool 2004; British Association of Applied Linguistics , London 2004)
Two articles in professional newsletters (Kiely 2004; 2005)
One Book chapter (Kiely 2006)
Three talks/workshops to university-based research centres (CREOLE, University of Bristol, Institute of Education, London. Christchurch University College Canterbury)
Two workshops at Department and Faculty level in the university of Bristol on developing the curriculum for taught postgraduate students.

In addition he has been involved in another research project (Rea-Dickins et al 2004 – Student Identity Learning and Progression, funded by the Joint IELTS Research Committee of the British Council and Cambridge ESOL) which has worked with student and tutor participants in the Faculty of Social Sciences in the university of Bristol. These experience have facilitated skills in managing pedagogical research, and in completing and disseminating findings.

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Book Chapter

Kiely, R. (2006 forthcoming) Teachers into Researchers: Learning to research in TESOL. In S. Borg (Ed.) Language Teacher Research in Europe. Virginia: TESOL Publications

Professional Newsletters

Kiely, R. (2005) In at the deep end: researching your own teaching context. Research SIG Newsletter. IATEFL

Kiely, R. (2004) Teachers into Researchers. *IATEFL Issues* 179 pp. 6-8

Conference papers

Kiely, R. (2006) Applied Linguistics Applied: Language Programme Evaluation as a bridge between research and professional domains. Presentation at the Joint Conference of the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL) and the Irish Association of Applied Linguistics (IRAAL) . University College Cork, Ireland, September 2006

Kiely, R. (2006) Applied Linguistics identities: from teacher to researcher. Presentation at American Association of Applied Linguistics, Montreal, Canada, June 2006

Kiely, R. (2004) Teachers into researchers: how teachers read TESOL research. Presentation (with Gerald Clibbon, Professor Pauline Rea-Dickins, Dr Catherine Walter, Helen Woodfield) at IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) Conference, Liverpool

Kiely, R. (2004) Learning to research in Applied Linguistics. Presentation at the Annual Conference of the British Association of Applied Linguistics, London September 2004

Research Reports

Rea-Dickins, P., R. Kiely, & G. Yu (2005) Student Identity, Learning and Progression (SILP): with special reference to the affective and academic impact of IELTS on 'successful' IELTS students. Cambridge: Cambridge ESOL/ London: The British Council.

Kiely, R. (2004) (with G. Clibbon, P. Rea-Dickins, C. Walter; H.Woodfield) *Teachers into Researchers*. London: CILT

<http://www.bris.ac.uk/education/research/centres/creole/projects/reportir>

Further details of pedagogic research and curriculum development can be seen at:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/education/staff/edrnk/>

Proposed research methodology

The approach to the research in this study is naturalistic and qualitative. The context of the research is a FT postgraduate programme in the Applied Linguistics field, where the participants are students and the lead research is the programme leader. There are three aspects to data collection: first, the learning journals are embedded in the learning processes engaged by the students, and in the learning interactions with the programme leader. This is considered an enhancement of validity. Second, the interviews and group workshops will be facilitated by a doctoral research student, Jim Askham, who has considerable expertise in a range of interviewing strategies. Third, the documentation will serve to articulate the institutional stake in the learning process: as documentation on assessment, it will illuminate the interface between the student learning experience and learning achievements in terms of grades and module credits.

The analysis will involve the development of case studies and discussion of cross-cutting themes. The latter will be generated by analysis of data to inform on interview and narrative workshops foci, thus facilitating a student involvement in the analysis process. For example, data collected in the early stages of the study will generate statements for a Putative Hypotheses activity as part of the workshops in Stages 2 and 3.

Stages

The study will focus on three stages of learning in the postgraduate programme, corresponding to Terms 1-3, where the focus is on Induction, Consolidation and Realisation respectively (see Research design summary below).

Data

- A. E-journals, with an interactive dimension, documenting learning practices over an academic year;
- B. Interviews, carried out periodically on the experience of learning , which include both individual interviews and small group narrative workshops (3);
- C. Documents, such as programme and research centre documentation, students' assessed work and tutors' feedback.

Data analysis

The data documenting the student experience of learning through these activities will be analysed using Invivo. There will be two outcomes: case study narratives of learning, and cross-cutting themes which affect learning. The case studies will be developed to orient future cohorts of students and help them reflect on the learning strategies most appropriate for them. The thematic analyses (which may use the narrative case studies as evidence) will lead to conference presentations and pedagogical research papers on issues such as advanced language development; use of virtual communities in learning, learning to research in Applied Linguistics. The analysis in each case will be informed by the socialisation and identity frameworks discussed above.

Outcomes

The outcomes will include:

- Report as specified;
- Paper at BAAL 2007 (Edinburgh);
- Papers in pedagogic and academic journals on the key themes of learning in Higher education, including advanced language learning in academic contexts.
- Case studies for inducting international students and raising awareness regarding learning strategies, which can be used for programmes within the University of Bristol which have a large proportion of international students, and more widely as deemed appropriate by the LTSN.

Research Design Summary

Stages	Learning Focus	Data Collection	Data Analysis
Stage 1 Term 1 Oct-Dec 2006	Induction Understanding the learning task Engagement with the academic community	E-journals Base line documentation	Review of e-journal data to generate Interview and narrative workshop 1 focus

Stage 2 Term 2 Jan –May 2007	Consolidation Honing strategies for successful learning Increasing independence in learning through community membership	E-journals Interviews Narrative workshop1 (Jan 2007) Documentation on assessment	Identification of themes to generate interview and narrative workshop 2 focus.
Stage 3 Term3 Jun- Sept 2007	Realisation of learning goals Achieving independently in the context of dissertation writing	E-journals Interviews Narrative workshop 2 (May 2007) and narrative workshop 3 (Sept 2007) Documentation of dissertation writing process	Identification of themes to generate interview and narrative workshop 3 focus. Compilation of draft case studies for individuals to respond to.
Stage 4 Sept 07- Apr 2008	Reflection on the programme experience when back in work context	Email communication Review of dissertations	Final stages of data analysis to determine case studies, thematic analysis and workshop case study materials.

Note:

This pedagogical research initiative is already underway as part of an institutional and programme commitment to developing curricular provision through understanding of the student learning experience. Success in this bid for funding will enable continuation and completion of the initiative in a manner that supports thorough data analysis procedures and facilitates wider dissemination.

Please briefly outline any ethical issues that may arise in your project and how you intend to address them

Ethical issues

This study will be carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL), and the Graduate School of Education of the University of Bristol, which in recent years has developed the notion of 'ethical mindfulness', an approach which integrates the legislation on data protection and consent and the personal responsibility of the educational researcher. Three particular issues will be considered as follows:

1. Students will be invited individually to participate, and have an opportunity to explore what is involved privately with the lead researcher before further commitment. This is deemed preferable to a general call for participation, and then (as in the TIR and SILP research projects) have to manage a greater than anticipated cases, or engage in a selection process.
2. Participating students will be informed of the balance of effort and contribution on their part and benefit in terms of using the dialogic process to further their own learning. The balance here is considered likely to facilitate a teaching/researching balance in the programme.
3. The database will be anonymised from the start, in accordance with the University's policy of compliance with Data Protection legislation. In addition, students will be invited at the end of the data collection period to give specific consent for uses of the data voice recordings which they feel may identify them, and student decisions here will determine the nature of workshop material from the case studies.

Proposed Budget

Resource	Cost	Notes
Replacement costs for Dr Richard Kiely	£1,954	Total of 8 days of a supply teacher
Research Assistant: Jim Askham	£1,102	Total of 8 days
BAAL Conference	£510	Attendance for one person
Lunch 3 Bristol Workshops	£180	Lunch for 8 people at 3 workshops
General Consumables	£254	Stationery, Telephone, Printing
Total	£4,000	

Project Plan

Project Target	Activities to achieve target	Start date	End date	Resource implications
Stage 1 Term 1	E-journals Base line documentation	Oct 2006	Jan 2007	Lead researcher (LR) time in addition to routing programme direction duties: 1 day
Stage 2 Term 2	E-journals Interviews Narrative workshop1 (Jan 2007) Documentation on assessment	Jan 2007	May 2007	LR time: 1 day Research associate (RA) time: 2 days Workshop lunch: 1
Stage 3 Term3	E-journals Interviews Narrative workshop 2 (May 2007) and narrative workshop 3 (Sept 2007) Documentation of dissertation writing process	June 2007	Sept 2007	LR time: 2 days RA time: 4 days Workshop lunches: 2
Stage 4	Email communication Review of dissertations	Sept 2007	Apr 2008	LR time: 2 days RA time: 2 days

Agreement of senior management in the institutions involved

Lead partner
Name of institution:
Signature of Head of Institution or nominee:
Name and position:

Partner institutions (if any)

Name of department or School and University:
Signature of Head of Institution or nominee:
Name and position:
Name of department or School and University:
Signature of Head of Institution or nominee:
Name and position:
Name of department or School and University:
Signature of Head of Institution or nominee:
Name and position:

Bids must be submitted to Marie Weaver mw11@soton.ac.uk by 30 November 2006.

Proposals should be sent using the official form only. Signed copies of the proposals should be sent by post. In addition, an electronic copy should be sent by email:

**Marie Weaver,
Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies,
School of Humanities,
University of Southampton,
Highfield,
Southampton SO17 1BJ
Email mw11@soton.ac.uk
Fax 023 8059 4815**

Appendix 2

BAAL 2007 Handout

'Visiting locals' houses' and 'English without noticing': the nature and potential of informal language development

**Richard Kiely and Jim Askham
Centre for Research on Language and Education (CREOLE)
University of Bristol**

Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a year-long study into the language development of a group of international students on a one-year masters programme in a British university. The aim of this research study (1) is to understand social and informal learning practices and processes from socialisation (Watson-Gegeo and Nielsen 2003) and identity (Wenger 1998) perspectives. Informal learning includes:

- involvement in learning groups with classmates,
- participation in computer-mediated communication environments,
- attending optional seminars and workshops, and
- discussions with tutors and other members of the academic community.

Data include students' assignments from different stages of the programme, journals on informal learning experiences, and interviews. The analysis for this paper involves identification of language-related episodes, and tracking the impact of these in terms of *language development* – aspects of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, discursal appropriacy and cultural meanings – and *identity development* – the relationship of that student to the learning demands of the programme and to tutors and peers, and plans and expectations as a user of English. The findings of this strand of the study will inform on how the social world shapes the language development of advanced learners, and how contexts of learning where the primary focus is not language teaching or learning can constitute rich environments for language development.

(1) *This study is supported by a grant from the pedagogical fund of the Language Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS) of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN).*

1. Starting points

I think the programme helped me on academic English development a lot but not on social use of English. Particularly helped me on describing language features and explaining own point of views more structurally and in a organized way.

I found that [church group] is a very meaningful activity for developing English too. I have chance to visit a local family. Having dinner and talking about anything is so enjoyable! **Visiting locals' houses** can also help me understand their culture and habits, etc which are worthwhile in knowing a culture and its language.

Ping Ejournal Month 6

I think my English has improved. I remember when I was in high school, I felt the sitcom "Friends" was really difficult to understand. I just couldn't understand their English. However, now I can understand it without English subtitles. I think "Friends" is the easiest among other programs.

As for the degree of the development of my English, I think it is still challenging for me to understand English naturally within half year. For example, I understand because I pay attention and I am energetic. If I am in a state of low spirit, I cannot even understand a word. I think that is one of the differences between a native speaker and non-native speaker. If one day I can understand **English without noticing**, I think my English to some extent is achieved to native level.

Sen Ejournal Month 6

Phenomena being investigated

Language development of successful FL learners

Informed, analytic language learning professionals

Rich learning environment

Theoretical perspectives

Language socialisation

Identity formation

Community of practice

2. Language Socialisation

Shi (2006) outlines five basic assumptions of language socialisation:

1. "Language learning and enculturation are part of the same process" (Watson-Gegeo 2004:339).

2. Language, as a sociocultural and contextualized phenomenon, is acquired through interactive practices and socializing routines

3. In second language socialization, congruency or incongruency between

home and target languaculture can impact the L2 learners' learning processes and learning outcomes in very influential ways.

4. On their way to accomplishing second language socialization, L2 learners are very likely to confront gatekeeping forces and unequal power relations.

5. With dynamic agencies, L2 learners tend to take multi-layered actions and reactions in their process of second language socialization.

(2006:2-5)

3. Identity formation

The purposive nature of learning presupposes a strong sense of identity in the learner. The purposes which grow out of learning imply a sense of self and personhood and thus the confidence to engage in the struggle of learning to create the values of the unfolding life. The identity we develop, however, and the motivation we have to unfold it are always acquired with and through others. Limited conceptions of ourselves, and limited expectations from others, seriously limit the motivation to learn.

(Ranson 1998: 21)

Building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities. The concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other. It avoids a simplistic individual-social dichotomy without doing away with the distinction. The resulting perspective is neither individualistic nor absolutely institutional or societal. It does justice to the lived experience of identity while recognizing its social character – it is the social, the cultural, the historical with a human face.

(Wenger 1998: 145)

Construct of student identity

- identity is fundamentally temporal
- the process of identity formation as negotiation of membership of social communities is ongoing
- the process is enacted in social contexts, so the temporality of identity is more complex than a linear notion of time
- the process has an important affective dimension, which may be a 'struggle' both in interaction with significant others, and a

struggle in reconciling different 'imagined' view of self

- identities are defined with respect to the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories.

(Rea-Dickins et al 2007:73)

4. Community of practice

A set of relations

Lave and Wenger (1991:98)

Formal and informal learning

Formal

- Lectures and seminars
- Tutorials
- Reading
- Writing assignments

Informal

- Involvement in learning groups with classmates,
- Participation in virtual learning environments,
- Attending optional seminars and workshops, and
- Discussions with tutors and other members of the academic community

5. Research design

Aims

- A. To explore postgraduate learning in Applied Linguistics from a socialisation and identity formation perspective;
- B. To document the particular experiences of international students on a one-year HE programme;
- C. To inform on the design of the wider postgraduate curriculum and strategies for its effective realization.

Specific Objectives

1. To construct a database of processes of learning in a FT Masters programme with particular reference to collaborative learning with an academic community;
2. To analyse these data from socialisation and identity perspectives;
3. To inform on learning in four areas in particular:
 - skills in academic language uses (including advanced English language skills);
 - skills in being a postgraduate student in the electronic information age;
 - skills in Applied Linguistics research; and

- skills in English language teaching;

5. To construct rich accounts of individual learning experience to document the learning trail leading to completion of a dissertation as an individual, independent study, with particular reference to the following *recommended but not required* curricular activities:

- Collaborative learning in class;
- Participation in non-programme specific research seminars;
- Use of virtual learning environments;
- Informal learning groups organised outside of class;

- Shared reflections with other students on tasks and challenges; and

- Participation in this dialogic research.

6. To present these accounts as case studies which can be used as workshop materials for HE teacher development (with particular relevance to international students, and to postgraduate and research programmes in the social sciences), and for student orientation purposes.

Seven cases: Profiles and progression

Name	Age	U/G exit profile	Lang Profile (IELTS or other)					Progression (6 taught units) (Three pass levels – A, B, C)					
			O	L	R	W	R	1	2	3	4	5	6
Chi	24	90.5	7	7	7.5	7	7	A	A	A	B	A	A
Ilan	26	87.11	7.5	8.5	7.5	7	7	A	A	A	A	C	A
Kai	20	3.20/4.0	TOEFL 603; TWE 5					C	B	B	C	C	C
Lin	22	80 (top 15%)	6.5	6.5	6.5	6	7	C	C	C	D	-	-
Pin g	27	2.54 (cl 2.2)	7.5	7	7.5	8	7	B	C	B	B	-	C
Sen	26	3.46 (MA)	TOEFL 253 TWE 4.5					B	B	B	B	C	C
Tia n	30	GA:66.31 (fair)	6.5	6	6	6	7	C	C	C	C	C	D

Stages and Data

Stages	Learning Focus	Data Collection	Data Analysis
Stage 1 Months 1-3	Induction Understanding the learning task Engagement with the academic community	E-journals Base line documentation	Review of e-journal data to generate Interview and narrative workshop 1 focus
Stage 1 Months 4-9	Consolidation Honing strategies for successful learning Increasing independence in learning through community membership	E-journals Task-based interviews Narrative Workshop 1 (Month 5) Documentation on assessment	Identification of themes to generate interview and Narrative Workshop 2 focus.
Stage 1 Months 9-12	Realisation of learning goals Achieving independently in the context of dissertation writing	E-journals Narrative Workshop 2 (Month 12) Documentation of dissertations	Compilation of draft case studies for individuals to respond to.

6. Chi and Lin – Analysis and Discussion

Language Development

Chi	Lin
<p>As to the program, I think , as a user, the courses provide me with lots of chances to use English , to communicate, to negotiate with other people. And the most satisfying experience is when I succeeded in persuading others or explaining what the concepts are in the reading. (Ejournal Month 2)</p> <p>For example, things such as 'Ash Wednesday' and 'Shrove Tuesday'.</p> <p>I saw these terms on the calendar, and did not know what they meant. So I checked the explanation on Wikipedia website. Some days later, I met my Irish flatmate frying pancakes, I talked to him about what I've found out on the website (and had pancakes, lucky me!). This is usually how I learn things related to cultural or religion here: check Wikipedia and then talk to native speakers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Ejournal Month 8)</p> <p>In the first task I had A, but I also arranged a tutorial because <i>[name of tutor]</i> underlined some parts, [...]and in the tutorial I found out that, you know, in writing I like to use a lot of clauses, and sometimes I didn't realise that it's too long for the reader to grasp the meaning you want to convey. And I think that the tutorial after the assignment is returned back to us is very helpful.</p> <p>(Interview Month 9)</p> <p>In this task I think my writing is not so academic, it's more close to creative writing, I would think about rhetoric, or I would use the words, for example I 'found the engine that propelled me in language learning' [reading from assignment, page 3] but now probably I won't use a sentence like that. [...] that helped me to become a successful language learner'</p> <p>(Interview Month 9)</p>	<p>(Writing about working with language tutor) Lack of subject or object in some sentences. We got the conclusion that the problem due to that I wanted to make longer and more complicated sentences, in this way, maybe I was confused by my own sentence structure. It's better to divide some of them into two short sentences to make them as clear as possible. The clarity is the most important thing comparing with complication and length of sentences. (Ejournal Month 2)</p> <p>Example from ejournal Month 4: I often neglect it after a couple of days, sometimes even resulting a bad circle in studying</p> <p>Int: Have you learnt things about your writing style from the feedback? Lin: I think one point is I like to write the long sentences [...] we have I have the kind of impression that as for the sentence the longer the better [...] I think I learnt it from the teachers [laughter] if you can make the sentence structure more complex, if you can use more complex vocabulary or words you will get the high points in the writing task.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Interview Month 9)</p> <p>Int: Is there anything you'd like to ask me before we finish? Lin: Can you not [laughter] I mean can you not include my that thing in the final data analysis [laughter] [...] You can refer a lot about the long sentences, but not the grammatical thing.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Interview Month 9)</p>

Identity development

Chi	Lin
<p><i>Sense of self</i> Confident [...] a responsible and autonomous learner [...] intrinsic motivation that generated and integrated all the language behaviours I have described. (Orientation assignment Month 1)</p> <p><i>Being a learner</i> My parents were patient listeners and brilliant interlocutors, so it was always safe to use the language [L1]. (Orientation assignment Month 1)</p> <p>I was often elected as representative</p>	<p><i>Sense of self</i> I am a very new and fresh teacher, maybe I haven't had enough teaching experience comparing from other classmates. (Interview Month 8)</p> <p>The students are easily affected by their mother tongue language and culture, so I usually held an active attitude to face the challenge, force me to open my mouth to speak with different persons, not care about making mistakes. That's the reason why I became a capable English teacher from a shy and poor English speaker and I also stuck with the same view to guide my students, to liberate themselves from a shady corner of inferiority. (Orientation assignment Month 1)</p>

<p>of my class in English speech contests. (Orientation assignment Month 1)</p> <p>I became a teacher who is eager to transform my own experience into strategies to assist the language learning of my students. (Orientation assignment Month 1)</p> <p>it is still the curiosity that drives me to experience everything novel here (EJournal Month 2)</p> <p>Before I came to Bristol, even as an English teacher, speaking in English--especially with native speakers--always makes me feel nervous. (Ejournal Month 8)</p> <p><i>Collaborative learning</i></p> <p>Classmates: They are almost as important as my own reading. We had so many discussions everyday. No matter it is on the way to lecture or during lunch break. It is great to have someone who is doing (and also worrying)the same thing as you do. And by these discussions, many confusions and doubts were solved. (Ejournal Month 2)</p>	<p><i>Being a learner</i></p> <p>From childhood on, I have dreamt to be an excellent English teacher. Every time when I watched Outlook English Speech Contest in CCTN in China, a burst of excitement and admiration would come in mind. (Orientation assignment Month 1)</p> <p>Starting from the pure imitation, mechanical vocabulary memorisation, and constant grammar exercises in middle school, I gradually developed some more efficient personal learning and teaching methods. (Orientation assignment Month 1)</p> <p>Many 'chinglish' mistakes, the typical mistake was 'people mountain, people sea, meaning there were full of people, here and there. (Orientation assignment Month 1)</p> <p><i>Collaborative learning</i></p> <p>Some studying ways have changed , that is,recognizing the importance of group discussion deeply which can burst into sparks in thought in many occasions and promote understanding in theory (Ejournal Month 1)</p> <p>Individual learning is very important in our learning since we only have very limited time in class. In this course, we should read lots of books. However, there is a practical problem come out, that is, how to change what we have read into our own knowledge. Most of us often find that after we have read,we may</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. forget them. 2. haven't a deep understanding about them. 3. don't know how to combine them together. <p>(Ejournal Month 2)</p> <p>Lin: [...] we cancelled the group because [...] we haven't the class time, that means we all should have studied by ourselves. In this way, everybody has his or her private time [...] and secondly maybe as the time goes on we think we have a, how to say, the higher ability to do things to think things by ourselves so we think maybe is less essential for us to have to discuss together maybe. (Interview Month 8)</p>
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Chi

- A sense of self characterised by achievement
- A learner-teacher view characterised by potential to be developed
- Community membership as supportive and opportunity for learning

Lin

- A sense of self characterised by struggle
- A learner-teacher view characterised by obstacles to be overcome

- Community membership as threatening, and distracting from learning

7. Conclusions

- i) The language socialisation is helpful as a metaphor for understanding participation and progress in programmes of learning.
- ii) The approach combines well with identity and community of practice theory in explaining learning as successful accommodation to the social and other demands and challenges of a new environment. Together these conceptual

frameworks provide some explanations for the very different patterns in the learning experience of Chi and Lin.

iii) The approach may be particularly helpful in understanding language development in advanced learners who are engaging with their own biography as a learner, their accumulated language repertoire, and the language demands of the new learning situation.

iv) Approaches to the pedagogic support of learners in such contexts may be informed by socialisation and identity perspectives.

v) Theoretical positioning in understanding language learning processes tends to be adversarial. An approach to understanding cognitive and socialising aspects of the processes might be to consider the requirement at different stages of language learning: cognitive processes may account for early stages of language learning, and socialising processes for advanced stages. Success for learners and in terms of programmes might be understood in terms of managing the shift between the two – a shift Chi manages very well, but Lin less so.

vi) There are some important methodological issues in operationalising this approach to understanding and explanation:

- *Use of self-report*: This provides an effective constructionist account of experience, and complements an ethnographic approach to interviewing and analysis of texts, but is it effective in eliciting the most important linguistics data?
- *Self-report and actual language*: Chi as a very effective language user provides very little evidence on the specific features of Interlanguage; Lin provides extensive evidence of problems with clause structure; idiom and word choice, and lexical form. So the data tends to inform on deficit rather than development.
- *Use of case study*: There is an ongoing challenge in theorising from particular cases. Shi (2006) describes the use of qualitative language socialisation case studies as a contributing factor to the limited theory construction in intercultural learning. Gregg (2006) in a critique of Watson-Gegeo's language socialisation paradigm (2004) comments on such accounts: '[...] one-shot, non-explanatory descriptions of

particular phenomena. It is not clear what good this would do anyone'. (2006:437).

- *Data analysis*: How can we test putative explanations for phenomena observed? For example, these comments from Chi suggest that she has picked up expressions and locutions from observation of socialised language use (for example on TV) but these explanations are not confirmed, (or arguably, not confirmable) through self report:

I think for me this experience connects to other experiences I have had.

So there are a lot of researchers' work or books I can read here that are different from the perspectives I had in Taiwan, so it's like broadening my personal perspectives.

(Chi Interview Month 9)

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Consent letter

Socialisation And Identity in Learning in Applied Linguistics (SAIL)
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Dr. Richard Kiely

Dear

I am writing to thank you for participating in the Socialisation And Identity in Learning in Applied Linguistics (SAIL) research project (funded by the Learning and Teaching Support Network for Language Linguistics and Area Studies, Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Your participation will involve email questionnaires, focus group discussions, individual interviews and providing access to your assessed work as requested. All the data gathered will be used anonymously, and with respect for the learning process which you have experienced, and I am privileged to share. You may at any time withdraw from the project.

I would however, like to ask for your consent formally, and specifically in terms of data use, as recommended by ethical guidelines for the conduct of research (UoB/GSoE; BERA; BAAL). I would be grateful if you could tick and sign the consent clause below, and if you do sign it, to indicate in the second box, the manner in which you would like your contribution to be acknowledged in the research report, which may be made available on the CREOLE website.

Use of anonymised data

Use of assignment, questionnaire and interview data	✓ = Yes	Signature	Date
I agree to anonymised use of data which I have provided for the SAIL research project in research report and in academic papers.			

Acknowledgment of contribution to research – please choose A or B

Acknowledgment of contribution to SAIL project – please select either A or B	✓ = Yes	Signature	Date
A. I would like acknowledgment and thanks expressed generically, i.e. to MSc TESOL students, University of Bristol.			
B. I would like acknowledgment and thanks expressed to mention me specifically, i.e. to the MSc TESOL student group, which includes [my name]			

If you have any queries about the project or this consent form, please get in touch.

Best wishes

Dr. Richard Kiely (Lead researcher – SAIL)

Ejournal initial guidelines**Month 1 (after induction Meeting)**

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this initial stage of the SAIL project. Please email me with you comments on the questions below over the next week or so (later is also possible).

I hope you have a nice weekend and look forward to hearing from you.

Richard

Socialisation And Identity in Learning

What are your learning goals for the MSc TESOL? Have these changed in any way in the first two weeks? In what ways? Why?

What impact do you think this course will have on your teaching skills? And on how you will approach your teaching in the future?

How do you feel your experience of university study will contribute to your learning this year? Have your views changed in the first two weeks? In what ways? Why?

How would you describe your experience as an English language user since the start of the course? Has it changed from your expectations? How do you feel this year on the programme will impact on you as an English language user?

What is your current view of the role of the following in your learning:

Individual learning
Blackboard
Classmates
Writing assignments
Lectures and seminars
Tutorials

Month 5 (after funding of SAIL by the LTSN had been announced)

Dear

Thank you for participating in SAIL this term. Your contributions have been most useful, and the research study has now received funding from the Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS) Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) of the HEFCE (Government body for Higher Education).

I will arrange a meeting in February to tell you more about this and explain the next stages. I hope ongoing participation in the study will provide you with insights into doing research which will benefit your study in the later stages of the MSc TESOL.

I would like to end this term by asking you to comment on your experience of learning in the MSc TESOL this term. I would like you to comment briefly or at length, simply reflecting high points and low points, or according to these headings:

Individual learning
Blackboard
Classmates
Writing assignments
Lectures and seminars
Tutorials

English language skills development

(You can comment on one, some, or all of these comments.)

I hope the term is ending well for you and look forward to seeing you at the party on Thursday 14 Dec.

Richard

Narrative workshop topic areas and guiding questions

Workshop

Focus: pedagogical resources and strategies for learning

Collaborative learning in class

For example: pairwork; groupwork; discussions; student presentations

Which of these experiences have you had as an MSc TESOL student?

Why do you the tutors introduced / promoted these activities?

Does it work like that for you?

What factors shape the impact of this?

Have your views changed since you started this course?

Which form of collaborative learning in class are beneficial?

Do you think you will use collaborative learning strategies more or less when you return to your teaching context after this course?

Major or minor part of students learning?

Informal learning groups organised outside of class

For example:

Learning groups; Organised and Informal discussions

Which of these experiences have you had of these on the MSc TESOL?

Why do you the tutors promoted this idea?

Does it work like that for you?

What factors shape the impact of this?

Have your views changed since you started this course?

In what ways could learning groups be more effective or beneficial?

Do you think you will promote such learning groups for your students more or less when you return to your teaching context after this course?

Major or minor part of students learning?

Participation in non-programme specific research seminars

For example: CREOLE; CLIO; Other such activities

Which of these experiences have you had as an MSc TESOL student?

Why do you think tutors promote these activities?

Does it work like that for you?

What factors shape the impact of this?

Have your views changed since you started this course?

Which form of seminars are beneficial?

Do you think you will attend seminars more or less during the rest of the course here?

How much time do you give to these in an average week?

What kind of outcomes do you feel you are getting?

Use of virtual learning environments - Blackboard

Which of these experiences have you had of BB on the MSc TESOL?

Why do you this tutors introduced this facility?

Does it work like that for you?

What factors shape the impact of this?

Have your views changed since you started this course?

Which form of use of BB is beneficial?

Do you think you will use a virtual learning environment more or less when you return to your teaching context after this course?

Major or minor part of students learning?

Shared reflections with other students on tasks and challenges

For example: evaluation of units; of own performance; of peers

Which of these experiences have you had of reflection and evaluation on the MSc TESOL? [filled in evaluation forms; read Unit evaluation summary on BB]

Why do you the tutors encourage reflection and evaluation?

Does it work like that for you?

What factors shape the impact of this?

Have your views changed since you started this course?

How could opportunities for reflection and evaluation be more effective or beneficial?

Do you think you will use shared reflection/evaluation more or less when you return to your teaching context after this course?

Major or minor part of students learning?

Participation in this dialogic research

For example: Emails for SAIL, and preparation for this workshop so far

Which of these experiences have you had of participating in research such as SAIL?

Why do you the tutor initiated this research study?

How is it for you?

What factors shape the impact of this?

Have your views changed since you started this course?

Improvement

Which other actual research activities would benefit your learning on this programme?

Interview schedule

SAIL – Individual Interviews – Month 8

Interview questions/cues

1. How would you describe your progress so far?

Cue:

Academic progress – Grades

Personal development – e.g. feeling re. dissertation; return to work context

In addition to required aspects of the programme (classes; tutorials; reading; writing assignments) what help you? Classmates? Blackboard? CREOLE? Participation in SAIL?

2. How have you changed so far during this programme?

Cue: as an academic; as a teacher; as a learner.

Are the changes (if any) what you expected?

Do you think this change will continue after the programme?

2a. If you were talking to a classmate about this book, or referring to it in an assignment, how would you refer to it?

(Cue: by title: By author? By date? Has this way of referring to books changed? Why?)

3. How have you changed as an English language user?

Strategies used to enhance English - Description and affect

Cue: grammar; extending vocabulary; use of language in interaction; language learning in the community. Ask for examples.

Task – commentary on section from early assignment

[Identify a particular language issue or problem, and ask if it is clear why attention has been drawn to it; if this represent further learning of rule, style convention; if there have been a lot of examples of such language learning from assignments

4. How do you view the future?

Further learning (TESOL and English)

Work

Influence of the MSc TESOL

Writing rating form

Rating Sheet

Please provide your rating (1-10) and justifying comments in the boxes below

Ass	Sentence-level accuracy: e.g. word choice; use of articles; verb-phrase grammar	Paragraph effectiveness: e.g. appropriate paragraph division; clear focus; development of idea	Overall impression: Readability, in terms of ease of comprehension, clarity of key points, and smooth flow of information; and adequacy as a response to the task set	Overall rating (/30) and comments
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
7				

SAIL Dissemination Activities

Date	Event
September 2007	<p>'Visiting locals' houses' and 'English without noticing': the nature and potential of informal language development</p> <p>Peer reviewed paper presented at the Annual Conference of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL), Edinburgh</p>
October 2007	<p>Learning on a one year masters programme</p> <p>Seminar and workshop on at the Centre for Research on Language and Education (CREOLE) University of Bristol</p>
February 2008	<p>Socialisation and identity: Developing academic Literacy</p> <p>Seminar and workshop on at the University of Newcastle</p>
June 2008	<p>'Gradually the writer's name becomes meaningful': the development of academic literacy</p> <p>Peer reviewed paper presented at the Annual Conference of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL), Edinburgh</p>