From the outside *In*:

A case study of changing roles in an undergraduate first-year discourse community

By

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in partial
fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics and
Discourse Studies

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November 2012

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ISBN: 978-0-494-94333-5

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-94333-5

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Abstract

This micro-level case study research drew on students' and teachers' voices in a one-semester undergraduate introductory course to explore how both first language (L1) and second language (L2) first-year students became part of the academic community and were gradually moving toward fuller participation by acquiring its mainstream discourse, culture, and conventions. The analytical approach used in this study is grounded in the theories of the culture of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), primary and secondary Discourse (Gee, 1990), and deficit-discourse shift (Lawrence, 2005). These theories informed the examination of the influences which appeared to shape and develop students' strategic academic choices for meeting the expectations defined in terms of course requirements. The data were gathered through close observation of classes and semi-structured interviews with the students, the course instructor, and the TAs followed by email contacts and informal conversations. As a result of the grounded theory analysis, the characteristics of academic engagement for entering students were identified and the process of integration into the culture of a first-year course was reconceptualised. The findings of this study support the contention that undergraduate students in an introductory academic course cannot achieve complete acculturation (Casanave, 2002; Zamel & Spack, 1998). Rather, the processes of academic development are characterized by students' changing roles and evolving identities, which gradually approximate insiderness in the discourse community of a discipline.

Keywords: discourse community, culture of learning, academic engagement, first-year experience, academic culture, transition, academic acculturation

Acknowledgments

Entering the community of researchers and striving for success would not have happened if I had not been carefully guided into the practices and not strongly supported throughout the challenging process of change. My heartfelt thank you is extended to:

- My thesis advisor and professor, Dr. Janna Fox, and professors Dr. Devon Woods and Dr. Tim Pynchyl who taught me invaluable lessons, not merely through courses but in their ways of thinking, acting and valuing. Their classes provided a route to *courage*, *passion*, and *wisdom*: I was given confidence to construct my unique discourse. I was encouraged to grow love for connecting to communities around and creating new ones. And I was reminded that developing knowledge and changing beliefs are ongoing, lifetime processes.
- My wonderful study participants who sincerely shared their discourses with me. Their first-year teaching/learning experiences together with their valuable thoughts and inspiring feelings not only enriched my study but also developed strong friendships.
- My family who have given me unreserved love and support: My first teachers, my father who taught me to love learning, and my mother who taught me to love life. My first friends, my sisters and brothers, Zohreh, Ziba, Mahsa, Mansoor and Mahmood who were always close to heart in all painful and joyful moments I experienced while far from home.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

To present “academic discourse” to basic readers and writers as if it were a unified body of literacy conventions and procedures to be mastered is to mystify what our students most need to have demystified: How work gets done in the university (Coles & Wall, 1987, p. 313).

Why is it difficult for some students to learn to read and write academic texts in a first-year undergraduate course? What kinds of reading and writing discourse practices do students and their teachers actually have in an introductory course? How do students’ academic literacies and identities change over time? What factors contribute to these changes? These “big questions”, Casanave (2002) claims, are shared by those who are interested in first language (L1) and second or additional language (L2) literacy practices. It is believed that such questions can be answered by in-depth qualitative studies which offer more sensitive ways for capturing the subtle complexities of the processes (Casanave, 2002; Duff, 2010; Pascarella, 1991). The process of literacy acquisition seems to be further complicated by the growing diversity within the culture of postsecondary institutions. Nowadays undergraduate students need to negotiate multiple discourses and become multi-literate rather than acquiring a simple read-and-write literacy (Lawrence, 2005; Zamel & Spack, 1998).

The increasing student diversity in postsecondary education is evident in the increased number of older students (Scanlon, Rowling & Weber, 2007) with professional and work experiences (Krause, 2006) as well as more international and new immigrant

students with different linguistic backgrounds (Zamel, 2004), especially in post-secondary institutions in Canada (Fox, Cheng, Berman, Song & Myles, 2006) and the U.S. (Zamel & Spack, 1998). The culture of the university is also subject to change as a result of strict administrative and budgetary constraints which dictate pedagogical decisions (Johns, 1997; Scanlon et al., 2007) and also due to new technologies which develop new discourse communities (Duff, 2010). What adds to this diversity is the culture of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), i.e., the expectations, values and beliefs that students bring with them to a first-year undergraduate course. Indeed, it is through the interaction of various discourses of students, teachers and texts that new ways of speaking, doing, and thinking are shaped within an academic course, or class (Zamel & Spack, 1998). To become an insider in the community of an academic course is to engage the discourses of multiple collectives living in the culture of class.

Some argue that students' acquisition of academic literacy can be better understood by drawing on research on second language acquisition (as cited in Zamel & Spack, 1998), because different forms of academic discourse function like a new language for the students new in the academic course (Kutz, 1998). From this standpoint, the process of academic literacy acquisition is characterized by developmental stages similar to those in second language acquisition, and the integration into the academic study cultures is conceptualized as academic acculturation (Cheng & Fox, 2008) or enculturation (Gee, 1990). In line with communicative views towards language acquisition which are concerned with both how to learn and how to communicate (Breen, 1987), academic discourse is to be acquired out of communicative needs in real, meaningful contexts (Kutz, 1998). Academic language acquisition is not an end and does

not simply involve practicing the discipline specific language, norms, and conventions implied in reading and writing texts (Zamel, 1998). Rather, academic language acts as a means for understanding and constructing knowledge, and learning happens when students are involved in the interpretation, expression and negotiation of meaning while reading and writing academic texts.

Simply being immersed in the specialized discourse and conventions of a new academic community does not mean that the students will necessarily become capable of producing such discourse on their own. Individuals do not acquire knowledge by internalizing it from outside but by constructing it from inside, building upon their previous knowledge (Zamel & Spack, 1998) and in the interaction with the environment (as cited in Plourde & Alawiye, 2003). With an awareness and consideration of the previous knowledge, the students need to be guided into the new writing and reading practices of the community. Guided participation (Rogoff as cited in Freedman, 1995) requires scaffolding (Bruner, 1978; Cazden, 1979; Gee, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978) and cooperative interaction with peers and teachers where the students can receive instructive and timely feedback.

The novice academic readers and writers “must learn to treat their readings and writings as media through which they are interacting with authors, professors, peers, [...] and view themselves as communicators and builders as well as displayers of knowledge” (Casanave, 2002, p. 79). Such a view implies that newcomers (outsiders) need to shift their positions from the margins and periphery and move towards the heart of the community. Through these developmental experiences, their academic identities will evolve to full participants who actively contribute to knowledge, not just passively

copying it. However, research indicates that like the long and on-going process of language acquisition, this level of mastery is expected to be achieved over years and at higher levels of education (Casanave, 2002; Spack, 2004).

The complexity of acquiring the mainstream discourse of an academic course for first-year students has also been subject to a large body of research conducted in the immediate context of the classrooms. These empirical studies enrich the theoretical perspectives by showing the importance of situated local literacy practices –the beginning of changes in identity (Casanave, 2002; Scanlon et al., 2007) for entering students in university settings. The research on first-year academic experience can capture the processes through which the novice students develop survival strategies–the ability to figure out what is expected in multiple local contexts (Casanave, 2002). As discovered by researchers, only by having access to and understanding the full context and complexity of these classrooms, could one begin to realize how the interplay of different factors brings about change in the students’ academic life experience (Pascarella, 1991, Zamel, 1998).

Given that there are not many case studies in print about undergraduate students (Casanave, 2002), this study aims to investigate the ways in which both L1 and L2 first-year university students learn to engage in the discourse practices of an introductory course and integrate into its culture of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Informed by theoretical and research perspectives, the present thesis draws on students’ and teachers’ voices in one first-year introductory class in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies in order to explore how the students changed during a course–from the outside *In-* as they began to acquire the discourse, culture and conventions of the discipline.

Motivation for the study

Teaching English as a foreign language and also teaching academic English courses at undergraduate levels in my home country, Iran, I discovered that the differing socioeconomic conditions and socio-cultural backgrounds of my students contributed to a highly diverse needs and goals, which in turn seemed to result in high levels of inconsistency in their expectations, development and performance in the class. I was influenced by factors as well, such as beliefs and attitudes towards teaching, personal concerns, my own language and learning background and my teaching experience. I was always curious to know how the discrepancy between my own culture of learning and those of the first-year students might contribute to their resistance to teacher's demands or course requirements rather than their accommodation. A question was challenging me in the first-year undergraduate courses, "Who is playing the role of an outsider in the classes: am I, - as the teacher or my students"? Gaining new academic experience, this time as an international graduate student in a Canadian university, I again encountered the cultural diversity of the classroom. In academic courses, the students, including myself, vary in expectations and understandings of academic demands, come from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, differ individually in age, gender, language and academic backgrounds, learning and coping strategies and skills. Reflecting on my own change process in this diverse setting, I decided to undertake an inquiry into the ways in which first-year students enter into their new academic environment and integrate into a new culture of learning by developing new academic literacy.

Research questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the first-year experience of eight undergraduate students who worked to access the academic culture and participate in its situated local literacy practices. To this end, this case study seeks to discover how first-year undergraduate students made strategic academic choices in order to connect with the discourse community of the first-year introductory course and meet the expectations defined in terms of course requirements. This qualitative study, then, focuses on the following questions:

- 1) What influenced the undergraduate students' academic engagement in an introductory course?
- 2) What facilitated the undergraduate students' integration into the culture of learning in an introductory academic course?
- 3) How should the undergraduates' process of transition to an introductory course and integration into its culture of learning be reconceptualised?

Having introduced the focus of the study, Chapter 2 describes university culture as made up of communities and their specialized discourses and explains how entering students build up literacy by drawing on their background knowledge in the practices of the new academic course, and interacting with both peers and teachers throughout the duration of a course. It also introduces a new approach to the analysis which is drawn from the literature and used for this case study. Chapter 3 provides the details of the research method including the rationale for using a case study design which applies constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) for analysis. The details about participant demographics, materials, data collection and data analysis are also included.

Chapter 4 presents the results for each of the three research questions by describing and discussing the detailed examples of participants' responses.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides an overview of the results, discusses the limitations of the study, and suggests further directions for the research. I conclude with my own reflections on what I have learned by undertaking this research. I too have moved from the outside *in*, or at least further *in*, as undertaking research for this thesis is the act of an 'insider' within the discipline of Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies.

Chapter 2. Literature review

For while we speak broadly of the university as a “discourse community,” particular interpretative communities come into existence only when particular students and teachers are gathered there. When this happens, neither students nor teachers leave their histories behind; they bring them to class, to every academic discussion, and to every reading and writing assignment (Coles & Wall, 1987, p. 313).

When the students enter the arena of first-year university, they encounter different *collectives* which are formed by shared discourse, i.e., shared ways of using language and other symbolic expressions, interests, values, beliefs and underlying assumptions (Gee, 1990; 1998). University is thus viewed as a diverse cultural community in which each discipline, course and module has its own mainstream discourse (Ridley, 2004). Entering the university from different backgrounds and with various cultures of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), the students add to this diversity by bringing their own primary discourses (Gee, 1990). The dynamics of discourses of students, teachers and texts while engaged in the practices create culture and language anew in the local context of each classroom. To become a full participant in the communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the students need to gain mastery over multiple discourses of different disciplines and become multi-literate. While the students’ background knowledge could influence their transition, the guided participation in the specialized practices and interactions with peers are necessary. Indeed, entering into a first-year academic course is “the beginning of

changes in identity as the students find their way into their majors and find ways to survive-to meet their professors' expectations" (Casanave, 2002, p. 49). Many studies try to characterize these processes and seek for ways to assist students and teachers in this transitory process. Case studies contribute to this understanding by shedding light on how students change while developing different forms of participation and become active members of the community.

This chapter begins with the theoretical perspectives which informed this case study research. It describes how university and classrooms have become communities in which various discourses speak to each other through individuals with diverse cultural and language backgrounds (Gee, 1998). Further, it explains the ways in which entering students develop the dominant literacy through guided participation in the practices and interactions with other members. The students' involvement in continual process of changing roles and evolving identities is also elaborated. It then moves to introduce several qualitative case studies while highlighting the important role these studies play in documenting how students find their way into their majors and survive in the community of an academic course. Analyzing the theoretical and research perspectives provides an integrated understanding of different factors that may influence the first-year experience of undergraduate students, which in turn led to the development of the analytical approach used to conduct this case study. The chapter ends with the definition of key terms which are used consistently throughout this case study.

Entering a new discourse community: Theoretical perspectives

First-year students entering university and making a major transition in their life are exposed to a new set of expectations in the complex literate environments of tertiary education. These expectations are accompanied by specific shared beliefs, rules and values defined in multiple disciplinary contexts and through the literacy practice of its participants. Therefore, we view this institution as a new cultural community consisting of various smaller communities with their own cultures. Each individual community comes to life through integrating words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities, i.e., discourse (Gee, 1990; 1998). Entering students start to develop the specific discourses of different communities through interactions with both expert members and other novice practitioners.

University, in the definition provided by Dison and Rule (as cited in Williams, 2005), is recognized “as a cultural community which is made up of sub-cultures, each with their own discourse” (p. 157). Following Gee (1990), Williams (2005) uses the notion of discourse communities of the university and of their disciplines and emphasizes that every individual needs to be a member of both. Using ‘Discourse’ as a *count term*, Gee (1990) moves beyond linguistics and situates his definition of discourse in the social practices of communities:

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’, or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful role (p. 143).

Critical discourse theory also contributes insights in clarifying how newcomers in university communities can participate successfully as students. This theory highlights the role of discourse in higher education teaching and learning by conceiving of pedagogical practices and outcomes as discourse (Fairclough; Van Dijk as cited in Lawrence, 2005). Luke (1999) also maintains that the mastery of discourse tends to constitute a principal educational process and outcome. Hence, Lawrence (2005) visualizes the processes of transition and retention as a journey of engaging and mastery of mainstream university discourses (p. 18). Another contribution made by critical discourse theory to the issues related to transition is the way in which it reveals the role of cultural diversity and the presence of literacies, or multiliteracies in the university culture (Cope & Kalzantis; New London Group; Pandian as cited in Lawrence, 2005). As such, having perceived the university as a culture, student engagement is defined as becoming literate in this culture (Lawrence, 2005, p. 18).

By embedding the notion of literacy within the framework of discourses, Gee (1990) argues that to be a member of a discourse requires more than just an engagement with print, i.e., read-and-write literacy. Put another way, the discourse of a discipline cannot be reduced to the language, conventions and generic forms, and to become academically literate does not simply involve practicing these specialized conventions and forms while reading and writing academic texts (Zamel, 1998; Zamel & Spack, 1998). Limiting the learning of academic discourse to the discipline specific language, norms, and conventions views academic language as an end (Zamel & Spack, 1998) which can result in imitation and mechanical reproduction (Bartholomae, 1985). Rather, academic discourse is acquired out of communicative needs in real, meaningful contexts

in the same way second language is acquired (Kutz, 1998). For the students new in the academic course, Kutz (1998) claims, “the standard forms of academic discourse are a new style, a new dialect, and in a sense, a new language” (p. 41). These insights thus lay emphasis on the fact that an understanding of students acquiring academic literacy seeks its principles in the research on second language acquisition (Zamel & Spack, 1998).

Highlighting the mastery of discourse through acquisition as opposed to learning, Gee (1990) makes a distinction between *Primary Discourse* and *Secondary Discourse*. Primary discourse is the initial discourse, i.e., “our socio-culturally determined ways of thinking, feeling, valuing, and using our native language in face-to-face communication with intimates” and “within a given culture” (Gee, 1990, p. 150). The primary discourse can serve as a framework or base for one’s acquisition or learning of secondary discourses. Then, secondary discourses are developed in association with, and by having access to and practice with secondary institutions in which the person needs to communicate with non-intimates. Gee (1990) argues that to acquire literacy, one needs to gain “mastery of, or fluent control over Secondary Discourses” (p. 153), which involves secondary institutions’ use of language, either written or oral, or both, as well as ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, knowing and using various objects and technologies (Gee, 1990; 2003). Since there are multiple secondary discourses in university, the students must develop proficiency in multiple literacies, i.e., to become multi-literate (Gee, 1990; 1998).

Secondary discourses dominant in different communities at university, in Gee’s (1990) opinion, are not mastered by overt instruction, but by *enculturation* into these discourse communities which in turn requires scaffolded and supported interaction with

people who have already mastered the mainstream discourse (p. 147). A key point about developing secondary discourse of the community is that the learners are required to be involved in “interactions with people with whom one is either not *intimate* or they involve interactions where one is being *formal*” (p. 152). Such involvement necessitates that one take on a new identity that transcends the primary socializing group with their own discourses and enculturate to the cultural or sub-cultural communities with their secondary discourses. Secondary discourses, in Gee’s (1990) view, can be local, community-based discourses peculiar to a specific sub-cultural group or more globally oriented, public sphere discourses.

Discourses, primary and secondary, can interfere with one another or certain aspects of one can be transferred to another as the learner can fall back on his/her primary discourses in the enculturation process (Gee, 1990). Like the process of second language acquisition, the characteristics of interlanguage can be observed in the secondary discourse produced by students who are at early stages of development, indicating their intermediate mastery (Kutz, 1998). It can thus be subject to simplification, pidginization and creolization (Gee, 1990, p. 153). Drawing on the notion of genre, Artemeva and Fox (2010) point out that the student engagement with the discourse of a new discipline can be facilitated or hindered by their prior genre knowledge. They define genres “as communication strategies that arise from and respond to the needs of particular situations” (p. 481). If the previous genre knowledge is relevant, the students can draw on it to have better understandings of the new genre, which in turn eases their transition to the new discipline and boosts their motivation.

Borrowing the concept of acculturation from studies in second language acquisition and extending it to academic cultures, Purves (as cited in Cheng & Fox, 2008) maintains that “instruction in any discipline is acculturation, or the bringing of the student into the interpretative community of the discipline” (p. 309). Cheng and Fox (2008) define *academic acculturation* “as the dynamic adaptation processes of linguistically and culturally diverse students engaging with the academic study cultures of [...] universities” (p. 309). This conceptualization views disciplinary acculturation as a “complex, locally situated and dynamic process” (Morita as cited in Cheng and Fox, 2008, p. 315) “whereby students and faculty negotiate a process of creating and recreating their identities and their communities of practice in a wide range of settings (Cheng and Fox, 2008, p. 311).

As emphasized in the definition of academic acculturation, the processes of adaptation and engagement are influenced by student diversity which in turn affects the range of discourses involved in tertiary education. This diversity results in the need to respond to widely disparate primary discourses (Gee, 1990) as the students are coming from vastly different social and cultural backgrounds. Indeed, it is essential to consider what different students bring to the learning situation, their *culture of learning*. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) define culture of learning in the context of language classrooms as:

That much behaviour which is set within taken-for-granted frameworks of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs about what constitutes good learning, about how to teach and learn, whether and how to ask questions, what textbooks are for, and how language teaching relates to broader issues of the nature and purpose of education (p.169).

The culture of learning, according to Cortazzi and Jin (1996), may influence the process of learning and teaching while the teacher and the students can be unaware of it. As there might be a diverse range of cultural backgrounds in the classrooms, more than one culture of learning may exist to influence the participants. Such diversity can result in the development of unnoticed gaps between the expectations of the teacher and the students, or between different groups of students (see also Spack, 1998). The classrooms with very diverse student body, according to Pratt (1998), function not like a homogeneous community, but like a “contact zone” where “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (p. 173). It can result in “a conflict of values, a challenge to one’s identity, and a threat to the familiar ways of knowing and doing” (Krause, 2006, p. 1). Thomas (2002) argues that if students from diverse backgrounds are accepted and respected in educational institutions and their practices and knowledge are valued, they will indicate higher levels of academic success (p. 431).

Cortazzi and Jin (1996) recognize different factors which shape and influence any particular culture of learning among the participants in a classroom. Among these factors, they name the educational traditions of the immediate community or society and the socio-economic conditions which may affect teachers’ and learners’ goals and strategies. They also refer to other social constraints such as age, ability, gender, the language syllabus, exams, materials and the immediate classroom context among others (p. 169). This approach can suggest that students’ degrees of engagement can be affected by the possible gap existing between the culture of learning they bring to the classroom and the mainstream culture of learning in both university and the immediate community of an academic course. Although Cortazzi and Jin (1996) locate the study of the cultures of

learning in different theoretical areas such as applied linguistics and ethnography of communication and review the research related to this topic, they emphasize the fact that this topic has been largely under-explored to the date.

As Cortazzi and Jin (1996) emphasize, what the students bring with them to the language learning situation should be valued. Indeed, academic literacy is not viewed as substitutions for students' own ways of knowing. Rather, the students' previous knowledge and experience function as essential resources upon which the new knowledge is constructed (Zamel & Spack, 1998, p. x). Highlighting the role of students' discourse in language acquisition, Fishman and McCarthy (as cited in Zamel, 1998) maintain that personal and academic languages need to be blended. From the same standpoint, Spellmeyer (1998) also claims that the only way for students to become insiders in the world of academic culture is to bring their own personal values, experiences, knowledge, and questions to the new culture.

Woods (1996) identifies what both teachers and students bring to the classroom as beliefs, assumptions and knowledge or BAK. He points out that the strategic actions taken by both teachers and students in the local context of the course cannot be separated from their BAK. Woods (2006) also refers to the “dynamic, embedded and recursive” (p. 97) nature of decision-making in language learning and highlights that it is “at the event level of the course”, that learners and teachers begin to co-construct instructional events through the negotiation and renegotiation of classroom activities (p. 100). Conceptualizing knowledge as being synonymous with BAK, Woods and Çakır (2011) suggest that both knowledge and beliefs influence decision-making practices. In effect, individuals are defined by what they bring with them into the process of learning, i.e.

their past experiences and beliefs, as well as their cultural histories and world views, and all of these influence the ways in which new ideas and events are interpreted and encountered (as cited in Plourde & Alawiye, 2003). Therefore, “individuals do not acquire knowledge by internalizing it from outside but by constructing it from the inside, in the interaction with the environment” (Kamii, Manning & Manning as cited in Plourde & Alawiye, 2003, p. 336).

Language backgrounds appear to play a critical role in academic communities. For example, in a context where both L1 and L2 students interact, Kutz (2004) claims that it is common for ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) students to attribute their problems with academic courses to their level of mastery of English. They consider these difficulties different from those encountered by native speakers; consequently, they try to remove these problems with language learning strategies at the vocabulary or sentence level and try to decode sentence-level meaning. Kutz (2004) argues that these students need to move beyond their familiar social identity as ESOL students which necessitates their unconscious dependence on language-learning strategies. A parallel to Kutz’s view of ESOL students is found amongst native speakers who encounter problems in reading and writing within a discipline. Many are likely to request assistance with grammar and see issues at the sentence level (Fox, personal communication, 2012). They are less likely to accept that their problems are related to thinking through ideas and taking time to synthesize concepts. Whether they are ESOL students or they speak English as their mother tongue, novice students need to become aware that the problems they encounter may be mainly “discourse-learning” rather than “language-learning”

problems and they are better addressed with more general academic learning strategies which facilitates “meta-level understandings” (Kutz, 2004, p. 77).

The impact of students’ academic background on the culture of learning of the academic communities has also been emphasized. The students’ prior experience with similar discursive contexts is deemed to be an advantage in university contexts (Freedman as cited in Artemeva and Fox, 2010) since it acts as a reference that individuals use to define new situations (Schutz as cited in Scanlon et al., 2007). If relevant, the antecedent genre knowledge of a discipline can support the students’ transition to the discourse of their new discipline (Artemeva and Fox, 2010, p. 479). To this end, the students need to be given opportunities to make connections between what they know and what they are expected to know (Zamel & Spack, 1998).

As noted in Cortazzi and Jin’s (1996) definition, learner’s strategies can both influence and be influenced by the educational traditions and conditions of the immediate community. Research shows that students’ academic achievement depends on the strategies they use for learning and coping with the academic and linguistic demands of their discipline (see Cheng & Fox, 2008; Fox et al., 2006). In their study of academic acculturation, Cheng and Fox (2008) define strategies as the “consciously selected processes that the respondents used for dealing with ... the tasks at hand” (p. 315). Brown (2000) defines strategy as “moment-by-moment techniques that we employ to solve problems posed by second language input and output” (p. 122). Adopting a more process-oriented approach, Dörnyei (2005) turns to a related concept used by other researchers, “self-regulatory mechanisms” and describes it as “the learners’ strategic efforts to manage their own achievement through specific beliefs and processes (p. 191).

Among the various components introduced for self-regulatory mechanisms (see Dörnyei, 2005, p. 192), stress management and time management are deemed to promote academic success. Similarly, Lawrence (2005) introduces time and stress management as necessary practices for students' successful academic transition to university (see also Figure 1).

In order to succeed in university, students need to cope with frustration or tension resulting from increased work load and less time (Fox et al., 2006). The result of some studies reveal that anxiety and tension can act as either beneficial/facilitative or inhibitory/debilitative factors in academic performance (see Brown, 2000; Dörnyei, 2005) based on the coping mechanisms adopted by the learner. In a study of the impact of ESL and EAP programs, Fox, Cheng and Zumbo (in press) considered anxiety and stress as personal background factors which lessen or strengthen the degree of academic and social engagement. According to the findings of their study, high levels of anxiety (students' internal feeling of shyness, lack of confidence, worry, nervousness, etc.) and stress caused by external pressures (from parents, finances etc.,) undermine the impact of academic language courses on students' development of effective strategies for social engagement with the life and academic study cultures they are transitioning to.

Time management behaviours are also deemed to facilitate productivity and alleviate stress (Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993). The lack of time management capabilities among university students can cause trait procrastination and consequently high levels of dilatory behaviour, i.e., the "putting off of that which is necessary to reach some goal" (Lay as cited in Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993. P. 649). In a study with undergraduate students, Pychyl, Morin and Salmon (2000) also contend that procrastination stems from time estimation problems. They emphasize that undergraduate students need to consider

their own past experience with task completion as well as the experience of others when making plans or predictions about their study patterns.

Today's highly collaborative academic settings with new technologies require the entering students to develop social interaction skills besides other academic skills (Duff, 2010). The learners can establish a congenial environment and ease their transition to the discourse of a new discipline by enhancing the willingness to communicate and interact. Conceptualized as a situated construct, willingness to communicate refers to "readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons" (as cited in Dörnyei, 2005, p. 208). With a strong emphasis on oral communication skills, Duff (2010) points out that these social strategic skills enable the students to participate effectively in initiation-response-evaluation exchanges (Duff, 2010, p. 177) and consequently engage themselves as well as their peers.

The culture of learning in first semester courses also demands the development of intellectual and academic skills related to the content. Indeed, to pass the subject, entering students need to engage, master and demonstrate the subject discourses and cultural practices (Lawrence, 2005, p. 20). These discourses and their associated practices are usually reflected in the course syllabus as prerequisites or entry knowledge for the course and include texts (lecture notes, PowerPoint notes, WebCT documents, etc), attendance, class participation, rules, research methodologies, referencing systems, ways of writing, assessment, etc. (see Figure 1). In order to integrate into this culture and become literate in its mainstream discourse, the students need to experience meaningful learning in the social setting. From constructivism perspective, the higher education context can be viewed as a community of learners (Plourde & Alawiye, 2003) where students construct

their own knowledge through social and academic interactions with peers and others. Learning also depends on the university learning community and staff generating conditions that stimulate and encourage student involvement (Davis & Murrell as cited in Krause & Coates, 2008).

The notion of learning communities and how they suggest ways of introducing newcomers to unfamiliar practices in new sociocultural settings can also be discussed under the umbrella of socially situated apprenticed approaches (Gee, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Vygotskey, 1978). Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* and Lave and Wenger's concept of *legitimate peripheral participation* are considered to be significant (Ridley, 2004) and play a leading role in the present study.

Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that effective learning takes place through increasing participation and involvement with established members of a sociocultural community. When a student is at the *zone of proximal development*, i.e., when there is a gap between what the learner has already mastered (the actual level of development) and what he/she can achieve, the skills and strategies are developed when the learner is provided with educational support, *scaffolding* (see also Bruner, 1978; Cazden, 1979; Gee 1990). Once the learner, under an expert guidance or in collaboration with capable peers (Vygotskey, 1978, p. 86) masters the task, the scaffolding can be removed and the learner will then be able to complete the task again on his/her own. Stated another way, in a conscious effort at scaffolding in students' zone of proximal development (Wood, Burner & Ross as cited in Casanave, 2002), students can be guided into new practices of the community.

Community of practice is defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (p. 98). Essential to newcomers’ learning is participating in these communities which share cultural practices (Wenger, 2000). What brings coherence to a community, according to Wenger (1998), are three dimensions of practice, namely mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. Lave and Wenger (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) view learning as situated activity which happens through increasing participation and involvement with established members of a sociocultural community. They suggest that learning takes place through a process by which novices (for example, students) within communities of practice learn to become competent practitioners by developing relationships with experts (for example, teachers). As masters in the community, the experts assist learners to develop knowledgeable skills “through modified forms of participation that are structured to open the practice to non-members” (Wenger, 1998, p. 99). They call this apprenticeship learning *legitimate peripheral participation* and suggest that through this process, new learners can become full participant in the community.

Freedman (1995) also elaborates on the nature of the process and learners’ efforts to become full participants:

Newcomers’ engagement in the process is carefully orchestrated and facilitated by their mentors so that there is a match between the learners’ abilities to perform and the nature of the specific portions of the task that they are assigned to perform. Over time, more and more of the task is given over until newcomers become full participants. (p.125)

Becoming immersed in the subject matter by attending lectures and seminars, reading, discussing and observing professional writers (Spack, 1998, p. 95), the students internalize the conventions of the community. What they need in the next step are opportunities for meaningful use of the acquired conventions, to be pushed to produce (Swain as cited in Freedman, 1995). This pushing can happen as a result of the assignments set, cooperative interaction with peers and the professor and by effective, timely feedback. The students thus are deemed to develop strategies that arise from and respond to the needs of the particular discourse community and produce texts that are “rhetorically constructed to meet the expectations of the disciplinary community insiders” (Artemeva & Fox, 2010, p. 483). Hence, the students manifest “genre capability”, i.e., not only the genre knowledge but also contextualized doing and being (Smart & Gilbert as cited in Artemeva & Fox, 2010, p. 483). In sum, they develop shared knowledge, shared purposes and shared strategies which help them move from “outsiderness” to “insiderness” (Gee, 1990; Kutz, 2004; Schutz as cited in Scanlon et al., 2007; Wenger, 1998).

The importance of feedback to first-year students has been strongly emphasized as it provides emotional support which in turn heightens motivation and facilitates integration into university (Poulos & Mahony, 2008). Receiving timely feedback, especially from the experts in the domain, can have “profound impact on the attitudes students take towards their work” (Stefani, 1998, p. 339). While involved in a kind of cooperative interaction over the work in progress (Freedman, 1995), the students and the experts can negotiate and renegotiate meaning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and the experts can probe and respond tactfully where necessary, giving over more and more

responsibility to the learners as the learning progresses (Freedman, 1995, p. 140). In other words, the meaningful feedback the students receive on their learning enhances their sense of ownership and personal responsibility (Topping, Smith, Swanson & Elliot, 2000) and helps them become effective, independent, autonomous learners (Stefani, 1998). As such, it helps the students develop one of the most important skills they require for effective learning, i.e., self-assessment.

Self-assessment, according to Boud (as cited in Taras, 2001) is the procedure through which the students are involved in “identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work and making judgements about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards” (p. 607). As an alternative assessment arrangement, peer assessment also helps self-assessment “by judging the work of other students and gaining insight into their own performance” (Vikerman, 2009, p. 222). Peer assessment also promotes greater metacognitive self-awareness (Topping et al., 2000) as it can assist students to monitor their progress as they learn and then adapt strategies if they are not working (Vikerman, 2009, p. 223). Hence, to be able to evaluate their own performance in order to meet the required expectations, the students need to participate in collaborative activities.

Becoming a full participant, according to Lave and Wenger (1991), implies learning which involves the whole person. Stated differently, becoming able to be involved in new activities, to perform new tasks and to master new understandings can only be realized through the development of systems of relations within discourse communities. Learning thus “implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations”, which in turn implies the

“construction of a new identity” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). Lave and Wenger (1991) integrate learning with identity formation and social interaction within the context of legitimate peripheral participation:

Viewing learning as legitimate peripheral participation means that learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership. We conceive of identities as long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice. Thus identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another (p. 53).

Therefore, identity is situated, i.e., the process of identity formation happens while the individuals engage in multiple contexts and interact with distinct groups of people (Scanlon et al. 2007). Identity is thus “multifaceted with individuals having as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of people with whom they interact” (Cooley as cited in Scanlon et al. 2007, p. 228).

By belonging to and engaging different discourse communities in university, students develop different forms of membership and thus multiple identities (Gee, 1990; 1998). These various forms of membership can conflict with, influence, complement and enrich each other and consequently involve the students in attempts to combine, confront, or reconcile various aspects of their identities (Wenger, 2000). This phenomenon, what Wenger (1998) calls *multi-membership*, “is a source of personal growth and also a source of social cohesion, because it builds bridges across practices (Wenger, 2000, p. 242). Wenger (1998) suggests that communities are more likely to engage the whole person,

the whole identity of their members if they can include a large portion of their membership in their forms of participation.

Wenger (1998) points out that a community with a strong focus on learning is not concentrated on full participation, but on creating possibilities in which the identities of participation and non-participation can interplay. From this standpoint, the marginalities of competence and marginalities of experience (forms of non-participation preventing full participation) are not considered to be a threat to one's membership, but the potentials for unrealized knowledge. As a consequence, "to support learning is not only to support the process of acquiring knowledge, but also to offer a place where new ways of knowing can be realized." (Wenger, 1998, p. 215). In this regard, teachers and instructional materials become resources for learning, and these resources in turn are reshaped by learning. So what matters is the interaction of the planned curriculum with the emergent curriculum so that they become structuring resources for each other (Wenger, 1998, p. 267). As such, both the teacher and students are engaged in the pursuit of meaningful learning.

With emphasis on the role of learning and learners, *engagement* is defined as "the intensity and quality of students' involvement in initiating and carrying out learning activities" (as cited in Yang, 2011, p. 182). Hu and Kuh (2002) define engagement as "the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes" (p. 555). Krause and Coates (2008) broaden the scope of the phenomenon arguing that engagement encompasses "academic as well as selected non-academic and social aspects of the student experience" (p. 493). They argue that the dynamic interplay between student and institutional activities and conditions can

develop student engagement. In many models that examine aspects of commencing student success at university, engagement is deemed to be a prerequisite for student integration, retention and progression (Krause, 2006; Lawrence, 2005; also see Kuh, Cruce, Shoup & Kinzie, 2008; Tinto, 2002). Lawrence (2005) introduces a framework in which the students' transition and retention are connected with their engagement, mastery and demonstration of mainstream institutional discourses. This framework is a conceptual representation of a theoretical shift, namely "the deficit-discourse shift" (Lawrence, 2005).

Lawrence's (2005) *deficit-discourse shift* theory has its grounds in critical discourse theory and constructivism. Therefore, it gives primacy to discourses and literacies in the university context and also to the roles of the social setting, culture and peer relationships in student learning (Lawrence, 2005, p. 19). Originated from this theory, Lawrence's *Framework for student transition and retention* (see Figure 1) identifies the university as a dynamic culture embodying a multiplicity of subcultures, each with its own discourse or literacy (p. 20).

Figure 1. Framework for student transition and retention, drawn from Lawrence's (2005)¹

In this framework, subject discourses, i.e., the discourses students need to engage in and demonstrate in their first semester, are considered to be among the first and most critical ones. Passing the subject requires students to acquire literacy in both the subject discourses and cultural practices (p. 20). Moreover, there are multiple other discourses/literacies students need to develop if they want to persevere. These are administrative discourses, academic numeracy, research discourses/paradigms, computer systems, library and database literacies, student discourses (school leaver, mature-age,

¹ In the original article, while retention is defined as the process of Mastering and Demonstration of mainstream discourses, the term "Demonstration" is missing in the figure for Framework for student transition and retention.

international, on-campus, external, online), and time and stress management practices among others. (p. 21). The theoretical shift and the framework together have implications for both students and institutions, considering both as being responsible for students' academic success.

The complexity of acquiring academic discourses for first-year students has also been largely investigated in real academic settings of practices. Taking into account the importance of macro studies that focus on the big picture through the analysis of large data sets, Pascarella (1991) invites scholars to pay more attention to naturalistic and qualitative approaches in the study of college impact. As Schoener (as cited in Zamel, 1998) discovered in her micro-study of university students in an academic course, it is only by having access to and understanding the full context and complexity of the classrooms that academic language processes can be understood. To have a closer look at the issues a diverse population of students face in order to access and participate in discourse collectives in a community of an academic course, a review of several case studies is provided in the next section. These studies complement the theoretical perspectives by giving a genuine picture of the realities created by students and teachers in the local discourse community. Furthermore, they illustrate how case studies contribute to an in-depth understanding of the processes in sensitive ways.

Case studies of academic discourse development: Empirical perspectives

Four case studies conducted by Zamel (2004), Spack's (2004), Sternglass (2004) and Casanave (2002) illustrate how entering students new in undergraduate academic contexts could develop strategies to meet the local literacy expectations. While Zamel and Sternglass investigated the issues from students' perspectives, Spack integrated teachers' and students' perspectives and Casanave concentrated merely on the role of teachers in the processes. All the researchers investigated the cases in their natural settings in order to capture the diversity of population in higher education communities.

In longitudinal case studies with Motoko and Martha, both non-native speakers of English who attended the first-year composition course taught by the researcher, Zamel (2004) made explorations into academic life of undergraduate ESOL students. In regular meetings which continued until Motoka and Martha graduated, Zamel discovered these two students' expectations, perceptions, and experiences while they were discussing their assignments, their teachers' responses and evaluation of their work, the classroom dynamics of their course, the roles they and their teachers played and the kinds of learning that they were expected in their classes. A common theme in these two case studies and the other surveys conducted by the researcher was students' dissatisfaction with barriers the faculty establish between themselves and students, which suggests the faculty to be perceived as "outsiders" (Zamel, 2004, p. 12).

Zamel (2004) concludes that like other studies of teaching and learning in higher education, her case studies indicated what these students perceived about their experiences could not be specific to ESOL students. Moreover, Zamel (2004) acknowledges that given the diversity in student population in higher education, every

classroom may represent a distinct culture and thus needs to provide the possibilities for newcomers to practice and participate in the construction of meaning and knowledge. These studies also demonstrated that change is slow, much like the process of learning itself and continues to evolve with exposure, immersion and involvement (p. 13).

Emphasizing the importance of situated local literacy in a similar way, Spack's (2004) study of Yoku as a second language learner provides examples of strategies that novice readers and writers develop to approach the unfamiliar English academic discourse. In a detailed longitudinal narrative, Spack gathered information through numerous interviews with Yoku and supplemented them by interviews with two of her professors, observations of two classes, and the collection of Yoku's writing, with instructors' comments over three years of her undergraduate studies. The researcher attempted to discover how Yoku acquired academic literacy under the influence of three factors present in the academic context, namely linguistic and cognitive development, previous educational experiences, and cultural background, as well as interactions with instructors and course-related texts (Spack, 2004, p. 20).

Towards the end of the first semester of her sophomore year, Yoku concluded that her lack of background knowledge resulted in undesirable outcome. Spack (2004), however, considers this perception to be premature as throughout the three-year study, they both became aware that literary acquisition involves being engaged in a process of constructing knowledge. In Spack's opinion, what changed over time was Yoku's confidence in herself as a reader and writer, which had a direct impact on her ability to develop and adjust strategies to comprehend various academic discourses in which she was immersed. Spack's study of this non-native speaker of English informed her that a

more contextualized and culture-based research approach is needed to account for the experience of bi/multi lingual, bi/multicultural students who vary in age, knowledge and language backgrounds (Spack, 2004).

In longitudinal case studies conducted with college students in New York City, Sternglass (2004) recognized that upon their arrival in college, first year students begin to establish academic and social connections which play a significant role in their persistence in their college experience (p. 47). Delores, the non-native student participant in Sternglass's study had already attended junior and senior English-speaking high schools before entering the college. The two introductory disciplinary courses she had taken upon her admission to the college, in Delores' view, provided the basis for her engagement in and commitment to her major field. Tracking Delores throughout 6 years allowed Sternglass to see changes in students' academic literacies and identities and the need for proper and timely support from the teachers.

In one-semester-long case studies conducted by Casanave (2002) in Japan, two teachers of an undergraduate academic literacy course participated to help the researcher make explorations into the role of teachers in local academic enculturation. Casanave attempted to consider David and Yasuko's classes as communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and teachers as expert models who helped novice students become participants through apprenticed practice. Casanave (2002) observed the classes and had interviews with David and Yasuko in addition to email and phone chats. These data were supplemented by those of students in responses to questionnaire with open-ended questions.

David and Yasuko as well as the researcher realized that the students needed ongoing support and interactions with teachers and peers through the practice of engaged discussions. This could provide the students with opportunities to receive different forms of feedback throughout their developmental experiences. However, they also came to the understanding that a one-semester course provides too little time to let academic enculturation happen, particularly in a foreign language setting. Casanave (2002) views academic enculturation as a set of “games” for which the students must learn the rules while benefiting from guided participation. Whereas the students’ participation in their discourse community was peripheral, Casanave (2002) emphasizes that “it was participation nonetheless” (p. 77). Casanave finally concludes that the diverse literacy practices the undergraduates in these case studies were involved in helped them develop strategies with which they could survive in multiple local contexts rather than developing expertise.

What the results of these case studies adds to the theoretical perspectives reviewed earlier is understanding that one-semester studies can reflect how much of a head start students can get in constructing academic knowledge and consequently a new identity by becoming engaged in the literacy practices. Similar to the prolonged process of second language acquisition, the complete acculturation or enculturation into the discipline and transition from novice to expert can be revealed in long-term (Zamel & Spack, 1998) and at higher levels of university education (Casanave, 2002). What the novice undergraduate students do is try to meet their professor’s expectations by developing skills which are named by Casanave (2002) as “Survival Strategies” (p. 41).

These developmental experiences are associated with shifting identities and growing awareness which help the students succeed in the university culture.

Theoretical perspectives also seem to have contributed to these studies by equipping them with well-defined frameworks (for example, the community of practice in Casanave's inquiry) within which the researchers were capable to generate new ways of understanding. Such integration of theory and research cannot be observed in the quickly growing literature on academic success in higher education (Lawrence, 2005). The common theme between the empirical evidence and the theoretical perspectives reviewed earlier is that change at university is dependent on the way social, psychological and intellectual forces interplay within each classroom (Pascarella, 1991).

While qualitative studies such as ethnography and case study tend to be more meticulous in capturing many of the subtle and fine-grained complexities of the phenomenon (Casanave, 2002; Pascarella, 1991), they have not been of particular interest to researchers. Qualitative methods, especially case studies, are assumed to be more time consuming (Sternglass as cited in Casanave, 2002) and not scientifically accepted enough (Herndl & Nahrwold, 2000) in comparison to surveys, cross-sectional sampling and quasi-experimental studies. Consequently there are not many case studies about college students and teachers and the issues which are involved in the processes of academic literacy acquisition. Existing qualitative studies have been merely rich in descriptive detail and suffered from interpretative and analytic skills in identifying the multifaceted effects of first-year (Pascarella, 1991). Furthermore, the research has largely investigated these issues from teachers' and stakeholders' perspectives rather than focusing on the students themselves (Lawrence, 2005). From this standpoint, Pascarella (1991) concludes

that the community of higher education researchers need to scrutinize the sub-environments (the classrooms, peers, practices) to fully understand how change at university is dependent on a “dynamic web of influences” (Pascarella, 1991, p. 458), i.e., the interplay of different factors which need to be investigated in the local context of the discipline.

All these findings provoked me to make inquiries into the complex phenomena, through an integrated synthesis of multiple perspectives which encompasses theoretical, research, student and teacher viewpoints. Stemming from all the theoretical and research conceptualizations of the change processes, three primary influences were identified as potentially affecting students’ academic engagement in the practices and their integration into the culture of a first-year introductory academic course. These influences provided an analytical approach for conducting the study. They are discussed in the following section.

What influences academic change processes?

This study was informed by theories of the culture of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996) and deficit-discourse shift (Lawrence, 2005). However, whereas Lawrence’s (2005) framework for investigating student transition focuses on the big picture by studying new students’ mastery of all institutional discourses, this study analyzes features of students’ engagement and mastery of the discourse of an introductory course. As noted in chapter 1, in-depth qualitative studies can offer more sensitive ways for capturing the subtle complexities of the processes (see also Casanave, 2002; Duff, 2010; Pascarella,

1991). To this end, this thesis examined three types of influences which appear to shape and develop students' strategic academic choices which in turn impact the quality of the change process as they make the transition to the discourse of a new discipline.

Exploration of the interaction of these influences may enhance our understanding of the academic engagement and mastery processes of undergraduate students. In order to meet the expectations of a new academic community/course, students make strategic academic choices which are influenced by situational, interactional, and personal factors (see Figure 2). These influences are discussed in the sections which follow.

Figure 2. Influences on students' strategic academic choices

Situational influences. As Lawrence (2005) notes, “in order to pass a subject, students need to become literate in the subject’s discourses and cultural practices” (p. 20). As such, the academic course requirements may play highly influential roles in the acquisition of dominant local literacy and give rise to specific discursive practices.

Interactional influences. Depending upon the academic and social connections the students develop with other participants in the academic setting, they make strategic choices which help them decide how to experience learning while involved in interactions with others. In effect, learning is viewed as situated activity which happens through interactions between newcomers (entering students) and established members (teachers) of a discourse community (see also Freedman, 1995; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The nexus of situated interactions with teachers and other students thus provides the context and process in which undergraduate students form their new identity (Scanlon et al., 2007, p. 223). In the context of the present study, interactions are defined in terms of social connections individuals make with the course instructor, the teaching assistants (TAs) for the course, the researcher, and other students in the same class and other classes.

Personal influences. The entry characteristics of the learners seem to have an important influence on the academic strategies they adopt within the academic community. Indeed, the students’ assumptions and expectations about academic discourse are influenced by the ways in which their individual, cultural, and educational

histories interact (Zamel & Spack, 1998). In the context of the present study, these personal influences are defined in terms of individual *background* and *strategies* which are described as follows.

- ***Background.*** The diverse body of the students in introductory academic courses seems to result from a wide variety of language and academic backgrounds which are discussed separately below.
 - *Language background.* This construct describes the language background of the students attending an academic course. It distinguishes students who speak English as their native language from those who are native speakers of other languages except English (ESOL). ESOL students can enter an English-medium university from countries where they experienced learning and practicing English as either a foreign or a second language. Language backgrounds also define the students in terms of their mastery over one, two or more languages, i.e., if they are mono-, bi- or multi-lingual.
 - *Academic background.* Information concerning the educational background of the students concerns which year of university they are studying in and what degree they are holding upon their entry in the academic context. It also concerns the gap existing between high school and university education and whether previous academic studies were carried out in an English-speaking context.

- ***Strategies.*** Based on their previous experience with similar/dissimilar contexts, entering students may adopt or adjust familiar strategies in order to cope with the academic and linguistic demands of their immediate discourse community. These situated, “consciously selected processes” (Cheng & Fox, 2008, p. 315) are described as follows:
 - *Stress management.* Drawing on the definition provided by Dörnyei (2005) and the notion of secondary discourse by Gee (1990), stress management in the current study refers to the ability to cope with worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a secondary discourse.
 - *Time management.* Following Lay and Schouwenburg’s (1993) conceptualization of time management, this construct is defined in the present study as “Setting Goals and Priorities, the use of Mechanics [...], and the Perceived Control of Time” (*Italics in original*) (p. 649).
 - *Social interaction management- Volunteer spirit.* Given the importance of students’ participation in discursive practices of the community, this construct is introduced to imply the same concept as willingness to communicate, but in a broader sense. While willingness to communicate mainly focuses on oral social skills, volunteer spirit in this study refers to initial willingness to enter into discourse of a community at a particular time with a specific person or persons.

Given that “language processes must be understood in terms of the context in which they occur” (Walvoord & McCarthy as cited in Zamel, 1998, p. 189), this approach allowed the context of this study to be examined in rigorous detail and from a number of different perspectives. In sum, it sets the stage to reveal the complex array of influences which shape the culture of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996) in a classroom.

Having introduced the major ideas in the thesis, before considering the methodology used in the study to investigate the research questions, the definition of key terms are provided to support the readers’ understanding. These terms are used consistently throughout the remaining thesis.

Definition of key terms

This section provides brief definitions of key concepts, which were applied within this thesis. I define them here in order to clarify their use within my study.

Discourse community. Draws on the work of Gee (1990), and Lave and Wenger (1991), discourse community refers to a set of relations among persons, activity, and the world, which is developed over time and based on accepted ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting in a particular context. In the case of my study the context is an introductory first-year academic course.

Primary discourse. Following Gee (1990), primary discourse refers to the familiar ways of thinking, feeling, valuing, and using language which individuals use

with intimate collectives and within a given culture before entering a new discourse community of an academic context.

Secondary discourse. Secondary discourse (Gee, 1990) in the context of this study is defined as the academic community's particular use of language, either written, oral, or both, as well as ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, knowing and using various objects and technologies. Secondary discourse also exists within a specific academic discipline.

Dominant literacy. Discursive practices of an academic discourse community which students strive to acquire and master as they engage with a discipline. See also mainstream discourse practices, which are exercised by those who have already mastered the secondary discourse of the academic community (e.g., Professors, TAs, etc.).

Academic engagement. The quality of students' involvement, both academically and socially, in initiating and carrying out the practices of a discourse community.

Summary

In order to situate the present case study research within a theoretical framework, Chapter 2 provided a review of studies which focus on the experience of first-year undergraduate students in developing academic discourses of post-secondary education. It introduced university as a discourse community where entering students need to acquire all the sub-discourses of the disciplines. It further described how the culture of learning of a classroom is shaped and influenced by a myriad of factors. The review of

theoretical and research perspectives provided the grounds for the development of an analytical approach for conducting a micro-level, situated case study. The introduced approach allows this case study to shed insights into the academic change processes of first-year undergraduate students. This research thus aims to investigate the dynamics of the influences in an introductory course and the way they affect the entering students to develop strategic skills for meeting the expectations defined in terms of course requirements.

Chapter 3 describes the methods used in this case study research and provides an overview of the context of the study, participants, materials, and data collection procedure. The elaborations on different approaches for the analysis of data are also provided.

Chapter 3. Method

Qualitative research is interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary, multiparadigmatic and multimethodological (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.7).

Chapter 2 summarized the theoretical and research framework that informed the study. Chapter 3 offers an overview of case study research with reference to the present study and describes the context within which the study was situated. The details about participant demographics, materials and data collection procedure is included next. Finally, the description of different approaches for the analysis of data is provided.

Approach

This study is considered applied research (Merriam, 1998), in that the inquiry was guided by interest in the problems and concerns which are experienced and articulated by students, the professor and the class TAs. The research was also guided by the researcher's personal values, beliefs and knowledge originating from personal and academic experience. Moreover, it applied an inductive logic which started from observations and led to theoretical models (Tashakori & Teddlie, 1998). As such, the methodology selected for this research was qualitative as it permitted inquiry into "what was happening to individuals in a setting and how individuals were affected by the setting" (Merriam, 1998, p. 228). The term methodology is used here as it includes an

implicit set of assumptions regarding the nature of reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology) as well as method, i.e., a set of procedures for collecting and analysing research data (Smart, 2011, p. 147).

The research used a case study approach, consistent with the key principles identified for case study research including: “boundedness, in-depth study, multiple perspectives or triangulation, particularity, contextualization and interpretation” (Duff, 2008, p. 23). This study explored a “bounded system, i.e., the system which was bounded by time and place (Creswell, 1998; Duff, 2008; Merriam, 2009). As such, it provided an in-depth description and analysis (Gall et al., as cited in Duff, 2008) of the system of a particular academic program and a particular classroom (Merriam, 2009) within the naturally occurring context (Duff, 2008) of the course over a 4-month semester. The study relied on detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 1998) such as interviews, observations and field notes, email contacts, archived documents and informal conversations. In addition to data, the samples and the researchers were also ‘triangulated’ (Duff, 2008; Merriam, 1998). The choice of three purposeful samples, the professor and the two TAs, in addition to the student participants provided another perspective. Furthermore, a second researcher’s interpretation suggested further confidence in the final conclusion (Duff, 2008). Finally, benefiting from the ‘data-driven, interpretative’ (Duff, 2008) nature of case study approach, this study attempted to develop models and ultimately theories for the academic development process of first-year undergraduate students on the basis of the findings from the data.

According to the classification introduced by Merriam (2009) and Creswell (1998) for qualitative case study, the present study was ‘instrumental’ as the participants

were used to provide the researcher with an insight into the academic development process. Since a number of participants were studied to investigate the phenomenon, it was a multi-person case study which benefited from considerable variation across the participants. The participants' diversity (i.e., age, language background, academic background, etc.) could potentially lead to "better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about still a larger collection of cases" (Stake, 2005, p. 446).

The case was situated within its "physical, social and historical setting" (Merriam, 2009, p. 61) as it was studied within the real context of a university classroom while the participants were involved in social interactions with others in that setting, and their engagement and integration into the academic context was investigated over the course of a 4-month period. Finally, it is considered "within-site study" (Merriam, 2009) since a single classroom in a single program and within a single university was selected for study.

The study took place at a Canadian English speaking university. The university is a mid to large size institution serving 26,000 students and offers 65 programs of study. The field of Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies (ALDS) combines several research areas that in other institutions have separate academic traditions. As an interdisciplinary field encompassing work in Applied Linguistics, Writing Studies, Discourse Studies, and Literacy Studies, ALDS focuses on language-related issues

The focus of this study was on a first-year course, namely *An Introduction to Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies* (ALDS 1001A), which is suggested in a BA program path in the field. This half-credit course is designed to introduce undergraduate

students to basic concepts and theories in the areas of applied linguistics and discourse studies. It attracts mainly first-year students who are planning to complete a bachelor degree in a range of subjects. It also attracts a few post-graduate students who are enrolled in the Teaching English as Second Language (CTESL).

In the course, ALDS 1001A, classes met twice a week, for 1.20 hours per class, over a 13-week term during the fall 2011. Presentation/discussion sessions were held in a large classroom in one of the main campus buildings. The students considered here were taking other courses at the time of the study. They had diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds. There were a total of 90 students registered in the class of whom 20 were majoring in Applied Linguistics and the rest were from other fields and majors.

The course outline specified the following topics, in defining the content focus of the course:

- “First and second language acquisition;
- Sign language;
- Language teaching and assessment;
- Language in society; language, identity and power;
- Discourse analysis;
- Written language, and
- Literacy”.

These topics were presented in this course through readings, lectures, guest speakers, multimedia sources, and group and class discussions. The required readings for the considered course consisted of a textbook and a few articles. In terms of evaluation, 10%

was awarded to the students' active participation in class and online, 70% was awarded to the test, mid-term and final exam (5%, 25% and 40% respectively) and 20% was awarded to two assignments, 10% each, written in response to the end of chapter activities in the textbook. Class attendance was not compulsory excluding for the tests, mid-term, final exam, and the term paper peer-review.

The sessions were held in a large classroom in one of the campus buildings. Each session started with lecture presentations which accompanied by PowerPoint slides. The students were involved in taking notes during the lectures, either on laptops or using pen and paper. Although the lecture notes were always posted on WebCT, they still needed to take notes as they had been reminded by the course instructor at the beginning of the semester that the WebCT notes were not complete and that not all the lecture materials were covered in the textbook.

The instructor used different techniques through which he elicited comments from the students, allowed them to interrupt, answer questions or ask for clarifications. He was taking a walk to the back every once in a while to let them know that he was concerned about their being attentive. The students could meet with the course instructor once a week during his office hours or make an appointment for a convenient time to ask any questions or concerns they might have.

Two TAs were assigned to the course, who were both the second-year Master's students majoring in ALDS. They were assisting the students with their questions on course requirements during their office hours which happened once a week for an hour. One of them was accessible on WebCT and the other one in a room in one of the campus

buildings. With regular presence in the classes, they were both sitting in the front row. The students usually referred to them at the end of the classes to seek help with their assignments.

Participants

The participants in this study were students, the instructor and the TAs assigned to the course in fall 2011. Eight students volunteered to participate in the interview study following a 15-minute talk by the researcher in the 2nd week in which the goals of the study and the method of data collection were explained to the class. The triangulation was attained by mixing different types of purposeful samples (Merriam, 1998), i.e. in addition to the student participants, the professor and the TAs also provided the researcher with data by participating in interviews. I also had the role of the participant as observer in the study. As a participant observer, I was involved in the activities of the setting under study in order to develop an insider's view of the processes, the *emic* perspective (Patton, 2002, p. 268). As an inquirer, I also needed to adopt an *etic* approach, or outsider perspective to see the similarities and differences of separate events.

The larger number of participants was helpful in exploring the nature of the process and trying to document diversity and understand variation (Merriam, 1998). A wide range of variety in terms of language and academic background, major and age could be observed among the student participants (see Table 1).

Table 1 - Demographic information from student participants

Student Participant	Country of origin	Time in Canada	First language	Other languages (in native country)	Major	Year of study	Educational Background	Age	Gender
<i>Participant 1</i>	Jordan	1 year	Arabic	English as a foreign language	CTESL	1 st year	Bachelor in language and literature from native country	30 yrs.	Female
<i>Participant 2</i>	Philippines	5 years	Tagalog	English as a second language	ALDS	1 st year	High school diploma from Canada	18 yrs.	Female
<i>Participant 3</i>	Mauritius	2 years	Creole	French and English as second languages	French	3 rd year	High school diploma from native country	25 yrs.	Male
<i>Participant 4</i>	Iran	6 years	Farsi	English as a foreign language	Special student	1 st year	Persian Language and Literature from native country- Diploma from adult high school in Canada	34 yrs.	Female
<i>Participant 5</i>	Canada	All my life	English	None	English and Linguistics	2 nd year	High school diploma	19 yrs.	Male
<i>Participant 6</i>	Canada	All my life	Hindi and English	None	Linguistics	1 st year	High school diploma	19 yrs.	Female
<i>Participant 7</i>	Canada	All my life	English and French	None	ALDS	1 st year	CEJEP	27 yrs.	Female
<i>Participant 8</i>	Canada	All my life	English and French	None	CTESL	1 st year	CEJEP- Bachelor in Business	Over 45	Male

The undergraduate student participants came from a variety of language and academic backgrounds. It was of much interest to the researcher that it happened accidentally to have almost half of the student participants as native speakers and the other half as non-native speakers of English. Among the non-native participants, two were international students staying in Canada for less than 2.5 years. The other two had been in Canada for 5 years or more and held diplomas from Canadian high schools. Their countries of origin also added to the cultural diversity of the participants as there was one student from East Africa, one from Southeast Asia and two from Southern and Western Asia. They spoke Arabic, Tagalog, Creole and Farsi as their mother tongues. English was spoken as the second language of the two and the foreign language of the other two student participants in their countries of origin. Out of four Canadian native speakers of English, there were three bilingual students. Two of them spoke French and English and they had received their CEGEP diplomas from Quebec; one spoke Hindi as her parents were originally from India. Five students were female and three were male.

The student participants had a variety of majors. Two of them were attending the course to receive the Certificate for Teaching English as a Second Language (CTESL), another two were majoring in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies (ALDS), one was doing a double major in English and Linguistics, one was majoring in French, another one in Linguistics, and one was attending the course as a special student planning to apply for Master's in ALDS. Three of them had already received an undergraduate degree from their countries of origin, either inside or outside Canada. Six students were in the first year of their studies while the other two were in the second and third years.

Four of the students were above the age of 27 with some work experience gained before and/or during the course.

In addition to the volunteer student participants, the two TAs and the Professor for the course were selected to be interviewed as they were considered to be ‘information-rich cases’ (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). The TAs were both the second-year Master’s students majoring in ALDS. Finally, I appeared to have a more dominant role in the study than a mere observer. I became a powerful ‘social other’, who assumed, besides the role of an observer in the site, the role of the participant. Adopting an “active membership role” (Adler & Adler as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 124), I was involved in some of the setting’s central activities such as class exercises and assumed some responsibilities like assisting students with their assignments and providing them with guidance and timely feedback.

Materials

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant in the fall 2011 and both closed and open-ended questions were asked in order to elicit information about the characteristics of student academic engagement and integration into the culture of the first-year introductory course. The interview questions (see Appendix A) were developed prior to the interviews and were approved by the ethics office at Carleton University (see Appendix B). The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour each.

Another source of data was my written account of the observations I did from all the sessions, twice a week, 80 minutes each, throughout the fall term while I observed

and participated in the class activities and recorded my observations in personal field notes. I recorded the details related to my observations in a field notebook and kept a field diary to chronicle my own thinking, feelings, experiences and perceptions throughout the research process. Tape recording of the classes could aid in writing up field notes of the observations to ensure that all the dialogic interactions were captured.

Other documents arose during the course and were used in the study. There were emails exchanged between me and the student participants in which I asked for the impressions of their performance on the tests and assignments. Moreover, I was provided with more evidence of the students' academic change process while I was helping them with their assignments. Some of the student participants continued seeking my advice on how to make more improvements in their academic life during and even after the course was over. I also had informal conversations with the students, both those who participated in my study and non-participants, while waiting in the corridor for the end of the session prior to the one for ALDS 1001A.

Furthermore, I was provided by the students' responses to an online assessment for the course which was conducted by the course instructor in week 8. I also had access to online discussions among the students, the TAs and the course instructor on WebCT where 765 messages were posted by the end of the semester. Finally, in an informal gathering which occurred immediately after the exam, the student participants reported on perceptions of their performance on the course in general and the final exam in particular.

Procedure

Ethics approval was obtained from the ethics review boards at Carleton University on October 4th, 2011 (see Appendix B). The ethics clearance provided me with the permission to conduct interviews with students attending ALDS 1001A in fall 2011. Interview data were triangulated by using other methods of data collection. All methods of data collection are described in their chronological order in the following sections.

Class observations. I obtained permission from the course instructor to observe the course setting before the classes started. The classes were held in 13 weeks in total with two sessions per week, 80 minutes each, which started on September 12th and finished on December 5th, 2011. I was a complete observer in the first week as I was not known to the large number of students with whom I was sitting. However, I assumed a more active role as a participant after I was introduced to the students by the course instructor in week 2 and became involved in the class activities and exercised responsibilities that could advance the students' progress. I recoded my observations in both descriptive and reflective notes (Creswell, 1998), i.e., I was jotting down the description of the teacher and students' interactions in separate columns while including my own thoughts, feelings, reactions and interpretations in speech bubbles around the pages (see Appendix C). All the classes were tape recorded to ensure that the teachers-students verbal negotiations of the academic discourse were captured.

Participant interviews. In order to recruit the participants for this study, I was introduced to the students and TAs by the course instructor in week 2. I was given about 15 minutes to describe the purpose of the study, the interview questions and the amount of time needed to complete the interviews (see Appendix D). As mentioned in the introduction, I was available to the students, including the study participants, for any counselling or providing them with feedback on their assignments and academic strategies. Eight students volunteered for the study by contacting the researcher through email early in weeks 2 and 3. The course instructor and the TAs also agreed to attend the interviews after the study was introduced.

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted twice in the fall of 2011. The first round of interviews was conducted in weeks 4 and 5, between October 4th and 11th. Then the participants were invited for the second round in weeks 12 and 13, between November 28th and December 5th before the semester ended. Meanwhile, I had close contacts with the participants through observing the sessions and exchanging email. At the end of each interview, the students were encouraged to raise their points or probable concerns about the course requirements and could receive some advice if they requested for any.

I interviewed the students at the location of the participants' choice, for example, library study rooms, classrooms or coffee houses on campus and in town. The course instructor and the TAs preferred to be interviewed in their offices on campus. The participants were provided with informed consents at the beginning of our first interviews in accordance with university ethics guidelines. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Email contacts. I contacted student participants twice during the semester, once in week 9 after they submitted the 1st assignment and took the mid-term exam and next in week 11 after they received the exam results and the feedback on their assignments (see Appendix E). In these contacts I asked them for their main problems while preparing for the exam and doing the assignment and attempted to find their unmet expectations or possible gaps in perceptions of the exam questions and assignment tasks after they received the tutors' feedback. Four student participants contacted me during the term regularly to seek my help with understanding the assignments and receiving feedback on their writings.

Course assessment. The course instructor provided me with the online assessment he conducted after the mid-term exam in week 8 for the purpose of assessing the teacher/students' performance in the course. Titled 'Midterm course feedback', the assessment included two open-ended questions in which the students were asked about what they liked/disliked least/most about the course and/or the instructor's teaching of it. Over 50 responses to the above questions provided extra data for my study.

Informal group discussions. The last series of data were collected while the student participants were invited to a finger food party by the researcher after the final exam. This session was a completely informal and friendly open talk meeting with the student participants in order to appreciate their participation and also receive their feedback on the final exam and their perception of their performance. After I received

their verbal consent to reveal their identities to one another, I received them in one of the classrooms on campus where they shared their experiences in their first encounter with university practices with me and other student participants. They also commented on the final exam and their approaches to assignments. All their discussions were audio taped and transcribed later. Besides providing me with rich data, this informal gathering seemed to develop the student participants' friendly relationships with each other and also with me as we are still in contact with one another on Face book.

Data analysis

Although my research was designed as a case study, the method I adopted for data analysis was constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). This combination was tried after the data were collected and analysed since I decided to define theoretical models for the undergraduate students academic change process based on the rich information obtained from multiple subjects. Using a different method for the analysis can be also supported by Merriam's (1998) statement about the nature of qualitative studies, "A qualitative design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry. Qualitative designs continue to be emergent even after data collection begins" (p. 255).

Grounded theory approach is considered to be a particularly useful tool for addressing questions about the changing process of a phenomenon over time and developing a theory thereafter (Merriam, 1998). As such, grounded theory could complement my case study approach to qualitative data analysis (Charmaz, 2006),

because the former approach produced a thick description of data based on which the latter developed a theory. This simply echoes Charmaz's (as cited in Merriam, 1998) logic for considering Glaser and Strauss's book on Grounded theory so *revolutionary*, "[i]t challenged [...] the assumptions that qualitative research could produce only descriptive case studies rather than theory development (Merriam, 2009, p. 30)

In a grounded theory approach, general, abstract theories are generated out of the participants' views in the study. To this end, the data is gathered and analysed at multiple stages which leads to the emergence of some interrelated categories of information which define a theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin as cited in Creswell, 2003). The hypothesized models I developed was grounded in theory as I began with the particular incidents from the analysis of first interviews and compared them constantly with other incidents in the data from second interviews, field notes, documents, etc. until I constructed conceptual maps (Charmaz, 2006) for academic engagement (see Figures 3, 4 and 5). Since the resulting theoretical models appeared to be an interpretation of meaning and actions on the part of both the researchers and research participants, the nature of the approach was constructivist as opposed to objectivist (Charmaz, 2006). Consistent with my approach as a constructivist grounded theorist, I took a reflexive stance toward the research process and products and considered how my theories evolved (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). As such, my analysis was contextually situated in time, place, culture and situation.

The raw data from interview responses were analyzed in a 'zigzag process' (Creswell, 1998, p. 57). Using an 'open coding approach', the first round of the interview responses was initially coded based on line-by-line coding and guided by my new

analytical approach (see Appendix F). Coding the data this way worked well with the detailed data resulted from 22 interviews and helped me identify the participants' implicit concerns as well as explicit statements (Charmaz, 2006, p. 50) about how to engage in the practices and integrate into the new academic setting. For the purpose of increased reliability, the strategy of "triangulating analysts" (Patton, 2002, p. 560) was used, i.e., another researcher, an expert in applied linguistics studies, coded the same data separately and then the different codings were compared and combined.

The initial coding of the first round of the interviews allowed us to capture and synthesize new threads for analysis and understand main themes in the participants' statements. It also helped us find out the possible gaps at the early stages of the research, which led us to other sources of the pertinent data, i.e., 'purposeful sampling'. After more detailed interview data were collected in the second round, the 'constant comparative method' (Glaser & Strauss as cited in Charmaz, 2006) was applied to compare the themes emerged within the same interview and also to compare the themes in earlier interviews. Through this comparison, the focused codes were developed, i.e. the most significant and frequent codes for categorizing the data were specified and then their respective features were outlined (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage, the categories were saturated with data (Creswell, 2003), i.e. no more data for characterising the properties of the identified categories were needed. Consequently our sampling became 'theoretical' (Charmaz, 2006).

The open coding phase resulted in the development of the initial set of categories. For example, almost all the participants were concerned about managing a large amount of reading material in response to written assignments and exams. Another example can

be given for the non-native student participants who avoided class participation as a result of lacking confidence in mastery over English language. To approach these problems, the students developed strategies which were labelled ‘productive strategies’ and ‘impeding strategies’ respectively. These strategies became categories (see Appendix G).

At the next stage, we began to relate categories to subcategories and specify their properties and dimensions. Subsequently major categories and some subcategories emerged and the links between them were demonstrated. This phase of coding, namely ‘axial coding’, helped us identify a single category first, ‘Characteristics of academic engagement’ and then strategies that addressed that category as well as all the contextual and intervening conditions that shaped those strategies (see Appendix H). To justify the emergent categories, the triangulation strategy was used by drawing on more sources of data such as class observations, email contacts, students’ assignments, the instructor’s evaluation records and informal conversations with student participants. The derived information verified the accuracy of the findings and validated the emergent categories and their relationships. Finally, a theoretical model emerged from the axial coding categories of information which could portray all the interrelationships in characterizing academic engagement.

I presented a hypothesis, in the form of both a ‘story line’ (Creswell, 1998) and a visual model, for characterizing academic engagement by integrating the categories which generated from the axial coding model (see Figure 6). The generated hypothesis suggested links between categories (three types of influences affecting academic development process) and properties (Merriam, 2009). This stage, namely,

theoretical/selective coding, is usually considered the last phase of analysis in grounded theory studies. However, I remained open to the emergence of new hypotheses at the end of my study. After I obtained enough evidence to establish suggestions, I developed a model that elucidated the situational, social and personal conditions influencing the phenomenon of student academic integration into the culture of the class. This formed the substantive theory for characterizing academic change in a first year undergraduate course. My theory was presented as both hypothesis and a visual model (see Figure 7).

Summary

This chapter described the methodological nature and the design of the present case study research. The participants of the study as well as the employed materials were also outlined. This was followed by an explanation of different procedures for data collection. Finally, all the stages for analysing data, which was informed by grounded theory coding methods, were elaborated. Chapter 4 presents the results and discussion in addressing the research questions which guided the research:

- 1) What influenced the undergraduate students' academic engagement in an introductory course?
- 2) What facilitated the undergraduate students' integration into the culture of learning in an introductory academic course?
- 3) How should the undergraduates' process of transition to an introductory course and integration into its culture of learning be reconceptualised?

Chapter 4. Results and discussion

The tendency of 'outer-directed' pedagogies so far has been to over-emphasize what it is that students must learn in order to become members of our community. The focus [...] is on what must change in our students, how they must become other than they are in order to accommodate our discourse. We feel the need to focus also on those motives and abilities that grow from our students' histories that may be sustained and extended (Coles & Wall, 1987, p. 299).

While the previous chapter presented the research methods used in this case study, this chapter details the findings which address the research questions. The chapter begins by describing and discussing the academic choices made by the participants in relation to the three types of influences introduced earlier in the related literature. The detailed examples of students' academic choices then provide the answers to the three research questions in the following sections.

As a result of data analysis, it became evident that all of the students considered in the study made strategic academic choices in order to engage in the discursive practices of the new academic setting. These strategic choices were used by the students to meet the expectations of the discourse community in the first-year academic course. Every individual academic choice was considered to be affected by three types of influences, namely situational, interactional, and personal influences simultaneously (see Figure 2). It was evident in the findings of the study that the situational influences were the most

salient among the three. Therefore, I discuss the other two influences in relation to the prominence of the situational influences.

The prominence of the situational influences: Strategic academic choices in relation to course requirements

This section further describes and discusses how the students' academic engaging and mastery of mainstream discourse was affected by three types of influences which co-occurred and acted together in the local context of the course. As mentioned above, the results of the study indicated that the interactional and personal influences appeared to play less prominent roles than the situational influences coming from course requirements. As such, in the elaboration of the findings of this study, the other two influences are discussed in relation to the salience of the situational influences. The following sections thus examine the students' strategic academic choices as developed in each of the categories of "course requirements", namely readings, lectures, writing exams, written assignments, attendance and participation.

Readings. While the student participants were discussing their views on readings in the interviews, some common strategies were identified as developed by them at different stages during the course. Focusing on the ways in which they developed these strategies allowed me to examine how the students needed to be engaged in the practice to learn to read texts. Such an active engagement was never *just* read-and-write literacy exercises, but it involved ways of talking, interacting, thinking, valuing and believing

(Gee, 1990, p. 43). This section looks at how learners attempted to grow academically, socially and personally strategic while approaching the required readings in order to integrate into the academic discourse of the community.

All four non-native speakers of English referred to re-reading as a useful technique used by them at the beginning of the course. Feeling confused by the challenge of understanding the content, they made comments like, “I’m speaking English. I understand English. But I need to read it [the course readings] 2-3 times to get it inside my head”. Although re-reading can be an appropriate and useful strategy for understanding difficult texts, Hass (1994) criticises the readers who are relying overly on this strategy arguing that these readers attempt to “understand the text not by moving out from it to a rhetorical context, but by moving in, focusing even more closely on text as an object” (p. 50).

Two of these non-native students tried to seek help with the unfamiliar and complicated academic concepts in the readings. While reading, they typically stopped to look up the technical words in the dictionary and one of them even attempted to translate these words into her mother tongue first and use them in her own sentences later. They appeared to be critically conscious of their own lack of language mastery as it was clearly stated by one of them, “I lack knowledge of both general words as well as technical vocabulary”. These ESOL students attributed their problems with academic courses to their level of mastery of English and tried to remove these problems with language learning strategies such as looking up unfamiliar words in a dictionary, translating sentences, and trying to decode sentence-level meaning. As Kutz (2004) notes, these students needed to move beyond their familiar social identity of ESOL student which

encouraged them to depend on language-learning strategies unconsciously. Instead, they needed to become aware that the problems they encountered were mainly discourse-learning and were better to be approached with more general academic learning strategies.

The increasing use of discourse-learning strategies by ESOL learners became evident in the second interview since, with the exception of one of the participants, they claimed that they found the academic content a lot easier to comprehend as they could develop some new skills such as summarizing, note taking, guessing the meaning of the unknown words, skimming through the text by focusing on the key words and phrases as well as the headings and subheadings. One of them reported on these skills in more detail:

At the beginning, my reading was so slow, but now I read faster. I read and understand. I write the key words on the paper. Then for the second reading, I just focus on those key words and definitions. Those are more important. And then I try to have an idea about that. I circle and highlight the key words and important sentences that connect with the subheadings in the chapter. Then when I get back to these words, I try to connect them with the other sentences and paragraphs. Then I write 1-2 lines or 1 paragraph about that. At the beginning I was just reading and memorizing, but now I understand better.

However, one of the non-native students, a high school leaver, was not successful in developing strategies beyond re-reading. She was relying on others for the explanations of the complicated concepts and was still hanging on reductive strategies which

prevented her from growing into an independent reader later in the course. In the second interview, she demonstrated that she had not acquired discourse-level understandings and the strategies that go with them since the techniques she was able to apply were reading aloud and memorization:

I ask a person who understands it well to explain it to me in an easy way, and then I have to reread it again and again to understand and then find the key terms in the dictionary. When I learn, when I study, I read aloud, so I can memorize the definitions.

The early-in-the-course comments made by native speakers of English while reflecting on their problems with the academic discourse also seemed to imply that they needed strategies which would help them with broader conceptualization of what is involved in university-level reading. All four native speakers of English found the readings dry and tedious to go through in the first interviews at the beginning of the term, which could indicate that like their non-native counterparts, they needed “to develop a sense not only of *what* is talked about in the academic context, but of *why* and *how*” (Kutz, 2004, p. 78). One of them described his challenge of moving into a new discourse community, “I’ve struggled through to highlight the important points and make comprehensive notes by drawing out of the readings what I need to”. What all the students needed, regardless of their language background, was the acquisition of the discourse competence with its underlying strategies which could help them to function as members of new academic discourse of their current course.

In the second interview conducted at the end of the term, the native speakers of English indicated that the readings interested them markedly as they began to comfortably adjust to and accommodate the academic style of the texts they were reading. One of them referred to the strategy she had chosen in order to retain the information much better. She had started looking at readings and slides from the lectures in combination. She commented on this combination as, “When I look at them both as two sides of one coin, I get all the information in one complete package. They go very well in this course and I love that”. From these statements, it becomes clear that they could learn how to build bridge across practices (Wenger, 1998). One of the non-native speakers also developed the same productive strategy after a few sessions. She said she could deal with the course in a more comfortable way because, “at the beginning when I was reading, I didn’t know what to focus on. But after the exams and presentations, I know what they want. I’m more familiar with the system and with the style of teaching”.

As Kutz (2004) argues, the classroom discourse the students are involved with through interaction and participation creates the shared understanding among students which makes vocabulary-learning problem different from what it was earlier. Added to this, the specific features of the professor’s discourse style contribute to making the difficult concepts of the readings part of the knowledge that students can share (Kutz, 2004, p.84). While responding to the online assessment performed by the instructor after the mid-term exam, one of the students emphasized the facilitating impact of the lectures on the comprehension of the readings. She/he described the features of the professor’s discourse style as benefiting from “very explicit explanations about terms and key words”.

When elements of the course are built up upon each other to create a larger framework for understanding, the students gain meta-level understandings about how the discourse works. They develop shared knowledge, shared purposes and shared strategies which help them move from outsidership to insidership (see Gee, 1990; Kutz, 2004; Wenger, 1998) as they begin to try on the discourse of a new setting, the dominant secondary discourse (Gee, 1990) of the community. As such, they can understand the meaning behind the assigned readings, i.e., determine what the purpose of the readings is and shape their own understanding rather than waiting to receive already-shaped understanding. Illustrating her active role in the discourse community, one of the non-native speakers commented on her reading strategy in the second interview:

Now when I read, I have to summarize. I have to write the main points. I can't study from the book. I have to study from my own notes. I write notes on a chapter, and then I go to slides. So I see what the similarities and differences are. Whenever I read and look at the slides, I can understand everything.

Another reason for which one of the native speakers found the readings more interesting later was the fact that the textbook introduced a specific subject in each chapter rather than following a natural progression which was expected to be boring. While he commented on the readings in the first interview as "a bit dry", he said in the second interview:

Generally I found the readings very interesting. Some of them are more interesting than the others. There doesn't seem to be a natural progression to the

book. It's like each chapter is on a specific subject, which is not surprising. It's more like, "This idea, that idea..." and then it put them all together.

While responding to the question 'What do you like about this course most?' in the online course assessment performed by the lecturer after the midterm exam, a student summed up her positive feeling about the variety of topics introduced in the textbook by mentioning, "It seems that there has been a topic for every student to engage in". It appears that the course instructor was already aware of the need for such a variety in the introduced topics in the course book as he referred to this feature as a merit while talking about his choice of the textbook at the beginning of the term, "I have chosen a textbook which has very specific topics, chapters which are devoted to specific topics".

When the student participants were asked to reflect on their improving reading skills throughout the course, it became evident that the non-native speakers of English seemed to have used a larger number of strategies or at least were more conscious of the adopted strategies and developed skills. This difference among the native and non-native speakers was obvious when the latter provided more detailed elaborations on the reading techniques they had used. This can also be supported by the research conducted by Sheorey and Mokhtari (as cited in Anderson, 2005) who studied the metacognitive reading strategies of L2 learners, with a specific focus on the differences in reading strategy usage between native and non-native speakers of English. The results of their study suggest that the number of reading strategies adopted by ESOL students was greater than those used by their American (native-speaking) counterparts. This claim can be supported by what one of the non-native speakers reported on her strategic approach in managing the complicated concepts in another first-year year academic course:

This is not an easy course. Even the native speakers in the class are complaining. But thanks God, I'm doing well. I think I'm doing well because the other students overread, over think. They are native speakers and they know the language, but they keep asking and overread. For me, I take it simple. I listen to the teacher and I apply the rule. And it's working for me. They study more and they understand more. Sometimes I don't understand everything in the class. But I take things as simple as it is. It's just like math. When you really wanna know the rules, at the end you get the wrong answer, because you give it too much attention and emphasis. I don't do that.

As a mature student with academic experience, she defined her approach towards learning clearly and suggested that she was capable of adopting appropriate strategies under the influence of her BAK (Woods, 1996). Her antecedent genre knowledge seemed to act as a reference schema for defining the new situation (see Artemeva & Fox, 2010; Scanlon et al., 2007).

Another interesting discovery that resulted from the investigation of the use of effective strategies by non-native speakers of English was the role of social connection in developing academic skills. One of the students referred to the way in which his interaction with the researcher affected his reading ability:

The tips you gave me last time helped me a lot with reading. I just go through the readings. I don't stop. If there's a word that I don't understand, I just highlight it. So I don't stop reading and actually I save time. And when you go through the reading the second time, it gets easier.

He resisted looking up the words for their meanings as he had discovered that “reading fluently was often a more effective way of achieving meaning” (Spack, 2004, p. 33).

Another non-native speaker emphasized her interaction with other students in the class and how it influenced her confidence as a non-native speaker and motivated her to continue to practice:

I thought first that the subject and the vocabulary were just new and hard for *me* to understand, but when I continued, I realized that most of the students found the key words new, too. Although their English is good, they should study hard as well.

These students were seemingly able to assess their current approaches to the dominant literacy by interviewing other participants in the community about their strategies, by trying out different possibilities, or by learning about strategies utilized by successful participants. These are all strategic choices they became capable to adopt under the influence of their volunteer spirit for interacting with others and also as a result of their intellectual growth. Indeed, as Johns (1997) notes, after having explored their already-established approaches and learned about more, they could attempt various types of reading to see which strategies worked with different tasks (p. 127).

As Fox et al. (2006) mention, some students may experience frustration or tension when they are overloaded with the mount of school work and are unable to manage their time effectively. One of the native speakers’ statements indicate his lacking in confidence as a result of not becoming fully engaged four weeks after the course started, “I’ve only read the first chapter in the book so far. I’m actually the worst student ever! It’s hard for

me to keep up with everything, because all my studies are reading intensive”. As Scanlon et al. (2007) point out, the change of context may result in feelings of loss and identity discontinuity. This might apply to the above-mentioned student who just left the school and was overwhelmed by the expectations of the new context. The demand for the new identity formation in the new academic context was even more evident when one of the mature native students made a comparison between the characteristics of the culture of learning of the present course with that of mid 90s in which he experienced the discourse community of the university with no frequent access to technology and the Internet. When he was inquired about his ability to meet the course requirements under the time constraints, he expressed his bewilderment at the beginning of the semester:

Before, it used to be just textbooks and notes and Profs. Now there are emails coming from 2 different places, from Carleton and from WebCT, and there are other readings and there's a discussion board, there's the class and there's the textbook. I'm not overwhelmed, but just I can see you have to juggle a lot of different things and prioritize what's the most important thing. To follow every thread, Oh Gees! That's tough!

His statements emphasize that like other students new to the community, he needed to develop more than read-and-write literacy and become multi-literate in the different discourses and discursive practices the subject offered.

Not feeling satisfied with her level of engagement, the non-native school leaver appeared to have discovered that she was unable to reduce time pressure. In the second interview she mentioned, “I need time management and focus, not to be lazy and

procrastinated. But the main reason is that there's the Internet, Facebook, social friends and then my friends want me to hang out with them". The way this student managed her social interactions seemed not to be strategic and consistent with the demands of the new context she had just entered. As Pychyl (2008) puts emphasis on the more destructive dimensions of social networking sites, using Facebook by this student resulted in her distraction and procrastination. Moreover, it appeared that she lacked strong motivation and will more than time management skills. Many researchers have suggested that students' will is as important as their skill (see Simpson, Hynd, Nist & Burrell, 1997). Students will grow into self-regulated learners if they can regulate their motivational aspects of learning besides the cognitive and metacognitive aspects (Boekaerts; Corno & Pintrich as cited in Simpson et al., 1997). To this end, they need to form realistic and positive self-schemes or self-concepts, to set goals, to create learning intentions and protect those intentions from competing forces (Boekaerts; Pintrich; Gracia & Schunk as cited in Simpson et al., 1997, p. 45). An example of this can be the mature non-native student who seemed to have improved her reading skills later in the course. She talked about her effective time management skills as a result of her motivation and persistence, "if the native speakers need three hours to study, I need five hours. My husband told me, 'Don't give up! Just continue. You need to spend more time'".

In sum, the students began to raise their awareness of reading practices. They also tried to develop effective skills and strategies in order to become active members of the new discourse community. Some of them identified the discourse-level skills that had been practiced, such as skimming, guessing the meaning of unknown words, note taking and summarizing. They could also bridge across different reading practices, which helped

them engage effectively. Furthermore, they pointed out how effective time management and social skills as well as motivation and persistence could ease their transition to the discourse community. Although it was not clear how much they changed to become active participants, they apparently became capable of monitoring and assessing their own progress. Based on this level of mastery, they could be positioned somewhere between the status of novice and skilled readers. Sheorey and Mokhtari (as cited in Anderson, 2005) describe skilled readers as those who are capable of reflecting on and monitoring their cognitive processes while reading. These researchers believe that this ability is not only manifested in the conscious choice of effective strategies, but it is also reflected in regulating the use of such strategies while reading. Anderson (as cited in Anderson, 2005) also highlights:

Strategic reading is not only a matter of knowing what strategy to use, but also the reader must know how to use a strategy successfully and orchestrate its use with other strategies. It is not sufficient to know about strategies; a reader must also be able to apply them strategically. (p. 759)

Lectures. Coming from a variety of academic and language backgrounds, the students' expectations and their ability in developing the necessary skills while attending the lectures were different. As members of the new academic discourse community of their current course, they needed to reflect on their past experiences in other discourse communities they had already attended and bridge them to the new discourse practices in the social world they entered. Students' comments at the beginning, during the course and by the close of the semester indicated their growing repertoires of skills and

strategies and taking up identities as more active members of the new discourse community while engaged in an interaction with the lecturer, slides, and their own notes.

In the first interview, one of the international non-native speakers referred to the difference between lectures given by her professors in another country and those delivered in the present course, demonstrating two different contexts with different cultures of learning. She said, “At the university in Jordan, they were spoon feeding the students, giving them no chance to communicate. The Professors were giving lectures and we were taking notes. It was mainly based on listening, writing and memorizing”. This student’s statements show that her personal academic background influenced her BAK, which in turn could affect her perceptions and expectations in the new community. Unsatisfied with the identity she had developed in the previous academic setting, she seemed to expect the communication process in lectures to be more than the transmission of thoughts from the lecturer and their reception by the students. In effect, she criticized the view which treats students as passive participants in the process of message exchange. This approach, as Badger, White, Sutherland and Haggis (2001) claim, considers “learning as a matter of transmission rather than interpretation” (p. 415). The evidence for forming a new identity as an active member of the new discourse community was provided by this student while referring to a range of techniques she used at the beginning of the semester in order to construct knowledge rather than merely receiving it:

I don’t read all the materials in the book for each class. But after the lectures, I know about the points that the Prof highlighted in the class. For me, reading after the class is more important than the reading before the class. I can understand the

topics more easily after I listen to the lectures. I listen carefully in the class, take notes and then read the postings and the slides after the class.

This student gave herself permission to eliminate some reading assignments or skip some difficult sections based on what was emphasized in the lectures. The lecture slides appeared to act like cues which helped her figure out what had to be read and what did not have to be read after the class. Indeed, she could become involved in an interactive dialog between the readings and the slides and making connections between their discourses, which required her to construct knowledge rather than just receiving it.

Badger et al. (2001) believe that the use of the PowerPoint is consistent with transmission views of learning where lectures are primarily monologues. This is evident in the comment made by another international student who had completed her undergraduate studies in a country where students played the passive role of recipients of knowledge. Influenced by the previous culture of learning, she expected the lecture slides to contain all the presented materials in detail as she commented:

The slides are not helpful. They are short with brief points rather than full sentences. I couldn't use them to answer questions in the quiz as they don't give you full sentences. I study the slides and then try to find more about it in the book.

Although the amount of information provided in the slides did not meet this student's expectations, the last sentence in her comments reflects how the slides functioned effectively to help her develop and adjust strategies for the purpose of meeting the requirements of the present discourse community with a new culture of learning. The lectures in the course benefited from the dialogues between the teacher and the students,

so they did not tend to encourage passive learning as noted by Badger et al. (2001). The lecture slides, indeed, guided the above student to the book, which helped her bridge the discourses presented separately. Entering the university with an established social identity as a high school student, one of the native speakers also referred to the more interactive nature of this course by emphasizing its demanding nature in comparison to the ones she experienced at high school, “At high school you have notes and they give you everything. In the class here, I had hard time to take capture of everything”.

One of the strategies the students developed while attending the lectures was taking notes, which is considered a key component of academic literacy (Badger et al., 2001). Examining how the students thought about the purposes of taking notes in lectures and the content of the notes and also how they changed their note taking techniques throughout the course can probably reflect the degree of their integration into undergraduate culture of learning. In the second interview, for example, the same non-native student who believed in the collaborative learning explained how she employed a new technique for taking notes:

At the very beginning, I used to take note of everything when the professor was giving a lecture. Then I noticed that there are slides and I can get back to them. Then I started to take notes of only important points, not everything.

This student modified her note-taking strategy by using the PowerPoint as the cues for taking notes rather than the main source through which knowledge could be received. Hence, the slides did not function as the transmitter of knowledge in this context as claimed by Badger et al. (2001). Instead, they assisted the students to engage more

effectively in the discourse of the lectures. Being exposed to a new culture of learning, the other non-native speaker who used to rely solely on the PowerPoint revised her approach later by adopting more interactive techniques. She was able to play a more active role by deciding what elements of the lectures were worth writing down. This was evident in her comments in the second interview:

The Professor says some important things and asks some questions I should answer. He mentions some key words whose definitions I need to find in the book. I go step-by-step, find the answer to the questions, highlight them in the book and highlight the definitions. After the lectures, I get back to the book and try to read the important points he mentioned in the lectures.

The other native speaker who found the lectures at university more demanding than those at high school could also grow competent enough in determining what to focus on while taking notes. She gave priority to the lecturer's opinion as she mentioned:

In the class here, I had hard time to take capture of everything, what to take note, what to write down. But now, I like it better. You have the teacher's opinion in it and his experience in it. Lectures are multi-dimensional.

While referring to his active involvement in taking notes, another native speaker also considered the lecturer's opinion as his main criteria for deciding what to include in his notes:

I feel that I comprehend my notes a lot better, because I can look at what he was saying on the slide and then what he said about it. So I like it. I'm having a lot of,

wouldn't say fun, because note-taking is never fun. But I mean it's a lot more productive that way.

In an attempt to develop the secondary discourse of the community (Gee, 1990), this student, like his peers, appeared to depend on the teacher as a reliable resource who had already mastered the mainstream discourse. He also tried to interact with his peers in the classroom in order to learn whether more effective techniques could be used,

I was watching everybody else in the lecture. What I'm doing is just jotting down notes on paper, but two girls next to me download the professor's slides before the lecture and then in the notes section, they write everything that he says about specific slides that are up.

Another study which examined the academic success of international students in an Australian university found that first-year international students had problems understanding lectures in terms of vocabulary and speed and were not able to follow tutors who spoke too fast or provided little input (as cited in Andrade, 2006). One of the non-native speakers attributed her unproblematic understanding of the lectures to her language background as she maintained in the first interview, "The Prof is from my country and I have no problems understanding his accent". Another non-native international student complained about her problem with understanding the lectures, "I'm not good at taking notes from oral presentations. I don't know how to take notes; sometimes I don't hear what he says. I can't follow him as he's sometimes too fast. I also get distracted sometimes". A recently graduated high school student, she appeared not to

have been equipped with previous experiences to cope with the academic literacy practices required of her. However, to compensate for this insufficiency, she made a clever personal strategic choice at the beginning of the semester by volunteering in the present study. While contacting the researcher, she clarified the intention behind her volunteer spirit:

Is it ok if I want to join your research and you help me with ALDS? I am a first year. Thank you! And the thing is, I want someone to explain to me again of what the professor taught us and will teach us. It's like a review, because I am a first year. I am still adjusting: D

She tried to involve herself in interactions with the researcher as one of the *significant* members (Scanlon et al., 2007) of the new discourse community. But she still did not seem to grow into an active participant in the community later in the course. Her statements in the second interview indicated that her failure in understanding the lectures were seemingly due to her inappropriate techniques while reading and taking notes. The lack of focused attention and receptivity to information in performing the particular task could also demonstrate that this student did not experience enough interest and enjoyment which are the proximal motivators for persistence and subsequent engagement (Sansone & Smith as cited in Bye, Pushkar & Conway, 2007). This became more evident when she talked about her insufficient persistence in using the strategies she had found helpful in note taking, "Probably if I read ahead, I'll get the points better. But I'm too lazy to do the pre-reading".

It was evident from what the above-mentioned student said in the second interview that she finally resorted to a counter-productive strategy, “I’m recording what he’s saying. I’m not still good at note taking. Even when I was in high school, I didn’t know how to take notes orally when somebody was talking”. While this student was not capable of integrating into the new culture of learning, another non-native international student who was in the third year of his studies commented, “The lectures are going smoothly, not very quickly. So I can take note of everything. He doesn’t use too many technical words in the lectures and I like that. It makes things way easier to understand”. This student might have gained familiarity with the style of the discourse in lectures based on his academic experience which helped him acquire the prior genre knowledge. It could be concluded that in understanding the lectures and taking notes, academic background seemed to have played more critical role than language background.

As it is implied in Wenger’s (1998) and Woods’ (2006) discussions, in order to develop an identity of participation, students must be given opportunities to contribute to the planning of classroom activities. One of the ways in which the teacher can negotiate the practices with the students and consequently motivate them, Johns (1997) claims, is providing them with tools and experiences that are relevant to their current and future lives outside of the literacy classrooms (p. 92), i.e., to invite them to bring their primary discourses to the discussions. The instructor in the present course was entirely aware of this precondition as he mentioned to the researcher in an informal conversation after the first session of the classes:

I try to choose the very main points mentioned in the course outline in the very first session. These are the points which the students find relevant to their lives.

That's why they find the course appealing the very first session. I can usually convert the students to Applied Linguistics the very first session.

As Bye and his colleagues (Bye et al., 2007) argue, younger undergraduates at identity-forming stages in their lives represent higher levels of motivation for learning when they experience situational interest, i.e., the stimuli they receive from outside the discursive practices which motivates engagement with the practice itself. The researcher's field note at the end of the first session could approve of the instructor's success in creating situational interest for learning, "I could see well that the class atmosphere interested both the instructor and the students highly enough to sit down for 80 minutes with complete concentration". Also another student complemented on this characteristic in the online assessment conducted by the instructor, "I find the professor is very clear when explaining and is very entertaining when he relates personal experiences to his lectures".

Another good example of the way in which the instructor motivated students appeared in the researcher's field note for the week five of the classes. While introducing the topic of 'Language Policy and Planning', it seemed that the instructor attempted to make the new academic concepts "situated" or "customised" (Gee, 2003) to the actual contexts the students were in by referring to multiculturalism and multilingualism in Canada. Since the class was attended by many Anglophone and Francophone as well as international students with a large range of language and cultural backgrounds, the topic could engage almost everyone as they started providing tangible examples from their own lives or their families'. The researcher reported on the students' high level of involvement in her field note, "Although the class is almost over, the lecturer is not done. But the

students are still listening with careful attention. The topic, Bilingualism and LINC program, could apparently draw on their lives as they look very interested”.

In the last session of the semester, the students could perfectly situate themselves in reality by being invited to discuss the relationship between “Texting and Literacy”. The students seemed so enthusiastic to participate in the discussion that the instructor finally needed to force them to move on in order to manage the class time. Motivating students by helping them experience situated meaning reiterates one of Gee’s (2003) principles for “opportunity to learn”:

People have not had the same opportunity to learn unless they have had equivalent experiences not just with texts, but with embodied experiences in a given semiotic domain that allow them to situate meanings for words and phrases in that domain (p. 38).

In the early days of an academic course, there might be potential gaps in expectations between students and tutors which need to be identified and overcome, in particular by the tutors. There might be the danger of academic tutors taking their own academic culture for granted and consequently they can find it difficult to know what they need to articulate (Jin & Cortazzi as cited in Ridley, 2004). It appeared in this course that the instructor was already aware of the variety of needs and expectations among the students and had preplanned for the ways in which the lectures needed to be delivered as he mentioned at the beginning of the course:

This is a first-year course. I have to really define terms. In this one, they are either first-year or from other departments. So I have to be very concise and helpful with new concepts, and not take for granted that they may not know simple concepts.

Based on the students' reflections on their developing the effective academic strategies while attending the lectures, it became evident that most of the students began to engage in the required activities as they were referring to their active role while taking notes and the productive skills they were able to develop. Examples of such engagement are students' growing awareness of how the discourse of lectures and readings interplayed with one another. They also learned how to bridge across their discursive practices by making effective notes. Apparently, the course instructor was successful in helping them become engaged in and become part of the new academic culture. Consequently, he seemed to have achieved the goals he had defined for this course at the beginning of the semester:

With respect to overall academic and transferrable skills, I'd like them to know how academic content is, how lectures are given, what is expected of them in terms of note taking, how it is possible that sometimes the textbook is not repeated word-for-word, but rather a summary is given.

Writing exams. In the first interview, the students' struggles to access the secondary discourse of the community became evident in their comments about reading for the first test and doing the first assignment. By the time of the second interview, around seven weeks later, their explicit engagement in the disciplinary genre was more

obvious to have been attained as a result of their persistent struggle to respond to the demands of exams and next assignments. In effect, they appeared to be developing proficiency in academic literacy by entering into “the Discourse of assessment as one of the Discourses of university” (Williams, 2005, p. 158). This section deals with the skills and strategies the students developed in order to respond to the language of assessment while reading and writing for the exams.

The first test in week 3 was worth 5% of the final mark. After receiving the results of the test, one of the students, a non-native speaker, criticised the negative feedback she had received because of her lack of familiarity with the technical forms and specialized vocabulary of the discipline:

In the quiz, I used my own simple vocabulary for definitions, but the TAs wanted me to use the technical vocabulary employed in the book. You cannot remember the technical words, not now that it's my first semester at university and in the field.

Although it can be very challenging, the explicit knowledge of the secondary discourse of an academic course and its features are to be shaped from the early stages as illustrated by Hounsell (as cited in Russell, Lea, Parker, Street & Donahue, 2009) in his investigation of novice students' problems with university discourses. As Hounsell points out, students need to be sensitive to different academic ways of framing in their writing. The students can be provided with the opportunity to express their understanding in their own words and negotiate the discourse of academic readings in their own terms while they are doing informal reflective writing (Kutz, 2004). However, this space can be

created for the students after they have acquired the secondary discourse of the community they just entered by practicing with other members.

Engaging and mastery of the secondary discourse of the community require the students to analyse the characteristics of the courses they are taking. According to Doyle (as cited in Simpson et al., 1997), through this characterization, the students can understand the thinking processes required and the nature of the products they are expected to produce. Included among these course characteristics are the instructors' grading procedures and the criterion task, i.e., the method of evaluation and the processing involved (Simpson et al., 1997, p. 44). However, the comments made by one of the TAs based on the students' online discussions could represent a mismatch between the students and the instructor's perceptions of the structure and organizational patterns at the beginning of the semester. The following quotation by the TA suggests that the interpretation of the language used by the lecturer to describe the assessment tasks posed a challenge for the students:

From what I've seen on WebCT discussions, the only issue is comprehending what the assignments are on or what the test could be on, so understanding structure seems to be the number one reoccurring theme. I think the reason is that they are not paying attention. I caught myself several times being in that situation when I was sitting here in my first year, not really reading the full instruction. I was listening to the Prof, but not actually listening to what he was saying. It's just coming down to instruction and processing what those mean. The information is right there, but they are not paying attention.

Although from the perspective of the TA, this misinterpretation was rooted in the students' lack of enough attention, Chanock (as cited in Williams, 2005) believe that many new university students seem to find the assessment-related language used by academics opaque; consequently, they appear to bring idiosyncratic responses to assessment task (p. 168). As Gee (1990; 1998) notes, the students need to develop proficiency in multiple secondary discourses among which the discourse of assessment plays a significant role. The language of the assessment tasks the lecturers use on the early stages of the assessment process may not be interpreted correctly by students new to the subject. Williams' (2005) research shows that if students are obliged to engage in assessment discourse prior to mastery of it through scaffolded participation, they revert to their primary discourse, their prior genre knowledge which might not be relevant and consequently hinders their engagement with the new discourse (Artemeva & Fox, 2010).

The other TA found the problem in the students' lack of understanding of how to clarify the academic terms in the quiz:

Based on the quiz results, I can say that their key issues were clarifying the terms, understanding exactly what is necessary to define things and explain things. How much detail is needed and how specific you need to be to explain a concept or define a term. They discussed more general than it should've been or more specific than it should've been. Being able to read the test is important.

As the TA emphasized, the reason for this problem can be found in the students' failure in the interpretation of the question. Ridley (2004) reminds us that interpreting a question and decoding an assignment title are integral parts of the academic discourse and

considered as part of the assessment (p. 98). It could also be argued that adopting proper strategies while studying for the test can play a significant role in the students' performance while responding to assessment tasks. In a research conducted at the college level, Pressley and other researchers (as cited in Tarban, Rynearson & Kerr, 2000) discovered that the students were not strategic enough to search for information in a text. According to these researchers, the undergraduate students did not monitor whether they knew the main idea of a passage, and consequently they did not elaborate on the facts in the text they produced based on their reading, "they discussed more general than it should've been or more specific than it should've been" (Taraban et al., 2000, p. 284).

According to the second interview conducted with the other TA at the end of the semester, the confusion many students felt about how much information to include while elaborating on a question appeared to result from the ambiguity in the question itself:

The Prof and as TAs, we expect certain amount of information from a question, so you get them in a basic question like "explain this theory". The question seems straightforward, just explain it, but there's no indication in the question how much explanation is needed in order to fulfill the question. I just think that a lot of students didn't quite have a handle of how much explanation was needed or how specific they had to be. So they would give a sort of a general explanation for what they understood it to be, but the questions would be lacking in like appeared to be too general. So this is kind of the idea, but it's not specifically that point or they would focus on one aspect but not discuss the other aspects of that question, so they would have an explanation, but not a full enough, specific enough explanation. That was one of the biggest problems for us.

Although a source of confusion for the students, Ridley (2004) reminds us that ambiguity can be included in the task by the assessors to make it more challenging as they consider ambiguity as part of the assessment process. According to Ridley, the analysis of the question can be seen as “a potential moment of anxiety for the students; the moment when they have to work out what the question is asking them to do; a moment when they could very easily lose their way” (p. 98). When the question perceived by the students does not match the assessor’s perception, there is apparently a gap in the expectations between the students and the teacher.

Once again, one of the TAs attributed the students’ struggles in writing the test to inadequate reading skills. She explained that the students needed to avoid mindless rote learning and try to connect what they were reading to understanding. In her view, the students did not possess appropriate strategies in place even when they were reading the test, “Most of the students could’ve done better if they had spent more time trying to understand the questions rather than just memorizing”. The second TA also reflected on the reasons for the students’ failure in meeting the instructor’s and the TAs’ expectations while writing the test. Similar to the other TA, she determined that the students were employing a counterproductive reading strategy by studying academic concepts out of their real context, which would result in rote learning. She did not seem satisfied in the first interview:

We expect them to know how to explain a concept, and a lot of them wouldn’t write a test we’re thinking of the importance, the significance. They see ‘There are obviously definitions I have to memorize’. They don’t study within the context a lot of the times, like how it relates to other parts of the field. I think it’s

hard for them to see the importance of making those connections within their answers and explanations as well.

According to Simpson et al. (1997), what students require to modify here is their epistemological belief about learning, which is typical to entering students at university, i.e., “learning is synonymous with the memorization of facts (p. 44). Schommer (as cited in Simpson et al., 1997) argues that the students who consider learning to be quick and easy rarely see the need for elaborative strategies.

The mid-term exam was received in week 8 and was worth 25%. Having been provided with sample questions, they appeared to know better what kind of meaning to look for while reading for the exam. Although almost all of them seemed overwhelmed by the high number of sample questions, over 100, they felt equipped with more effective strategies to manage their time and plan the reading. They showed both their appreciation and discouragement while responding to the researcher’s email making an inquiry about their impression of the mid-term exam and the received results. Like many others, one of the non-native international students valued the instructor’s effort in providing the sample questions, but criticizing their large number:

I really appreciate the sample questions that were on the WebCT. Many instructors don't do that and leave the students struggling with the dryness of the text book, but I also agree with some students that there were really too many questions which make it harder to study each one in depth.

It can be often challenging for many students to adopt an investigative approach while selecting reading which can be used effectively in writing. As Ridley (2004) points out,

the quantity of reading can be frightening for not only the students who should read the texts in a language which is not their first, but also for native speakers of the same language. This was mentioned by one of the native student participant in the study, “When it came to the midterm, I had some issues studying, because the review was so long”.

In her study of international students’ experiences related to written assignments, Ridley (2004) discovered that it can take time for the students new to the academic culture to get involved in its discursive practices and adapt and extend previous experiences in order to meet the expectations of the tutors (p. 102). In the second interview which happened in the last weeks of the semester, the same international student proved that she was able to develop effective strategy to approach the large number of sample questions and remove the problem:

The questions were really helpful for the mid-term. Even though I felt that the questions were too many and didn’t give me the chance to focus on each question, somehow I was like saying to myself that this is important, this is not. From my experience and from my attendance in class, I’ve been able to know what’s most important, what’s least important. So I didn’t really focus on every question.

Evident is the growing academic competence which not only resulted from her seeking ways to meet the requirements of the course, but was also influenced by calling on her previous academic experience as an adult student. Having brought her own knowledge and experience to the construction of the writing she was required to undertake for assessment, this learner applied multiple reading strategies in a purposeful manner. She

was able to make predictions about the instructor's expectations. Consequently, she was prepared to set reading goals, vary reading style according to the relevance of the text to the reading goals and jump forward and backward in the text to find information relevant to reading goals. These are the same strategies adopted by skilled adult readers as described by Taraban et al. (2000, p. 284). According to these researchers, amongst the characteristics of skilled adult readers are awareness of their cognitive processing and their progress towards reading goals, which were evident when this student reflected on her strategies for approaching the final exam:

The chapters are a lot and the materials are big. It has many details, especially the definitions. I will study like how I studied for the first and the second exams. I'll just read the slides, focus on definitions and the class notes.

After a few weeks, a sense of growing competence was evident among the other students. A good example is the student who had been discouraged by the result of the first test because she had not mastered the forms and conventions of the secondary discourse. While responding to the researcher's email and elaborating on her results for the mid-term exam, she explained the strategic academic choices she had made in order to overcome her weaknesses:

For the mid-term exam I had some questions and asked the professor. The exam was easy and I tried to find another method to learn a new definition. Because there is too much information that you should learn and you might sometimes forget some of them. Anyways I try to study more for the final exam.

What she drew from her experience earlier in the course was developing focused strategies which would allow her to achieve understanding academic concepts so that ‘she might not forget’. She seemed to realize that she needed to experience “deep learning” which demanded her to become engaged in her work and seek meaning rather than focusing on short-term memorization of fact and concepts , i.e. “surface learning’ (Paloma & Banta, 1999). Moreover, she made a strategic personal choice by creating social connection with the instructor in order to ask for clarification and receive feedback. According to Ridley (2004), the students need to benefit from “socially situated opportunities for conversation at critical moments” with teaching staff in order to see how they can align themselves with the learning practices that are being required of them” (p. 92). In academic settings with large diversity, as Skyrme (2007) claims, there is huge scope for misunderstanding because of language limitations and cultural differences. To avoid this problem, university teachers need to be committed in terms of time and will to act like mediators of international students’ learning. Consequently, “both teacher and learner respond appropriately to new dimensions of learning situation” (Skyrme, 2007, p. 367).

The lecturer also responded to the students’ experience in this learning situation as he mentioned it in the second interview at the end of the semester:

For the mid-term there was a student who made a comment “Thank you for the questions, but there were too many questions.... when it came to final exam, I said, “somehow that student was correct. There were too many questions I gave you”. Now for the final, however, I remembered this girl’s comment and then I told them that this time, “I won’t give you too many questions. I will give you

exactly what I will be talking about today”. I reviewed *limited* number of the questions. I really talked about 3 long questions and one of them was *the* question. Instead of giving them 10 questions like the mid-term, this time I gave them 3.

Through close contact with the students and collecting their feedback on learning, the instructor was able to conduct classroom assessment to learn about the students’ response to his teaching practices. As a complementary to summative assessment which was carried out through tests, mid-term, final exam and papers, classroom assessment allowed the teacher to examine how the students were learning at the initial and intermediating points. A type of formative assessment, classroom evaluation provided feedback not only to the students, but also to the teacher and helped him take the action to meet the students’ expectation later in the course:

I gave them fewer questions because I listened to that student. I realized that she was right, I gave them too many and it was much more difficult to study. I mean they were helpful. On the other hand, it made them study everything, which is kind of tedious, at least to those 1st year students. Maybe they were intimidated by 10 pages of questions.

The instructor’s focus on improving the students’ learning and his resultant decision for what to assess makes it evident that this form of assessment was both “learner-centered” and “teacher-directed” and consequently “mutually beneficial” (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 4). Also “context-specific” (ibid.) in nature, this assessment helped the instructor respond to the particular needs and characteristics of first-year students with a large variety of linguistic and cultural background as well as learning strategies and skills. The effective

result of the instructor's action was reflected in the comment made by one of the native speakers in the informal gathering the researcher had with the student participants of the study immediately after the final exam:

Compared to the midterm, I loved this one. I was hundred times more confident.

The limited number of the sample questions we discussed in the last session in the classroom made me feel confident about the information I needed to know.

The process of in-class review in the last session of the course might have been a critical moment because focusing attention on the examples could show the relationship between the questions and the notes the students took and reviewed so carefully. Another native student in the same after-the-exam informal session said:

In every lecture and slide, he put a question to say what information we should know. When I was studying for the final, I used the notes from the last lecture and I went through every slide during the classes and ticked out the questions.

As Skyrme (2007) suggests, it does not seem unreasonable to provide students with sample tests which can guide them to deeper understanding of the course. Williams (2005) also believes that the question-answer routine of tests within a specific discipline is a special kind of discourse in its own right, and access to it needs to be learned. The instructor was already aware of the necessity of developing the competence for the discourse of assessment and the accompanying skills and strategies among the students as he referred to his struggle for designing tests at the beginning of the semester:

I'm required to have a test for this course. It's very easy for me to design just a few questions and ask them to answer them. But I have multiple choice, I have

fill-in-blanks, I have definitions, explanations because I'm hoping to teach them a few skills how to take a general test, how to tackle different question types. My attitude is that some people are not good writers. They might be good at multiple choice questions rather than open-ended questions, and vice versa. That's why I try to strike a balance between the two.

It appears that meeting the exam requirements posed a challenge to both the teacher and students. The students began to develop expertise in the discourse of assessment by using effective skills such as analysing and interpreting the evaluation system, predicting the expectations, and adjusting the quality and amount of reading and writing accordingly. They could also illustrate their changing relationship to the texts, because they were not relying on the readings merely to receive the knowledge. Rather, they began to make connections between the discourse of texts (slides and textbook) while making notes. On the other hand, the teacher needed to respond to the students' different expectations growing from their diverse levels of ability and needs.

Another academic skill the students needed to hone was writing in response to open-ended questions, to cues in the assignment topic. The students' engagement in this practice will be looked at in the following section.

Written assignments. Writing in response to cues in the assignment topics seemed to challenge students to develop genre capability (see Artemeva & Fox, 2010). These writing tasks, as Freedman (1994) also notes, needed the students to become overly engaged in higher levels of processing in comparison to doing comprehension

tests. Focusing on the students' writing issues revealed the strategies they developed to respond to the discourse of assessment, i.e., comprehending the task, relating readings to the writing and also using the writing technicalities. The strategies used by the students along with the facilitating role of feedback are detailed in what follows.

Two written assignments, 3-4 pages each, were supposed to be done in response to the end-of-chapter activities in the textbook. They were expected to be submitted in weeks 7 and 11 and were worth 10% each. Decoding the conventions of academic writing in response to the writing tasks puzzled the students at the beginning of the semester since they were not integrated into the discourse of the discipline yet. This confusion seemed to be greatest among the students who had not experienced the genre of the dominant discourse in the education environment before entering this context. I could see this bewilderment when the first-year ESOL student who had immediately commenced her university studies after graduating from high school lamented in the first interview:

I have troubles with assignments. I don't know how to do them. I don't understand the instructions. It was not clear to me even when the Prof explained them to us. I don't know how they start an essay. I don't know what the Prof wants me to do. I'm going to ask my classmates how to do them.

The provided instructions and explanations seemed to have contributed nothing to this student's understanding about how to write an essay. The lack of experience and engagement with the relevant context might have resulted in her sense of disconnectedness which in turn could be a possible reason for her failure in genre production. Coming from a background with a different culture from that of university, she was not familiar with the assessment discourse. The quotation suggests that "dialogue

and collaborative engagement with tasks related to the assignments are necessary to supplement written guidelines and explanations” (Ridley, 2004, p. 100), which in itself emphasizes the importance of opportunities for participation and performance (Lave & Wenger, 1991). But the above student did not seem to have made a strategic choice in grasping opportunities for dialogic communication and participation as she attempted to seek help from her peers who were unlikely to be familiar with the features of the dominant secondary discourse of assessment in the early days of their discursive practice.

The instructor had already provided the students with a module guide with the relevant criteria for the two assignments in the first session. This guide included comprehensive information in terms of the expected content, length and format as well as the grading criteria for the writings. However, it became more evident that there were gaps between students and the instructor’s understandings of the writing requirements when one of the TAs expressed her feeling of frustration after receiving the students’ first assignment:

In the paper, I thought [the Prof] had been very clear when he was sort of telling them what we expected at the paper, and so he would say, “For the introduction, just say directly what you are doing. Don’t try to be fancy, just be direct and say what chapter and what activity you’re responding to and exactly how you responded to”. He said this in class since I was there. So I’m surprised when I see people who don’t do that, who don’t meet those expectations. It seems to be easier to meet that than to try to be fancy with your writing.

As Freedman (1995) notes, the students seemed to begin to acquire genre competence, i.e., the features and requirements for successful writing through being immersed in lectures and readings. But what made the produced texts meaningful and appropriate by dominant members of the secondary discourse was “embodied experience of action, interaction, and/or dialogue within this domain” (Gee as cited in Artemeva & Fox, 2010, p. 482). It was evident in the TAs comment that the students needed to be engaged in apprenticed, scaffolded participation which would enable them to make judgements about the extent to which they had met those criteria mentioned in the lecturer’s guide. This was emphasized when one of the students made her constructive suggestion in the online assessment conducted in the middle of the semester:

The only thing I would suggest would be a few more small assignments to hand in, to give us a bit of feedback before the big assignment. So we can get a feedback for the material, and also for the way the assignment will be marked.

What this student’s suggestion highlighted is developing learner awareness, understanding and knowledge (Rea-Dickens, 2001) while focusing on feedback as the essential support in the process. Advocating the notion of assessment for learning, Clarke (1998) refers to the support this student expected to receive while doing a task:

In order for improvement to take place the [learner] must first know the purpose of the task, then how far this was achieved, and finally be given help in knowing how to move closer towards the desired goal --how to close the gap (Clarke, 1998, p. 68).

It is striking that the above-mentioned student's suggestion seemed to encompass the three key features of assessment implied in Clarke's statements. In other words, the students could gain increased access to assessment procedures and requirements by firstly, doing scaffolded tasks with low stakes or no stakes, then receiving teachers' feedback in order to identify and understand possible problems prior to summative assessment, and finally using summative, graded work. These key features appear to result in the development of one of the most important skills that students require for effective learning to write, i.e., self-assessment. Although the recommended activity could have been a very influential practice for improving self-assessment skills, it was not employed by the instructor in the course. It is possible to make a reasonable assumption that the large lecture size could make the practice sound impractical and time-consuming which might probably add to the workload of the teachers. However, receiving timely feedback from the TAs prior to the exams seemed to help students assess their own performance and compare it with the standards, i.e., it enhanced their self-assessment skills.

To ensure that the students were in the process of developing mastery over the language of assessment at the early stages, the TAs always provided the students with ongoing monitoring and timely support. Lacking confidence, one of the non-native speakers talked about her regular contacts with the TAs, a strategic personal choice she made to ensure that the required criteria were met, "I have a lot of stress. I send the assignments to the TAs before it's due to check if everything is good or not". The lack of confidence and the resulting anxiety (see Fox et al., in press) in this student could have had an undesirable impact on her response to the assessment task. However, she was

capable enough to allow this personal factor lead to the development of a facilitative strategy rather than an inhibitory one (see Brown, 2000; Dörnyei, 2005). Indeed, she could interact with the tutors “to receive advice and act on it as a basis for future improvement in learning and assessment” (Kift & Moody, 2009). As Knight and York (as cited in Poulos & Mahony, 2008) argue, “The less students believe in themselves, the more explicit and frequent feedback they require” (p. 144). Also remarked by Tinto as well as Poulos and Mahony (as cited in Poulos & Mahony, 2008), vital to first-year student development is the early engagement with teaching staff, the TAs rather than the lecturer in very large classes like this introductory course. Hence, the timely, effective feedback provides them with emotional support more than helping them improve their grades.

Some newcomers to the discourse community of the discipline might not be able to function strategically appropriate enough to manage their anxiety and take advantage of the available sources of feedback for assessing the quality of their writing. A good example of this can be the same school-leaver novice non-native student, “I’m too shy to go to TAs or the Prof. I don’t have confidence in the language I’m using. I’m not sure if they will understand me. I’m concerned about what to ask, about my pronunciation”. This student avoided asking for assistance from the teachers in fear that her accent would fail, that she would not have the skill to engage in a coherent conversation. Contrary to the other non-native student mentioned earlier, the personal influence of language background discouraged the second student from developing a productive strategy which could have engaged her in the practice.

Gee (1990) notes that the secondary discourse is acquired in interactions with non-intimates and in formal situations. Presumably the entering students would feel less intimidated to interact with their peers with whom they can assume more intimacy in terms of shared knowledge and experience. As such, they can form *discourse collectives* to which they would be able to relate themselves less formally by taking on a new identity. Discourse collectives can be defined as socially meaningful groups or social networks which form as a result of, or in response to, the requirements of an academic discourse community. However, the interaction with peers needs to be apprenticed by those experts in the community who have full mastery over the dominant secondary discourse, namely the course instructor or/and the TAs. Focusing on the role of peers, one of the students recommended in the online assessment:

I think it would be a great learning experience if there could be a group assignment of some form, if the class is OK with groups. I think this would be interesting and would just add to the learning experience.

This would suggest the need for smaller discourse collectives to facilitate the critical conversations and the early opportunities for engagement with other learners. Peer assessment in this way, as Topping et al., (2000) note, can promote greater meta-cognitive self-awareness and help students monitor their progress. Consequently, they learn and adapt strategies if they are not working (Vikerman, 2009). Such self-assessment skills, as emphasized by Topping (as cited in Topping et al., 2000), enhance sense of personal ownership and commitment which in turn result in increased motivation, interest and self-confidence.

But similar to self-assessment activities, as Weaver and Esposto (2011) note, peer-assessment tasks can be time-consuming when it is implemented in large classes like this introductory course. Although it was not applied as a classroom practice, the partnership between students and their peers (Stefani, 1998) could still be observed when one of the mature non-native students commented on the students' online discussions and their impact on learning, "I enjoy the postings on WebCT. I read them all. I learn from them, learn how to write, how to answer".

The online context appeared to act like a directed learning environment which offered students motivating assessment tasks and encouraged self-reflection on the learning process. This carried out in discourse collectives formed out of the partnership between students and their peers, students and TAs, and student, TAs and the instructor. As Stefani (1998) highlights, "assessment at any level should not be a unilateral activity" (p. 340).

Timely feedback, as Freedman (1995) points out, is a kind of cooperative interaction over the work in progress where the students and teachers can negotiate and renegotiate meaning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and teachers can give over more and more responsibility to the learners as the learning progresses. The following quotation from one of the TAs suggests a way of creating an opportunity for the required support through interaction and collaborative participation:

I have become quite good at looking over an essay and responding to the major points in it, because I don't want to edit the students' essays. It's their business and they should take care of it themselves. What I look at, I look at at least 4-5

before going to class the day and basically I checked for plagiarism, for sourcing, for enough support to say, “this is sort of you got the right idea, but maybe there’s not enough support from the textbook, maybe you could back this up with something, maybe your organization would be clearer. So I give them some ideas about how they can strengthen their essay rather than editing and proofreading.

This kind of co-participation between expert guides and novice learners allow students learn through doing and guided collaborative performance. As both Hanks (as cited in Freedman, 1995) and Freedman (1995) highlight, the role of the guides is not to transmit academic concepts by “editing or proof reading”. Rather, the newcomers’ engagement in the process needs to be facilitated by helping them think through the changes they can make for improved writing. Such a gradual engagement in the practice and the integration into the community as an active member seemed to be noticeable when the same high-school leaver, non-native participant explained how she approached the second assignment which was due in week 11. Unlike her first experience with the assignment in which she found the discourse of the new community puzzling, the strategies she adopted towards the end of the semester assisted her to have a better performance on the task. She said, “For my last assignment, I read the lectures and then I read the readings and then I searched about some of the things in the lectures and I read your explanations, too”.

The student’s voice above indicates her growing awareness of the discursive practices and the connections between the discourse of different texts. As Freedman (1995) claims, through being immersed in the discourse of lectures and readings, she began to respond dialogically to the cues from the context and consequently to the questions that were set. Having developed her social connection with the other members

of the community, this student tried to seek help from a more expert individual this time. As such, she contacted the researcher and arranged a session for receiving feedback on her understanding. The ability to form a new discourse collective could demonstrate that with the changing relations between novice students and expert teachers, as Wenger (1991) claims, there was growth not only in the genre knowledge, but also in contextualized doing and being (Freedman, 1995).

As Ridley (2004) notes, another discursive practice which is often challenging and can take time to develop is the effective use of reading in writing. When responding to the first assignment in the course which asked the students to draw on voices from their own histories and experiences, the students were not aware of effective ways of linking the reading with the writing. This was again a clear illustration of a gap between tutors' and students' expectations. The following comment made by one of the TAs emphasizes the necessity of initiating students successfully into the discursive practices which involve using literature effectively:

They are really good at looking at their personal experiences, but what they don't do as well is connecting those personal experiences to specific terms and concepts we cover in the class. So I think I expect them to see, 'this is a personal question, but how can I support my personal experiences with back up from the textbook at the very least'. And for the first assignment a lot of students didn't do that. They pretty much ignored the textbook which ended up in a lot of inaccurate points or no points. So in the second one, I think they could see. From some of the feedback, I'm getting more support they are just more familiar with the

information, because I'm getting more textual support from the second assignment from what I can see.

As mentioned earlier and also emphasized by Johns (1997), although students need to be given the opportunity to write creatively and develop personal voice, focusing exclusively on the primary discourse can be detrimental to their development as readers and writers within academic contexts. What Johns (1997) notes applies to this context, because the students were required to take into their consideration the issues of textual constraints, their roles of writers, and the context. The TAs' support appeared to guide them into making the relationship between the underlying knowledge of the subject and the expected writing conventions.

The technicalities of referencing and paraphrasing with the reading were not transparent for many students, either. Although strongly expected by the TAs, the provided written guidelines did not appear to guarantee that the students were able to implement what had been said. One of the TAs' comments below reflect a certain bewilderment as to why this was not the case:

[....] part of the teacher's expectation is that students read all the instructions for an assignment, especially if they have only a few assignments. We expect them to read, and it seemed that a lot of students weren't reading or would dismiss some of the information, especially when it came to APA. Using the APA needs to be standardized and a lot of the students didn't at all any way. That surprises me because it's right there. That autonomy we expect them to be able to look at an

assignment and pull things out and they don't have that to ask questions. I don't know what happened there.

Once again, as Ridley (2004), and Lave and Wenger (1991) point out, the existing gap in expectations illustrates that the written guidelines need to be supplemented by dialogue and collaborative participation. The critical role of the situated opportunities which could help the students shape the desired output through timely support and interaction was highlighted by one of the non-native speakers:

For my second assignment, I referred to OWL and asked the TAs for their feedback on how to do the reference section, how to paraphrase and cite others. Before, I was assuming that for paraphrasing, I needed to read the sentence and just change a few words, but I know how I should paraphrase in an academic way.

The researcher's field notes written in the sessions 21 and 22 in which feedback was offered on the first assignment also recorded how students still needed the TAs to lead them forward besides prescribing them the writing technicalities:

There were 5 questions about how to do citations. It seems evident that the students are a lot more careful about the formatting now. There was also a question about the possibility of the use of *I* while they were looking at their personal experience in the assignment. Moreover, the instructor reminded them of avoiding bold terms and assertive language and made them aware of the importance of hedging while discussing ideas in written assignments.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), in directive teaching in which prescriptions about proper practice are provided, the lack of participation in ongoing

practice engenders a practice different from that intended (p.97). Although writers need to be shown the basic techniques for revision, it is essential that they “experience a guiding, steadying collaborative hand as they are going through successive drafts in order to find that satisfying match between the unfolding words on the page and the felt sense created by the rhetorical exigencies” (Freedman, 1995, p.139). We can see how learning evolved out of collaborative participation besides the prescribed requirements specified by the teacher first when the same TA reported in the second interview:

For the first assignment, a lot of them missed that, so for the second assignment we went back and were like harping on it in class. So once we do that, then the students who do complete, their assignment get improved a lot more with some exception of course. I’ve also noticed a lot more how much better APA referencing is with a big difference, whereas before I was continuously writing, “Source, source, citation, citation” and like fixing the citations, and I’m not doing that often. For the most part, most of the students seem to understand the need for sources and a lot of them are doing them correctly.

The students also seemed to form a new identity as a university student by learning how to do the assigned tasks under strict time constraints. Entering the university with her recent schema of the high school learning context (Scanlon et al., 2007), the non-native international student complained about her feeling of loss in the first interview:

I’m still adjusting. I’m shocked. I don’t know how to organize my studies. I don’t know how to cope with the stress. At high school, life is easy as the teacher

always reminds you of the midterm and the assignments, but at university, it's all your own responsibility.

As Schutz (as cited in Scanlon et al., 2007) points out, this student defined the new situation based on her previous academic experience at high school, whereas the change of context required her to form a new identity which involved becoming more of an active, independent learner than a student who waits to receive what has been shaped. Similarly, one of the mature native speakers who had some academic experience before entering the university complained about the heavy academic work load when replying to the researcher's email asking her about her perceptions of the first assignment:

For the assignment one my main concern was time; I actually started to work on it as soon as he gave us the assignment sheet but got sidetracked by other assignments and exams and I could only get back to it a few weeks before the due date. So I am really concerned on how well I've done, because I know I could have worked harder and longer on it.

As suggested by Scanlon and her co-researchers (2007), students can recognize the horizons of possibilities for learning through situated interactions with teachers and other students. In effect, they evolve into different persons with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The students' evolving form of membership was evident when they demonstrated how they developed effective ways in order to become involved in activities. An example of this can be the mature native student with a long gap between his previous and the present experiences with discursive practices at university. Although he appeared to feel puzzled by the demands

of the knowledge and skill-intensive course at first, he indicated later that he could make good interpretations of his experiences with various interactions with the discourse community in order to become engaged:

I think the Prof's course outline was very good, very sustained. There's a lot of information there. So I used that as a way to budget my time. I knew I had to do my papers, I knew I had to do my mid-term. So I had a really good idea about what I needed to do ahead of time. The course outline to me was really comprehensive, so it was really helpful. That's what I used to schedule my time.

Trying persistently to establish membership in the community, another non-native mature student suggested that she could develop effective time management strategies by using stress as an enabling factor. She said, "2-3 weeks before the assignments, I try to think about my time. Because of my stress, I think I should manage my time and finish everything I should do in order to feel relaxed".

As implied by most students, their collaborative engagement seemed to increase their understanding of the purpose of the assessment tasks, which in turn helped them use the appropriate discourse to respond properly to the tasks. The students' dialogic interactions with each other and with the support teachers also raised their awareness of the critical role of peers and mentors in self-assessment. Such awareness could thus assist them to implement strategic approaches to managing their time, stress and social interactions.

Attendance and participation. In the provided course outline, “Participation” was defined as, “Active participation in class and online; this will NOT be measured by taking traditional attendance”. Although it was worth merely 10% of the final grade, 70-80% of the students participated in class throughout the semester. What was the experience like for them and how they became connected to the community? To find the answer to such questions, the students’ “situated actions” (Scanlon et al., 2007) with others were observed in all classes during the semester, and in the two interviews held with each of the participants of the study at the beginning and the end of the semester, the strategies adopted by them to grow into active participants were identified. The analysis of the resulting data seem to illustrate how learning was realized through participating in the community and by integrating into its culture of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

In the first interview, one of the mature, non-native international students emphasized the importance of attending the class in spite of the accessibility of all the sources of information online:

I can’t miss a lecture. If I do so, I feel I’m lost; I won’t be able to follow. It’s very important for me to attend all the classes. I can’t miss any classes even though everything’s available on WebCT. I have to listen to the Prof, to other students’ questions and to class discussions.

This student highlights implicitly the role of specific local contexts in learning without which she would experience the loss of social networks, which could mean the loss of identity. As Freedman (1995) and Scanlon et al. (2007) note, through the situated practices students engage in with teachers and other students, they form new identity and define its salient features. Indeed, this is the need for forming a new *self* through social

interaction which brings the learner to the classroom, not merely the need for the information he/she receives by attending the classes. Not aware of this logic behind the course planning, one of the mature native students expressed his surprise at the amount of resources available out of the class physical setting:

You get more out of the course when you're there. Just *a bit* of information that the Prof gives you might not be in the textbook or online. And if you're there, you're more engaged. But I think you could skip a lot of classes, read the textbook, participate online, and I think you could still have a decent mark. I'm not saying you get the mark for the participation or attendance.

But what this student attempted to provide as a personal reason for his attending the classes was possibly the motivating drive for many others who were expecting to form identity through situated interactions, "I really enjoy the experience of being in the classroom. Other than the fact that you're getting a degree or achieving some sort of mark, I just like the interaction".

Drawing on his personal academic experience, a third-year non-native student considered a more critical role for class attendance by referring to its positive impact on his test performance:

I did attend all the classes last semester and I got good results. I think what we do in class, it's gonna end up in the final paper. I think missing the class would be like missing a part of the exam.

In a similar vein, another non-native student's comment revealed insights into how attendance can foster learning:

I think if I miss one class, I miss a lot of information. I'm here for learning and having knowledge. Every session is a new lesson.

These two students' BAKs seemed to convince them that their regular presence in the classes resulted in learning, i.e. the accumulation of skills and information. But learning, as Wenger (1998) puts it, is more than the acquisition of knowledge, "it's a process of becoming... an experience of identity, because learning transforms who we are and what we can do" (p. 215). As such, learning needs a context, a place in which new ways of knowing can be realized. It might be for the same reason, albeit tacit in their BAK, that these students could find the context of the classroom a secure setting in order to realize their potential for learning, to form a new identity.

As Wenger (1998) points out, learning can happen when learners are offered alternative forms of participation. It appears that the instructor provided different opportunities for participation in the discourse community and consequently supported the development of new understandings as sources of identity. The students' comments in the interview and the online assessment at the end of the semester can reflect the instructor's success in addressing this need:

It's good that the Prof encourages discussions, because when he asks a question, we have to think about the point.

I love the social aspect of this course, the class discussions are what keep me coming to class. I like how the teacher gets involved as well, and encourages us to question the theories and ideas raised in class.

These perceptions reveal the *mutual engagement* (Wenger, 1998) of the participants, both the teachers and students, in the practice of the present community as they are all included in the discourse.

As Gee (2003) notes, entering interactive dialogue with peers and the tutors provide the “opportunity to learn” for the students who are at the early stages of picking up the academic language of the discourse community. In such dialogues, the students come to discover others’ different perspectives on what is being talked about. To put it other way, this dialogic experience would allow learners to guess what different perspectives the forms used in the language of the practice can mean. One of the native students aptly put it at the beginning of the semester:

During the lectures, the other students and the Prof bring in information that you maybe wouldn’t have connected to it. There’s a lot of connection runs to it. It’s pretty easy for me to understand the concepts in the textbook, to understand the broad ideas, but the Prof and the students in class give examples, bringing new ideas that I wouldn’t have considered. That’s why I come to class because I know there’s always something new I wouldn’t have thought of.

It appeared that the students could learn through the process of “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998), since they experienced evolving patterns of participation in situational activities. As Wenger (1998) notes, the students’ inevitable participation in discourse collectives (formed as a result of class discussions) could lead to their mastery of knowledge and skills, which in turn would change them to more active participants. At the end of the semester, one of the non-native

student's justifications for regular attendance implied her developing into a more competent participant in the community as she was able to build up knowledgeable skills:

I don't like to miss any classes. I just like to be there, even if I can take the notes from someone else. I like to have my own notes. Plus every time that I attend the class, I get to know something. It's always adding to my information. I feel like every minute in the class will add to my knowledge. I don't like to miss the class, because sometimes the students say, 'OK, the notes are there, the slides are there'. But for me, the class is really helpful, because when I listen to the Prof, I write my own notes that will help me a lot in the exams.

An active participant in the community now, she seemed to grow competent enough to experience "comprehensive understanding" (Wenger, 1991) and began to construct knowledge rather than merely receiving it by making her own notes.

As Skyrme (2007) emphasizes, while the learners' increasing participation and active involvement with the members of the community is prominent in learning, the teacher and the materials he/she produces can play leading parts in the process since they can be considered as a potential source of access to new learning. The importance of the teacher's support and scaffolding the learners' progress through social interaction was indicated by one of the native students at the end of the semester:

I like seeing the people who I sit with. I like being in that setting soaking up what he's saying. Because even if I read the textbooks, it helps when he puts up questions and his lecture slides that you should notice, and he asks the class what the answer to this is. For example, he asked a question last week, he repeated the

question and the class answered, and I kind of took it in. And later on he asked it again and I remembered. Today I remember it well and will probably remember it next week because of the repetition in class and because of what I read in the textbook.

As pointed out by the student above, the instructor decided to identify what the students had already mastered independently while involved with the assigned readings. Then he attempted to lead them forward through raising questions, i.e., he encouraged them to solve the problems under his guidance and in collaboration with peers. This substantiates Vygotsky's (1978) concept of "zone of proximal development" according to which learners are able to experience new learning.

Under the umbrella of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, it can be concluded that if students rely on the available sources and do not attend and participate in the class, the learning which is achieved is at the level of the students' present capability, while what they experience under the guidance of an expert teacher and in collective activity is "good learning", which is beyond their present capability but still can be achieved if they "grow into the intellectual life of those around them" by participating in discursive practice (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89). The instructor let the students choose between experiencing *learning* and *good learning* by not taking attendance during the semester:

I provide as much information as possible to get something, whether they come to class or not. That's why if they have chosen not to, I will give them all the resources on WebCT as much as possible... If they are learning, they will come.

The second important condition of a coherent community of practice, the negotiation of a *joint enterprise* (Wenger, 1998) requires both the teachers as experts and the novice learners to bring their understanding and experience to a situated activity. As such, the teacher and students co-construct instructional events (Woods, 2006), because “the dialogic engagement and the interanimation of the diverse voices” brought to the discussions initiates the development of “new ways of thinking about pedagogical practices” (Hirst, Henderson, Allan, Bode & Kocatepe, 2004, p. 73). The instructor’s BAK seemed to reflect this insight in the first interview:

The Prof adds more information and gets the idea that this is why you need to be here. You need to be here because you can get involved in class discussion, express yourself and contribute to knowledge rather than the Prof to be the center all the time.

In spite of the instructor’s effort to provide the learners with equivalent opportunities to be involved in discursive practice and learn, some students seemed not to be participating with others. One of the first-year, non-native students explained the reason for her failure in participation at the beginning of the semester, “I don’t know what kind of participation he needs me to have”. No privilege of the university experience in this student’s case could be considered the reason for her non-participation. She was not able to respond to the mainstream discourse as she lacked previous experience with the demands of an academic community. Non-participation, as Wenger (1998) claims, cannot prevent new students’ membership in the community, because “full participation is not a goal to start with” (p. 166). However, the amount of effort they put into the process of becoming a member of the community by moving from marginal

position (non-participation preventing active participation) to fuller participation could change their status from an “outsider” into an “insider” (Wenger, 1998). Similar to the above-mentioned student, all the other non-native student participants illustrated their identity as an “outsider” at the beginning of the semester, but their providing the reason for their non-participation seemed to reveal that they were trying to find an entry point into the practice. One of the mature and highly motivated ESOL students talked about her struggle:

I feel shy to raise my points in the class. I don't feel confident enough about not making mistakes. The students can laugh at me. Can I say it correctly? Do the Prof and the students understand me?

Another non-native student who had just entered university from the high school followed the same logic:

I'm not very good at English. I feel very shy if people notice my pronunciation is wrong. They may make fun of me. It's good that people participate in class, so others gain knowledge. But I'm too shy and scared of saying answers which might be wrong. I'm too shy to speak up.

It can be inferred from this student's statement that a personal characteristic, here the language background, could influence the development of the academic strategy of non-participation while interacting with other members of the community, even in a semi-formal setting:

I'm too shy to go to TAs or the Prof. I don't have confidence in the language I'm using. I'm not sure if they will understand me. I'm concerned about what to ask, about my pronunciation.

Again, another mature non-native student complained about her lack of confidence in the mastery over English language:

In discussions, I have problems following the students as I don't understand their accents. Most of the students speak English as their native language with a pure accent that is difficult for me to understand. I'm not good at English.

However, this cannot be considered as a sign of full non-participation. Put it other way, the degree of her non-participation seemed to be “peripheral”, i.e., a form of non-participation which did not prevent from active participation later (Wenger, 1998). An evidence for her peripheral participation is that she was already engaged in the practice and developed ideas, “I can't talk in the class. I have ideas for discussion, but because I'm not good at English I prefer not to talk. I feel embarrassed if I make mistakes”. Like many ESOL students in the research conducted by Sieber (2004), she felt self-conscious about her English speaking abilities and chose to remain silent.

All the students, both native and non-native speakers of English, attended this discourse community with their BAK (Woods, 1996) and the established social identity which had been already shaped by their prior experience at school, college or another university. But ESOL students had a more challenging experience as they were also moving from one language community to another. As Kutz (2004) also points out, these students entered the community with an identity whose central aspect came from their

experience as a speaker of English as a second language. As was shown above, their BAK influenced their participation patterns in the community and consequently their new identities.

It was striking to see how much was common in all students' academic experience, not unique to the experience of non-native speakers, when the inquiry was made about the native speakers' struggle while they were experiencing the interaction between participation and non-participation at the beginning of the semester:

I'd rather go see the teacher directly if I have a question. I'm uncomfortable with interacting with a bunch of people in class. I don't really like to say something before people that I don't really know...

To harness the influence of her personal characteristic, i.e., lack of confidence or self-esteem, this student decided to opt for another strategy to enter into the practice. In effect, her non-participation was enabling not problematic as she was inside the practice, although "peripherally involved" (Wenger, 1998).

To encourage the learners to comfortably enter the discourse collectives in the community, the instructor offered another form of participation in a different context. Creating a "network of practice" (Duguid, 2005) through online discussions, the novice learners' process of acquiring knowledge was supported in a different form from face-to-face interaction. Learning, as Wenger (1998) notes, entails both a process and a place in which the new understandings and consequently an identity is developed. The mature non-native student's comment reflected how a new identity of participation was

supported to be realized in a different discourse collective at the beginning of the semester:

The WebCT discussions make me feel more comfortable. You have the chance to write and to correct your writing. It's always easier to write than to talk. You have more time to think about what you've written down.

It was striking that the same student posted the first question on WebCT and encouraged around 100 students to feed the online discussion with their participation.

As this student highlighted, contrary to spontaneous oral performance in class, writing assignments can be modified and completed. As it is also shown in Sieber's (2004) studies, writing would not intimidate the new practitioners into voicing their ideas in the public classroom context. In the first interview, one of the native speakers talked about her enthusiasm in participating in online discussions because, "it encourages you to talk if you've got something to say. Nobody's going to know who you actually are. There's a kind of anonymity factor, so nobody really cares". This reflected the uncertain membership, but still the enthusiasm for participation this student had in the discourse collective early in the course.

By creating such an alternative milieu, the instructor was likely successful in supporting students to gradually produce knowledge in a reflective and critical way. A native speaker explained how she and her peers could experience a new identity of participation in this way:

I think it's empowering for us students to speak our minds freely and openly saying, "No, I totally disagree with you"! Or "Yes, I back up that opinion thoroughly". Because on WebCT nobody can see your face, nobody can pull you out after the class saying, "You, you are the person who is really opinionated".

The system of relations among participants in this context provided possibilities for "producer-like" learning (Gee, 2003) which enabled learners to evolve their form of membership and construct a new identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It appeared that the instructor could help students think critically, provide experience in democratic process, encourage independence, or induce them into a body of knowledge or way of thinking (Brookfield, 1995, p. 43). Not inhibited by criticism, even one of the mature native students grew competent enough to form an identity which was characterized by his "social selfhood" and consequently his "social power" (Wenger, 1998):

About WebCT discussions, I kind of pick and choose, put my name in. I think it's really important to do so. There's a little bit of strategy, too to make sure you're known, you're being seen. Because he said the TAs and he are looking at that.

Privileged by a strong sense of belonging, i.e., legitimate membership (Wenger, 1998), this student appeared to be moving from peripheral participation to active participation and felt like an insider member in this discourse collective. His new identity was likely to be influenced by his personal characteristics, i.e., confidence and goal-commitment, which enabled him to perform strategic in his social interactions. As a mature student, his life experience and also as a university degree holder, his previous academic background had a promising impact on the new social self he developed in the practice.

The online discussions seemed to provide a secure space, a comfortable point of entry through which the students started to move from non-participation to peripheral participation at the beginning. However, it played a more critical role in their identity formation later in the semester as it helped them transform into more interdependent, active practitioners while engaging in practices. According to one of the non-native learners:

Now there's more friendship and we can communicate especially through WebCT discussions. If you have questions, you can ask. You don't have to just wait for the Prof to answer your question. Maybe some of the students can help you with those questions. The WebCT helps you with any information. I think it's a good way of connecting the community together.

This student's comment illustrates how the students began to rely on one another in order to negotiate the learning situation when they had limited interactions with the instructor. As Weiss (as cited in Scanlon et al., 2007) claims, this opportunity for interactions would help them build a new sense of self, a new BAK (Woods, 1996), within the new learning environment of the academic context.

The virtual space facilitated the interaction and consequently supported the engagement which was a prerequisite for the formation of the online discourse collective. However, the discourse collective in the physical classroom setting was still suffering from non-participation in oral discussions. The students were mainly hesitating to grow into full participants for fear of being criticized by putting face to their points. One of the TAs reported her observation of the students' interaction in the first interview:

I found it interesting that they are really active online, but when it comes to discussions in person, they are hesitant in class, although the Prof really encourages them to discuss those issues in class.

The reason for this passive membership, which still cannot be called full non-participation, was found in the large lecture size in the view of many members of the community. One of the native student participants attempted to justify the student's avoidance of raising their points in class:

The large number of people in class is another factor that prevents from talking. One of the huge fears everybody has is talking in front of people. It's scary when there is like 200 eyes staring at you waiting for what you're going to say. That's one of the reasons I sit in front of the classroom, because when I put up my hand, there are only 10 people I can see.

Benefited by the personal characteristics of interest and persistence, this student was intelligent enough to develop the enabling strategy for social interactions. As such, he could possibly compensate for the lack of a secure setting with physical interactional facilities, a point of entry for newcomers at the stage of peripheral participation early in the semester. The space this student created himself to comfortably involve in the interaction was expected to have been provided in the class setting. In anticipation of such facility, one of the students in the online assessment conducted by the instructor suggested:

I would suggest smaller lectures, or possibly a discussion group for smaller parts of the larger lecture. This way I feel ALL our questions and concerns will be

heard. This is a very large lecture, and sometimes it can be intimidating to ask something.

A kind of discourse collective, a discussion group, can be a means for facilitating engagement as it offers the opportunity for working on joint tasks, i.e., things to do together and provides the availability for help (Wenger, 1998). Coming together as a collective with a specific purpose can possibly allow the newcomers to develop relations with other members of the community in a less formal and more intimate context, each bringing their own experience, knowledge, skills and strategies:

I think it would be great if there was a discussion group attached to this course.

With other courses there are discussion groups. The class is separated into smaller groups. They're given a topic to talk about. We're such a large number. If there was a smaller group, my voice would be heard a little bit more.

In fact, the group of students can develop into smaller collectives in the larger community of the classroom, which would allow them to think aloud and to formulate their ideas and understandings. This can create the space to encourage students to develop new competences and new identities:

I feel more group discussions (getting people involved with what's being taught) would be a profit to the class; it would help us better understand and retain what we are learning.

This way, newcomers can likely experience learning through interaction with other members, including both the students and the teachers, and evolve into active participants

in the practice. One of the native speakers expressed his frustration with the impracticality of this kind of practice at the end of the classes:

I still don't like the fact that the class is so large. I don't know how big we are, but it's scary because it's hard to make sure your voice is heard. It really is. I don't really think that the course would benefit from having discussion groups. But we don't have the TAs to do that. We don't have the time to do that. It's just hard to get all that organized.

An active practitioner in the community, the mature native student also tried to explain how the large lecture size had an undesirable impact on his full participation:

My personal style is that I find it hard to go through the whole class without asking a question or making a comment. I like to talk and be involved. If it was a smaller class, I would ask more questions. At least I would be interacting more. I think I have to give other people more chance, too and certainly there's half-dozen people who like to make comments.

Although the large class size can hinder more active participation and interaction, this student's non-participation can be considered a personal strategy for social interaction which was developed under the shadow of a tacit understanding and respect for the other members of the community. In effect, he appeared to form a new identity by sharing the practice in a respectful way.

The class instructor was also aware of the shortcoming, "In other classes which are smaller, there are lots of class discussions. There are 2 sessions in a week: one session is me, and the other session it's just them discussing in groups". As noted by Johns

(1997) and Scanlon et al (2007), the administrative constraints seemed to influence the instructor's pedagogical decisions. However, as Johns (1997) maintains, thoughtful teachers can still insert into discussions, into reading, and into writing, despite the pressure of the teaching situation (p. 115). The instructor in the present course seemed to be successful in making compensations for the problems resulting from the large lecture size by creating spaces for student voices and giving them a chance to draw upon their primary discourses against the concepts they were taught. As such, he was capable of making them feel like insiders to the particular classroom community. The instructor mentioned one of the strategies he adopted to meet this end:

I think it's a great achievement to have 70%-80% students participating in discussions in class and reading for terms to be able to say something, because you know a big class is very intimidating for many students to raise their hands, because they could feel embarrassed if their comments are not the ones the Prof is looking for or if they sound silly. Then that's one of the skills I think the instructor should have. No matter how silly a comment or a question might be, they should do their best. Never show it to embarrass the students.

The instructor was acknowledged by most of the community members at the end of the semester. "Our instructor appreciates every opinion announced in class, whether it is first year student or not", said one of the students in the online assessment. The mature native speaker also praised the lecturer for the way in which he encouraged ideas and their exchange by treating everyone in the community equally, "I find our professor a really great teacher. He's very respectful of everybody. Sometimes there's a comment made that maybe isn't 100% relevant, but he still treats it with respect and considers

everybody”. One of the TAs also reported on her observation of the virtual and physical settings for the members’ engagement in the discursive practice, “the students seem to be much more engaged. With online participation, there’s a lot! In classroom setting, students are responding to more questions”.

Both native and non-native speakers’ comments at the end of the classes could substantiate that they found the space to express their understanding in their own words and to share them with others, i.e., they began to move from outsider into insider, from peripheral participants towards active participants:

Of course when you are more comfortable in participating, you’re engaged more.

Probably I’m participating more. I feel I just got more comfortable in the class, and I think our Prof welcomes all the opinions. He won’t make fun of you.

I’m definitely participating more now. Since the beginning, I feel more comfortable speaking to the Prof, talking with my classmate, expressing my opinion. Absolutely!

It is striking that nowhere in non-native speakers’ account of their experience as a member of the academic discourse community of ALDS1001A did they identify themselves as non-native speakers in the same way they were concerned at the beginning of the semester.

The outstanding accomplishment by the instructor was his success in fulfilling a fundamental requirement for the development of a productive community of practice, i.e., “a willingness to collaborate honestly and openly, building the ground rules of trust and

mutual respect” (Brown as cited in Hirst et al., 2004, p. 72). This growth was observed not only in the patterns of student-lecturer discourse but also in that of student-student. A good example for this is one of the non-native learners’ comments on his personal experience of interaction with peers coming from different cultural backgrounds in the two interviews:

I’m not that much prone to express my ideas, because I’m afraid I might hurt someone. I’ve been here for 2 years and I’ve seen not many people take your opinion easily. I got a fight in the classroom last year about a discussion. It was something about American politics and George Bush, and the war between the US and Afghanistan. One of the students took it too personally. That’s why I just rather discuss things on WebCT to get the participation mark. I like the WebCT discussions”.

To avoid broader conflicts with other members of a sociocultural community, this student developed the non-participation strategy, which was influenced by his personal experience in former academic contexts. As such, this student was acquiring a new identity which might conflict with his initial identities connected to other discursive practices in which he engaged. However, his concluding remarks at the end of the semester demonstrated an “evolving form of membership”, a new experience and a new identity as a result of long-term, living relations with other members while engaging in the practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). He said, “What I found surprising was that I felt maybe there would be clashes on there. But everyone was pretty respectful to others and I really liked that”.

By developing relationships with each other in the provided time and space, the students started to get to know each other, to value each other's perspectives and to learn from each other. This allowed them, to see themselves as a community of learners in which participation patterns of members continued to evolve and consequently the community itself evolved. It became evident from students' comments that they appreciated the opportunities to learn from each other. One of the non-native speakers reflected on the role of her peers in her developing a new experience, a new identity:

At the beginning, I was thinking because I didn't know anything, I had to sit at the corner. But now I realize that if I contact the students, I have more information.

You can share your information with them and they can share theirs with you and you can learn better. I try to find more friends and be in touch with them.

This student indicated her awareness of the key role social interaction skills play. She seemed to come to the understanding that establishing networks with peers would ease entering the discourse community and meeting its expectations. This can simply echo Reeves' argument (as cited in Scanlon et al., 2007) that institutional cues are frequently transmitted via other students.

The students also highlighted forming a discourse collective with the lecturer as fundamental to their identity formation, emphasizing the fact that it is through this interaction that learners begin to understand the university construct of being a student (Scanlon et al., 2007). The mature native student considered his growing into an active practitioner in light of support he received from both instructional materials and the teacher. But he put strong emphasis on the role of the situated interaction with the

instructor. Although as Scanlon et al. (2007) mention, the restricted staff-student contact hours and increased tutorial size could have resulted in reduced intimacy among the instructor and the students, this student believed that the instructor was capable of establishing friendly relationship with the students:

I will say that I can realize that our professor would be able to start identifying people. He's done a pretty good job at that. I don't know how many in the class he actually knows by name or by face but seems at least there are 20-25 people who he knows who they are.

The close interaction between this student and the instructor, mutually achieved through the process, encouraged the student to develop new learning strategies, i.e., new competencies and new identities. When he was asked at the end of the semester how he felt about his own engagement, he replied:

More confident! Part of it is because of my understanding of the material, kind of grasp of it. Part of it is the Prof's reinforcement for sure. It sounds funny, my ego again. I remember the 1st time when I put up my hand, he said, "yes, Peter"! So he knew who I was. So I said, OK! Confident but at the same time I can't hide any more. Now he knows who I am, so when I do say something, I wanna make sure that it's well-structured and is a good point or a valid question to say. So it goes back to taking attendance again, we don't know how many people he knows in class. That was a good thing I felt. He knows who I am now, but it also makes me realize that I should be more careful with what I am saying.

Another discourse collective which developed throughout the course was based on the relations among the students, the TAs and the activities they could collaborate on. In the first interview at the beginning of the semester, one of the TAs expressed her discouragement of the students' lack of interest in interacting with them out of the classroom, "I just received one email. It was a very short question asking about the first assignment. Nobody has dropped by at my office hours during the last 5 weeks after the course began". Similarly, feeling frustrated by students' non-participation in the practice with her, the second TA tried to provide the possible reasons:

So far, just one student has referred to me, asking about a good number of participation to have. No one comes to my office hours, no one emails me. I feel maybe the Prof is really answering their questions. They're satisfied with the help they're getting from him. I've seen some students are CCing me and the other TA, but the main addressee is the Prof. He's easy to talk to. If I were a student in the same situation, I would definitely choose the Prof versus the TAs.

The above quotations can provide the evidence for the students' active membership and participation in the discourse collective they developed with the course instructor. It also indicates that they did not seem to identify themselves with TAs first as they did not have active participation in their collective. This illustrates the fact that that the students like other practitioners in the context of university are commonly involved in several collectives (Tight, 2004), a case of multi-membership in Wenger's terms (1998). Belonging to different discourse collectives can imply various forms of membership, which in turn contributes in some way to the production of identities (Wenger, 1998, p. 158).

The students could still be recognized to be the members of the collective of the TAs at the beginning of the semester, but at the marginal level, i.e., their non-participation dominated their participation. The TAs attempted to figure out why this happened while the “cultures of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) of different collectives were not in opposition to one another:

There are a few reasons for their not contacting us. For the 1st years coming from high school, TAs are ones who they are not really used to. At high school, the teacher comes to you if you have a problem. They may not trust the TAs for help. They may not even know when my office hours are or be too shy to ask. They may not admit that they are in trouble and they need help. They may not be feeling comfortable to come to me.

The above quotation highlights the fact that past experiences of school together with personal influences like the lack of confidence developed the students’ “culture of learning” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996) which was not aligned with that of the dominant group in the new community in the university. According to the same TA, the relationships evolved over time. But as it seems to be evident in the following quotation, what defined the students-TAs discourse collective was not just a matter of a specific amount of time; rather it was a matter of sustaining enough mutual engagement in pursuing the practice together and development of a “shared repertoire” (Wenger, 1998). She characterized this change in the second interview at the end of the semester:

It was nice at the end that they could feel comfortable and a lot of them by the end were a lot more open with me to ask me personal questions about what I do,

because they see me more and more and feel more comfortable at the end of the course to talk to me. It's kind of the shame that the class ends. If it was a full-year course, if we had another 15 weeks with the students, we would see more improvement and they understood what we expected. Because they would feel more comfortable asking us what we expect.

The sense of belonging and identification can be observed to have been developed as a two-way process through direct interaction. The enthusiasm experienced by both the TA and the students emphasizes Wenger's (1998) point "the mutuality of this process of giving and receiving can be very fulfilling. It can make a community of practice the source of great social energy" (p. 193). However, as it is evident in the above quotation, full participation would be achieved in long-term rather than in one semester.

And finally, another discourse collective was emerged in the interviews and the written contacts I had with the student participants as a researcher while I was playing the role of both an observer and a participant in the study (see Chapter 3 for Participants). Students began to share their experiences with discursive practices and their approaches to the course requirements after they announced their willingness to cooperate in my study. The students' volunteer spirit and my commitment to the study could build the grounds for the development of a productive discourse collective in which we appeared to collaborate honestly and openly based on trust and mutual respect (Brown as cited in Hirst et al. 2004). This was reflected in my field notes taken in session 4:

I suppose people are building trust and confidence in me and my study as I had the first three volunteers in the same session I introduced myself (session 2) and

five more have been added to the participants so far. I could never imagine they would show so much interest in my study.

According to the student participants in the present study, their developing relationship with me was conducive to learning. Having been influenced by their personal characteristic of volunteer spirit, they could act academically strategic by being involved in the study. A few of them asked me to assist them with the assessment tasks and some others were just sharing their thoughts and feelings about the course while meeting the researchers before, during or after the classes:

Actually I think you've been one of the many benefits of the course. Having you there and being able to meet you outside the class and have somebody from outside helping us, or at least offering help, I think, it's been great. You were such a great presence always.

They believed that participating in the interviews allowed them to think aloud and formulate their ideas and understandings. What their comments all showed was that student participants began to become insiders to this discourse collective. Like the case of students in Kutz's (2004) study, my study participants seemed to become able to think *with* me, not just *to* me about the things I would discover and understand. An appreciation of opportunities to engage with the practice and experience learning was evident in one of the native speakers' comment in the second interview:

Thank you for asking me all these questions and making me think about the course. I think one of the reasons I am doing well in this course is because you're helping me to think about it in different ways.

In sum, it can be claimed that in this introductory course, engagement was supported, i.e., the formation of discourse collectives was supported by all the practitioners involved in the practice. As such, an “infrastructure of engagement” was created by providing “interactional facilities” which included physical and virtual spaces, interactive technologies and communication facilities that extended mutual access in time and space (Wenger, 1998, p. 237). The students thus began to develop mastery over the secondary discourse of the community through active participation and moving inside these collectives.

The detailed examples of the strategic academic choices made by the students illustrated how the entering students engaged in the discursive practices of an introductory academic course and attempted to master and demonstrate the mainstream secondary discourse of the community. The description and interpretation of these examples provided answers to research questions which informed this case study. These questions are addressed in the following sections.

Q1. What influenced the undergraduate students’ academic engagement in an introductory course?

In Lawrence’s (2005) framework for student transition and retention (see Figure 1), the process of transition to university is characterized by students’ becoming familiar with and engaging their first-semester subjects, each of which encompasses specific secondary discourse and related practices. Investigating the students’ journey inside the

discourse community of ALDS 1001A could identify the characteristics of their academic engagement.

As a result of grounded theory analysis of the participants' responses, a multi-dimensional network of connections emerged which illustrates interlocking patterns of relations between the learners, the teachers and the contextual elements of the academic setting they were involved in. It became evident that the individuals gained familiarity with and engaged the discourse community of ALDS 1001A as a result of the dynamics of these connections. The degree to which the students were able to bring their "whole person" (Wenger, 1998) to involve in these connections appeared to influence their academic engagement and consequently their success. In the context of this study, I move beyond the sociocultural definition of *whole person* as suggested by Wenger (1998) and extend it to include the individuals' psychological and personal aspects as well. The dynamics of these situated connections helped me develop a new conceptual model for academic engagement (Figure 3).

Figure 3. ALDS 1001A discourse community and the dominant situational influences

My new model represents some contexts in which connections are established and consequently learning is experienced. These connections are combined into a single nested large community in which I describe the individual strategic academic choices and the way they are shaped. The large discourse community which locates all the connections represents the University with its own culture, and the first-year academic course ALDS 1001A is a smaller community within, a community with its own discursive practices and culture of learning. As it is evident in Figure 3, the community of ALDS 1001A includes some requirements, namely readings, lectures, writing exams, written assignments, and attendance and participation which create the situational influences and consequently give rise to specific discursive practices.

Participating in the discursive practices of the community will be impossible for the individual student to happen if there would be no connections with other participants of the discourse community. Indeed, the students' academic choices for engaging the mainstream discourse are also affected by interactional influences resulting from the social networks created among the students, the teachers and the researcher while involved in discursive practices (Figure 4). The negotiation of discursive practices among the individuals thus results in the appearance of discourse collectives.

Figure 4. Discourse collectives emerged from interactional influences

Discourse collectives emerge from the interactions between each individual student and the other members of the discourse community of ALDS 1001A. These

collectives may overlap. For instance, there might be an interaction between the collectives of the lecturer and TAs while the individual student is involved in both. The individual's participation in different collectives would give rise to multi-membership (Wenger, 1998), i.e., participation in different collectives simultaneously. Driven by their volunteer spirit, there were students among my study participants who seemed to find their place in discourse collectives of the lecturer, the TAs and the researcher, and the students both in ALDS 1001A and other courses. There were also students who created a discourse collective while they were waiting in the corridor for the class to be started. I usually met those collectives before the class while they were discussing their problems with readings and the assignments. Some of them seemed to form another little collective that could exchange lecture notes because of where they were sitting in class. As such, the students were involved in not only carrying out the practices of the already-existing discourse collectives, but also in initiating new collectives.

The main human components of the community, individual students are also affected by their entry characteristics, the personal influences with which they participate in class. From the analysis of data in this case study, it became more evident that besides background and strategies, there are other factors which affect students' engagement in the discourse community of class. Indeed, embedded in every student's linguistic and academic experience is his/her BAK, i.e., beliefs and assumptions about learning as well as knowledge. Moreover, factors such as confidence, goal-commitment, persistence, motivation, and interest seem to be among characteristics which affect the degrees of academic engagement and success (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Personal influences affecting students' academic engagement

In an attempt to demonstrate the dynamics of all influences existing in the context of ALDS 1001A, I can describe multiple discourse collectives which are developed while all the participants, i.e., the lecturer, TAs, the researcher and the students, negotiate the literacy required for involving in course requirements. Therefore, a key sign of undergraduates' engagement in the academic discourse of a discipline is that the students' relationship with the course requirements becomes "layered" (Casanave, 2002, p. 79), involving some aspects of the texts, some aspects of themselves and some aspects of people around them (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Students' academic engagement in ALDS1001A as a result of dynamics of influences

As such, there seems to be large connections among the participants of different collectives in the academic course setting. Understanding the dynamics and implications of these connections among individuals appears to reveal the way in which the students develop their repertoires of academic skills and strategies. In effect, it is the nexus of situated connections between discourse collectives and their participating individuals that can be the context and process of academic engagement.

The last conceptual model presented above (see Figure 6) aims to represent how the three influences co-occur and interplay in order to engage the students in the discursive practices of different collectives in class. To sum, it can be argued that the situational, interactional and personal influences appear to function hand in hand to

engage the student in the discourse community of the academic course. As noted earlier in the reviewed literature, engaging the discursive practices of the disciplines is a prerequisite for students' integration into the culture of university, their perseverance and consequently their progress (see Krause, 2006; Kuh et al., 2008; Lawrence, 2005; Tinto, 2002). In what follows, I discuss the conditions under which the students' integration into the culture of the first-year academic course is enhanced.

Q2. What facilitated the undergraduate students' integration into the culture of an introductory academic course?

As illustrated in Lawrence's (2005) framework for student transition and retention, the entering students' familiarity and engagement with the mainstream discourses of university subjects are necessary for their transition to university. But, what moves the entering students further inside the discourse community of an academic course and helps them fit to the new culture and persevere is believed to be their mastery and demonstration of the mainstream secondary discourse, which is considered to be the result of the engagement process (see Figure 1).

The individual student's personal factors together with immediate contextual features of the classroom as well as the socio-economic conditions of the larger context of the university shaped and influenced a 'culture of learning' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996) among the participants in the discourse community of ALDS 1001A. In fact, through the negotiation of multiple discursive practices, some expectations, attitudes and beliefs about good learning and teaching were formed among all the participants. This new

culture of learning might be similar to or different from the culture of learning with which each person entered the course. As mentioned earlier and supported by the related literature (see Gee, 1990), enculturation into a disciplinary community at university requires each individual student to achieve full mastery over the mainstream secondary discourse of the academic course. This may require full participation and complete insiderness in the discourse and discursive practices of the community which did not seem to happen in the experience of my study participants. However, based on the accounts of the participants in my study, the students could develop evolving patterns of participation in multiple discourse collectives which helped them meet the expectations of the ALDS 1001A community in order to pass the subject. This may imply two conditions under which the entering students could master the secondary discourse of a first-year introductory course and consequently integrate into its culture of learning:

- Active participation and insiderness in discourse collectives
- Simultaneous membership in multiple discourse collectives

As it was evident in the students' practices and conversations in this case study, those who are new to the context might start with the identity of 'non-participation' in the discursive practices. The students' non-participation at the beginning can be either 'enabling' or 'problematic' for fuller participation (Wenger, 1998) depending on their previous culture of learning and the primary discourse they bring with them. The students might not participate in some collectives at the beginning since they might not be familiar with the language, values, attitudes and dispositions of the dominant group (the lecturer, the TAs and the researcher) in the discourse community. Coming from a different cultural background and consequently carrying a different culture of learning can result in gaps

between the expectations of the teachers and the student, or between different groups of students and consequently encourages non-participation at the beginning.

For the students coming from a background that has a similar culture of learning with that of the current context, their primary discourse can act like a “carrier” or “foundation” for acquiring the secondary discourse (Gee, 1990). For instance, if the students have already experienced learning in an academic setting like that of the university, they are already familiar with the defaults of the frameworks for the discourse used for lectures, readings, etc. Therefore, there might be initial connections which would initiate “peripheral participation” (Wenger, 1998), that is, these students may not participate in the new discourse collectives at first, but they have the potential to develop into active participants, an insider later, through apprenticed, scaffolded participation led by the lecturer and the tutors and assisted by peers.

Providing an example for the opposite situation, we can talk about an individual who enters the discourse community with an identity influenced by a culture of learning which is different from that of the present community. Hence, the gap between the primary and the secondary discourses would be wider and may result in the individual’s non-participation in the practices of discourse collectives. The identity of non-participation can turn to be either enabling or problematic depending on the interactions the student is involved in with the teachers who master mainstream secondary discourse of the community. If the engagement in secondary discourse happens through the timely apprenticed, scaffolded participation, the learner can move towards the center of discourse collectives and acquire mastery over their dominant literacy. This movement

can also be supported and facilitated by other personal influences within the students themselves.

However, if the students are obliged to demonstrate the secondary discourse prior to their engagement and mastery of it through apprenticed participation, they may try to fall back on their primary discourse and try to make it fit to the needed functions or decide to use a “simplified or stereotyped” version of the required secondary discourse (Gee, 1990). This process would prevent the learners from acquiring mastery over the secondary discourse. If this troubling situation would neither be guided by the experts in a timely manner nor affected by the learners’ personal influences for discovering other channels to receive the necessary support, the learners may develop “marginalized” identity of participation, i.e., a form of non-participation at the beginning which can lead them to either “non-active participation” or “non-membership” and “outsiderness” (Wenger, 1998) later.

The students’ membership in multiple collectives also seems to be encouraged by two factors, one from inside, i.e., the individual students’ personal influences and the other from outside, i.e., the secondary discourse experts’ skills in organizing the discursive practices and activities. All the personal influences of the individual students, the identity with which they enter the disciplinary context, can affect the degrees of their involvement in multiple practices. For instance, the language background of a non-native speaker can act as an enabling or troubling influence for multi-membership in multiple collectives based on the personal strategy the individual students develops. Among the participants of my study, for example, I had four non-native speakers who were driven to participate in my research by their volunteer spirit. However, all of them adopted

marginal or peripheral participation in the practices initiated by the lecturer, of the TAs and of other students at the beginning. But a few of them were capable of controlling their lack of confidence in their language and turned into fuller participants in those discursive practices later.

When the course components are built up upon each other, the collectives and discursive practices emerged around them appear to share the same values. As such, active participation in one discourse collective appears to facilitate membership in the others, because as Wenger (1998) notes, the students learn to build bridges across practices. For instance, when lectures were accompanied by relevant readings, the students in this case study were encouraged to participate simultaneously in both discursive practices. This in turn facilitated their understanding of the secondary discourse as they began to respond dialogically to the cues from exams and assignments later. It seems that the more cohesively the course is organized, the more overlaps might be observed among the collectives and their discursive practices as they appear to share the common principles for the dominant literacy.

To conclude, the undergraduate students' experiences in a first-year introductory academic course appears not to be complete acculturation or enculturation (see also Casanave, 2002; Zamel & Spack, 1998). In fact, mastery over the secondary discourse is acquired through full participation and complete insiderness in multiple discourse collectives which cannot happen in a one-semester introductory course. Nor does the framework presented by Lawrence (2005) for student transition and retention appear to specifically illustrate the entering students' journey to the discourse community of a discipline on a more micro-level or smaller scale (i.e., within a course). Hence, the

following section attempts to improve on the already- existing models and definitions which characterize the processes.

Q3. How should the undergraduates' process of transition to an introductory course and integration into its culture of learning be reconceptualised?

Mastering dominant literacy of multiple collectives may require the individual student to become a complete insider in the collectives and have full participation in their practices. Stated another way, to integrate into the culture of the academic context, every individual student apparently needs to move towards the center of multiple discourse collectives and let his/her 'whole person' become thoroughly involved in their discursive practices (see Figure 7). As such, the student can develop the repertoire of skills and strategies for engaging and mastery of the secondary discourse by drawing on the enabling personal factors, becoming involved in social connections and supported by the significant experts in the secondary discursive practices for apprenticed, scaffolded participation.

Figure 7. Moving from non-participation to full participation

As it became evident in the reviewed literature and also in my study participants' accounts of their perceptions and performance, full mastery over the secondary discourse of an academic course does not seem to happen in the first semester, because learning academic discourse is similar to the process of second language acquisition which happens in long-term and at higher levels (see also Casanave, 2002; Zamel & Spack, 1998). The changing roles of students between non-participation and participation provide evidence of the students' development of new skills and strategies which change their position from outsider to insider. But what the novice students achieve in a first-year introductory course does not appear to be full participation and complete insiderness. Rather they gain an intermediate mastery of the secondary discourse of the discipline by developing "survival strategies" (see Casanave, 2002) which help them meet the

expectations of the teachers and pass the subject. The students' response to the secondary discourse indicates the stage of developmental process they belong to. This conceptualization can resonate with Kutz's (2004) notion of approximative system or interlanguage while referring to the developmental process in the acquisition of the secondary discourse of an academic course.

Striving to move inside the community, the novice students seem to develop an intermediate discourse which is characterized by some aspects of the texts, some aspects of the people with whom they interact, and some aspects of themselves which in turn include their primary discourse affected by their BAK, their previous culture of learning, and their personal skills and strategies. The novice students need to find their place in the mainstream discourse by developing a sense of the practices, and enter the connections that involve the aspects of all the three influences. This will require them to develop strategies which help them change their roles to active participants. Reflecting on the evolving identities which approximate insiderness in the discourse community provoked me to explore a new term for this developmental process of adaptation and accommodation.

Many theoretical perspectives have been developed to identify these processes experienced by entering students as transition /retention, acculturation or enculturation. Defined as a move from one state to another (Hussay & Smith, 2010), the term *transition* tends to refer to a linear trajectory (McLeod, 2012) while both *academic enculturation* and *academic acculturation* tend to emphasize the dynamics involved in the communication of cultural and linguistic knowledge. Academic enculturation views this process as a student's acquisition of mainstream secondary discourses while involved in

supported interaction with people who have already mastered the discourse (Gee, 1990, p. 147). However, academic acculturation takes into account the active role of students in the adaptation process while engaged with the academic study cultures (Cheng and Fox, 2008, p. 309). While acculturation appears to start from the culture the learner brings with him/her to the learning context and how it assimilates into the new culture, enculturation suggests priority to the mainstream culture in the learning setting and the necessity of the learner's integration into it as a full member.

I wrestled with the question of which term to choose for interpreting and describing the experiences of my study participants with the academic discourse of their immediate learning community. I was seeking for a term which could broaden the domain of the process in the definitions to refer to the mutual or reciprocal exchange of cultures of learning between the entering students and the discipline. It could thus emphasize power balances between institutional discursive practices and entering students, because in a first-year introductory course, not only the students but the teachers do also seem to challenge to help students survive within the bounds of the discipline. As it was evident in my study, the teachers were required to adapt and adjust the practices in order to engage the linguistically and culturally diverse students. In fact, it seems imperative for the teachers as well to adopt strategic approaches to encourage students' active participation in the discourse community of the academic course. Put it other way, teachers may need to adapt the culture of learning in the course to meet their students' needs. This led me to explore a new term for this reconceptualization: *In-culturation*. It seemed to me that this new term could suggest the students' participation in a sociocultural context where they can both affect and be affected by the culture of learning

(Cortazzi & Jin, 1996) shaped in the class setting. This might need them to develop an identity which is neither the one with which they entered nor the one which is dominant in the learning context. Indeed, novice students in an introductory course appear to discover new aspects of themselves while they try to engage with the academic study culture of the discourse community. In sum, entering students need to be viewed not simply as products of culture but as creators of culture as well (Spack, 2004, p. 39).

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the first-year academic course, ALDS 1001A, as a case of academic engagement . First, the roles of the influences which affected the study participants' experiences was identified, and the students' and teachers' developing strategic approaches to figure out what was expected in the discourse communities were discussed. The detailed description and discussion of the study participants then provided answers to the three research questions which informed this study. New conceptual models and definition for illustrating the entering students' experiences were also introduced and elaborated upon. The next chapter concludes this case study with a summary of key findings, the limitations of the study, implications for further research, and a personal reflection on this research.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

It is a simplification, then, to represent our students as coming from one distinct discourse community, that of their own culture, and entering another, that of the university. [...] as they are [...] people who live “between two worlds,” bringing the cultural forms of each with them as they move back and forth, transforming both worlds in the process (Coles & Wall, 1987, p. 313).

With the ultimate goal of supporting successful integration into university, a large amount of research has been conducted to illustrate how multicultural population of students and the changing culture of university make the first year experience challenging. To this end, many theoretical perspectives have been developed to identify these processes. Grounded in the theories and models which characterize and illustrate the process on a large scale, this thesis attempted to focus on a small picture and reconceptualise the undergraduate student transition, adaptation and integration processes while attending a one-semester introductory course.

The present case study is concluded in this chapter with a summary of the study and the main findings presented in this thesis. I then discuss the limitations of my research design and the implications my study has for further research. Finally, I provide reflection on what I learned from this research as a learner, teacher, researcher and also a newcomer to the culture of social and academic world communities.

Summary of the study

This study aimed to investigate the first-year experience of undergraduate students who strived to access the academic culture of an introductory course and participate in its situated discourse practices. It introduced university and classrooms as communities in which various discourses speak to each other through individuals with diverse cultural and language backgrounds. Further, it explained the ways in which entering students develop the dominant literacy through guided participation in the practices and through interactions with teachers and peers. The review of theoretical and research perspectives revealed the factors that influence the experience of entering students, based on which an analytical approach was developed to conduct this case study. Observation of classes as well as interviews, email contacts, and informal conversations allowed me to track and interact with the student participants in a one-semester undergraduate course. The analytical approach then enabled me to discuss the detailed examples of the strategic academic choices the students made in order to engage the practices of multiple discourse collectives and master the mainstream secondary discourse. Finally, answers to research questions gave rise to a new theoretical model for academic engagement and a re-conceptualization for the processes of transition to a first-year academic community and integration into its culture.

Summary of the main findings

The findings of this case study can be summarized in terms of some key elements (attitudes and behaviors) which enhanced undergraduate students' potential for successful academic progress within the introductory course. These elements are as follow:

- Developing an appreciation for and connection to ALDS 1001A community and its culture of learning
- An active awareness of the different expectations of ALDS 1001A discourse community
- Developing discourse-level skills and adjusting strategies to engage the practices of different discourse collectives
- Initiating new discourse collectives and developing multi-membership in both new and existing ones
- Developing an awareness of the interconnectedness of the discursive practices
- A willingness to interact with and respect diverse student body with different primary discourses
- Entering connections which involve the aspects of all the three influences (situational, interactional, and personal)
- Changing patterns of participation - from non-participation to active participation- using the enabling personal influences and the timely feedback received from skilled mentors as wells as peers
- Developing skills for monitoring and assessing one's own progress
- Developing confidence and self-regulated learning within the classroom

Limitations

Although this research was carefully designed, there were some unavoidable limitations and shortcomings that need to be acknowledged and addressed. First, the samples in this case study were not randomly selected but volunteered to participate. In attempting to understand the change in the processes of transition and integration, however, this case study narrowed the focus on particular participants, a particular course and a particular tertiary institution. Neither is possible to replicate the experiences of the research participants, nor is it possible to generalize to other cases.

Second, the findings of this study are based on the students' accounts of their experiences while trying to engage with and participate in discourse communities. I should recognize that some of these experiences might be tacit and unaccounted for. Hence, the interpretations of the findings should be treated with caution. Finally, like other qualitative research, this investigation also raises ethical issues, since in pursuing this study I involved not only eight students but also the course instructor and two TAs in the process of reflecting on their own learning and teaching. It is not clear to what extent the research itself may have influenced the instructor's and the TAs' pedagogical decisions. It seems inevitable that the research effected change in the students. As mentioned by a few student participants, the study provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their own learning. Indeed, the research seemed to allow them to articulate and develop strategies for success.

Implications for further research

Further research could be conducted on the topic by following this group of students into the upper years of their studies. A longitudinal study would actually confirm if transitions and integration were or were not happening, and if identities were constructed. It would allow for the change process to be observed, which in turn helps some questions to be answered: Would the students who did not seem to participate fully develop academic skills and strategies throughout the second and third year of university? Would full mastery and insidership happen at higher levels of education? And if not, what would be the barriers? The discourse collective I developed with my study participants still benefits from some patterns of participation from some of the student members. This encourages me to continue this research by conducting another case study with one of the student participants who could enter her Master's in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies after a year. As such, I would have the opportunity to examine her evolving patterns of participation and identity while developing fuller mastery over the discourse of the discipline.

Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures would increase the external validity or generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, although the limited scope of my study and time restrictions did not allow it to happen, further research should investigate psychological and/or sociological dimensions which were not considered in the study (e.g., the role of personal characteristics such as shyness, extroversion; the influence of socio-economic status, parental education, etc.). More studies are required if institutions are to more fully understand the nature of student engagement and how to foster it in the first year (see also Fox, 2004a; 2005; Fox et al., in press). Finally, the

study strategies of L2 learners can be investigated with a specific focus on the differences in strategy usage between native and non-native speakers of English.

Personal reflection

This case study changed my understandings of my various roles as a learner, a teacher, a researcher, and as a self in the academic world community. As a learner, I was strongly encouraged to build this case study upon my past experience as well as my knowledge. My narratives of past experience in Curriculum course papers and the identification of my BAK (Woods, 1996) while writing my teaching philosophy in Seminar for University Teaching course throughout the first year of my Master's studies "created the condition for a fire" (Pychyl, 2011), for a desire and enthusiasm for conducting this study. From writing this thesis, I learned how to develop the academic discourse which is marked by a balance between my personal voice and the expectations of the community of scholars in the discipline.

Conducting this case study taught me to agree with Smoke (2004) that learning to be a successful teacher, like learning to be a successful student, is a long-term process during which the teacher needs to assess and reassess what he/she does. Reflecting on both my teaching experience in a small educational setting in Iran and my study participants' experience in a large Canadian university, I tend to be more aware now that in post-secondary institutions with different levels of diversity within the culture, the teacher needs to take account of the power of student culture in shaping what is happening in a first-year academic course. This requires the teacher to undertake

assessment in order to reflect on and understand the learners' diverse expectations, goals, and outcomes (cf. Fox et al., in press). Searching for the evidence of misalignment based on what was done and what might have been done can help the teacher discover the "leverage points" (Fox, 2004b), i.e. "access points in a program- which are replete with curricular potential and need, and sites for positive intervention" (p. 1). Focusing on the academic language needs of the learners may have no results if the context needs of all the participants in class are overlooked. As Brown (2008) points out and also the findings of this study indicated, context needs can be identified by referring to the physical, social, and psychological influences under which learning takes place.

This thesis also helped me change my perceptions of how academic literacy is acquired in a first-year undergraduate class. Like some other teachers of academic discourse to entering undergraduate students, I sometimes expected my students to think, read and write quickly in ways that had taken me many years to learn. Whereas, I know better now that setting up unrealistic expectations that entering students will complete the process of engagement and mastery of the dominant discourse excludes students from the very work they are trying to take part in and labels them as outsiders (Elbow, 1998). In effect, the teacher needs to be strategic as well in order to help students survive to the level of expectations of an introductory course. With entering students, it also seems necessary for the teacher to accept wider varieties of participation and multiple ways of communicating.

As a researcher, I changed roles while doing this case study. I moved from the outside as a researcher to inside as a participant observer and back again to the outside as a researcher continuously while I was involved with my study participants. These shifting

perspectives better informed my understanding of students' change processes.

Furthermore, the evolving nature of the study while in progress called for much patience and perseverance, because as Casanave (2002) claims, case studies "immerse the scholar in so much detail that basic questions cannot be answered unambiguously" (p. 42). I needed to struggle with ideas, to take risk in exploration and interpretation, and to assess and reassess my understanding of different perspectives. However, I gained satisfaction from my changing role as a researcher, my evolving identity, when I shifted from *we* to *I* later in the study. I was continuously encouraged to talk to the texts I was reading and writing, to bring my own views and voices. This shift in power had a dramatic effect on my engagement in the research and supported my development as an independent researcher. This changed my identity to a fuller participant in the discourse community of the researchers in the discipline, an insider who could construct and contribute to knowledge, not just receiving and copying it.

Finally, my sense of self appeared to change by entering inside the community of researchers in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies. It was shaped anew by integrating into the community, but with a unique identity. It was affected by engaging in practices, but with a unique experience. I crafted a discourse of my own, one that brought together different texts and different perspectives, but still created new understandings of my own experience.

As a newcomer to the country and its culture, I was not only involved in the discourse community of the discipline, but I also became a member of different discourse communities both at university and in the society and participated in their cultural practices simultaneously. Echoing Giroux's (as cited in Zamel, 2004) words, this required

that I cross over borders that were culturally strange and alien to me and pushed me to analyze my own values as viewed from different ideological and cultural perspectives (p. 15). What came out of my struggle to find my place was “a middle ground which was added to- rather than substitute for- my own personal, cultural and historical backgrounds” (Zamel & Spack, 1998, p. xiii). While monitoring my changing roles and evolving identities in the academic and social communities of a new culture, I learned never to question my own values, assumptions and beliefs while I am open to new ones. This ongoing process of change can be described best and bring an end to this thesis by my new version of the poem by Hispanic poet Sandra Maria Estevez²:

I am two parts/a person
 Past and present
 Alive and evolving
 Given a cultural beauty
 ... and looking for cultural identity.

² I am two parts/a person

Boricua/spic

Past and present

Alive and oppressed

Given a cultural beauty

...and robbed of cultural identity

“*Sandra Maria Estevez*”, Hispanic poet

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Appendices

Appendix A Interview Questions

Appendix 1: Sample interview questions for Student Participants

- 1) Can you tell me a little about your academic life before coming to Carleton?*
- 2) What motivated you to take this course?*
- 3) What do you hope to learn more about in this course?*
- 4) Having been in class for ____ (number to reflect the timing of the interview) weeks, how would you define applied linguistics? **
- 5) In the class there are readings, lectures, and discussion groups. Let's talk about each as a source of information. Can you tell me something about the reading you are doing for the course? **
- 6) Can you tell me something about the lectures you have had? **
- 7) Can you tell me something about the group discussions you have had? **
- 8) Do you find this course easier or more difficult than the other courses you are taking? **
- 9) Did you use the readings, lectures and discussions in responding to the assignments? Please explain. **

Appendix 2: Sample interview questions for the instructor

- 1) What do you hope the students will learn in this course? *
- 2) How does this course differ from the other classes that you teach? *
- 3) What are your impressions of the course so far? **
- 4) Have you changed your mind about anything you planned for the course? **
- 5) What are some of the key issues you think the students are facing? **

Appendix 3: Sample interview questions for the TAs

- 1) What are your impressions of the course so far?
- 2) Have students been contacting you for assistance for the course?
- 3) What are some of the key issues you think the students are facing?

* Interview #1 only

** Other interviews

Appendix B Ethics Clearance Letter

Carleton University Research Office
 Research Ethics Board
 5th Floor Tory Building
 1125 Colonel By Drive
 Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6 Canada
 Tel: 613-520-2517
 Fax: 613-520-2521
ethics@carleton.ca

Ethics Clearance Form

This is to certify that the Carleton University Research Ethics Board has examined the application for ethical clearance. The REB found the research project to meet appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and, the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research*.

☒ New clearance

☐ Renewal of original clearance

Original date of clearance:

Date of clearance	4 October 2011
Researcher	Zinat Goodarzi
Status	M.A. student, School of Linguistics and Language Studies
Supervisor	Professor Janna Fox, School of Linguistics and Language Studies
Funding status	Non-funded
Project number	12-0602
Title of project	Exploring a culture of learning: How the teacher and students negotiate academic literacy in a discipline?

Clearance expires: **31 May 2012**

All researchers are governed by the following conditions:

Annual Status Report: You are required to submit an Annual Status Report to either renew clearance or close the file. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the immediate suspension of the project. Funded projects will have accounts suspended until the report is submitted and approved.

Changes to the project: Any changes to the project must be submitted to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board for approval. All changes must be approved prior to the continuance of the research.

Adverse events: Should any participant suffer adversely from their participation in the project you are required to report the matter to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. You must submit a written record of the event and indicate what steps you have taken to resolve the situation.

Suspension or termination of clearance: Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

Antonio R. Gualtieri, Chair
 Carleton University Research Ethics Board

Session 23 - NOV 20, 2011

Prof

David Crystal → "thinking"

response

thinking as phenomenon for literature

→ emotional reaction from the students

students

thinking

creative students
is trying it

- 52) Scott → my own thinking → my phone is
- 53) I was always using my phone but I was using smart things
- 54) → This time I was told photos & text
- 55) → I was never given for a moment
- 56) → It depends on what you want to do
- 57) →

Penelope

the topic really engaged people
I believe the reason is that the topic drove on their

Appendix D PowerPoint Slides for the Researcher's Introduction

Why I'm attending your class?

- Zinat Goodarzi
- MA student in ALDS
- Collecting data for my MA Thesis
- My focus: **"The Culture of Learning"**

Research questions

- What counts as successful learning in teacher and students' views?
- How do the teacher and students' assumptions about language and learning differ from each other at the beginning of the course?
- How do their beliefs and expectations evolve during the course?
- How does the students' interpretation of the content and assignments change during the course?

How can you help me?

- Four interviews at **your** convenient time
- Once a month
- For 45 minutes (each)

Interviews

- Face-to-face interviews will happen outside the class.
- I will ask a few questions, but the interviews will happen as natural conversations and students can raise their points.
- All interviews will be confidential.
 - Not even your Prof. (let alone classmates) will know about the data/your answers

Possible benefits to you

I can help you with tutoring on ALDS

- MA in ALDS
- Experienced teacher
- An international student myself and understand first-hand some of the challenges that students who are new to a learning culture may be facing

I only need help from 6-8 students

If you are interested in participating in my study, contact me at:

zgoodarz@connect.carleton.ca

Appendix E Email Contacts with Student Participants

View Message

<https://luminis.carleton.ca/cp/email/message?msgid=5c0cda358ca5a7c5e0200a42e42a0e1...>

Date: **Tue, 8 Nov 2011 20:40:05 -0500 (EST)**
 From: "Zinat Goodarzi" <zgoodarzi@connect.carleton.ca> **Block Address**
 To: [REDACTED]
 Subject: **A brief question**

Reply Reply All Forward Print Delete

Hi [REDACTED],

Hope everything's going smoothly at school. Although I know how busy you might be these days, I would appreciate it if you take the time to drop here a few lines telling me about your impression of the first assignment and the mid-term exam. I'd like to know what your main issues and concerns were when you were struggling with these two. It would be great if you could reply to this before you receive the feedback in the class tomorrow.

Thanks for all your time and consideration,

Zinat

Reply Reply All Forward Print Delete

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1 of 1

25.09.2012 10:00 AM

View Message

<https://luminis.carleton.ca/cp/email/message?msgid=54852b3c72abb06b1bc54a78992b5f1...>

Date: **Mon, 21 Nov 2011 08:39:45 -0500 (EST)**
 From: "Zinat Goodarzi" <zgoodarzi@connect.carleton.ca> **Block Address**
 To: [REDACTED]
 Subject: **Reflection**

Reply Reply All Forward Print Delete

Hi [REDACTED],

Hope you're doing fine. Although I know that the second assignment is due soon and you might be very busy with that now, I really appreciate your response to the following questions. Your written reflection will help me a lot with my study. It may also encourage you to think about your problems with your written assignments and come up with practical solutions. Please don't hesitate to ask me any questions or let me know if you need any help with your second assignment.

Would you drop a few lines telling me how the feedback you received on your first assignment can help you to improve your work for the second assignment. What were the main issues with your first assignment which made you lose some points? Do you think if you take the Prof or the TA's comments into consideration, you would be able to improve your work?

Best of luck with your paper,

Zinat

Reply Reply All Forward Print Delete

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1 of 1

25.09.2012 10:08 AM

Appendix F Line-by-line Coding

Interview #1 - Participant 1

Oct 4, 2011

In the class there are readings, lectures, and discussion groups. Let's talk about each as a source of information.

Some points in readings are easy and clear, some others are challenging. I have to reread them, to Google them or to ask someone else to explain them to me. But overall, it was easy for me to reread the content to get ready for the quiz.

Reading Strategy
Interaction with others
Reading Strategy in response to class

I can't miss a lecture. If I do so, I feel I'm lost; I won't be able to follow. It's very important for me to attend all the classes. I can't miss any classes even though everything's available on WebCT. I have to listen to the Prof, to other students' questions and to class discussions. I listen carefully in the class, take notes and then read the postings and the slides after the class.

Class attendance-Identity
Class attendance-personal choice
Interactions with Prof & peers
Attendance & participation
Linking practices (Read & lect)

I don't read all the materials in the book for each class. But after the lectures, I know about the points that the Prof highlighted in the class. For me, reading after the class is more important than the reading before the class. I can understand the topics more easily after I listen to the lectures.

Reading Strategy
Teacher as a Source
Linking practices
(Read & lectures)

I feel shy to raise my points in the class. I don't feel confident enough about not making mistakes. The students can laugh at me. Can I say it correctly? Do the Prof and the students understand me? The WebCT discussions make me feel more comfortable. You have the chance to write and to correct your writing. It's always easier to write than to talk. You have more time to think about what you've written down. I enjoy the postings on WebCT. I read them all. I learn from them, learn how to write, how to answer. It's also interesting to me as a new experience. Also, you feel connected with other students. You're not alone; others can help you when you have a question, when you need some help before the exam. I love the interaction between the Prof and the students on WebCT.

Non-participation
Lack of Confidence
Another place for participation
Confidence in writing
Easier communication strategies
Self-assessment strategy
Interest-Interactions
Identity-Interactions
Interaction with teacher and peers in a different place

Appendix G Initial Categories

Problems	Productive Strategies	Impeding Strategies
Difficult Readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading them over and over - Asking Sr to explain them - Not giving too much attention to complicated concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading around - Memorizing
Note-taking Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recording the lectures - Reading the slides before the class - Taking notes of points that are not in the slides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoiding pre-reading in spite of knowing that it helps with note-taking
Doing Assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading lecture slides, personal notes & textbook - Focusing on the points which are common among practices - Asking the researcher for explanations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gap in understanding the tasks
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sitting in the front rows to avoid seeing large number of people in class while raising points and participating in discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling too shy to speak up - Not interested to talk in front of unknown people - Feeling stressed because of lacking confidence in lang
Time Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taking advice from a graduate friend - Feel stressed until I finish everything 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Getting distracted <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> Facebook Friends Internet </div>
Social Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Putting name on WebCT discussions in order to be known by the teacher(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not having time to make friends - Believing that native speakers problems are different → Avoiding socializing with them.

Appendix H The Initial Theoretical Model

Fig. 5