SYMPOSIUM ON HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCH STUDENT WRITING

Writing is a central concern for higher degree research (HDR) student progression and completion rates. The building of HDR student writing capacity encompasses multiple, divergent and interconnecting responsibilities and models. This symposium focuses on two primary touch points for developing student writing:

(1) The student supervisor relationship, and;
(2) Institutionally endorsed spaces from which programmatic and/or centrally delivered writing ‘support’ may be provided by faculty academics, academic developers, and academic language and learning educators.

The symposium, supported by the Association for Academic Language and Learning, will showcase diverse practices from a range of universities for developing HDR student writing. It will provide opportunities for supervisors, deans and directors of graduate research, academic developers and academic language and learning educators to discuss what works – and what might work better in the contexts of their institutions.

FRIDAY 3 OCTOBER 2014
THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

**Bill Green**
Bill Green is Emeritus Professor of Education at Charles Sturt University in NSW, Australia. His research interests curriculum inquiry, literacy studies and professional education, as well as a longtime focus on doctoral research education. He has a wide range of publications in areas including higher degree research pedagogy and supervision. His most recent publication is the co-edited volume Body/Practice: The Body in Professional Practice, Learning and Education (Springer, in press/2015).

**Inger Mewburn**
Inger Mewburn is the Director of Research Training at the ANU where she is responsible for co-ordinating, communicating and measuring all the centrally run research training activities and doing research on student experience. She runs workshops for research students and is the founder and managing editor of The Thesis Whisperer blog.
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<td>From go to woe? Calibrating writing expectations for HDR student work from proposal to examination</td>
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<td>Hamilton, Margaret &amp; Ruth Walker</td>
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<td>The benefits and challenges of multiple inputs into HDR writing</td>
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<td>HDRs and ECAs together: A combined writing group as a community of practice</td>
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<td>Plenary – Report back from Research/Project Groups, where to from here, close</td>
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Themes for these Groups will be decided based on those priorities indicated by participants on white paper sheets which will be made available in the morning tea and lunch areas during the day.
A case can be made for a distinctive set of research literacies as featuring heavily in doctoral research education, as centrally and even organically involving a complex of reading and writing practices. In such a view, research itself is a form of rhetoric – the artful, informed use of texts to learn, to generate knowledge, and to inform, and also to persuade. In this presentation I will take up this notion of research literacies in arguing for a radical reconceptualization of doctoral education as writing and rhetoric. A key assertion here will be that doctoral writing is best conceived in terms of praxis and ontology – as an engaged form of making meaning, which is also profoundly implicated in refashioning the self.

BIO-STATEMENT
Bill Green is Emeritus Professor of Education at Charles Sturt University in NSW, Australia. His research interests curriculum inquiry, literacy studies and professional education, as well as a long-time focus on doctoral research education. He has a wide range of publications in various areas including higher degree research pedagogy and supervision. His most recent publication is the co-edited volume Body/Practice: The Body in Professional Practice, Learning and Education (Springer, in press/2015).
KEYNOTE

"What are your doctoral students doing after school?"

Mewburn, Inger  
*The Australian National University*  
*Email: inger.mewburn@anu.edu.au*

With the rise of blogging, social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, there has been an explosion of freely available educational resources. These resources take a range of forms which circulate via social media and feed an emerging ‘self help’ culture amongst research students. But is this trend an unmitigated good? While teaching and learning inside the academy is subject to a barrage of quality metrics and procedures, the unregulated spaces of the web are quietly becoming education’s new Wild West. In this paper, an evolving collaboration between Inger Mewburn and Pat Thomson, we begin to chart this new Wild West and self help culture and ask: should you be worried about what your doctoral students are doing after school?

BIO-STATEMENT

Inger Mewburn is the Director of Research Training at the ANU where she is responsible for co-ordinating, communicating and measuring all the centrally run research training activities and doing research on student experience. She runs workshops for research students and is the founder and managing editor of The Thesis Whisperer blog.

Notes:
Throughout the process of completing a doctorate, International students for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL) need to address a complex array of linguistic and cultural aspects regarding doctoral writing practices and processes. Previous research has focused more on linguistic dimensions rather than cultural dimensions for this cohort of students. Nevertheless, student’s cultural backgrounds are pervasive in their doctoral writing experiences. This paper aims to identify some direct and less direct cultural influences impacting on doctoral writing. Taking a sociocultural perspective on writing as an activity, I argue that culture pervades multiple experiences for these EAL International scholars affecting their doctoral writing. If students are made aware of possible cultural dimensions to their experiences, they can be empowered and positioned to deal with doctoral writing challenges in a positive and effective manner.

This reflective paper is based on extensive conversations with International EAL doctoral candidates in research writing workshops and individual consultations over 20 years. What has become clear is that formal writing support sessions need to articulate as explicitly as possible a variety of cultural aspects impacting on the doctoral process, and writing specifically. Some examples are: becoming familiar with the university research culture and expectations; negotiating a workable supervisory relationship despite the supervisor’s authority; expressing ‘own’ voice in relation to other respected scholars; clarifying how research texts may contradict academic texts written previously. This paper discusses implications for how such cultural dimensions can be incorporated into doctoral writing curricula.
“There’s magic in the room”: Reflections on running a thesis writing boot camp

Burnett, Linda, Dominic Fitzsimmons, Pam Mort and Sue Starfield

University of New South Wales
Email: l.burnett@unsw.edu.au

In this brief presentation, we will describe and reflect on our experience of running the first UNSW thesis writing boot camp earlier this year. We were asked by our Graduate Research School to facilitate the boot camp which took place over a weekend in June from a Friday afternoon to a Sunday evening. While initially sceptical as to the value of a ‘boot camp’, we have had to reconsider our doubts as the feedback from the 25 participants has been overwhelmingly positive with one of the participants exclaiming that there was ‘magic’ in the room enabling her to write. In our talk, while distilling the ingredients of the boot camp experience that seemed to contribute to its success and that could have wider implications for supporting HDR writing, we would like to share our experience with others who may be contemplating boot camps and hear more about the experiences of those who have taken part in similar events. These programs have been evaluated through end of course surveys, focus groups and a recent survey of student perceptions of how their writing is developing.

Notes:
In this paper we explore our experiences of working with diverse RHD (Research Higher Degree) writing groups at The University of Queensland. These RHD writing groups have sprung up informally in response to students’ expressions of interest. We use personal reflections, correspondence with students and students’ texts to explore students’ motives for joining these groups, to deliberate on the role of the facilitator, personal responsibility and inter-personal dynamics in writing groups, and to understand the choices group members make in either continuing to work with writing groups or abandoning them. We discuss how our early experiences with writing groups have shaped our practice in facilitating writing groups over time and we describe the lessons we have learned, how the process has shaped us as learning advisors, and how we now use these lessons to inform our writing pedagogy.

Notes:
Pleasures & practicalities of online HDR writing support (with reflections on community-building)

Charles, Cassily and Lisa McLean

Charles Sturt University

Email: ccharles@csu.edu.au

Charles Sturt University is the largest sole provider of distance education, and more than half of its research students are off-campus. As it is also a regional university spread across 25 campus and affiliate locations, CSU has been historically ready to embrace technologies for working, learning and teaching across distances, and increasingly these are being extended to support research candidates. Notable examples include a calendar of online workshops (including writing workshops), online ‘Shut Up & Write’, hybrid online/F2F research writing Bootcamps, hybrid peer feedback writing groups, an online Three Minute Thesis competition and a hybrid professional development pilot, ‘DocFest’. Many of these initiatives have been the fruit of ‘pop-up’ collaboration across faculty and divisional boundaries, and community-building has been a valuable (if vulnerable) outcome for both internal and external HDRs.

Notes:
Metaphors for talking about doctoral writing

Charles, Cassily
Charles Sturt University
Email: ccharles@csu.edu.au

Individual consultations are often the most desired form of writing support and research students report them to be very effective: for example, in a 2013 impact survey at CSU, 93% of responding research candidates who had taken part in individual consultations reported positive changes in their work as a result. One advantage of individual consultations is the opportunity to tailor the discussion to terms which resonate for the individual, including the use of metaphors drawn from the research candidate’s own field, or from everyday life. This session will look at some metaphors which have proven illuminating and efficient for research candidates at CSU, when discussing both writing products (such as the literature review) and writing processes, including drafting and the feedback cycle between research candidates and supervisors. Session participants will be invited to share their own favourite metaphors, and to engage in discussion about whether the use of metaphors might sometimes be a betrayal of theory, displacing more appropriate technical metalanguage, or just an admirably intuitive short-cut to insights about writing.

Notes:
Teaching doctoral writing as text work/identity work

Chatterjee Padmanabhan, Meeta
University of Wollongong
Email: meeta@uow.edu.au

It is generally recognised in the rapidly growing literature on doctoral education that the writing of the thesis, a sophisticated artefact, involves considerable understanding of the chosen subject area, competent use of the discourse of the discipline and the ability to problematize important issues within the discipline so as to contribute to the disciplinary knowledge base. However, there is also the acknowledgement that provisions for enabling doctoral students to acquire these competencies are at best ad hoc. Aitchison and Lee (2006, 266) observe that there is a ‘common absence of curriculum’ within research degrees. The absence of a curriculum with regard to writing at the doctoral level is even greater (Kamler and Thompson, 2006, p. 6). Despite a wide array of books that advice on doctoral writing, there is, paradoxically, very little that is helpful because teaching doctoral writing as a set of tips and strategies does not work. Approaching doctoral writing as text work/identity work is a more productive way of addressing the complexities of doctoral writing (Kamler and Thompson, 2006). Although this is a very valid argument, how does one turn the concept of text/ identity work into classroom pedagogy?

The proposed presentation discusses possibilities of helping students manage the text/identity nexus/polarities by presenting extracts from a lesson on writing a literature review.

References:

Notes:
Each of Macquarie University's specialist Higher Degree Research Learning Advisors has designed and is currently delivering an intensive research writing course which has its own "disciplinary flavour": Science, Social Science or Humanities. This presentation will outline the rationale for and aims of these courses, and will highlight the particular ingredients that distinguish each one.
The systematic review: ‘My supervisor has told me how to do one – but how do I write one?’

Clerehan, Rosemary
Monash University
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Systematic (i.e. ‘standardised’ and ‘objective’) reviews enable researchers to synthesise information, and identify critical areas for future research. They are ‘research-based research’, with their units of analysis original primary studies, and are given as much scholarly weight as primary studies (Ferreira Gonzalez et al. 2011: 689). A systematic review involves exhaustive searching for all potentially relevant articles; selecting articles using explicit and reproducible criteria (which are included in the review); describing the design and implementation of the studies; synthesising the data; and interpreting the results. The systematic review is, therefore, an important and powerful and form of discourse which research students, particularly medical, need to read and potentially write. To date, the genre has excited little linguistic research: Mungra (2006) is a notable exception. While genre analysis of, and consequently pedagogies for, other types of research texts are these days well-advanced, analysis and teaching strategies for the writing of the systematic review are still noticeably absent. Supervisors are keen on their students writing systematic reviews, as the end-product is a publication (Bearman et al. 2012). Tensions can arise, however, as it is often the first research text a PhD student produces, and the supervisor can assume, once the essentials have been taught and a methodological tool such as PRISMA (Moher et al. 2009) or AMSTAR (Shea et al. 2007) is chosen, that the writing will be straightforward. This presentation outlines and reflects on a pedagogical program to support supervisors and students in their endeavours to overcome these constraints.

Notes:
An orientation program for international higher degree research students (IHDR)

Connell, Julia, Terry Royce and Marie Manidis
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International higher degree research (IHDR) student numbers in Australian universities have increased significantly. It is well documented that these students face considerable isolation, identity, welfare, language, research literacy and supervision issues (CAPA 2012). In order to orientate IHDR students to the research culture and improve their PhD experiences and academic literacies, UTS is developing a new orientation program introducing IHDR students to peer, organisational and faculty networks/support services.

The program (referred to as KickStart@UTS) will intervene early on in the candidature, making explicit how conducting research is a social practice within varied disciplinary, social and institutional discourses and epistemologies. Providing an intensive five-day program based around the doing of, and reflecting on, a basic but extensive literature search exercise related to their topic, students will engage with peers, library personnel, supervisors and current students as they work cooperatively in disciplinary groups. The pedagogy will focus on the varied discourses and practices in faculties and how these are realised in different spoken and written texts to (re)produce disciplinary knowledge.

This paper will briefly situate the KickStart@UTS program as part of a range of academic support offered by UTS including bi-annual academic literacies schools, 1:1 thesis writing support and faculty initiatives that include ‘different patterns’ (Gherardi & Perrotta 2010, p. 95) of orientation. We will explore how language practices, activities, ways of relating to others and how these are associated in different disciplines, might initiate some students more effectively than others into the practices of thesis writing and speaking.

References:

Notes:
So What are we Waiting For? The Application of Computer-Aided Argument Mapping to HDR Writing

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An argument map (AM) visually represents the structure of an argument, outlining the informal logical connections comprising the argument and informing the conclusion. Argument mapping can be augmented with computer-aided argument mapping (CAAM) software that aids the visual mapping process. Empirical evidence suggests that combining argument mapping methodology with CAAM software produces remarkable increases in students’ critical thinking ability. A trial of the locally-produced CAAM software program, Rationale, repeatedly produced impressive improvements in student critical thinking abilities (van Gelder, Bissett, & Cumming, 2004). These gains amounted to 0.8 SD in 12 weeks. These results have been replicated (Butchart, Forster, Gold, Korb, & Oppy, 2009; Twardy, 2004). Argument mapping also enhances comprehension and reading skills (Dwyer, Hogan, & Stewart, 2009) and has also been shown to improve critical thinking skills even without the use of a computer software (Harrell, 2007). A recent meta-analysis of all extant CAAM studies suggests that all have produced measurable gains.

Can AM assist in helping HDR students to write more critically? If students can be taught how to ‘make an argument’ using CAAM how easily can this translate into the written form, suitable for higher degree theses? Supervisors of HDR students have long complained that one of the hardest transitions HDR students have to make in their candidature is the shift from the ‘merely descriptive’ to the ‘argumentative’ style of writing. It is suggested in this presentation that this transition can be greatly abbreviated if AM is introduced into HDR preparation programs and assessment regimes.

This paper has now been withdrawn and is replaced by a presentation by Percy, Alisa and Emily Purser.
Supervisors’ oral feedback on HDR thesis writing: a criterion-based approach

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The University of Sydney
Email: bronwen.dyson@sydney.edu.au

Despite its high-stakes nature, supervisor feedback has a problematic profile: research on oral and written feedback documents not only quantity but also quality issues. In relation to the quality of oral feedback (advisory meetings), Paré (e.g. 2010) argues that advisors experience difficulty in articulating feedback and, by implication, that students experience difficulties in understanding advisory feedback. However, this work falls short in only presenting a general analysis of the feedback and in not examining student learning. This paper takes a fresh look at oral doctoral feedback by adopting the Systemic Functional Linguistics-inspired MASUS writing criteria (Bonanno & Jones, 2007) and the Second Language Acquisition construct of uptake (short-term evidence of learning). It reports on two longitudinal case studies each involving four fortnightly one-hour advisory sessions. The data collected were the oral feedback given by two Humanities supervisors and the oral responses of two Chinese-speaking PhD students. The feedback and uptake were analysed in terms of moves and episodes using the five MASUS writing criteria (and their 26 sub-criteria). The findings reveal that the feedback contained little evidence of articulation difficulties but, rather, demonstrated a fine-tuned awareness of criteria A (Use of source material) and B (Structure and development of the argument) and their sub-criteria. Nevertheless, the major Area of feedback (B) attained less uptake than A, the feedback shifted across the Areas, focused more on inappropriate than appropriate writing, and out-numbered the uptake. The paper concludes by arguing for a criterion-driven approach in current considerations of good practice in supervision.

Notes:
Academic Language and Learning Service (ALLS) at QUT received the Vice-Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in 2007 and was nominated for a national teaching award in 2008 for a series of timely writing programs for higher degree research (HDR) students. Since this time the model has evolved to Research Writing Programs, and is now offered to HDR students in Creative Industries, Health, and Science and Engineering (SEF). In 2014 SEF has 513 international PhD students and increasing numbers of domestic students who participate in the Research Writing Programs.

Originally called Language Development Programs, and catering for the large numbers of international PhD students, the programs have recently undergone a name change to identify them as developmental and necessary. In fact the discussion of an appropriate title and content continues with SEF academics to include an introduction to philosophy and more extensive presentation and research skills, as well as to make this program accredited and compulsory for all HDR students.

The aim of these programs is to develop PhD students as competent writers and presenters of research using discipline-specific examples and models of QUT and current HDR scholars’ work. The focus is on the HDR milestones, using discourse analysis, developing rhetorical strategies and research argument as well as developing capacities for conferences, journal publications and longer-term careers. These programs have been evaluated through end of course surveys, focus groups and a recent survey of student perceptions of how their writing is developing.

Notes:
In November 2013 Academic Writing Month (AcWriMo) was held for the first time at Adelaide University. Running in parallel to the worldwide movement (http://www.phd2published.com/2013/10/09/announcing-acwrimo-2013/), I wanted to offer a more local version of this event for doctoral candidates. I had three main aims:

1. to encourage more writing;
2. to build a sense of community; and
3. to provide a form of online writing group for those who can’t (or don’t want to) attend face-to-face sessions.

Participants were invited to register and commit to a daily writing target. The register was housed in Dropbox, and participants filled in their word count at the end of each day, then tallied their results for each week and for the month. A Wikispace was also set up for community discussions to run alongside the individual writing. As facilitator I tried to model the writing commitment by being an active participant, and also seeded discussions on the wiki.

Twenty-six signed up for the month, and most appeared to reach their writing targets. Not all were active on the wiki, but contributed by adding to their daily word counts on the register. Most of the names on the register were not people who attend the other writing groups and workshops I run for research students, so AcWriMo seems to have reached out to a different group from our other offerings. For most, the timing in November was useful, as the lead-up to the end of both the calendar year and the academic year in Australia.
A pragmatic approach to enhance writer-reader interaction in HDR student writing

Gunawardena, Maya and Neda Akbari
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In recent decades, academic literacy theorists and practitioners have placed more importance on writer-reader interaction and its consequences in developing cogent and cohesive arguments in thesis writing. However, non-native speaker HDR students seem to pay more attention to grammatical accuracy than to the linguistic resources that facilitate reader engagement. Often, the reading flow can be hampered by grammatically sound but awkward and semantically inadequate expressions in their writing. The present study analysed ten non-native speaker HDR students’ thesis writing samples reviewed by ALL staff. Drawing on systemic functional and social constructionist frameworks, the study examined the students’ use of linguistic features that contribute to increasing writer-reader engagement, particularly sentence structures, lexical choices, appropriate verb voice, and cohesive devices such as anaphora and cataphora. The findings have assisted the researchers to develop a pragmatic model to coach students to evaluate and edit their own writing. The model offers useful insights to assist HDR students’ to review their thesis writing with a focus on linguistic resources that enable effective communication.

Notes:
From go to woe? calibrating writing expectations for HDR student work from proposal to examination

Hamilton, Margaret and Ruth Walker
University of Wollongong
Email: Rwalker@uow.edu.au

This presentation addresses issues faced by a Head of Postgraduate Studies when calibrating the writing support for HDR students. This must take into account what information students are given in their proposal stage, what the supervisors think they should be telling the students or how they should be supporting them, and what the examiners are then told to look for when assessing the submitted work.

Notes:
Henderson, Fiona and Rob McCormack  
Victoria University  
Email: Fiona.Henderson@vu.edu.au

Victoria University and its ASD staff have been giving increased attention to HDR students. The Academic Support and Development department at VU, despite a more prominent focus of the department on undergraduate students, has allocated eight ASD lecturers to support HDR students; seven are assigned to a specific discipline/College (Victoria University, 2014).

In 2013 two core semester-long units were introduced as hurdle requirements for all new HDR students. ASD teaches into one of these units—Conceptualising and Contextualising Research. Using current institutional discourse (Percy, 2011), ASD ‘owns’ 25% of the delivery time and 15% of the final assessment mark in this unit. There are seven weekly online student tasks in which the HDR students, drawn from disciplines including Business, Engineering & Science, Education, Arts, Sport & Exercise Science, Health & Biomedicine, and Law & Justice, study the conventions within their own field of study for realising different textual and interpersonal meanings (Kamler & Thomson, 2006). The results of these micro-ethnographic investigations are posted to shared discipline-level discussion boards.

Feedback by ASD staff for students within their discipline group establishes early and regular contact. It also familiarises the ASD lecturer with the writing of that discipline (Starke-Meyerring, Par, Sun, & El-Bezre, 2014).

On completion of the core units, Writing Circles (Aitchison, 2003), built around disciplines but with fuzzy edges, are offered in six of the disciplinary Colleges. The commitment is for each discipline-aligned ASD lecturer to facilitate these for eight sessions, however since their inception in 2012 many have run fortnightly all year. The main issue confronting us now is how to support the large numbers of students undertaking Minor Theses or research in non-PhD qualifications, a challenge that requires finding a way to weave our current commitment to embedding ASD staff in specific Colleges together with the assumption-laden development of resources that are more generalised in form, scope and potential use (Starke-Meyerring et al, 2014).

References:

Notes:
HDRs and ECAs together: A combined writing group as a community of practice

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There is an extensive body of scholarship on the benefits of writing groups for higher degree research (HDR) students and, increasingly, a focus on early career academics (ECAs) (Aitchison, 2009; Dwyer, Lewis, McDonald, & Burns, 2012; Lassig et al., 2009; Lee & Boud, 2003). This paper examines the practices of a writing group consisting of HDRs and ECAs in a collaborative network. What distinguishes this group from others is the absence of an expert facilitator. The group has previously evaluated its practice using various conceptual frameworks and methodologies, including feminist theory, affect theory, peer mentoring, and memory work (Bosanquet, Cahir, Jacenyik-Trawogé, & McNeill, 2014). We build on previous analyses to focus on how HDRs and ECAs write together. We approach it as a community of practice (CoP), a social learning enterprise in which participants develop shared practices and identities (Lave & Wenger, 1991) which we analyse using critical reflection (following Kreber, 2004). How do we negotiate meanings, share identities and generate community to meet the needs of both HDRs and ECAs? The findings reported here demonstrate the effectiveness of our combined group, not only for writing pedagogy but to induct HDRs into academic practice and ECAs into supervisory practice.

References:


Notes:
The benefits and challenges of multiple inputs into HDR writing

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The research writing of HDR students is often shaped and guided by a number of agents. These may include multiple members of their supervisory team as well as one or more academic language learning (ALL) advisors, and in many cases may also involve peers, friends and family members. This presentation uses interview and questionnaire data from case studies of successful HDR candidates to present their views on what constitutes effective HDR writing support – what worked for them, what was counterproductive and how they dealt with any conflicts in the advice they received. These student perspectives are placed alongside the reflections of the supervisors and the ALL advisors on the writing challenges involved in the research project and the effectiveness of the strategies that were employed.

Notes:
How great is GREAT? Reflections on the outcomes of a staged writing program for HDR candidates

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Murdoch University's Graduate Research, Education and Training (GREAT) program offers a range of workshops designed to assist Honours and postgraduate students to develop their writing and research skills. This paper focuses on three programs intended for different stages of the thesis writing process: Words on Paper assists students to formulate a topic, ensure their work is original and develop an academic voice; Making and Mapping assist students to revise their literature review, and refine their argument to develop a coherent structure. The Writing Space is a structured, quiet writing space to support students who are actively writing. The writing Space is available only to candidates who have completed Words on Paper. The authors argue that creating a sequential program provides a greater level of support for HDR candidates and is therefore likely to increase completion rates, particularly among international students who may have difficulty writing within the parameters of what is acceptable as a thesis in Australia. At the same time, provision of “wrap around” support raises questions about the responsibility for building candidates' writing capacity, and the nature of the relationship between the HDR supervisor and the candidate: there is anecdotal evidence that some HDR supervisors regard the more active workshops as intrusive. This paper argues that the GREAT Program complements the supervisory relationship, but does not undermine it.

Notes:
Paving the pathway: building research writing capacity for pre-doctoral candidates

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In 2013 Macquarie University adopted the two-year Master of Research (MRes) research training program, which has replaced undergraduate honours as the core pathway to an HDR degree at Macquarie. A compulsory component of the first year of the MRes program is the centrally-delivered “Research Communications” unit, which exposes students to the theory and practice of presenting research in various forms to various audiences, and builds students’ capacity for higher degree research writing. This presentation outlines some of the pedagogical and curriculum challenges that were faced in designing and delivering this academic literacy unit for such a diverse cohort of pre-doctoral students, and describes how the unit has been refined since its first delivery.

Notes:
Online writing groups to build bridges and writing capacity among off campus HDR candidates

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In Australia, as in other countries, significant proportions of HDR candidates choose to work on their research off campus (Pearson et al., 2011), and providing effective research training and support for these geographically-dispersed candidates often requires pedagogical innovations. Online writing groups have been suggested as a cost-effective way to enhance off-campus candidates’ training and support by engaging them in peer feedback and discussion with other researchers (Kozar & Lum, 2013). This presentation reports on a trial of online writing groups for off-campus HDR candidates from different faculties at Macquarie University. We ran three online writing groups with varying degrees of facilitation (non-facilitated, semi-facilitated and fully-facilitated), various discipline mixes, and different communication modes (video-chat, audio-chat and asynchronous email communication). Based on participant survey responses and observations during the trial and interviews after the trial, we found that facilitation is important for setting up online writing groups but may not be necessary for running them; synchronous voice communication, particularly when accompanied by video, seems to enhance group rapport and task engagement; and problems with technology do not significantly influence participants’ overall satisfaction with the group. We describe how the groups were set up and showcase the tools used by participants to manage meeting logistics, circulate text and share feedback.

References:

• Kozar, O. & Lum, J. F. (2013). Factors likely to impact the effectiveness of research writing groups for off-campus doctoral students. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning, 7*(2), 131-149.

Notes:
Ethnographic needs analysis in support of STEM doctoral writing

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It is surprising how little writing support is oriented to the specific disciplinary needs of higher degree by research (HDR) students. This could be because not enough is known about such environments and the writing skills students need in order to succeed in them. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields are particularly neglected in this regard. And yet without understanding their writing cultures, it is hard to envisage what successful communication should look like in these contexts. 'Needs analysis' in education is a process for delineating the gaps between what is currently being achieved and what needs to be achieved. Needs analysis is often narrowly construed—for example, involving the highly codified systems of TESOL methodology. However, such are the rich complexities of writing cultures and the manifold ways in which research students can struggle with their writing, that a broader methodology is required. Embedding writing advisors in departments and faculties can lend itself to a kind of needs analysis based on ethnographic observation and informants’ talk, which can result in ‘thicker’ descriptions and deeper knowledge of particular groups. Given the complexity of a writing culture, a needs analysis must, in fact, be a kind of ethnography. This paper reports on a needs analysis based on principles of ethnographic observation with the goal of informing a writing support program for HDR students undertaking STEM research. The investigation gave rise to an unexpectedly multilayered picture of writing practice, which underpinned the design of a range of interventions.

Notes:
A FAQ Website on Theses containing Publications

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Early in 2014, a Faculty Liaison Librarian expressed the need for a website to which she could refer students embarking on a thesis containing publications (TCP). In a number of workshops thereafter, I asked each attendee about their major concerns, which I used as a basis for a FAQ webpage.

The main issues identified were: first, getting cohesion among all the various elements of the thesis and secondly, varying the literature reviews in the introduction and in each paper. I set about answering these questions using my research to over 40 theses recently placed on the university's electronic repository.

What is distinctive about the website is its many live links to theses. I obtained permission from 6 writers whose successful theses I wished to use as models.

The website has been publicised through asking faculty librarians to provide a link between the Learning Centre website and their library websites, asking HDR coordinators in different faculties to alert their candidates to the website, and contacting students who have had contact with the Learning Centre. Feedback from several current candidates has led to the additional questions and rewording of those already. Preliminary response from students and lecturers has been very positive. The aim is to turn the website into a blog if the response warrants it.

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**Notes:**
Reflections on the positioning, politics, and pedagogy of a language education/research writing subject for international HDR students

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This presentation reflects on the positioning, politics, and pedagogy of a centrally delivered language education/research writing subject for international HDR students at the University of Wollongong, RESH900/901: Fundamentals for HDR Writing. The presentation will begin with a description of the context which gave rise to the subject, a collaboration between Academic Language and Learning (ALL) lecturers and the Research Student Centre. The subject’s current positioning in the four year PhD (Integrated) program, and its potential positioning in the proposed Graduate Research School, is then discussed. It is argued that this latter positioning creates new opportunities for examining the tensions between centrally-offered and disciplinary programs and practices and the role of ALL staff in both spaces. The pedagogical design of the subject is then described to demonstrate how (1.) this centrally-offered language education subject complements rather than duplicates disciplinary research writing subjects and practices, and (2.) the feedforward and feedback processes around assessment are intended to enable students to become more sophisticated language learners during their study. Student reflections and evaluation data are used to provide a student perspective. Practical issues will also be discussed.

Notes:
For the last 6 years, ALL staff working from the Law Library at Monash University have been providing a writing development program to students enrolled in research degrees in the Faculty of Law. It has evolved within overlapping institutional spaces, managed and taught by the library but sponsored and publicised by the faculty. Although set up in response to a faculty request for writing support for international research students, the program is open to all, and benefits from a mix of local and international students from earlier and later stages of candidature. From 2015 it will be a compulsory part of the faculty’s research education program for all candidates. Using writing group practice as a central element of its pedagogy (which also includes input on selected writing topics), the program seeks to provide a safe space for students to share some of their writing struggles, and develop their ability to critically assess their own writing through the process of providing constructive feedback on the writing of their peers. Our presentation will outline the pedagogy, development of curriculum, and student response to the program. We will discuss the enablers and constraints we have encountered in developing this program, and unpack the overlapping, constantly renegotiated institutional spaces within which we work.

Notes:
This snapshot / presentation gives insight into students' experience of an educational practice occurring within a subject designed for international students in the PhD-Integrated degree. Corpus tools are being used to inform the revision of draft writing and prepare HDR students for their ongoing thesis writing work, but the real innovation here lies in the combination of connections being made: firstly, between context, text and lexicogrammar; secondly, between stakeholders (students, language educators, supervisors and institution). As well as sharing corpus-based language development practice, the showcase provides good evidence of something that works in the teaching of academic writing to HDR students. Given only basic feedback on draft writing (indicating where there are problems, not correcting) students search their corpus for specific language features, and correct their own work.

The case offers evidence of students building capacity as language learners, and advice to supervisors on simple but useful feedback to give HDR writers about 'language'. In their own voices, students make the case that over-correction can be as disempowering as no feedback, and that something in between is needed from those reading their writing; basic indications of where there are lexical and grammatical problems in draft writing, and access to corpus tools, so they can develop their own understanding of how academic English works. Evidence from interviews and developing writing indicates that corpus-based literacy education can rapidly raise awareness of complexity and subtlety in the lexicogrammatical systems of English, and create a reliable basis for independent and collaborative ALL development.

Notes:
Enabling discipline-specific research writing: a case study in science and engineering

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There are high levels of dissatisfaction among supervisors regarding their ability to engage and guide students in research writing (Hammond, Ryland, Tennant & Boud, 2010) and among students who find the input and feedback that they get from their supervisors regarding research writing to be unhelpful (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross & Burgin, 2012). Within the more positivistically-oriented scientific disciplines, academic literacy has tended to be viewed as a suite of generic skills or, in the case of international students, English language proficiency. Often, they perceive the teaching and learning of ‘academic literacy’ as separate from the research teaching and learning process; they do not consider it as part of research supervision and it is often left to the students to develop as an individual skill (Cadman, 2000; Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Li & Vandermensbrugghe, 2012; Murray, 2012).

Discipline specialists are able to instruct students in the content but falter when they try to address the communicative aspects of research. This is because discourse conventions are so deeply embedded within the psyche of the discipline specialist that its practices become routine (Aitchison et al., 2012) and, consequently, unarticulated. It is not surprising that many students, especially international students, struggle to meet their supervisors’ expectations and comply with institutional demands. This paper represents an attempt to fill the gap and to theorise a systematic approach for the teaching of research writing. It will also describe an online learning support resource that is being developed to take care of the rhetorical aspects of research writing.

References:


Notes:
A systematic model of feedback on research student writing

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Research higher degree students in Australian universities contact Learning Centres for individual help with a wide range of problems in thesis writing. The problems may occur at the levels of the whole text, the individual chapter, the paragraph, or the sentence. In these cases there is a need for academic literacy advisors to give sustained and systematic feedback so that the student can gain insights into how language functions in a disciplinary context.

This paper discusses a case study of research into a cycle of feedback on a student’s thesis writing in consultation with a literacy advisor. A taxonomy of face-to-face and electronic feedback was devised, which drew from the SFL-based 3x3 framework of Humphrey, Martin, Dreyfus & Mahboob (2010). Both typological and topological perspectives on feedback (Mahboob & Devrim, 2013) were used to identify and analyse the problem and then to provide an explanation for revision.

Analysis of the student text will show how the framework enabled the student and the advisor to focus on one aspect of the text per cycle of feedback and build a common metalanguage. Thus, using the SFL stratified model of language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), the student could understand feedback at the level of whole text, paragraph and sentence. That the text can be probed in a systematic manner further helped the student to understand issues of content, evaluation and structure (Martin & Rose, 2007).

It is hoped that this paper will increase the understanding of giving individualized feedback to the research higher degree student, by applying a theoretically driven approach.

References:

Notes:
Developing Research Writing Skills in HDR Students through an Online Program

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Preparatory and specialist teaching programs are becoming increasingly important to support the diverse backgrounds of research students entering universities in Australia (Kiley, 2011). The "Research Writing Skills for HDR Students" online program was developed in response to an identified ‘need’ for the Faculty of Business and Enterprise students to improve the writing skills required for thesis writing. It also aimed to provide a supportive environment for students and opportunities to apply and develop new skills as well as receive feedback from a Learning and Academic Skills (LAS) Advisor and learn from their peers. The program was taught twice in 2013 to a total of 20 HDR students. The program design was based on the ‘Five-Stage Framework’ of teaching and learning online (Salmon, 2006) and delivered over five weeks. The focus of week 1 was on ‘Introduction and socialisation’; the topic of week 2 was ‘Managing referencing’; week 3 topic was ‘Appropriate and accurate referencing’; week 4 was on ‘Effective academic reading and writing’; and week 5 topic was ‘Critical evaluation of writing and literature review’. Each week between two and nine e-tivities (i.e. electronic activities) were offered to students and e-moderated by the LAS Advisor. At the end of each week participants submitted their weekly ‘reflections’ on their experience of participating in the program. The students completed an evaluation at the end of the program and two focus groups were conducted to gain an insight into students’ perceptions of this program. The paper discusses the value of and offers some recommendations to LAS Advisors and senior management with regard to establishing and providing a program for online delivery of writing skills for HDR students.

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