The processfolio: a critical action research intervention designed to mitigate negative impacts of writing assessment practices on agency in a UK EAP pre-sessional context

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the interaction between assessment and agency. The context in which the research took place is an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) department of a UK university, specifically its summer pre-sessional courses which prepare and assess postgraduate international students' academic language for their degree programmes. The specific focus of this thesis is the negative impacts of academic writing assessment practices within this context on students' ability to

a) exercise agency in learning and assessment situations

b) conceptualise themselves as developing writers.

The research was underpinned by a critical realist perspective, which allowed educational assessment to be seen as a layer of societal structure with the potential to enable and constrain individual and social agency. An action research methodology in iterative cycles over three consecutive years was employed to investigate and intervene. As a response to the negative impacts identified in a reconnaissance cycle in 2013, I designed and implemented a *processfolio* assessment for academic writing to facilitate student agency around assessment. The first intervention took place in 2014 with my own class of 14 students; the second in 2015 widened the participation to three classes (46 students) and three teachers including myself. Due to the necessity for flexibility in methods of data collection in this context, a range of methods and analysis was employed in each cycle. Data sets generated through both intervention cycles were the processfolios themselves and interviews with students and teachers.

Benefits deriving from the processfolio were that students both demonstrated and reported high levels of self-efficacy and awareness of writing as a both a social practice and an individual metacognitive process. In keeping with the aims of action research underpinned by a critical realist approach to agency, the students showed a growing critical consciousness of the potential of EAP assessment to constrain or enable their understandings of writing, and their relationships with themselves, peers, teachers, and the academy. Participating teachers' tacit assumptions about assessment practices and EAP writing pedagogies were also disrupted. Moreover, through a reflexive process, my own understanding of the original intention of the processfolio shifted. For practical and philosophical reasons, it should not be a replacement assessment tool to foster better learning behaviours. Rather, I conclude that the processfolio should be used on the pre-sessional to mitigate the negative impacts of assessment by creating conditions for a continuous dialectic between agency and structure. These findings imply that this approach to action research in assessment writing in EAP can contribute to a greater understanding of the mediating conditions which shape assessment practices.

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List of Abbreviations

AR: Action Research

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for languages

EAP: English for Academic Purposes

ELT: English Language Teaching

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

HE: Higher Education

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

L1: First/native language

L2: Second language

NSS: National Student Survey

SELT: Secure English Language Test

TESOL: Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages

SELT: Secure English Language Test

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. The research problem

Over the past two decades, UK universities increasingly rely on international students for revenue, yet must determine linguistic readiness for those students to undertake a degree in English. Therefore, the number of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) pre-sessional courses for students who have not met their English entry requirements has grown exponentially (Bell, 2016). Such courses aim to prepare students over a short period of time for the academic and linguistic demands of a tertiary degree in their chosen discipline, and provide information to departments' admissions through assessments designed to determine their readiness. This project took place within an EAP department of a UK university, henceforth to be named Barksdale, who run pre-sessional summer courses annually for postgraduate international students. I chose pre-sessional courses for the focus of this research because, although each local context is unique, the interacting political, economic and theoretical forces which shape EAP pre-sessional assessment make Barksdale illustrative of other UK universities, allowing this thesis to contribute to the field of EAP research by speaking to the wider community.

Originating from my own concerns as a practitioner, clarified through a literature review and small-scale empirical investigation, two key research foci were identified. The first was how assessment negatively impacted on students' agentic ability to make choices as learners, and to exercise some degree of control over their assessment events. An ancillary concern which developed throughout the research process was the extent to which teachers also had agency to make pedagogic choices around academic writing in the face of highly constrained assessment practices. The second key focus was how the Barksdale product approach to writing assessment impeded students' understanding of writing as a complex iterative social process and practice (Hamp Lyons and Condon, 2000). There seemed to be a problematic relationship between assessment on pre-sessional courses, often the first contact international students have with writing in UK academia, and students' approaches to learning, conceptualisations of writing, and understandings of themselves as individual and social agents within educational structures. Therefore, going beyond a study of the impact on teaching and learning only, commonly defined as washback (Messick, 1996), I wished to explore the extent to which assessment, as an example of social structure, constrained, and had the potential to enable, agency. Agency in this thesis is conceptualised as the ability to interact with structure to

effect control over one's social world (Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003; Mercer, 2012).

1.2. The methodological framework

To investigate the impact of writing assessment practices in a complex situation, action research as a methodological framework seemed more able to allow a critical inquiry into assessment impact. This is a deviation from the more psychometric paradigm that dominates language assessment (Leung and Lewkowicz, 2006). It would also balance the pragmatic need for action and interventions that go beyond critique when considering the practical nature of assessment (Saville, 2010). Action research (henceforth AR) can be defined as the inquiry into a real-world problem with the aim of affecting social change (Burns, 2005). As I will show, within the fields of English Language Teaching (ELT) and EAP, AR has to a large extent become synonymous with reflective teacher research on their own classroom practices and/or staging interventions for measuring improvements in learning. However, as an action researcher, my key concern was not strictly my own practice, although the reflexive nature of the study caused me to question my own underlying assumptions. Rather, as part of the critical tradition of transformative praxis, I wanted to explore the mediating conditions which shape our practices as EAP teachers and assessors. These are the cultural/discursive conditions which shape thinking; the material/economic which shape the behaviour or 'doing'; and the socio-political which shape how people relate to one another in relationships of power (Kemmis and Smith, 2008). The ultimate aim of this more critical approach to AR is for practitioner-researchers to change our practice, our understandings of practices, and the conditions under which we practice.

I conducted the research over three iterative cycles. An initial reconnaissance cycle (Elliot, 1991) in 2013, involving interviews with six students and a review of the literature on assessment impacts, allowed me to gain some understanding of the negative effects of writing assessment on the Barksdale pre-sessional. This cycle precipitated two intervention cycles involving the design and trial of a form of writing assessment termed processfolio, an adaptation of the writing portfolio concept common in higher education (HE) and EAP (for a review see Boud and Soler, 2016, and Lam, 2017 respectively). The first cycle took place in 2014 over nine weeks with my own class of 14 students; the second in 2015 on another nine-week course widened the participation to three classes (46 students) and three teachers including myself. The processfolio concept was informed by a critical survey of alternative assessment literature and two key approaches to academic writing which have influenced EAP theory but which were not employed at Barksdale: namely, the process approach and Academic Literacies. The processfolio was trialled as an accompaniment to the existing Barksdale

assessment (a written essay). In the processfolio, students depicted their writing process of their essay through chosen artefacts with a rationale for their choices. Crucially, their choice of presentation and even the extent to which they chose to engage with it was at the students' discretion, with the only stipulation being that they must submit it alongside their essay.

1.3. Contributions to knowledge

The overarching contribution of this research to the field of EAP writing assessment was facilitating a critical reflexive questioning in the participating students and teachers, including myself, of assessment conditions which enable and constrain agency. Through the AR process of designing, implementing and evaluating the processfolio, I came to understand a new way of thinking about how change in assessment could be conceptualised within the highly constrained context of a UK EAP pre-sessional course. Through the understanding of change, I came to understand the potential use of the processfolio.

The first original contribution of the processfolio project is to the field of UK EAP assessment research in investigating the impacts of an in-house assessment of EAP writing in relation to agency and structure. The second original contribution is systematically designing and evaluating an innovative EAP assessment within the constraints of UK EAP pre-sessionals, where the majority of such studies have involved large-scale testing systems, theoretical critique, or informal and anecdotal in-house validation techniques (Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015). This research was a small-scale attempt at an intervention for change in one EAP writing assessment at Barksdale, yet was underpinned by a critical realist position on educational research which allows AR to say something about the wider context of pre-sessional EAP. Critical realism as associated with Bhaskar (1986, 2008, 2016), Archer (2000, 2007) and Sayer (1992, 2000, 2011) allowed me to conceptualise assessment as a layer of social structure which impacts on the agency of students and teachers. Furthermore, it provides an ontological approach that does not reduce agency to structure or vice versa, therefore going beyond critique to engage with possibilities for change. My initial intention was to effect change in the practices of assessment by replacing the Barksdale product-only writing with the processfolio to foster learning and writing behaviours and attitudes that the current Barksdale assessment was impeding, particularly around agency and control. However, throughout the thesis, I reveal how my thinking around what the processfolio could and should do shifted through a praxis of action and theory and through interaction with participants. In adopting a critical realist perspective, change in writing assessment, as epitomised by the processfolio, is not conceptualised and evaluated as difference or replacement with an 'alternative assessment' practice to elicit positive impacts or desired behaviour. Rather, change is absenting

negative impacts. Therefore, the third original contribution of this thesis is having conducted a form of critical practitioner AR informed by this understanding of change within a UK EAP assessment context.

1.4. The structure of the thesis

This thesis does not follow a conventional structure. Action researchers wrestle with the dilemma of how honest to be in the cleaning up of the messiness of their research reports (Smyth and Shacklock, 1998; Davis, 2004), and this is particularly pertinent when writing a thesis for doctoral accreditation (Herr and Anderson, 2015). Indeed, my greatest challenge was the writing up of this project. The anxiety I felt in imposing an order on the thesis that did not reflect the complex process of action mirrored the experiences of my students in their accounts of writing for assessment. For example, the stages within the classic AR cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982) as they will be depicted throughout the thesis represent my simplified model of how these stages in fact overlapped. As the research took place within three iterative cycles, questions of organisation arose such as whether to begin or end a chapter with reflective next steps, as reflection naturally fed into the planning stage of the next cycle. Therefore, each chapter represents an attempt to more neatly delineate what was in reality a series of messy overlapping stages within each cycle, with some chapters depicting one stage and others depicting more than one.

Pat Thompson's (2013) metaphor of the education thesis as "bricolage" was particularly helpful to me in that I could legitimately conceive of the thesis as an intertextual collage of different fields of literature and different methods of data collection and analysis chosen for their suitability to the local context and the nature of the inquiry. I have embraced the complexity of conducting research in the complex open systems described by critical realist and action researchers. In understanding the thesis in this way, I feel have adhered to the truthfulness validity criterion for AR (McNiff, 2013), while accepting that I sometimes had to prioritise clarity over authenticity in representing the staging and general intricacies of this project.

Chapter Two provides an overview of my research context, moving from the macro to the micro. The purpose is to show how EAP pre-sessional assessment is mediated and constrained by a variety of factors. Firstly, I define EAP in terms of its knowledge bases as a discipline or field, and the political, economic and social forces which determine the quotidian realities of practice. This is followed by a summary of three overarching tensions around EAP pre-sessional writing assessment which frame the research inquiry: achievement of learning outcomes determined by EAP professionals vs language proficiency determined by external stakeholders; the formative vs summative purposes of assessment, and

the product vs the process of writing. Finally, I introduce Barksdale as the local context and focus of the research, and myself as a practitioner within this context.

Chapter Three gives a rationale for my choice of AR as an inquiry framework for assessment research, explaining how this choice was underpinned by a critical realist philosophy concerned with ontology, structure, agency and change. This is followed by an overview of the research design for the three years of iterative data collection. As each cycle used a variety of data collection and analysis methods, only an overview is provided here, with the detail on methods accompanying the relevant findings chapters. Finally, validity criteria for my approach to AR as critique and change are established.

Chapters Four and Five form the two aspects of the reconnaissance cycle. Chapter Four is the first of two literature reviews. It draws on key literature from the fields of language assessment and wider HE assessment to make the case for the problematic impacts of assessment practices in general and how these apply to EAP writing. Chapter Five presents a small-scale empirical study conducted iteratively with the literature review, which confirmed that many of these critiques are pertinent to EAP writing assessment at Barksdale. Four key themes were identified: teacher-dependency as part of a submission to external judgement, surface approaches to learning as part of a potentially alienated state, a lack of awareness of general and individual metacognitive writing processes, and a lack of awareness of writing as a social practice.

Chapter Six is the second review of the literature which shows how the processfolio intervention was designed to address all four of the identified negative impacts. The design of the processfolio was informed by principles of alternative assessment, or 'assessment for learning' in the HE literature, and language assessment: authenticity, multiplicity of evidence and the primacy of self and peer evaluation, and two key approaches to academic writing: process and Academic Literacies. I show how I adapted the traditional portfolio concept to the Barksdale pre-sessional context.

Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine present the two intervention cycles trialling the processfolio. The methods of data collection and analysis for each cycle are included within each chapter to clarify how my approach to each cycle differed.

Chapter Seven focuses on the first processfolio trial in 2014 with my own class of 14 students (intervention Cycle One). This cycle used four different data sets to obtain a more holistic overview of the intervention, employing more informal and flexible research techniques. The data sets were participant peer interviews, the students' portfolios, self-assessment grade comparisons, and basic interactional analysis of Moodle VLE forum discussion threads. The findings indicated positive benefits in addressing the four impacts, although issues arose around self-evaluation.

Chapters Eight and Nine focus on the second iteration of the processfolio in 2015, Cycle Two, which widened the participation to three classes (46 students) and three teachers, including myself. This cycle reduced the number of data sets to two, interviews and analysis of student processfolios, which were amalgamated into narrative case studies. I chose to do this after reflecting on the lack of depth of Cycle One, to provide a deeper narrative focus for exploring emerging agency and students' awareness of themselves as developing writers. Therefore, Chapter Eight focuses on the experience of nine students, while Chapter Nine focuses on the two participant teachers and my own reflections on the process of research, an overview the key benefits, limitations and challenges of the processfolio, culminating in the shift in my own understandings of its purpose.

Having evaluated the processfolio itself in Chapter Nine, Chapter Ten evaluates the project as a piece of AR, set against the validity criteria established in Chapter Three. This framework includes implications, limitations, and potential future research directions. I conclude by summarising the key contributions of the thesis to the field of AR in EAP pre-sessional assessment.

Chapter Two: The research context from macro to micro

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide context to the processfolio project which took place at Barksdale. The way I have conceptualised AR widens the lens of the local context to economic forces, socio-cultural discourses and theories, and political ideologies which impact on EAP, i.e. the mediating conditions (Kemmis and Smith, 2008) referred to above. At the start of this project, key questions emerging for me were: What exactly do we need and want to test? Why do we test in the way we do? What are our responsibilities to our students as individuals, and how does our testing impact on them? What are our responsibilities to ourselves as practitioners and people? The following sections explore how I articulated some of these generic questions within my own local context of one UK HE institution in order to formulate a clearer research inquiry. My work on the project began from the inside, i.e. my own concerns as a practitioner, and expanded to become an exploration of the practices of writing assessment at Barksdale in the wider context of EAP. However, I felt that presenting it in this way to a reader would cause confusion. Therefore, this chapter is structured to uncover layers of a particularly intricate context from the macro to the micro.

Firstly, I present a critical overview of contemporary EAP in the UK, and some challenges facing the field and those who work in it. Then I narrow to outline some questions and concerns around EAP assessment on a more generic scale which will foreground the two specific research foci of writing assessment impacts to be explored in Chapter Four. Finally, I provide an overview of the institution in which the project took place, the pre-sessional context, and introduce myself as a practitioner interacting with this setting.

2.1. What is EAP?: the problems of definition and challenges facing EAP

It is not an easy task for an insider practitioner to define English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to those who are unfamiliar with this environment, partly because there is divergence between many of those working within it. EAP can be defined primarily as a subset of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which arose to meet the need for access to English for business, industry and fields of communication where English is the medium of communication. ESP and EAP originate from English Language Teaching (ELT), further categorised as a branch of Applied Linguistics (Hirvela, 1997). The primary goal of EAP has long been seen as that of assisting international students in achieving the

language proficiency required to facilitate tertiary level education in English speaking countries (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001). Similar to ELT, EAP courses have been traditionally designed to facilitate students' acquisition of the four macro-skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and four systems (grammar, vocabulary, phonology and discourse). Distinct from ELT, where the study of the language itself is the main goal and a student can generally set the level of proficiency required to meet their needs, a student in the UK will be studying EAP as a means of acquiring a specific level of language proficiency determined by an external body to undertake a course in a particular discipline at tertiary level (Robinson, 1991).

According to Jordan (2002), EAP began within certain institutions as a means of language support for international students seen to be struggling with the demands of their courses. The picture of EAP is quite different in the countries where it is provided, and it is not within the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive overview of the variety of EAP provisions outside the UK. Driven by the economic interests of countries wishing to compete on the global stage by having a pool of graduates with a good command of English (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002), UK EAP provision has grown to meet this demand. It can be broadly classified into two categories: 'in-sessional' support for students who have met the language requirements of their university and are currently enrolled in a degree programme; and preparatory courses for students wishing to enter tertiary education. The main incarnation of the latter is the pre-sessional, defined as a preparation course, usually taking place over the summer months prior to a September semester entrance point, for those who have been accepted onto a degree programme but have either failed to meet the language requirements or have self-selected to undertake a course in order to be better prepared (Alexander et al, 2008). It is pre-sessional which has been the least theorised, despite the increasing literature base in EAP over the past decade, and it is this type of course which is the focus of this project.

Despite the difficulty of obtaining a coherent picture of UK pre-sessional EAP due to the variety of provision and standards within institutions (Bannerjee and Wall, 2006; Ding and Bruce, 2017), the focus of these courses is not merely the mechanics of language skills and systems but also equipping students with research skills, awareness of academic written and spoken conventions, both in general and within their chosen disciplines, linguistic and intercultural competence, and the fostering of autonomy and critical thinking (Hyland, 2006; Alexander et al, 2008). EAP has been influenced by applied linguistics, education and psychometrics (Alderson et al, 2017). Therefore, for an increasing number of people, EAP is seen as an academic discipline in its own right, with goals in addition to language teaching (Hamp-Lyons, 2011; Ding and Bruce, 2017). Bhatia's (2004) framework of discursive competence forms a key aspect of the knowledge base of practitioners, whereby the goals are to facilitate students' ability to participate in the social and institutional structures,

understanding texts, genres and the linguistic and rhetorical elements that constitute academic communication within academic disciplines. A text can be written or spoken, but, as the written medium remains the primary academic assignment model despite the expansion of multimodality of text (Lillis and Scott, 2007; O'Halloran et al, 2016), I have chosen to focus on writing in this project.

There have been many positive developments towards the professionalisation of EAP. In 1972, the British Association of Lecturers of EAP (BALEAP) was set up with a view to standardising and representing the proliferation of 'ad-hoc' courses born out of the widening access to western tertiary institutions for overseas students (Hamp Lyons, 2011). BALEAP, and its affiliated international *Journal of EAP*, have since been the forbearers of scholarly activity within the field of EAP (Alexander, 2013), although BALEAP is not a regulatory body and institutions choose whether to become accredited through BALEAP's professional competencies scheme (Ding and Bruce, 2017). Over the decades, scholars and practitioners have pragmatically incorporated theories of linguistics, academic literacy and learning within their approaches and syllabus designs (Hamp-Lyons, 2011), if not necessarily within their assessments. Examples of research-informed practice which have influenced EAP pedagogy include Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978) focusing on rhetorical analysis of text, and Genre Theories, or the deconstructing of academic texts to raise awareness of how language is used within academic discourse communities (Swales, 1990; Hyland, 2003; Gardner and Nesi, 2012). More recent influences explore the individual processes and procedures that writers undergo to produce a text, such as Academic Literacies (Lillis, 2003; Turner, 2012) which both examines and contests disciplinary conventions and epistemologies, and most recently Legitimation Code Theory (Maton, 2014), which analyses textual practices through semantic codes. However, in practice, there is by no means a consensus in pedagogic approaches in institutions, and Barksdale was no exception in its ad hoc approach to teaching writing. Indeed, in the case of pre-sessional courses, the quotidian reality provides three key challenges to attempts to advance the notion of EAP as a legitimate discipline.

Firstly, EAP's contributions to an understanding of student writing and apprenticeship of discourse conventions within the academic disciplines can be said to have largely been unheeded by wider academia, to which it is often seen as a remedial support tool in subordination to academic departments (Hamp-Lyons and Hyland, 2002; Breen, 2018). Its origins as an ad-hoc support service for international students on a part-time basis has perpetuated this attitude (Jordan, 2002; Turner, 2004). This view is exacerbated, as suggested by Hadley (2015), in the trend towards moving EAP into the realm of administrative services within HE institutions. Hadley uses the metaphor of 'processing' international students, who are seen as a 'cash cow' by universities increasingly losing government funding and turning to commercial activities and higher-fee-

paying students to maintain revenues. In this way, universities are in a position of economic dependence on international students (Ding and Bruce, 2017). Advocates of a market-oriented system would suggest that students are empowered by the choice on offer for them as consumers. However, the educational benefits of this choice can be called into question in the reality of twenty-first century HE where adherence to market principles of competition and cost-efficiency, or the neo-liberal ethos, lead to economic accountability as a driver of educational policy (Brown and Carasso, 2013). In this environment, courses, particularly the pre-sessional preparatory courses, are to be short, easy to replicate, often employing temporary staff on short-term contracts and easy to administer (Hadley, 2015), a type of pedagogic "factory" (Giroux, 1988, p.12) where students are taught, tested, their deficiencies fixed, and moved through the system.

This trend has a profound effect on how EAP teachers and the students who take these courses are perceived by the wider university. The more money EAP makes for its institution, the less it is seen as a true academic endeavour, which impacts on whether teachers and students can view themselves as legitimate members of the academic community (Fulcher, 2009). Due to the huge increase in student numbers over the summer, which is not sustained throughout the academic year, pre-sessional teachers are often employed on temporary contracts (Bell, 2016). Full-time teachers are often on professional services or teaching contracts. Very few language centres in UK universities currently employ EAP lecturers on academic contracts, although some are increasing the push towards scholarly output (Ding and Bruce, 2017). Raimes' (1991) famed and often criticised 'butler stance' of EAP towards the disciplines remains widely used as a metaphor by disgruntled and undervalued teachers. For international students, the high fees and risk associated with moving to a new country make their participation in and successful completion of an EAP pre-sessional increasingly high-stakes (Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015). I have chosen the pre-sessional as the focus for this project because it involves the highest numbers of students and teachers than other forms of EAP provision, is the most lucrative for universities, and the most highly regulated by non-academic bodies. It is where most teachers cut their teeth in EAP and hence is the formative influence on their perception of what EAP is (Alexander, 2013). Crucially, it is arguably the mode of EAP which is affected most directly by high-stakes assessment and the challenges and external constraints described in the sections below.

Secondly, despite the lowly status of EAP within the academy, UK EAP pre-sessional courses, in the early twenty-first century climate of economic downturn and cuts to government funding for higher education, are subject to particular external regulations and scrutiny to assess value and quality. The explosion of international education as a multi-billion dollar industry for the UK (Universities UK, 2017) has led to the drive for Secure English Language Tests (SELTs) to regulate access to university places. The most common of these is

the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). In the UK, the required level of language proficiency in each of the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking for university entry is determined by university admissions departments in combination with the UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI)'s guidelines on minimum language levels required for Tier 4 (student) visas. The only tests recognised by the UKVI since January 2016 are the IELTS and Trinity College Integrated Skills in English (UKVI, 2016), which provide a score in each of the four skills in addition to a holistic score of language proficiency. However, if students undertake and pass an EAP pre-sessional course prior to commencing their degree course, the SELT requirements are understood to have been met (Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015). This places onus on the pre-sessional, whether administered by the university itself or by a private education provider (Bell, 2016), to benchmark its in-house assessment to the grading of SELTs in order to provide information about students in a language that is understood by admissions departments, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, or CEFR (Murray, 2016). However, studies commissioned by IELTS themselves (Knoch et al, 2016) have found that admissions and academic departments often have limited understanding of the test. Additionally, research conducted by Moore and Morton (2005), Leung et al (2016) and Pilcher and Richards (2017) has shown the incompatibility between the requirements of an exam which solely tests English language proficiency, and the complex linguistic and socio-cultural demands of a university course. As described above, the pedagogy of EAP, whether following a genre-based, study-skills, process, or Academic Literacies influence, is generally of academic literacy acquisition rather than merely a language course (Wingate, 2012). Hence, the idea that it is possible, let alone desirable, to equate what is taught in EAP courses with the information that university admissions require is at best arbitrary; at worst disingenuous. While some UK EAP departments do have some freedom in their assessment design, many are bound, explicitly or implicitly, to test what is most commonly understood by those external to the field (Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015).

The issue of international students and visa requirements is a highly political one, fraught with controversy and subject to shifting political agendas. There are increasingly frequent and complex changes to the visa system. The most recent example is the reduction in the number of both SELTs themselves and institutions validating SELTs being accepted by the UKVI (UKVI, 2016). There is uncertainly and fear within the sector concerning the potential economic and cultural impact on HE in general, and EAP in particular, of immigration restrictions (Scott, 2014), exacerbated in light of the 2016 Brexit referendum result (Finn, 2017). Increasing competition among universities to attract the students who do still wish to come to the UK manifests itself in shorter, more affordable courses and lowering entrance requirements, to the potential detriment of students and academic departments (Murray, 2016). Pre-sessional

EAP is caught in the crossfire of economic necessity, on one hand of providing a means for accepting more students at a lower level of English proficiency than perhaps would normally be deemed appropriate; on the other, of being the gate-keeper for a government policy of maintaining university standards as 'Highly Trusted visa Sponsors' (Chan, 2013; Cunningham, 2014). The move towards the auditing of performance requires university departments to make themselves accountable through measurable outcomes (Ball, 2012). In the immigration policy context, EAP pre-sessional perhaps bears more of this burden than its counterparts in the wider university, where content-based modules are still afforded relative freedom to set their own standards through internal validation. The powerlessness of both students and practitioners is exacerbated in that the role of EAP pre-sessionals has become regulation rather than education.

Thirdly, although there has been some recent debate about the key questions of what EAP should be teaching, facilitating, and ultimately assessing, and who is responsible for making those decisions, this discussion has generally not trickled down to pre-sessional courses. This is perhaps unsurprising given the above constraints to practitioner working conditions. In other words, the key issues of what we do; why we do it; and who we do it for, are questions that are not being fully engaged with by UK EAP professionals and researchers at the scholarly and public level (Hamp-Lyons, 2011; Ding and Bruce, 2017). Outside of the UK, the debate in EAP around the need to work within its constraints or challenge them led to the emergence of Critical EAP (Benesch, 2001), itself influenced by Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2005) and Critical Applied Linguistics (Pennycook, 2001), approaches which focus on how language reproduces or disrupts inequitable power relations. This has encouraged scholars to engage with the power relations perpetuated by the academy through discourse conventions and the metalanguage around assessment and feedback on student work, and question the extent to which EAP should uncritically reproduce these merely by helping students assimilate to these conventions (Lea and Street, 1998; Hyland and Hyland, 2006). However, the focus of this scholarly activity is largely on classroom pedagogy and bringing wider societal issues such as homelessness and the environment into the classroom rather than taking classroom issues into wider society. It has also been accused of contributing to a "pedagogy of pessimism" (Morgan, 2009, p.89) which raises practitioners' and students' awareness of the issues but gives them little room to work for change. Allison (1996) among others, has advocated pragmatism in the highly politicised climate of UK HE internationalisation, believing that encouraging students to do any more than merely acquire the genre knowledge needed to acculturate to their academic discourse communities is in fact alienating them from these academic communities and perpetuating the notion of the international student and EAP teacher as outsiders in the wider academy (Belcher and Braine, 1995).

However, as Breen (2018) points out, the relevance of these issues to a wider HE context should not be ignored, and EAP teachers who engage with the discourses

of the neo-liberal university critically or uncritically as part of their raison d'etre, have much to contribute to an understanding of disciplinary and transdisciplinary practices. ELT as a field has long been considered 'political' (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2001) and according to Gee (1994, p.190), EAP practitioners can either "cooperate in their own marginalisation by seeing themselves as 'language teachers' " or accept that they "stand at the heart of the most crucial educational, cultural and political issues of our time." This seems no less true in 2018. Where these issues are debated in the literature, practitioner voices themselves are less often heard. The nature of 'scholarship' and 'research' in EAP has yet to be fully defined and unlike other disciplines within HE, rarely refers to practitioners working within the field (Ding and Bruce, 2017). As I will discuss in Chapter Three, practitioner research is often limited to small-scale classroom interventions disseminated at conferences and through informal networks. As a practitioner myself, a key motivation for this research was to participate in this debate at level of action and scholarship, to question and intervene where the status quo is particularly detrimental to the well-being of students and teachers: in the area of assessment.

2.2. Assessment of writing in EAP: what are we testing?

Just as it is not easy to define EAP, it is even more problematic to define what is to be assessed on EAP courses. A survey of several core texts which outline the knowledge base of EAP (Harwood and Petrić, 2011; Hyland and Shaw, 2016; Ding and Bruce, 2017) find few references to the role of assessment. As described in the previous section, because of the discrepancy between the course aims and learning outcomes of EAP and tests of language proficiency (Leung et al, 2016), few EAP pre-sessional courses use official SELTs, relying instead on their own in-house assessments. However, as described above, due to the requirement for EAP pre-sessional assessment within the UK to be 'benchmarked' to SELT-style criteria and scoring (Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015), balancing the needs of the EAP test-taker with those of the external stakeholders can be problematic. This can lead to the application of popular proficiency testing systems such as IELTS on EAP courses, with insufficient consideration of how they may meet the real needs of the test-taker or of the wider university (Bruce and Hamp-Lyons, 2015). This is problematic for two reasons. First, Banerjee and Wall (2006) point out that there is a disconnection between constructs of the two assessment models: "external tests such as IELTS and TOEFL...are insufficiently representative of the construct of EAP… to be used as an exit measure for pre-sessional EAP courses" (p.54). Secondly, Alderson et al (2017) have pointed out that large-scale proficiency tests are concerned with evaluating the language necessary to perform in situations, rather than how this language was acquired or learned. This inevitably

disconnects assessment from learning and because an EAP course is primarily concerned with the latter, makes the application of a SELT testing model particularly problematic in terms of impact on students and teachers. This section outlines three key debates around EAP assessment which contextualise my two specific research foci.

2.2.1. English Language Proficiency or Academic Literacy Achievement?

Brindley and Ross (2001) distinguish between proficiency (as a measurement of whether learners can use general language as defined by indicators of performance in a given situation) and achievement testing (whether objectives of a particular course have been achieved and students have acquired the skills or knowledge that has been taught). As proficiency describes the ability to function in a given situation, that which is assessed by a SELT, it would seem natural that linguistic proficiency would be the goal of EAP. Yet, according to Green (2007) and Alderson (2000), proficiency is unlikely to increase exponentially as a trait in short preparatory courses. This creates and maintains a fiction around EAP pre-sessional courses by internal stakeholders for external stakeholders that students' language proficiency skills will be raised as measured by half or a full IELTS band (Green, 2007). Hence, achievement testing, designed to measure how much has been learned from the EAP academic literacy and skills syllabus including research skills, intertextual synthesis and disciplinary discourse conventions, may be a more accurate measure of students' preparedness for a degree programme (Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015). This is congruent with constructive alignment (Briggs and Tang, 2011) in education theory, where assessment and learning activities are designed to give students opportunities to meet the objectives and outcomes of the EAP course.

I would argue that both traditional notions of achievement and proficiency testing are problematic on EAP pre-sessionals. On one hand, McNamara and Hill (2012) argue that the construct of language is quite different from academic disciplines in which achievement of course aims (knowledge of content) can be determined by learning objectives around which the curriculum is designed. Indeed, language assessment has therefore had to focus largely on the underlying micro-skills using psychometrics, thereby advancing validity theory (Alderson et al, 2017). Knowledge is the object of disciplinary study (Shay, 2008) but within EAP, language is not only the *object* of study (the knowledge about language) but also the *medium* of expressing, transmitting and understanding knowledge. Therefore, conceptualising language and literacy as achievement can lead to teaching writing unproblematically as a technical set of skills in a remedial study-skills approach (Lea and Street, 1998), rather than a developmental or social approach, an argument I will

develop in Chapter Four. On the other hand, claiming that EAP courses and assessment can raise and measure students' level of language proficiency plays to an agenda described above, where students pay for a short course that sells the idea they will be able to function as full members of the academy, rather than that they have met a narrow set of achievement outcomes and where continuing support from the university is needed (Pilcher and Richards, 2017).

2.2.2. Process or product?

Black and Wiliam's (1998) seminal work on assessment in mainstream education critiques the focus on the outcome measures of learning rather than the processes. In the EAP context, this relates to writing as a product or performance to be measured, which overlooks, and at worst can negate, reflection on the processes of learning to heighten awareness of writing as meaning-making (Wingate and Tribble, 2011) as well as provide the necessary conditions to foster transformative learning (Kahn et al, 2012). However, the practical difficulties of measuring constructs that form part of an EAP course, such as autonomy, criticality, and intercultural communicative competence have led to a reductionist agenda by the SELT testing systems which influence EAP (Paran, 2010). Coupled with a lack of empirical research into assessment of such constructs in the UK EAP context, only the assessment of what *can* be measured comes to dictate what is taught, leading to a focus on product (outcomes) at the expense of process in the EAP classroom. This may disadvantage and distress students on their future courses where multiple approaches to text creation and meaning-making come into play (Lillis and Scott, 2007).

Yet the idea that learning processes can and should be assessed is also contentious. Issues of subjectivity in students' processes and teachers' marking (Weigle, 2002), as well as increased time spent holistically and hermeneutically marking the process, reduces practicability, a key concept in assessment and testing (Bachman and Palmer, 2010). There is increasing interest in the process of writing in EAP as recent innovation in course design has highlighted the focus on process in research writing (Dovey, 2010; Sevior, 2015). However, raising this to the level of an end of course assessment which could also meet the needs of admissions has not been investigated on a larger scale. My concerns were initially around designing an assessment to integrate the process and product while being mindful of this issue.

2.2.3. Summative or formative?

EAP pre-sessional courses serve a dual role of formative assessment, usually classroom-based, to provide feedback for the benefit of learning, and summative assessment to report achievement which will determine access to university places (Harlen, 2012). This places the EAP teacher in the dual and conflicting role of facilitator of development and gate- keeper/judge of performance (Rea-Dickens, 2004). Although this is not unique to EAP, the high-stakes nature of pre-sessionals and the bond formed between teacher and students on such intensive courses can understandably lead teachers to define their role only as helping students to pass summative assessment. If that leads to teaching towards the assessment, then research-informed EAP pedagogies of fostering critical literacy and conceptualising writing as a social process of meaning-making can be overlooked, de-prioritised or even negated by the immediate needs of the assessment. Furthermore, the gap between educational assessment theories, particularly assessment for learning, and EAP widens (Alderson, et al, 2017). Formative assessment becomes little more than continuous practice for the summative.

Messick (1996, p.243) defines this as washback: "the extent to which the test influences language teachers and learners to do things that they would not necessarily do otherwise." The effect focuses on the classroom and can be both negative and positive, intended or unintended (Bachman and Palmer, 1996) and encompasses effects on curriculum, materials, methods, attitudes and learning (Wall, 2000; Spratt, 2005). Indeed, Boud et al (1999) assert that assessment has a greater impact on how students learn than any other factor, including teaching and materials employed. By and large, I have not used the term washback throughout the thesis because I was concerned largely with impacts that go beyond the classroom, including individuals, policies and practices (Tsagari and Cheng, 2017), to encompass the interplay between society and the human agent, within a critical realist framework.

It can be argued that to be measured and move on may be the pragmatic goal of some students and in that regard EAP assessment would do well to serve its consumers with what it wants within a market economy. But it is difficult to claim that summative assessment on an EAP pre-sessional, due to the very nature of its raison d'etre of preparing students for the future learning situations, should not serve some pedagogical purpose in addition to providing information to external stakeholders. Indeed, as Gardner et al (2010:30) state, "assessment of any kind should ultimately improve learning."

In summation, assessment of writing EAP occupies the space between a number of contradictions and opposing forces which shape this research inquiry. Barksdale, therefore, represents a microcosm of this situation.

2.3. EAP assessment at Barksdale

EAP pre-sessional courses at Barksdale are run by the English Language Centre (ELC), a teaching-only department of Barksdale. It is part of the institution and subject to the same quality control as the university as a whole but it is not an academic department in that teachers are not expected to engage in research or scholarly activity. Barksdale is a public sector institution, which are currently less strictly regulated by the government than private sector education providers (Bell, 2016). As such, there is relative freedom to develop courses and direct the curriculum and assessment. Yet Barksdale is still subject to British Council and UKVI guidelines as well as responsible to the university and must provide information about its pre-sessional students' language proficiency, as benchmarked to UKVI approved SELTs and CEFR, to their academic departments. At the time this project began, assessment was the sole responsibility of the course coordinators. There was no system of statistical validation or quality assurance other than a few eyes being cast over the tests. For the majority of pre-sessionals, tests were not trialled. Anecdotally and in my own experience in several UK EAP departments, this is not at all anomalous. The pre-sessional is not subject to an internal audit by the university itself, although as with all HE modules, the programme has an external examiner from the EAP community on a biennial appointment to oversee rigour in scoring procedures.

The ELC runs a number of courses throughout the year (the Foundation and Pre-Masters programmes run from September to early June) and the pre-sessional courses run from mid -June to early September so there is little 'down-time' for teachers between courses. All permanent members of staff were required to teach the pre-sessional for some stages of the course. In addition to permanent staff members, as student numbers can range (at the time of writing) from 200-250 over the summer, a large body of temporary staff are recruited between July and September, as is the norm with UK university pre-sessionals (see above). Although initial recruitment stipulates experience and DELTA and/or MA TESOL or Applied Linguistics, the scramble for longer contracts and competitive salaries leads to a high rate of qualified teachers reneging on their contracts. Coupled with the difficulties of being able to predict student numbers accurately, last minute recruitment meant that the levels of experience and qualifications of temporary staff varies. Partly for this reason, the pre-sessional syllabus was prescriptive and certain lessons must be taught at certain times in order to ensure parity across courses where more novice teachers may be less able to work flexibly according to student needs (Breen, 2018), and to ensure that all teachers are adequately preparing students for standardised assessments. There was no one pedagogic approach to EAP specified by Barksdale, although genre analysis, study skills and language acquisition theories tacitly, if not explicitly, informed the curriculum. As I have argued above, and will further

elaborate in Chapter Four, to some extent this ad hoc and pragmatic pedagogy is a reaction to the assessment practices which dominate EAP pre-sessionals.

Assessment literacy amongst teachers at Barksdale was varied. The majority of the teachers professed a lack of interest or were intimidated by assessment, perhaps due to the lack of training in their professional courses. Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons (2015) point out that assessment is usually an option module on MA TESOL courses and its focus on psychometrics and statistics may intimidate many teachers. However, many staff were dissatisfied with or questioned the model of writing assessment.

Entry to the pre-sessional course and the stage at which students begin is determined by the student's SELT result prior to starting the course. Table 2.1 provides an overview of exit and entry requirements of each course, in addition to the formative writing assessments. The pre-sessional courses were divided into stages corresponding to the number of weeks that a student took part on the course: either 13-week, 9-week or 5-week courses. Students with lower SELT scores at entry therefore undertook a longer pre-sessional. As can be seen from table 2.1, the amount and nature of the formative assessment was rather limited. Feedback on formative work was typed up on official forms and given to the students with indicative grades, making the process time-consuming and formalised for students and teachers.

Course length (weeks)	SELT score on entry	Exit score(subject to department)	No. of formative assessments
13	5.5	-	2 essays
9	6	-	1 essay
5	6.5	7.0	-

Table 2.1. Summary of courses on the pre-sessional

Table 2.2 summarises the four skills model components of the final course assessment.

Skill	Final summative assessment		Weighting (%)
Writing	Research Essay 1750 words		45
		Timed exam	13.3
Speaking	Presentation		15
Reading	Comprehension Exam		13.3
Listening	Comprehension exam		13.3

Table 2.2 Summative assessment on the pre-sessional

Marking of writing was criterion-referenced with criteria benchmarked to IELTS band scales in order to comply with Barksdale's admissions team and UKVI policy (**see Appendix i**). The same criteria were used to assess both the timed-essay writing and the research essay. In the closing weeks of the course, there was considerable pressure on both teachers and students. The work load was imbalanced towards the final week of the course, where marking and reporting results for up to 200 students must be completed within days in order to present to university admissions staff, for offers to be made to the students for their appropriate courses and visas to be renewed or issued.

A Standardisation Committee, which marked student sample essays according to the criteria, provided models to teachers to ensure parity and standardisation of criterion-referenced marking. This reinforces the idea that not only is the students' writing seen as a product, but the complex and often subjective process of grading according to criteria and the discussion from which the final grade emerges is hidden from the staff body and is disseminated as a final product itself. This reflects a focus on improving the efficacy of the assessment tool or technology with little questioning of the assumptions of what is being tested in the first place (Madaus, 1993).

2.4. Myself as a practitioner researcher

There is no one route into EAP teaching, although my own career progression can be considered to be the traditional one (Paterson, 2016) from overseas EFL teacher in my 20s to a desire for a more stable job with a higher status in my 30s. My undergraduate degree was in Linguistics, so this was in many ways a natural career progression. However, in the early 2000s, many language schools still required the only training and knowledge of their English teachers to be that of

having been born in an English speaking (Western) country (Breen, 2018) rather than any specific qualifications. During my time teaching in Estonia, Nepal, Hungary, Japan and Russia, I became interested in professionalising my clumsily instinctual pedagogical practices, so undertook British Council-accredited EFL teaching courses, with an optional module in assessment and testing. I began teaching EAP quite by accident in 2008 with the necessity in which my students sometimes found themselves: to find a temporary job as dictated by the condition of my visa in Australia, and was employed with no EAP experience on a zero-hours contract at a university in Queensland. From there, I read, attended conferences, and experimented with developing courses and materials, partly concerned with improving my ability to facilitate learning, but partly to enable me to obtain the holy grail of a permanent contract.

Things proved even more difficult on my return to the UK. My experience was limited to pre-sessional EAP in Australia and despite being a UK citizen having undergone a first degree here, the years I had been overseas had brought myriad changes to the HE system. I felt like a stranger in my own country, feeling my way through a maze of new acronyms, SELT requirements and disciplinary expectations. I very much empathised with my students. Some years and more temporary contracts later, I felt more acculturated to UK EAP and its particular rewards and challenges, and I did finally obtain the full-time permanent contract at Barksdale in 2012. However, something was always bothering me.

As an EFL teacher, I had been largely unconcerned and unaffected by the nature of assessment. My students wanted to learn English for travel, for a hobby, or for their jobs. Occasionally I would teach a preparation course for a SELT. I would teach the class but rarely feel that I had any direct influence over their result and certainly no involvement in the assessment itself. Although as part of my own process of teacher development I became aware of my ambiguous role in perpetuating the proliferation of English as the dominant language of global power (Canagarajah, 1999), it seemed that as an EFL teacher, rightly or wrongly, I was certainly able to turn a blind eye to it if I wanted to. EAP was different. My direct involvement in in-house assessment made it suddenly evident that I was in a position of gate-keeper for access to educational and economic opportunity as an assessor and evaluator of students' readiness for academic study.

As an EAP practitioner, I was at the coal-face of assessment in that it seemed to constrain everything I did to varying degrees at various times, yet I had no control over its design or implementation. I saw tests written badly by my harried superiors who were expected to have acquired assessment literacy purely by the virtue of being appointed to a management role rather than through training in assessment (Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015); saw students developing illness from stress about exams or failing to comprehend the expectations of degree assignments despite having spent months on a pre-sessional; saw my own

meticulously planned lessons being abandoned to do yet more timed-writing practice for examinations. This sense of powerlessness affected me as a teacher, and in numerous conversations with colleagues, I realised that I was not alone in this. However, I also saw tests motivating students, their success giving them self-confidence and new skills; saw some exciting innovations in assessments, and developed my own interest and enjoyment in test writing and becoming assessment-literate. I did not feel that it was necessary for assessment to exert the negative influence that I perceived it did, yet I was aware that it was inevitably going to assert some considerable influence over my students and colleagues given its omnipotence in the EAP context.

Upon commencing work at Barksdale in 2012, I immediately felt that it was place of considerable pedagogical talent, conscientiousness and professionalism. Colleagues supported each other personally and professionally, and were concerned with developing pedagogical practices to enhance their ability to facilitate student success. Yet the same issues were there around assessment, and teachers, students, and co-ordinators expressed frustration concerning many of the issues I have outlined above.

Conclusion: the research problem/inquiry

Adhering to the ethos of AR to acknowledge the "messiness" of the research process (Smyth and Shacklock, 1998), extracting a clearly defined research inquiry from the entangled mesh of the issues outlined above was my first task in this project.

An initial reconnaissance cycle consisting of a review of the literature on assessment in EAP and an empirical inquiry into my local context identified two key issues that seemed to be overarching and encompassed my concerns as a practitioner. These were the negative impacts of pre-sessional writing assessment, which I later came to view in a critical realist sense (Bhaskar, 2008) as the 'absenting' or negation of

a). students' ability to exercise agency over assessment situations through a reflexive understanding of their choices

b). students' abilities to conceptualise themselves as developing writers through a focus on writing as a product performance.

At this point, I did not consider these to be research questions in the traditional sense, but they were formulated to answer the questions AR is concerned with: not just *what is* but *what can be done* (McNiff, 2013: 93); i.e. to understand the nature of the situation, why things are the way they are, and where change (intervention) can and cannot be effected. Chapter Four will detail the literature which addresses these two concerns and Chapter Five will show how a mutual

interaction between literature and an empirical exploration of the local context united to clarify these foci. However, prior to this, Chapter Three provides a rationale for my philosophical and methodological approach to the research.

Chapter Three: Conceptual framework, methodology and research design

Overview

This chapter justifies my choice of Action Research (henceforth AR) for investigating EAP assessment, and my particular approach to AR. The chapter is structured into four main sections. Firstly, I discuss my philosophical stance of critical realism. This is followed by a critical review of traditional AR in EAP to show how four critical emancipatory principles underpinned my methodological framework and were operationalised within the research design. This section includes an overview of the limitations and challenges of this approach. The third section briefly outlines the research design procedure and data sets over three consecutive years (2013-2015). Because a range of data sets were employed for each cycle, necessitating different methods of collection and analysis, I felt it would be confusing to present all these here as would be done in a classic methods chapter. Therefore, details of these are provided when reporting on the three cycles in Chapters Five, Seven and Eight. In the final section, I explain how validity criteria were developed for the evaluation of the project.

3.1. Why adopt a critical realist stance to action research?

This section explains how critical realism as philosophical stance which attempts to explain social reality through the primacy of ontology, or the 'real', best supports the research approach that I used in this project. I have not deemed it necessary in this thesis to expound upon the many philosophical complexities of critical realism. Rather, I wish to engage with the basic concepts which underpinned my research approach: ontology, structure and agency, and emergence and change.

Although the clear links between AR and critical realism are explicit in the fields of health care and social work (Winter and Munn Giddings, 2001; Wilson and McCormack, 2006; Houston, 2010), educational AR has so far paid little attention to critical realism, which seems curious given their shared foci on understanding the conditions which shape social life, immanent critique and transformation of unjust practices. Critical theory, especially that associated with Jürgen Habermas (1972), usually underpins a critical approach to AR, although in the following sections I will explain why I felt that critical realism was more informative for this particular project and more aligned with my research for change in the face of assessment as a structure.

3.1.1. Ontology

Critical realism refers to natural and social phenomena and is based on the premise that planes of social being can be categorised into transitive and intransitive domains. The former represents what we *can* know about the world because we can see its impact on us. This takes place within what Bhaskar (1986) terms the realm of the 'actual' and empirical', (processes/events themselves and our experiences of them respectively). In the latter, the realm of the 'real', things exist regardless of our knowledge or awareness of them. Structures, or patterns of social organisation, in the realm of the real are the causal mechanisms of events, process and experiences, which may have an effect on us or may not, but crucially have the potential to do so (ibid). In this project, assessment is a practice or event in the realm of the 'actual' which impacts on the experience of EAP students and teachers in the realm of the empirical; for example, on how a student experiences the nature of writing, their academic identity as a writer, or their relationship to the academy. However, what has generated these conceptualisations may be evident to the student/teacher, or it may have been internalised to the extent that they are not directly aware of this, only accessible at the level of the real. This thesis makes the claim that assessment is also a structure which acts as a causal mechanism of certain experiences, behaviours and beliefs on a pre-sessional course.

According to Bhaksar, traditional research inquiry in the social sciences, either from 'positivist' or 'interpretivist' paradigms, has only focussed on the transitive domains: the event itself or the human experience of it. Understanding, and therefore only valuing, that which can be experienced or understood (epistemology) is what is commonly referred to as the 'epistemic fallacy' in critical realism (Collier, 1994) because this only offers an attempt to describe the world rather than explain it (ontology or reality), which may perpetuate faulty thinking and social injustice. A critical realist perspective in this research is therefore an attempt to go beyond a description of my context, the *what* or *how*, and to try to understand *why* it is the way it is, the way that the mechanisms of the real impact on and interact with individuals, ultimately in order to offer possibilities for changing the aspects which are unjust (Corson, 1997).

Such a philosophical position has been criticised for denying diversity, identity and multiplicity of social roles, imposing one version of truth on others (Hammersley 2009). In one sense, if we presuppose there is an independent reality outside the researcher and the researched, this can be seen as an attempt to make a claim to absolute knowledge, which returns us to the dominance of modernist rationality (ibid), and it can associate critical realism with a hegemonic attempt to deny the legitimacy of the individual's viewpoint (King, 1999). However, critical realism accepts that there are different ways of interpreting the world (epistemology) because knowledge is socially produced and therefore transient and fluid through time. This is termed 'epistemic

relativism' (Bhaskar, 2008). Critical realist ontology distinguishes between 'core universals' at the level of the real and 'particular mediations' at the level of the empirical and actual (Bhaskar, 1986). These mediations explain differences at the local level, for example why assessment regimes in one EAP department might be different from those of another, or why one student's reaction to assessment may be positive and another negative. Therefore, critical realism neither rejects interpretivist nor positivistic approaches to describing the empirical, nor does it devalue the voice of the participant's own attempt to describe the world. Rather, it acknowledges the fallibility of all attempts to describe the world (including critical realism itself), as this description can by its very nature only take place in the realm of the empirical, or that which is experienced. However, crucially, it rejects the idea that all attempts to describe the world are equally valid (judgmental relativism) in the way a social-constructivist paradigm can be accused of (Scott 2006). There may be incorrect interpretations of the world which can gain ground in society and perpetuate social injustices, such as in the case of the assessment practices to be described in Chapter Four.

This distinction between epistemic relativism and judgemental relativism allows a critical realist interpretation of the notion of "false consciousness" defined by Lather (1986, p.265) as "the denial of how our common sense ways of looking at the world are permeated with meanings that sustain our disempowerment." Because 'facts' are examples of epistemology which are formed by 'values' at the level of the real, it is possible to critique the facts by uncovering the values (Hartwig, 1994). Therefore, the objective of research inquiry in a critical realist approach is to attempt to sustain the wanted meanings and remove, or 'absent,' obstacles of faulty thinking and belief systems which may prevent people from realising a fuller picture of the world and our potential to act as agents within it (Bhaskar, 2008). This occurs through an analysis and recognition of these beliefs as being socially situated (Fairclough, 2005) and importantly, actualising and exercising the potential for transformation by removing or 'absenting' the beliefs which sustain disempowering practices (Bhaskar, 2016), in this thesis, writing assessment practices on the Barksdale pre-sessional. A critical realist approach to change is therefore not the same as difference. The latter means to replace one thing with another, whereas true change builds on Hegelian philosophy of negation, or the absenting of absence, which creates space for something new to move into (Bhaskar, 2008).

The critical realist precept of immanent (insider/emic) critique (Scott, 2006) is also fundamental to a critical approach to AR (Eikeland, 2015). Critique should not come from an objective or partial outsider but from 'experts' within their own field, the only way that awareness of the potential contradiction between one's values and actions as a practitioner-researcher can be raised (Bhaskar, 2014). Hence, it is vital that researchers are working *with* participants rather than

for them and ideally to reach a point where participants are working for themselves to uncover their own false consciousness (Gibbs et al, 2004). The objective of this project was not only for me as a researcher to understand and describe the nature of EAP assessment and its impact on students and teachers but also to work with the students and teachers themselves to uncover their own understandings, views, beliefs and awareness of social structures as causal mechanisms which underlie these. In other words, through this awareness-raising, people may have a truer sense of agency or intentionality in choosing to accept or reject the structural constraints of assessment and academic writing practices as the first step in a process of transformative change (Bhaskar, 2016).

Critical realism has been accused, quite rightly in many ways, of failing to engage with or often even acknowledge the contribution of critical theory to the epistemic fallacy debate (Strydom, 2007). The similarities between critical realism and critical theory are manifold. However, according to Bhaskar, Habermas' focus is on consensus and dialogue through a process of validating truth claims, rather than a process of uncovering false beliefs to discover what *is*, which requires passing value judgments and acting to remove the sources of false belief (Sayer, 2000). A criticism that Bhaskar levels at Habermas is that the latter's focus on moral norms constructed by discourse is only epistemological, rather than ontological truths which can be determined through judgmental rationality, or a process of explanatory critique (Hartwig, 2015).

This is particularly crucial when dealing with EAP as the subject of research. Language and discourse here are both the object of study for students (the knowledge of which will be assessed) and the medium of knowledge transmission. While critiquing assessment as an example of structure, it was important to remain aware of the issue of language as a social construct. The traditional critical realist focus on knowledge in education takes place within a disciplinary framework, where objects of knowledge, or constructs, are ontologically real (Shay, 2008; Young, 2009; Maton, 2014). However, little attention has been paid to the complexities of language as a socially-mediated but 'real' object of assessment. An alternative way of thinking about this therefore is by considering the interplay between structure and agency.

3.1.2. Structure and Agency

At its most basic level, structure refers to patterns of organisation within the social world as "set of internally related objects or practices" (Sayer 1992, p. 92). Education systems are an example of structure, and assessment is a layer of structure having wider individual and social ramifications. However, I will also refer to assessment as a 'practice' when referring to the localised events and

processes in EAP. Critical realism sees structure as stratified into the material, social and discursive, all interacting with each other in all contexts (Bhaskar, 2008). Material structures are the physical elements of things, such as the body and the tangible objects that we encounter in daily life. In my context, these can include teaching resources of writing, the classrooms and lecture theatres, and the physical forms of the assessments tasks themselves. The social element is the interactions between people, which occur at the interpersonal level and at the level of culture, class, gender and so on. As will be explored in Chapter Four, this occurs at the level of the individual student, their interactions with peers and teachers, their relationships and roles as subjects of assessment, and their identification with or alienation from the academic writing community. The discursive element refers to discourses of practices created and sustained by language which become ways of knowing. EAP writing pedagogies and assessment ideologies, are examples of discourses but these discourses are influenced by belief systems. As outlined in Chapter Two, if the system values certain ways of assessing and of writing, then this will become a discourse and by extension an ideology (Corson, 1997). Indeed, Shohamy (2001) and Hamp-Lyons (2007) among others criticise large-scale language testing systems as an example of an ideology which pervades EAP and has become incontestable. As the focus of this project is a language-based course, the focus on discourses would on one level seem appropriate and could be seen to be similar to social critiques offered by such as Foucault (1982) whose theories of power relations which constrain individuals offer a way of understanding the social world.

However, as Sayer (1998) points out, there is a need to understand the difference between structures which are determining and those which are contingent, as it is the contingent which can be changed. If structure is only seen as determining (which postmodern theories of power do according to Sayer), this can lead us to be pessimistic and reductionist, devaluing the human agent by engaging in resistance rather than change (Flyvberg, 1998). The first aim in this AR project was to investigate where assessment was determining and where it was contingent in order to effect change. Hence, a critical realist analysis of a social situation attempts to work at all levels of stratified structure, but by separating their respective influences. In other words, discourses are real in that they are causal mechanisms of structure, and therefore in educational terms can be objects of study, but reality is not constructed by discourse (Archer, 2007). One obstacle to change is seeing the world as only that which is realised in discourse, or assuming it constructs social reality (Carter and Sealey, 2000). This assumption severely limits the ability for praxis and much research in EAP stays at the level of description and problematising, because emancipatory discourses are also seen as part of the problem (Morgan, 2009). It is certainly the case that such discourses are easily co-optable by a neo-liberal agenda as a means of introducing practices in HE, such as those around assessment and feedback, which are anything but emancipatory (Chun, 2009; Kubota, 2014). This is

because by only changing the discourses; i.e., making them different by replacing one with another, we do not fulfil a critical realist criteria for change because the structures that engender the discourses are alive and well in the domain of the real (Hartwig, 2015). This is why, for me, if the focus of research inquiry is purely on discourse and language as creating versions of reality, rather than on processes, events and the reality of underlying social structures as manifest in discourse, it is difficult to move beyond a critical understanding of a situation to find a means of transformation as action (Fairclough, 2005). In other words, a critical tradition of purely problematising can lead to a dead-end that rightly rejects the claim to objectivity of assessment judgements, but flounders when facing the necessary reality of producing actual assessments required by the economic, political and ideological context of pre-sessional EAP (Saville, 2010).

The historical tendency of theory to emphasise either agency over structure or structure over agency (Ahearn, 2001) has given rise to theories of power and social structure that either assume agency is equated with Enlightenment rationality of the individual as being the centre of his own world, or that social structures are the determining forces on an individual. Social realist Margaret Archer (2000) refers to these as upwards and downwards conflation respectively, both of which deny the relational aspect of human agency. Giddens' (1991) theory of Structuration sees structure and agency as equally important but inseparable, in that society creates the individual who in turn reproduces or transforms structure. While this theory acknowledges their interdependence, it has been criticised for seeing structure and agency as "mutually constitutive" (Archer, 2000, p.6). By failing to see structure and agency as separate aspects, there is no possibility to understand how one impacts on the other (ibid), negating the potential for change. Critical realism asserts that although they are not dichotomous, neither is one reducible to the other and that agents can also affect structures, or as succinctly explained by Conners (2015, p.26): "the world exists and its existence is not dependent on our knowledge of it, although our actions will affect it because we ourselves are part of it and are ourselves affected by our interactions with the world." By becoming reflexively aware of structural influences over time, by relating oneself to the past present and future, agents are able to enact changes to their social world though "a dialogical process by and through which actors immersed in temporal passage engage with others within collectively organised contexts of action" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 974). Agency thus is a process of emergence. On a small scale, I attempted to facilitate such emergence by working with the participants in this project.

Morally-informed praxis in education (Carr, 2007) from a critical realist perspective is research which stems from human concerns about their world, their roles in it and their relation to those around them (Sayer, 2011). Hence, critical realist research challenges the notion that a researcher can or should be

neutral in relation to the object of inquiry, particularly if the objective of the research is to change a problematic situation. The first task of research is therefore to paint a clear picture of the research context, which acknowledges the assumptions and preconceived notions that the researcher brings to it (Bhaskar, 2008). This is much more than merely an acknowledgement of research limitations but a fundamental part of how the emergence of reflexivity or agency in research has the potential to transform that which is researched (Borda, 1979). The reconnaissance cycle described in Chapters Four and Five and the contextual issues described in Chapter Two aim to fulfil this objective.

3.2. Action research

As what is considered epistemologically valid has shifted to encompass the knowledge gained through practice (Schön, 1983; Somekh, 1995), more weight has being given to research done *in situ* by practitioners on and within their local contexts and own practices. For the purposes of this project, 'practices' refers to the assessment of writing, the act of writing itself, and pedagogies of academic writing in EAP.

Conventional educational research has been accused of being disconnected from the realities of quotidian classrooms (Stringer, 2004; Hargreaves, 2007), focusing instead on the concerns of the academic community or government policy makers (Crookes, 1993; Kemmis, 2006). Carr (2007) claims that educational research is in a catch-22 situation, where research is considered to have little practical application due to the emphasis on theory, but that post-modernist refutations of truths have weakened the ability of research to provide useful pedagogical frameworks. AR was posited as an alternative, focussed on teacher concerns in their localised contexts, which respects the profession by enabling them to rationalise their practices rather than uncritically impose top-down pedagogical models.

AR originated with Kurt Lewin's 1946 management organisational research, focusing on the local and particular, rather than attempting to find generalizable patterns of behaviour. This aligns with the critical realist perspective of social research taking place in 'open systems' with interacting factors of causation, as opposed to the experimental cause and effect explanations, or 'closed systems' (Bhaksar, 1986). In education, Dewey's (1916) philosophy of education as a process of inquiry rather than achievement of results and Stenhouse's (1975) focus on the inseparability of teaching and research helped to give more prominence to forms of AR. The work of Paulo Freire (1970, 1973) has influenced AR in their shared focus on enhancing emancipation and transforming unjust systems and practices (Boog, 2003). Examples of AR in

assessment in HE have aligned with alternative assessment principles, focusing on peer and self-assessment for increased student agency (Torrance and Pryor, 2001, McDonnell and Curtis, 2014) as well as reflection and reflexivity in teacher education (Klenowski et al, 2006).

Criticisms of AR have come from a variety of voices. Many of these criticisms can be made equally of all qualitative approaches to research, and can be answered by the application of an alternative paradigm of thinking about the social world. Researchers who favour a more positivistic approach to educational research (such as Hammersley, 2009) propose that research should be objective, explaining the world through the generation of theory which can be generalised to the wider community and that AR does not exempt itself from other education research in this standard. Although AR can make use of quantitative data and concern hypothesis-testing (Wallace, 1998), as a methodological framework, it works on a different paradigm of the relationship of the researcher to the researched, so objectivity is not a goal of AR. Indeed, as with a critical realist stance above, objectivity is criticised as being illusionary (Kemmis, 2007). Rather, the concern for the action researcher is to consider their positionality and to be explicit about this in the process of conducting and reporting of the research (Koshy, 2005). AR works to understand how variables interact, not to minimise or control them (ibid); hence, replicability is not a key criterion. However, this is not to claim that anything goes or that AR does not have to hold itself up to standards of evaluation in the educational community, only that the usual criteria for social research have to be reconceptualised in a different way (McNiff, 2013). Within higher education scholarship, AR is not an uncommon method of pedagogic inquiry. The situation within EAP however, is more complex.

3.2.1. Action research in EAP

The field of language education has adopted AR as a common research method (Nunan, 1992; Edge, 1992; Burns, 2005) both for individual professional development, where classic definitions of research require time and funding, and for development of the profession itself in its desire to be more accepted by academic communities as higher-status skilled professionals (Burns, 2005:48, Ding and Bruce, 2017). In their seminal 1986 work *Becoming Critical*, Carr and Kemmis identified three typographies of AR which they see as aligning with three distinct views of education: that of the *technical*, the *practical* and the *emancipatory*. However, these delineations have been subject to ideological criticism (Elliot, 2005; Hadfield, 2012), and perhaps a more useful distinction when thinking about AR in language education is the notion proposed by Noffke and Somekh (2011) of variations as points on a spectrum of the professional, personal and political.

Professional AR can be seen as being underpinned by a more rational, empiricist philosophical view of education, concerned with providing generalizable findings and contributing to theories of learning. It is concerned with ends and outcomes, so the focus of the AR is improving the means with which to achieve these ends, for example an intervention to increase test scores of a class or a new pedagogical technique to improve students' vocabulary learning. As with Madaus's (1993) critique of assessment as a continually improved technical tool, these ends in themselves are not questioned and research can become a way of reproducing the status quo (Kemmis, 2006). According to Hamp-Lyons (2011, p.92), EAP itself emerged as an "ad hoc, small-scale, quick-fix" solution to the perceived problems of international students' linguistic deficiencies. Therefore, many research initiatives in EAP can also be conceptualised as such because of the common role of the EAP practitioner as "technician" (Morgan, 2009, p.87). A recent article in the *Journal of EAP* by Swales and Post (2017) advocating practitioner-led research in EAP define AR as a "problem-solution approach," giving an example of an intervention to "solve" students' grammatical problems in the use of the imperative mood. Usually, in EAP and ELT, the teacher is the researcher and the research focus may be the teacher's own classroom. This is different from the spectator perspective of AR where an experienced researcher works with or for a teacher, which is more common in mainstream educational context (Kemmis, 2012). However, as the focus is on implementing external theories of learning as interventions of pedagogical techniques within the classroom, the interests of the practitioner him/herself may not be not represented because the focus is on improvement or problem-solving rather than complex understanding (Rainey, 2000). In addition, while attempting to raise awareness of good practice, teachers can be disempowered and disillusioned when, due to their constraints, they are unable to enact these practices, such as those around assessment, in the way they would wish (Morgan, 2009).

Personal AR values the experience and knowledge of individual practitioners, mindful of education as a social practice. It is less concerned with technical control over educational outcomes but rather improving the way that teaching and learning occurs. The aim is to 'act better' for the sake of pedagogy rather than to achieve results or aims (Kemmis, 2009). However, although participants may be given a voice in decision making, the intervention for improvement often stays at the local level because there is little engagement with external stakeholders. Such research can play into the hands of those who would criticise AR for lack of rigour, by doing little more than "telling stories" (McNiff, 2013, p.6).

The external context in which EAP takes place has meant that teachers are not often engaged in research (Hadley, 2015; Ding and Bruce, 2017). BALEAP conferences and proceedings provide a much needed platform for practitioner-led research, but it is often conceptualised as small-scale intervention cycles at the classroom or programme-development level (ibid). A recent collection of

EAP teacher research by Blaj-Ward (2014) indicates its potentially more prominent place. However, there is a trend for teachers to largely focus on improving their practices, rather than use collaborative approaches or to consider the wider social, economic and political structures which impact on their daily working lives (Burns, 2005). Indeed key EFL practitioners such as Nunan (1992), Wallace (1998) and Dörnyei (2007) emphasise AR as a means of understanding one's own practice or for professional development. However, Crookes (1993) makes the distinction between teacher research and critical education practice in language teaching, the latter of which is concerned with emancipation from disempowerment, which emphasises reflexivity rather than reflective practice (Akbari, 2007), and which has generally not been taken up by the ELT or EAP community.

As the focus of this project is assessment of academic writing on a pre-sessional course, which impacts at the washback level of the individual practitioner or classroom, but is shaped by and shapes a variety of discourses, behaviours and social relations (Kemmis, 2009), an over-emphasis on the individual practitioner would impede the potential for the project to say anything about the wider EAP context or how agency and assessment as a structure interact. Indeed, Boog (2003, p.434) states that AR should represent a "microcosm of a problematic social situation," which allows possibilities for such research in a localised context to offer some tentative wider claims to truth (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001), critical realism's 'concrete universals' rather than merely a 'particular mediation' at the local context. It could be claimed that one of the many reasons for the paucity of research into EAP assessment and its social impact is because it does not sit comfortably within an interpretivist and individual practitioner-focused paradigm, or "little narratives" (Lyotard, 1984, p.45) in which much UK EAP research takes place.

Therefore, my project adopted a more political approach associated with (although not the same as) critical emancipatory AR (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, 2005; Carson, 1990), or participatory AR (Udas, 1998; Kemmis and McTaggart 2005). Participants explore their understandings of their practices within three "mediating conditions," according to Kemmis and Smith (2008): the cultural/discursive, which shape thinking; the material/economic, which shape the behaviour or 'doing' (Kemmis, 2009); and the socio-political, which shape how people relate to one another in relationships of power. The aim of this type of AR is for practitioner researchers to change our practice, our understandings of practices, and conditions under which we practice by exploring ways of thinking, behaving and relating that interact to shape, maintain, enable and constrain practices and practitioners (ibid). Teachers should themselves be contributing to a theory of education through systematic inquiry which generates new understandings of localised practices, and, crucially, of where changes in particular situations may be informative for other situations or institutions. I was conscious when beginning this project that external constraints and levels of

EAP teachers' assessment literacy and engagement (Schmitt and Hamp Lyons, 2015; Manning, 2016) were key impediments to attempts to alter individual assessments, let alone question the wider pre-sessional EAP assessment culture.

Elliot (2005, 2006) criticises the idea of typologies of AR as exalting only the political/critical which intimidates teachers and de-values other forms of research which improve practice and inspire practical change. This is a valid criticism when considering the constraints of the EAP context described in Chapter Two, where the daily realities necessitate practical solutions rather than grand theorising. Indeed, Manfra (2009) has stated that there is little dialogue between practical or teacher research and more critical AR traditions, which limits the potential for each to learn from the other, or for what individual practitioner research can add to a critical tradition. As Sayer (1998, p.121) states, "practice always takes place in the muddy waters of the concrete; it cannot be usefully informed by a theory which does no more than reduce the concrete to the abstract."

Conversely, the traditional Critical AR has also been heavily criticised for its focus on the group over the individual (Cohen et al, 2013), denying the complex multiplicity of social roles. The idea of achieving consensus can be seen as naïve when EAP students and teachers come to education with struggles and backgrounds that conflict not just with that of the privileged in the academy, but with those of each other (Webb, 1996). However, such a criticism represents a postmodern view of identity as being a plurality, rather than a totality through temporal acquisition of experiences (Archer, 2000). If we see a critical realist-underpinned AR not so much as reaching consensus but as uncovering mutual false beliefs though action, the charge of naivety can be inverted.

I have attempted of offer a resolution of views of critical AR as a dichotomy between grand theorising and postmodern localisation (Eikeland, 2014) through the use of critical realism, moving beyond epistemology to the ontological meanings of things as I have outlined above. In this project, AR was more than a research 'technique' for intervention at the professional or personal level but was also driven by a philosophy of morally-informed action and social concern (Cunliffe, 2004) around disempowering assessment practices. As mentioned in 3.1.1., although similar to the critical theory on which traditional CAR is based, critical realism provided me a different means of conceptualising ontological change within a highly constrained context as absenting the negatives, manifesting itself as emerging agency, rather than replacing one assessment with another.

The literature on AR identifies key principles for such research. McTaggart (1991) identifies nine principles; Winter (1989) identifies six, and Townsend (2013) identifies eight. I have combined these into four over-arching principles which were operationalised in the research: collaboration/participation

(including issues of ethics); transformational change; reflection and reflexivity, and praxis/knowledge production.

3.2.2. Key principles of a critical approach to action research

3.2.2.1. Collaboration and Ethics

Wellington (2000, p.54) states that "the main criterion for educational research is that it should be ethical." Yet if research is to be potentially emancipatory for its participants, it requires a particular ethical framework within which research can and should be conducted (McNiff, 2013), which goes beyond the usual criterion for ethical research such as anonymity and participant protection. Overarching principles of ethics for all cycles will be discussed in Chapter Five and my specific ethical safeguards pertaining to each cycle will be outlined in the relevant chapters.

McTaggart (1991) distinguishes between 'involvement' and 'participation' in AR, the former being open to Allwright's (2005) criticism of AR as being "parasitical" (p.355) on the time and lives of its participants by expecting them to conduct or participate in research which is only to the benefit of the researcher. Although AR does not have to be collaborative to be valuable (Nunan, 1992), for research to be truly emancipatory, defined as the capability to exert control over one's life (Boog, 2003), participants must at least be equal to the researcher in the processes of meaning-making and decision-making. Collaboration is considered vital for ethical and philosophical reasons, as what makes AR 'research' according to Carr and Kemmis (1986, p.188) is that it is a "systematic development of knowledge in a self-critical community of practitioners."

My research design facilitated this as much was possible. I informed student participants of research results through member-checking (Seale, 1999), where my initial interpretations of the data were given to the participants *a postori* for the purposes of verification. However, the nature of the PhD as an individual undertaking for accreditation meant that the data analysis, or process of meaning-making, had to be largely my own work (Klocker, 2012). It was crucial that the project be collaborative in that student and teacher participants undertook a process of their own meaning-making and developing a shared understanding of writing and assessment practices. Although I was solely responsible for the processfolio assessment, its design and refinements were based on data collected on students' and teachers' views. It is possible for project to begin as an individual concern with gradual widening of participation as the project processes, and the teachers shared responsibility for how the processfolio was implemented in their own classroom in the second cycle of the research, participating in decision-making. Stringer (2004) terms this as inclusion. As

Townsend (2013) and Ladkin (2008) state, change through AR involves some level of leadership, which is conceptualised as not the researcher as leader, but the research itself sparking interest, then including and influencing the practice of others. This is an inherently bottom-up approach to a transformation of assessment culture, which is fundamental to a criterion for success of my critical approach to AR (Tripp, 1998).

3.2.2.2. Transformational change

As we have seen above, a critical realist stance to change is about absence rather than difference (Collier, 1994). A critical approach to AR is also concerned with absenting unjust practices. In the project, the ills or injustices were the negative impacts of assessment on agency and the inability of students to conceptualise themselves as developing writers.

As Kemmis (2009, p.465) states, "the conditions that shape practices [are not] entirely created by this person or that person's understandings of practices; they are formed through larger, longer collective histories of thought and action." A key aim of AR then is identifying and understanding the conditions that create and sustain the subjective experience in order to be able to change them. This was the first step in my research process through a review of the literature and reconnaissance of the local context in Chapters Two, Four and Five. This process is an example of Winter's (1989) principle of dialectic critique (similar to a critical realist perspective) in that it is important to understand the oppositional relationship between elements of a phenomenon as the first step in the research process. These structures are then transformed through action (the intervention), which in turn informs and develops new understandings and actions through a series of iterative cycles (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982). Research is thus conceptualised as a process where "the researcher joins the participants in a theoretically guided program of action extended over a period of time" (Lather, 1986: 268), in this case over three consecutive years. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) conceptualise this as the generation of a 'living theory' where one's ideals about education are enacted in practice, similar to a critical realist precept of 'seriousness', or the consistency between theory and practice (Bhaskar, 2016). Although I tried to maintain this as much as possible throughout the process, it was not always possible to marry these while working within the highly constrained settings of EAP pre-sessionals; therefore some level of pragmatism was needed (Atkinson, 1994). Yet as with collaboration and participation above, a guiding principle was to remain reflexively critical of my actions as a researcher that did not conform to my ideals.

3.2.2.3. Reflection and Reflexivity

Reflection and reflexivity as a component of agency applies in this project to the teachers, students, and myself. Schön's (1983) notion of the reflective practitioner emphasises how we come to know things as practitioners by way of the knowledge gained through experience and action. What prevents practitioners from fossilising in their received notions of best practice is the idea that one can reflect back on one's action, thoughts or behaviours in a particular situation and learn from that in terms of re-setting or re-acting in a different way for the future (Mezirow, 1991). Therefore, reflection is also central to the whole process of any AR project, from planning to data collection and analysis or interpretation (Burns, 2005), hence the original concept of iterative cycles (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982). Schön (1983) distinguishes between reflection during the action, or the ability to adjust based on experiences, which is common for all reflective practice, and the theory-building of providing a reflective account of the action (reflection-on-action), which is crucial for AR.

Townsend (2013) distinguishes between reflection and reflexivity in education, in that the former is the understanding of practices while the latter is the understanding of the self in relation to the world. Reflection is often concerned with solving problems or correcting behaviours, and refers more to the particular, while reflexivity is questioning who we are as people in a transformative process of learning (Cunliffe, 2004). The latter involves a questioning and revision of potential distortions in meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). The Frierian (1970; 1973) notion of education as reflection, or problem-posing, where students and teachers explore their relationship with themselves and the world through critical inquiry rather than information-transfer from teacher to student, has had influence on educational AR (Boog, 2003) in its emphasis on the raising of critical consciousness of ways of being within the world rather than only personal liberation. This aligns with a critical realist concept of reflexivity as necessary for the emergence of agency (Archer, 2000).

The role of the self in AR is foregrounded as a means of personal empowerment and development, referring to reflexivity as the continuous back and forth scrutiny of all stages of the research process, questioning and making explicit the role of the self in all aspects of research (Somekh, 1995). Of course, this is crucial to maintain the integrity and validity of most forms of qualitative research methodologies (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). However, the reflexive nature of critique in AR lies in the questioning not only of ones' biases and research procedures but attempting to reach a deeper understanding of the relationship between oneself and the social world (Rogers, 2001). Underpinned by immanent critique (see 3.1.1), this includes the capacity to deconstruct one's own thinking and assumptions (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009). I attempted to do this by maintaining a practitioner journal throughout all three cycles. Field notes or "scribblings and jottings" (Burns, 2005, p.85) as recorded in a practitioner

journal can be an aid to memory, can "push the research forward" (Holly and Altrichter, 2011, p.45), allow for a more emotional perspectives to be given than pure field notes (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) and add to the building of a wider picture of the situation, including reactions and responses. My practitioner journal including recorded observations of the classroom, staffroom interactions, and staff meetings in addition to my emotional responses to the challenges, frustrations and "critical incidents" (Corwin and Clemens, 2012, p.64) that occurred. I will discuss how it functioned as an aid to my own reflexive process in Chapter Nine.

3.2.2.4. Praxis and the production of knowledge

AR represents a theory not only of action but an alternative theory of knowing and of the forms of knowledge that are produced as a result of conducting practitioner research. McNiff (1993) based on Chomsky (1986) refers to the concept of I-theory, a form of knowledge "located within the practitioner's tacit forms of knowing, that emerge in practice as personal forms of explanations for what is done and what is known" (McNiff, 2013, p.34). Distinct from E-theory, or forms of knowledge external to the self, the knowledge of and about things from studying objects (research-informed practice), I- theory places the self at the core of the research, even if the research is not specifically focussed on the self as practitioner. Knowledge then emerges from the raising of tacit or intuitive knowledge of practice to explicit conscious awareness of the practitioner (ibid), which enables new forms of knowing to emerge when connections are made between existing knowledge and new experiences. This can occur at any point in the lives of people, but becomes research when it occurs in a systematic way (Carr, 2007).

However, generation of I-theory knowledge alone is insufficient for the critical realist approach to AR that informs this project. Rather, praxis is the main goal of research. Praxis is not merely the unification of theory and practice, or action based on reflection, but a morally-informed and ethical process of knowledge formation through action and lived experience (Kemmis, 2008). Grundy (1987) sets out a framework for praxis based on Aristotle's definition, which starts with a situation or question about the human condition which is guided by 'phronesis' or a disposition to act morally. This was my own concern around assessment in EAP. As this project was underpinned by a critical realist definition of praxis, the right courses of action can be determined through a process of explanatory critique (Hartwig, 2015), which took place in an initial reconnaissance. This engages 'praxis,' or the interaction with that situation through action and reflection (Freire, 1973). This took place through my intervention cycles. The critical realist approach to change as a process of emergence aligns with this continual monitoring of action and reflection. The means and the ends of

research are both processes, rather than the former achieving the latter (Kemmis, 2009).

3.2.3. Limitations and challenges

In terms of ethics, principle and pragmatics, AR requires support of the researcher's institutions and other stakeholders. Stringer (2004) states that this should begin with the most disempowered voices, and move to include others in the intervention. I followed this precept by beginning with the students in the first cycles and moving to include teachers in the final cycle. Issues of conflicting voices and views can be, although part of the process, frustrating to a researcher and slow down the process. Even with all participants and stakeholders on board, there were unavoidable constraints such as timetabling, curriculum requirements, staff shortages and lack of time, and it was important not to create an extra burden for any participants to avoid the claim of conducting "parasitical" research (Allwright, 2005, p.355). Decisions sometimes had to be made on a pragmatic basis in order to balance principles with inevitable constraints (Atkinson, 1994). Action researchers must anticipate, plan for, but also to some extent accept the unpredictability of the research process when variables are not being controlled (Townsend, 2013).

It is also vital that research not take teachers away from their practice or add to a division between research and practice in those that 'do' research and those that choose not to, particularly when a project is undertaken for a doctoral thesis or publication. Inherent in doing this for doctoral study was my temptation to push the project along to meet deadlines, which can limit the nature of emancipation as the process of self-realisation that cannot be forced on participants (Elliot, 1991). Zuber-Skerrit and Perry (2002) distinguish between the 'core project' and the 'thesis project', the former being the process of AR in all its messiness while the latter refers to the knowledge about the situation, or contribution, which is generated through dissemination. This makes sense in terms of 'writing up' the research, as I have outlined in several places throughout this thesis, but can be seen as a false dichotomy in that one cannot be separated from the other and in fact the act of conducting research itself enables us to make sense of the practice (Mellor 1998). In other words, the knowledge gained from the process of writing was inherent to the product: a central theme of my inquiry into writing itself.

3.3. The Research design

3.3.1. Aligning action research with assessment design

Winter (1989) defines AR as iterative in that action must be sustained and the reflexivity and praxis that are its goals cannot be achieved through classical experimental approaches. Hence, AR is usually conducted in cycles, with one cycle flowing into another. For this project, I adopted Kemmis and McTaggart's (1982) model of a spiral of cycles (Figure 1), adapted from Lewin's (1946) original AR cycle consisting of four stages of planning, action, observation and reflection, although there are many adaptations (Elliot, 1991; Townsend, 2013). This process aligns with the approach to assessment development and production, conceptualised in various iterations as a cycle of information gathering regarding test specifications, constructs and criteria, to implementing (trialling) and evaluating based on data collection, which feeds into refining and improving the test (Read, 2010).

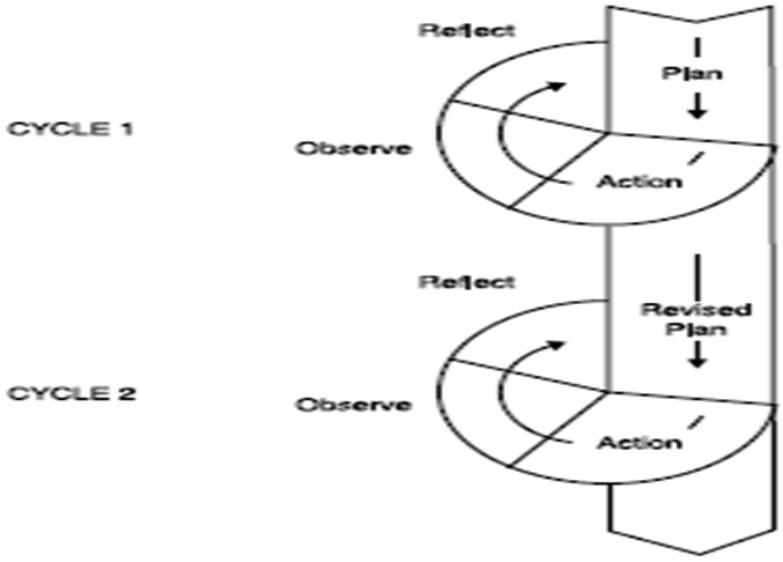


Figure 1: Kemmis and McTaggart's action research spiral (The Action Research Planner 1982, p.8)

Although language assessment research largely takes place within a positivist paradigm, there are various aspects of the AR process which align with assessment research. Firstly, the increasing focus on consequential validity, or the social impacts of a test (Messick, 1996; Shohamy, 2001; McNamara and Roever, 2006; Fulcher, 2009), problematises existing practices as disempowering. Secondly, to be explored in Chapter Six, the increasing call in the alternative assessment literature for a reconceptualization of the psychometric constructs of validity and reliability (Moss 1996; Lynch 2001; Leung et al, 2016) align with an approach to AR that relies on another way of seeing the world and valuing that which might not be measurable in the classical paradigm. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative data collection to evaluate

the validity of local in-house EAP assessments are increasingly advocated (Weir, 2005; Manning, 2016). Finally, recent concerns around EAP teacher assessment literacy (Manning, 2013; Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015) have led to calls, albeit tentative, for more practitioner-orientated research into in-house EAP assessment practices (Manning, 2016).

3.3.2. The process of conducting the research

Kemmis and McTaggart (1982, p.10) caution that Planning, Action, Observation and Reflection "are not to be understood as static steps, complete in themselves but rather as moments in the action research spiral." Hence, these "moments" overlap and sometimes the distinctions seemed arbitrary; for example, designing the processfolio can be seen as part of reflecting on the data of Cycle One as well as planning stage of Cycle Two. Action and Observation always go hand in hand and Reflection must always form part of the analysis (Observation) and Action in order to adhere to the principles of reflexivity and monitoring one's interpretations. As I outlined in Chapter One, the overlap of "moments" posed challenges in the writing up of this thesis. Imposing a structure on the process for the purpose of ensuring clarity for readers is an inevitable part of the 'cleaning up' process referred to by Smyth and Shacklock (1998). I decided it would be clearer to present the differing procedures and methods of each cycle along with the findings and analysis to avoid the reader referring back to one methods chapter. However, in order to orientate the reader and provide detail about the scale of the project, an overview of the research design is provided in Table 3.1.

The research took place over three consecutive summers from 2013 to 2015. The first cycle was a systematic reconnaissance (Townsend, 2013) involving a review of the literature as described in Chapter Four, and an exploration of the local context, with four wider impact themes emerging in Chapter Five. In reality, exploration of the literature and the data collection in this stage took place in tandem and informed each other (Stringer, 2004). I felt this adhered more strictly to critical realist and political AR principles (Noffke and Somekh 2011), in that it was not a deductive process of hypothesis-testing based on a review of previous literature but an iterative one where literature allowed me to obtain a wider picture of the social structures acting on EAP assessment and writing practices (Creswell, 2002). The second cycle in Chapters Six and Seven involved designing and trialling the processfolio intervention to implement with my own pre-sessional class; the third in Chapter Eight widened the participation (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) and the trial of the assessment intervention to three classes, including my own. As such, the data sets and methods of analysis differed between cycles as summarised in Table 3.2. Again, these will be explained in detail in the data chapters.

To avoid confusion, I have termed the intervention cycles ‘first’ and ‘second,’ with the reconnaissance cycle named as such.

Cycle(date)	Planning	Action	Observation	Reflection
2013 Reconnaissance Cycle	Selecting participants – 6 students Selecting data collection and analysis methods- semi-structured interviews Obtaining ethical clearance and consent	Conducting the interviews	Analysing the data – thematic coding Referring back to the literature Keeping a practitioner journal to record details of intervention	Referring back to the literature Designing the processfolio
2014 Cycle One	Designing the processfolio Selecting and designing data- sets as related to processfolio assessment Primary data sets: folios and paired interviews; Secondary data sets: Moodle forums; tutorial records, self-assessment forms Talking to stakeholders (coords of pre-sessional) Finding a way to explain to class Obtaining ethical consent	Implementing the processfolio trial with one class of 16 students on the 9-week stage of the pre-sessional	Keeping a practitioner journal to record details of intervention Analysing the data from primary and using the secondary data sets for triangulation	Reflecting on the limitations and challenges of the processfolio intervention Making refinements to the processfolio based on this Reflecting on the limitations an challenges of the data collection Making refinements to the data collection process based on this Initial dissemination of findings – staff development session/workshop; producing written report for teachers; conferences

2015 Cycle Two	Refinement to data collection based on the previous stage, and additional data set of teacher interviews Selecting teacher participants to trial with other classes (in collaboration with coords) Conducting initial informal interviews with teachers Conducting 'training' sessions with 2 volunteer teachers	Implementing the processfolio trial with 3 classes of on the 9-week stage of the pre-sessional (selecting 3 students from each class to participate in semi-structured interviews)	Keeping a practitioner journal to record details of intervention Fortnightly catch-up sessions with participating teachers Analysing the data from primary and using the secondary data sets for triangulation	Reflecting on the limitations and challenges of the processfolio intervention Making recommendations for further study/implications based on this Further dissemination of findings- conferences, teacher workshops at 2 other universities, article

Table 3.1: Overview of research process

	Participants	Data sets	Analysis methods employed
Reconnaissance	6 pre-sessional students on the 9 week course	12 semi structured interviews (6 pre-course, 6 post-course)	Content analysis
Cycle one	14 pre-sessional students on the 9 week course	Processfolios from 14 students	Content analysis
		Structured interviews with 14 students (interviewed each other)	Content analysis
		VLE forum interactions	Interactional analysis
		Self-assessment form grades	Comparison
Cycle Two	46 pre-sessional students on the 9-week course (9 case study participants)	Processfolios from 9 students (including VLE interactions where available)	Content analysis
		9 semi structured interviews (3 post *processfolio*; 3 post course) with students	Thematic analysis
	2 teachers	Relational interviews and one-semi structured interview post-course with both teachers	Thematic analysis

Table 3.2: Overview of data sets

3.4. Developing validity criteria

Burns (2005), based on the work of Anderson et al (1994) and Lather (1993), suggests five categories of validity as criteria for evaluating AR: democratic, outcome, process, catalytic and dialogic. These provide the basis for my final evaluation of the project in Chapter Ten.

Democratic validity is the extent to which all perspectives and voices are taken into account. This includes the need to act ethically and responsibly to ensure the wellbeing of all involved. As we have seen above, a critical approach to AR would go further in this to suggest that participants should be more than included in the research but an integral part of decision-making in design and dissemination. In this thesis, democratic validity thus refers to the students' and teachers' levels of engagement with and participation in the assessment evaluation and the interpretation of the data as co-constructors of praxis.

Outcome validity is not simply 'solving' the problem, rather how the problem can be re-framed to generate new questions or understandings. McNiff (2013, p.126) cautions against the desire for "happy endings" or the judging of outcomes as performance rather than the process of learning. The success or otherwise of this AR project was the extent to which there is change, conceptualised as absence rather than difference. In critical realism, difference is replacing one thing with another while absenting is the creating of space for change to occur. Change is the emergence of new understandings, the process of losing some of one's old ways of thinking, reinforcing or confirming others (Bhaskar, 2008). This may mean that the evaluative criteria for the level of change will not be the same for all contexts or indeed all participants (Townsend, 2013), and this was something for me to bear in mind working within the highly constrained context of EAP pre-sessionals.

Process validity is the nature of how the research is conducted, for example the systematic inquiry, ethical considerations, and the maintenance of reflection and reflexivity in questioning my biases and assumptions throughout the implementation of a project. In a critical realist approach, validity is ontological truth in addition to methodological, which includes being explicit about my values and seeking explanations at the level of the real (Bhaskar, 2016); therefore, necessitating an interpretive approach which does not necessarily take participants views at face value. Lather's (1986) seminal work on ideological research emphasises the necessity of methodological checks on empirical studies, even when accounting for theoretical validity of such research. The notion of 'credibility' of interpretations must be assured and the 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the research secured to the best of my ability. O' Hanlon (2003) talks of the need for depth of data as a criterion

for rigour, for example triangulation (Silverman, 2014), or the corroboration of findings through a comparison of different types of data sets or methods of data collection as a common technique of asserting validity for qualitative approaches (Cohen et al, 2013). This can be seen at the level of truthfulness and comprehensibility in the account of the process and its justifications (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009).

Catalytic validity is defined by Lather (1986) as the extent to which the capacity for self-determination is inspired in participants to work for continual change, especially upon the conclusion of the project. Criteria for success of this project will be determined at the individual level as "learners' reports about the growth of their capacity for self-determination in the domain on which the research focuses," and at the collective level as "whether researched subjects and other actors obtain more transforming power and influence on the process of decision-making" (Boog, 2003, p. 434). More crucially here, it is the ability of both teachers and students to feel "causally efficacious" (Shipway, 2011) to enact change as agents, as well as aware of the awareness of the constraints on that causal efficacy.

Finally, **dialogical validity** is communication or dissemination of the research to a wider audience for critical evaluation. A key concern of AR is the dissemination of knowledge generated by action, the 'making public' (Stenhouse, 1981) and to whom this should be communicated. Writing is part of reflection and therefore is fundamental to the process as well as the product of research (Townsend, 2013; McNiff, 2013). In traditional research approaches, the researcher owns the data and therefore decides what to do with it (Boog, 2003), whereas the writing up of AR should be a shared product in addition to a shared process (Stenhouse, 1980); however, as I have stated above, the nature of my conducting AR as part of doctoral study placed constraints on this (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002; Townsend, 2013). Yet the sharing of the knowledge learned through the research is fundamental for the desired goal of transformational change (Mohr et al, 2004) and the voices of the participants must be heard in the communication of research results to conform to the ethos of participation and collaboration (Burns, 2005). This includes submitting to scrutiny and critical feedback of others, including in this case my students and colleagues as participants, other stakeholders as indirect participants and the wider EAP and academic community. To be dialogically valid, the research should be able to be communicated to practitioners at Barksdale and the wider EAP community for critical evaluation. Hence, discourse of the research reports must be for practitioners primarily in order to conform to the tenets of AR (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009) by using a first- person perspective. Ironically, given that academic discourse is subject of inquiry for this project, I am aware that these discourses do not conform to the accepted discourse of academic publications. I addressed this discrepancy by producing a longer report for the

academic community and shorter reports for practitioners in a variety of genres, such as oral or poster presentations, reports and interactive workshops (Somekh, 1995; Burns, 2005).

Conclusion

This chapter has justified my approach to the research from a critical realist perspective on AR and how AR, although not a traditional methodological framework for EAP assessment research, provides a means for investigating and changing disempowering assessment practices. Chapter Three focuses in detail on the two main consequences of these practices: on students' agency in learning and assessment situations and on the ability of students to conceptualise themselves as developing writers.

Chapter Four: Reconnaissance I: the literature

Overview

The reconnaissance cycle of an AR project is a fact-finding mission (Elliot, 1991) with two functions: to give a fuller picture of the problematic situation; and to investigate the possibilities for intervention, "not just what *is* done but what *can be* done" (McNiff, 2013, p. 90). In other words, reconnaissance "will help […] decide where (to) best exert an effect" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982, p.8). This cycle established the specific foci of the research problem through an iterative process of literature investigation and empirical evidence from the Barksdale context. For clarity, I have represented this cycle in two parts: the literature and the methods/findings. This chapter presents the former.

As we have seen in previous chapters, based on Messick's (1989) concept of consequential validity, Saville (2010) and Fulcher (2012) propose the examination of *impact* as one area for assessment research, where evidence is found of intended and unintended effects on individuals and on society. I selected key theoretical critiques of assessment in the fields of EAP and ELT, and, because the language assessment literature is often lacking in a broader view of the influence of assessment on learning, I used key literature from the field of HE. Drawing on these two fields within a localised study of assessment impact attempts to address a gap in the literature on EAP writing assessment research: that of the relationship between agency and assessment.

The chapter is organised by my two overarching research concerns. The first section explores how current EAP writing assessment practices might constrain students' agency in learning and assessment situations. This section is further sub-divided into two main issues of dependence on judgement of others, and a surface approach to learning as a reaction to alienation. The second section explores how product-only writing assessment might impede the ability of students to conceptualise themselves as developing writers in two main ways: the effect on metacognitive awareness of writing processes and the understanding of writing as a complex social practice.

4.1. How assessment might constrain agency

Although I have discussed how the concept of agency relates to my approach to AR in Chapter Three, it is also the focus of the research inquiry itself. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss how it pertains to assessment and learning both here and in Chapter Six. Ahearn (2001, p.112) defines agency as the "socio-culturally mediated capacity to act." The socio-cultural aspect signals that agency is not an

inherent property of the individual but rather arises in interactions with the world at various levels (van Lier, 2008). The mediation aspect refers to how structure, defined as the organised social institutions and patterns of interaction, or "sets of internally related objects or practices" (Sayer 1992, p.92) which constitute society, both enables and constrains the individual. Agency, therefore, emerges from interaction with contextual constraints, by engaging with and exerting influence over them (Mercer, 2012).

In this research, I conceptualise assessment as a structure which can mediate the formation of the self in either an enabling or constraining way (Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003). On EAP pre-sessionals, summative assessment largely acts as a constraint because assessment events or practices locate control in the hands of assessors. In EAP this is an external body or more commonly the teacher in the role as assessor, or some combination of both. Thus, there is an exercise of power over those subject to assessment (Boud, 2000). Students perform to a requirement external to themselves so assessment becomes an act done to or 'performed on' them (ibid, p.156), fundamentally constraining agency as the capacity to act. Therefore, students' ability to *feel* in control and *do* control (Mercer, 2012) by exercising influence over their educational experiences is thus impeded.

At this point, it is important to distinguish between the concept of learner autonomy (Little, 1995, Benson, 1997, Dörnyei, 2001) and agency, and why I use the latter. Leaner autonomy is defined as "the development of a capacity for thinking and acting independently" (Littlewood, 1996, p.428). This is elaborated upon by Benson (1997) as consisting of three elements, the technical, the psychological and the political, the latter being associated with a more critical approach (Benson, 1997, 2008, 2010; Breen and Mann, 1997; Lamb, 2010). However, while autonomy is certainly an aspect of the agency construct (and is often considered by many, for example van Lier, 2010 to be synonymous to it), the term "learner autonomy" as most commonly espoused in ELT and EAP literature has largely adopted the technical approach. This approach emphasises autonomy as self-regulation and responsibility for one's own learning, a property of the individual at the expense of the social world (Toohey and Norton, 2003). Learner-training models of pedagogy underpinned by this approach can disempower students by assuming that agency is facilitated by good learning strategies rather than a critical consciousness of the potentially constraining nature of educational practices (Pennycook, 1997) such as assessment. As Karp (1986) states, an agent "refers to a person engaged in the exercise of power in the sense of the ability to bring about effects and to (re) constitute the world" (p.137). Although the technical and psychological constructs of autonomy have their place in educational contexts, when dealing with assessment as a structure which transcends the classroom, it is Benson's political version, or as it will be referred to here as agency, that is the focus of this project. Therefore literature

on autonomy and learning strategies in HE and EAP are largely excluded from this chapter.

Therefore, the first main focus of my literature search was how agentic learning feelings and behaviours may be negated or 'absented' (Bhaskar, 2008) by writing assessment practices and by assessment as a structure. This will be explored under two key themes that emerged in tandem from a comprehensive search of the literature (and from the empirical investigation in Chapter Five): dependence on others for judgement and adopting a surface approach to learning.

4.1.1. Dependence on others for judgement

In the first place, assessment can impede self-efficacy, which is a key component of agency. Bandura's (1982; 1997) seminal work in the field of educational psychology has much to contribute to an understanding of agency. He defines self-efficacy as both the ability to understand the behaviours which produce desired effects and the capacity for self-belief that those effects can be achieved. Thus, students must know the expectations of academic discourse to be deemed successful writers, and must cultivate belief in their writing ability. As we have seen in Chapter Two, one main function of an EAP pre-sessional course is to build students' confidence in their abilities and acquire academic literacy skills that enable them to participate as members of a discourse community (Wingate, 2012). However, the nature of product-only writing assessment can impact on self-efficacy both as self-belief and the actual ability to evaluate choices and performance (Benson, 2010). When students' writing proficiency is assessed by samples of writing performance only, they conceptualise their writing as 'output' or 'ends' of learning, rather than focusing on the means with which their processes of learning and writing is taking place and questioning whether they have control or influence over those processes (Elbow, 1991; Black and Wiliam, 1998). A study by Newman et al (2003) in the USA which examined EAP students' attitudes to academic achievement found that those who focused on grades were unable to understand the difference between learning processes and outcomes as defined by those grades. Compared to students who focussed on what they had learned, they were more dependent on the teacher to judge the quality of their writing and, ironically, less successful in the tests themselves. This can partially explain the phenomenon of students retaking SELTS many times in succession hoping to achieve a higher score without understanding the nature of language proficiency (Green, 2007). Hence, applying Bandura's criteria for self-efficacy, assessment can render students unable to comprehend for themselves the learning behaviours which would produce desired outcomes.

Secondly, there is the engagement with marking criteria. It is unrealistic to expect students to be unconcerned with their grade, especially given the high-

stakes context and its structural forces described in Chapter Two. Indeed, many students claim that grades provide direction and motivation even within formative assessment (Lam and Lee, 2009). However, to understand how to achieve a grade without impeding their learning processes, students need to recognise and question criteria which exemplify the grades through facilitative discussions and activities (Wolf et al, 1991; Nicol, 2010). According to Hughes (2003), the move from discrete-point or indirect testing of the skills thought to underpin the construct of writing (such as cohesion and lexis though cloze and multiple choice) towards samples of writing performance led to Glaser's (1963) development of criterion-referenced testing for writing. While this move can be seen as inherently more valid by using band descriptors of performance, the application of criteria is not unproblematic. Research has shown that unless students actively engage with criteria in a sustained way, comprehension of requirements are unlikely to be understood (O' Donovan et al, 2001; Elander et al, 2006; Carless, 2011). This can lead to feelings of anxiety and powerlessness, or 'learned helplessness' where a sense of control over one's own actions around assessment is negated (Wiliam, 2007; Akca, 2011). This can help to explain the disconnection between understanding the desired effects as specified by ends or outcomes of learning in criteria and the capacity or confidence to achieve these (Black and Wiliam, 1998, 2009).

A third issue connected with dependency is students' application of formative feedback. Formative assessments are a key component of EAP courses, as shown in Chapter Two, and extensive, time-consuming written feedback is given by the tutor, yet a common complaint among teachers is that students fail to apply this feedback effectively (Ferris, 1997; Dam and Legenhausen, 2011). Some students are highly motivated by formative writing assignments and see the opportunities for learning, consistent with research on motivation and approaches to learning (Birenbaum, 2007; Dörnyei and Otto, 1998). Others become stressed and disheartened by their indicative grades. Although feedback is an inherent part of assessment practices, it is not within the scope of this project to do justice to a growing body of EAP and HE literature on the characteristics and discourse power relations inherent within feedback (Lea and Street, 1998; Carless, 2006; Leki, 2006). The focus here is on how the nature of feedback can be determined by the assessment context.

Boud and Falchikov (2006) state that a key function of assessment is to provide students with the opportunity to make judgements about their own work rather than submitting to the judgements of others. Thus, even positive feedback can be a means of controlling behaviour, according to van Lier (2013), if students do not understand their strengths for themselves. When learning is defined by the teacher, whether by a grade or through one-directional written feedback, it impacts on a "consciously experienced sense of progress" (ibid, p.185). If students cannot question and improve the quality of their work, they lack understanding of behaviours that would facilitate self-efficacy in writing (Wolf

et al, 1991). Due to time constraints, feedback on the pre-sessional occurs in an information transfer from teacher to student, through a formalised process (see Chapter Two) in the medium of writing presented as a product, with little room for dialogue or student response (Nicol and McFarlane-Dick, 2006). Sadler (2010) criticises this method of feedback as one-directional 'telling', the main purpose of which is to provide information about past performance, rather than foster the capacity to transfer skills to future learning situations independent of the teacher. Good practices of helping students to self-evaluate can then become little more than 'criteria compliance' (Torrance, 2007; Lam, 2016). This situation is no different from general HE situations; however within the time-constrained and high stakes context of a pre-sessional, teachers may inadvertently foster dependency in their students by reverting to Sadler's (2010) 'telling' of how to pass the course. This tendency is exacerbated by the precarious position of the temporary summer teacher who might obtain a permanent contract if s/he gains a reputation for having many of her/his students pass (Smith and Coombe, 2006). However, helping students in this way does not allow them to "conceptualise the act of assessment for themselves" (Boud and McDonald, 2003, p.211).

Finally, assessment can be considered to be a constraint on agency when it is set by an external agenda that not only fails to meet the "needs" of the test-taker (McNamara, 2001), but more problematically, leads those assessed to inculcate the values of the system and equate them with their own needs. This situation is of course not unique to EAP. A wider literature search of assessment in HE reveals a historical rationale for assessment as a prerequisite for the function of industrial or capitalist societies: to have a means of allocating roles, and to be able to judge the competence in those roles and the skills needed to perform them (Broadfoot, 1996). This was seen as a move towards equity and meritocracy to counter nepotism associated with pre-capitalist societies (ibid). Within EAP, the limited number of places for degree programmes and visas for international students creates competition and those who fail to achieve the requirements, in this case level of language proficiency, are deemed to have been subject to rational selection criteria, thus inadequate for that place.

In other words, standardised assessment can be seen a means of legitimising selection and regulating competition through the ideology of objective rationality. Assessment is "a moral activity" according to Brown and Knight (2012, p.25) meaning that when an assessment is constructed, it is, explicitly or implicitly, asserting the skills or knowledge to be valued. As the skills valued in a society reflect the culture or values of the dominant groups, assessment becomes a means of selecting those who hold or are willing to perpetuate those values (Shohamy, 2001; Johnston, 2003). While rational justifications in terms of equity cast assessment as an objective and neutral technology, in reality, an assessment event is not only concerned with the evaluation of the learning of skills and knowledge, but also serves the function of legitimatising, reinforcing

and sustaining certain ideologies and norms (Madaus, 1993; Boud, 2000), This is summarised by Snyder (1971) as the 'hidden curriculum.' In EAP, the hidden curriculum could be inculcating a construct of language proficiency through standardised SELTS as set by the UKVI (see Chapter Two). Hamp-Lyons (2000) talks of the 'industry' which has grown up around SELTs, from the proliferation of books and websites designed to help students prepare for the test and how little of that money is made by those with a vested interest in language pedagogy. The proliferation of testing bodies such as Pearson and Password vying for contracts with university EAP departments for test outsourcing support this claim (Ding and Bruce, 2017). Indeed, as discussed in Chapter Two, the idea that EAP assessment and large-scale standardised tests are synonymous serves certain economic interests. This point is crucial, as it requires that students accept an assessment system as fair and normal, and in turn reproduce this discourse around assessment for themselves. International students learning a foreign language in a foreign education system, the "strangers in academia" (Zamel, 1998) do not necessarily know what those needs are at the stage of a pre-sessional EAP course and are thus especially susceptible to an exercise of power through assessment of their writing and academic proficiency (Leung et al, 2016).

These concepts are also explored in wider educational literature. Not only are assessment practices imposed on passive objects by active subjects (Friere, 1973), but also by subjects on themselves through the process of individualisation or *subjectifcation* (Foucault, 1982). One is constrained by one's own sense of self when the individual in fact becomes an object to be described (ibid) and made visible (Ball, 2012), in this case through grades or criterion descriptors. Reay and Wiliam (1999) provide an example in their research on the impact of grading on younger students in terms of the way they internalise the grades given to them in external appraisals and learn to judge themselves as successes or failures or define themselves by the grade. This is most commonly applicable to the example of quantitative judgements in exam scores (Boud and Falchikov, 2006) but may be equally true of the more qualitative EAP criterion-referenced research writing, which can be seen by students as a judgement on their identity. This is sustained by the neo-liberal discourse of making students responsible for their own learning, which Torrance (2015) terms responsibilisation. This falsely equates autonomy with agency. The autonomous learner is responsible for her/his own success or failure in their "willingness to comply with the process" (ibid, p. 9) of assessment rather than question it as an unjust structure which constrains the choices of the agent. The equating of performance with self, inherent to Lyotard's (1984) notion of performativity and which has been referenced explicitly in mainstream educational literature (Broadfoot, 1999; Ball, 2012; Torrance, 2015) is pertinent to EAP. The discourse of EAP assessment at Barksdale around criteria, such as 'descriptors' and 'indicators,' adheres to this notion of performing the individual

through the collection of information about them with which to make decisions. A "potentially robust sense of self is replaced by a publicly judged self" (Breen and Mann, 1997, p.139), as students internalise and reproduce discourses around their assessment performances.

4.1.2. Adopting a surface approach to learning

Assessment is fundamental to educational situations to the extent it can be "the single biggest influence on how students approach their learning" (Rust et al, 2005, p.231). As Alderson et al (2017) point out, EAP assessment has not traditionally been concerned with learning theory. The theory of deep and surface learning approaches was formulated by Marton and Säljö (1976) and developed by Prosser and Trigwell (1999), who distinguished between approaches of instrumental memorisation for short-terms goals (information reproduction) and more meaning-seeking longer term approach to learning (knowledge transformation). The approaches are not considered to be inherent; rather they are largely determined by students' perceptions of their learning context and their place within it, an issue particularly pertinent to EAP students. Assessment is a key factor in shaping the choice of approach (Entwistle and Entwistle, 1991). On one hand, it can support a disposition to learn through motivation based on achievement (Popham, 1987; Krapp, 2005), and studies recount students' positive experiences of exams and assessment on their self-efficacy and feelings of competence (Falchikov and Boud, 2007). On the other hand, a student's disposition to learn can be impeded by assessment practices (Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003).

Ryan and Deci (2014) distinguish between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in learning, the former being driven by external rewards. In the case of EAP pre-sessional, the reward is a place on a degree programme, with its affordances of economic and social advancement. Psychological research on extrinsic rewards claims that engagement in an activity such as an assessment is heightened if that activity provides information about the students' personal competence (Arnold, 1974 in Bandura, 1982). However, if EAP assessment is seen by students as a gate-keeping exercise it can lead students to concentrate only on what they need to do to demonstrate performance outcomes and 'get though,' rather than engage on a deeper, more intrinsic, level with academic discourse, knowledge acquisition and other facets of intellectual life (McNamara, 2005; Chan, 2013). Miller and Partlett's (1974) seminal work on assessment impact refers to this phenomenon as "playing the game," showing that students can become "resolutely instrumental" in the face of assessment regimes (p.49). If students see assessment as a threat or as a hoop to jump though, 'motivation' manifests itself as a surface approach to language and academic literary acquisition, in order to reduce the risk to their sense of agency (Rust, 2002).

Assessment can narrow the curriculum, preventing teachers from doing things which are not directly related to the assessments, the washback phenomenon referred to in Chapter Two. Students often concern themselves only with what needs to be learned for a particular type of writing assessment, for example to memorise rhetorical formula for a short discursive essay. As a result, a student might be unable to make critical connections between learning events so that skills and knowledge are transferred to other contexts (Gipps, 1994; Newman et al, 2003). This inability manifests itself in difficulty with different assignment tasks or understanding how core concepts such as criticality are applicable to different assessment genres or disciplines. This narrowing of the curriculum can occur regardless of construct validity, the ability of the test to measure skills which are thought to underlie the construct (Messick, 1996). Research has suggested that coursework, such as the Barksdale research essay is perhaps a more valid assessment of writing than timed-writing exams, likely to elicit deeper approaches to learning (Gibbs and Simpson, 2005). However, Tang (1994) among others, has shown that it is the students' perceptions of the assessment demands rather than the assessments' intentions which determine a surface or deep engagement. Therefore, factors other than the validity of the assessment must be taken into account, including the micro and macro context in which the students are learning.

Indeed, taking a surface approach could be seen in fact an agentic choice (Mann, 2001). Students usually undertake an EAP course as a mandatory prerequisite to entering their chosen degree programme; thus, are not necessarily intrinsically engaged with the learning of English, nor might they see the possible benefits of taking a preparatory course in academic literacy when comparing their peers who have scored higher on a SELT to obtain unconditional direct entry with what can be perceived as less effort (Pilcher and Richards, 2017). In light of the high fees that students will pay for a pre-sessional and its intensive nature, it can be seen that adopting a surface approach to passing is a pragmatic reaction to structural constraints (Rust, 2002; Naidoo and Jamieson, 2006). The approaches to learning theory has been critiqued for its lack of focus on structural factors and the interplay between agency and structure (Ashwin, 2008). In addition, it has been critiqued for its potential to misunderstand and stigmatise some cultural education systems, such as those of many EAP students, which typically value surface approaches (Clark and Gieve, 2008). Therefore, although throughout this thesis I will use the term 'surface approach' to describe the manifestation of behaviours around assessment such as memorisation, I was concerned with a wider sociological perspective on the interaction of structure and agency, i.e. how assessment impacts on student' ability to exercise agency in learning situations as a response to alienation.

The Marxian concept of alienation of the individual from the means of production in economics has been applied by a number of scholars to an increasing trend visible in students in HE (Mann, 2001; Case, 2008). An

alienated state is the antithesis of engagement and is an obstacle to the exercise of agency defined as "powers of ongoing reflexive monitoring of both self and society, which enables this subject to make commitments in a genuine act of solidarity" (Archer, 2007, p.295). It is characterised here by a feeling of lack of control and a lack of ability, perceived or real, to exercise influence over one's situation (Case, 2004). Case (2008) defines three arenas of alienation: entering university; fitting in and trying to stay there, all of which are impacted by disempowering assessment practices. International students are vulnerable in all three arenas in that the forces of globalisation in their own countries often mean that they may not be intrinsically interested in their discipline or in learning English but rather are pursuing a British education for the purposes of increased social status and/or greater opportunities for paid employment that is conferred with a degree from a UK university (Mann, 2001). EAP students are often considered to be in a period of transition (Gourlay, 2009) and expected to assimilate a new academic culture (Tinto, 1993). In addition to the feeling of being an outsider in the university system by virtue of language and academic culture, when students do not have faith in the assessment system or feel powerless in the face of it (Mann, 2001), the constraints on personal authenticity and increased anxiety can suppress the will to exercise agency (Archer, 2012).

Of course, with the necessity to pay high international student fees in the context of global GDP inequities, the typical EAP student is rarely from a disadvantaged background in their own country (Vandrick, 2010) and I am in no way claiming this is a marginalised group. However, on a more global scale, as discussed in Chapter Two, the competition for university places and degrees based on the acquisition of English as a global language of education is itself part of a structure which is perpetuates privilege (ibid). Students may feel under increasing pressure from family and society to compete for these places, returning to Marx's original concept of alienation as the "fragmentation of the social body into isolated individuals" (Meszaros, 1970, p.35). As we have seen above, viewing assessment as an individualistic event suits a neo-liberal economic ethos, where competition and individual achievement is the basis of distribution of resources and social capital. Assessment is an example of structure here which can negate or absent the ability of the agent to mediate between their personal desires and identity on one hand, and their social and relational concerns on the other; therefore facilitating the desire for purely individual success (Archer, 2000).

Alienation is pertinent as a concept in pre-sessional writing in that it has been linked to a rejection of deeper learning approaches and intrinsic motivation that manifests itself in such behaviours as plagiarism. Plagiarism is a complex concept, much debated in the literature on international students (Carroll, 2007; Pennycook, 1996), and it is not within the parameters of this paper to discuss the subject in detail. But a pertinent element of plagiarism is as a manifestation of a surface approach to assessment due to alienation. Qualitative studies by

Ashworth et al (1997) on home students, and Hayes and Introna (2005) on international students, found several students justified plagiarism as an overt reaction to stress, competition for places, or a perception of assessment as flawed. Students felt cheating was legitimate if they perceived assessment practices to be unfair or if there was a feeling of powerlessness, especially in a foreign system, where they have become "alienated from the process, purpose and meaning of the assessment" (p.23). Here, plagiarism is an agentic act whereby students may choose the surface approach to avoid risks to their own sense of identity (Mann, 2001). In Power's (2009) study of university students' self-reported motivations for plagiarism, lack of agency was a major theme: the choice *to* plagiarise was motivated by confusion over assignment expectations; while the choice *not to* plagiarise was motivated by fear of punitive consequences, rather than asserting their intellectual, moral and personal concerns.

Within the EAP curriculum, a key aspect is educating international students about UK academic conventions of citation, based on the contentious notion that international students are more likely to plagiarise than home students (Shi, 2006). Plagiarism is associated with notions of textual ownership and the ownership of one's own work. This can indeed be seen as a cultural difference in that students from some cultures view texts as property of society rather than the individual and where deference to an author is reflected in using the author's words (Pennycook, 1996). However, arguably, if the student does not feel in control of their own process of writing, and is not explicitly aware of the choices they are making, the incentive to plagiarise or the likelihood of reverting to familiar cultural norms are heightened. Indeed, the framing of plagiarism policies within assessment of writing as punitive can be seen to contradict the aim of EAP as preparatory and developmental. Research has suggested that 'plagiarism' can be the first step for a writer in developing their own voice by emulating that of others (Pecorari and Petrić, 2014). When plagiarism policy is not framed as a cultural practice underpinned by a Western individualistic notion of textual ownership, but rather as a universal morality, plagiarism policies can be seen as an imposition of authority (Power, 2009). Students who do not fully understood the ideological nature of plagiarising and do so by mistake could feel more alienated from academic writing when teachers falsely conceptualise their plagiarism as purely an agentic act of cheating (ibid).

In summary, this part of the chapter has explored how assessment can constrain agency. Two overarching themes of the impact of assessment on students' ability to exercise agency in learning and assessment situations have been identified: dependence on the judgement of others and taking a surface approach to learning due to a sense of alienation. EAP pedagogical practices may mitigate such problems in facilitating a deeper approach to learning and an ability to self-evaluate, but current assessment is likely to impede the ability of students to engage in genuine acts of social and individual agency.

4.2. Negative Impacts on students' ability to conceptualise themselves as developing writers

This section explores the second research concern: the ability of students to conceptualise themselves as developing writers. This is ***not*** the same as the development of writing ability itself, which I see as something more tangible, and which is dependent on factors such as the pedagogy of the course. As such it would be somewhat perverse to suggest that pre-sessional assessment does harm to the students' writing *development*. Rather, the research focus here is the impact of assessment on how students *conceive of the construct which is being assessed*, in this case, the act of writing as a process of development rather than a performance. This becomes problematic if their construct of writing leads to a view of themselves as correct or incorrect, successful or unsuccessful writers with an unrealistic picture of the complex iterative nature of academic research writing.

The literature in this section has largely been selected from theories of writing in the fields of EAP and ELT, in which there is a much more developed body of literature than in assessment impacts. Although the common knowledge base of EAP writing is derived from social constructivist perspectives (Ding and Bruce, 2017), I have turned also to literature which reflects a more cognitive process-based approach, i.e., key theories of metacognition of writing development which relate directly to the impact of EAP assessment: the understanding of writing as a process. I have distinguished between two main negative impacts which can be placed on a spectrum of more individualistic to more social conceptualisations of writing. The first section explores the impact on students' understanding of writing itself as a process, including metacognitive awareness of their own writing processes, while the second examines possible impacts on students' ability to conceive of writing as a social practice and process.

4.2.1. Effects on metacognitive awareness of the writing process

According to Pintrich (2002), metacognition involves both knowledge about learning in general and knowledge of one's own learning. It is considered part of the construct of agency because it is generally referred to as the ability to control and monitor one's own thinking, although it is generally thought of as a cognitive, therefore individual, aspect of agency (Hacker et al, 2009; Negretti, 2012). This section focuses on how writing assessment in EAP can negatively affect the knowledge of the learning being assessed, that is, the construct of writing itself. When international students join a pre-sessional, their experience of writing in English, and often in their first languages (L1) in HE systems, has been that of timed written examinations (Lam, 2017). However, as shown in Chapter Two, on the Barksdale pre-sessional, writing is assessed summatively

by both a timed-writing exam and a source-based research essay. I shall address the timed-writing here first. It has been suggested that writing under time pressure may be an authentic method of assessment in EAP in terms of simulating written examinations on university courses (Horowitz, 1986). This may be the case, particularly at undergraduate level; however, innovations in UK HE assessment practices are precipitating a move away from traditional examinations as the primary means of assessing students at all levels (Sambell, 2016). We have already seen that recent research has poured scepticism on IELTS as an equivalent to an assessment of academic literacy (Leung et al, 2016; Pilcher and Richards, 2017). If this model is the main method of assessment, it can perpetuate the assumption that an EAP pre-sessional is merely a high-level exam preparation course (Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015).

However, the more fundamental concern of this project is that the continued application of a SELT model of writing in EAP could have far-reaching consequences for how students conceptualise the nature of writing itself. Attempting to compartmentalise skills to benchmark to SELTs fosters a narrow conceptualisation of academic writing. In other words, it creates what it intends to measure (Hanson, 2000). Hayes and Flower (1986) identified through think-aloud protocols the practices of good L1 writers, including clarifying purposes of texts, planning, drafting and revising, and identifying dissonance between their intended message and their text. Manchón (2011) describes the nature of writing as a mode of learning, encompassing both process and a product which can allow for recursive and reflexive feedback immediately as the writer can review their product as the process is occurring; hence, learning occurs through the activity of writing. Yet, according to Lam (2017), EFL and EAP writing is largely product-based, focusing on replication of genres and, while drafting may be encouraged, it is usually not explicitly part of the curriculum. This is particularly the case with timed-writing exams, where writing is judged by a one-shot sample of performance, usually the discursive essay (Hyland, 2003), and based on first responses to an unseen topic (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 2000).

If writing is a process of discovering what one wants to say (Zamel, 1982), it is therefore integral to the process of learning about that which one is writing. As Hacker et al (2009, p.160) claim, writing is "applied metacognition." Therefore, if learning is a recursive rather than linear process, as Pintrich (2002) asserts, so is writing itself. When writing in L1 or L2 situations such as EAP is assessed as a regurgitation of a memorised topic, or a first response to a topic which is not relevant to a student's chosen discipline or interest, the actual learning which takes place through the medium of writing is minimal. Furthermore, because the type of learning which takes place is determined by its representation according to Eisner (1982), in the words the process (learning about writing) is determined by the product (timed writing exams), the surface approaches discussed in section 4.1.2 are further encouraged by a reduction of learning to a particular model. Furthermore, an excessive focus on the mechanics of writing, the

emphasis on first time accuracy, and the framing of writing as a performance, leads to anxiety and fear around writing (Lee, 2008; Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011).

At Barksdale, the research essay is more highly weighted than the timed-writing exam, which represents a recognition of the inadequacies of timed-writing to assess the construct of research writing in the academy (Schmitt and Hamp – Lyons, 2015). However, the seemingly more authentic research-essay assessment also reinforces the conceptualisation of writing as a product. There are two main reasons for this.

Firstly, despite the influence on EAP pedagogy of theories of writing as a social practice rather than a series of rhetorical features (Luke, 1996) a skills-and-systems focus dominates assessment criteria which separates meaning from language and focuses on topic sentences, nominalisation, hedging and so on **(see Appendix i**), reflecting the dominance of timed-writing construct because of the legitimacy conferred on SELTS. As we have already seen above, such assessment criteria can, at best, negate alternative pedagogies of writing if they are incongruent with the assessment, and, at worst, form the basis of the EAP syllabus and define how writing is taught. A study by Rouse et al (2017) in US university political science writing found that first-year students were better able to conceptualise writing of a literature review as an iterative process than fourth-year students who had been explicitly taught the process as a series of linear steps to meet assessment criteria. The further students progressed in their degree, the less confident they felt as writers because of the disconnection between what they were taught about writing and the reality they were experiencing as writers.

Rouse et al's study is particularly pertinent to my context. The time-constrained nature of pre-sessional courses necessitates the teaching of skills for students to produce a summative assignment, which can lead to a washback formalisation of writing whereby the process is taught, if at all, as a linear activity from researching to proofreading (Brown and Stephens, 1995). Studies by Lee (2016) and Negretti (2017) emphasise the importance of planning and drafting work as a means for students to self-evaluate. Assessing only the product negates this practice, discouraging students from taking risks (Weigle, 2002) and compounding pre-existing attitudes among students who cannot conceptualise their development of and engagement with learning itself as anything other than a performance for a grade. According to Emig, (1983), writing reflects our inner speech to the outside world, establishing our place in it. If writers are unable to reflect on their experiences of writing and creating, they lose the sense of connection to themselves and others, reducing them to manufacturers of products and measured by output.

Secondly, the nature of product assessment perpetuates the view that learning is complete once the writing is completed. On the Barksdale pre-sessional course, students hand in their essays at the end of a stage, receive their grade and

feedback several days later, and begin a new assignment. Summative essays, due to the short window of time between recording grades and the admission progress, will receive little or no feedback. Therefore, students are denied the time and opportunity to explicitly engage in the key metacognitive process of reflection on their task by exploring cognitive and behavioural strategies which have made them successful or unsuccessful (Mezirow, 1991) or on their experiences, which can facilitate mindful self-understanding (Negretti, 2012). It also ignores the necessary attending to affective elements that precipitate reflection (Boud and Walker, 1993). This negates what students may have learned about themselves as writers and what they can transfer to other situations in future academic writing or assessment events (Cozart et al, 2016). Perhaps more worrying, because the consensus in educational theory is largely that reflection is central to learning (a more comprehensive treatment of reflection is provided in Chapter Six), if reflection is not only not part of the curriculum but actively negated by the nature of the assessment, there is no opportunity to increase the gap between those who may be naturally disposed to reflection and those who need help to facilitate a process which may be unnatural to them.

4.2.2. Effects on writing as a social practice and process

Much literature in EAP has focussed on the differences between an English for General Academic Purpose (EGAP) approach, where students are encouraged to write in a generic academic style and register and a discipline-specific or English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) approach (Flowerdew, 2016). As I stated in Chapter Two, the EGAP/ESAP debate is not the focus of this thesis, although emerging from the literature here and the empirical evidence from Chapter Five is the impact of assessment which encourages the student writer to emulate generic academic features to meet criteria without fully conceptualising the choices they have made as writers in their social world (Luke, 1996), or as a means of communicating ideas and knowledge to others. In a product and performance-oriented approach to writing, there is no requirement for students to justify the choices they have made to achieve the social goals of their writing or understand the disciplinary conventions. Writing is not seen as integral to its socio-cultural context and there are few opportunities for students to explore or even be aware of how information can change according to its audience or how knowledge can be co-opted and disseminated in textual form to serve a particular agenda (Kubota, 2014). The increasing focus on disciplinary discourses in pedagogies of writing, such as genre theories and Academic Literacies which will be explored in Chapter Six have had some influence on EAP courses in moving away from a traditional study skills and language focus. However, I would argue, for reasons explored in this chapter around the power of assessment, that even pedagogies which do attempt to engage with the socio-cultural contexts of textual practices would be negated by an assessment which

conceptualises writing as a generic performance using criteria benchmarked to SELTs (Pearson, 2017a).

Moreover, assessment practices impact on the development of personal identity as a writer. According to Ivanič (1998, p.3), writers are "positioned by their discourse choices," building on Halliday's (1978) notion of ideational meaning, or the communication between people in linguistic interactions. International students bring to the EAP classroom a series of shifting and, at times conflicting, identities (Morita, 2004), and one of their major choices in writing is how to position themselves in relation to an issue or to their reader. A focus on the text as product prevents students from mediating the dichotomy between an academic voice and their own self-expression (Ivanič, 1998) by raising awareness of these choices and constraints. The lack of opportunities for reflection and explicit justification of tacit choices (see 4.2.1) perpetuates this. In addition, as teacher feedback also as a written product (Nicol, 2010), students are often denied the opportunity to engage through teacher-student dialogue with their own textual practices and processes (Lillis, 2003).

A final aspect of writing as a social process which is impeded by assessment is how writing can be co-constructed. Students might peer review each other's drafts but this is often on a text they have individually produced (Badger and White, 2000), emphasising the idea that writing is a private act (Storch, 2011). Literature on peer evaluation (explored in Chapter Six) reports that students tend to focus only on surface-level grammatical errors (Richardson, 2000), which impedes the effectiveness of peer evaluation because they are commenting only on the product and not the process, and so not reflecting on and justifying choices. On one hand, cultural aspects come into play here as students might feel that the judgement of their work is the responsibility of the teacher alone (Zhang, 1995), or face-saving in group situations could make students reluctant to criticise their peers' work (Brown and Levinson, 1997). On the other hand, it is likely that the assessment reinforces an individualistic attitude that writing is indicator of personal ability (Storch, 2011) and the danger that on high-stakes gate-keeping courses constructive peer review can be seen as collusion (Yeo, 2007).

In summary, current writing assessment practices can be damaging to pre-sessional students' ability to conceptualise themselves as developing writers in two main ways. They may be prevented from understanding writing as constructing meaning within a discourse community, and the wider social world, or to metacognitively reflect on their choices and processes as writers within that social world.

Conclusion

A review of the literature clarified and confirmed many of my concerns as a practitioner and formed the two over-arching foci (Stringer, 2004) to inform the research inquiry. An iterative process to investigate these issues at Barksdale to "show the situation as it is" (McNiff, 2013, p.15) and gain insight into the particular setting involved both literature and empirical investigation. Therefore, Chapter Five will describe in more detail how my initial empirical investigation into the Barksdale pre-sessional in 2013 occurred in tandem with this literature review and provided a basis for formulating the next steps for action or intervention.

Chapter Five: Reconnaissance II: the empirical study

Overview

The wider context of EAP pre-sessionals has been described in Chapter Two and the literature on the negative impacts of writing assessment within this context in the previous chapter. In order to fully obtain, from a critical realist perspective, the interconnectedness, or totality of social phenomena (Bhaskar, 2008) in order to deepen understanding of the research context, this chapter presents the second part of the reconnaissance cycle, a small sample of individual students' experiences on the pre-sessional at Barksdale in order to form a microcosm of the wider assessment context (Boog, 2003).

This chapter follows the Planning, Action and Observation and Reflection stages of an AR cycle (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982). The first section describes the methods of data collection and analysis. The second presents and analyses the findings on students' assessment experiences both prior to attending the Barksdale pre-sessional and of the assessment of writing on the pre-sessional itself. The third section reflects on how the findings were used to plan the next steps of the intervention.

The small-scale study revealed evidence of the two main negative impacts of writing assessment at Barksdale: that of an impediment to both students' ability to exercise agency over learning and assessment situations, and to conceptualise oneself as a developing writer due to the focus on product over process.

5.1. Planning: methods

According to Townsend (2013), the first stages of an AR project are refining a focus and conducting reconnaissance. Reconnaissance, a military term, was used by Lewin (1946) as an analogy to describe the process of investigating the context to refine the general idea or research focus. It attempts to describe and explain (Elliot, 1991) the situation through fact-finding and analysis. This cycle could be likened to the critical realist process of retroduction (Houston, 2010), which begins with a question at the level of the actual (what the negative impacts of writing assessment are), posits causal mechanisms at the level of the real (the reasons for the negative impacts) and seeks evidence at the level of the empirical (how the data reveals the impacts and their reasons). Hence, what is often a planning stage in AR grew into a distinct cycle in this project.

5.1.1. Participants

In line with an AR framework, at this point I began to widen the research inquiry to draw in other people (McTaggart, 1991). I discussed my plans with the pre-sessional course coordinators, who gave me permission to recruit students for interviews. Participants were recruited on a volunteer basis (randomly self-selected), although in order to ensure consistency, all were 9-week stage postgraduates who were entering at this point in the course on the same or similar levels of language proficiency as measured by a standardised SELT. These students were from a variety of chosen disciplines; however, as they would be assessed in the same way on the pre-sessional, as Heigham and Sakui (2009, p.94) state, "the research then focuses on common behaviours experiences or identities shared by the group in order to reveal the culture people share." The call for volunteers took place during the students' first day induction, and students signed up to a volunteer list after the induction. Volunteers were then emailed with prospective times and dates for them to choose at their own convenience, and an ethical consent form to read.

10 students initially volunteered and were emailed, although four were later omitted from the data as they were unable to attend both interviews. The remaining six participants were as follows:

Mariko (Japanese, female)

Luis (Brazilian, male)

Pai-han (Taiwanese, male)

Ji-yeon (Korean, female)

Alice (French, female)

Shuling (Chinese, female)

The ratio of females to males on pre-sessional courses is disproportionate, so it is not surprising that interviewees were predominantly female. The surprising variety of L1s of the participants was purely coincidental and largely not representative of the nationality demographic of pre-sessionals at Barksdale, which is mainly made up of Chinese speakers. The size of the sample limits the ability of the data to inform a comprehensive picture of the course and its students. However, as has been seen above, rather than generalisability, the interviews can be judged by their transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), or the potential of providing a 'thick' description of their experiences (Geertz, 1973).

5.1.2. Ethical conduct

As with any research pertaining to people, ethical considerations were taken into account. This is not more so within AR than with other research methodologies (Stringer, 2004); however, as has been described in Chapter Three, ethics was central to the project and I remained vigilant throughout the procedure. The British Educational Research Association (2011) Guidelines (BERA) formed my basic minimum standard for ethical procedures.

I obtained ethical clearance through the University of Nottingham in the stipulated procedure before the study. I informed students of the project through a specifically designed guide, with reasons for its being undertaken and its affiliations (identifying myself as a PhD student of University of Nottingham as well as a Barksdale employee); ensuring that it was clear to participants what they would have to do and the benefits of taking part, such as practicing speaking and potentially influencing future assessment at Barksdale, as well as potential disadvantages in terms of giving their time for interviews (Creswell, 2013). Aspects of confidentiality and maintaining anonymity (Winter, 1989) were pertinent here, as I was concerned that the students be made aware that their names would not be passed on to course coordinators, and indeed the course coordinators were never aware of who was participating in the interviews. I felt at this stage that it was important that these students were not ones that I had or would teach myself, hence the choice of recruiting volunteers from a later stage that I was not timetabled to teach on. This was not to reduce bias in selection (Newby, 2010) but for students to feel more comfortable expressing potentially negative opinions about the course and the assessment without fear of prejudice. It was made clear to students that they were able to drop out at any point, without giving a reason and without affecting their pre-sessional results (BERA, 2011).

All names have been changed to protect identities. While the argument can be made that anonymity reduces the voice and agency of the participants and that they should be given the option of being named (Rallis and Rossman, 2007), I felt it important here, given the nature of the project as being written and disseminated as part of doctoral study (Zeni, 2006), as well as taking into account the small world of UK EAP, that all participants should be given pseudonyms.

Interviews were conducted at the students' main site of study, outside class time and interviews were arranged via email at their own convenience. Participants were advised beforehand that they would be recorded, and that this would be stored in a careful manner according to the Data Protection Act, 1998 (BERA, 2011). Consent was obtained through written ethical consent forms, which were produced and printed as part of the University's ethical clearance application **(see Appendix ii).**

I had initial concerns that the language level of the students may be insufficient for them to be able to understand the technicalities of the consent form, a common problem highlighted by Burns (2005) within EFL research. This was addressed by explaining the form to all students at the induction recruitment and prior to the start of each interview (Spradley, 2016). I also offered students the option of having the document translated at my expense, but none of the participants requested this.

5.1.3. Interviews

Interviews were chosen as a means of data collection under a qualitative paradigm due to my preference for a more detailed and nuanced description of the situation with the first-hand experience of the students (Townsend, 2013). There were two sets of interviews, conducted at the beginning and the end of the course. The aim of the first interviews was to investigate participants' past experiences and opinions of SELTs. The aims of the second were to

a). discover whether the pre-sessional course assessment had confirmed or altered their views of writing compared to their previous assessment experiences;

b). explore their perceptions of their writing development over the course and the extent to which this might have been aided or impeded by the assessment;

c). investigate the extent to which students felt a sense of agency in the process of writing their assignment and the timed-writing exam.

The interviews were conducted in the final week of the course, after all assessments had taken place but no grades had been released. I did not want students' perceptions of their writing or of the assessment to be affected, positively or negatively, by the grades they had achieved.

I chose semi-structured interviews to allow some flexibility to explore issues (Richards, 2009) but with an interview guide for key themes and topics, as I felt some structure was needed to provide guidance for non-native speakers. There is some literature on the issues inherent in interviewing non-native speakers in terms of accuracy and ethics (Marschan-Peikkari and Reis, 2004), however little on the interaction in interviews. As an EAP teacher, however, I was aware of the potential necessity to reformulate questions in case of misunderstanding, to concept check where possible, and potential impact of asking leading questions in this process of clarifying or simplifying. In focusing more on rapport and the need to listen carefully and respond to the interviewees, I chose to audio-record the interviews for analysis at a later date rather than take notes during the interview, which I felt would be distracting for both parties (Richards, 2009).

5.1.4. Data Analysis

As this was a preliminary cycle, with only 12 interviews (2 x 6), coding software was not used. I felt using software could put distance between myself and the data, as Creswell (2013) cautions. Coding "enables researchers to describe data by topic, draw connections and develop theoretical concepts and identify themes" (Richards and Morse, 2007, p.150) in a qualitative approach. As the purpose of this data was to identify key concepts and themes relating to the research foci of agency and ability of students to conceptualise themselves as developing writers, rather than identifying linguistic features, I applied a basic content analysis, defined as a "research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p.1278). The terms content and thematic are often used interchangeably as terms to describe the same analytical process (Boyatzis, 1998). However, generally, content analysis is defined as a slightly more quantitative approach to coding (ibid) for looking at the frequency of themes. I adopted this method in this cycle as I was examining a cross-section of the pre-sessional cohort to obtain a picture of EAP pre-sessionals at Barksdale. Fletcher (2017, p.182) recommends a "flexible deductive process" to examine data within a critical realist stance, as it reflects the complexity of a situation without feeling the need to align itself solely with either a quantitative or qualitative paradigm. The codes are a mixture of descriptive and more interpretative approaches. This is because it was easy to assign a descriptive code when a student had an opinion about a topic, but as the nature of the project involves exploring agency and the impact of structures on the views and behaviours of students, it was necessary to interpret when an account represented a possible false example of this. According to Ashwin (2008), interviews as data are unhelpful for identifying structural constraints if the participants' narrative is only taken at face value. From a critical realist perspective, it was also important to look for absences in the data to represent a fuller picture of the context, the totality (Bhaskar, 1989), than only focusing on what was present.

The interviews were transcribed, and through a process of familiarisation with the data through many readings and initial note-taking, where students' accounts were assigned with *in vivo* tags, a preliminary tag based on the actual wording used by the participants (Creswell, 2013). These tags were tabulated to look for emerging patterns and frequencies, and then I assigned codes based on their connections. For an overview of this process see **Appendix iii**. I classify the interview as one data set, so I have not counted the number of times a code was stated by a specific student. The frequency thus refers to the number of students who mentioned it; i.e., the student is the unit of analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). Due to the size of the sample, the use of frequencies was more to look for recurring patterns rather than make generalisations. Miles and Huberman (1994) urge care in assuming that all codes are of equal importance and I felt that counting

frequencies may help to determine significance in a slightly more rigorous way. However, codes with frequencies of one have still been included in order to obtain a full picture of the situation, as it would be dangerous to dismiss small frequencies with such a small sample (ibid).

According to Gibbs, (2007), data-driven coding (when themes emerge for the data with no prior framework) and concept-driven coding (when codes are assigned a priori) are not mutually exclusive and can be placed on a continuum. As my empirical data collection and review of the literature took place in tandem during this AR cycle, this was an iterative process of allowing subthemes to emerge, which in turn allowed the two larger themes defining the focus of my research inquiry (and on which the semi-structured interview topic discussions were based) to be mapped back onto them (Saldana, 2013). The final presentation of this data is represented in **Appendix iii**. As can be seen, there is some overlap in themes (Newby, 2010). For example, a definition of writing as a set of structural or linguistic features is an example of a mechanical approach to writing *and* surface approach to learning. These codes were assigned colours to indicate overlapping themes.

As Marshall (2002) recounts, in qualitative data analysis, more can always be extracted from the data and it is difficult to know when to stop. Although a critical realist approach has given reconnaissance more significance than perhaps in many AR projects, prioritising the intervention cycles within this thesis was my pragmatic reason for the level of detail presented here.

5.2 Acting/Observing: analysing the findings[1]

As can be seen from the findings below, to a great extent, the students' experiences of SELTs prior to the pre-sessional in 2013 confirmed the literature on assessment impact described in Chapter Four. The findings from the second interviews were more complex in that the Barksdale pre-sessional clearly had some positive impacts, mainly in the students' increased awareness of writing as a process through having completed a research essay in addition to timed writing. However, there were clearly concerns that were confirmed in areas of agency, the conceptualisation of the writing process as linear and generic, and the largely sceptical attitude to any potential to exercise control over their assessment situation.

[1] All extracts are presented verbatim and language errors have not been corrected

5.2.1. Dependence on others for judgement

In the first interviews, with regards to SELTs, students can be said to express explicit awareness of assessment as being performed on them (Boud, 2000) and professed dissatisfaction with elements that left them feeling powerless. All students had previously taken a SELT as is required by the UKVI. Three students had taken IELTS and three had taken Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). At the time of these interviews, this was still a test accepted by the UKVI as entry to a UK university (since 2015 this is no longer the case). Four students had taken the test more than once (Shuling had taken the TOEFL five times) and one student had taken both tests. Three students explicitly talked about feelings of nervousness and anxiety in exam situations, consistent with Falchikov and Boud's (2007) findings. Five of the six students mentioned test preparation and the purchasing of books or materials specifically for these tests. This is all consistent with the concerns of such as Hamp-Lyons (2000, p.580) regarding the "multi-million dollar a year enterprise" of large-scale language testing, and the proliferation of material designed solely to prepare students for tests which determine access to UK higher education. The students questioned the fairness of the test and its fitness for purpose (see below) but did not elaborate on this facet of the SELT industry, commenting casually on the money spent in response to my question regarding their test preparation. However, when asked about the awareness of the purpose of the exam, Alice took a more macro view in her answer: "to be able to get into a British university (laughs)." I had intended the question to tease out whether test takers were aware of what was being tested in terms of language skills or otherwise, but Alice reflects a critical awareness of the gate-keeping nature of such testing systems (McNamara, 2005; Chan, 2013).

Pai-han, Shuling and Mariko mentioned the idea of 'luck' or 'randomness' in their test score. These students expressed bewilderment that they were unable to predict when they had done well, as several had obtained lower scores the second time they had taken it. For example, Mariko states: "I took three times and I thought the second one is best, but the score is not the same. The score was best was the third one but I don't know why." This 'arbitrariness' as an aspect of testing echoes findings of Falchikov and Boud (2007, p.150) in their study of emotional impact of HE assessment and of Sambell et al (1997) on students' perceptions of traditional assessment practices. Although criteria is given on the official websites (IELTS, 2018), this attempt to be ethical and transparent about test requirements seems insufficient if students are not engaging with this criteria (O'Donovan et al, 2001). It perhaps supports Newman et al's (2003) findings that if a student is purely grade-oriented, they are often unable to understand the difference between learning and assessment and therefore unable to rationalise their scores.

It is possible on one hand to say that these students expressed alienation from the process of assessment (Hayes and Introna, 2005) and this reflects their lack of faith in the system (Mann, 2001). On the other hand, their willingness to submit to a judgement of their writing performance equated with a score reflects a schizophrenic attitude that exams can foster in students. For Ji-yeon who questioned the validity of the test: "I am not sure the British Council...mmm ...examine what they want to test," she felt she got a lower score due to nervousness imposed on her through exam conditions. Yet when asked whether she thought the test was fair, said: "Yes, since I got minimum requirement." It was difficult to determine the level of irony in her statement. This could be seen as an inculcation of the values perpetuated by assessment. Ji-Yeon can see the assessment as fair now she has submitted to its judgement and become willing to uphold its values (Johnstone, 2003; Torrance, 2015). Pai-han reflects a similar disjuncture. His need to re-take the test, at some expense, is something he submits to in order to achieve his immediate agentic goal of attending a UK pre-sessional, but is also critically aware of the power of the SELT on his future in its role as gate-keeper of access to higher education (McNamara and Roever, 2006): "If I take the exam and the result would not be ideal, but it decide my final result, whether I can pass or fail." Pai-han represents the space where pragmatic choices hide a false consciousness of the reality of a constraining structure.

In the second interviews, the first thing to note was that four students expressed similar concerns regarding the timed examination part of the Barksdale writing assessment as with the SELTs: time constraints and the ensuing stress, as well as the restrictions on topic choice. Two students reiterated the point made in their previous interview that they felt timed examinations were "pointless" and "irrelevant." A study undertaken by Howell and Slaght at the University of Reading in 2007 indicated the different attitudes students had towards their assessments, a timed writing and a longer research project, in the same vein as Barksdale. They found that generally the project was viewed by the students as more important for development of future writing and research skills, whereas the timed test was seen as an indicator of success or failure. This is borne out by these interviews where all students believed the longer research essay was a more realistic construct of writing, and four students stated that the process of writing in an ideal world should be reflected in the grade for the essay.

However, despite the students' awareness of the value of authenticity in the research essay, when I asked which they felt was a better indicator of their writing ability, three chose the timed-writing and Alice attached equal importance due to the fact that timed-writing "can show tutors what our abilities are when under pressure." Ji-Yeon said that "outcome should be the thing you evaluate students on," yet, conversely, expressed the unfairness of the topic restriction which she felt had impacted her performance in the final exam. Pai-han and Shuling expressed awareness of the difficulties of including the writing

process as part of the final grade: that it would be impractical because teachers had no knowledge of individual students and commenting on subjective processes would be unfair. Ji-yeon reiterates this, but, despite my question reformulation and concept-checking, seems to have conflated the process of writing with measuring the students' individual learning progress, as can be seen in this vignette:

> *I think the final score should focus on final product. Because when you consider process, then it can be too subjective. We need objective criteria, right? So…actually, the tutors can't know where the students starts exactly…where is the starting point, so I think it's a better idea to have, like, to focus on final outcome.*

These students' views on the necessity of working under constraints correlated directly with their views on the fact that exam writing caused anxiety and stress, affecting their performance. They seem, despite an awareness of the inauthenticity and anxiety caused by timed-writing in their own experiences, to be reproducing the discourse of objectivity and outcomes (Shohamy, 2001; Brown and Knight, 2012). This is an example of the way that assessment is experienced as structure, where awareness of the causal mechanisms acting on the way assessment practices are determined by values is absent (Bhaskar, 2016). Rather, the practices and discourses around assessment are inculcated by students and equated with their own needs, a means of performing the individual (Ball, 2012), which is an example of Snyder's (1971) 'hidden curriculum.'

One of the key issues emerging was the nature of feedback on the students' writing during the course. Four students stated that the only feedback they received was written by the teacher. However, they did not express dissatisfaction with this, perhaps another absence caused by a tacit acceptance of feedback as the teacher's role. Four students were explicitly unhappy with the perceived paucity of feedback, which may have been due to poor feedback practices on the part of teachers, or evidence of their expectations of the teacher as an authority on their writing product (Aydin, 2010). Alice expressed satisfaction with her teacher who had allowed her students to email her at any time with questions, but stated that she was "too available for us...so perhaps we were not so much independent." This comment seems to indicate the problems of well-meaning teachers fostering dependency in pre-sessionals students on a high-stakes course where the immediate goal of passing takes precedence over development of self-evaluative judgments and capacities for life-long learning (Boud and McDonald, 2003), something only Alice among these students expresses awareness of. The variety of student views confirmed anecdotal teacher concerns and those in the literature that feedback on the pre-sessional at Barksdale was being employed inconsistently, at times minimally and usually in a one-directional method. Given the importance of feedback in formative

assessment (Nicol and McFarlane-Dick, 2006; Davison and Leung, 2009), this seems to be a problematic element of the pre-sessional.

Students' awareness of the external constraints to agency on the pre-sessional in terms of time and money clearly emerged from the interviews. With the exception of Luis, all students discussed the problem of time; however, Luis was the only student with an unconditional offer and had taken the pre-sessional to "improve his English," and on the surface, therefore, less subject to the impacts of high-stakes assessment. Shuling explicitly stated that four weeks was not enough to learn what is needed about writing in the academy or to develop as a student writer, but that to take a longer course would have been too expensive. It is not clear whether on some level Shuling is aware of herself as an international student in relation to the academy as a means of gaining money through short cost-efficient courses (Hadley, 2015). However, she expresses an awareness and pragmatic acceptance of assessment and a willingness to comply with the assessment event (Torrance, 2015): "Choice? Well […] you told us 'ok now you have to write a timed writing.' I will do it. And then give us a long essay. I will do it (laughs)."

In terms of self-efficacy, there were some positives emerging from the interviews as three students expressed increased confidence, three out of the four students who professed a lack of confidence in the previous interview. Two students said that they felt they could disagree with their teacher and that they were allowed to direct their essay themselves. Pai-han said that his teacher "did not give us pressure" and that he felt the lack of numerical grading on the part of his teacher's more holistic approach to formative feedback was more helpful: "Although I think a score will sometimes give you some warning or message…about judgement of your performance, I think encouragement will give us more." In terms of his emotional affect, the negative 'warning' around external judgement reflects anxiety around the notion of assessment (Boud and Falchikov, 2007) contrasting with the word 'encouragement' in formative learning events.

Shuling also stated: "Your teacher won't tell you how to write the structure. It's you who are writing the essay," indicating some sense of responsibility for the direction of her assessment. But awareness does not necessarily indicate an ability to put that responsibility into action. It was interesting for me that Shuling expressed most explicitly the feeling of constraint in her reference to being told what assessments to do (see above). It is clear that while her ideas about writing and assessment were changing in some areas, Shuling seemed confronted with the reality of similar constraints that she faced in previous assessment experiences. She continued to define her ability in writing by her grade (Reay and Wiliam, 1999) when asked about her development: "Later we have another timed writing practice and I got A. I am happy for my improve," but could not offer specific areas in which she felt she might have improved. Similarly, Mariko

stated that she "still did not feel in control" and that this ability required time to develop. Although two students stated that their confidence around writing had increased, Mariko stated that she still did not feel in control of the direction of her essay despite the emphasis by her teacher that it was her work, reflecting a continuing lack of self-efficacy: "I am not good at English so I couldn't have any confidence to write…mm maybe I didn't have any opinion to show my teacher." The blanket statement about her ability seems indicative of an absence or inability to explicitly identify specific areas for improvement, or reflexively engage with her own processes of learning. However, much literature has emphasised the Asian culture of deference to the teacher in such situations (Chen, 2006, Carless, 2011) and it is possible that Mariko's feeling of disempowerment is exaggerated in a cultural self-effacement or through socialisation in her educational culture to respect authority. Although cultural influences are not within the scope of this thesis, educational socialisation certainly has a cultural element to it (ibid). For example, for most students there was a lack of self-efficacy in understanding of critical thinking, generally thought of as crucial to academic success and a main goal of EAP pedagogy (Alexander et al, 2008). Three students professed confusion in the depiction of this concept in marking criteria and frustration at the inability of teachers to clarify the concept, consistent with findings by Woodward Kron (2002). This is an example of how defining a complex concept by criteria alone has the effect of disempowering both teacher and students (O' Donovan et al, 2008), particularly if students are not given explicit opportunities to engage with criteria, which all of these students revealed had not occurred.

5.2.2. Surface approach

In the first interviews, as discussed above, the students clearly saw their SELT assessment as little more than a gate-keeping exercise (McNamara, 2005). Shuling discussed memorisation as a key technique: "The things won't change when we write it, just memorise something." Alice saw the exams as assessing technique only: "The TOEFL is just a technique, not your real level of English," echoed by Luis: "If you know the structure you can do it. It's not a real test about how much English you know." This is consistent with Miller and Partlett's (1974) notion of playing the examination game. These students are consciously aware of their approaches, making choices to be strategic (Entwistle and Ramsden, 2015). However, the true sense of agency as feeling, having and doing control (Mercer, 2012) over their assessment can be questioned in that the skills required by the exam may be antithetical to the personal concerns of the students (Archer, 2000), as shown by their scepticism. However, these students are unable to contest or resist examination practices which are performed on them (Boud, 2000) due to the ideology created around SELTs and sustained by institution and

UKVI policy. The potentially damaging impact of this on students' ability to conceive of the construct of language proficiency as a longer-term process (Green, 2007) is clear in the fact that these students continued to take the test many times in quick succession, perhaps believing, as Ji-yeon stated that "practice makes perfect." There is an absence of metacognitive reflection in evaluating their writing performance or learning processes. As the construct of agency requires a person to make these connections between past experiences and future projections (Emirbayer and Mirsche, 1998), if students are unable or denied the chance to do this, they are unable to exercise the reflexivity from which agency emerges.

In the second interviews, there were clearly positive benefits of the course itself in terms of raising student awareness of writing as a process and the need to develop responsibility for their own essays in terms of structure and source choices. Five students described following a process to complete their essay. However, their description of this process and the criteria they used to describe their development was generally mechanical and linear, and there was rarely difference between accounts, indicating perhaps that this process had been defined for them by their teachers (Hayes and Flower, 1986). Indeed, when asked about their writing development, three students defined writing by criteria, using meta-language such as "hedging," "nominalisation," "topic sentences," "logical structure." The extent to which this knowledge is declarative or procedural (Van Lier, 2008; Schraw, 2009) is unclear and is a limitation of my interview technique in omitting to probe more deeply. However, Mariko did articulate some personalisation of the process in her confusion between the processes elicited by timed-writing and the research essay in the use of sources as defined by criteria: "I felt if I want to say something I have to find citation from the resources but in the timed-writing there is not time to find the appropriate part of things." As Barksdale uses the same criteria for both assessments, this inability to understand the distinction has led to a conflict in Mariko's mind of how sources are used in authentic and simulated situations (Weigle, 2002). She is beginning to conceptualise for herself how writing processes differ, and in expressing confusion about textual ownership and voice, she is perhaps beginning to question or contest generic criteria for writing assessment.

There was some element of pragmatism in some of the students' descriptions of their approaches to learning. Luis' and Pai-han's expectations of academic writing on the upcoming Barksdale pre-sessional were that essays would be *"*meaningful." It is likely that they are referring to "educational tasks which articulate the concerns of the participants and will affect the extent to which the participant is actively engaged in their learning" (Kahn et al, 2012, p.864). Pai-han explicitly stated that writing was a process over time and that "from the beginning how to form my ideas and I need to collect information. It's like being a real learner and scholar." Pai-han's expectations of his emerging identity here reflect his growing awareness of learning as development. However, it can be

seen that his expectations conflicted with the reality somewhat. He showed an awareness that the process of learning was not complete in the pre-sessional and there was more to writing than he had been taught, but that his agentic choice (Mann, 2001) was to do what was required to pass the course: "My role should be learn as a student to study more...but during this time I really need to learn how to write an essay." This could be seen as Pai-han viewing the assessment as hoop-jumping to reduce the risk to his sense of agency (Rust, 2002), but his other responses do not seem to confirm this. Rather, as described above, he seems to have made a pragmatic choice to focus on what he needs during this short course, but is also aware of and able to reflect on his need for further development as a writer, which he is choosing to defer. In the HE literature, this can be seen as a strategic approach to learning, whereby a student selects the appropriate approach for the particular task, here a short term, memory-based approach to pass the course (Entwistle and Ramsden, 2015). From the perspective of agency in how it relates to this thesis, it could also be seen as an example of Friere's (1973) 'integration' a critical ability to make choices about one's own reality, in contrast to 'adjustment' of the acquiescence to the system in the way that it could be said that Shuling has done (see 5.2.1). However, it is also a clear example of inability to fully exercise agency defined as aligning with concerns that Kahn et al (2012) refer to above.

In contrast to Pai-han's instrumentalism, Luis's expression of his agency is passive resistance. He articulated frustration with the pre-sessional course as focusing on "writing" rather than "English" when he felt he already "knew about writing" from the IELTS examination. Luis stated that his teacher's interpretation of this frustration was that he was choosing not to engage with the work to the same extent as his peers, judging him as being "not interested." In other words, Luis has conceptualised his own learning goals (Dweck, 1986) or concerns, as different from that of the teacher and course, and this has caused conflict. Luis' conceptualisation of writing might be interpreted here as an example of false consciousness, where his equating academic writing with grammatical and lexical accuracy reflects a concept of writing specific to SELTs, where the focus is on "English" and which is at odds with pedagogies of writing which make meaning within disciplines (Leung et al, 2016; Pilcher and Richards, 2017). Luis was both unable to reflect on this understanding or, again, to fully articulate his own learning goals in the assessment event, which has led to frustration and a sense of alienation from the pre-sessional course.

A final key finding was that of the reference to plagiarism. Both Shuling and Ji-yeon referred to incidences of plagiarism by other students on the course in the research essay. Shuling stated: "Sometimes we will get some help from other people and maybe for someone just like if some students have some local friends here and then his essay will be...polished." Shuling, is using the third person "his" to show that she is aware this is something other students do, yet the use of "we" hints that this is maybe something she identifies with as a choice to meet

assessment expectations. She talks about the differences in writing and educational culture: “We are still learning because [...] it is really different from things we learn in the past, in my country,” reflecting the idea of being a ‘stranger in academia’ (Zamel, 1998) as an international student. Yet her references to plagiarism do not seen to be created by misunderstanding of academic conventions, contrary to some of the literature on international students, for example Shi (2006) as her possible coyness in the use of the word “polished” indicates an awareness of proofreading as a grey area regarding collusion.

Ji-yeon stated that although she was aware other students had done this, she had chosen to do her own work: “I’ve heard there quite many students who get help from native speakers but for me I did it by myself…it was really difficult process...but I just made it!” Although this had meant more difficulty, she felt proud of her choice, a small but significant example of taking a deeper approach to learning, seeking meaning in the task despite the investment required in doing so (Rust, 2002). Both Ji-yeon and Shuling have taken on board the notion of textual ownership (Pennycook, 1997), and are keen to show awareness of it to me while distancing themselves from the other students through their choice not to collude. However, it is not clear whether their attitude is something that was facilitated by the Barksdale plagiarism policy, their own strongly felt sense of agency, a possible lack of awareness of their own plagiarism, or their relationship to me as a Barksdale practitioner in the interview.

5.2.3. Metacognitive awareness of writing

As we have seen, in the first interviews on their experiences of SELTs, students are questioning the fairness of the exam but are also aware of how it is at odds with a construct of writing that is useful for university. Several of these students expressed the incongruity between ‘real’ writing, which would, for example allow them to use dictionaries (Mariko) and also that writing under timed conditions on a future postgraduate programme would be inauthentic and not necessarily a valid representation of the writing construct on MA programmes where, “ok you have a deadline, but you have months to arrive at that deadline” (Luis). Indeed, four students mentioned the imposition of a time limit on the SELT not only as anxiety-inducing but also as a false representative of the construct of writing in the academy (Moore and Morton 2005; Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015). Pai-han, for example, was explicitly aware of learning as more than mechanical practice when asked what he expected to be different about the pre-sessional: “I can learn more than take again and again the [SELT] test”.

When asked about their ideas of what a good IELTS essay would look like, criterion meta-language of “logical,” “coherent” and “organised” occurred repeatedly. This declarative knowledge, given the students’ lack of success on

the exam, is not likely to be fully procedural (van Lier, 2008). Indeed, Shuling used the adjective "professional" when asked to define writing in the academy but was unable to clarify what she thought that meant. Indeed, she made specific reference to this disparity between procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge in response to my question about her understanding of the purpose of the SELT: "Many students...they kind of know, but when we actually write the essay just a little students can achieve that."

However, there seemed to be little change in their conceptualisations of writing in the second interviews. Four students stated that grammar and vocabulary were the main indicators of good writing. Although it would be nonsense to say that grammar, vocabulary and cohesive devices are not important to academic writing, the level of importance attached to this by the students was possibly indicative of the SELT mentality of acquiring generic phrases and displaying certain linguistic features rather than seeing writing as a means of expressing ideas (Leung et al, 2006; Pilcher and Richards, 2017).

Perhaps most pertinent here were the absences in the students' responses when discussing writing: their lack of awareness of the creative process of engagement with ideas, self-expression, revision and reflection on their writing (Yancey, 1998; 2009). For example, only Luis explicitly mentioned creativity of the individual process in relation to writing: "Paper is the most beautiful thing we have in this world and we can put our ideas there." As discussed above, when asked whether they had some understanding of the process of writing, all bar Pai-han answered in a similar way, talking me through the linear stages of writing and researching their essay, with little detail and no variety. If students have not been able to conceptualise the act of writing for themselves, they are likely to have been impeded in the understanding of writing as a process of meaning-making and iterative learning (Hacker et al, 2009). For the pre-sessional, while teaching a process which can be transferred to other genres of assignment seems beneficial, in reality, this may cause problems for students when they encounter the process of writing for research in their disciplines (Hyland, 2007), where the fixed process that many of these students explained to me conflicts with the real process of writing for tertiary education purposes (Rouse et al, 2017). Only Pai-han differed from others in that he showed a keen awareness of the difficulties inherent in drafting and the nature of managing the process compared to his classmates whom, he claimed, "spend a lot of time revising language again and again but when you ask them about their topic they are still sometimes confused." However, he also stated that having to make wholesale revisions to his essay would be "a disaster… awful", which may derive from a need to get as close to perfection in a first draft as possible (Lee, 2008), exacerbated by the time constraints of the pre-sessional course and the fact of assessing writing only as a product.

5.2.4. Writing as a social practice

As above, within this theme some positive aspects emerged. In the first interviews, all showed some awareness of the fact that writing a first response in a discursive essay to an unseen topic was not the same as writing within their discipline in the academy. Two students talked about the differences between academic writing and the SELT writing as the use of sources reflecting an awareness of the intertextual nature of writing. Pai-han expressed an expectation on the pre-sessional of the collaborative nature of writing (Storch, 2011) and peer feedback: *"*We will share our opinion with our classmates…and we can exchange ideas," although he was the only student who expressed this view. Most still defined their ideas of good writing in terms of structure, grammar and vocabulary, reflecting a rather mechanical approach to emulation of discourse features rather than seeing writing fully as a communicative practice. As above, it is clear that these students were generally aware of the discrepancies between writing for a SELT and writing in the academy at least at its most basic level. However, the extent to which they would be confronted by the realities of those differences were clearer in the second interviews.

While it is clear from their responses that all students felt their writing had developed during the course and were able to pinpoint specific areas where this development had occurred, their "talk around text" (Lillis, 2003) is of the finished product rather than the process and development. Only Pai-han discussed the challenges he faced explicitly and there was no attempt generally among the six students to justify or explain their discourse choices, although again, it is a limitation of my interview technique in this cycle that I did not probe enough for details. Although there was talk of "topics" and "ideas", the meaning-making, purpose-driven elements of writing (Ivanič, 2004) were largely absent. This is possibly indicative of the use of the approach to writing assessment on the Barksdale pre-sessional, where more critical or discipline-specific elements of writing may be explored within the classroom by some individual teachers, but the adherence to teaching students how to write to pass an assessment benchmarked to generic criteria reduces text to an expression of formulaic rhetorical moves or linguistic features (Luke, 1996) as we have seen above.

However, as these students were post-graduates, they are likely to have been aware of this discrepancy. Indeed, Mariko expressed concern that she had been taught one genre of writing, the discursive essay, which may not be appropriate in her field of psychiatry: "I think it's a way of writing…not science, but like…er linguistics or law. It's useful to me but maybe for my field it's a little bit different." There was no place for Mariko to reflect on the nature of these differences or to explore conventions more pertinent to her own discipline, as such as Hyland (2003) and Turner (2004) have claimed is so critical. As discussed in Chapter Four, it is important to reiterate that this project was not specifically concerned with the EGAP vs ESAP debate, only as it pertains to the narrow concept of writing assessment at Barksdale and how this may reduce student's ability to conceptualise themselves as developing writers and reduce

their choices to write in a way they know is more suitable for their own discipline.

In addition to paucity of students' references to peers or readers, two students expressed the attitude that writing should be an individual pursuit, explaining the views (above) that timed-writing is a better indicator of writing ability, because "there is no aid for the person." (Ji-yeon). This utterance seems to reflect the inculcation of writing as a performance rather than a process of development or means of communication (Lillis and Scott, 2007), as perpetuated by assessment norms. Interestingly, although Pai-han mentioned "sharing ideas" with his classmates, something he observed as culturally different from Taiwan, there was no explicit reference to peer and self-evaluation of writing. While this does not mean they did not occur on the course, the lack of reference, or absence in the interview discussions of the process and feedback in general was notable.

In summation, the data provided a picture of a time-constrained and high-stakes gate-keeping course where students and teachers were trying to do their best with the limited resources and within external constraints. By comparing the data from the two interviews, it is clear that the pre-sessional had a positive impact on raising students' awareness of writing as a process in general terms, and creating a more authentic assessment situation in the research essay. There was also some critical awareness of assessment impacts. All students expressed some scepticism of the value of the SELT model of writing and were aware of factors impacting on their pre-sessional experiences such as time, money and lack of control over assessment events and practices such as feedback. However, what was absent from the students' accounts of their assessment experiences was as significant as what was present. There was a seeming inability to talk around their individual metacognitive and social processes of writing and the choices they had made. There was inconsistency in the extent to which they were explicitly conscious of the structural forces and causal mechanisms acting on assessment or the extent to which they had inculcated certain values as perpetuated by writing assessment. There was also an absence of awareness of their relationship to the academy, and, where this *was* expressed, there was largely a sense of resignation and powerlessness around grades and judgement. Their reactions to these mechanisms in their lived experiences varied in expressions of agency, but it can be concluded that their sense of agency around writing and their ability to conceptualise themselves as developing writers was being absented. Although it was impossible to definitively claim a direct causation between these findings and the writing assessment practices at Barksdale, it was clear that these problems were certainly not being addressed, or even fully conceptualised as problems, because of the immediate need to pass the course.

5.3. Reflecting

5.3.1. Limitations of the data

There were some potential problems in the methods of data collection and analysis. Firstly, as I have shown, as a novice researcher in 2013, I tended to miss some opportunities to examine the context in further detail with these students. There were utterances and views for which I did not always probe to explore underlying causes but rather moved on. This was largely due to a fear that I would be unduly influencing the opinion of the students with my follow-up questions, a belief that Gubrum and Holstein (2002) and Brinkman and Kvale (2015) claim has been exaggerated, and that the most important aspect of the interview is establishing rapport. Secondly, as a teacher at Barksdale, although not the students' own class teacher, my relationship to the participants and the power asymmetry (Kvale, 2007), which is heightened more than in typical researcher/researched relationships, could have affected the data. Thirdly, it would have been better to obtain a larger sample of students in order to provide a fuller picture of the pre-sessional assessment experiences, although sample size was limited in practice by the desire to recruit volunteers. In many instances during data analysis, I realised retrospectively that a triangulation of the students' self-reports of their development with evidence of their writing would have been useful, as well as a parallel interview with their teachers about the student's process of writing. I felt strongly, however, that ethical considerations would prevent me from discussing individual students with their teachers. However, these realisations fed into future cycles where triangulation was ensured.

In terms of ethics and collaboration as AR validity criteria, the fact that the interviews were conducted in the students' L2 can be seen in one sense as disempowering (Marschan-Peikkari and Reis, 2004) and the problems of interpretation, always something to be considered with qualitative research (Silverman, 2014) is intensified in an L2 situation (Burns, 2005). I attempted to be conscious of where I may have imbued meaning in utterances that were unintended due to the students' lack of linguistic resource. As the second interview took place after the course, I was unable to transcribe in time to perform collaborative member checks with these students (Searle, 1999), many of whom went home before the start of their course. I wanted to ensure that this did take place in future cycles by retaining email addresses of future participants.

As these students were not the same participants that would take part in the intervention in Cycle One, this calls into question the nature of participatory democratic involvement (Lather, 1986). Yet at the level of wider social emancipation, I was working with these six students with a view to improving the assessment situation for future cohorts.

5.3.2. Moving to the next stage

This stage feeds into the planning stage for the first intervention cycle. My first task was to summarise the main issues arising from this reconnaissance data and how they could be addressed on a broad level. This process has been summarised in Table 5 below, to show how the findings from the reconnaissance cycle informed the first stage of the processfolio design in conceptualising the objectives of the new assessment. The second task was to consider what would be changed, which necessitates the Observation and Reflection stage of a new cycle in order to monitor and evaluate these changes, just as in an assessment cycle (Read, 2010).

Problem / Consequence	How it informed the processfolio
Students have a largely mechanical approach to writing and define their development mainly in terms of outcomes (scores or criteria); often require model answers to follow and produce poor work to complete imposed deadlines	Provide opportunity for students to conceptualise their own processes of text creation, including time management
Many students find it difficult to explain their writing choices beyond a fixed linear process and acquisition of linguistic features	Provide opportunities for students to explore and justify their own choices in research and text creation
Students express degrees of stress over their assessments and many feel it is only the job of others to evaluate them.	Providing an opportunity for students to feel in control over the way they wish their abilities to be judged
Students have a conflicted attitude to concepts of writing, questioning the construct of timed writing while seeing it as the greater indicator of ability	Provide an opportunity for written reflection and discussion about writing development and different processes of text creation
Students are experiencing inconsistency of feedback and it is lacking or may be fostering dependence in some cases; teachers unsure of feedback practices	Provide consistency and improve the capacity of teacher feedback to empower students
Students conceive of writing as an individual practice. There is currently a lack of peer evaluation on the course despite the benefits in the literature	Provide opportunities for peer collaboration on text and evaluation of work to emphasise writing as a social practice
Students express confusion over their grades or rely on their teachers to tell them how to 'fix' their essays. Teachers express concern over the suitability of ELC criteria	Provide opportunities for students to self-evaluate by understanding and applying criteria as well as exploring the suitability of criteria
Some students plagiarise or collude; there is minimal conception of writing as textual ownership or as a means of positioning oneself within an academic discourse community	Provide an opportunity to explore and question issues around academic conventions, disciplinary differences textual ownership and plagiarism
Many students lack confidence in writing and some suffer from emotional distress	To develop students' confidence with all of the above

Table 5. How the findings informed the processfolio objectives

It is important in AR projects to think about where one can be "causally efficacious" (Shipway, 2011, p.188) and the limits of this. According to Smyth and Shacklock (1998), a key component of reflexivity is reflecting on the constraints, internal and external, on the researcher. In spite of the above suggestions for intervention in the form of a new assessment, the constraints with which I had to contend were:

- The assessment intervention must first be trialled at the formative stage of the course due to test trialling ethics and stakeholder concerns; therefore, I was aware that any positive impacts may be negated at the summative stage.
- I was unable to change the product assessment of a discursive essay, even as a trial, because of parity across the cohort.
- There was no time for students to write more than one extended piece of writing in the formative stage.
- The time of the course could not be extended.
- The individual process of each student could not be graded due to issues of subjectivity (Callahan, 1995) and impracticability; therefore, some method of providing motivating feedback and an incentive to engage with the assessment must be sought.
- It was stipulated that the formative essays must still be graded to provide indicators of progress.
- The timed-writing exam was stipulated by the course coordinators as mandatory. At this stage, teachers and the institution were keen to retain it as system of countering a grade in the research essay that may have been achieved through collusion or plagiarism. I felt this would place restrictions on attempts to mitigate some of the negative impacts of the focus on exam preparation while this assessment occurred in tandem.

Praxis cannot be merely the making of tacit intuition explicit but a return to theory and primacy of knowledge (Maton, 2014). Therefore, decisions around the design of the intervention were not only informed by the empirical findings from these students and my own concerns, but were also informed by a return to the literature, this time on alternative assessment design principles and key theories of academic writing which have influenced EAP. These are described in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six: Using literature to design the intervention

Overview

The first purpose of this chapter, which forms part of the planning stage of intervention Cycle One, is to show how the concept and implementation of the processfolio was informed by literature. As I pointed out in previous chapters, alternative assessment and its connection to theories of learning has been predominant in mainstream HE; hence, some of the theoretical literature has been drawn from this context. However, this review draws mainly on the fields of ELT and EAP for relevance of application to my own contexts, particularly in the area of portfolios, although the majority of the studies have not taken place within UK EAP contexts.

Therefore, the second purpose of this literature review is to show how the processfolio intervention, as a systematic empirical study, represents a contribution to the field of alternative assessment within UK EAP. Although as a practitioner, I am aware anecdotally of innovations and research projects taking place at various institutions, for reasons outlined in Chapter Two, little of this has been disseminated outside the UK EAP community of practitioners.

The first section will examine some broader general themes and principles of alternative assessment, then some approaches to academic writing (the Process approach and Academic Literacies), all of which have influenced my thinking in the design of the intervention. The second section focuses in particular on the benefits and limitations of the most ubiquitous example of such assessment, the portfolio. The final section shows how the portfolio was adapted for my own processfolio concept. At this stage, my intention was to replace or alter the product-only essay with a focus on assessment of the writing and learning process in order to address the issues identified in the reconnaissance cycle.

6.1. Theoretical influences on the processfolio

6.1.1. Alternative assessment

There has been a gradual shift away from psychometric positivism and rationalism as tenets of educational measurement in higher education (Gipps, 1994; Rust et al, 2005; Sambell et al, 2013). Despite this shift, language assessment research has remained more concerned with the concepts derived from psychometrics: validity and reliability (Alderson et al, 2017). At their most basic, validity refers to whether the assessment tests what it intends to, while reliability ensures that test-taker would achieve the same results under different conditions (Weir, 2005). A wide body of assessment literature has contributed

to statistical measures for achieving these core tenets within a range of assessment situations (Cronbach, 1956; Messick, 1996; Weir, 2005). Yet with the acknowledgment of the wider variety of non-traditional students entering universities, including international students, there is a growing concern within academic disciplinary instruction for assessment which facilitates rather than impedes learning, precipitating the assessment for learning movement (Boud and Falchikov, 2006; Sambell et al, 2013). As this term has not permeated the EAP field, I will retain the more common term in the literature: alternative assessment. EAP assessment has not shifted as fast or with as much conviction to embrace the research on alternative assessment in HE (Leung and Lewkowicz, 2006; Alderson et al, 2017). However, as we have also seen in the previous chapters, there is a growing recognition of alternatives to current practices in principle, although there remains a lack of empirical evidence for its successful application in UK EAP.

One key principle of alternative assessment is that of authenticity, in the sense of being close to real life and situations in which the skill or knowledge being assessed will be used (Lewkowicz, 2000; Leung et al, 2016). In EAP, this has largely been limited to simulating disciplinary assessment genres that students might encounter on their courses (Manning, 2016). However, as we have seen in Chapter Four, authenticity in EAP assessment also involves representing an authentic view of that being assessed i.e. language as a social and cultural construct (McNamara, 1997). My primary concern, however, was in designing an alternative assessment for authenticity as a facet of agency (van Lier, 2013): how students could articulate their personal educational concerns; how assessment could be integrated with learning (which is more than merely positive washback but an integral part of assessment for agency); and how assessment could focus on processes of learning about writing in addition to products or outcomes (Sambell et al, 2013). However, in order for learning to facilitate agency in a critical realist sense, such assessment should also provoke questions about accepted concepts, identity and social structure (Luckett and Luckett, 2009) rather than merely facilitating students' personal liberation.

Alternative assessment should also ideally be context specific and localised. It is generally acknowledged within the EAP community that the construct of writing as tested by SELTs is not sufficiently representative of an EAP construct (Alexander, 2013; Manning 2016; Leung et al, 2016) and in-house assessments such as research essays, some with a process element (Sevior, 2015), have supplemented the traditional timed-writing. Therefore, a more hermeneutic approach to assessment emphasises locality as a positive notion in that decisions made on the basis of the assessments are particular to institutions and disciplinary departments; thus, institutions, including practitioners, should have more participation in the test design and interpretation of results (Moss, 1996; Teasdale and Leung, 2000; Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015). This is a key facet of the processfolio project as a piece of practitioner research.

A third principle identified in the literature is the need for multiple sources of evidence on which to make decisions about students' achievement or linguistic proficiency (Huerta- Macias, 1995; Shohamy, 2001; Lam, 2016). This is a direct reaction to the problem of construct validity of writing in high-stakes, one-shot, product-oriented writing exams and an attempt to use a range of data to increase rigour in gathering evidence for decision making (Falchikov, 2005). Hence, at Barksdale, I wanted to move away from assessment of the product-essays only to include a range of evidence and voices, particularly that of the students.

However, within the interest in alternative assessment in EAP, there have been voices calling for caution in throwing the baby of reliability and validity out with the bathwater (Hamp-Lyons, 1997). There is some scepticism regarding the claims, espoused by such as Huerta-Macias (1995), that alternative assessments are inherently valid given they are more authentic representations of language and literacy events and that triangulation occurs with the provisions of multiple sources of evidence. Brown and Hudson (1998) have asserted that while alternative assessment can provide detailed and rich feedback to the learner in a formative context, if it is to be used for summative purposes, it must stand up to rigourous validation procedures, including reliability measures, which much of the literature on alternative assessment does not satisfactorily address through empirical evidence. This is certainly the case within EAP where local innovations are rarely shared outside of a small community.

It is difficult to see how one can realistically dismiss notions of validity and reliability altogether when discussing assessment, yet the difference arises in the way reliability and validity are conceptualised, and the research paradigm for providing evidence about assessments that is employed (Moss, 1996; Lynch, 2003). As we have seen in Chapter Three, validity and reliability can be re-conceptualised in line with a shift in discourse; therefore, this also applies to assessment research (Teasdale and Leung, 2000). For example, Gipps (1994:171) advocates the use of the term comparability in place of reliability, as the former suggests consistency rather than statistical accuracy. Lynch and Shaw (2005) assert this is fundamental to alternative assessment validity criteria. Weir (2005) advocates a priori considerations of consequences, an example of which is Bachman and Palmer's (2010) Assessment Use Argument, which builds on their original concept of test usefulness. They advocate a framework for assessment design to encompass decisions and consequences of the assessment in the specific institutional context, evidence of which the following intervention chapters provide.

The first step in designing the intervention was forming a theoretical framework for agency in assessment. Mercer (2012) conceptualises agency as both the capacity to act and the behaviours themselves; i.e., the feelings of control, and the having control as evidenced by actions or doing. However, the former two are preconditions of the latter. In an assessment situation, prior to the exercise of

agency, the learner must first have a "belief that their behaviour can make a difference to their learning in that setting" (ibid, p.41); both intrapersonal and interpersonal elements are necessary for agency (Bhaskar, 2008). I have conceptualised the former here as metacognition, self-regulation and self-efficacy and the latter as interactions with teachers and peers, and structural-social such as texts, assessment and the academy. Hence, my intervention needed to foster these aspects through its design and implementation.

Van Lier (2013) provides examples of these manifestations of agency in an English language classroom context as part of the "organising, controlling and evaluating of experiences" (p.71). To address the results of the reconnaissance cycle, I have modified these to my own context of EAP writing as

i). the ability to organise learning and writing processes
ii). to reflectively and reflexively evaluate choices and processes
iii). self- efficacy or the belief in one's own capacities
iv). to feel able to exercise some influence over assessment situations
v). to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers

These five manifestations of agency function as umbrella categories for the key principles of alternative assessment and also provide the framework for evaluation of the processfolio (as indicators of improvement and as coding themes) in Chapters Seven and Eight. Table 6 shows how these five manifestations were mapped onto the problems identified in the reconnaissance cycle and articulated in the design of the processfolio. While some of these can be exercises of agency at the individual level, most involve interaction with others and with structures in order for agency to be fully realised (Archer, 2000).

6.1.2. Agentic models of writing

I have claimed throughout the thesis that application of pedagogy within the curriculum or classroom is unlikely to fulfil its purpose if it is in opposition with the ethos of assessment. However, if the assessment is based on research-informed practices of writing, it can constructively align with and therefore facilitate, the genuine application of best practice pedagogies for writing among teachers and students (Biggs and Tang, 2011). From a vast body of literature on writing which has influenced EAP to varying degrees (see Chapter Two for a very brief summary), two main approaches to writing have influenced my own thinking around assessment based on the findings from the reconnaissance cycle on the negative impacts on metacognition and students' awareness of writing as a social practice. The first one is the process approach and the second Academic Literacies (AcLits).

According to Hamp Lyons and Condon (2000), the process writing model derives from an expressivist theory of writing, where students are encouraged to respond to texts through a process of development, as well as a cognitivist theory, emphasising writer habits and patterns of organisation. Freewriting, planning and drafting are identifiable elements of core writing processes, although individual differences and creativity in these processes are foregrounded (Zamel, 1982). The process writing model has been criticised for its focus on the cognitive and the inner because the focus on meaning over language, with language as part of the editing stage, can falsely attempt to separate meaning from language in the same way as a technical skills-based approach, preventing students from understanding that rhetorical features and language choices are a means of communicating with a reader (Hyland, 2003). Moreover, process models have been accused of reducing writing to a universal and transferable skill, and uncritically assuming that when students focus on their language learning processes, they will gain access to the discourse communities they are attempting to join (Barwashi, 2003). The process writing model is most commonly associated with EFL classrooms and generally side-lined in EAP as not fit for purpose (Furneaux, 1999) because the freedom to write in a creative and expressive way is constrained both by the academic conventions of disciplines, and by the nature of assignments as means of expressing acquired knowledge through a prescribed written medium for a specific audience in order to receive a grade (Hamp-Lyons, 1991).

Nonetheless, facilitating an awareness of the writing process on an EAP pre-sessional course can assist teachers and students in understanding writing for the academy and the nature of developmental learning by promoting higher-order thinking skills, including metacognition and self-regulation that are required as part of all academic disciplines at post-graduate level (Atkinson, 2003; Granville and Dison, 2005). Seminal research conducted by Flower (1979) reflected on the difference between writer-based prose as indicative of a novice writer, and the more sophisticated reader-based prose which considers the reader primarily in the presentation of ideas. Although reader-based prose is the ideal in academic contexts in that clear communication of ideas is paramount, and a text is judged according to these norms (Furneaux, 1999), writer-based prose reflects the development of the student writer's inner cognitive processing of the subject information learned. By focussing somewhat on the cognitive elements of the learning process, it is possible to enable students to see writer-based prose as a part of the writing process, which could encourage them to make wholesale revisions to the final product as part of an iterative learning process (Dovey, 2010). This is particularly pertinent in EAP where multiple sources are used and the processes of meaning-making as a creation of text through synthesis are not fully explored within genre-based pedagogies (ibid). I see the process approach as agentic in how it relates to an understanding of the self as a creator of text from reading to writing. From a critical realist perspective, a rejection of process

approaches can be equated with a downplaying of the intrapersonal agent, or the downward conflation of structure and agency referred to in Chapter Three (Archer, 2000).

A second theory of writing which complements the process approach is the AcLits approach. This is a more social-constructivist model, which does not see writing as an internal process or a universal one, but rather attempts to examine the linguistic features of discourse that writers use to communicate with their reader and more importantly, recognise the social reasons for doing so. It emphasises the choices that individual writers make as social subjects within structures as part of knowledge construction (Kress, 2012). Writing itself is thus seen as a social event, and the process of writing is inextricable from the text or product (Ivanič, 2004). Writing is purpose driven, and has social goals, which in the case of the Barksdale research essay, is to communicate a critical approach to ideas, and should thus be judged on its effectiveness in achieving those social goals (ibid).

Lea and Street seminal paper in 1998 defined three approaches to writing in the academy: the deficit or remedial model of writing which teaches writing as a skill to be acquired or a product to be fixed; the acculturation model where students are expected to emulate discoursal features of their disciplines with a view to transitioning unproblematically to a UK academic disciplinary identity, and the AcLits model, which questions the notion of a universal literacy in academia. This third model aligns with a critical EAP (Benesh, 2001; Morgan, 2009) in its exposing of how power operates through discourse to engender and sustain imbalances in the academy, particularly those around assessment. This involves a focus on the individualised processes of text creation across a variety of spaces, epistemologies and audiences, thus contesting the notion perpetuated by a neo-liberal agenda that students can become assimilated to UK academic conventions within a short summer course (Turner, 2012).

A key principle is the interest in students' own perspectives of writing and, by extension, of assessment practices, as writing is still the main means of assessing students (Lea, 2004). One implication for pedagogical applications is feedback which gives students the opportunity to comment on and discuss their own writing rather than merely receiving comments and grades from a higher authority, in line with the principles of alternative assessment as outlined above. One of these is 'talkback' (Lillis, 2003:204) which looks at the process of text creation. The student has space and a voice for exploration of what they feel about writing and their experiences and struggles in doing so. In exploring ways of learning through writing, AcLits focuses on process as an epistemological stance, in that knowledge and writing about knowledge is not static. This addresses the concerns about the individualistic nature of the process approach and its unsuitability for EAP by emphasising that the negotiating of one's academic identity and sense of self as developing writer is also as much a process as the act of text creation itself (Ivanič, 1994).

Lillis (2003) defines AcLits as primarily an oppositional framework and as critique. It takes much from the often overlapping theories of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992) and Critical Applied Linguistics (Pennycook, 2001) where the focus is on how power operates through language. This is particularly useful in framing not only disciplinary discourses but also raising an awareness of other discourses of power within the university system (Lea and Street, 2006) which impact substantially on EAP. However, as we have seen in Chapter Three, because of its primacy of discourse as a constructor of reality, AcLits does not take into account the Realities which engender and sustain practices, such as assessment as a structure.

Therefore, in summary, I felt that both the process and AcLits' approaches, although neither one currently fully engages with high-stakes assessment, could offer a framework for EAP writing pedagogies to inform the approach to an alternative assessment of writing. How these principles were operationalised in the processfolio design will be shown in the following two sections.

6.2. Portfolios

The most common example of alternative assessment of writing is the portfolio. However for reasons explored below, adopting a portfolio assessment in the context of a pre-sessional at Barksdale was problematic. I will therefore attempt to elucidate how I adapted the traditional portfolio concept in my design of the processfolio. Although ELT contexts in Hong Kong and North America have applied examples such as portfolios, the high-stakes nature of UK EAP pre-sessionals and the dominance of the epistemological foundations of psychometrics in the language-testing field (Leung, 2007; Alderson et al, 2017), means that there has been little innovation in UK EAP assessment reported in the literature. Selection criteria for the literature search thus had to include theoretical proposals in addition to empirical studies.

6.2.1. Portfolio as a solution to the problems of EAP assessment?

Writing portfolios have been used in higher education for some time (Slater and Astwood, 1995; Birenbaum, 1996), and there has been growing interest in their use in EFL and EAP contexts (Hamp Lyons and Condon, 2000; Lam, 2013), although there is a lack of empirical evidence of their benefits within the UK. Herman et al (1996) categorise portfolios into three models: the showcase portfolio, which demonstrates a collection of students' best pieces of work; the working portfolio, which shows all the completed work of students as part of a course; and the progress portfolio, which is used to assess students' development

over a period of learning. According to Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000), the main characteristics of portfolios are their context richness, the range of writing samples (relating to the alternative assessment principles of multiple sources of evidence), the control over the writing process by the student, largely as a result of the elements of selection, reflection through abstracts and explanations of their selection and self-evaluation, as well as the ability of a portfolio to represent growth and development of writing over time. It was clear to me that portfolios could address the four main negative impacts of assessment identified in the reconnaissance cycle.

One tenet of portfolio assessment is that it acknowledges the metacognitive complexity of writing as an iterative rather than a linear process. According to Belanoff and Dickson (1991, p.xx), "portfolio assessment alone can map the process students go through as they write." Indeed, it can be seen that portfolio assessment facilitates students' understanding of the nature of writing, as, in order to select their best work to exemplify their development, they are monitoring the whole writing process (Belgrad, 2013). Romova and Andrew (2011) in New Zealand found that portfolios were useful for encouraging multiple drafting as well as developing academic literacy skills such as referencing, paraphrasing and organising of texts.

In addition, a portfolio can also help to facilitate an appreciation of writing as a social practice for a variety of audiences and purposes in its emphasis on exploring language use as a social practice in the disciplines (Delett et al, 2001). Romova and Andrew (2011) state that portfolios can aid students to become socialised into their discourse communities through reflecting on identity construction, and tentatively suggest that they may be able to critically contest genres and the construction of power through academic discourse. One of the many obstacles to disciplinary writing in pre-sessional EAP at Barksdale is the fact that EAP teachers are not practitioners of the students' discipline, which is problematic in fairly assessing the students' understanding and application of academic literacy in that chosen discipline (Spack, 2001). Although this is generally critiqued in the literature (Hyland, 2003; Flowerdew, 2016), at Barksdale, it remains an ingrained belief. Hirvela's (1997) disciplinary portfolios represent a solution by allowing students to explore discourse conventions of their own discipline rather than writing one generic piece for assessment. Students investigate aspects of disciplinary discourse and report in the portfolio their knowledge of how texts operate, language choices are employed, and implicit and explicit discourse conventions play out. This could encourage flexibility and, through reflection on these practice, allow room yo question and contest the nature of power relations in discourse. Students can, through the assessment itself, become "ethnographers of their disciplines" (Frodesen, 1995, p.1).

The problems of assessment being located in the hands of others and students taking a surface approach to learning to avoid risk could also be lessened in the portfolio situation. Delett et al (2001) point to the fundamental element of portfolios as power sharing between students and teachers, as students create, select and justify the choices of the pieces of work they will include in the portfolio. In Lynch and Shaw's (2005) MA TESOL portfolio, students not only had to create and select pieces of work, but elements of peer and self-assessment were also included as integral to the portfolio process, increasing the evidence for achievement and widening the number of voices included in the assessment process (Falchikov, 2005). In this way, students exercise some degree of control and responsibility over the assessment process in selecting pieces they wish to be assessed (Murphy and Camp, 1996). For example, research into portfolio use in EAP situations by Fox and Hartwick (2011) in Canada showed an increased independence in decision-making around editing. A study by Lam and Lee (2009) in Hong Kong reported that students felt empowered in relation to making choices for their portfolios and felt their language accuracy and ideas were enhanced as they engaged with the tasks in a more meaningful way.

Issues related to plagiarism can also be mitigated for three main reasons. Firstly, involving the student in the assessment of their own work, and giving them a voice in doing so, reduces the motivation to plagiarise as students are less alienated and more invested in their own work. Secondly, exploring the nature of writing in different contexts increases students' awareness of the notion of textual ownership (Irons, 2004) and rather than telling them policy, allows them to conceptualise it for themselves. Finally, and more pragmatically, it is difficult to plagiarise an entire portfolio or a piece of reflection referencing pieces written by the student. Hence, the detection of potential collusion is easier and provides a possible discouragement to an agentic choice of deliberate plagiarism.

In terms of self-efficacy, a study by Hughes-Wilhelm (1996) found that the self-reported motivation and pride of the students who participated in portfolio assessment increased. Öztürk and Çeçen (2007) found that students' fear and anxiety around writing was reduced by the developmental and formative nature of learning from iterative processes as espoused by the culture of portfolio assessment. This is partly because portfolio assessment allows for formative feedback to be foregrounded in the learning process (Hounsell, 2007). In theory, the problem of teachers as assessors on EAP pre-sessionals becomes less problematic when the paradigm shift trusts the teacher to provide a holistic and comprehensive picture of the student rather than an anonymised product assignment or a timed-writing examination. The portfolio can reduce the impact of grades by making a series of iterative suggestions for improvement, moving away from one-directional feedback on one practice essay (as is the case with formative assessment at Barksdale), and locating more control in the hands of students through dialogue (Carless et al, 2011). However, caution must be taken in assuming that students will automatically see teacher's feedback as

empowering rather than as directive (Richardson, 2000), as will be seen in later chapters.

A commonly accepted benefit of portfolios is that they include opportunities for reflection on writing as a process and writing as integral to, not just indicative of, learning. The principle is that students are given opportunities to analyse their own writing and its relative successes and weaknesses through the process of reflection, which, as we have seen, increases metacognitive awareness of learning (Klenowski, 2002) and also reinforces the idea that students are agents of their own learning (Yorke, 2005; Dam and Legenhausen, 2011). According to Rogers (2001), reflection can take place before, during or later writing although in the portfolio context, usually occurs at the later stages as a way of working through emotions, reactions and evaluating successes and areas for improvement. Yancey (1998) describes reflection as inner dialogues, resembling Archer's idea of the 'internal conversation' (2000, 2012), central to emergence of agency. There is a difference between reflection on the task performance and reflecting on the process of learning itself, and as portfolios generally take place over time, this allows the deeper reflective process to occur (Walker, 1985). The latter involves a more holistic meta-reflection (Granville and Dison, 2005) and is more reflexive, in the sense that it is less of an individual process but involves a questioning of the relationship between the self and the social world, necessary, as we have seen in Chapter Three and Four, for emergence of agency. The transformative learning which can occur through a resetting of previous assumptions and perspectives (Mezirow, 1991) is facilitated. A student therefore, moves from more procedural self-regulation of goal-setting and identifying constructive habits to feed forward into future learning, or procedural autonomy (Ecclestone, 2002), towards an evaluation of the inner dialogues which can lead to a revision of actions or thinking: in a critical realist sense, the reconciliation of personal concerns and social situations.

6.2.2. Limitations and challenges of portfolios

Despite the espoused benefits of portfolios, I did not choose to use them as an assessment intervention within my context for a number of significant reasons. These were largely issues around or feasibility, or practicability (Bachman and Palmer, 2010) surrounding their implementation on pre-sessional EAP courses. Firstly, a showcase type of portfolio was highly impractical on a 5-week course stage at Barksdale when students only have time to write one extended essay. A working or process portfolio could align with an achievement model of assessment. However, due to the time limitations of the course, the stipulation for different pieces of writing over time could lead to the course becoming little more than a series of writing tests, with confusing weighting systems and different criteria for different tasks. This solves none of the issues surrounding

high-stakes assessment and in actuality, creates the problem of too much summative assessment as each piece of writing is itself high-stakes, which according to Harlen and Deakin-Crick (2003, p.1) "has a negative impact on motivation for learning that militates against the preparation for lifelong learning." If every piece of writing is assessed summatively, anxiety around writing may be increased and students are less inclined to feel comfortable making mistakes (Hirvela and Sweetland, 2005), which negates the reason for introducing the intervention. This could also exacerbate reasons for plagiarism and increase teacher burden to detect it in many disparate pieces.

A second issue is the extra burden on teachers as markers. On the pre-sessional, all student work is marked by classroom teachers rather than external examiners, who in addition to their regular work on short intensive courses, would be expected to provide much more qualitative feedback rather than marks for many different pieces of work if they have to have the desired effect of feeding forward into learning and if students are to improve their drafts for summative purposes (Kohonen, 2010). Not only would individual pieces need to be marked, but also holistically the folio itself, which requires thorough analysis in order to understand students' depictions of their processes and justifications (Gearhart and Wolf, 1997). If a portfolio is to be used as high-stakes end of course assessment, then it is imperative to ensure parity of assessment; hence, double marking and standardisation would increase, all a burden on teacher time. Good feedback practices may be abandoned in the necessity to turnaround pieces of writing. At Barksdale, double marking on final essays takes place in the final days of the course before results need to be confirmed to admissions. To increase this to marking a whole folio of pieces would be time-consuming and potentially impact on the time taken for university admissions to receive grades. Hence, students may have their visa application process delayed.

A related issue is how to assess the portfolios, to grade or report the scores, particularly in high-stakes contexts. This is something that the majority of the literature on portfolios does not address because they largely take place in formative or classroom contexts (Lam, 2017). Approaches to evaluation may favour either assessing the individual pieces of the folio or judging it as a whole (Herman et al, 1993). If choosing the former, in addition to the marking burden described above, there are additional issues with applying the same criteria for different portfolio pieces. It is highly time-consuming to create criteria which reflect success in writing in different social contexts, yet providing generic criteria for all writing, as is currently the case at Barksdale, reiterates the idea that writing is a generic skill with generic features. If the portfolio is to serve its purpose as a record of writing development, it should be judged holistically (Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2000); therefore, designing criteria to assess subjective processes of development is also highly problematic in summative contexts. Applications in the USA on large scale summative contexts found a high level of discrepancy between raters (Callahan, 1995). A study by Gearhart

and Wolf (1997) found that teachers' approaches to assessing the portfolio varied immensely and reflected their own attitudes to writing, reducing the rigour of the assessment through consistency and comparability as an alternative way of conceptualising reliability. Bannerjee and Wall (2006) on the University of Lancaster's EAP course pioneered a summative assessment of checklist of can-do statements provided by class teacher based on literacies students are perceived to need for university. This could potentially be applied in a portfolio context where formative feedback becomes part of a summative report and conforms to the principle of a more interpretivist and qualitative reporting of students' abilities (Lynch and Shaw, 2005). However, the voice of the student remains silent under this system and this does little to address the notion of problematic criteria compliance (Torrance, 2007; Lam, 2016).

Finally, there is the problem that portfolios have not always had the levels of success in practice as espoused in theory. A critical realist view would suggest that merely shifting the discourses of assessment does not help to shift practices when causal mechanisms of structure are acting on EAP assessment and constraining change. A review of the literature by Lam (2016) found several key issues, including the recognition that grade-conscious students, cultures or contexts may resist the portfolio or see it as another hurdle to jump through. Richardson (2000) found that students maintained their roles as subservient to the teacher and resented instances where the teacher did not give clear directives as to how to how improve. Portfolios cannot be a clear-cut solution in addressing power relations in educational contexts. Lo (2010) and Lam (2013) in Asian contexts and Aydin (2010) in Turkey found their students to be initially culturally resistant to autonomous learning. Furthermore, they may not be a solution to surface approaches, as Lam (2013) found that students often avoided revising drafts of anything that would not be in the final folio for assessment. Students are not unaware of the subtext of messages sent by assessment (the hidden curriculum), even when these assessments purport to facilitate empowerment and engagement with learning (Sambell and McDowell, 2006). It is clear that any attempt to introduce an assessment to elicit certain behaviours will encounter the inevitable fact of assessment as a constraining force. Chapters Seven and Eight recount how my intervention findings confirmed this.

In my own context, there were challenges that made the use of traditional portfolio assessment unfeasible, in addition to my own reservations about their ability to mitigate the negative impacts on students' sense of agency and ability to conceptualise themselves as developing writers as described above. My alternative design of a processfolio attempted to adapt to the Barksdale pre-sessional EAP context and address some, though by no means all, of the issues with portfolios as identified above.

6.3. The Processfolio

Processfolio is the name for a type of assessment associated with Zessoules and Gardner (1991) in the Arts, which is an adaptation of the traditional portfolio. Rather than a collection of disparate pieces of work as in the portfolio, a processfolio allows the learner to depict the journey they have undertaken through a collection of 'artefacts' in order to complete ONE piece of work. It is distinguished from the progress portfolio in that it represents process of completing a task rather than the progress gained in learning, although this is also hopefully a core element. As the processfolio would be trialled on the formative stage (the first four weeks) of the 9-week course, the assignment set by course coordinators was a 1000 word source-based research essay related to their chosen discipline (**see Appendix iv for assignment brief).** The processfolio should include a variety of work that has been undertaken as part of writing the essay. Students were required to select those pieces themselves and explain why they did so, either in an essay, abstract, introduction or annotated contents table. The processfolio itself could be presented in a folder (hard copy or electronically). The aim of the processfolio was to retain the principles of the portfolio in allowing the students to demonstrate active engagement with assessment and with writing, but to physically depict their process, showing what they have learned, how, and how this might affect their continued learning process within a time-constrained context. They would have complete control over the organisation, content and presentation of the processfolio, and were expected to demonstrate and justify the choices they have made in doing so. In their processfolio introductions, students were also encouraged to reflect on their product essay, their writing process, process of learning and reflexively on the experience of the assessment itself. Students' choice of artefacts would depict their judgements on elements of the learning and assessment process that they found more or less helpful, participating actively in the voices forming assessment decisions (Falchikov, 2005).

Both in the assignment brief and throughout the course, students were provided with suggestions for what could be included in the processfolio, although the point was not to be too prescriptive to allow students to make choices about how they wished to be judged (Leach et al, 2001). Many of these were based on activities that were built into the syllabus for the class and homework as part of the process of writing the essay for the four week course (see Chapter Seven). This aligned to the principles of assessment for learning, going beyond language testing washback concerns to a constructively aligned curriculum (Biggs and Tang, 2011). Everything students did in class or at home would be working towards the assessment (Hirvela and Sweetland, 2005), which addressed criticism of AR by not creating extra burden on students' or teachers' time and workload (Allwright, 2005).

One purpose of the processfolio was to emphasise the process as integral to the product; therefore, the processfolio and the product essay were not graded separately or individually weighted but rather the processfolio *was a component of the product.* As the processfolio would be a physical representation or depiction of learning, in this respect is in essence (its material form) a product. I faced an initial dilemma with this. Despite my concerns of assessing the writing process, I felt that if students did not feel it was assessed in some way, it would not be viewed as important in a high-stakes context (Hamp-Lyons, 2007). As a solution to this dilemma, it was decided in informal discussion with colleagues that students would not receive a grade for the essay unless they handed in the processfolio. The processfolio itself would not be given a numerical grade, but would be given holistic feedback comments using met/not met/partially met criteria on an indicative criteria form **(see Appendix v).** At this stage, these criteria were being trialled as if the processfolio may later become a summative assessment.

Table 6 below depicts the process of mapping the implications from the reconnaissance findings with the key manifestations of agency above (van Lier, 2013) and how these were rendered into the practical elements of the processfolio design.

Aims of the processfolio based on the recon cycle: **Provide Opportunities…**	**Corresponding attributes of agency and writing development in the literature**	**How this was actualised in the processfolio design**
for students to conceptualise their own processes of text creation, including time management	*the ability to organise learning and writing processes*	The folio would require students to present the pieces they chose to include in the order in which they had completed the process. The folio could be completed in tandem with the essay or composed retrospectively.
for students to explore and justify their own choices in research and text creation	*to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes*	The folio would require students to write a piece in a genre of their choosing (reflective essay, abstract, contents page, etc) to justify their choices of pieces and what they thought was helpful or unhelpful during the process.
for students to feel in control over the way they wish their abilities to be judged	*to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations*	Students were given choice on how they wished to present their processfolio (with the exception that at this stage it was paper based). It could be written in an academic or personal style.
for written reflection and discussion about writing development	*to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes*	In addition to the folio, students were given a freewriting task on day one about their assessment experiences and feelings. On the final day of processfolio project (week 4 of 9-week course), they were asked to write a reflective essay in class about their experiences of doing the folio and essay.
to improve the capacity of teacher feedback to empower students	*to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers*	The number of tutorials increased from ad-hoc and infrequent in 2013 to once a week in 2014. The students were asked to prepare for tutorials by setting an agenda and completing a record of what was discussed following

		it. Dialogic principles were applied where eliciting and discussion was emphasised rather than one-directional 'telling.'
for peer collaboration on text and evaluation of work to emphasise writing as a social practice	*to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers*	Face-to-face peer evaluation sessions in class were introduced with structured forms and I set up a peer discussion forum on the VLE platform where students would post sections of their work and comment on each other's writing. These (including screenshots of conversations) could go into the folios if they chose.
for students to self-evaluate by understanding and applying criteria as well as exploring the suitability of criteria	*to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations* *to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes* *self- efficacy or the belief in ones' own capacities*	Self-assessment forms were drawn up for students to complete for their formative essays using the writing criteria. These could go into the folio if they chose.
for students to explore and question issues around academic conventions, disciplinary differences textual ownership and plagiarism	*to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations* *to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes* *to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers*	I designed a classroom activity to discuss plagiarism as an issue rather than follow the syllabus material on Barksdale's plagiarism policy which used a test and was framed punitively. The project allowed for students to reflect on the nature of textual ownership and problems and challenges they faced in their reflective essay OR in the folio itself.
for students to develop students' confidence with all of the above	*self- efficacy or the belief in ones' own capacities*	I hoped that the above elements would shift the focus from grades and facilitate self-efficacy and confidence in writing as creation rather than performance.

Table 6. Designing the *processfolio*

As can be seen from Table 6 above, I wanted to foster an ethos of co-creation and demystification around assessment practices as emphasised in the AcLits approach, and the "social learning processes […] that engage students in marking practice […] and sharing standards" (O' Donovan et al, 2008, p.212). Therefore, I incorporated two key elements of the writing process into my intervention trial: self-assessment and peer evaluation. As above, the students could choose whether to include these elements in their physical folios as artefacts.

6.3.1. Self-assessment

Self-evaluation can be either grading one's own work against criteria, or reflecting more holistically on an individual piece of work or wider learning processes. The former is usually referred to as self-assessment (Tan, 2007) and emphasises the product of assessment rather than the processes undertaken. In addition to the general reflective elements of the processfolio, in light of the reconnaissance cycle findings and the inevitable high-stakes nature of pre-sessional assessment, I felt it was important for my students to be able to self-assess in order to understand performance standards and be able to judge their progress (Elander et al. 2006). Studies by Boud and McDonald (2003) and Harrington (2011) reported that not only did self-assessment training with criteria help to improve students' performances in summative exams but students reported feeling empowered, independent and more analytical. I also saw this as an opportunity to include students' own voices in their grading judgements as a means of sharing power within assessment events (Shohamy, 2001). Therefore, in addition to the reflective introduction of their processfolios, I decided to ask students to complete a self-assessment of their product essay using the Barksdale ELC criteria **(see Appendix i)** prior to handing in their essay. They graded themselves for each of the six criteria and justified their grades based on descriptors **(see Appendix vi)**. This procedure will be explained in Chapter Seven.

6.3.2. Peer evaluation

There is a clear interest in peer evaluation in HE and EAP fields, reflecting a social-constructivist view that students learn through social interaction (Rust et al, 2005). It is not within the scope of this project to engage with the vast body of literature on this topic, but to show how peer evaluation (here in terms of qualitative feedback rather than summative grading, a distinction made by

Falchikov, 2005) has been used as an example of a pedagogical application which fed into the processfolio.

Giving and receiving feedback from peers is thought to foster metacognition and management of learning (Liu and Carless, 2006), and allow students to engage with criteria in a more meaningful way by applying them to written work (Nicol and McFarlane-Dick, 2006; O'Donovan, 2008). In an EAP context, according to Ho and Savignon (2007, p.270), peer evaluation may "raise learners' audience awareness, foster collaboration and help learners develop a sense of discourse community." Language acquisition is also facilitated by the fact that learners work together in the target language to collaborate on a task (Wrigglesworth and Storch, 2012). Crossman and Kite (2012) point to individual benefits such as self-confidence and motivation; social benefits such as communication and empathy; and academic skills such as objectivity, justifying a position and developing voice. In addition, agency can emerge from the refining of internal conversations with others, obtaining feedback which can confirm or disrupt one's own thinking and ways of acting (Kahn et al, 2012)

Peer evaluation in pair situations was already employed at Barksdale in class situations by many teachers although this was usually on an ad hoc basis, formed no official part of the pre-sessional curriculum for less experienced summer teachers, and was at the discretion of the individual teacher as to the method and frequency of its use. In addition, it was often assumed that students who showed resistance to evaluating their peers did so because of their cultural and educational backgrounds. Therefore, I felt that these students might be more open to online feedback as a heightened sense of anonymity might make students more honest and critical (Kern, 1995; Ho and Savignon, 2007). Moodle is a type of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used at Barksdale, which is based on a social-constructivist theory of education, emphasising collaborative, student-centred and personalised learning (Al Ajlan and Zedan, 2008). The platform allows teachers to establish discussion forums for their own classes, where material can be uploaded and commented upon by others, which was the design I employed for my version of online feedback. Moodle forums lend themselves to the uploading of short draft versions of work that can be easily read and commented upon, rather than whole drafts of a paper, conforming to Van den Berg et al's (2006) optimal model of peer evaluation. Feedback can take place synchronously (where students feedback to their peers and receive responses in real time) but I chose to use the asynchronous medium (where students access the VLE in their own time to post their own work and read and post comments on the work of others). There is greater time in these contexts for students to reflect on the detail of the language and the communicative meaning of their peer's text, which means that more meaningful comments might be given, rather than merely surface grammar errors (Zeng and Takatsuka, 2009). I was keen to see how collaborative agency might be achieved through an explicit negotiation of meanings in texts and standards to judge writing (O'Donovan, 2008).

I designed two VLE peer evaluation activities for the 4-week processfolio trial stage of the pre-sessional. In the first, students uploaded their definition of their subject as part of the assignment (**see Appendix iv**) and commented on each other's definitions. The second activity was on the introduction to their essays and took place two weeks later. It served an additional purpose of reducing marking of individual pieces of work which would usually be submitted as homework and simultaneously reduce the burden of teacher time (Vogel, 2017), a concern for me when anticipating more teachers employing the processfolio. I wanted to create an online community facilitated not directed by the teacher (Skinner and Austin, 1999), yet I wanted to increase motivation by giving comments myself and monitoring their progress and management of the peer evaluation if needed (Di Giovanni and Nagaswami, 2001). However, I did not wish students to only value comments made by the teacher; hence, I informed them that I would only comment once they had commented on five other students' work. The hope was that if students had only extrinsic motivations to obtain teacher feedback (Zhang, 1995), by seeing others' comments first, they would see the value for themselves and therefore see writing with and for peers as a vital element of academic writing. This principle was key to my implementation of the whole processfolio project.

According to Guardado and Shi (2007), training around cooperative learning is vital for peer evaluation to be useful, especially for students from educational cultures where individual competition is valued and the teacher is seen to be the one who should provide feedback (Zhao et al 2014). If not used consistently, therefore, its benefits can be diminished. Therefore, I chose to integrate face-to-face peer evaluation activities in tandem with the VLE forum in order to provide such scaffolding and training for the types of helpful comments which could be made online. Research has shown that students are able to provide more useful advice when prompted by specific areas (Cho and Cho, 2010); hence, I provided a scaffolded feedback worksheet **(see Appendix vi)**.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how a critical review of the literature on alternative assessment principles and portfolios, two writing theories which have influenced EAP and two pedagogical activities, self-assessment and peer evaluation, informed the design of the processfolio. These were informed by findings from the reconnaissance and mapped onto a framework for analysis of improvement in the intervention cycles. Chapter Seven presents the findings from the first of these two cycles.

Chapter Seven: Intervention Cycle One

Overview

This chapter represents the first intervention cycle of the AR project. The information presented here covers the Action, Observation and Reflection stages of the cycle (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982). As the purpose of this cycle was to obtain a holistic picture of the extent of improvement of students' ability to exercise agency and conceptualise themselves as developing writers, a variety of data sets were generated from a range of methods and analytical tools. This is not uncommon in AR according to Dadds and Hart (2001) who rationalise 'methodological inventiveness' in complex situations. I felt it necessary for clarity to present each data set with its particular methods, analysis and findings together; therefore, the chapter will proceed as follows:

The first section describes the research design. The second presents and evaluates the data collected from one class of 14 students with myself as the writing teacher during the summer of 2014. Data presented are the students' processfolios, paired interviews between students, and results from the self and peer evaluation activities which were built into the course. In section three, I reflect on what I learned in this cycle, including the limitations and challenges of both the research design and the processfolio itself, and how this informed the planning and proceeding to the second cycle.

Overall, the data in this cycle presented a snapshot of positive benefits on students in terms of their metacognitive awareness of writing as a process and a developing awareness of their own individual processes by being able to organise their learning and writing processes and reflect on choices. The nature of writing as social was also prevalent in their understanding of discourse choices and enthusiasm for peer evaluation. In some areas, students demonstrated agency in their choices as writers and the processfolio had allowed them to exercise some control over their assessment situations. However, reflexive exploration of assessment as a structure was minimal, the extent of students' self-efficacy in their willingness and ability to self-evaluate was ambiguous, and the processfolio raised a question around the nature of assessed reflection as performativity.

7.1. Planning: methods

7.1.1. Designing the research procedure

The first step, described in the previous chapter, was to design the intervention of the processfolio from a framework based on the reconnaissance findings and the literature which would attempt to address the problematic situation of EAP pre-sessional writing practices at Barksdale.

Although previously the AR project was a largely individual undertaking, at this stage I began to draw in participation from other people at Barksdale by disseminating the reconnaissance findings in staff development sessions and course meetings as described in Chapter Five. At the conclusion of Chapter Five, I described the constraints to the implementation of the intervention; however, some changes were introduced by the course coordinators in 2014, some of which were based on recommendations from my reconnaissance cycle.

1. At the coordinators' request, I rewrote the wording of the formative essay task on the rubric, responding to the different ways in that teachers had been interpreting the task. Students now were to write a three part essay, firstly defining their discipline, secondly presenting what it means to do 'research' in that discipline and finally taking a seminal work or article in their discipline and reviewing its contribution to the field (**Appendix iv**). Workshops to clarify teachers' understandings of this assignment took place prior to the pre-sessional, and for temporary teachers in their induction sessions.
2. A weekly essay workshop was introduced by coordinators. These workshops provided an opportunity for me to implement peer and self-evaluation and reflective activities in class and provide immediate dialogic feedback (Hounsell, 2007). Doing so provided constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang, 2011) with the processfolio assessment and reduced workload for the students outside of class.
3. Although, as stated in Chapter Five, the timed-writing element of writing assessment was retained, the amount of class time dedicated to timed-writing practice was reduced from every two weeks on all courses to only twice on the 9-week and one on the 5-week. Teachers were to highlight that the exam would be only 13% of students' cumulative grade (see Chapter Two) and therefore not to focus much on it in class.
4. Upon consultation with the coordinators, I exercised some judgment in the syllabus materials, adapting and designing materials to support the processfolio that I employed in my classroom, provided that all skills were covered**.** This gave me slightly more freedom to adapt lessons that I felt were too dogmatic in their conceptualisations of writing, such as

those concerning plagiarism. Again, this allowed space for a pedagogic approach which aligned with the ethos of the assessment.

As above, a key concern was for the processfolio not to create a significant amount of extra work for students, or for myself in terms of marking. Hence, it was essential to map the assessment activities onto the existing syllabus and ensure that I was still teaching everything necessary for my class to complete the formative stage of the pre-sessional course. I assumed that students would choose to include work from some of these activities in their folios if they judged to them to have been useful.

- ✓ Freewriting activity on the first day to explore their previous experiences of writing in English and assessment of writing **(Appendix vii).**
- ✓ A lesson designed to raise awareness of why plagiarism can occur, as a supplement to existing materials on policies at Barksdale.
- ✓ Rudimentary peer evaluation forms for students to use in evaluating each other's work in class. This took place with three of their writing activities: a summary of their academic article, their essay introductions and their first drafts **(Appendix vi).**
- ✓ The discussion forum for peer evaluation which took place on the Moodle platform as described in Chapter Six[2].
- ✓ Two self-assessment forms: one for their formative essay using the Barksdale writing criteria; and another for their processfolio using my own criteria sheet created for it **(Appendix vi).**
- ✓ Tutorial record forms designed as a three-stage (before, during and after) process, where students were asked to make an agenda prior to the tutorial, make notes during and write a brief action plan afterwards. These formed the basis of the class work and the following tutorials but were not assessed or commented on by me. They could be included in the processfolio if students wished **(Appendix vi**).
- ✓ End of course reflective writing: a lesson was dedicated to a written post-hoc reflection on their experiences **(Appendix vii).**

The processfolio concept was introduced to the students in the first week of class, alongside the assignment brief of the formative essay given to all classes. Instructions were given to the students that their folio should be handed in alongside the essay and the processfolios were marked and returned to the students over the weekend. I photocopied all contents of the processfolios to analyse at a later date.

[2] It was impossible to anonymise the Moodle screenshots which were identified with students' names and pictures; therefore, I am unable to include samples as data

7.1.2. Participants

The selection of the class was a convenience sample (Cohen et al, 2013), i.e., the class I was assigned to teach. It consisted of eleven female and 3 male students and more detail is given in Table 7.1. Unusually on a Barksdale pre-sessional, the whole class was from mainland China, their first language Mandarin. Although in this research, issues of confounding variables such as language and nationality were not a key consideration, the make-up of the class minimised this quite coincidentally.

Name	Discipline/MA programme
Hubert(m)	Cultural and Creative Industries
Effy (f)	Cultural and Creative Industries
Emily (f)	Film Studies
Kahlen (f)	Cultural and Creative Industries
Chi (m)	Philosophy
Andy (m)	Business Management
Xinyang (f	World History
Michelle (f)	Cultural and Creative Industries
Ruby (f)	Film Studies
Susie (f)	Cultural and Creative Industries
Si (f)	Digital Asset Management
Ivy (f)	Cultural and Creative Industries
Adela (f)	Philosophy
Ella (f)	Cultural and Creative Industries

Table 7.1: Participants 2014

7.1.3. Ethical conduct

Many of the ethical procedures and protocols followed in the reconnaissance cycle were repeated here (refer to 5.1.2). However, there were some differences in this cycle.

The class were informed about the project on the first teaching day of the course. I initially requested a whole class of volunteers but this was not permitted by the coordinator for reasons of timetable organisation and fairness. It was the correct decision as self-selection is open to biases (Newby, 2010) and my call for participants might have attracted students with preconceived agendas about the project. At my request, the course coordinator participated in this discussion in case of any complaints or requests to be in a different class. As part of the ethical guidelines and consent form (**see Appendix ii),** students were informed that their

choice to not participate in the project would not impact on their grades and they were not obliged to complete or submit the processfolio. However, it was decided by the course coordinator that requests to leave the class would not be permitted given that the syllabus would be the same and all materials and lessons designed as part for my project adhered to norm at Barksdale of allowing teachers to use different approaches and select their own materials in the classroom. Hence, students would benefit from their participation even if they chose not to complete the processfolio. No student expressed a problem with participation. It was made clear that if they did choose to participate that they must abide by the assessment stipulation of not receiving a formative grade for their essay unless they completed the processfolio (see Chapter Six). This did not conflict with the ethical guideline that students were permitted to drop out at any time up to the deadline for submission (BERA, 2011), only that they must inform me before doing so rather than merely not doing the assignment.

7.1.4. Data Sets

The purpose of this cycle was to establish benefits and viability of the processfolio as assessment before widening the trial to a larger cohort. Unlike the previous cycle, where the data was qualitative from six students to obtain a thick description of the context (Croker, 2009), the data collection methods used in this cycle were largely qualitative but with some more quantitatively influenced methods to obtain a snapshot of the intervention effects with a complete class (Wallace, 1998). It is often necessary in localised AR to be flexible about data collection methods that best fit the context, rather than adhere to a strictly qualitative or quantitative paradigm (Udas, 1998). A critical realist allows for this in that it accepts a synthesis of "mixed methods, interdisciplinarity, triangulation, theoretical erudition and systematic review in order to capture the complexity of the objective and subjective dimensions of social life" (Houston, 2010, p. 84).

The primary data collection sets, the processfolios themselves and the paired interviews, were to chosen to provide an evaluation of demonstrable benefits to the processfolio assessment intervention. The secondary data sets were learning activities which took place in-class and online and which were employed as part of the processfolio designed to align with a pedagogy of agency and process with assessment, as referred to in Chapter Six. They provide triangulation to the primary data sets but are not evidence of interventions in themselves. Therefore, they are not analysed in great detail.

7.1.5. Data Analysis framework

Throughout the data analysis I was looking for evidence of the students' increased sense of agency and their ability to conceptualise themselves as developing writers as categorised by five attributes of agentic learners derived from the literature described in Chapter Six and outlined in Table 6. This approach represents a more critical realist engagement with the literature or theory from the outset, contrasting with a grounded theory approach (Fletcher, 2017). The two foci were subsumed within (as listed below) the five manifestations of agency as posited by van Lier (2013). These formed overarching themes or indicators of improvement. This time, rather than in-vivo tags and codes, descriptive codes (Saldana, 2013) were assigned to each data set, and mapped onto the five indicators, which allowed me to reformulate for my own context (Gilgun, 2011) the above model of student agency. These five indicators form the overarching themes for all data sets.

1. *the ability to organise learning and writing processes*

refers to students' organisational or self-regulative ability evidenced by depicted processes and procedures of writing or learning.

2. *to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes*

refers to how students reflected on what they did and what they learned from the experience; their awareness of things they should have done or good things they did do, to be able to understand and monitor the choices they made as writers in the process of text creation. This includes where students explicitly stated they felt in control of decisions made in their writing process OR where they thought things were decided for them by external/internal constraints. It refers to emotional aspects and behaviours, their identification of themselves with their texts or sense of identity as developing writers.

3. *self- efficacy or the belief in ones' own capacities*

refers to where students reported levels of confidence in aspects of the writing process. This section refers largely to the affective aspects rather than behaviours.

4. *to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations*

refers to engagement with writing assessment practices and where they felt empowered or constrained. It also refers to experiential elements such as what they actually thought about the experience of doing the folio itself.

5. *to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers*

refers to students' accounts of the extent to which interactions with teachers and peers in the writing process were dialogic and empowering, and their awareness of writing as a social practice.

Table 7.2 summarises how the data sets provided evidence of the five indictors of improvement.

Data set		**Indicators of improvement**
Primary	Processfolios	1, 2
	Interviews in pairs	1, 2, 3, 4,5
Secondary	Peer evaluation forums	5
	Self-assessment forms	3, 4

Table 7.2. Data collection sets and analytical framework 2014

7.2. Acting/Observing: analysing the findings

Table 7.3 below summarises the main findings of this cycle. A detailed account of the analysis methods and the findings of each data set is provided as each set is treated in turn.

Problem identified from Recon cycle	Findings from first processfolio trial	Corresponding attributes of agency and writing development in the literature
Students have a largely mechanical approach to writing and define their development mainly in terms of outcomes (scores or criteria); often require model answers to follow and produce poor work to complete imposed deadlines	Students were generally able to depict their own process or retrospectively impose an order on it, rather than follow generic linear steps. They were identifying areas of strength and weakness in more concrete terms; although still some focus on grades, much less intensely. Students setting some goals for future development but not always consistent	*the ability to organise learning and writing processes*
Many students find it difficult to explain their writing choices beyond a fixed linear process and acquisition of linguistic features	Students were explaining more specific processes of text creation and focusing on aspects pertinent to them, including aspects of language but not defining writing solely as linguistic features. More focus on writing as a social practice and process	*to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes*
Students express degrees of stress over their assessments and many feel it is only the job of others to evaluate them	Stress and lack of self-efficacy remains around timed-writing and some nervousness around grades, but this was far less of a focus. Many struggle with self-assessment. All seem to submit to the act of assessment and do not question criteria or assessment practices	*to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations*
Students have a conflicted attitude to concepts of writing, questioning the construct of timed-writing while seeing it as the greater indicator of ability	Still concerns around timed-writing but processfolio helps students to see the process they have gone through as an achievement rather than mere performance and raise questions around assessment writing constructs. Conflict still evident in anxiety and lack of self-efficacy in timed-writing while valuing it.	*to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes*

Students are experiencing inconsistency of feedback and it is lacking or may be fostering dependence in some cases; teachers unsure of feedback practices	More dialogic tutorials and feedback. Most students felt they could disagree or question their teacher and were satisfied with 3 levels of evaluative feedback (teacher, peers and self)	*to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers*
Students conceive of writing as an individual practice. There is currently a lack of peer evaluation on the course despite the benefits in the literature	More focus on the communicative nature of writing and value of peer evaluation unequivocal (with some variation in medium- face to face vs online; written vs oral). Peer interactions show increasing awareness of writing as a social practice.	*to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers*
Students express confusion over their grades or rely on their teachers to tell them how to 'fix' their essays. Teachers express concern over the suitability of Barksdale criteria	Most think criteria are fair but confusion over its applicability to their own essays. They still lack self-efficacy in evaluating their own work according to set criteria, although there is more recognition that evaluation is a shared responsibility with the teacher.	*to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations* *to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes* *self-efficacy or the belief in ones' own capacities*
Some students plagiarise or collude; there is minimal conception of textual ownership or as writing as a means of positioning oneself within an academic discourse community	Plagiarism was not mentioned, nor was any comparison to other classes. This does not mean students did not plagiarise but the inclusion of Turnitin submissions meant I could see there had been no evidence of plagiarism. Some discussions of their discipline but more in terms of content than discourse.	*to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations* *to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes* *self-efficacy or the belief in ones' own capacities*
Many students lack confidence in writing and some suffer from emotional distress	Clear evidence of increased confidence in all areas except timed writing and language for some. Most reported an increased sense of self-efficacy in writing choices.	*self-efficacy or the belief in ones' own capacities*

Table 7.3: Main findings 2014

7.2.1. The Processfolios

As the processfolios are the result, the *product* of the assessment as a tangible collection representing their internal processes, they are significant evidence of students' responses to it. Analysis proved a challenge as there is no precedent in the literature for an analytical method of this kind; hence, I was reliant on the 'methodological inventiveness' referred to by Dadds and Hart (2001). In this respect I deemed it particularly important to triangulate processfolio data with other data sets. I chose to focus on three main aspects of the processfolios which provide evidence to support the improvement of the situation on in terms of agency and the ability of students to conceptualise themselves as developing writers.

I chose to focus on

a). the students' chosen method of introducing the processfolio explaining their choices of pieces for inclusion in the folio,

b). the content of this introduction as reflective discourse,

c). the artefacts they included and the order in which students presented them in the processfolios.

The introduction was a focus as it was the demonstrative reflection of how students had chosen to present their processfolios in their own words and reflect on their choices, therefore acting as an expression of identity (Gee, 2014). Using content analysis to note and assign tags to pertinent features (Creswell, 2013), a table was used to record the three foci for each student's processfolio and mapped onto indicators *1* and *2* (see table 7.2). As the processfolios were manifestations of the students' writing processes in behaviours (doing), they would not be able to show the feeling/having of control and self-efficacy, and may only have minimal evidence of their ability to participate in dialogic feedback situations; hence, I did not analyse them in terms of indicators *3-5*. For a sample of this process, **see Appendix viii.**[3]

Generally, the processfolios indicate benefits for the students in terms of their ability to organise the process of their writing, reflecting metacognition about writing as an iterative process. Choices had clearly been made independently and generally justified. However, the evidence of agency remained superficial.

[3] In both cycles I use italics to represent the students written words in the folios, while their utterances in interviews are presented within quotation marks

1. the ability to organise learning and writing processes

All students used the processfolio to depict the process they had undertaken to complete the assessed essay. The processfolios showed evidence of source selection, note-taking, outlines and plans and multiple drafts, which reflects a clear metacognitive awareness of writing as a process by selecting artefacts and organising them in a way which depicted their research journey (Lam, 2016) and their awareness of text construction (Dovey, 2010). In Pintrich's (2002) definition of metacognition, this is general knowledge of learning processes. However, most students ordered their artefacts in a similar way. Definitions of their subject usually came first, followed by sources, notes and brainstorming, outlines, summaries, introductions and drafts. This calls into question their metacognitive awareness of their *own* learning or writing processes (Pintrich, 2002). This consistency in the process of writing was in large part due to the essay workshops which were organised around an aspect of the essay each week, and expected students to be at the same point in their process. Although this standardisation was deemed necessary by Barksdale to ensure parity with other classes, it perhaps instilled the idea of writing as a series of linear steps rather than as a complex iterative and individual process (Negretti, 2012); therefore, it is not unusual that the majority of students have organised their processfolios in a similar way.

Nevertheless, three students either imposed a different sequence of artefacts or focused on an aspect of the process that was specific to them. Hubert depicted the process in his processfolio backwards from the order in which it was completed, with his essay draft as the first item. His introduction did not explain why he chose to do this, so it is unclear whether it reflects a choice to present his process in reverse order from finished product. Emily imposed a three-stage order on the process, depicting what she felt were distinct steps taken to complete the essay. Ivy's focus was on the time scheduling as she included planning, timelines and schedules. These students appeared to be conceptualising the process of writing for themselves in an explicit monitoring of their whole process of learning (Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2000; Belgrad, 2013).

Further evidence of organisation of individual learning was shown in the processfolio introductions. 11 of the 14 students identified benefits of the pieces of work selected in order to justify their inclusion in the processfolio, which clearly highlight conscious choices made during the writing process. No processfolio included all the same artefacts and the only artefact included by all students was the peer feedback, whether online or the forms from face-to-face classroom activities, as will be explored in 7.2.3. Some students included particular things that were important to them. For example, Susie's awareness of plagiarism and recreating texts was shown in her inclusion of original sources as well as her notes and summaries of them. She also included her Turnitin report. The students' decision to include pieces of work relevant to their own process

reflects an understanding on the part of the student as to why certain activities contributed to their writing process and what *they* valued rather than merely what was being tested (Newman et al, 2003).

The detail in which students depict their process varies, and some were more thorough than others. All included some pieces of writing which had contributed to the final essay, and all included the first draft as this was my stipulation in the assignment brief, although only Susie included the final completed draft. In addition, although all students included the peer evaluation form and/or a screenshot of the Moodle forum, no student specifically showed how they used this to improve their drafts. No student described *all* pieces of work that they included in the processfolio and two students stated in their introduction that they had included certain things which did not actually appear in the processfolio. This could have been due to rushing and not checking the contents thoroughly, or because they had misplaced some of the material. The latter explanation is quite plausible given the comments regarding the trouble of printing and collating of material (see 7.2.2). Significantly, in their introductions, three students did not mention the artefacts in the processfolio at all or referred to them very implicitly, choosing instead to describe the processes or actions of writing itself. These students concentrated more on the challenges and how they solved them. Although on the surface, this may reflect a distancing from the assessment or a lack of understanding of the purpose of the processfolio, it perhaps illustrates an agentic choice in that they may have identified themselves with the act of *doing* rather than the static processfolio as a product. In addition, this focus on process indicates a possible capacity to distinguish between learning goals and performance goals (Dweck, 1986). The distinction between the process and the processfolio is a recurring theme which will be further explored in Chapter Eight.

2. *to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes*

Evidenced by their introductions, many students showed the ability to reflect on their strengths and weakness to inform future choices and solve problems. Andy's introduction discussed his lack of confidence with grammar and how he used the notes he made on articles to practice his grammar structures for the finished essay. Si chose to see the processfolio as the place to reflect explicitly on her strengths and weaknesses, the mistakes she made and areas for improvement (*I should have.., I have to work on…).* This demonstrates a metacognitive awareness of ones' experiences and ability derived from this understanding to evaluate what has been gained from the experience and how this feeds into future learning situations (Granville and Dison, 2005). According to Säljö (1979, p.446) "optimal learning occurs once the phenomenon of learning itself has become an object of reflection...something that can be explicitly talked about and discussed and can be the object of conscious planning and analysis."

The processfolio as a tangible record of learning provided a platform for this conscious planning and analysis to occur. All students expressed increased confidence, with only Hubert's processfolio introduction reflecting his continued lack of self-efficacy, with phrases such as *I cannot seek out, not relevant, too esoteric, beyond the scope of my knowledge.* Hubert was the weakest linguistically on entry to the course, and the oldest, having had more experience in the workplace before returning to education. Hubert's interview echoed some of this sense of frustration, although he conveyed a sense of trust and safety in reflecting on his situation within this processfolio medium (Rogers, 2001). According to Walker (1985), the act of writing can help people to distance themselves from their emotions, thereby working through them in a positive way.

One of the main choices made in the processfolios was how to introduce them, and this was the area where most individual agency was shown through the way that students wished to present themselves and thus how they wished to be assessed (Murphy and Camp, 1996). 11 students wrote abstracts of varying lengths from one paragraph to a mini essay. Two used a contents table and two used both an abstract and a table of contents. Andy wrote a short abstract explaining the process of writing and a longer essay saying what he thought he had gained from the processfolio. Ruby chose to organise her contents table with three columns of *what I put in, reasons why I put it in, what I have learned.* Three students depicted their writing process as stages and chose pieces to reflect those stages, although each of them saw the stages differently. Emily broke down these stages into very specific actions and procedures within each stage. Hence, despite the similarity of their ordering of processfolio contents as described above, one of the most significant findings was that in their reflections, some students had conceptualised their own individual process (Pintrich, 2002), which can be seen as an expression of agency and ownership**.**

The linguistic choices made by students in their introductions to the processfolios were further evidence of this sense of ownership in how they positioned themselves in relation to their work. The students' terminology in describing their processfolios exemplifies this choice in what they wanted it to be: a record of their work (*a documentary*), a step by step description of their journey, an overview of the process, or a reflection on their progress (*a review*). The majority of students employ the use of personal pronouns *I/me/my* in referring to their own work, which can be interpreted as an identification of themselves with their work in this more reflective genre. Those who used a combination of definite article+ noun (*the essay/ the work*) and possessive pronoun + noun (*my essay/ my mind*), consistently used the latter more, reflecting a sense of ownership. The use of 'I statements' (Ushioda 2010) with a cognitive (*I think, I believe)* affective *(I prefer*) or state (*I divided, I chose*) verb (Gee, 2014) illustrates the awareness on the part of the students that they were consciously making choices but also making declarative statements about themselves as writers and as individuals (Ivanič, 1994).

According to Granville and Dison (2005), if students can use their own voices and reflect on their own identity in some contexts, they may not feel so alienated by academic discourse. The processfolio gave the students an opportunity to talk around text (Lillis, 2003) using their own words and discourse, helping them to identify themselves explicitly with their own work and increasing the concept of textual ownership (Irons, 2004), which can be impeded by the need to write in an unfamiliar discourse.

Only Xinyang chose not to employ personal language at all. She was the most initially resistant to some aspects of the course, including interaction with peers, and although never explicitly expressed discomfort with the processfolio, did not seem to engage in the same way as others as is clear in her largely descriptive abstract. She chose not to invest of herself in the same way as the others, engaging with the processfolio and the interview in an obliging but instrumental way, perhaps to avoid a risk to her sense of agency (Rust, 2002), perhaps because she did not believe in its value. Aydin (2010)'s study posits culture as a factor in approaches to learning and developing agency. Although this appears not to be bourne out by the fact that all the students were Chinese, Xinyang's resistance can be explained by a learning preference for her own educational culture. Indeed, she was the most vociferously defensive in class discussions about the Chinese way of writing and learning.

7.2.1.1. Limitations of the folio data

As mentioned above, I am unaware of any precedent for analysing processfolios, so my analysis was largely intuitive, hence perhaps underdeveloped, less rigourous and open to claims of incorrect interpretation. Although I have attempted to mitigate this by proffering several interpretations of data (Silverman, 2014), triangulation through other data sources below was the best way to ensure validity (Burns, 2005).

In addition, as one function of the processfolio was facilitating agency through genuine choices, I gave minimal guidance on the presentation or the content. The data available for analysis, therefore, was only that which students choose to include, limiting my ability to obtain a comprehensive picture of students' writing processes.

7.2.2. The Paired Interviews

The main purpose of the paired interviews was to triangulate the processfolio evidence (Silverman, 2014). The processfolios themselves provided external evidence of the students' increased awareness of the writing process and some sense of agency in their demonstration and justification of choices, but I decided paired interviews were necessary to obtain a fuller picture and deeper understanding of the students' experiences, in other words to go beyond the physical manifestations of their learning. Interviews would provide not just an insight into motivation for choices and actions but also potentially uncover any discrepancies between them (Townsend, 2013).

The interviews took place on the day of submission of the formative essay and processfolios. I wished to gather opinions from the whole population (Wallace, 1998) rather than select a sample from the class at this stage and it was feasible to do so with 14 students. However, this was the last Friday of the 4-week stage and students would begin the 5-week final stage of the 9-week course the following Monday. Therefore, in order not to place a burden on their time with 14 separate interviews, I decided to ask the students to interview each other as part of a classroom task (Burns, 2005). A list of topics and questions for discussion were provided to the students, as well as a dictaphone to record their conversation. Adhering to Townsend's (2013) framework for understanding the nature of interventions, questions and topics were based on experiences of the processfolio, what was learned or gained, what behaviours changed, and to what extent these initial effects have been or can be sustained. Some of the questions about writing were the same as the reconnaissance cycle for some comparability. At the end of the course, I made sure to perform an in-class member check, where the results of the project were disseminated for students' comments in an informal class discussion about the processfolio experience, as suggested by Burns (2009).

The procedures for analysis were similar to the reconnaissance cycle as described in Chapter Five, using content analysis. First, I developed 18 codes from data, counting the frequency of codes across the sample with the student as the unit of analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). As the interviews provided a more comprehensive picture, I was able to map *all five* indicators of improvement from the analysis framework (7.1.6.) onto the codes for an overall picture of the improvement. Codes included positive and negative aspects, hence increasing my ability to form a more comprehensive picture than merely looking for improvement, and reducing the potential for bias in analysis. For a sample of the coding procedure, see **Appendix ix**.

1. *the ability to organise learning and writing processes*

All students showed some elements of referring to the process of text creation and choices made. For example, Emily discussed imposing the three-stage order on her process of writing as depicted in her processfolio. Metacognitive awareness of the writing process was demonstrated in their descriptions of the choices made (Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2000) and a mindful reflection of those choices (Cozart et al, 2016). Unlike in the reconnaissance cycle, where the students were describing the process as a set of linear steps, these students focused on aspects pertinent to them. For example, Ella wanted to discuss her editing and proofreading process with her partner Adela: "Time flies fastly (sic) when I'm typing...when I'm editing or correcting I always spend a lot of time on this...how to make my writing better, do you think this is right?" This contrasted with their largely generic depictions of their processes in their processfolio contents, indicating that metacognition had been raised at the individual level as well as the general (Pintrich, 2002). They described processes in more detail and focused more on choices they had made, for example of searching for and synthesis of sources, clearly conceptualising writing as a recursive process of development (Negretti, 2012).

2. *to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes*

The main finding here was that students thought the processfolio was an aid to understanding the process because it represented a tangible record of what they had done (Lam, 2016), rather than trying to recall and reconstruct it through written or oral reflection alone. Most students collated their artefacts after they had produced the essay. Reflection can occur at any stage during the process (Schön, 1986) but retrospective reflection is more common and useful as people are generally better at reflecting after the fact (Rogers, 2001). In the act of completing the processfolio, students had actively reconstructed their process and, by doing so, were able to see more easily their strengths and weaknesses (Freedman, 1993),

Indeed, 10 students described noticing mistakes they had made during the writing process, and identified challenges they had faced, some of which they had resolved, some not. The majority (13) were identifying areas in which they could develop, for example Andy: "I'm still confused about my writing style. In the next month this is the most important thing I want to focus on." Of these 13, 10 referred to their underestimation of the time it would take to write a research essay. Chi, for example, spoke of the revelation that "my seminal work is 2000 pages and I made nearly 20 pages of notes and I was shocked I wasted a lot of time for a 1000 words essay." Si also was frustrated with her allocation of time to the descriptive element of the essay and less to the higher scoring critical evaluation part: "This essay I took almost three or four days working on the

definition part...it's too long so the evaluation part I have one or two days and the evaluation was weak." Si and Chi here are revising their expectations of the writing process, showing reflexivity towards their learning experiences and choices by evaluating them (Yancey, 2009), and showing a growing reconceptualization of writing from a product or performance to a recursive progression of actions and reflections (Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2000). Indeed, many students stated that the processfolio had not helped them manage their time during this particular essay but that the benefits would be felt in the future summative essay, for example, Andy: "Based on the folio I know what I need to do and what kind of plan I can make and about the schedule." Because the processfolio was a permanent document of the process, five students said they had used it to set goals for the future, which might feed forward into future learning (Mezirow, 1991; Carless, 2007).

Many students still focused on language features as their weak area, and one that they felt most stressful about, but unlike in the reconnaissance cycle, these students were not defining writing as merely language when asked about their development. Indeed, rather than the focus on accuracy and correctness, three referred to language as ways to "express your ideas." However, Ruby and Michelle remained tied to an idea of writing as "vocabularies." In addition, as in the reconnaissance cycle, some students mentioned technical skills such as "paraphrasing," "structuring" and "argument" without the detail of showing they really understand these concepts, although as will be shown below, this was largely a limitation of my interview method. More students in this cycle explicitly referred to the content of their essays and the ideas, discussing this as an aspect over which they felt they had control. As with the processfolios, the 'I-statements' (Ushioda, 2010), for example: "I chose by myself," "all by ourselves," " my essay" reflected engagement and a sense of ownership. Doing the processfolio perhaps raised their awareness of the notion of textual ownership (Pennycook, 2001) because going through the process step by step required them to conceptualise the actions and choices they made as writers (Irons, 2004). Unlike in the reconnaissance cycle, plagiarism was not mentioned by any of the students, nor were there any comparisons between other classes or reference to outside help. However, an important caveat which will be explored below is that this was a formative stage, therefore did not contribute to marks, reducing the incentive to plagiarise.

However, although 13 students discussed their ability to make decisions, many expressed various constraints on those decisions, both external: the assignment brief which they felt dictated their structure (nine), disciplinary or academic conventions which dictated their style and ability to express their ideas (nine), the limited time of the course (five); and internal: Chinese culture and its impact on their views of learning (three), and personality (three). Although awareness of personality shows an intrapersonal awareness central to agency (Mercer, 2012), the fact that personality and culture were generally conceptualised as

static in utterances such as, “I am the sort of person who,” could impede the transition and risk necessary to participate fully in their learning situations (Molden and Dweck, 2006). On one hand, viewing social structure as dominant over the agent allows the individual to submit to disempowerment (Shay, 2008). On the other hand, a reduction of agency to ‘personality’ can further disempower or alienate, leading to a sense of failure or self-blame (Case, 2008).

According to critical realist Nash (2005), it might be more helpful to think of ‘disposition’ of individuals which implies a social mediation and possibility of change through emergence, opening up a critical consciousness of structure. Indeed, the ability of the students to recognise assessment and academic discourse as external constraints shows a growing possibility for agency by their recognition of structures which impact on their choices (Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003). One example is an exchange between Adela and Ella, where Ella, through reflecting on her development of writing, begins to question the timed-writing construct as different from the research essay:

> I think I feel something positive about my writing, how to write logically, and how to organise my ideas....but yesterday when we did timed-writing I found something strange. I found I still cannot think quickly and I always think about what grammar structure I can use to show a higher...no, to show I have acquired some writing skills.

The idea that timed-writing is act of using language to demonstrate ability rather than for a communicative purpose (Leung et al, 2016) is clearly emerging in Ella’s description of her experience. Although not explicitly, she is making the connection between her previous assessment experiences and seeing them as similar to how timed-writing is tested as a performance, at odds with the research essay. By allowing students a space to explore conceptualisations of writing explicitly, the processfolio has somewhat facilitated this emerging critical consciousness.

However, Ella is unable to dismiss timed-writing and still wants to “practice her skill.” Ella’s agency is not fully emerging from interaction with structure because she remains committed to the idea of timed-writing, not merely submitting to but choosing to remain bound by a disempowering practice, in a similar way to Shuling in Chapter Five. At this stage, the students do not seem to have distinguished between areas where they can be causally efficacious and areas where they cannot affect change (Shipway, 2011). This is unsurprising within a 4-week period and represents a limitation of the project, which will explored in later chapters.

3. self-efficacy or the belief in ones’ own capacities

A recurring theme in the findings was the increased self-efficacy gained from the processfolio being tangible, which allowed students to notice what they had achieved. Ten students identified how their confidence with writing had

increased, supporting Hughes-Wilhelm's (1996) study on the portfolio's positive impact on pride. This is shown in Susie's comment "it gave me a sense of fulfilment," Chi's "oh, I'm brilliant," and Michelle's "I feel on the way to being a professional." Hubert's reference to his folio as a "documentary" echoes Lam's description of a portfolio as "a window for witnessing efforts and achievements" (2016, p.1901). This is perhaps heightened with the processfolio because it does not contain pieces of writing as snapshots of performance (their best face). Rather, it provided them a fuller picture of the choices they made throughout the process. Indeed, eight students stated specifically their self-confidence had increased because their opinion of writing had changed. They had initially felt the processfolio and essay writing itself would be complicated or too difficult and afterwards realised this was not the case. Their experiences had disconfirmed negative assumptions which contributed to increased self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982).

However, the picture of self-efficacy is more complex. Of the eight who still expressed some lack of confidence, three were concerned with the timed exam, using words to describe their writing like "terrible," "rubbish" and "crap." Such self-deprecating language was not present when talking about their research writing, reinforcing the findings from the reconnaissance cycle on the impacts of timed-writing on self-belief. There were also concerns around the research essay process, where three students stated their confidence had decreased: "At first I was very confident...but in the process of finishing the essay, I became more and more unconfident." Kahlen and Emily discussed their lack of confidence in researching their own subject because of their perceived lack of knowledge in that discipline, although this is perhaps indicative of a stage of learning development where the process of revising one's previous as parameters is accompanied by emotions, and a consequence of taking a deeper approach to learning (Rust, 2002). Finally, as will be explored in 7.2.4, many students expressed confusion around the finer distinctions between the Barksdale criteria; therefore, they were less confident about how to apply it to their own work.

4. *to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations*

As we have seen above, students were clearly making choices as writers and demonstrated a level of control over their assessment by choosing to present their processfolios and conceptualise them in individual ways. This is reflected in the range of nomenclatures for the processfolio: "an alarm," "a review," "a documentary."

Anxiety and stress around assessment was a key finding in the reconnaissance cycle. It is notable here that stress was explicitly mentioned by only three students and, again, all regarding timed-writing. This is not to say that students did not experience stress during the project, merely that it did not seem to be at the forefront of their minds during the interviews. This supports findings by

Öztürk and Çeçen, (2007) that anxiety may be alleviated by alternative assessment which does not foreground grades. Grades were mentioned only in the discussions of criteria (as will be explored in section 7.2.4). Two students said they shifted their focus because of the processfolio's emphasis on process, for example Adela: "I am stressed more…[about] consequences rather than process...so ask us to do more than a product can provide us with new method maybe." This represents a critical evaluation of her inner dialogue and exploration of a shifting learning identity. According to Kohonen (2010, p.5) "learning becomes transformative when an individual revises his or her beliefs, assumptions or expectations into qualitatively new ways of seeing the world." Adela is moving somewhat towards those revisions.

However, as we have seen above, students remained constrained by the assignment itself and seem to be submitting to the act of assessment. Emily expressed resignation and frustration simultaneously around assessment experiences: "I don't have much feeling because I have to do something similar in the past 4 years so...I just repeat." In her peer discussion about whether she felt she could disagree with her teacher, she stated: "Nothing because I think the method of assessment or homework or something related to the course, that is what you should do." This is consistent with Richardson's (2000) critiques of the limitations of alternative assessment which claims to facilitate agency, given the inevitable power imbalance in HE between the student and teacher.

Although Emily appears to be submitting to her situation, she chose to present her processfolio in the most unique way of all the students, a paradox that can potentially be explained by the fact that Emily had encountered reflective learning as a concept in her previous Western-model education system. In contrast to Luis in the reconnaissance cycle, who had disengaged from the course to focus on the assessment, Emily decided to take a new opportunity for learning from a familiar situation, an example of agentic behaviour (van Lier, 2013). Because she was sceptical of what she saw as the purpose of processfolio, she used it for her own purpose, to manage her time: "It gave me a guideline…it make me organise time schedule at the beginning so I think it's a useful method." Andy also made an agentic choice in that, rather than accept the assignment brief as his title, he chose to use his own title for the assignment. These students are showing evidence of contesting parameters drawn for them by the assessment.

In terms of whether the processfolio itself was seen as a constraint, four students said it was time-consuming because they had chosen to complete it retrospectively (confirming findings from a portfolio study by Aydin, 2010), although they also highlighted its benefits. Another issue was the collation of physical artefacts. The processfolio was a physical folder; therefore, all pieces had to be printed out to go into the folder, even if they had been completed electronically or using a mobile device. In 2014, the use of mobile devices and online learning was not as prevalent on the Barksdale pre-sessional as it was to

become in the following years, but three students did express frustration with a rather primitive paper-based assessment model.

However, the more troubling questioning of the processfolio came from Chi and Andy. It touched upon the aspect I was most concerned about in the intervention regarding replacing one disempowering practice with another. Andy expressed concern over the need to reflect in a public way "I'm afraid I can't tell the truth about myself if I have to submit…." This highlights a common issue with reflection in that a student can skew their reflection towards what the audience, the teacher, expects of them (Moon, 1999; Rogers, 2001). While Chi dismisses this as cultural face-saving (see below), the *processfolio* as assessment is information collected in order to make judgements (Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2000) even if just by me for research purposes. Indeed, this might be exacerbated when students are more invested in the assessment as authentic, thus giving more of themselves to be judged (Rust et al, 2005) as is the case with a depiction of their complex writing processes. It is clear that Andy has a natural inclination for reflection: "I know what I need to improve, maybe I didn't write it but I know." He is not resistant to reflection itself, only its performative aspect (Hirvela and Sweetland, 2005). This is consistent with criticisms of the confessional aspect of reflective practice, where "the boundaries of public and private become available to critical scrutiny" (Fendler, 2003, p.22), which triggers defence mechanisms and the feeling of the need to hide aspects of the process. If Andy feels the need to make his learning public for an audience, the learning itself might be diminished (Moon, 1999).

5. *to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers*

Peer evaluation was the most successful element of the project in that 13 students explicitly said they found it helpful and no one said it was unhelpful. Effy stated that "it was a good way to learn from each other by interacting with each other," echoing the Vygotskian social constructivist education theory that students learn from co-constructing meaning. As much of the literature on peer evaluation emphasise, learning about writing can occur through these oral interactions in face-to-face peer activities. According to Leung and Mohan (2004, p.356) "students who engage in oral discussions of academic subject matter are likely to be better prepared for written academic discussion." The only divergence concerned the format. All liked the asynchronous Moodle forums, supporting studies by Kern (1995) and Ho and Savignon (2007), although Adela stated that she preferred face-to-face feedback in classroom situations as she was more comfortable with speaking. Ella by contrast, said she felt shy in discussions. This supports the findings of Warschauer (1996) around the issues of saving face and lack of linguistic confidence in peer discussions. However, as in the processfolios, students did not discuss specifically how their peers' feedback had

contributed to their writing specifically. Peer evaluation will be further explored in section 7.2.3.

In terms of teacher feedback, particularly in tutorials, 10 students said they felt they could disagree with their teacher and used words like 'advice,' 'suggestions' and 'recommendations' to describe their interactions with me. However, Susie's comment "they are so persuasive" about her teachers could belie her belief that she is being coerced into doing certain things. Effy said of her time management "I just do what the teacher tell me to do step by step," and Andy made many references to "Jayne." Although the verbs were "suggest," "help" and "advise", it is clear he felt constrained by his respect for the teacher as an authority (Richardson, 2000). Andy had arrived on the course a week late and was struggling to understand the assignment, so I did step in with a suggestion for his seminal work to analyse as part of the task. It was alarming to me because, despite my attempts to be dialogic in tutorials and in class, the difficulties were highlighted of maintaining dialogue and facilitating independence from teachers within the high-stakes nature of the EAP pre-sessional. This problem is compounded by the cultural attitude to teachers as indicated by Chi: "In Chinese education the tutors...we don't have equal position…you show your best face," which could have impacted on this feeling of teacher dependency (Zhang, 1995). However, to a large extent because of the context, the inherent power imbalance in students seeing me as an authority in the classroom or an expert in my field is unavoidable, and it is likely that did not want to disagree but rather to learn from me (Little, 1995). According to La Ganza (2008), the development of autonomy, albeit procedural, is paradoxically often heightened "while the relationship with the teacher is strong…characterised by the teachers concern for the learners' educative wellbeing" (p.71).

7.2.2.1. Limitations of paired interviews

I chose to ask the students to record their discussions in pairs to save time. There were clear benefits to being allowed to lead the discussion themselves. Although they were aware they were being recorded, it might have lessened interviewer bias slightly in that they were not in the presence of an authority figure, particularly given my dual role as researcher and their teacher. However, this meant I had to provide a list of topic questions to discuss so the interviews were far more structured than I would have wanted. This limited the depth that the interviews could provide because I was unable to probe or ask follow up questions as in a normal interview situation (Silverman, 2014). In some pairings, one student corrected the other's' mistakes in understanding the question, but in others, it was clear the misunderstanding was mutual, so it was difficult for them to progress with that question. The absence of an interviewer to reformulate or clarify understanding was problematic in some exchanges. It was also at the

discretion of individual students as to how much they wanted to divulge. Sometimes I felt they rushed to move on and I had no way of following up some utterances for a richer explanation (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002), increasing the level of extrapolation and potentially reducing the rigour of the data analysis.

It was impossible to make a direct comparison between the reconnaissance cycle and this cycle to determine whether the improvement was due to factors other than the processfolio, such as personality, culture or my change in teaching style. Yet it was not my intention to provide generalizable comparisons to prove improvement, but to see how the problems associated with assessment could be mitigated. More problematically, it was difficult to judge the extent to which this mitigation had occurred because this cycle took place on a formative stage while the reconnaissance interviews were conducted on the summative stage. It is likely that the students in this cycle were more relaxed in general given their awareness that this essay did not contribute to their final grade (Leung and Mohan, 2004).

The most significant limitation of the paired interviews was that they took place immediately following the processfolio project only. This did not allow me to gain a fuller picture of the impact of the processfolio on their approach to the summative stage of assessment. Therefore, this cycle was limited as a validity study of an assessment trial as well as a critical realist-influenced AR project to obtain a rich picture of the local situation.

With the exception of the trialling at formative stage, which was ethically obligatory, these limitations fed into the refinements of data sets for Cycle Two (see 7.3.2).

7.2.3. Moodle forum peer evaluation

The Moodle asynchronous forums were a secondary data set and therefore, although revealed some quite interesting data, here, I only present basic overview of how the forums were being used. The focus was not on how peer evaluation facilitated improvement of writing itself here; rather how the VLE might help to facilitate a community of inquiry to co-construct an understanding of writing as a social practice (Garrison et al, 2010); and how agency could emerge from collaboration and dialogic interactions with peers (Liu and Carless, 2006). Therefore, the only indicator of improvement from the analytical framework was *5* (see table 7.2).

I performed a basic interaction analysis, a branch of discourse analysis appropriate for analysing online interactions (Mazur, 2004) looking at the frequency of student interactions. The process of analysis was similar to that of interviews in that text logs were treated as a transcript ready-made for me by

taking screen shots (ibid). I counted the number of comments made by individual students, as well as the number of interactions. An interaction is defined as one reply to a comment, or an exchange between two or more students on the same thread (Henri, 1992). As I participated in the forums as a teacher to facilitate conversation and give feedback, I have included my own comments in the data.

All students actively participated in the forum by posting their work, and all made comments on at least five other students' work as requested. The exception for the first task was Michelle, who had arrived a week late for the start of the course, therefore was unable to access the VLE for the first two weeks of the course and unable to participate in the first forum. The findings are summarised in figures 7.1 and 7.2 and analysed below.

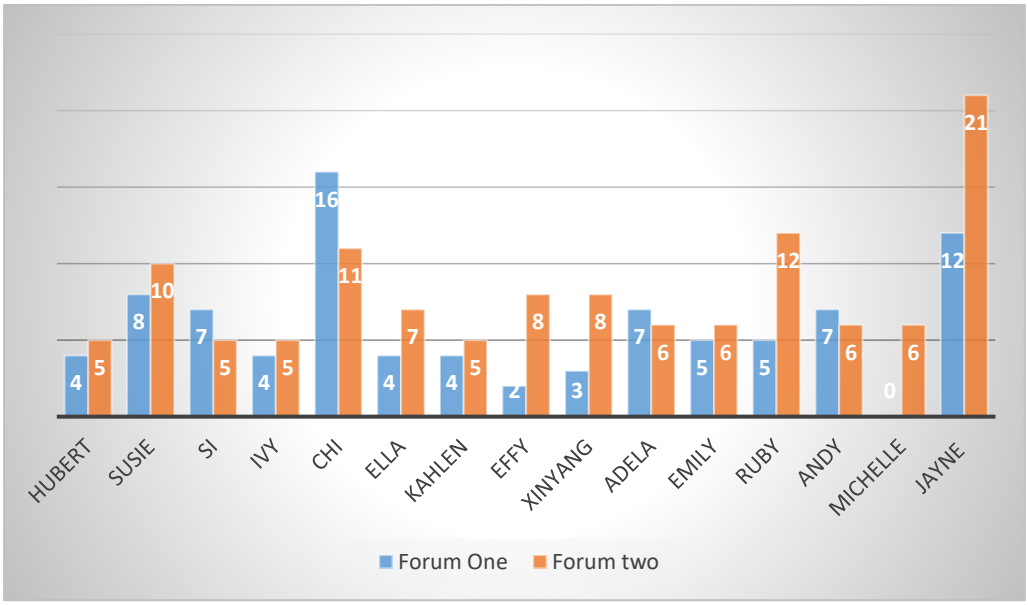


Figure 7.1. Comments and interactions on VLE forums

As can be seen from the table, the number of posts increased for 10 participants from the first online forum work (a definition of their subject -103 posts) to the second (the introduction of their essay-120 posts). The mean average in the number of comments increased for each student from 5.71 to 7.64. This is consistent with findings from Kessler and Bikowski (2010) in the increasing number of students participating over time, although of course the sample size is far too small to make any claims to generalisation. Perhaps more significant is that while the first forum was dominated by Chi as a strong and engaged student, with the others much lower, there was more of an even distribution (from the median) of comments in the second forum. It is likely that students participated in the second forum more because they have derived benefits from it in the first, as borne out by the interview data.

I also examined and categorised the nature of their comments and interactions according to communicative functions slightly adapted from Liu and Sadler (2003) template for analysis. While Liu and Sadler explored the types of

comments and areas students selected for feedback, because the focus of this data was not on the effect of receiving or giving peer feedback on the students' writing per se, as in their study, but on the types of dialogic exchanges which are central to interpersonal dimensions of agency, I only looked at communicative functions.

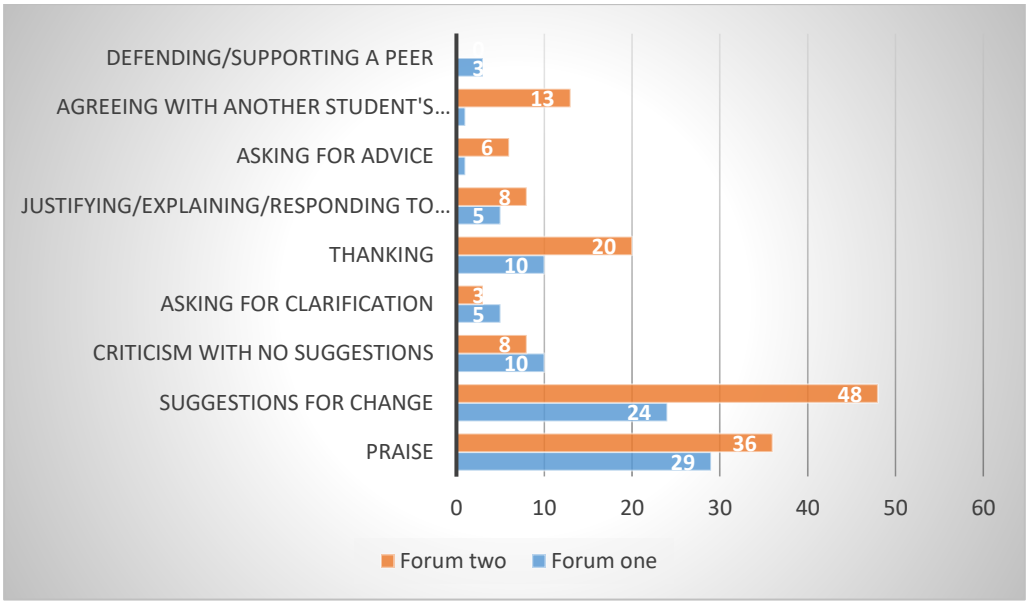


Figure 7.2. Classification of online interactions

Given that the number of interactions increased overall, it is not surprising that the number of individual communicative functions increased. However, there is a significant increase in both suggestions made for change (from 24 to 48 incidences) and a slight drop in the number of criticisms without constructive advice (from 10 to 8 incidences), confirming Kessler and Bikowski's (2010) findings of an increased focus on meaning and elaboration on comments and suggestions over a sustained period of time. In the second forum, the number of incidences of asking for focussed advice about specific points rather than merely uploading their writing increased from 1 to 6. These students were demonstrating a self-regulation in their request for feedback, as well as considering their reader, supporting Liu and Carless's (2006) assertion that peer evaluation increases management of learning. This is probably because their confidence and trust in one another increased over time, perhaps facilitated by my participation as a teacher confirming many of their suggestions (Zhao et al, 2014). Cho and Cho (2010) claim that reviewers gain more from the process of reviewing than in the feedback received from peers itself, which might explain the lack of data in the processfolios about how they used peer feedback for specific revisions but the fact that all 14 participants reported the peer activities as being very "useful" for them.

There were also more affective or social functions (Rourke et al 1999) in the second forum, such as thanking (doubling the number of incidences) and praising (increasing from 29 to 36). According to Hall (2008), this helps to

maintain the sense of politeness and community online. Praising also served the function of reinforcing self-efficacy as efforts were rewarded for writing as communication (Cho and Cho, 2010). Forums create an authentic audience for the writer (Kol and Scholnik, 2008), allowing them to conceptualise their texts as meaning-making when they upload them to the forum. This is indicated by the lack of error correction at the local level of grammar errors but rather in suggestions for rephrasing of certain sentences, reordering information, and academic conventions such as incorrect referencing (Zeng and Takatsuka, 2009). The types of interactions that the forums may have facilitated were also academic skills of justification, critique and debate. Building these skills is thought to be a common by-product of peer evaluation (Liu and Carless, 2006).

The number of incidences of agreeing and supporting a third-party comment on a peer's writing increased as did the number of incidences of justifying and explaining comments. One interaction which took place involved an 'argument' between Adela and Chi, both philosophy students, regarding the use of Wittgenstein to support a point in one piece of writing. Adela and Chi were joking and teasing each other rather than giving advice. This 'chatting' which can be seen as a disadvantage of using social media technology for educational purposes (Cheng, 2007) actually fosters a learning community and "provides a forum for social interaction, collaboration, negotiation of meaning and dissension" (Sullivan, 1993, p.34), going some way towards fostering collaborative agency. This diminishes the idea of writing as an individual act (Storch, 2011), increases collaboration on text construction and reinforces the nature of writing as a socially situated practice of communication. According to Cassidy and Bailey (2018, p.27), an online learning community can be more "enduring than any physical classroom could ever hope to be," and therefore indicates a possibility of transferring these types of activities and the benefits gained from them into their future degree programmes. Collective and social inquiry is inherent not only to the process of learning but of critical reflection that facilitates agency and emancipation (Mezirow, 1991). The students have begun this process by using the forums as a means of collaborative enquiry into academic writing conventions.

7.2.3.1.Limitations of the forum

My analysis was not comprehensive because peer evaluation was not the focus of the thesis but only a pedagogic aid to enhance writing which was facilitated by the *processfolio*. The analysis took into account the individual number of contributions and the types of interaction, but did not look at the types of individual interaction and contribution, which might have shown limits to sense of collective agency and meaning-making if one student was making only negative comments or only praising. In addition, my presence is likely to have influenced their online behaviour. While I wanted to be part of the class community, the inevitable fact of the teacher as authority (Richardson, 2000) means that the interactions between students may have been less authentic than if I had not been a participant.

7.2.4. Self-assessment forms

The main purpose of the self-assessment forms was to determine whether students were sufficiently aware of the marking criteria and their own development to be able to grade their essays with justifications from the criteria, a key principle of the alternative assessment in empowering students (Elander et al, 2006; Sambell et al, 2013) The ability to self-evaluate is also a component of self-efficacy. Therefore, the forms were evidence of indicators of improvement *3* and *4*.

I compared my grades for each of the assessment criterion with the grades they gave themselves in Table 7.6 below.

KEY:

SE- their self-evaluation T -my grade for their essay

T grade higher T grade lower Same

Name	**Ruby**		**Michelle**		**Ivy**		**Effy**		**Adela**		**Kahlen**		**Ella**	
Criteria	**SE**	**T**	**SE**	**T**	**SE**	**T**	**SE**	**T**	**SE**	**T**	**SE**	**T**	**SE**	**T**
TF	A+	B	A	B	A+	A	B+	A	B	A	A	B+	A	B+
CA	A	B	B+	B	A	A	B	A	B	A	B+	B+	B	B+
CC	A	B	A	B	A	A	B+	A	A	A	B+	B+	B+	B
Voc	B+	B	B+	B	A	B+	B+	A	B	A	C+	B	B+	B+
Gr	B+	B	B+	B	A	A	B+	B+	B	A	C+	B+	B+	B
AC	A	C	B	B+	A+	A+	A	A	A	A+	B	A+	A	A+
	0/6		0/6		4/6		2/6		1/6		2/6		1/6	

Table 7.4. Comparison of students' self-assessment with teacher's grades

These findings contradict those of such as Dam and Legenhausen (2010), who found as high a correlation coefficient between students' self-assessments and 'objective' tests as between teacher assessment and objective tests. With the exception of Ivy, the levels of accuracy were low in all criteria. Of the seven who completed the form to include in their processfolio, generally, the self-assessment did not reflect teacher grades. Two students overestimated themselves in most criteria; one overestimated in three criteria but underestimated in two; two students underestimated on most criteria; one underestimated in three but was accurate in two. Only one student was accurate in most criteria. Ruby and Michelle overestimated themselves in almost all criteria. Effy and Adela underestimated themselves in most criteria. In sum, there seems to be no pattern of consistency across the cohort.

Seven students did not complete the self-assessment form or at least did not include it in their processfolio. Possible reasons for this could have been lack of time, forgetting, not understanding the purpose, not understanding the criteria itself, or not liking/ being uncomfortable with self-evaluation. However, the interview data largely suggests that students were confused with the criteria and lacking in self-efficacy in understanding the minutia of difference in, for example, between B and B+.

Overall, this confirms research on issues with self-assessment. As we have seen in Chapter Four, using self-evaluation to focus on performance goals rather than learning goals (Dweck, 1986), i.e. judging themselves against what is needed to pass the assessment, the students can be disempowered in that they are prevented from conceptualising their learning goals for themselves (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). This confusion is also compounded by the fact that criteria is written in a discourse which can confuse (Lea and Street, 1998). Studies by Harrington (2011) and Mazloomi and Khabiri (2018) on the increased self-efficacy gained through criteria training highlights the need for understanding of criteria discourse if self-assessment is to be successful. Mazloomi and Khabiri (2018) found that the correlation between teacher and students' assessments increased over time, which indicates that my one-off assessment form was unlikely to be successful. In addition, their study employed criteria lists and not grades. Dam and Legenhausen's (2010) study above focused on students who had been trained in monitoring their own learning and therefore had experience with criteria for language proficiency. By focusing on how they might grade their essay, I had unintentionally reinforced their focus and sense of disempowering confusion around measurable standards. I used one exemplar essay (Sadler, 1998) in my course for students to practice applying grades and criteria, but this is not enough to facilitate a deeper understanding of the difference between standards, and a dialogic means of analysing a variety of exemplars and applying the criteria over time is more useful (Carless and Chan, 2017). To avoid criteria compliance, Falchikov (2005) and Dam and Legenhausen (2011) advocate introducing self-evaluation over time in levels, where students begin with

official criteria then move gradually to a critical questioning of criteria and the possibility for negotiated criteria in some situations. Doing this could move the students' focus away from grading as a number towards an understanding of the nature of criteria and academic standards and from where these derive; therefore understanding assessment more critically as a socially mediated practice (O' Donovan et al, 2008).

7.3. Reflecting on Cycle One

7.3.1. Limitations of the processfolio

In terms of practicability (Bachman and Palmer, 2010) of the processfolio as assessment, two main issues arose. Students' interviews revealed some negative comments concerning the processfolio as a physical paper-based folder which required printing and collating many pieces of paper as artefacts. The potential for omitting material due to loss or confusion increases the subjectivity of the assessment, although I had felt online e-folios would require training for teachers and students that a time-constrained pre-sessional might not allow for.

Secondly, the marking turnaround was tight in that feedback on the formative essay had to be given in the first week of the next stage, restricting the amount of time that could be given to return the processfolio to the students. I did not want to hand them back to the students separately, as I felt this would reduce the effect of having the process as integral to the product. The use of the processfolios as a data set would not be a factor in a real assessment situation, although if the processfolio were to become summative, photocopying would still be necessary for external examiner purposes and increase teacher admin time. Again, online folio software seemed to present a solution to this, however.

In terms of aligning the assessment with pedagogy, although the processfolio facilitated aspects of a process and AcLits-influenced approach to writing, running the processfolio project in parallel to the Barksdale syllabus to cover the material caused time pressure. I was often rushing to finish activities I had designed, the purpose of which paradoxically was to facilitate development and discussion. This impacted on my ability to practice self-evaluation training through criteria engagement which I felt was crucial to the facilitation of agency and empowerment around assessment.

After analysing the data, the following list of refinements fed into the planning stage of Cycle Two.

Refinements to the folio project:

- Exploration of e-folio software
- Returning the processfolio and essay together later in the first week of the summative stage of the course
- Restructuring syllabus to integrate processfolio better
- More explicit and earlier introduction of self-evaluation but abandoning the idea of self-assessment grades
- Lessons designed to help students use and understand criteria using a variety of exemplars at each grade level
- Addition of extra materials designed to facilitate dialogue (e.g. around plagiarism) and on processes of discourse conventions in the classroom
- More flexibility in the workshops to allow students to set their own deadlines and choose activities rather than compulsory activities which required all students to be at the same stage in essay writing.

At this point, a significant question was arising of whether the processfolio should be conceptualised as assessment. I was concerned that the processfolio might reinforce what it was trying to mitigate, being employed as a technical tool to demand engagement (Madaus, 1993) or elicit desired behaviours (Hughes-Wilhem, 1997). The issue of performative reflection was pertinent. On one hand, students who are inexperienced or resistant to reflection can require safe spaces and training to be able to take risks rather than engaging on a surface level (Lo, 2010; Rogers, 2001). I felt this could be solved with a more integrated classroom approach as in the refinements above. On the other hand, the findings also highlighted the inevitable fact of assessment as a determiner of learning behaviour. Students are not unaware of the hidden messages being sent by assessment, despite the discourse around empowerment and responsibility (Sambell and McDowell, 2006). If they perceive something as assessment, however authentic, they may still approach it with surface strategies in order to avoid risks to agency (Rust et al, 2005). Students may have conditioned responses to reflection if they perceive it as hoop-jumping (Torrance, 2007) or a performative display which they submit to in the same way as a quantitative judgement or grade. I felt this was a question which a further cycle with wider participation could answer.

7.3.2. Refinements to the data sets

I have discussed above the limitations of the data sets following the findings in each section above. These informed the refinements made to the research design in Cycle Two. I decided to:

- shift the focus from a mixed methods approach for overall picture of the cohort to a focus on a smaller selection of students for a more case study-based approach (Merriam, 1998). Case studies value the narrative experience and enable participants to have a voice in the research, and conform to critical realist criteria for good research in the use of intensive (usually qualitative) methods of data collection (Porpora, 2015).

- interview three students from each of the three participating classes, after the processfolio intervention, and again at the end of the whole pre-sessional, with myself as an interlocutor to probe and explore responses more deeply (Richards, 2009). This was facilitated by the reduction in the number of key participants.

- add a post-course interview in addition to the post-project interview to provide evidence of longer-term impact and possible changing attitudes through reflection over a longer period of time. This would allow evidence of sustained agency or catalytic validity (Lather, 1986).

- interview the teacher participants both pre-course and post-course. I anticipated additional development of codes/ themes due to the fact that I was also interested in the impact of the processfolio on teachers themselves as well as their impressions of its impact on their students.

- exclude grade-based self-assessment forms from the data sets and as part of the processfolio itself due to the problems discussed in section 7.2.4 above.

Conclusion

The evidence from this cycle showed definitively positive impacts of the processfolio intervention in the students' abilities to conceptualise themselves as developing writers and to see writing as a social practice. There was also evidence of a growing sense of agency around writing choices through increased self-efficacy and a deeper approach to learning. The processfolio allowed some choice and control for the students in their assessment, and for me in how I wanted to teach writing, albeit limited by some external constraints such as the nature of the essay assignment itself and the time limit of the course. I wished to explore these benefits and address some of the limitations in a further AR cycle.

Prior to this cycle, I had intended the processfolio to be an assessment event that would foster agency and agentic process-oriented pedagogies on a pre-sessional EAP course to allow students to conceptualise themselves as developing writers.

Yet the data from this cycle showed that despite the positive benefits in many areas, using it as a replacement or alternative assessment was raising new areas of inquiry, as is the nature of AR (Townsend, 2013). Questions were arising from dissemination of my findings to staff at Barksdale and at conferences around whether it should be assessed quantitatively and/or qualitatively, whether it should be weighted as part of the product, or not assessed at all. This was the beginning of my reflexive process of understanding how the processfolio should and should not be used.

Chapter Eight records the planning stage of Cycle Two in a wider trial of the processfolio project in 2015, the findings and analysis from nine students, two teachers and myself as a practitioner-researcher.

Chapter Eight: Intervention Cycle Two: the students

Overview

This chapter presents part of the Planning, Action and Observation stages of Cycle Two in the summer of 2015. I have divided the data analysis for this cycle into two chapters representing the corresponding perspectives of participants: students and teachers (including myself). This chapter presents the findings from the perspective of nine students.

Here, I analyse and present the findings in more detail than in Cycle One. Rather than analyse a variety of data sets for a holistic overview, as in Chapter Seven, the data presented here considers a small number of students as individual case studies (Merriam, 1988). In order to focus more on emergence of agency, the number of data sets was reduced and amalgamated to produce a narrative account of participants' experiences as individuals (Porpora, 2015).

Overall, the findings from Cycle Two confirm and deepen those of Cycle One, with more detailed evidence of students able to conceptualise themselves as developing writers: of having gained increased awareness of writing as both a social practice of meaning-making and of their individual metacognitive writing and learning processes. On the surface, evidence of the reduction of teacher-dependency and surface approaches to learning remained ambiguous. However, the widening of the AR to three different perspectives, and refinements to the implementation of the processfolio itself, facilitated a deeper analysis of how agency was emerging from interactions with self, peers and structure. It seems that the processfolio, despite limitations, was raising a critical consciousness both of the constraining influence of assessment and of areas where it was possible to be causally efficacious around writing and assessment practices to make genuine agentic choices.

8.1. Planning: methods

The design for this cycle largely replicated that of Cycle One with the refinements outlined in Chapter Seven. The processfolio was again implemented on the first four weeks of the 9-week course.

8.1.1. Participants

As in 2014, the students in the three classes were a convenience sample, the students who were assigned to the teacher participants by the course administrator (a total of 46 students). All were post-graduate students with a variety of chosen disciplines. Below is summary of class profiles.

Teacher Class	No. of ss	M:F ratio	Nationality	Case study participants
Harry 9C	17	4:13	Chinese 13 Thai 2 Korean 1 Brazilian 1	**Patti** (Thai, female, law) **Joyce** (Chinese, female, law) **Kaiji** (Chinese, male, Digital Asset Management DAM)
Kathleen 9B	15	2:13	Chinese 11 Kazakh 1 Taiwanese 1 Japanese 1 Turkish 1	**David** (Chinese male) **Amanda** (Chinese female) **Jessie** (Chinese female) All Education Management
Jayne 9A	14	3:12	Chinese 10 Japanese 1 Turkish 1 Korean 1 Thai 1	**Li (**Chinese, male, China and Globalisation) **Rebecca** (Chinese, female, Finance and accounting) **Damo** (Chinese, female, DAM)

Table 8.1: Participants 2015

Although not strictly case studies because they do not conform to the definition of following individuals over a sustained period (Creswell, 2013), I chose to analyse a smaller number of individuals to provide a more complex and context-specific, or intensive, understanding (Porpora, 2015). This allowed for a more in-depth analysis of individual experience, using multiple sources of data (Yin, 2014). However, the variety of the data sets was reduced in this cycle in order to explore in more detail the impacts of the processfolio on the participants as individual and social agents. Therefore, only the data yielding the richest information from the student participants (the processfolios and two interviews) is presented in this chapter. As discussed at the end of Chapter Seven, the number of interviews increased to two, with myself as an interlocutor, and replicated the more in-depth and semi-structured approach in the reconnaissance cycle (see Chapter Five).

There is differing opinion on the satisfactory sample in case studies, determined by factors such as the type of research, scope of study and quality of the data (Mason, 2010). Although all 46 students took part in the project, it was impractical to collect, analyse and present data from a large sample in an in-depth narrative way. I thought that attempting to do so would reduce the ability of the data to show the complexity of individual agency and writing processes. Therefore, I decided to select three students from each of the classes, making a total of nine case narratives. In selecting the case study participants, I wanted to obtain a sample representative of the cohort (Stringer, 2004). Given the disparity of females to males in all classes, random sampling or using volunteers may have meant that the male voices were not heard (Wallace, 1998). I was also cautious not to choose only students who had something particularly positive or negative to say, i.e. the opinion leaders (ibid). Therefore, I chose not to allow self-selection. Rather, in the second week of the course, I drew two names from a female ‘hat’ and one from a male ‘hat’ for my class and asked the teachers to do the same for their classes. I stipulated if that a selected student did not want to participate, another name could be drawn, although in the end this measure was not necessary. This process meant that most students were again Chinese because this was a typical representation of the Barksdale cohort.

8.1.2. Ethical conduct

All ethical procedures and guidelines replicated those outlined in Chapters Five and Seven. During induction, the participating teachers and course coordinator informed the classes about the project, following the same procedures as in Cycle One. All students in all classes took part in the processfolio project.

I arranged interview times and places at the students' convenience through emails. One interview took place in the week following the formative processfolio stage; the second took place at the end of the course before any final assessments results were released.

8.2. Acting/Observing: analysing the findings

The same five indicators of improvement/ themes developed from the coding process in Chapter Seven, based on van Leir's framework for learner agency (2013), were applied here to enable a comparison between the two intervention cycles. Codes were mapped onto this five-theme framework**, this time only following step four in Appendix ix.** Table 8.2 below summarises the main findings from the nine participants' narratives as a holistic overview.

Findings by theme	Positive	Negative or limitations
the ability to organise learning and writing processes	All folios unique in way students had introduced, compiled it AND named it, reflecting clear choices of how to present their journey and different conceptualisations of that journey Imposing their own order on the process of time management: either compiling the folio retrospectively; others at the same time as writing the essay Ss were talking through difficulties and challenges of the process of text creation and their choices in detail	Some did not depict their complete journey (some were missing key elements such as drafts/plans) and some claimed in their processfolios they had included certain things that they did not Not all students justified or elaborated on the artefacts they had chosen Two students included many teaching/class materials in their processfolios and little of their own work
to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes	Evidence of personalisation and ownership of their process and their product from their folios All said the folio was a means of noticing and recording the process explicitly in order to raise awareness and aid memory (tangibility) Awareness of the self in transition- many mentioned explicitly the pain and conflict as well as the changing in their character through the process of writing Students reflected on the tensions between choices and constraints in their writing choices Evidence of taking responsibility for the direction of their essay Evidence of goal setting and some mention of how they overcame challenges The questioning of a narrow construct of academic writing on the pre-sessional course	A significant number of students set goals, but many were vague and not all gave concrete examples of specific actions to achieve those goals Choices were made for the students in structure for the formative essay due to assignment requirements For one class, deadlines were set for them by the teacher for both formative and summative stages

self- efficacy or the belief in ones' own capacities	Evidence of confidence in ownership of own words clear in language used to describe essays, declarative verbs Many expressed confidence about writing in their future MA programmes and disciplines	Self-evaluation was still a problem-not enough time, not useful, not confident and unhappy when it was seen as formal procedure they were required to complete Still some levels of teacher dependency for some students
to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations	Questioning of the purpose of assessment and whose responsibility to evaluate – negotiating responsibility References to feelings of freedom and peace Feeling more able to manage time Making agentic choices to accept or reject constraints placed by the assessment on their writing Many see the understanding and use of criteria as empowering	Concern about the processfolio being an 'end in itself' Time still a key constraint to development and amounts of pressure on the pre-sessional Increased self-efficacy was limited to personal liberation, limiting ability to contest assessment practices Some see the use of criteria as disempowering The constraints of culture and ingrained practices of educational assessment systems cannot change in a short course
to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers	Some students were reflecting and questioning disciplinary differences and conventions of academic practices Students were collaborating with their peers, seeking advice, thanking and praising- motivating rather than competing with each other Using writing itself as a means of communication on the VLE forums (talk around text) Many preferred the asynchronous nature of VLE peer evaluation to the in-class face-to-face feedback sessions	Class dynamics and time were a factor in the acceptance of peer evaluation Inevitable power imbalances between students and teachers

Table 8.2: Main findings from students 2015

Wolcott (1994) distinguishes between description, analysis and interpretation as different although not mutually exclusive approaches to transforming qualitative data. The descriptive element, the process of depicting the data, can be seen in **Appendix ix.** Analysis, or applying a systematic framework to explain the data, is usually seen as the final step. The case narratives below present (describe) and analyse the findings together with reference to the key literature which informed the research and the adapted van Lier (2013) framework for agency described in 6.1.1. and 7.1.5.

However, a critical realist approach to analysis of social structure and human agency requires researchers to go beyond description and analysis to be able to explain causal mechanisms which may not be visible at the level of the empirical, and to examine where participants' descriptions of their experiences may be open to different interpretations (Ashwin, 2008). According to Sayer (1992, p.5), "social phenomena are context dependant. We not only have to explain...but to understand, read or interpret what they mean." This is what Wolcott (1994, p.15) would term interpretation, different as he sees it from analysis or explanation, and defined as "to reach out for understanding or explanation beyond the limits of what can be explained." Sayer (1992, p.5) goes on to state that in a critical realist approach to research "although they [social phenomena] have to be interpreted by starting from the researcher's own frames of meaning, by and large, they exist regardless of the researchers' interpretations of them." Deciding on the 'correct' interpretation is based on explanatory critique, justifying the rightness of meaning through presenting and considering alternatives (Hartwig, 2015). However, this also involves being honest and explicit about what I, as a researcher, have brought to this process (Wolcott, 1994). As mine was an explicitly ideological approach (Lather, 1986), it is necessary here to acknowledge several choices made within the presentation of the narratives to the reader.

Firstly, although all five indicators of 'improvement' were applied to all students in the data analysis process, for the purposes of presenting the research narrative, I chose to present each student's journey as representative of only one or two main indicators of improvement. According to Wolcott (1994) there can be critical or key events around which a narrative is built. These were the aspects which could be identified through the systematic process of analysis as most prominent in the accounts of the participants. The interpretation is that this prominence might reflect their journeys as writers, individual and social agents, and democratic participants in the AR project (McNiff, 2013).

Another choice made was in the construction of the narratives. They combine data from the processfolios and post-assessment and post-course interviews[4]. In this cycle I was interested in the individual student experiences; however,

[4] Extracts from the processfolios are presented in *italics*, while interview extracts are presented as quotations.

multiple cases and multiple data sets, according to Miles and Huberman (1994, p.26) "offer an even deeper understanding and a good picture of locally grounded causality." As explained in Chapter Three, the focus of this research was not to look for a linear cause and effect relationship, acknowledged as impossible given the interacting factors of open systems (Fletcher, 2017), but rather to look for underlying themes in the empirical data to find "tendencies" (Danermark et al, 2002, p.70) which allow us to say something about the real. As with previous cycles, extracts from students are presented verbatim for authenticity of narrative voice. However, in the process of transforming the data and imposing an order and structure for rhetorical (textual) purposes, it becomes something other than what it was, therefore only an approximation of the real experience of the participants and an approximation of their voice (Wolcott, 1994).

The order of how I have chosen to present the case studies is a further deliberate choice, moving from students' focusing on individual agency around writing choices and metacognitive processes to the more reflexive accounts of emerging agentic awareness of the constraining and enabling possibilities of writing assessment. I have presented the constructed texts from the most unequivocal to the more ambiguous in terms of tensions and complexities. Each narrative case foregrounds something which was more pertinent in the next, my explicit choices to depict the evolution of a complex picture of the Barksdale processfolio context, which, through interacting with that context as an insider researcher, I have interpreted for the reader while being conscious of the fallibility of this interpretative account.

8.2.1. Rebecca's process: "I felt I was on the way to a professional"

Rebecca's account reflects the development of her ability to organise her learning and writing processes. She commented that she valued organisation, aligning with her choice of discipline (Accountancy), and that the processfolio provided her with a clear means of imposing order on the process. In her first interview she stated: "At first when I do an essay I mixed everything together [...] but when I record what I have done I know what I'm going to do next." Evidence from her processfolio reflected this level of organisation in her thinking. She divided her contents page into four sections: artefact, timeline of completion, its relation to the overall process and the reasons for including it in the processfolio. In this way, she demonstrated metacognitive awareness of general processes (Pintrich, 2002) as well as her individual cognitive learning processes: *I need time to refresh my mind,* and her structural choices as a writer: *from the general to specific information*.

Reflecting on her experiences of the summative essay in the second interview, she seemed to have taken the principles behind the processfolio further in by developing and discovering her own metacognitive processes. When asked what she had learned from the processfolio, she asserted "Every step I keep a file in

my computer to record what I will do," and termed her processfolio "a record." Rebecca saw the processfolio as a way of experimenting with strategies for writing: "I can't do the same process of all essays!" reflecting on challenges to writing rather than merely on the linear steps she took to complete the summative essay, which had been "a very different journey." For example, she recalled being "ruthless" with herself when she had exceeded the word limit for the essay, and the difficulties of finding sources and structuring the essay. According to Dovey (2010), students are often reluctant to take risks in writing when they see it as a product, preferring to make surface level linguistic corrections. Rebecca was able to take risks in editing: "Actually the last draft was very different from the first with different language and arrangement of ideas." This is an example of an increased ability to see beyond a purely technical linguistic proofreading approach to writing, with increased independence in editing choices (Fox and Hartwick, 2011). Indeed, Rebecca was explicit about her growing self-confidence in her ability to push herself to make these changes: "At first I thought I can only do this and I cannot do more, but when I determined to find more ideas I thought, ok I can do better." Through monitoring her own process, Rebecca seems to have gained a better understanding of the general nature of writing as an iterative and complex process (Belgrad, 2013).

Rebecca's interviews foreground both her identification of herself as a developing writer within her discipline, in terms of research practices, and the difficulties of communicating specialist terminology to a lay person. She stated "It [the processfolio] transformed myself from reader-responsible writer to writer-responsible writer." Rebecca, as a student in my class, was likely to have heard those terms from the materials I adapted based on Flower's 1979 definitions to facilitate understanding of text creation. However, she seemed to demonstrate her own understanding of them from the examples she gave when asked to elaborate: "When I gave it to my classmates they could not understand it...so I rewrote it and pretended I was that young naive girl four years ago without any specialist knowledge." She went beyond the developmental step above of discovering meaning in a reader-based process, showing awareness of writing as a means of communicating ideas to a reader (Hyland, 2003) rather than a performance for an assessment, and was judging the success of her writing less on a grade than on its communicative effect. Having an authentic audience in the VLE forums and in peer activities in class allowed Rebecca to conceptualise her texts as meaning-making for an audience rather than performance for assessment (Kol and Scholnik, 2008; Cho and Cho, 2010).

Moreover, Rebecca also showed increased independence in making her own personal writing choices. In her processfolio contents page, she described her process in active verb phrases, *I put*, *I have divided*, and balanced this with a more academic register, *the correlation between, constructive suggestions*, which perhaps indicates awareness of the academic norms with which she will be judged (Furneaux, 1999) while depicting ownership of her essay and process

by using personal pronouns *I* and *my*. The fact that the processfolio allowed Rebecca to reflect on her academic identity in her own discourse may have facilitated her understanding of academic discourse as a series of positional choices rather than reproducing the discourses of assessment criteria (Granville and Dison, 2005). During the first interview, Rebecca cited an example in which she had decided to follow her own guidance: "My classmates thought it weird and complicated ...maybe different people have their own thought but I should firm my own style." This is an explicit choice by Rebecca as a writer negotiating her academic voice and sense of academic self (Ivanič, 1994; Hyland, 2003). Her second interview reflected a development of this point at a more general level: "Maybe people will have different views on your topic but you must arrange it in a way to convince others." She seems aware that criticality is partly shown in the choices writers make to position themselves as social subjects interacting with structure (Kress, 2012). In this respect, she displayed the potential for social agency in using her writing to connect with others.

Rebecca's views of assessment also reflects this changing interaction with social structure. In the second interview, when asked about what had changed for her, stated:

> At first I just think assessment is teacher's responsibility and students have no rights to ask why, but when I learned and you gave us the criteria to make self-evaluation, it is reasonable and equal to us.

This indicates a realisation of a shared responsibility for learning and assessment. She seemed to feel this ability to self-evaluate and continually improve her work without submitting to the judgement of others (Boud and Falchikov, 2006) is part of being "on the way to a professional." Nevertheless, Rebecca's emphasis on rights and equality might indicate that, having acquired the discourses to enable acculturation to academic conventions and norms, she could now see assessment as 'fair' (Mann, 2001). It was a concern for me in that students might not go beyond procedural autonomy (Ecclestone, 2002) to develop a more critical inquiry of assessment discourses and practices and become merely criteria-compliant (Lam, 2016). In other words, agency may stop at a sense of personal liberation, which continues to perpetuate disempowering practices.

Rebecca's experiences of the processfolio project largely reflected both her understanding of the writing process and her transition to a disciplinary identity. The processfolio seems to have mitigated the research concern regarding students' understanding of writing as a social process and practice in Rebecca's case.

8.2.2. Damo's process: "I'm not afraid"

In her first interview, Damo stated that prior to the course, she did not like writing "because I don't know how to express my ideas in the right way, in general but especially in an exam." She felt constrained by her perceived writing ability as defined by a SELT exam score that had forced her to take the pre-sessional: "I am not reach the requirement of my major." Her notion of "the right way" to write in an academic context seems was influenced by the experiences of the SELT indicated by her reference to linguistic features (Bruce and Hamp-Lyons, 2015). By contrast, her second interview was peppered with the statement "I'm confident." She listed examples of she now "knows" and stated three times: "I'm not afraid." The reference to fear indicates the extent to which writing had been a source of internal conflict for Damo, where writing as a performance for a gate-keeping examination had increased anxiety and stress (Martinez, Kock and Cass, 2011). In contrast, the processfolio assessment did not create the same levels of fear and anxiety and has increased her levels of self-efficacy, consistent with findings on portfolios by Hughes Wilhelm (1996), Lynch and Shaw (2005) and Öztürk and Çeçen, (2007). The fact that the second interview took place after the summative stage assessment indicates that the increased self-efficacy was sustained beyond formative assessment situations.

Not only did Damo report increased self-efficacy, but also an increased awareness of the writing process. Like Rebecca, Damo's processfolio abstract was divided into different parts: the *requirements or knowledge base* (the teaching materials from class with notes), *evaluation-to find out problems* (tutorial feedback and screenshots of the Moodle forums interactions), *the process of the essay* (including her notes, plans, summaries and draft) and *the final essay*. Damo seemed to be choosing how she wished to represent herself, implying a sense of control over how she wished to be assessed (Murphy and Camp, 1996). However, the processfolio was not actually arranged in the way she depicted in the abstract. Much of the information was organised in order of weekly completion, rather than in the four categories she formulated. If we assume that this a deliberate choice, rather than confusion or a mismatch caused by rushing to compile the processfolio, it would seem that Damo has distinguished between the physical processfolio itself and how she conceptualises the process, in a retrospective understanding of the different elements she used and applied. This echoes some of the students in Cycle One. This distinction was confirmed in her first interview, when she called the processfolio "a way for me to remember," or the tangible record referred to by Lam (2016). She justified the order of artefacts: "everything in this processfolio shows my idea in every step," whereas in her abstract she demonstrated the skills and understanding she gained, a meta-reflection of her learning process (Granville and Dison, 2005). Damo stated that she had undertaken a portfolio assignment on her undergraduate course, and showed an awareness of the

difference between a portfolio and processfolio: "I think portfolio just the collection of your important works and show the teacher what you have done. But processfolio you have to show every step you did (int.1)." Although she used the same verb "show" for both, the added element of teacher judgment in the former is perhaps indicative of the way she views the portfolio and writing for it as a product (Hirvela and Sweetland, 2005). Throughout both interviews, Damo stated that she found the processfolio to be useful as a "catalogue," in contrast with a portfolio, which she termed a "collection." The collection is for display whereas the catalogue is for Damo herself her to review the stages of her work.

Like Rebecca, Damo took ownership of her learning processes as demonstrated in her reporting of adopting a creative method of note taking:

> In the first time I just reading. This time I reading and take notes... I copied the content of the source into a word document and I read it and add some notes. That's really useful because in the writing process I copied the notes to a new word document (int. 2).

This process was developed between the first and second essay, hence was not in her processfolio. Damo stated in her second interview that she used the processfolio to review, noticing that she had not made notes. The processfolio allowed her to understand that she had struggled at the formative stage to manage and synthesise the literature because she had not made connections between reading and writing processes (Dovey, 2010). She acted on her new understandings of herself as a developing writer by adopting new strategies for the summative assessment that the processfolio has made explicit for her. This is an example of emerging agency in that Damo was not only reflecting on her experience but was also able to re-set or re-act her previous behaviour and understandings differently to transfer knowledge gained to future learning situations (Mezirow, 1991; Cozart et al, 2016).

It can be seen that Damo's reflexive process revealed her changing levels of self-efficacy in her writing ability. The impact of assessment on her ability to take action around learning and writing processes was absented to a degree here through the opportunity for explicit reflection that the processfolio afforded.

8.2.3. Joyce's process: "a witness to my process"

Joyce reflected on her changing attitudes to writing over the 9-week course. In her first interview, she reported initially feeling that the processfolio was "strange." She had questioned its necessity: "Why do we have to put these things into a document because we have done this?" feeling that learning a generic process of writing an essay was sufficient. However, in both interviews, Joyce identified the main benefits of the processfolio as providing a tangible record of

the process which allowed her to review her process to guide future essays. In addition, it provided a document of her journey as a student writer in terms of development and improvement, a physical manifestation of growing self-efficacy (Lynch and Shaw, 2005), or in Joyce's words: "a witness to the progress I've made" (int. 2). Lam (2016) speak of the tangible nature of folios (although not a processfolio) which not only stimulates the metacognitive process of reflecting on one's learning experiences but also provides a sense of achievement through witnessing effort that has been undertaken, effort which can be forgotten in new learning situations. Moreover, in terms of agency, as one plane of social being is the interaction with the material or physical elements of the world (Bhaskar, 1986), Joyce's interaction with a physical object of her own creation might have contributed to her growing sense of agency around assessment as being not merely a display for others but also for herself. This is a key principle of assessment for rather than of learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Joyce was one of two students who did not complete her processfolio retrospectively, but in tandem with the completion of the essay, an example of reflection during the process of completing a task (Rogers, 2001). When asked in the first interview why she did this, she felt it alerted her to "think which is important" and to "prove my progress." The word "prove" could imply that she feels the processfolio is for display, but in a similar way to Damo, Joyce focused on its being a way to "remind me" and that "it makes me relook all the things I've done," indicating that this document is for herself more than for others. Joyce was monitoring and revising her expectations throughout the process (Yancey, 1998). In the introduction to her processfolio, Joyce chose to write more about what had helped her overcome her *weaknesses* and justified in more detail than some of the others why she had selected certain artefacts. She placed things in exact order of completion because, she said, *I wanted to show the real process.* For example, unlike any of the others, she included her timed-writing from the first week diagnostic writing task, saying this was to show the understanding gained of the differences between Chinese and English writing styles. Clearly, the reflective element of the processfolio allowed Joyce to gain a sense of herself in transition (Gourlay, 2009). She valued the opportunity to demonstrate authenticity of the complexity of this transition process rather than performing for assessment. Perhaps it could be claimed that the processfolio has absented the constraint on personal authenticity (van Lier, 2013) that stems from the interaction with assessment as a structure.

However, Joyce showed elements of a residual teacher-dependency and an unwillingness to take agency as manifest in her lack of self-efficacy in evaluating her own work, where she claimed she was "not confident" (int.1). Although Joyce claimed that she found lessons on applying criteria (see Chapter Seven) as part of self-evaluation to be empowering because she "could know which part is good and we can improve according to the criteria" (int. 1), her lack of self-efficacy might indicate that adherence to set criteria might impede students'

ability to evaluate the effectiveness of their own writing (Torrance, 2007). For example, when asked about her writing development, she said: "I think if Harry said it's not so good, although I feel I have made progress, but it's kind of not so good, I would not feel confident. My feeling kind of depends on the feedback from my tutor" (int. 1). This confirms findings by Lam (2013) that students often are unable to self-evaluate without the accompaniment of teacher and peer feedback and is perhaps natural given the inevitable power imbalance between student as novice and teacher as expert (Little, 1995). Joyce referred many times to her teacher, using his name 11 times in the first interview and 11 times in the second, stating that he was largely responsible for their time management: "Ourselves don't have so much ideas about how to manage the time because we got all our information from Harry about what we need to do" (int. 1). However, in her second interview, she was more ambivalent about the responsibility for judgment, as she stated: "I'm the one who write my essay and I should know which is good, not so good." She added: "Although I may not spend several hours doing evaluation, while writing I did evaluation. When I read this sentence, I know the grammar is good or bad. I think this is self-evaluation." Perhaps the formalising of self-evaluation and reflection that the processfolio required in fact impeded their agency in constraining their ability to be authentic because the processfolio was an assessment event (Walker, 1985; Richardson, 2000). Like Andy in Cycle One, Joyce did not reject self-evaluation or reflection but has chosen to conceptualise it in her own way (Tan, 2007).

Overall, although Joyce's levels of teacher-dependency seemed high on the surface, it is clear that throughout the course, she was able to see connection between the skills gained from the processfolio and her future learning situations.

8.2.4. Patti's process: "Harry told me I'm the boss"

Although Patti did not refer directly to her teacher as frequently as Joyce, her levels of dependency immediately following the processfolio project seemed initially also to be quite high. Over the 9-week course, there was evidence that Patti was developing the procedural autonomy necessary for self-determination in her future degree programme (Ecclestone, 2002) but less evidence of the more critical and social engagement that characterises agency (Archer, 2000; Benson, 2010).

When asked in the first interview whether she felt that she made choices in the process of writing, she affirmed, but did not elaborate upon or specifically identify those choices in the same way as other students. Indeed, her rather ironic utterance: "Harry told me I am the boss!" perhaps indicates that ownership had been imposed upon her, or that she required the teacher to allow her that level of ownership. She echoed Joyce's assertion that Harry set deadlines for his class

for the processfolio assignment, without which she felt that she would have been unable to manage her time. This implies that she did not fully comprehend ownership because she felt control could be bestowed upon the student by the teacher rather than through a process of co-discovery (Freire, 1973, Little, 1995, Pennycook, 2001).

However, in Patti's processfolio, there was evidence of choices made and of active engagement and ownership of the writing process. She introduced her processfolio with a mini-essay which explained the artefacts she chose to include and, unlike some of the others, what she chose not to include. She included few teaching materials, in contrast to some of the other students, and instead focused on her own work to depict her own writing journey (Lam, 2013). All artefacts were in order of completion to reflect this journey. There is incongruity here between the personalised processfolio and the rather ambiguous attitude to learning as a process of self-regulation. This incongruity raised questions of whether her respect for Harry disproportionately credited him for her developing sense of competence, or whether a cultural or personal deference to authority either to her teacher or me as a researcher had prevented her from being completely honest (Lo, 2010).

In terms of self-evaluation, Patti was as doubtful as Joyce about its value, citing time as a key factor in her lack of self- efficacy in writing. Unlike Joyce however, who recognised that self-evaluation is not separate from the act of writing, Patti stated: "I don't have time for self-evaluation" (int 1) and did not elaborate. She claimed that the criteria were not useful: "It did not help me to check I have covered all the details…I feel uncomfortable" (int 1). This certainly limited her sense of self-efficacy in being able to evaluate her own work against institutional standards (Nicol, 2010), which could perpetuate learned helplessness (Dweck, 2013). That she felt "uncomfortable" is perhaps the beginning of a more critical engagement with the criteria and a contesting of their usefulness in helping EAP students to conceptualise the complexities of writing. Indeed, she also asserted, "I can manage," indicating some confidence with the processes of writing, if less so with product when she mentioned her residual nerves about grammar. Perhaps she was conceptualising success in terms other than that defined by criteria (Newman et al, 2003). This inference can be supported by her reference to the change in her approach to feedback from her previous experience: "In my country getting instructions from teacher to correct my grammar mistakes," to the growing realisation post-folio that: "I have to learn to pick good and bad advice." To determine the quality of advice requires some level of confidence in her own judgement of whether and how her work could be improved by such advice. Indeed, in her second interview, she seemed more positive about the notion of self-evaluation in a reflexive realisation that writing is a continuous process of reflection where "I need to keep looking back and improve myself."

In contrast to her ambivalent attitude to self-evaluation, Patti placed high value on feedback from peers. She initially conflated the processfolio with competition. When asked about her first impressions of the purpose of the processfolio replied: "So I can compare my skill with other people or show me the same level." However, throughout both interviews, she referred to how she relied on her peers for help and advice, evidence of re-evaluating her understanding of peer interactions in a classroom situation (Kohonen, 2010). Harry's class, in particular, took up the concept of peer evaluation enthusiastically, after some initial training, and then became the most fervent users of the Moodle forums, uploading work and commenting on each other's without his request or guidance (as confirmed by Harry). Patti comments on the preference for the Moodle forums over face-to-face feedback as more "comfortable" because "people may be shy to correct each other's mistakes," confirming findings by Ho and Savignon (2007). Patti only included her screen shots of the VLE forum discussions in her processfolio for others' comments on her work and not hers on her peers; hence, it is difficult to judge her level of contribution and interaction on the forum. However, Harry's class seemed to have formed self-directed groups to help one another achieve a collective goal of improving and understanding academic discourse (Mazur, 2004; Cassidy and Bailey, 2018), a clear example of social agency. If we see competition and individualism as a result of alienation (Meszaros, 1970; Mann, 2001), peer evaluation activities in the project fostered an environment of collaboration which absented this to a degree.

In general, the potential benefits of the processfolio for Patti were more ambiguous than for some of the others. Teacher-dependency has not been absented; however, I would tentatively posit a process of movement towards understanding writing as a collaborative dialogue with peers and teachers rather than only an individual performance to be judged by others.

8.2.5. Jessie's process: "This is a way that presents I have developed myself"

Jessie was clearly able to reflect on the development of her own learning processes through the processfolio. For Jessie, the act of compiling the processfolio was a way of breaking down the writing process into steps that allowed her to impose some sense of order, thus gain a sense of control (van Lier, 2013). In her introduction to the processfolio, she used a table with three columns of *what processes I have approached* (what she actually did); *reasons* (the justification and how this relates to the process of writing) and *why I gained* (the perceived benefits). She stated that: "Before I got totally lost in the process" (int. 1), and, as with the others, the processfolio provided her with a tangible record of that process, or "a database" that she could refer to in order to aid memory,

fostering a sense of empowerment around writing. Furthermore, she reflected on her learning about academic writing through a metacognitive monitoring of her process (Belgrad, 2013). Jessie realised the act of writing was actually less time-consuming than the preparation for writing: "I spent 70% of the time to find materials, 20 or 25% to make the decision on my research and I spent maybe 5 % or less to write my essay" (int. 1). In this way, she analogised the processfolio as "an invisible tutor," a nomenclature invoking her major of Education. She indicated a sense of autonomy in being able to use the processfolio explicitly to aid her process of development as an academic writer "this is what I see after doing the folio" (int. 1). Transformation in the learning process comes not only from experience, which may have been provided by the pre-sessional course without the processfolio, but the reflection on that experience by questioning old ways of thinking and acting (Mezirow, 1991; Rogers, 2001. Cozart et al, 2016). The processfolio has facilitated this.

In addition to metacognitive reflection on learning, Jessie underwent a reflexive process of monitoring changes in herself as a person, using the experience as a way of discovering herself (Romova and Andrew, 2011). Echoing some of the Cycle One students, Jessie reported a personal sense of achievement: "When I finish, I think 'wow I've got it" (int. 1). I was concerned throughout the project about whom the students felt the processfolio was for, given some of the student's references to their teachers. This will be further explored in Chapter Nine. However, it seems that for Jessie, self-presentation is not performance for her teacher, but an aid to her own reflexivity, as she stated in interview one: "I want to illustrate for me not just to submit the assignment but to review the progress I want to make and the benefit for my further essay writing" (int 1). She stated that the processfolio was a "way that presents how I have developed myself" and writing the essay was a way "for me to reform my character, to help me become a more positive person" (int 2). Furthermore, she claimed the changes in her personality were commented upon by her friends on social media.

At first glance, this phenomenon contradicts the literature on the dangers of performativity in educational assessment (Broadfoot, 1999; Torrance, 2015), and my own concerns, because Jessie felt more empowered. However, perhaps because she has not viewed the processfolio as assessment for grading purposes, she was unaffected by the subjectification of performing the self through public reflection (Akbari, 2007). Jessie's renewed relationship with herself reflects one aspect of agency.

In addition to a sense of defined individual agency, Jessie's narrative emphasised a growing sense of camaraderie and social agency among her classmates in their collective transformation towards becoming developing, efficacious writers. In contrast to Harry's and my class, Kathleen's class, of whom Jessie was a student, had difficulties with peer evaluation on the VLE. In her first interview, Jessie claimed that the lack of effectiveness of peer interaction was caused by

reluctance on the part of classmates to be critical of each other. In contrast to the research on face-to face vs asynchronous online feedback (Ho and Savignon, 2007), Jessie believed that she and her classmates were more willing to be honest and critical of each other in a classroom situation, whereas online "almost all times we write in a positive way." She believed this was because "our tutors will see what we have written," and students wanted to present themselves in the best possible light to their teachers. Findings by Cho and Cho 2010) and Lu and Law (2012) provide an alternative explanation in that those receiving feedback gain fewer benefits from their peers' feedback than they gain from the process of giving feedback themselves, which takes time to recognise. Indeed, Jessie's view changed somewhat in the second interview, supporting findings from Kessler and Bekowski (2010) that the benefits of online feedback become more evident as peer familiarity developed: "We are familiar and put our problems straight." Jessie cites her gradual ability to open herself to criticism in terms of her relationship with her teacher and her peers, developing empathy and communication skills through the experience of collaborating with peers on text creation (Crossman and Kite, 2012). This is reflected in her humour when referring to herself and her classmates: "We make jokes and sometimes call ourselves the writers or creators."

Finally, Jessie's relationship to assessment shifted somewhat. Although she stated that there was no significant change in the direction of assessment from teacher to student, her thinking about who was responsible for assessment and evaluation altered, and she felt a slight shift in power from teacher to student. For example, when asked how she felt about disagreeing with her teacher's opinion, Jessie reflected on the nature of assessment practices and control:

> At the beginning I was a bit confused and even angry. My final assessment will be evaluated by my tutor so if I don't have agreement with her, how can I get a good mark? But as the essay went on I appreciate much more about it... I can keep the communication with her (int.2).

Jessie's depiction of herself as 'angry' reflected a clear sense of disempowerment around assessment as being judged by others, as referred to by Boud (2000) and her reflexive account of this change in attitude around assessment is foregrounded in the second interview: "I can feel we are all in peace and doing what we want to do. I really appreciate it. Thank you for folio." The absenting of anxiety or stress around assessment on a high-stakes course is a clear benefit of the processfolio. Perhaps Jessie is exaggerating the impact of the processfolio. However, it remains an example of how group or self-directed behaviour can lead to changes in the way students perceive their learning outcomes, and foster a positive attitude to learning that makes for less risk-averse students (Rust et al, 2005).

Overall, Jessie's emotional journey shows the importance of emotion in learning as well as its role in developing agency (Archer, 2012). Her account reflects changing interactions with her peers, her teachers and herself, as well as with writing and assessment as elements of discursive, material and social elements of structure.

8.2.6. Amanda's process: "I noticed the problems that can be avoided"

Like Jessie, Amanda documented her personal and emotional journey reflexively. She referred to a key area where changes occurred in her understanding of writing and approach to the process: as an aid to understanding the underlying reason for her plagiarism. In her first interview, she discussed the changes in understanding 'personal voice' in academic writing (Hyland, 2003): "I put my self-thoughts in the essay but last time I just looked at others and combine them without my own thinking." Amanda demonstrated a growing understanding of the intertextuality of academic writing (Lillis, 2003). However, in her second interview, she reported that her teacher had commented on the formative stage essay on her patchwork plagiarism, i.e. taking extracts from several sources without changing the majority of the original structures, sometimes without acknowledgement, by using quotation marks, to indicate that these words are the original author's (Shi, 2011).

In fact, Amanda's processfolio was quite chaotic. Although she listed the artefacts in order of completion in her contents page, the artefacts were not in that order. In the processfolio introduction, she stated that she had included sources but there were none, and she included materials that she did not mention. From her own work, she included drafts and plans but there were no notes and she did not show how she synthesised sources. In the second interview, she openly acknowledged that she had "some problem about plagiarism" and that "I noticed I didn't put many note taking in the folio...it may be because I didn't note-taking very clearly so that it leads to plagiarism." As discussed in Chapter Four, plagiarism is a controversial concept both for students and teachers. Amanda's plagiarism seems not to have been a deliberate act of cheating but a misunderstanding of academic referencing conventions and the process of source synthesis. Therefore, here, rather than her teacher 'telling' what is right (Sadler, 2010), the tangible processfolio has enabled Amanda to notice not 'mistakes' conceptualised as something wrong, but rather 'absences' in her process (Bhaskar, 2008).

This distinction is important because according to Cotterall and Crabbe (2008), reflexivity occurs when students can not only identify and describe their weaknesses but also go beyond this to identify causes. Amanda has done so here:

"From the folio I find I should collect things related to my essay…because sometimes we write down things and can't remember where we got the information" (int. 2) and in the learning sense has understood a reason for the processfolio at a deeper level through reflecting on the experience (Mezirow, 1991). In addition, she showed an understanding of her process in relation to her physical processfolio, which she admits was rushed. She stated that "last time I just wanted to finish and I didn't do it in order" and "I over-estimated my assignment" (int. 2). From a critical realist perspective, immediate changes in attitude and feelings can obscure deeper changes, which necessitates a continual reflexive monitoring (Archer, 2007). The processfolio seems to have provided Amanda with a means of discovering these absences for herself: "If I didn't do the folio I don't know what is the most vital part might lead to some problem" (int. 2). Arguably, this is an example of praxis: rather than information transfer regarding correct academic conventions from teacher to student, in this case Amanda has discovered for herself through action.

In addition, Amanda talked about changes in attitude and feelings about writing as a social practice, which she attributed to the processfolio experience. Initially, she stated that she saw talking as social communication, and writing as an individual event, therefore had different emotional responses to each: "When I communicate with others I feel energetic but when I sit down and write things alone, I feel stressful" (int. 1). This confirms findings by Storch (2011) on students' views of writing as an individualistic act. However, through the processfolio experience, Amanda became able to see writing as an act of communication. For example, she attributed discussing marking criteria with her peers in class to an increased understand of each other's writing (Ho and Savignon, 2007). Here, oral discussion has facilitated written communication (Leung and Mohan, 2004). As confirmed in interviews with Harry and Kathleen, one of the main benefits of the processfolio was the increasing shift from individualistic attitude of competing with each other and teacher-dependency to a growing collaborative approach by using each other to improve their writing in addition to using the teacher. Amanda often referred to "we" in addition to "I", and claimed she did not feel the need to complete with her peers or worry about the differences between their processfolios: "Maybe some others done something and I didn't...but to depend on ourselves is very good...we feel free" (int. 2). The marrying of the individual and the collective in Amanda's account is a depiction of her personal journey, but one which takes place through mediation and dialogue with other people, an expression of agency as oneself in relation to the social world (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998).

8.2.7. David's process: "My main task was to finish that essay"

David's main focus in his account of the processfolio experience was on efficiency and time management. In his first interview, he made many references to time, and defined his writing process by separating it into units of time. He compiled his processfolio in tandem with his essay: "Every time I did something I put all useful things together" (int. 1). David made the choice to use the processfolio to that manage his time, for him a key benefit: "I can find which part I used a lot and which I passed quickly…if I wasted a lot of time or if I effectively used time" (int. 1). This approach is supported by the artefacts in his processfolio, many of which were teaching materials that he found helpful for writing strategies. David was displaying a 'strategic' or self-regulatory approach to learning here by identifying elements which were more time-consuming and less beneficial to his goal of completing the essay, therefore applying himself less to these tasks (Entwistle and Ramsden, 2015). In terms of emerging agency, this can be seen as Freire's (1973) 'adjustment', or the critical ability to make choices about one's own reality within constraints, rather than passively acquiesce to the system. Perhaps David recognised time as an aspect of assessment events over which he was able to exert influence (Mercer, 2012). The processfolio in this sense can be seen as facilitating the conscious reflection on these choices. However, the picture is not so clear cut.

On the one hand, David stated that completing the processfolio "gives me confidence about myself and it makes the procedure easier" (int. 1). He stated that "without the folio, I will never review my essay" (int. 2), echoing the common theme from these participants of having a tangible artefact of their learning process. On the other hand, his frustration with the limitations of assessment and writing practices on the pre-sessional was evident. His focus on time can be seen as a response to structure in that the time-constrained nature of the pre-sessional impedes development of writing as meaning-making beyond the procedural skills approach on the course: "I think postgraduate is not just summarising and paraphrasing. I have to find something new. But my main task was to finish that essay" (int. 2). By the end of the course, David recognised the need to invest more personally in the process, but had chosen to resist that investment due to perceived time constraints. Although his critical consciousness of constraints was evident, he was not taking the risks required for a more transformative learning experience (Rust, 2002). For example, he mentioned several things that he chose not to do because they were "too complicated" such as evaluating research theory to answer the essay question fully, and employing marking criteria to aid his self-evaluation. He stated, "If I aim at the quality and spend too much time it might be terrible and I feel a little bit sad about it" (int 2). It is not clear what "it" refers to here, but if he meant the finished product, the essay, he might be reflecting a desire to prevent the damage done to his self-esteem of investing his time and energy and achieve the same

grade as if he had not done so (Case, 2008). David was not fully able to exercise his agency in pursuing his deeper learning goals (Kahn et al, 2012).

However, by the second interview, the references to time reduced slightly and he referred more to the process of editing and re-writing, focusing more on criticality than description, displaying an increased independence in editing choices (Fox and Hartwick, 2011). Although he remained grade-oriented (Lam, 2013), three times referring to grades, he recounted taking a risk in writing too much and the "painful" experience of having to cut down almost 1000 words to meet the task requirement of the summative stage essay. David became more accepting of the inevitability of emotional and intellectual investment that arises with the conceptualisation of oneself as a developing writer (Walker, 1985) and of taking a deeper approach to learning (Entwistle and Ramsden, 2015). By absenting the constraint of time, David was faced with a new challenge that agency and a deeper understanding of writing might present. David admitted that "maybe I ignore the impact of the folio because I try to finish the essay quicker and quicker." This acknowledgment is a first step towards a reflexive revision of his attitudes (Rogers, 2001), or in critical realist terms, a metacritique of his beliefs and assumptions (Bhaskar, 2016). When asked how he might use the processfolio for future essays, he recognised the need to take responsibility for his own learning in academic institutions: "Future tutors will not manage the time for us. So I must have a plan for myself."

The processfolio might not have had an immediate impact on David, but his transition from a "pre-sessional student" to an agentic writer making "painful" choices had begun.

8.2.8. Kaiji's process: "The pain is part of the experience"

Kaiji was in some ways the mirror image of David. He too struggled with what he saw as a narrow conceptualisation of academic writing perpetuated by the Barksdale EAP pre-sessional. However, in contrast to David who adopted an approach which did not align with his deeper learning goals, Kaiji recounted the painful nature of writing and the tensions inherent in the choice between becoming a writer and passing a high-stakes assessment.

Kaiji was the only student to include a diary of his progress in this processfolio. This diary recorded not only the steps he took to complete the essay but his thoughts and feeling about doing so. The diary was written in note form, but sometimes longer passages reflected on his choices and emotional journey. Initially, there were many entries expressing confusion and concern over not being *on the right track*, with entries such as *I am still confused, no idea what I am going to do, I start to think I have choose the wrong programme.* In one entry he used the metaphor of *torture* to describe his decision-making process.

Literature on journal writing as a means of empowerment stresses the nature of voice as key in the agent choosing how they want to be presented within discourse (Moon, 1999; Blommaert, 2005). In contrast to the above students, whose retrospective reflections concentrate on their post-processfolio experience, Kaiji was depicting the raw emotion 'live' as it is happening and finding a way to vocalise his inner dialogue (Yancey, 1998). The five entries for the first three weeks were longer and more intense. After these weeks, the entries became less sporadic but more procedural and less emotional, more note-like, with entries showing the change in mood: *the world seems more brighter, it's the first time I find London sky so charming.* However, towards the end of the course, Kaiji recounted a family tragedy affecting his ability to concentrate. Here, the diary was a catharsis for his feelings, an element of the therapeutic nature of journal writing (Thomson, 2004). Crucially, the processfolio provided a forum for students to share as little or as much as they chose. Kaiji, like Jessie, seemed to have made the explicit choice to self-present as a form of empowerment. When asked why he chose to include his diary, he claimed that without it, the processfolio might not have been an honest "reconstruction" which "might not present the total choice. If it's not wonderful I just pick it out so you might not know the true state of us" (int.1). In expressing his struggle as a writer and a person, Kaiji was using his own voice in a way that he felt was denied to him in his product essay: a way of regaining control over the process of assessment. Verbalising, or textualising, his emotions was a way to make them more manageable in order to continue to act.

In his interviews, Kaiji also reflected on his struggles with the concept of criticality: "You want to fight so you put something from the red team and something from the blue team and you pick them up and you make them fight." This analogy of a child playing with toys resists a narrow conceptualisation of criticality in writing as it has been presented on the pre-sessional. Harry had chosen to instruct his class to write the formative essay task in a certain way, using rhetorical moves of counter-argument and argument (Swales, 1990) and providing a model essay at the start of the course for them to follow. As will be discussed in Chapter Nine, Harry's justification for doing so when the task did not require this (**see Appendix iv)** was to help his students pass the final discursive summative assessment because they would have had practice in this genre. This is a clear example of assessment washback on teaching to the test, and also a wider social impact discussed in Chapter Four, where assessment has created a concept of writing that is teachable but does not adhere to real processes or constructs (Hanson, 2000; Rouse, et al, 2017). Kaiji's attitude to his teacher's attempts to simplify or mechanise things was ambivalent: he praised Harry for his "good advice," yet resented and resisted this advice at times, for example, when discussing his disagreement with Harry over his choice of seminal work:

> Harry thought it might not be controversial enough. If you disagree with the theory it will be easier to achieve critical thinking. But the sources I found mainly help the validity of the theory...it's dangerous. I should have chosen an easier one.

From this extract it seems that in making the choice not to follow Harry's advice, Kaiji was not resisting the advice itself, which he knew was "easier" and therefore sensible. Rather, he was resisting what he saw as a surface approach to passing the assessment that Harry offered, which he felt lacked authenticity. Kaiji's talk around text construction (Lillis, 2003) allowed him to contest academic conventions and practices. In this way he reclaimed a sense of control over the assessment task by actively resisting the judgement of others. Kaiji was discovering his sense of identity as a writer through his interaction with, and exerting of control over, social structure (Kahn et al, 2012).

However, Kaiji was clearly aware of the nature of assessment as a constraint when it remains high-stakes (Richardson, 2000). In his second interview, he stated: "I can't settle in this city because I might be excluded any time I fail my exam," clearly illustrating the emotional impact and the potential for alienation in the transition to a new academic identity which is compounded by pre-sessional high-stakes gate-keeping assessment (Case, 2008). Although he did not directly express this, he was engaging with UK immigration policies as one causal mechanism of such gate-keeping assessment (Cunningham, 2014), a clear example of disempowering structure. He discussed assessment as an inevitable fact of educational life: "It won't be better, there are also exams on my Master's degree. I guess I will keep worrying" (int. 2), reflecting a potential for continuing alienation through the effort to stay at university through continual assessment events (Case, 2008). Echoing David, Kaiji admitted that: "I just wanted to finish the pre-sessional." However, in direct contrast to David, Kaiji made the explicit choice on both essay assignments at formative and summative stage not to be pragmatic in terms of emotional and time investment:

> I think, why can't I pretend I love everything and just choose one topic, use the structure? That way it might be easier because you didn't put your emotion into this process and it's like a machine and it might be easier. But I think that's a waste of time. I think the pain is part of the process.

Kaiji rejected a surface approach, or even a more positive strategic approach, to learning in order to seek meaning and resist inauthenticity: "To fight for the fight is meaningless" (int.1). Despite a clear recognition of the high-stakes nature of the course, he chose to take risks in his writing and, through dialogue with his teacher and peers, made his own choice and took his own path: "For the score and results this will make sense but I'm an idealist so I just chose the stance I actually agree with…and I got into trouble!" He clearly recognised the dangers of this approach, displaying, according to Luckett and Luckett (2009:10), "transcendental concern...feeling alienated from social contexts and not

necessarily respond [ing] to opportunities for social advancement." In contrast, he assigned significance to his longer term interests of developing an authentic academic discourse and understanding of his subject (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006).

The processfolio did not alter the constraining nature of assessment as a social structure, or Kaiji's concern about it. However, it did clearly aid his critical consciousness of it and enabled him to assert a degree of control by providing a forum to express not only his ideas around text creation to justify his choices but also his sense of self as a writer and a personal and social agent. Using a critical realist analysis here, through the processfolio as an assessment event in the realm of the actual, Kaiji was enabled to understand assessment as a causal mechanism or structure in the realm of the real, which impacts on lived experiences in the realm of the empirical.

8.2.9. Li's process: "I think the processfolio isn't very important, I think the process is very important"

Li's narrative focuses on the dialogic interaction and relationship with teachers as figures of authority. In the first interview, he compared his previous experience with teachers in written assessment situations in China with those on the pre-sessional course. He reported a sense of powerlessness in China due to what he saw as a deficient relationship with his teacher, "the professor don't tell you how to do it and after I made mistakes the professor always say 'why are you so stupid?'" This might be an exaggerated depiction of his university experience, yet Li felt disempowered around assessment, confirmed by his assertions of feeling "very afraid and nervous." It is clear that his fear around writing as a performance to be judged by his teacher has caused high anxiety (Martinez, Kock and Cass, 2011). Crucially, it was less the assessment itself and more the educational culture around assessment which has impacted on Li. He stated that: "If we are afraid of teacher how can we do best study process?" and in answer to my question about whether he now felt he could disagree with his teacher, stated: "We all make mistakes, why can I not interrupt you and say you are wrong?" Given that I was both his teacher and interviewer in this case, Li nevertheless felt comfortable to express this, indicating the difference between his relationship with me to his previous experiences, where "teachers are like gods." Dialogue and the ability to exert his voice was clearly important to Li as a person and as a student.

Harry's students, Joyce, Kaiji and Patti, show how a teacher can influence levels of dependency through benign actions due to the assessment culture. Li took this further in attributing the success of the processfolio's intentions to the teacher. In his second interview he questioned whether the processfolio stands alone as an assessment. According to Li, "if a bad teacher uses the folio to collect

information about us, it's not useful. I think folio must be cooperate with a good teacher and if used in the wrong way it's not useful." Here, Li seems to see the "wrong way" to use the processfolio would be as a measurement tool, to judge someone based on their subjective process, which is means of replacing one disempowering practice with another (Hartwig, 2015). He seems to see the processfolio as a means of providing a pedagogical feedback loop (Falchikov, 2005), offering students opportunity to engage in, rather than demanding, desired educational behaviours. Li's interviews highlight the potential for AR to blur of the relationship roles of student and teacher, and researcher and researched, as, by offering his opinion, Li felt he had some influence over the future use of the processfolio as a democratic participant in the research (Kemmis, 2009).

There were indications that the processfolio was useful for Li. He confirmed the other students' view that the tangible object provided a way to "see how I improve." Li distinguished between declarative and procedural knowledge (Van Lier, 2008; Schraw, 2009): "it is easy to SEE that but not so easy to DO that" (int. 1) in relation to completing the process. This utterance supports the point that the processfolio had more impact than if the course, through EAP pedagogical approaches, had merely emphasised the writing process as equal to the product. He identified the processfolio as making the process more manageable by breaking it down into steps in order to gain control over the assessment: "In postgraduate life, my professor will give me a topic, it's very large...and I don't know how to do it. I feel afraid. But the processfolio taught me how to do it step by step" (int. 1). In his second interview, Li reported moving from a more procedural approach to personalise the process "I can disrupt the steps...make more effective for myself." This is not only metacognitive awareness of both generic and individual writing processes (Pintrich, 2002; Negretti, 2012), but also in terms of agency, is an assertion of control over his own writing practices. Finally, he demonstrated reflexive changes in his surface approach to learning: "We try to find out the process of how to get a good grade...I think before if we find out the process is not useful we give it up." He acknowledged previous examples of his hoop-jumping (Newman et al, 2003): "I rewrite homework not for us, not make more knowledge or learn more things, but to get a good grade from teacher" (int.2). This aspect of learning as a performance to be demonstrated to others is further highlighted when Li recalled that he used to focussed only on linguistic features of writing from his IELTS training as a means of obtaining a grade rather than understanding writing as meaning-making (Pilcher and Richards, 2017): "We don't focus on the thesis or anything like that...if you write many vocabulary you get a good grade." Li's approach shifted from information reproduction towards knowledge transformation (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999), facilitated by a more relaxed environment for learning: "I was afraid of the grade before...here I feel in peace."

However, Li did not attribute most of these benefits to the processfolio but rather to a learning culture created in the classroom. When explicitly asked whether his experience might have been different without the processfolio, he stated that he did not feel the processfolio itself made the difference. Li was the only student in these case studies who admitted to disliking doing the processfolio, but said he enjoyed the process of writing itself. He felt the processfolio was merely a "collection" (unlike Damo who explicitly saw the processfolio as different from the portfolio/collection as a product) and said that: "I think the folio is not very important. I think the process is very important" (int. 2). He referred to the processfolio as a strategy and felt "the strategy becomes the end" (int 2). When asked to elaborate on this, he stated: "The strategies are not the destination. It's just the instrument...so I think it's same to doing the folio. It's not the end, it's just one instrument for us to improve ourselves." Because, as can be seen above, Li did not conceive of the processfolio as assessment, he questioned its use as a means of judging students, thereby negating its positive benefits.

Conclusion

In summary, these nine students represent elements of the five indicators of improvement: the ability to organise learning and writing processes (all students), to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes (all students), self-efficacy (Damo, Amanda and Jessie), to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations (Rebecca, Jessie, Amanda and Kaiji) and to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers (Joyce, Patti, Jessie, Amanda and Li). These are manifestations of agency and the ability of students to conceptualise themselves as developing writers, addressing, although not completely absenting, in a critical realist sense, the initial problems identified in the reconnaissance cycle: dependency on others for judgement, surface approaches to learning, lack of metacognitive awareness of writing processes and the inability to see writing as a social practice. A theme arising from these case studies is the sense of "peace", or absence of fear, expressed by students engaged in a cooperative endeavour of learning. A significant finding was the fact that students were conceptualising the processfolio in very different ways: some as assessment, some not (Li and Jessie); some as a diary (Kaiji), a self-regulatory time management tool (David), a means of self-presentation (Jessie and Kaiji), a memory aid (Rebecca, Joyce and Patti) or a means of noticing weaknesses (Damo and Amanda). In this way, students were exercising a degree of control over their assessment events, both in terms of how they wished to be assessed and how they metacognitively understood their own learning and writing processes. Some were aware of possible constraints on their ability to exercise full agency (Kaiji, Patti, Li and David); others seemed to exaggerate their agency (Jessie and Amanda) or

showed a lack of awareness of the constraining nature of assessment (Rebecca). A crucial point is the recognition of time and individual differences in the process of metacritique. These students were at varying stages of emerging agency, awareness of this emergence, and readiness to perceive the potential for transformation. However, it was clear that the processfolio has the potential to facilitate such critical consciousness around the dialectic between agency and structure, which may align with those students who are ready, and potentially prepare those who may not yet be ready, to use that potential to exercise their agency.

Nevertheless, a paradox of the processfolio project was being established. Li for example, echoed explicit concerns raised by some students in Cycle One, cautioning against the possibility, were the processfolio to become assessment, of reifying the writing process, making it static or abstract, and separating the creation from its creator. This could militate against any potential positive impacts in facilitating the ability of students to conceptualise writing as a process of development, to see themselves as developing writers or to explore their positioning in relation to the social world. Although my original intention was for the processfolio to become part of summative assessment to address the issues identified in the reconnaissance cycle, I was becoming more aware that agency and critical awareness of structure in this case could not be achieved through the top-down power of assessment. How I reflected on this central issue with the experiences of the teacher participants will be explored in Chapter Nine.

Chapter Nine: Intervention Cycle Two: the teachers

Overview

This chapter presents the findings from the perspectives of the teacher participants, including my own reflexive process. This is the stage where the project had the potential to become more emancipatory and participatory in that teachers were also part of the process of the project, implementing the assessment intervention on the pre-sessional with their own classes. The findings from the teachers triangulated evidence of the benefits and limitations from the students' accounts (Silverman, 2014). I was also interested in the teachers' own reflexive processes as collaborators in AR, understanding and revising their assumptions of their own practices and the social conditions which shape them.

The chapter first outlines the planning stage, which includes an account of the initial relational interview and collaborative workshops conducted with the two teachers. Then, I present and analyse narrative case studies of the teachers based on the main post-course interview (the Acting and Observing stages). This is followed by an account of my own experiences of the project (Reflecting) and how my thinking around the processfolio evolved through interaction with participants, data, and reflexive monitoring of my own understandings of the nature of change.

9.1. Planning: methods

9.1.1. Participants

Following Cycle One in 2014, I produced a written report of the project to be distributed to staff as part a staff development presentation, an example of which, at 7000 words, was unable to be provided as an appendix. The purpose of this was to adhere to the principle of AR communication, Stenhouse's idea of "systematic inquiry made public" (1981, p.104). I also wished to stimulate preliminary interest among teachers to participate in the project as volunteers rather than imposing it on them (Townsend, 2013). Seven teachers from a staff body of 15 (excluding coordinators and managers of other programmes) expressed an interest. However, by the summer of 2015, only two eventually met the criteria: Harry and Kathleen. This was due to timetabling and my desire that all participants should teach on the whole 9-week course to allow observation of the effects of the processfolio over the remaining five weeks of the course.

In 2015, Harry had been an EAP teacher for 4 years, after leaving a career in medicine for teaching in 2010. He obtained a permanent contract at Barksdale in 2015 but had been a temporary summer teacher on Barksdale pre-sessionals for three consecutive years.

Kathleen joined Barksdale in January of 2015. Before this, she had been working in Australia in TEFL, and since 2011 in EAP for a private partner provider with a UK university. This was her first pre-sessional at Barksdale.

9.1.2. Conducting interviews as a way of moving forward

To reduce burden on time and integrate data collection with planning in complex institutional contexts, Somekh (1995) suggests using interviews to explore the context, to iron out problems and discuss planning. These are also termed relational interviews (Fujii, 2017) because they establish a connection between the interviewer and interviewee to foster a more harmonious collaboration. Despite the open and supportive working relationship between myself and my colleagues, we had never fully shared our views on teaching and learning, assessment and our own professional identities. I felt it was important to discuss areas of potential conflict in the process of implementing the intervention. It was also crucial in the shared process of meaning-making that the teachers could explore and reflect on their own views, which is central to transformational goals of AR in the emergence of new understandings of practices (Stringer, 2004). These relational/exploratory interviews were conducted two weeks before the start of the course. Extensive field notes were made from the recordings rather than transcriptions, as the aim was not to develop codes from these but allow a space for teachers to explore their own thoughts, feelings and experiences. The interview was therefore unstructured and informal to explore beliefs and mindsets (Newby, 2010) based around four main topics:

- reasons for participating in the project
- expectations - for students and yourself
- anticipated issues/challenges/concerns
- general thoughts about assessment in EAP and on the pre-sessional.

A summary of findings relating to these topics can be found in **Appendix x**. These are also explored in more detail as part the teachers' narrative case studies below.

9.1.3. Collaborative workshops

Building on the relational connection established in the interviews, I arranged two workshops over the month leading up to the pre-sessional, involving a discussion of the theoretical principles and practical implementation of the project, including timetabling and using the pedagogical activities that had been successful for me in Cycle One. I had drafted a list of FAQs for the first session, and at this stage ethical consent forms and guidelines were distributed. The ethical consent forms were altered slightly from the student versions but essentially followed the same procedures **(see Appendix ii).** The second session introduced new materials that I had designed for lessons and the Thursday afternoon essay workshops. Questions and concerns arose from Harry over the level of autonomy he would have over the project in his own class. At this stage it was clear to me that although I had designed certain materials to facilitate a principle that aligned assessment with learning, teachers would have to make the project their own if they were to facilitate engagement, commitment and trust from their students. Hence, I decided not to impose the pedagogic activities, rather to make the materials optional. I produced a folder to put on the Barksdale intranet, along with the optional syllabus which I had redesigned following Cycle One (see Chapter Seven). However, I stipulated that the peer and self-evaluation elements must be included for comparison with Cycle One.

Responsibilities or control over aspects of the project were negotiated with the constraint that because the project was a doctoral thesis, some of the work which would traditionally be co-constructed in an AR project was to be my individual responsibility. Despite the need and desire for collaboration in as many stages of the process as possible, I had to distinguish between my role as a participant in the AR and my role as a doctoral candidate in allocation of tasks. Table 9.1 represents this division of responsibilities.

Teachers	Me
Participating in workshops and planning of the intervention	Designing/Refining the processfolio
Implementing the activities and syllabus for the 4 week course to incorporate the folio	Providing a revised syllabus for teachers to follow if they wished
Introducing the processfolio project to their class	Providing the information about the processfolio
Collecting the ethical consent forms	Designing, distributing and storing the ethical consent forms
Collecting the processfolios and other data sets from the students	Analysing the data and ensuring member checks

Table 9: Division of responsibilities

The second interviews were more structured, in the same way as the students', to determine triangulation of the themes. Therefore, as with the students in Chapter Eight, I mapped the same five macro-themes developed from Cycle One onto the teachers' interview transcriptions as a means of triangulating the students' views. An additional purpose of the teacher interviews was to empower them as co-constructors of the research rather than as participants and I wished to share problems and solutions in our respective processes of implementing the processfolio project (Reid et al, 2006). Therefore, I developed new codes through the same process of note-making, sub-coding and thematic development described in Chapter Five. The purpose of these new codes was to explore issues that the teachers raised about the direct impact of the intervention on them as well as their views about writing practices, opinions about learning, assessment and the purpose of EAP itself. This process is shown in **Appendix xi**.

9.2. Acting/Observing: analysing the findings

Kathleen and Harry began with opposing attitudes to the processfolio. Kathleen's enthusiasm stemmed from seeing the project as aligning with her views on the constraining nature of pre-sessional writing assessment practices. This contrasted with Harry's scepticism, not only of the processfolio's potential to improve assessment, but also of the necessity of that improvement. Throughout the project, both underwent a shift in attitudes to varying degrees, Kathleen becoming less certain about the practicalities of the processfolio and Harry more convinced of its benefits. Although both remained more or less committed to their original views, their participation questioned underlying assumptions and raised new questions about the relationship of assessment to writing, agency, economic and social forces shaping EAP and their own roles as EAP teachers.

9.2.1. Kathleen's process

Kathleen's reaction to the *processfolio* was positive from the outset. In our relational interview, she stated that she had volunteered, despite 2015 being her first pre-sessional at Barksdale, because she had observed many negative impacts of writing assessment at previous institutions where she had worked. The processfolio ethos of addressing these impacts of assessment aligned with her beliefs about how the focus on grades impacted on her students: "Students can feel like they're just writing in the air, what do people want from me judge me rank me I just want to see my grade." In this extract, Kathleen encompasses her previous experiences of pre-sessionals outside Barksdale. She perceived assessment to be performed on students, but saw students, in her experience, as

having inculcated the values of assessment systems, equating the tenets of competition and judgement perpetuated by ranking and grades with that of their own, and their eagerness to submit to that judgment (Shohamy, 2001; Torrance, 2015). Kathleen's experience supports many of the findings from the initial reconnaissance cycle.

Therefore, decreasing teacher-dependency and changing the surface approaches to learning towards a more genuine active engagement were her self-reported goals in undertaking the processfolio project: "I wanted them to gain that sense of they could do it themselves." She witnessed in her class that: "There was a sense of not trusting yourself, of second guessing yourself...they were very nervous," supporting the issues around lack of self-efficacy around writing that arose in the reconnaissance cycle. Kathleen valued the ability to take responsibility for learning processes as a trait for successful learners on postgraduate degree programmes and for life-long learning (Boud and Falchikov, 2006), a key facet of autonomy. She felt that those who enter their programmes directly with their SELT score can lack this skill and therefore are less "prepared" for the rigours of academic practice and discourse than students on a pre-sessional course:

> If you think about what is a pre-sessional for? And you think 'if it's mostly for a Masters, I need to know how I can do certain things. Not just so that I can improve my English or whatever ...it's that there are certain expectations of me at university and the expectations will not be made explicit during my Masters degree'. So it's making explicit all those expectations which are unsaid.

For Kathleen, therefore, an EAP pre-sessional is more than a language or skills course but also plays a role in helping students in demystifying the academy (Harwood and Hadley, 2004). In this way, the processfolio allowed her to shift the students' focus more explicitly to this goal by the reduced focus on assessment as an end in itself. In this way, the project allowed her to reconcile her pedagogic values with her actions (Scott, 2006).

Because Katheleen's concerns and attitudes towards assessment and EAP aligned with the ethos of the processfolio, and she already believed the students would gain from it, it was perhaps unsurprising that she was keen to see benefits derived from the experience, a phenomenon highlighted by Kahn et al, (2012). She asserted the main benefit for her class was their transition from what she saw as passive to active and engaged learners. She stated that the students "had an attitude to learning that was not helpful for postgraduate study," using metaphors to describe their surface learning approaches during the formative stage, such as, "they were going through the motions" and she had to "drag them though." She clearly felt there was a high level of teacher-dependency and a failure to engage on a deeper level with writing and learning. In contrast, Kathleen pointed out differences in attitudes and behaviours over the duration of

the course, citing the processfolio as the reason. Firstly, she claimed it "sharpens their focus on what they need to do," enabling them to conceptualise their own learning goals rather than the "writing in the air" or mystification that she refers to above. Secondly, she stated that the processfolio enabled students to make metacognitive connections between the writing process and the product for assessment: "You're not just producing a piece of writing, it's coming from somewhere." Thirdly, like many of the students, she felt that because the processfolio was a tangible object, it helped to reduce the abstract dichotomy between product and process, instead emphasising their inextricability.

Consistent with literature on reflection as a retrospective process which takes place over time (Rogers, 2001), Kathleen found that her students' attitudes to learning did not shift during the formative processfolio stage, but rather the change in approach was noticed at the summative stage. This is certainly confirmed by David above, whose levels of pragmatism in his first interview were high. Although Amanda, Jessie and David did not express this, Kathleen stated that her class initially saw the processfolio as "another assessment" and they were motivated initially only by the fact that it was assessment, an example of an extrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2014). However, she thought the processfolio "helped the students immensely without them realising" throughout the formative stage, allowing them to retrospectively re-evaluate their understandings of assessment and writing at the summative stage. In some ways, as I will explore below, this reinforced my initial belief that the processfolio should in fact be a piece of assessment in order for students to engage with it and the full benefits to be gained.

Kathleen noticed both her students' growing self-efficacy and their reflexive ability to revise assumptions and expectations. She stated that her students were still suffering high levels of stress in the formative stage, but that this dissipated immensely in the summative stage, with high levels of enthusiasm: "They were bouncing off the walls." This supports the pride and sense of achievement noticed in portfolio studies where a more genuine investment with learning has occurred (for example, Hughes Wilhem, 1996; Aydin, 2010). It also somewhat allayed my concerns that the processfolio had only mitigated stress because it had been trialled on a formative stage. Kathleen specifically mentioned Amanda's incidence of plagiarism and how the processfolio had allowed Amanda to reflect on it. Kathleen reported that Amanda was keen to demonstrate her new understanding of the process of source collection and synthesis by showing Kathleen the process she had gone through in a tutorial, even at the summative stage when a processfolio was not required. On one hand, this could be interpreted as teacher-dependency in requiring Kathleen's approval. On the other hand, Kathleen believed Amanda's reflection on the incident was a critical reflexive moment in her understanding of textual ownership: "Plagiarism was good for her because it allowed her to see 'ok I've done it the fake way, now I've done it the real way.' " Kathleen, like me, interpreted this as Amanda's

praxis, or reflection through action: “There’s being told and there’s finding out by doing.”

A recurring theme from Kathleen’s interviews is that under Barksdale practices it was possible for students to have not made any learning gains: “If you come out of a pre-sessional course just having done a summative assignment and getting a grade for it then you haven’t learned.” Kathleen’s version of learning is more than achieving short-term instrumental goals, but disrupting one’s way of seeing and reflect in order to act (Johansson and Felten, 2014). She states that after handing in her summative stage essay, “she [Amanda] was in tears, she was so proud of her essay.” She feels Amanda’s experience was transformational because it was precipitated by failure and struggle. The processfolio enabled Kathleen to facilitate the kind of educational experiences that she values rather than merely fulfilling an instrumental purpose as an educator of helping students to pass the course (ibid).

From the focus of both interviews, Kathleen appeared to value the processfolio project more in terms of reducing teacher-dependency and fostering a deeper metacognitive awareness of writing than its contribution to the development of student’s understanding of writing as a social practice. However, Kathleen also valued the social aspect of learning because she felt the initial class dynamic of competition was obstructive (Guarado and Shi, 2007; Rust, 2002) and clearly believed that being able to “trust each other” is invaluable in becoming a student within the academy, in terms of developing criticality and communicating ideas to an audience within an academic environment (Wingate, 2012). Kathleen does not refer to the online forums or peer evaluation specifically as a means of fostering this, but mentions the gradual shift in attitude towards a collaborative ethos that developed over the course, which is consistent with David, Amanda and Jessie’s reporting of this shift. The students’ level of trust in each other perhaps facilitated more honesty and constructive criticism over time, fostering the emergence of a more collective or social agency (Liu and Carless, 2006).

Kathleen’s participation on this project began with using the processfolio as a means to foster skills that she believed students need to be successful on their postgraduate degree programmes rather than concentrating solely on grades. In this way she can be said to have a more acculturalist approach to EAP in uncritically preparing students for what is valued in academic life (Harwood and Hadley, 2004). She did not initially contest the “underlying legitimacy” (Benson 2008, p.15) of these grades. Yet in her post-course interview, she began to question the nature of grading itself on pre-sessionals:

> What we’re asking is can students cope on a Master’s degree and from this random number we’ve given them, we’re not sure... you’re going out there with a grade based on your exam results and a certain way of marking criteria that allows certain things to get through.

She seems in this extract to be developing her own reflexive understandings of the mediating conditions which shape EAP as a practice. As outlined in Chapter Two, the political and economic condition of EAP require that while, on one hand, courses are preparing and facilitating acquisition of academic literacy, they are simultaneously providing a gate-keeping function (Chan, 2013; Hadley, 2015). Kathleen uses this gate metaphor in describing the criteria which "allows them to get through," alluding to a system which, while maintaining the illusion of rigourous assessment, is open to adjustment in order for as many students to obtain the passing grade as possible for the institution to gain fees from subsequent tuition. This aligns with Turner's (2004) assessment of EAP as seen by external stakeholders as the means of obtaining "the maximum throughput of students with the minimum attainment levels in language in the shortest possible time" (p. 97). For Kathleen, this meant that focusing on the grade for the students is "meaningless" in that students are likely to pass the course regardless; therefore, the focus on assessment as high-stakes is a fiction detrimental to students' long-term learning and writing development. Here, Kathleen was engaging in the critical realist immanent critique as a practitioner in her own field, voicing her growing understanding of EAP assessment as shaped by socio-economic forces that has led her to desire change.

Therefore, in order to counter these impacts, Kathleen advocated the processfolio be used as summative assessment for all students, although she hedged by acknowledging the inherent paradox of the concept: "I know the idea is to de-stress students from the idea of assessment!" Comparing her class and the 5-week stage students she marked anonymously, she comments on the discrepancy between the quality of their work despite the latter's higher SELT entry scores:

> They are nowhere near as prepared as my students. They all just going to get a number and think oh I got this number, I'm fine on my Masters...[but] they are still using non-academic sources, plagiarism, all sorts of issues that my students don't have.

Kathleen's perspective supports the growing body of literature on the false construct and false sense of security that a SELT result might perpetuate regarding academic literacy acquisition (Leung et al, 2016; Pilcher and Richard, 2017). Furthermore, Kathleen advocates the processfolio as potential extra evidence of a holistic picture of the individual provided by their teacher, rather than relying on one-shot product grading (Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2000) which, at Barksdale for purposes of reliability, is anonymous (Weigle, 2002). Kathleen cited two of her students as examples of things that a class teacher would know, stating that it can be difficult to judge a student's readiness for further study from their product only: "Maybe the realisation of their work wasn't there...but they had reached too high and you couldn't see that as you were reading the essay. You could have seen [through the processfolio] oh, this

is the process they went through and where they were going. It would have given more evidence." In this way, Kathleen feels that the processfolio could form a hermeneutic approach to summative assessment. This supports literature on the alternative assessment principle of multiple sources of evidence taken into account to form a comprehensive picture of the students' abilities or reveal the more invisible aspects of learning (Moss, 1996; Shohamy, 2001; Sambell, 2016; Lam, 2017).

In terms of how the processfolio affected Kathleen herself, she valued her participation in the project and did not see it as a potential constraint to her own teacher autonomy, which is a common concern when teachers see interventions as imposed on them (Shaw, 2008). In the post-course interview, she explicitly thanked me, saying: "It really helped my students and I'm thrilled." She asserted that her own sense of self-efficacy has increased: "I think it really helped me," consistent with findings by Lam (2016) on increased self-efficacy of teachers in portfolio situations. For example, she thought the processfolio "improved my teaching" by providing a practical means of applying the theoretical principles with which she defined her pedagogical approach, and which she claimed were not being realised to the extent she wanted in previous courses. In other words, Kathleen was moving from "espoused beliefs" to "belief informed action" (Vieira, 2003, p.230) and from tacit practices to explicit ones (McNiff, 2013). Indeed, she suggested that the processfolio project could be expanded as part of a training or induction session for teachers who are transitioning from other educational contexts such EFL to pre-sessional EAP: "I think it would be really good for new teachers on the course. Just so they know what they are doing. Because I think they don't get enough...there needs to be more done on that scheme of work." Here, Kathleen was alluding to perceived inadequacies of the Barksdale syllabus in its focus in linguistic mechanics of writing and materials with what she felt was a narrow construct of EAP in light of the necessity to employ under-qualified and inexperienced teachers on summer pre-sessionals, as described in Chapter Two. Again, Kathleen's critical awareness of some of the mediating conditions that shape EAP pre-sessionals is clear. While this awareness may not have been raised purely through participating in the processfolio project, it has at least allowed a forum for expressing these views and a means of reconciling values and actions, consistent with AR's 'living theory' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006), or the critical realist concept of 'seriousness,' or theory/practice consistency (Bhaskar, 2014).

Although Kathleen believed that the processfolio had benefits, as described above, she also critically reflected on the constraints enacting on attempts to shift assessment culture on a pre-sessional. The main institutional factor seems to be time. Kathleen referred to the time-constrained nature of the courses in that the students have to make "a big jump" both linguistically and culturally in a short period. She stated that she would like to use the processfolio on future courses but begin at an earlier point in the course for all students to establish the ethos

she felt it fostered: “I would start earlier and ...stretch out the folio to make them more independent from an earlier stage.” Workload was another institutional factor which influenced how Kathleen implemented the processfolio. On one hand, she referred to the processfolio, the materials in particular, as reducing her workload: “You have little time to plan and there’s all these great materials.” On the other hand, she was challenged by the increased amount of time spent marking the processfolio itself and monitoring students’ interactions in the VLE forums as challenging. This raises the question of practicability, a key concern in assessment design and validation (Bachman and Palmer, 2010) and the need to balance student learning gains with a concern for teaching workload (Gibbs, 2003). However, Kathleen also acknowledged the possibility of increased workload as a potential consequence of a pedagogy and assessment that focuses on meaningful learning: “If you want to teach them properly that’s what happens.” Kathleen’s acceptance of this challenges the notion that teachers might be reluctant to invest in something that will require more time and energy for them; in fact they are at their most autonomous and agentic when they are invested in the “educative well-being” of their students (La Ganza, 2008, p.71). Yet Kathleen was not necessarily representative of teachers at Barksdale, as she has chosen to actively participate in the project and therefore was inherently invested in the improvement in the current situation (Kahn et al, 2012).

9.2.2. Harry’s process

In direct contrast to Kathleen, Harry was initially sceptical to the point of resistant to the ethos of the processfolio. Although he did not decry the theoretical principles of fostering agency and reflection on writing practices and processes, he questioned their necessity as skills to be acquired on a pre-sessional course, therefore the extent to which these principles could and should be part of assessment practices.

Harry volunteered to participate largely as a favour to me given that he was one of only several who were available to participate given the summer teaching schedule. He participated actively in all development sessions, meetings and the project in general but his sense of the authentic self would not allow him to adopt pedagogical principles and beliefs that he did not feel align with his own. Throughout both interviews, Harry’s discourse is that of “outcomes” and “measurability,” perhaps reflecting his scientific background and confirming his view, expressed in our relational interview, that research in complex social situations is amorphous and lacking in rigour. He expressed concern that students might be allowed to fail the course if being agentic was equated with “doing what they liked” and that my research agenda was at the expense of his being able to make the right choices for his students, as suggested by Shaw’s (2008) study of teacher autonomy. This view is consistent with Borg and Al-

Busaidi (2012) findings that that teachers value the desirability to make decisions and choices around assessment much less than in other areas, such as topics and tasks. Harry's view could also be said to align with an accommodationist model of teaching skills and language required to pass the pre-sessional course (Al Maamari, 2016). In our relational interview, Harry was only concerned with this short term-goal and did not discuss the potential wider purposes of EAP. Like Kathleen, he was interested in the students' metacognitive learning processes, although he was more explicit about valuing individualistic attributes of "autonomy" and self-reliance", which he hoped would be a positive outcome of the processfolio project for his students. However, the more social/critical "demystifying" of the academy that Kathleen defined as part of her role as an EAP teacher was absent from Harry's notion of helping students to conceptualise and achieve their own individual learning goals. Harry seemed to see agency as a psychological construct, a product of the individual which is either inherent or absent, therefore cannot be 'taught' (Littlewood, 1996), which he saw the processfolio as attempting to do. This view was evidenced in his scepticism that agency can or should be a goal of an EAP course.

In our relational discussion of the value of focusing on the processes of writing, he stated that people are judged on their product or performance in "life in general" and that it might be unfair to students to pretend otherwise. In their case study with 62 faculty lecturers at one New Zealand university, Harland et al (2015) found that some lecturers believed frequent summative assessment was preparation for the external judgement students would face in a neoliberal job marketplace. This echoes the findings of some of the reconnaissance cycle students, who viewed competition and performance as an inevitable facet of human interaction with structure. It also highlights the debate in EAP circles (as outlined in Chapter Two) pertaining to pragmatic vs critical pedagogic approaches, or the extent to which the role of the EAP teacher is to facilitate critique of discourse conventions for students to challenge them, or whether this is detrimental to students' instrumental goals of acquiring a degree (Harwood and Hadley, 2004; Bell, 2016). Harry does not question or challenge the current model of teaching writing as a means of acquiring linguistic features to emulate academic discourse conventions as defined by criterion outcomes. Thus, he seemed confronted by my notion of the processfolio and my own questioning of his approach in our relational interview. He described the processfolio concept as "wanky" and "meta," alluding to a possible discomfort masked by humour and teasing with the risk inherent in AR in questioning assumptions and deeply held beliefs (Eikeland, 2014; Pearson, 2017b). Morgan (2009) emphasises the possibility of risk as a factor in teachers' resistance to agency in general, in that they feel powerless in their position in the academy and within their own contracts, to work for change and therefore the role of themselves as "technician" (p.90) is a safer role to adopt than the obligation of the critically conscious

teacher to affect change in their practice. Although Harry was a permanent member of staff, he only became so after three consecutive years of temporary pre-sessional contracts, a common situation for EAP teachers (Ding and Bruce, 2017).

Nevertheless, Harry showed some level of reflexive monitoring of his own attitude and was willing to discuss in our post-project interview how this had shifted throughout the project. He expressed surprised at the levels of independence shown in his class compared to his expectations of students' resistance to the processfolio because it confronted their accepted way of learning, supporting findings by Lam (2013) on teacher beliefs. Therefore, like Kathleen, Harry highlights a perceived reduction of teacher-focussed learning or dependency as a main finding: "They were more independent generally... they definitely were." He compared his previous experiences of tutorials where students would demand the answer from him, and of receiving a large volume of emails, compared to this time where "I had very, very few emails… I think they were less teacher-dependent." Harry's class seem to have been motivated by the processfolio idea more immediately than in Kathleen's class. Kathleen felt initially "there was resistance," which, conversely, she had not anticipated. Harry claims that he was careful not to convey his scepticism to the students so as not to prejudice students against the processfolio. This perhaps reflected his view of himself in the role of participant researcher in the AR project but conforming to his own notions of research as being objective in relation to the inquiry.

Another of Harry's initial concerns was that the processfolio might cause increased stress due to the high-stakes nature of the course and perceived extra workload, yet it seemed that these fears were also unfounded. Like Kathleen, Harry reported an increased level of confidence and a decreased level of stress, stating that: "I did feel they were a lot less anxious this year," and that, except for one student, "everyone seemed pretty chilled." Harry also stated that certain materials as part of the project "got them thinking about different elements of their essay" and understanding textual processes, rather than conceptualising writing as a demonstration of linguistic ability alone. In addition, like Kathleen, Harry believed that his students "knew what they were doing" throughout the course, had goals and saw the process as valuable. Both teachers also stated that the obvious benefits on their class were seen less during the project itself and more during the final summative stage of the course. Both concentrated on students making connections, as expressed by Harry, "they had transferable skills" through the self-regulatory monitoring of their individual writing processes and "were prepared" for their degree programmes. Harry conceptualised these skills and attributes as demonstrable outcomes, which perhaps allowed him to understand another purpose to EAP in preparing students for life-long learning that he had not previously valued.

Moreover, Harry pointed out that, compared to previous classes, his students "went down their own path a little and owned it." This indicates that his students felt able to make choices and contradict his advice. For example, Harry singled out Kaiji for his use of the diary in order to explore his own transitions and struggles with his new identity as an academic writer, which, like me, he interpreted as a deeply personal use of the processfolio. He gave another example of a student who, after realising the importance of conceptualising writing as a process rather than performance, "wanted to write an article about the process" for a blog. These are examples of students who conceptualised themselves as developing writers and have made a journey from student or novice to form a new identity through their growing and changing understandings of writing practices throughout the course (Ivanič, 2004). However, as shown in Chapter Eight, Harry's students Patti and Joyce seemed to be more teacher-reliant than the other participants. Harry could be overestimating the independence of his class, or giving a generally accurate overall impression of his class, where these students are slightly anomalous, because not all students will gain a sense of independence at the same time or in the same way (Breen and Mann, 1997). With just three studies case studies from Harry's class, it is impossible to determine. Benson (2016) points out that when a teacher does not have commitment to making an intervention work, there is a higher reported failure rate. Two of Harry's students do not seem to have been as agentic in their choices as he believed; however, my findings disconfirm the idea that a teacher's commitment will influence the intervention if the teacher, like Harry, remains open-minded in the classroom, and if the students are allowed to see the benefits or problems for themselves.

In terms of his own experience, Harry acknowledged that participating in the project explicitly raised awareness of some aspects of his teaching that had previously been tacit, which in turn allowed him to re-evaluate some of his previous assumptions about learning. The first aspect was that his teaching style became less didactic: "it stayed my hand" and more dialogic. He gave the example of tutorials where he realised that the feedback of telling was less effective than allowing students to find out through doing:

> If you say to them 'what about this idea?' they go ' oh I must do that idea' but maybe they don't understand…if you say 'go away and read', they'll come back with something and they'll understand it better because they've done more reading.

He stated that he noticed more so than previously when particular students were teacher-dependent, claiming that it was easier to distinguish when a particular student was asking for reassurance because he was so different from the others on this course: "He wanted to leave no stone unturned, including the stone of the teacher!" This corroborates Patti account of Harry's attempts to foster self-regulative behaviours and self-efficacy in informing students they were "the boss"

of their essay. Harry reported balancing his desire for the students to pass the course with a new objective to allow them to discover learning and writing practices for themselves; therefore, he allowed the students to make choices as to whether to turn to him for help, representing a mutual "holding back" on behalf of teacher and student to foster "inter-relational dynamics" of agency (La Ganza, 2008, p.66). In this way, he felt feedback between the students and teacher was less one-directional and more dialogic this year, while acknowledging the inherent power imbalances between the teacher and students, as well the constraining nature of assessment on the course, in that some students did want to defer to the teacher as authority (Richardson, 2000). However, again, Patti and Joyce's accounts of Harry's management of deadlines and provision of model essays questions the extent to which Harry has overestimated his attempts to be dialogic, or indeed that he may have underestimated how didactic he had previously been.

Harry used the processfolio as an opportunity for students to give feedback on his teaching and on the course: "When I was reading their folio I was like, oh yeh I said this and they've done that so I didn't communicate that very well." His interaction with the students has allowed him more clearly to critically reflect on the effectiveness of his teaching in this example. Even accounting for the fact that the students knew the assessment was formative, there is a clear element of power-sharing and dialogue. Harry found it was positive that students (and teachers, as will be explored below) felt they could "could choose to reject" elements of the processfolio project, such as the face-to-face peer evaluation form, if they chose to give feedback informally or orally. This calls into question my initial impressions from Joyce and Patti that Harry's students may have been more teacher-dependent; rather, they may have been making more conscious choices in order to work in an inter-relational way with their teacher.

A second revision was his view of peer evaluation. Harry perceived a change in students' attitudes from a surface approach to a more genuine engagement that allowed him to revise his previous attitude to peer work as being more useful in theory than in practice. He felt that the use of the VLE peer forums fostered a collaborative culture of motivation (Garrison, et al, 2010) that he had not experienced with his usual method of conducting peer evaluation: "In the past, I've always felt they were doing that to keep me happy, whereas this time I think they were really, really into it." Harry claimed that this reduction or absenting of teacher-reliance had an unintended consequence of decreasing his workload, and his own stress, commenting humorously, "I had a pina colada and read the paper." This confirms findings by Vogel (2017) on reduction of teacher workload through online peer feedback activities. Like Kathleen, he felt that the VLE forum and the structured peer activities provided an alternative to the usual incarnations of peer work that studies have found students to be ambivalent towards (Kern, 1995; Ho and Savignon, 2007). The positive benefits of the engagement and collaborative nature of the class challenged his assumptions

about the resistance of the students to this ethos of social agency. This sense of empowerment around text remains for Harry a focus on students' ability to judge the product, although he explicitly states that he will "focus more on process" in future incarnations of the course. He said that the students "understood it better than I did" and perhaps this acceptance by the students facilitated Harry's understanding of the ethos of the processfolio as allowing them to reflect on their choices, something Harry did not previously value or appreciate himself. This is an example of the mutual understandings reached by participants (here being teacher and students) working collaboratively to understand institutional practices in this project (Kohonen, 2010). Unlike Kathleen's experience, where the processfolio had provided a means to align her values with action, Harry's experience was one of having his assumptions and expectations about the processfolio and, crucially, his students, disconfirmed. This reflexive resetting of beliefs seemed have provided a more transformative experience for Harry than for Kathleen.

Yet, despite Harry's journey of gradual acceptance of some benefits, he did not fundamentally alter his beliefs around agency in assessment situations. He remained unconvinced by the benefits of reflection, seeing it as a personal attribute associated with the personality of individuals which cannot be reduced to a learner training skill (Akbari, 2007). But the act of reflection and agency as a mediation between oneself and the social world are conflated in Harry's mind: "So, are we teaching them agency?" because both are seen as inherent properties of the individual. His pedagogical approach was to foster personal autonomy rather than help students to gain a sense of structural factors which might prevent them exercising agency (Smith, 2003). Therefore, he decried the performativity element of "a public display of reflection" and questioned the need to "externalise the inner voice," similar to Fendler's (2003) critique of the blurring of boundaries between public and private self. Harry did not believe that students should be challenged or confronted in their sense of selves if they are "naturally teacher-dependent" because it is "like fitting a round peg into a square hole." His view represents an upward conflation of agency over structure (Archer, 2000) and a focus on personality as static (Molden and Dweck, 2006). It appears that Harry viewed reflection as the main objective of the processfolio; due to his conflation of agency and reflection, he rejected its application as a skill to be assessed. From Harry's perspective, like that of Li, the potential of the processfolio to be summative assessment is therefore limited because it might assess not only subjective processes but the personality of the student, reifying the process into an end product.

Clearly, from his expression of the processfolio's benefits, Harry valued the aspect of formative teacher and peer assessment that could be meaningfully built into the course, but continually hedged as to whether the benefits could be directly attributed to the processfolio; i.e., whether it is "causation or correlation." He made this point nine times during the second interview. Harry sees the

processfolio project as fostering certain pedagogical approaches which he had previously dismissed and providing evidence of their impact. His conclusion was therefore that: "It didn't do any harm," a possible allusion to the Hippocratic oath of his medical background. His positivist discourse around assessment has clearly not shifted, but whether consciously or not, his utterance has reflected a key concern that assessment be ethical (Shohamy, 2001; Brown and Knight, 2012) as well as an allusion to a deeper understanding of the potentially negative consequences of assessment more generally than he had hitherto acknowledged.

Although he claimed that he would adopt elements of the processfolio project on future pre-sessional courses, in direct contrast to Kathleen, he was firm that it should not form a part of summative assessment, although he did not have Kathleen's concerns about its being practical and feasible. His concerns echoed mine in Cycle One of recognising the tensions inherent in making the processfolio the type of assessment "where they get a mark" because "then you've got problems because it goes against what it is." Harry's comment here indicates for the first time in his interview that despite protestations of confusion around "what the outcome measure is", he had conceptualised the purpose of the processfolio for himself: "Shouldn't it be self-engaging?"

In sum, the processfolio aligned with Kathleen's own critique of EAP assessment practices and some of their negative impacts, and her understanding of EAP as being shaped by ideological forces had been facilitated though her participation in the project. Harry was confronted and challenged by many of the principles of the processfolio and his attitude shifted in response to some of the perceived evidence of benefits for his students. Because of the deflection of attention from grading and rhetorical formulae for performance writing, it allowed Kathleen and Harry to see how approaches and activities, such as peer evaluation, which had previously not been successful for them, could be facilitated by a more authentic and engaging assessment. Kathleen had previously been aware of the constraining nature of EAP writing assessment, its impacts on approaches to learning and its incongruity with academic writing as a social practice and process, but less aware of the possibility for enabling and more critically conscious of the forces shaping it. Harry had not previously been aware of assessment as constraint because of his own inculcation of the values perpetuated by a neo-liberal ethos of competition and standards and his own views of writing and learning, particularly reflection, as an individual endeavour. Although they were at different points in their emergent understandings, Harry and Kathleen have clearly mirrored their students in their "recursive processes of critical reflection and emergent understandings that facilitate a transformative potential in EAP teachers" (Morgan, 2009, p. 87).

I was also in a process of transition in my reflexive re-evaluation of what the processfolio should be, coming to understand that simply advocating the

replacement at Barksdale of one form of assessment for another was not how I wanted to conceptualise change as an action researcher. The following section depicts this process throughout Cycle Two.

9.3. Reflecting

One dimension to consider in AR is that the people and setting are part of one's own practice, and includes oneself. To accord to the principles of immanent critique and reflexivity, it was important to be aware that the process of selecting what to include in this account is part of my process of constructing and representing my social world (Corwin and Clemens, 2012).

This section depicts my reflective account, facilitated by my practitioner journal (see Chapter Three), of my conflicts with myself and my own roles throughout the process of research; my reactions to managing the research process and teachers' fears around change; and my interactions with structure in the evolution of my thinking around the processfolio. Through interactions at the intra, interpersonal and discoursal levels of structure, I came to a new understanding. Rather than being assessment in itself, the processfolio should be an accompaniment to product essay-writing assessment to mitigate negative impacts arising from writing assessment practices as shaped and constrained by the mediating conditions of pre-sessional EAP.

9.3.1. My process

As Townsend (2013) states, AR cycles and iterations can be messy, and risky, in that they can take us far from the direction we imagined taking when we embark on a project. While this is of course the case for other types of research, the 'human factor' of AR in attempting to collaborate with colleagues and students for change, as well as the attempt to deeply understand the context while enacting that change, perpetuates this challenging process.

In a similar way to Harry, the project made me question the way I might previously have been inadvertently fostering dependency in my own students. A huge issue for me was the time constraints of the course which made me feel as if I was rushing through some activities and not always allowing students time to come to their own conclusions. It impeded my desire to facilitate agentic choices around writing decisions in some instances. For example, despite adjustments made to the syllabus from Cycle One, I found attempts to be dialogic in the first few weeks of Cycle Two were still impeded by the need to get through 90-minute lessons while incorporating the processfolio activities and the syllabus content. I noticed myself reverting to information transfer if I felt time was short. I recorded being unsure whether this was related to the need to adhere

to the syllabus or whether I was anxious around silence, understanding it as a developmental step in the process of learning for international students (Li and Jia, 2006). Over time, and through mindful noticing, I was able to relax around this issue in both cycles of the project.

Nevertheless, the gains I experience as a teacher and researcher from a greater awareness of critical incidents (Moon, 1999) that I would otherwise have passed over were manifold. The project highlighted an aspect of my personality which was hard to detach from, the desire to manage and control, compounded by the fact of undertaking this project for an individual attainment goal of a PhD (Klocker, 2012). My anxieties around not being able to control aspects of the research process, and oftentimes, not fully comprehend the direction the research was taking, was difficult to resolve. Through a reflexive process of using my practitioner journal to properly understand my own thinking and work through anxieties (Moon, 2006), and through engagement with the literature on the messiness of AR (Cook, 2009), I was able to slowly embrace the nature of complexity as something lived rather than something theorised.

In addition, I tried to balance my role as researcher and my role as a practitioner and colleague to maintain positive working relationships (Vieira, 2003). For example, I reflected in the first few weeks on my conflict with Harry. As mentioned above, Harry wished to give the students' model essays for them to follow and to manage deadlines for his students in their process of producing outlines, summaries and drafts, which I felt was problematic for the purpose of the processfolio, particularly in light of the new criteria application materials. Given this was a formative stage, I felt it was important to allow students the right to make their own choices, poor or otherwise, over issues of time management to facilitate the opportunity to take risks and fail in a safe space (Harland et al, 2015). Harry required a high level of autonomy in his implementing the processfolio with his class to ensure his established pedagogical approach was not changed in a way that would make him uncomfortable, as Shaw (2008) cautions. This was a condition of his participation and, in respect for the democratic principles of AR, I was forced to confront the balance between the desire for change and the necessity to adhere to democratic choices of participants, a dilemma highlighted by Day and Townsend (2009).

According to Smyth (1997, p.1102), teaching is a "form of debate or struggle over important ideas and ideals" and the participation of Harry, Kathleen and I brought to the fore a number of conflicts in our ideas and ideals around assessment, writing and even EAP itself, as can be seen above. Rather than allowing my own views to dominate, I tried to allow Harry and Kathleen the freedom to use the processfolio with their classes as they saw fit, even if this diverged from my own ideas (Freedman, 2006). Indeed, through this process, Harry and I converged somewhat to reach a mutual understanding. Harry and I,

oppositional in our approach to pedagogy and assessment, were similar in our strong willed and highly reflexive dispositions, which allowed for convergence and some level of consensus to be reached as we undertook the process of uncovering and adjusting our beliefs. Frequent conversations, some teasing and humour throughout the research process helped in this. As Jaworksi (1993) states, critical reflection is easier to achieve when it is expressed to someone else, and as with the students, this self-expression to Harry and Kathleen was a form of learning for me. Through an iterative process of interaction with the participants through action rather than merely dialogue, I reached new understandings of my own intentions, reflexively correcting my own false beliefs. These examples can in some ways claim to be a process of collective explanatory critique over a period of time, albeit short, and as insiders on our own practices, which facilitated us to engage "within collectively organised contexts of action" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p.974).

The final section presents an evaluation of the successes and limitations of the processfolio and the process of my thinking about its potential uses throughout both intervention cycles.

9.3.2. The evolution of the processfolio

I initially evaluated the processfolio as a piece of alternative assessment, returning to the principles outlined in Chapter Six. This was because my original intention, as I have highlighted throughout this thesis, was to explore its potential to be used as summative assessment in some incarnation with a view to a longer term replacement of the current product-only essay. The processfolio did meet many criteria of principles for alternative assessment. Firstly, it was localised and particular to Barksdale, combining research literature adapted to my context with empirical evidence from my investigation of that context. Although this may limit its potential for application to other EAP contexts, the ability of Barksdale to have some freedom in communicating its test to internal stakeholders (see Chapter Two) might allow the use of processfolio as information about which to make decisions on students' linguistic readiness for university. Secondly, the processfolio could provide multiple sources of evidence for making decisions about a student's readiness for university study, more so than a one-shot examination and a single-genre research essay. Indeed, Kathleen, above, suggested that it could be a fairer way of assessing in that students who narrowly missed the grades could exemplify their learning gains, and their capacity for continual learning, through the evidence in their processfolios. Moreover, it can be considered more authentic assessment in that it represents a real process that all students must undergo: in this case the individual metacognitive processes of text creation and the social positing of oneself as an academic writer through discourse choices. Finally, the

processfolio somewhat enabled teaching and learning to be more integrated with assessment, taking into account washback as a validity consideration. As advocated by Hounsell (2007), in the participating classes, students were working in class directly on tasks that would be useful for their future learning, and able to explicitly connect them with the assessment because they would be able to show them in their processfolios. It supplemented deconstructing genres of text in order to identify linguistic features, a common EAP pedagogy which, while useful, does not facilitate the metacognitive awareness of how text is constructed through a process, which inadvertently disempowers students who later come to realise the complexity of the process is incongruent with what has been taught (Dovey, 2010).

However, through the process of interaction both with the data and within interpersonal relationships, a number of key questions and concerns arose around the potential use of the processfolio as summative assessment. These can be divided into practical and pedagogical/philosophical issues. Firstly, Kathleen and I felt there were practical issues involving extra burden of marking. As outlined in Chapter Two, the tight turnaround for marking on all stages of the pre-sessional meant that, even with the met/not met/partially met criteria form, assessing the processfolio in addition to marking, commenting on and grading the product increased the amount of time spent marking. The processfolio was designed not to create extra work during the course because all artefacts were to be peer assessed or completed as class or homework, which would be marked as part of the original course. However, it was impossible to avoid the fact that the processfolio should be returned to the students alongside the product essay in order both to adhere to principles of timely and meaningful feedback as espoused by Nicol and McFarlane-Dick (2006) and to avoid negating the aims of the processfolio by falsely separating the product and process through different feedback sessions. Therefore, teaching marking load and its intensity did increase. There was a clear tension in that, if the processfolio were to be summative, it would require some level of grading that could be understood by university admissions and not delay processing of offer letters and visas.

In terms of pedagogy, despite the many successes of the processfolio project, it is clear that not all students felt the benefits and all to varying extents. Students such as Xinyang did not engage with the processfolio on more than a surface level, and David's surface approach did not significantly alter, as shown in Chapters Seven and Eight respectively. This perhaps indicates an attitude to the processfolio as a hoop-jumping exercise, which supports findings by Stuyven et al (2006) that some students will retain their learning strategies if they align with their own short-term goals, regardless of the assessment.

In addition, a lack of confidence and competence in reflection and self-evaluation remained for some students. Factors which impede students'

acceptance of reflection are often the absence of a supportive environment which encourages students to take risk (Boud and Walker, 1993). Tensions are inherent in high-stakes courses such as the EAP pre-sessional in balancing a pedagogy for autonomy with a supportive relationship between teacher and student. According to La Ganza (2008), a strong teacher does not necessarily lead to teacher-dependent students, although as has been seen in Harry's class, if the teacher does not her/himself value agency as an educational or social precept, it can be difficult to allow space for reflecting on experiences that could be transformational. Personality is often cited by both teachers and students as a reason for acceptance or resistance to reflection, although for the concept of agency employed in this project, seeing personality as static and fixed can inhibit reflexivity and undermine the emergence of agency. However, it must be acknowledged that some students, especially those at the beginning of their educational journey in a new educational system such as international students, may not be ready to fully embrace the potential for transformative experiences (Johansson and Felten, 2014).

This returns us to a limitation of any assessment in truly mitigating the impacts of structural constraints (Richardson, 2000). Although the students in Cycle Two were more able to vocalise their reflexive awareness of the impact of culture and discourse on their beliefs about assessment, writing and learning, some acknowledged that a 9-week course was not enough to change these beliefs. In addition, although some expressed awareness of economic forces acting on their EAP experience, they did not raise this to the level of understanding of complex interacting structural forces as described in Chapter Two. The processfolio might then be able to raise awareness of a different way of experiencing the world as individual and social agents, but it is unlikely to enable students to develop the critical action required for true praxis while assessment remains gate-keeping, high-stakes and potentially alienating.

Furthermore, it seems clear from students such as Rebecca and Damo that a feeling of self-efficacy around assessment and criteria in particular could be fostering only personal liberation that allows alignment of one's own strategic interest in acculturating to the practices of education in an uncritical way (Breen and Mann, 1997).While this is positive in the short-term, when someone has merely accepted standards defined by criteria as fair because they now understand and can meet them, this only enables them to comply with criteria as defined by external bodies and ideologies rather than being able to question or challenge; thus, structure is reproduced (Archer, 2000). This called into question for me the extent to which the problematic situation of writing assessment had been truly addressed.

Nevertheless, although a more critical social agency was less immediately evident, a critical realist analysis of the students' and teachers views indicates that there was a growing critical consciousness of mediating conditions or causal

mechanisms of EAP writing assessment underlying many of their accounts, the first step in a process of transformative change (Bhaskar, 2016). In the reconnaissance cycle, the students seemed aware of the nature of academic writing as distinct from the SELT model, but most were unable, beyond a cursory questioning, to appreciate writing as a form of transition to a disciplinary identity, or discovering of what one means to say. Students in 2014 were better able to engage with writing as communication, and in 2015 to reflexively comment on their new understanding of the conventions, discoursal and epistemological, of their discipline and therefore the choices they had made within those conventions. By seeing themselves as transitioning to academic or professional identities as a process of becoming, they demonstrated an awareness of how agency is mediated by the social world (Ahern, 2001). Many recognised the external forces of time and money impacting on the pre-sessional course, and an awareness of the influence of educational culture on their ability to fully align their deeper learning concerns with more instrumental goals. In addition, Kaiji and David, among others, showed a critical ability to interact with structure and explicitly recognised assessment as a constraint. Patti showed a critical contestation of the criteria and Kaiji and was able to carve out spaces of resistance to structure which could enable him to activate change in his social world. In addition, because the processfolio allowed students to present their process as it pertains to them, it can be said to have personalised assessment in a way that facilitates meaningful learning and engagement. By choosing the artefacts for the processfolio and justifying their choices, students were sharing some responsibility for assessment events in presenting how they wish to be assessed. Amanda, Jessie, Li and Kaiji used the processfolio as a forum to self-present, to represent their emotions (and reflect on their changes), using their personal voices to participate in assessment events, thus felt empowered. The processfolio can, therefore, be said to have provided students with a forum in which to reflect on academic writing and assessment practices as sites of struggle (Lillis, 2003), both in terms of individual creation and as a reflexive means of understanding ones' position within the social world (Mercer, 2012).

A tension inherent in the project from the outset was the extent to which changes in the students and the positive benefits in terms of writing and agency derived from the processfolio itself or the experience of doing the pre-sessional course. Harry and Li, for example, believed that the assessment was not necessary if the course itself focussed on the process; what needed to change was pedagogy rather than assessment. However, as I have argued throughout, potential pedagogic good practices were being inhibited at Barksdale by disempowering assessment practices. In addition, reflexivity is a natural human condition (Archer, 2000), and I did not want to claim, as Harry believed I would, that the processfolio was "causing" this. As discussed above, students may already be at different stages of transition. The act of vocalising through interview could have allowed these particular students a forum to reflect; therefore, my intervention

of conducting research itself may have been more influential than my intervention of assessment (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). However, this was a living example of how the understandings derived from conducting AR are inseparable from the intervention or action itself.

As I have alluded to throughout this thesis, my thinking around the processfolio as an assessment event shifted throughout the project as I reflexively explored my own understandings and assumptions through a process of explanatory critique (Hartwig, 2015). At first I had wanted to design an intervention to actively foster agency and felt that replacing a disempowering form of assessment with an alternative form could do that. The teachers had opposing views on this, with Kathleen believing it could and should be summative assessment for the reasons mentioned above, perhaps weighted as a separate component to the product essay (although a small weighting as she acknowledges issues with criteria and subjective grading). Harry believed it should be only a formative teaching tool. However, we all concurred that whether students perceived it to be summative or formative assessment is likely to have affected their reactions to it. Initially, in order to foster desired learning attitudes and behaviours which could be considered agentic, I had felt the processfolio must be assessed summatively. Before 2013, any attempt at critical and social pedagogic practices within the Barksdale classroom seemed to be negated by the focus on high-stakes product assessment; therefore, I believed that if the summative assessment itself changed, positive washback would occur on the course.

However, paradoxically, to make the processfolio into a high-stakes product to be assessed was, as Harry and many of the students pointed out, antithetical to its intentions. Here, I was forced to confront a limit to my causal efficacy in that I could not affect the external constraints and causal mechanisms of market forces acting on EAP pre-sessionals that currently shape assessment. These forces or mediating conditions (Kemmis and Smith, 2008) meant that for the foreseeable future, for better or for worse, writing assessment on pre-sessional EAP would remain a product to provide a judgement of linguistic performance, however much the construct of that being judged might shift. This context, as I came to understand, could lead to using the processfolio as a tool or technology to demand certain desired behaviours, which was potentially replacing one form of disempowerment with another. Therefore, I began to see the processfolio as a means not to facilitate positive behaviours or attitudes so much as to mitigate constraints on them. In other words, I conceptualised change in the highly constrained context of pre-sessional assessment as not difference or replacement but a critical realist process of absenting (Bhaskar, 2016).

A question arising from this decision was whether the processfolio should therefore be understood conceptually as assessment or as a pedagogical tool. As

I have shown throughout the thesis, assessment can directly affect pedagogy. Assessment is an example of structure, with its impacts on agency and students' ability to conceptualise themselves as developing writers stemming from the causal mechanisms of assessment (and the causal mechanisms which shape assessment). In critical realist terms, assessment exists at the level of the real, as well as at the level of the actual as an event (see Chapter Three). Therefore, to intervene for change at the level of the assessment itself is necessary because even though as stated above, replacing one assessment with another at the level of the actual is flawed, to only intervene in EAP pedagogy would be to only focus on the level of the empirical, therefore denying any possibility for structural change.

From this engagement with critical realist thought, I began to articulate the idea that if it is to be used, the processfolio should be an integral part of assessment, either summative or formative, but not in itself assessed, perhaps in the way this incarnation had required students to submit the processfolio in order to obtain the grade for their product essay. If it is a compulsory component of writing assessment, students are compelled to complete it in order to emphasise the inseparability of product and process. But because it is not assessed, it does not represent an assault on their agency if they choose to present themselves in a certain way, to engage with it minimally, or not at all. In this way, students may come to see the benefits of the processfolio for themselves rather than it be imposed as a requirement. If it facilitates reflexive thinking or a space for students to question or vocalise their concerns and transitional experiences, then it will have a positive impact. However, if students do not choose to engage, it does not affect their grade, subjective processes are not being judged, and the individual is neither being performed nor subjectified. In other words, as Harry states, it does no harm.

Conclusion

This chapter has described and analysed findings from the two teacher case studies and my own reflections to evaluate the impacts of the processfolio intervention, showing how the dialogic process of action and reflection allowed our initially differing views on the nature and intentions of the processfolio to converge somewhat. By this stage I had conceptualised the processfolio as assessment designed specifically to mitigate the negative impacts of assessment itself. The following chapter will form the final stage of reflective evaluation of the project, both as an impact study of in-house EAP writing assessment practices and a AR project underpinned by critical realism for fostering understandings of change within a high-stakes pre-sessional context, including the implications and suggestions for further research and the contribution to knowledge of the project.

Chapter Ten: Conclusions

Overview

The previous chapter reflected on the success and limitations of the processfolio intervention itself. This chapter represents the final stage of reflection: on the AR as a whole. I begin with a brief recap of the project. In the main section, I use the five validity criteria established in Chapter Three as a framework to evaluate successes, limitations, implications and suggestions for further research. The chapter concludes by reiterating the contributions to knowledge to the field of EAP writing assessment research through its focus on agency, and discussing the significance of AR, and in particular an approach underpinned by critical realist understandings of change, within a UK EAP pre-sessional context.

10.1. Summary

The project derived from my concerns as a practitioner regarding the problematic effects of EAP writing assessment practices on Barksdale pre-sessionals. My deeper investigation into the situation formed the reconnaissance cycle of the AR, narrowing the focus to two main negative impacts on students which became the two research foci for the AR intervention. The first focus on agency encompassed students' inability to exercise agency in learning and assessment situations, manifested in teacher-dependency as part of a submitting to external judgement, and taking a surface approach to learning as part of an alienated state. The second focus was the students' seeming inability to conceive of themselves as developing writers, manifested in the lack of metacognitive awareness of writing as a process and as a social practice rather than only a product or performance. I viewed these as social impacts, due to the focus on the interaction between agency and assessment as structure which were manifested at the level of the empirical, on washback on teaching and learning. An analysis of the data from this reconnaissance cycle allowed me to intervene in the form of what I initially conceived of as an alternative assessment: the writing processfolio. The design of the processfolio was informed by a critical review of alternative assessment literature and an adaptation of the traditional portfolio concept to my own context. It was also informed by two approaches to writing which have influenced EAP research and pedagogy but which were not employed at Barksdale: that of process writing and Academic Literacies. The design involved a mapping of the four key impacts (problems) onto pedagogic interventions for solutions, such as self-evaluation and peer evaluation activities, so working towards the assessment could create space for teachers and students to take a more authentic process-oriented and social approach to writing on the Barksdale

pre-sessional, as well as exercise some level of agency of their writing choices and those around assessment.

The main findings from intervention Cycle One with 14 students provided a holistic picture of the processfolio as mitigating many of the problems identified, although there was a lack of self-efficacy around self-evaluation due to my choice to use grades, and some teacher-dependency remained. Questions around the performative nature of the processfolio as public reflection and display of the subject were raised. The data generally provided a positive impetus to continue with the trialling of the processfolio but was lacking in depth. These issues informed the refinements for Cycle Two, which narrowed the data sets to analyse in more detail the narrative experiences of nine students (from 46 participants across three classes) and three teachers, including myself. This data provided a deeper picture of how the processfolio was raising a critical consciousness of the constraining nature of assessment, and of areas where students could exercise agency in learning and assessment situations. At the intrapersonal level, agency emerged through reflexive monitoring and revising of previous beliefs, habits and behaviours. Students' understandings of themselves as developing writers emerged through new conceptualisation of their personal and writer identities. These emergences also occurred at the interpersonal level through collaborative dialogue with peers and teachers; at the discoursal level with shifting attitudes and to and understandings of academic writing; and at the level of structure, with some awareness of EAP writing assessment as an example of a wider educational structure shaped by forces acting on EAP and HE and as a site of struggle and possible resistance. However, the initial concerns from Cycle One were confirmed. There were key practical and philosophical limitations which called into question the use of the processfolio as summative assessment. Therefore, I advocate its use as a mandatory accompaniment to formative or summative assessment. In other words, the processfolio should be understood as assessment which mitigates the negative impact of assessment itself.

10.2. Evaluating the project as a critical approach to action research through validity criteria

"Shall the practitioner stay on the high, hard ground where he can practice rigourously ...but where he is constrained to deal with the problems of relatively little social importance? Or shall he descend to the swamp where he can engage the most important and challenging problems if he's willing to forsake technical rigour?" (Schön, 1983, p.42).

While my incarnation of AR cannot make a claim to achieve the technical rigour of much assessment research, it should be judged by the validity claims of its own paradigm. As discussed in Chapter Six, this is a claim that mirrors that of alternative assessment. The following section uses the five validity criteria

established in Chapter Three to evaluate the successes, limitations, implications for practices, and future directions of the research project. I focus on students, teachers, myself, the wider context of pre-sessional EAP writing assessment at Barksdale and within the UK.

10.2.1. Democratic validity

Democratic validity is the idea that participants' voices and perspective are considered and that ethical principles are followed to act in the best interests of participants. Ethical procedures and guidelines were followed at all stages of the project, and ethics were inherent to the project because it began with a moral concern, i.e. how assessment was a disempowering practice for students and teachers at Barksdale.

I was keen that the students' voices be heard in the research writing, affecting my decision to have them interview each other in Cycle One and then to include case studies with the narrative focus on voice and experience in Cycle Two. In critical realist terms, it was necessary to go beyond description to investigate causal mechanisms, including looking at what was absent from the data as well as what was present. Therefore, I would inevitably impose my own interpretation on participants' narratives to some extent. My coding processes adhered to rigorous procedures and the transcript accounts were member checked (with the exception of 2013) as described in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine. However, I was unable to present the case studies to the students or teachers at the time of writing them due to the post-hoc nature of thesis writing; therefore, perhaps I missed something which may have seemed small but represented a fundamental misunderstanding.

In AR however, it is important to move beyond a mere consideration of other voices and work together in a process of co-construction of meaning in the research process. In terms of the students, although they were not consulted in designing the processfolio because the assessment had to be designed and ready for their arrival on the course, their opinion of and reactions to it informed its refinements and even my eventual conceptualisation of its use. In the reconnaissance cycle, students' accounts of how assessment impacted negatively on them formed the idea for the project and its initial design, as can be seen in Chapters Five and Six. Therefore, they can be said to have collaborated, albeit indirectly, on the eventual incarnation of the processfolio. In the intervention cycles, the reactions of students and teachers to the processfolio directly impacted on refinements to its incarnation in the next cycle (hence the iterative nature of AR). In all three cycles, students offered opinions around what they thought I should be trying to achieve with the processfolio, adopting the role of co-researchers. However, it would have been impossible, given time restrictions

on a short summer course, to engage in the types of discussions and interpretations that facilitate true collaborative emancipation with students without placing a burden on participants' time.

In terms of the teachers, although the development of the processfolio was my own, through a series of collaborative workshops and co-production of materials, Harry, Kathleen and I shared responsibility for elements of its implementation in 2015. The course coordinators were also included by seeking their opinion on solving certain practical limitations, such as the didactic nature of the syllabus and the use of the VLE for the peer evaluation forums. As a result of the dissemination of my findings in the 2013 reconnaissance cycle, essay writing workshops were added as part of the course in 2014 to facilitate a focus on the writing process.

Finally, I had to acknowledge and accept that the forms of participation would be different depending on the circumstances and social roles of the participants (Sinclair, 2004). If this project had not been for an accredited thesis, co-construction between teacher participants and myself may have been achieved; but in the case of students, the inherent power imbalance between the student and teacher-researcher roles cannot be naively assumed to be levelled by facilitating a more dialogic approach, and this remains a challenge to a truly critical approach to AR in the context of pre-sessional EAP.

10.2.2. Outcome validity

Outcome validity refers to the extent to which transformational change and a generating of new understandings for praxis occurred. In critical realism and a more critical tradition of AR, within open systems of education, outcomes cannot be conceptualised as measurable improvement or generalizable findings. Therefore, a more statistical validation of the processfolio was not the focus of this research. Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter Seven, a major limitation was the ethical necessity to trial the processfolio on the 9-week formative stage of the pre-sessional. Students are likely to have been more open to a new assessment approach than if it had been summative, because stress around new and risky assessments are compounded if they contribute to overall grades (Leung and Mohan, 2004). Therefore, I was unable to make definitive conclusions about the extent of improvement of students' ability to exercise agency and to conceptualise themselves as developing writers between 2013 and 2015.

However, if we conceptualise an improvement of the problematic situation at Barksdale as absenting (removing) the absences (negative impacts of assessment) then this could be said to have occurred to a large, but not total,

extent. A critical realist understanding of change is as the emergence of new understandings, the process of losing some of one's old ways of thinking, reinforcing or confirming others. It is an important consideration in AR that the level of change will not be the same for all contexts or indeed all participants. Some participants were expressing a more explicit critical consiousness of the mediating conditions the cultural/discursive; the material/economic and the socio-political, acting on assessment in EAP than others, but based on triangulated self-reported data, each participant, including myself, can be said to have reached new understandings, confirmed or adjusted others.

Further trialling needs to be conducted not only with a wider sample but also potentially in other contexts. This would allow a level of comparability impossible to achieve at Barksdale since substantial changes have been made to the original incarnation of the course and assessment since 2013. For example, the pre-sessional took place with postgraduate students and it is possible that these students responded to the ethos of the processfolio better than undergraduates. This is one possible avenue of research. In addition, a question arose in informal discussions with teachers about the fact of Barksdale being a world-ranking university capable of attracting high academic achieving and linguistically stronger students. Students on courses of similar length who had been accepted with lower SELT scores by less prestigious universities may have different concerns and priorities in terms of achieving linguistic proficiency, regardless of the in-house assessment format. Kathleen thought that it could benefit more complacent stronger students on short courses by providing a challenge. Harry thought reflective elements may alienate stronger students who may already have sufficient strategies for learning (although as shown throughout the thesis, this does not mean they have genuine agency), whereas linguistically and academically less-prepared students might feel the benefits more because it mitigated assessment stress and fostered classroom and peer support around writing. It was not within the scope of this thesis to explore these issues, which opens up another area for further research.

The 'giving' of emancipation is antithetical to AR; hence, participants must come to a realisation of their own conditions and to desire change. This is a potentially uncomfortable process and those who do not wish to be emancipated cannot be coerced into being so. Elliot (2005) cautions against seeing participants as 'dupes' who are utterly ignorant of their conditions and it is clear from the data that not only is this not the case, but also that some students exercised a form of agency in retaining more surface approaches and some teacher-dependency in order to achieve short-terms goals. Although genuine agency was postponed, there was some level of awareness of its potential. There is also the danger that self-efficacy and an acculturation to writing, assessment and learning practices in UK HE can offer only the type of personal liberation that can lead to a perpetuation of practices which disempower others.

The project, therefore, highlighted the limitations of the potential for true emancipation given the power imbalance between the teachers/researchers/assessors and the students; moreover, the imbalance between teachers and the institution, SELTs system and UKVI. It would be falling into the trap of taking an individualistic, even neo-liberal, perspective to assume that students and teachers can always be autonomous in their practices in the face of structural constraints. As shown throughout this thesis, this is particularly problematic within assessment, as such a view increases disempowerment by responsibilising the agent. Therefore, within the highly constrained context of EAP pre-sessionals, a critical realist view of the practitioner-researcher may inevitably be that of a "custodian of emancipation," and that the processfolio project can be seen only as a means of "facilitating the emergent rationality...towards emancipation" (Shipway, 2011, p.200).

10.2.3. Process validity

Process validity refers to the nature of the research process. What makes AR 'research' is the systematic nature of inquiry, and I conformed to systems of procedural design, data collection and analysis at all stages of the AR cycle: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. As described above, I adhered to ethical considerations for educational research, and through the use of a practitioner journal, I maintained reflection and reflexivity throughout the project. To observe rigour in the research process, I triangulated evidence in all cycles to corroborate findings, a key criteria for ideological research such as this, although the paucity of depth in 2014 necessitated reducing the data sets in 2015. Each cycle fed forward into refinements for the next as I learned from mistakes made. Through an extensive iterative investigation of the context and theory, and intervening through action and reflection, some awareness of causal mechanisms has been generated. Nonetheless, it is impossible to claim to have a complete picture of any social phenomenon through one piece of research. Moreover, as in all research situations, it is likely that my assumptions and beliefs may have led me to overemphasise some aspects or overlook others.

Throughout the writing up of this project, I have adhered to the criteria of truthfulness and comprehensibility. I have attempted to strike a balance between the two in accounts of the process and its justifications, including reflection on the practical constraints and limitations of the data sets at the end of each intervention cycle chapter. As I foreground in the introduction, perhaps more so than other types of research, the messiness of the AR process does not lend itself easily to linear depictions of the research process. Therefore, despite an attempt at clarity, I have prioritised the telling of the story and resisted somewhat an imposition of conventions in the structure of the thesis and the narrative

depiction of my reflexive process of learning. My anxieties around the messiness of AR in an under-researched area of EAP pre-sessional assessment were mitigated by reconciling my real intention to remove constraints where possible rather than attempt to make definitive comparative conclusions around cause, effect and measurable outcomes.

10.2.4. Catalytic validity

Catalytic validity, or the capacity for self-determination inspired in participants to work for continual change, can be evaluated at the level of the individual and collective (Boog, 2003). At the individual level, if I accept as valid the "learners' reports about the growth of their capacity for self-determination" (p.434) in the interviews and processfolio introductory reflections, I can make claims that the research has met this criterion; and the processfolio itself triangulates this with empirical evidence. The students seemed to be identifying areas in their writing itself, their beliefs and understandings of writing and their approaches to learning and assessment, which they were feeding forward into future learning situations. This was demonstrated between the formative and summative stages of essay writing, where emerging agency and self-efficacy, and change in attitudes and behaviours, were evidenced between the two assessment events. As above, this comes with the caveat that the levels of change will not be the same for all participants (Townsend, 2013). However, whether the action generated around writing on the pre-sessional will be sustained by the students on future degree programmes can be questioned. Thus, tracking students to follow their processes as they interact with structure at the level of the wider academy is a possible avenue of research.

There is also the question of whether the pre-sessional was the best forum for this sort of intervention. Time constraints limited its potential to provide a more transformative experience, and the current structural forces acting on EAP pre-sessionals are unlikely to change. Indeed, Lam (2017, p.89) cautions against using portfolios in "product-based and test-driven writing environments." Using the processfolio on in-sessional contexts, when students have a longer period of time, although fewer contact hours, over one or two semesters might develop their understandings of assessment and writing practices in a context of their own disciplines while studying it. The processfolio, therefore, might have more potential to mitigate negative impacts of disempowering assessment practices on their disciplinary programmes by facilitating a reflexive monitoring of the interaction between structure and their agency from a slightly more nuanced perspective as novices in their disciplinary discourse communities, rather than as EAP students. However, I would contradict Lam's assertion because the pre-sessional, being the most obviously subject to structural constraints, seems to be the place where such interventions are currently most needed. Indeed, if a

preparatory course can begin the process of emerging agency, students may continue the process of transformativity during their time within the academy.

At the *collective* level, or "whether researched subjects and other actors obtain more transforming power and influence on the process of decision-making" (Boog, 2003, p.434), this can be evaluated by the ability of both teachers and students to feel causally efficacious as change agents, as well as their awareness of the constraints on that causal efficacy. Awareness of some constraints around assessment was certainly raised for many of these students, although as we have seen in the above sections, there are certainly limits to causal-efficacy in the face of them. Time is a huge factor, and the sustainability of the processfolio is called into question when there is an increased burden on teachers as participants. Although most students enjoyed the experience of the processfolio, many commented on the time burden for them in collating the artefacts and printing. This could be alleviated by the innovation of efolio software (Lam, 2017). Such examples exist in UK HE already, and are growing in popularity. However, training students and teachers to use the technology is time-consuming, which may decrease their practicality on a pre-sessional. Indeed, the tangibility of the processfolio appeared to be the most beneficial element to students, as discussed above, and digitalising may reduce some of these benefits. Nevertheless, with the increasing digitalisation of assessment and the integration of technology into educational contexts to reflect the nature of the students' lives (as well as the improvement of VLEs which has increased exponentially since this project was completed in 2015), it seems likely that a digital version of the processfolio could be developed for use on shorter courses such as the pre-sessional.

The project had the effect at Barksdale (and within a small section of the EAP community, as will be discussed below) of opening discussions around assessment, writing practices and EAP itself, which called into question some of the tacit assumptions about EAP assessment. The project chimes with a growing call for a greater practitioner engagement with assessment and a crossing of paradigms in assessment research (Teasdale and Leung, 2000). A quest for ontological truth from a critical realist perspective allows for a wider analysis and generating of new understandings of the causal mechanisms (the real in critical realism) that impact on practice and practitioners and inspired a small social change at Barksdale. Following the two consecutive AR cycles, I decided to suspend the data collection for the purposes of the thesis project. Although as participants in this project, Kathleen, Harry and I were not initially working together for institutional change per se, amid a sudden restructuring of Barksdale ELC, I left the university and Harry was promoted to pre-sessional course coordinator, whereupon he changed the assessment to include a portfolio. Although the project began with me as a leader, the research itself came to be the leader (Townsend, 2013) of a change in how writing was taught and assessed. This did not occur to the extent I desired, however, as I will expound upon below, and the element of timed-writing was retained. A key finding of the

reconnaissance cycle was that timed-writing impeded students' ability to conceptualise themselves as developing writers. While this rather schizophrenic approach to writing is maintained, the processfolio's ability to mitigate attitudes towards writing as a product will always be limited. However, since 2015, the grade weighting of timed-writing at Barksdale has decreased; therefore, its focus on the course has reduced.

10.2.5. Dialogical validity

Dialogical validity is the communication or dissemination of the research to a wider audience for critical evaluation. As the sharing of knowledge and understandings gained is vital for transformation, this was a key concern if the AR was not to fall foul of my original critique of localised narrative. This "making public" (Stenhouse, 1981, p.104) took place at the level of the institution through informal discussions, more structured workshops, including a report summarised in lay language for the teachers, and then widened to include the EAP community at BALEAP conferences, culminating in two published articles. However, according to Stenhouse (ibid) the writing up of AR should also be shared, which could not be done with a thesis for a PhD accreditation. It was my intention for the students and teachers to participate in conferences with me, but logistics of organising this also proved difficult, therefore greatly reducing its participatory element and dialogic (and democratic) validity.

AR should generate and democratise knowledge by disseminating it to the wider educational world (Rowell and Hong, 2017). From my public dissemination at BALEAP conferences, interest was garnered from two UK universities to use the processfolio as assessment on their pre-sessionals. I attended training sessions at both University A and University B and collected anecdotal evidence on the implementation. At University A, the processfolio was imposed top-down from management onto pre-sessional teachers, many of whom were enthusiastic. Informal correspondence with management showed some positive benefits but not to the same extent as at Barksdale. In 2016, University B had made the decision for their pre-sessional to be preparatory rather than a gate-keeping course so all students were given unconditional offers and all exit assessment was formative only. This gave many freedoms to teachers in terms of the curriculum, and those who were enthusiastic about the processfolio could trial it in their own contexts as they wished. Personal correspondence from two teachers indicated that the processfolio had been a success and would be used again with refinements to their own context. For practical reasons I was unable to conduct thorough research into these contexts and as such any claim I make here will be tentative. However, the implication is that when the processfolio is taken up by teachers of their own accord, it is more likely to be self-engaging and potentially

inspire others through enthusiasm for a gradual, cumulative bottom-up shift in culture (Tripp, 1998). When it is imposed on teachers who have had no role in its development, it is more likely to be seen as a management initiative and its emancipatory character is lost (Townsend, 2014). One avenue of further research then is to investigate potential for AR networks to be established, where EAP practitioners, perhaps through BALEAP, collaborate on projects such as this to share their collective findings. Such development networks have the potential to unite not only EAP practitioners through the dissemination of their own work, but also EAP departments to advocate for change in the status of EAP in the academy. Such collaborative AR communities could challenge the divisive and individualising nature of competition for international students amongst universities which pervades neo-liberal HE.

To widen dissemination, a further avenue of research is the possibility of the processfolio being used in other disciplines outside of EAP, even when the focus is not on writing. As mentioned in Chapter Six, process portfolios are already being used in art and engineering and could potentially be adapted to any task or experiential learning activity which involves process. In a less time-constrained context, it could form part of a culture of empowering assessment and engagement with feedback. With the pressure on UK HE to provide quantifiable outcomes for measurement tools such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the National Student Survey (NSS), there is a rise in focus on teaching and learning within universities as an equal priority to research. However, there is the possibility that assessment such as the processfolio could be adopted as a solution without the prior contextual investigation as was conducted here in the reconnaissance cycle. A culture of research on trialling and reflexively monitoring any incarnations would have to be fostered within institutions and the structural mechanisms of HE as described in Chapter Two can be quite antithetical to this approach.

10.3. Overall conclusions and contribution to knowledge

An analysis of EAP in 2018 could lead us to pessimism. The HE sector, restricted by underfunding and a market-driven ethos of competition, fast results and profit, is also caught in the crossfire of an interventionist government restriction on immigration. This makes the EAP pre-sessional likely to continue to be seen as a gate-keeping and remedial course, with its assessment used for accountability at the level of student, teacher, department, institution and country. However, as outlined in Chapter Two, as the status of knowledge and research begins to be foregrounded in EAP, there is a growing resistance to the subordinate, instrumental status of EAP. The financial circumstances of UK HE are leading to a recognition of the central role of EAP units in attracting, retaining and supporting the lucrative international student revenue stream. Whether this is

seen as positive or negative, this recognition has led to more embedded support within disciplinary departments and the increased status of EAP practitioners as academics and change leaders (Bond and Whong, 2017). Furthermore, the necessity of high-stakes gate-keeping assessment has begun to be questioned in recent years. This thesis therefore is one practitioner's attempt within this milieu to contribute to the field of assessment research in EAP by showing the negative impacts of one in-house assessment regime at one UK institution, all of which are illustrative of a wider trend. It has the possibility to aid understandings of both EAP practitioners and students, as well as those outside the EAP community about how EAP writing is assessed, why, and the negative impacts on the agency of its students and teachers.

A second contribution of the thesis is in collaborative practitioner-based design and implementation, through a systematic research process, of an assessment, in the form of a processfolio, to mitigate negative impacts of pre-sessional assessment practices. As I described above, Harry changed the assessment to include a portfolio upon his appointment to pre-sessional coordinator. For the reasons outlined in Chapter Nine, he felt the processfolio too esoteric, but incorporated elements of writing process into the course for the self-regulation and metacognitive understanding of learning that he valued. I felt ambivalent about this development. Harry's portfolio met with approval from the departments and admissions at Barksdale. This decision indicates the possibility of a tentative shift in the attitude within some universities in allowing qualified EAP professionals to make their own decisions regarding the readiness of their students, to reduce some of the negative impacts that were identified in this project. However, as I have described above, I feel that interventions such as the processfolio, if they become summative assessment, can be used as part of a metricising or performative culture which negates genuine agency. In spite of this, and my own thinking around what the processfolio should be, ultimately, its use and intentions should be decided by the community of practitioners who might choose to apply it on their courses.

As a product in itself, the processfolio could offer possibilities for the wider EAP community. As mentioned above, two universities in addition to Barksdale expressed interest in implementing the processfolio in their pre-sessional courses, and although these met with varying degrees of success, it implies that there may be more of a role for assessment such as the processfolio and more need for research to be done on how assessment in EAP more generally could enable agency or mitigate negative impacts on it. In addition, as stated in previous chapters, there are increasing calls for a reconsideration of the power invested in SELTs to provide judgment on student's academic literacy and parallel calls for increased assessment literacy amongst practitioners and students to facilitate their agency and participation in assessment practices.

As a process, the research also offers possibilities for the EAP community, through offering an approach to research which empowers practitioners to work for change within their own practice, even a practice such as assessment which is often so externally determined. This returns me to the belief that AR needs to engage with the mediating conditions that shape practices in EAP assessment and pedagogy in order to be continually vigilant about the co-option of emancipatory intentions being used to further the neo-liberal agenda rather than adopting the latest pedagogical, technological or evaluative innovation. However, I also believe this requires not only an ontological realism in AR but also a shift in the conceptualisation of the nature of change. This is the third way in which this thesis represents a contribution: to an understanding of the nature and potential of an approach to AR underpinned by critical realism within the field of EAP assessment research.

As I have suggested throughout the thesis, a critical realist view of the social world sees change not as the replacement of one thing for another; rather it can be seen as an ontological interaction between the positive and negative dimensions of absence. Absences are mistakes, faulty thinking and disempowering practices, a recognition of which allows us to diagnose what needs to change. But for something new to emerge, we need absence in order to create space for something to move into and something to pass out of. Therefore change is conceptualised as a continual process of dialectic between structure and agency. This implies that a more technical AR imposition of 'fixing' a problem can lead to an uncritical assumption that the change will automatically improve the situation and when it does not, pessimism can set in. Rather, if we accept the necessity of tensions and constraints as part of social life rather than trying to resolve or remove them, we will see change as a process characterised by a continual metacritique, or critical revision of our assumptions. By foregrounding agency, we can analyse change in ourselves as beings in the world, where change is not necessarily external but comes from a disruption in our belief systems and ways of seeing the world. In our rapidly developing and bewildering world, the desire for stability and fixed beliefs can see structure as dominant and determining, resulting in disillusionment and change fatigue, or overemphasising human agency by solely responsibilising the individual for their successes or failures, or retreating from complexity to provide instrumental solutions to educational challenges. Therefore, there is a low tolerance for the gradual and cumulative process of change and transformation that is needed if absences are to be absented, and as I realised throughout this project and the writing of this thesis, this is by no means easy and is accompanied by deep personal risks. However, I remain optimistic that, like Kaiji, our pain is part of our experience.

Afterword

Although the processfolio has facilitated the emergence of a critical consciousness around the disempowering impacts of assessment practices on EAP pre-sessionals, as highlighted in 10.2.2, this thesis must be accompanied by the caveat that as a project for change, the context within which it takes place, as outlined in Chapter Two, severely limits its outcome validity in the sense of concrete structural change.

It was not within the scope of the project described in this thesis to be able to effect any real change in the wider context of SELTS, government policy around pre-sessionals, and the flaws in EAP as an academic endeavour. However, by examining the causal mechanisms at the ontological level of student agency, or its absence, around assessment, I have attempted to generate a space for dialogue around these causal mechanisms, which have not been acknowledged in the literature or practice of UK EAP.

In this project, action research was more than a research 'technique' for intervention within this context, but was also driven by a philosophy of morally-informed action and social concern around assessment practices. As discussed in 3.1.1., although similar to the critical theory on which a tradition of critical action research is based, critical realism as a philosophical underpinning provided me a different means of conceptualising ontological change within a highly constrained context. Therefore, change in this project is beginning the process of absenting negatives/lacks (here the lack of agency as manifested in behaviours such as surface learning and dependence on others), rather than replacing one assessment or pedagogical intervention with another. The thesis has attempted to highlight the limitations as well as the possibilities of effecting change, however it is conceptualised, within such disempowering social structures. However, it has also highlighted the necessity to continue to try: to resist encroaching structures by, as educators, critically examining the mediating conditions of our practice. Acting to enact small changes in practice can lead to larger shifts in thinking, as occurred with many of the participants in this research project.

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Appendix i). Barksdale Marking criteria

Band	Task Fulfilment 20%	Critical Analysis* 15%	Coherence and Cohesion 20%	Style and Lexis 20%	Grammatical Range and Accuracy 20%	Academic Conventions 5%
IELTS 8 and above **80% and above**	• fulfils task requirements in every respect • presents a well-developed response to the question with relevant, extended and supported ideas	• presents a thorough understanding of all main issues and wider implications • gives an insightful and creative critical analysis	• extremely well organised; very clear and logical progression • manages all aspects of cohesion well • excellent paragraph development	• uses a wide range of academically appropriate vocabulary with natural and sophisticated control of lexical features • absence of errors	• highly competent use of grammatical features of academic texts (hedging, nominalisations, reporting verbs etc) • uses a wide range of sentence structures with full flexibility and accuracy	• follows formatting requirements (layout, spacing, font, use of headings etc) to a 'proof-read' standard • follows in-text and end-text referencing conventions to a 'proof-read' standard
	• where a first draft has been required, appropriate improvements to final submission have been made	• *(where writing is NOT produced under timed conditions)* uses a comprehensive range of relevant evidence demonstrating extensive reading				
	16 – 17 – 18 – 19 – 20	**12 – 13 – 14 – 15**	**16 – 17 – 18 – 19 – 20**	**16 – 17 – 18 – 19 – 20**	**16 – 17 – 18 – 19 – 20**	**4.5 – 5**
IELTS 7 **70 – 79%**	• fulfils task requirements but minor omissions, irrelevancies or misunderstandings possible • presents, extends and supports main ideas with sufficient detail • meets word count requirements **	• presents a good understanding of main issues • takes a critical approach that does not lapse into inappropriate description and which presents a clear position throughout	• logically organises information and ideas from introduction to conclusion. There is a clear progression throughout • ideas are effectively linked together and 'flow' coherently and cohesively • good paragraph development with clear topic/main idea in each	• uses a good range of vocabulary appropriately to allow flexibility and precision • uses vocabulary appropriate to academic context and audience • infrequent errors in spelling and/or word formation	• competent use of grammatical features of academic texts (hedging, nominalisations, reporting verbs etc) • good range of sentence structures • few errors, very rarely impeding communication • accurate use of punctuation	• follows formatting requirements (layout, spacing, font, use of headings etc) with only very minor lapses • follows in-text and end-text referencing conventions with only very minor lapses
	• where a first draft has been required, appropriate improvements to final submission have been made	• *(where writing is NOT done under timed conditions)* presents good evidence of extended reading with appropriate incorporation of sources				
	14 – 14.5 – 15 – 15.5	**10.5 – 11 – 11.5**	**14 – 14.5 – 15 – 15.5**	**14 – 14.5 – 15 – 15.5**	**14 – 14.5 – 15 – 15.5**	**3.5 – 4**

Band	Task Fulfilment	Critical Analysis*	Coherence and Cohesion	Style and Lexis	Grammatical Range and Accuracy	Academic Conventions
IELTS 6 **60 – 69%**	• generally fulfils task requirement but some parts may be more fully covered than others • presents, extends and supports relevant main ideas but some may be inadequately developed/unclear	• presents a sound understanding of main issues • presents a position with a generally analytical approach although there may be some inappropriate use of description	• arranges information and ideas coherently and there is clear overall progression • ideas for the most part are effectively linked together although cohesion may be faulty or mechanical at times • most paragraphs generally well developed	• uses an adequate range of vocabulary although some inaccurate use may occur • vocabulary generally appropriate to academic context and audience • makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation but rarely impeding communication	• some competent use of grammatical features of academic texts (hedging, nominalisations, reporting verbs etc) • moderate range of sentence structures • some errors but seldom impeding communication • generally accurate use of punctuation	• generally follows formatting requirements (layout, spacing, font, use of headings etc) • follows in-text and end-text referencing conventions for the most part
	• where a first draft has been required, improvements to final submission have been appropriate for the most part	• (*where writing is NOT done under timed conditions*) presents evidence of sufficient reading with generally appropriate incorporation of sources.				
	12 – 12.5 – 13 – 13.5	**9 – 9.5 – 10**	**12 – 12.5 – 13 – 13.5**	**12 – 12.5 – 13 – 13.5**	**12 – 12.5 – 13 – 13.5**	**3**
IELTS 5 **50 – 59%**	• only partially addresses the task • lack of elaboration of ideas and arguments: there may be insufficient support or minor/irrelevant detail may be included at the expense of more supporting detail	• some understanding of main issues • expresses a position but the development is not always clear and there may be no conclusions drawn; much of the content may be descriptive when a critical approach is required	• presents information with some organisation but there may be a lack of overall progression • some lack of coherence; cohesive devices sometimes misused or overused • may not write in paragraphs, paragraphs sometimes not well developed	• uses a limited range of vocabulary appropriate to academic writing • may make noticeable errors in spelling and/or word formation that may impede communication	• limited use of grammatical features of academic lexis (hedging, nominalisations, reporting verbs etc) • limited range of sentence structures • frequent errors, sometimes impeding communication • some inaccurate use of punctuation, possibly causing strain for the reader	• some lapses in following formatting requirements • does not always follow in-text and end text referencing conventions
	• where a first draft has been required, some improvements have been made to the final submission	• (*where writing is NOT done under timed conditions*) evidence of some reading but there may be an over-reliance on sources or incorporation of sources may be inappropriate or insufficient				
	10 – 10.5 – 11 – 11.5	**7.5 – 8 – 8.5**	**10 – 10.5 – 11 – 11.5**	**10 – 10.5 – 11 – 11.5**	**10 – 10.5 – 11 – 11.5**	**2.5**

Band	Task Fulfilment	Critical Analysis*	Coherence and Cohesion	Style and Lexis	Grammatical Range and Accuracy	Academic Conventions
IELTS 4 **40 – 49%**	• Task only addressed in a minimal way due to serious omissions, irrelevancies or misunderstandings or because the answer is tangential • presents some main ideas but these are difficult to identify and may be repetitive, irrelevant or not well supported	• limited understanding of main issues evident • position is difficult to identify; analysis is limited or non-existent	• limited attempt at organisation and no clear progression • very limited coherence, cohesive devices misused or overused • may not write in paragraphs or their use may be confusing; no clear paragraph development	• mostly simple, general vocabulary not appropriate to academic writing • has limited control of word formation and/or spelling causing significant strain for the reader	• very limited or non-existent use of grammatical features of academic texts • very limited range of sentence structures • very frequent errors often impeding communication • use of punctuation frequently inaccurate	• often fails to follow formatting requirements • frequently fails to follow in-text and end-text referencing conventions
	• where a first draft has been required, improvements to the final submission are limited	• (*where writing is NOT done under timed conditions*) limited or no evidence of reading and/or over-reliance on sources or inappropriate or insufficient incorporation of sources				
	8 – 8.5 – 9 – 9.5	**6 – 6.5 – 7**	**8 – 8.5 – 9 – 9.5**	**8 – 8.5 – 9 – 9.5**	**8 – 8.5 – 9 – 9.5**	**2**
IELTS 3 and below **39% and below**	• inadequately to barely addresses the task • few ideas presented with insufficient or no development	• lack of understanding and focus • no position established	• no clear organisation or progression • lack of coherence	• very limited range of words and expressions with very limited control of word formation and/or spelling	• minimal control of sentence structure • errors severely impede communication	• does not follow formatting requirements or in-text and end-text referencing conventions
		• (*where writing is NOT done under timed conditions*) no evidence of reading				
	0 –1-2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 7.5	**0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 5.5**	**0 –1-2 -3- 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 7.5**	**0 –1-2 -3 -4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 7.5**	**0 –1-2 -3 -4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 7.5**	**0 – 0.5 – 1 – 1.5**

*** Where significant sections have been plagiarised (25% or more) this constitutes a fail**

Appendix ii). Ethics consent form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project title: The impact of process writing assessment

Researcher's name: Jayne Pearson

Supervisor's name: Professor Monica Mclean and Dr Alex Ding

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audiotaped during the interview.
- I understand that audiotape and interview transcripts will be stored in electronic copies and paper copies in the home of the researcher. No access will be gained by anyone without express permission of the participant. The only person entitled to access the information will be the researcher and the researchers' supervisors as named above.
- I understand that I can request access to the audiotape and interview transcripts at any time during the research process and can request copies to be sent to me following the interviews.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed ..... (research participant)

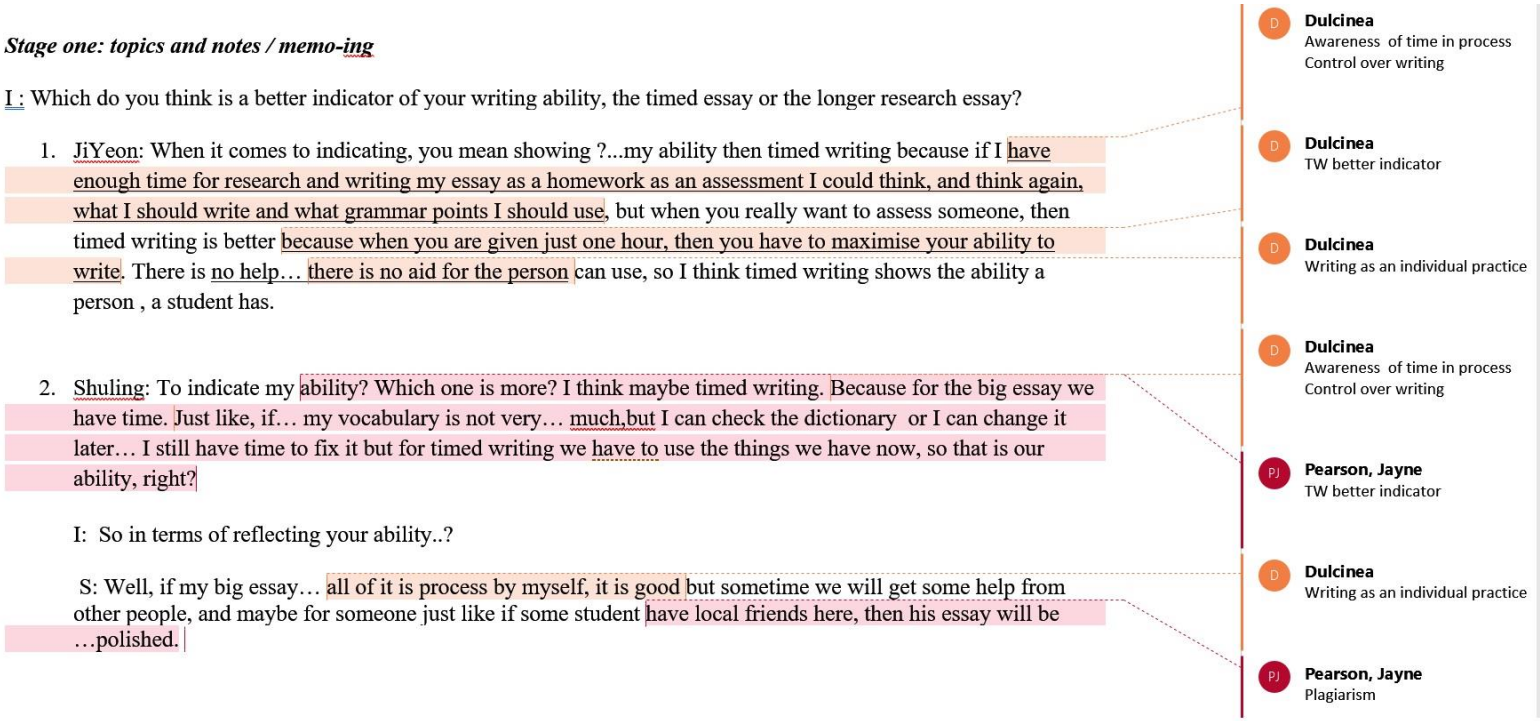
Print name ..... **Date** .....

Contact details

Researcher: *jayne.pearson@kcl.ac.uk* or *ttxjp13@nottingham.ac.uk*
Supervisor: *monica.mclean@nottingham.ac.uk* and *alex.ding@nottingham.ac.uk*

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix iii). Process of coding interviews for reconnaissance cycle



Stage one: topics and notes / memo-ing

I : Which do you think is a better indicator of your writing ability, the timed essay or the longer research essay?

1. JiYeon: When it comes to indicating, you mean showing ?...my ability then timed writing because if I have enough time for research and writing my essay as a homework as an assessment I could think, and think again, what I should write and what grammar points I should use, but when you really want to assess someone, then timed writing is better because when you are given just one hour, then you have to maximise your ability to write. There is no help… there is no aid for the person can use, so I think timed writing shows the ability a person , a student has.

2. Shuling: To indicate my ability? Which one is more? I think maybe timed writing. Because for the big essay we have time. Just like, if… my vocabulary is not very… much,but I can check the dictionary or I can change it later… I still have time to fix it but for timed writing we have to use the things we have now, so that is our ability, right?

   I: So in terms of reflecting your ability..?

   S: Well, if my big essay… all of it is process by myself, it is good but sometime we will get some help from other people, and maybe for someone just like if some student have local friends here, then his essay will be …polished.

Stage two: counting frequency per ss: looking for patterns by assigning in vivo tags

Interview one:

Topics discussed in interview based on research foci	Tags emerging from student responses					
	Luis	Alice	Mariko	Pai han	Shuling	Ji Yeun
Agency						
Times taken SELT	TOEFL X 1	TOEFL X 1	IELTS x 3	IELTS x2 TOEFL x1	TOEFL x5	IELTS x 2
Prep for SELT	Books Private tutor	Books	Books Websites Not much info	No prep	Classes	Books Websites Not much info
Understanding SELT purpose/requirements		Gatekeeping	Gatekeeping	Gatekeeping		Examine four skills
Fairness/ indicative of writing ability	Exam technique Topic Time	Time Topic Exam technique (memorised phrases) Anxiety	No dictionary Topic choice Doesn't understand reason for score (luck)	Doesn't understand reason for score(luck) Exam technique (training) No dictionary Anxiety	Receptive vs productive knowledge Memorised phrases	Doesn't understand reason for score(luck) Anxiety
Concepts of writing and writing development						
Defining writing	Related to discipline (content) Creativity Vocabulary	Related to discipline Organisation Diff cultures Grammar	Examples from IELTS scores Logic	Ideas Structure Diff cultures	Structure 'specific' 'professional'	'Coherent' Logic Grammar and Vocabulary
Differences btw timed and other	Has written longer essays	Genre conventions Has written longer essays	Time for prep Never written longer essays	Time for prep Never written longer essays Using sources	Never written longer essays	Never written longer essays Using sources Time for prep

Feelings about writing	Creativity Likes writing	Grammar problems No confidence	Writing to be assessed by others Doesn't like writing No confidence	Likes writing	Too simple language Likes writing No confidence	Doesn't like Wants to like
Expectations of PS assessment	Vocabulary learning Related to discipline Practice Feedback	Choice of topic T help/feedback Grammar and vocabulary	Feedback	More meaningful Collaborative Related to discipline Learn from process	Practice Specific (to discipline?) 'Strict' requirements	Using sources

Interview two:

Topics discussed in interview based on research foci	Tags emerging from student responses					
	Luis	Alice	Mariko	Pai han	Shuling	Ji Yeun
Agency						
Dialogic feedback	Not enough feedback	Teacher dependent BUT T gave some control Long feedback sessions Email feedback	Too little time Not confident to dialogue (reliant on t opinion) More peer collab needed	Peer collab valuable Encouragement (score=warning) T gave control Email feedback T dependent	Not enough tutorials	Too little time
Plagiarism	ok to make English better				Heard others do it -unfair	Heard others do it-unfair
Confidence		Increased	No confidence	Imposing own order on process	Defining by score	

Control	Yes Lots of time!	Research Essay yes TW no Anxiety but pressure normal	RE yes TW no	Less pressure on RE Anxiety on TW Pragmatic choice-learning v passing course	Assessed by others Time pressure Exam anxiety Culture shock Money for course	Memorised phrases Exam anxiety More choices of topic etc
Concepts of writing and writing development						
Defining writing	Grammar and vocab TW not authentic	Grammar and vocab	TW not authentic	Ideas more important than grammar	grammar and vocabulary	Structure and argument more imp than grammar
Defining writing development	Not developed as already writer in Brazil Development occurs by practice	Developed Too little time	Too little time	Developed	Developed Defining by score Too little time	Developed Defined by grammar
Feelings about writing	Easy Can learn about writing through internet	TW shows ability	Confused about diff btw TM and research essay Creative TW shows ability	RE calmer	TW shows ability	TW shows ability Confusion over fairness and ability
Process	Grade should reflect process Equates practice with process of developing language	Clear of process (mechanical) Grade should reflect process	Clear of process (mechanical) Grade should reflect process	Writing as thinking Learning from the process Grade should reflect process OWN process	Clear of process (mechanical) Too little time for teachers to know process	Clear of process (mechanical) Grade should reflect product outcome only
Discipline			Disciplinary differences			Content knowledge important

Stage three of analysis*: *Tabulating the tags into codes and then subthemes in tandem with the literature and re-reading of the interviews, counting frequency of codes. Overlaps are indicated in colours.

Interview one:

Codes	Frequency	Sub themes	
Money for test prep *Gatekeeping* *Constraints (topic, time restrictions etc)* *Taking SELT many times* *Writing assessed by others* *Lack of understanding of score* *Exam anxiety*	*5* *1* *4* *4* *1* *3* *3*	Dependence on others for judgements	**Agency**
Exam as technique *Don't like writing* *Taking SELT many times* *Defining writing by structural/linguistic features* *Luck/unfairness*	4 2 4 6 3	Surface approach to learning	
Time limit negates process *Lack of self-efficacy* *Defining writing by score*	4 3 1	Meta Cognitive Awareness of writing	**Ability to conceptualise selves as developing writers**
Importance of topic/discipline *Defining writing by structural/linguistic features* *Awareness of writing as meaning-making* *Peer collaboration* *Awareness of cultural differences*	4 6 2 1 1	Writing as a social practice	

Interview two:

Initial Codes				Sub themes	Research foci
Positive	**Frequency**	**Negative**	**Frequency**		
Happy with feedback *Teacher gave control* *Confidence increased* *Imposing own order on process* *More control in research essay* *No pressure*	*2* *2* 2 1 4 1	*Unhappy with feedback* *Relied on teacher* *No confidence* *Assessments imposed* *Pressure of course* *Pressure of exam/anxiety* *Defining success by score* *Timed writing better indicator of ability*	*4* *2* *1* *1* *3* *4* *1* *4*	Dependence on others for judgements	**Agency**
Imposing own order on process	*1*	*Plagiarism* *Memorised phrases* *Pragmatism* *Mechanical linear approach to process*	3 1 1 4	Surface approach to learning	
Following a process *Imposing own order on process* *Felt writing had developed* *Writing as thinking/learning*	*5* *1* *4* *3*	*Mechanical linear approach to process* *More time needed to develop* *No development*	4 3 1	Meta Cognitive Awareness of writing	**Ability to conceptualise selves as developing writers**
Lack of peer collaboration *Writing as ideas/meaning making* *Disciplinary differences*	*2* *2* *1*	*Lack of peer collaboration* *Defining writing by structural/linguistic features* *Writing as individual practice*	1 4 5	Writing as a social practice	

Appendix iv). Assignment briefing for 2014 and 2015

Pre-sessional Programme
Formative Writing & Presentation Assignment
9-week Pre-sessional Programme

THE PRODUCT:
For your **Formative Writing and Presentation Assignment** you will write a 1000-word essay (+ or - 10%)[1] and deliver an 8-minute PowerPoint presentation on the following topic:

> ***Define your academic subject and outline what it means to do 'research' in that subject, then choose one seminal or recent piece of research and evaluate its contribution to your field of academic study.***
>
> ***You should refer to a small range of sources in your definition and in explaining what other people say about your chosen piece of research.***

Submission

You will submit your completed PowerPoint slides to your class tutor by **9.30am on 15th July 2014** and deliver the presentation in class on **15th-17th July 2014.** Essays must be submitted to Turnitin via your class's Assignments and Submissions page on KEATS S by **10am on Monday 21st July 2014.**

Please remember to include a completed cover sheet with your assignment. This document can be found on the Assignments and Submission page on KEATS and should be inserted at the beginning of your word document. You can also find information on word limits and formatting your essays in the student handbook.

Sources and reference list

You must refer to a minimum of five reliable sources in your essay (i.e. peer-reviewed journals and/or books) and in your presentation. You should use a combination of both quotation and paraphrase in your essay, and you must acknowledge the sources appropriately. You should also write a reference list at the end.
You should refer to your sources both orally and on your PowerPoint slides, as appropriate, in your presentation. You should also write a reference list at the end.

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[1] See handbook for penalties relating to essays outside of the word limits

Pre-sessional Programme
Formative Writing Processfolio

THE PROCESS:
In order to obtain your grade for this assignment, you will be required to submit **a folio,** or collection of work, which **documents your writing journey**. This folio should demonstrate your process of writing the assignment and justify the choices you made in **organisation, language, selecting sources, drafting and editing.**

This will be handed in on 20th July, along with your essay.

Suggested content could include but is not limited to:

- Summaries of articles
- Notes
- Practice homework related to the assignment
- Drafts and/or draft sections
- Criteria and feedback given by your peers
- Criteria and feedback from your own self evaluation
- Any teacher feedback

- At the end of the course, you will be asked to write a reflection on your experiences of writing the assignment to accompany the folio. This will take place in class and does NOT need to be handed in with the folio.

You should hand the folio in hard copy format along with your essay. A paper folder will be provided to you by your teacher.

OR you can scan and upload documents and email them to your teacher on the 21st July.

The folio should contain a short abstract on the front cover of about 200 words detailing what you have chosen to put in it and why.

It will not be graded but will form part of your assessment for this stage of the course. You will receive feedback on this folio and you will also receive teacher guidance about what you could include within it.
YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE A GRADE FOR THE ESSAY WITHOUT THE FOLIO. However, this will have NO effect on your presentation.

Appendix v). *Processfolio* marking criteria (draft proposed)

	CRITERIA	**MET**	**PARTIALLY MET**	**NOT MET**	**COMMENTS**
Organisation of folio	You have shown your process of your writing by selecting a range of documents that depicts your research journey e.g plans, notes, summaries, drafts, etc				
	These are organised in a way that shows the clear progression of the process you undertook to complete the research essay				
Engagement and participation	You have engaged with the process throughout the course by: Attending all classes				
	Completing all homework assignments				
	Participating in the peer assessment				
	Participating in the self-assessment				
	Participating in the KEATS forums				
Peer and self-assessment	You have shown the ability to develop your writing based on feedback from the teacher and from peers				
	You have shown the ability to evaluate your own work by including a self-assessment in the folio and participating in the self-evaluation task in class				

Responsibility for learning	You have shown the ability to take control of the direction of your work: By attending tutorials				
	Being prepared to ask questions				
	By completing tutorial records				
Plagiarism	You have shown an awareness of plagiarism issues and there is no evidence of deliberate plagiarism				
Reflection	You have written a reflection justifying your choices of folio contents				
	You have demonstrated the ability to reflect on your writing development by commenting on weaknesses and strengths				
	You have identified areas for future writing development and strategies to achieve future goals				

MET= you have shown this ability
PARTIALLY MET= you have shown the ability to a minimum standard
NOT MET= you have not completed or attempted this

Appendix vi). Self-assessment form, peer evaluation form and sample tutorial record form

Using the ELC criteria, make comments on your own work based on each of the following headings. Give yourself a grade and justify this with reference to the criteria.

Task	Criticality	Coherence/ Cohesion	Vocabulary and Grammar	Academic Conventions
Grade:	Grade:	Grade:	Grade:	Grade:

Peer Evaluation Worksheet 1: Summary of research article

What are the key features of a summary?

-
-
-

Read your partner's article summary and analyse it for these key features. Make comments in the table below and return it to your partner.

Are the findings/ main ideas of the research clear? Is it easy for you to understand even though you do not know the subject? Is it brief and to the point?	
Is it coherent? Is the referencing correct? Is the author and date of publication included?	
Are there any grammar and vocabulary mistakes that impede the meaning?	
What suggestions would you make for improvement?	

Now read your partner's comments on your own work. Do you agree? If not, why not? Confirm any disagreements or concerns with your teacher.

Pre-sessional 9-week programme
Tutorial form

In order to get the most out of your tutorials, it is important to come prepared. Remember that you only have 10 minutes, and this is YOUR time so you need to use it well.
Think about some things you want to discuss with your tutor and write them in the **left column**.
You should take notes during the tutorial about what you discussed with your teacher and write this in **right** column.

WEEK _____

What I want to talk about	What my tutor said
•	
•	
•	

ACTION PLAN:

-
-
-
-

Appendix vii). Samples of freewriting and reflective writing

Freewriting

Free-writing is when you write for a period of time about a topic without thinking about the language or style of your writing. It is rather like writing in a diary, in that you want to communicate and the main aim is to focus on your thoughts and feelings rather than writing for an audience.

It is not an essay, so you don't need an introduction, or conclusion. You don't have to write in paragraphs if you don't want to! Just pick up your pen and start writing.

You have 15 minutes to write about your experiences with tests, exams and assessments of writing before you started the course.

You can include some or all of the following and any other things that you want to talk about:

- How do you feel about assessments? (eg: Motivated? Stressed?)
- How do you prepare for assessments and do you always understand the purpose of them?
- How do you feel about your writing ability in English?
- Do you feel that you have control over the way you are assessed/tested?
- What are your expectations of the way you will be assessed on this course?
- How would you like to be assessed in a perfect world?

NAME: Sun Yinan

I feel stressed about assessments because my study will be judged with marks and the marks are always important to students. Every time I prepare for assessments, I feel nervous and tired. Preparing for assessments takes lots of time, I review all the textbooks and materials, picking up the important contents and remember them. In my point of view, assessments are used to help us to check what we have learned. And the process of reviewing is another way of learning.

My writing ability in English is not very well. I wish I could use many kinds of sentence patterns without ~~not~~ any mistake.

I do not feel I have control over the way I am assessed.

On this course, I expect that students are not only assessed based

On the ~~to~~ outcome of their work, but also on the process. For example, if a student is not that outgoing, he/she may be shy when she gives a presentation although she has well prepared it.
Finally, I think learning is ~~a~~ something for one's own benefits, to be more specific, we just learn for the sake of ourselves. So, assessments are not very important. Students need not to be judged with marks, they just need to check what they learned.

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UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
Supplementary Answer Book

Candidate's Number 1408177 Susie

Paper Title: Reflective writing

Paper Code:

(To be inserted, *in order*, at the end of the main Answer Book inside the cover. The whole to be securely fastened together with the string supplied.)

Question.....

In this formative assignment, I ~~re~~searched lots of journals and books related to my subject on google scholar and other academic resources websites. My ability of selecting ~~sour~~ academic resources has been improved during the process. In order to synthesize different ideas, I read abstracts in each journal and did note-taking. If it is helpful to my essay, I will continue doing the intensive reading rather than ~~sk~~ scanning. Meanwhile, I collected the good points from different resources ~~and~~ to stimulate my inspiration for my own essay. ~~B~~ Besides, I asked Jayne and Emma for advice, thus, I gained a better understanding of the title and academic style. ~~Du~~ Due to the lack trainning of critical thinking, I also borrowed a book from library ~~nam~~ titled "critical thinking skills" to help myself think more logically and critically, especially in the evaluation parts. Furthermore, I set up a time table for my essay so that I furfil my essay on time and give me ~~ext~~ spare time for modifying my essay drafts.

I ~~feel~~ am encouraged by this experience, actually. When I ~~were~~ was in China, I felt very unconfident about my English writing though I have been taught and writing in English for four years. I still think that I am lack ~~of~~ of logic. ~~Or~~ During the

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Question.....

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four
~~f~~-week trainning, I realized that academic writing is not that difficult as I imagined, but I should do it ~~set~~ step by step following by some basic rules. Besides, I feel motivated and interested about academic writing, because I learnt a lot from it like a sponge absorbing ~~knowled~~ water, I absorbed knowledge of CCL during the process.

My attitude towards academic writing changes, from fear to confidence. I believe that I will do a better academic writing in the summative if I work hard on it. My confidence is increasing, because I can see the progress compared to myself. During the process, I learnt ~~the~~ a few things. First is time management. Secondly is academic style. I tried to employ different academic words or expressions properly to ~~en~~ state my position in the essay. Thirdly, I learnt sythesize resources and evaluate them. ~~Et~~ ~~Eo~~ Meanwhile, I made effort in expressing them in a logical and cohensive way. It helps me organise a more academic, ~~cohens~~ logical and coherent essay structure.

The potential challenge refers to the academic style and critical thinking. It still need to be improved ~~to~~ for ~~my~~ me. Although I have already known ~~on~~ something about them, I still work hard on it to pass the summative assignment, as well as complete my master program. More books should be read, ~~More~~ More pratice should be employed.

As for the strong areas, I think they are organisation and finding materials. I know how to search ressources effectively. Besides, I know how to structure the whole essay logically. Thus, the whole structure of my essay is well-organized from my perspective.

From tutor's and peer's feedback, I think I should work on the grammar and academic style. From my own observation, I should also

Write on both sides of the paper

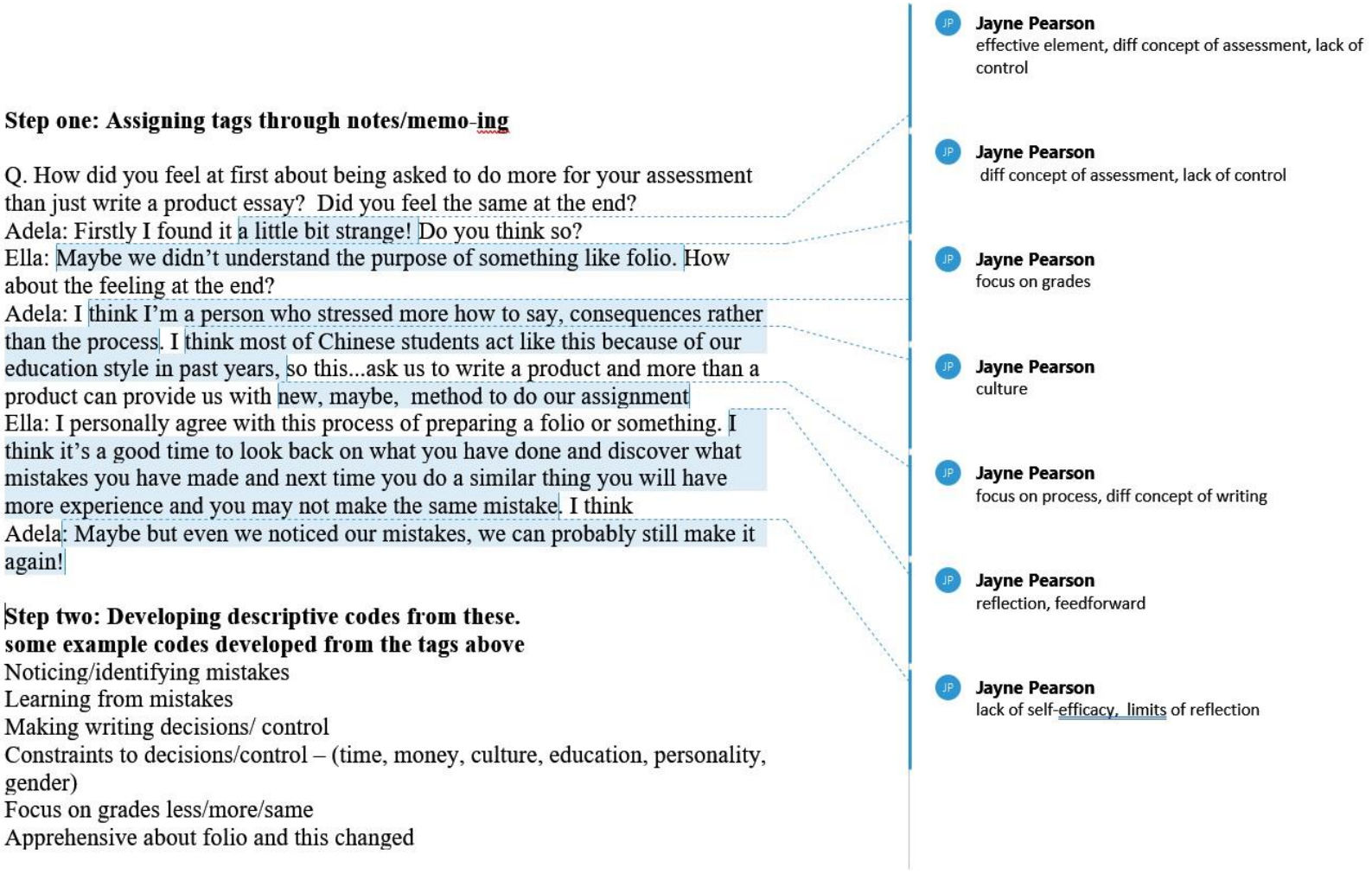
Appendix viii). Coding process for folios

- How ss chose to justify their choices of what put in
- Did they include all the things they said? Did they put the pieces in order?
- Language which indicates agency and language which indicates process awareness

Student	Contents of folio	Analysis
Ruby	**Abstract** in form of a contents page with table of *what I put in, reason why I out it in and what I have learned*	I didn't tell ss to do this, so this was Ruby's choice to demonstrate her work this way
	Language: "an important writing skill", brilliant way to X" finding my weaknesses" " help me to" " essential process"	Repetition of verb 'help', use of adjectives ' important/ essential' potentially repeating what taught but' brilliant' indicates some positive subjective opinion because not academic style.
	" want to chose" "important to me" " my essay" whenever refers to it! "Me/I"	Indication of agency and engagement my essay= ownership
	Order of info- reading/ research* brainstorming notes and outline definition writing* summary of article* peer f sheet on summary introduction comments on intro from KEATS first draft + FB self eval *Didn't actually put this in	Showing order of the process she went through. She showed awareness of the process but some of the pieces she claimed were in there were not. This could have been due to losing them or not having time to find them due to tight deadline for folio.

Andy	**2 Abstracts** in essay style!	A different choice of how to show what done from some of others. One essay seems to depict the process and one talks about what he out in any why. This shows a deeper engagement than some of the others.
	Language: repetition of 'important' " I have to do X" (2) "what I am supposed to X" (2) " Jayne told me I cannot " " I decided" " I think" (2) " I wrote/ I made" Mentions T and Peers "my / myself/I This/the essay (5) my essay (10) " I really got some inspirations"	*"I have to / what I am supposed to"*- not agency! *Jayne told me I cannot* (although used *because* so showed understanding of the reason) *I decided* etc- showing choices and opinions I wrote/ I made" Lots of neutral verbs reporting what he did (could indicate AWARENESS OF PROCESS B UT POSSIBLY ALSO MECHANICAL) Use of my essay more than the essay= ownership Mentions T and Peers- writing as social practice Lots of reporting verbs in here but also " important" "useful" " I think" " helped/helpful"
	Contents in order (with justifications) Assignment brief Plan Peer eval sheet of summary of article Peer eval of draft Tutorial record sheet Processfolio criteria (called it self eval) *included KEATS comments on his intro, and his draft and also p/c of some research	Didn't include all his actual pieces of work (only first draft) but mainly chose what he thought helped him to move forward (has taken an interesting slant on it) Misunderstood diff between criteria and self eval

Appendix ix). Coding process for interviews



Step one: Assigning tags through notes/memo-ing

Q. How did you feel at first about being asked to do more for your assessment than just write a product essay? Did you feel the same at the end?
Adela: Firstly I found it a little bit strange! Do you think so?
Ella: Maybe we didn't understand the purpose of something like folio. How about the feeling at the end?
Adela: I think I'm a person who stressed more how to say, consequences rather than the process. I think most of Chinese students act like this because of our education style in past years, so this...ask us to write a product and more than a product can provide us with new, maybe, method to do our assignment
Ella: I personally agree with this process of preparing a folio or something. I think it's a good time to look back on what you have done and discover what mistakes you have made and next time you do a similar thing you will have more experience and you may not make the same mistake. I think
Adela: Maybe but even we noticed our mistakes, we can probably still make it again!

Step two: Developing descriptive codes from these.
some example codes developed from the tags above
Noticing/identifying mistakes
Learning from mistakes
Making writing decisions/ control
Constraints to decisions/control – (time, money, culture, education, personality, gender)
Focus on grades less/more/same
Apprehensive about folio and this changed

Step three: tabulating codes and counting frequency (defined as how many ss mention it- so even if one ss mentions 10X then still only counted once). This is to get an overall picture of the cohort

Code	Frequency
1.Identifying processes/nature of text creation	13
2.Folio as	
-document of process	10
-aid to process	5
3. Identifying development/improvement for future goals	13
4. Confidence as writer	
-increased	10
-decreased	3
-no change	8
5. Stress	
-increased	
-decreased	
-no change (TW)	3
6. Noticing mistakes/challenges	10
7.Learning from mistakes/solving challenges	7
8.Making writing decisions/ control	13
9.Constraints to decisions/control	
-course/assignment brief/disciplinary conventions	9
-teacher	2
-time	5
-culture	3
-marking criteria	2
-personality	3
10.Self-assessment	
-capable	4
-incapable	4
-not useful/valued	4
11. Criteria	
-understand	8
-don't understand	5
12.Focus on grades/outcomes	
-less	2
-same	5
13.Dialogue with teacher/feedback	
-equal	13
-unequal	5
14.Peer collaboration	
-helpful	13
-not helpful	2
-difficult	1
15. Changing opinion of folio	8
16.Negative aspects of folio	
-time consuming	4
-boring	1
-printing	3
17. Structural/linguistic features	8
18. influence of or comparison with SELTS	2

Step four: mapping these codes to the five indicators of improvement. Overlapping codes are indicated in colours.

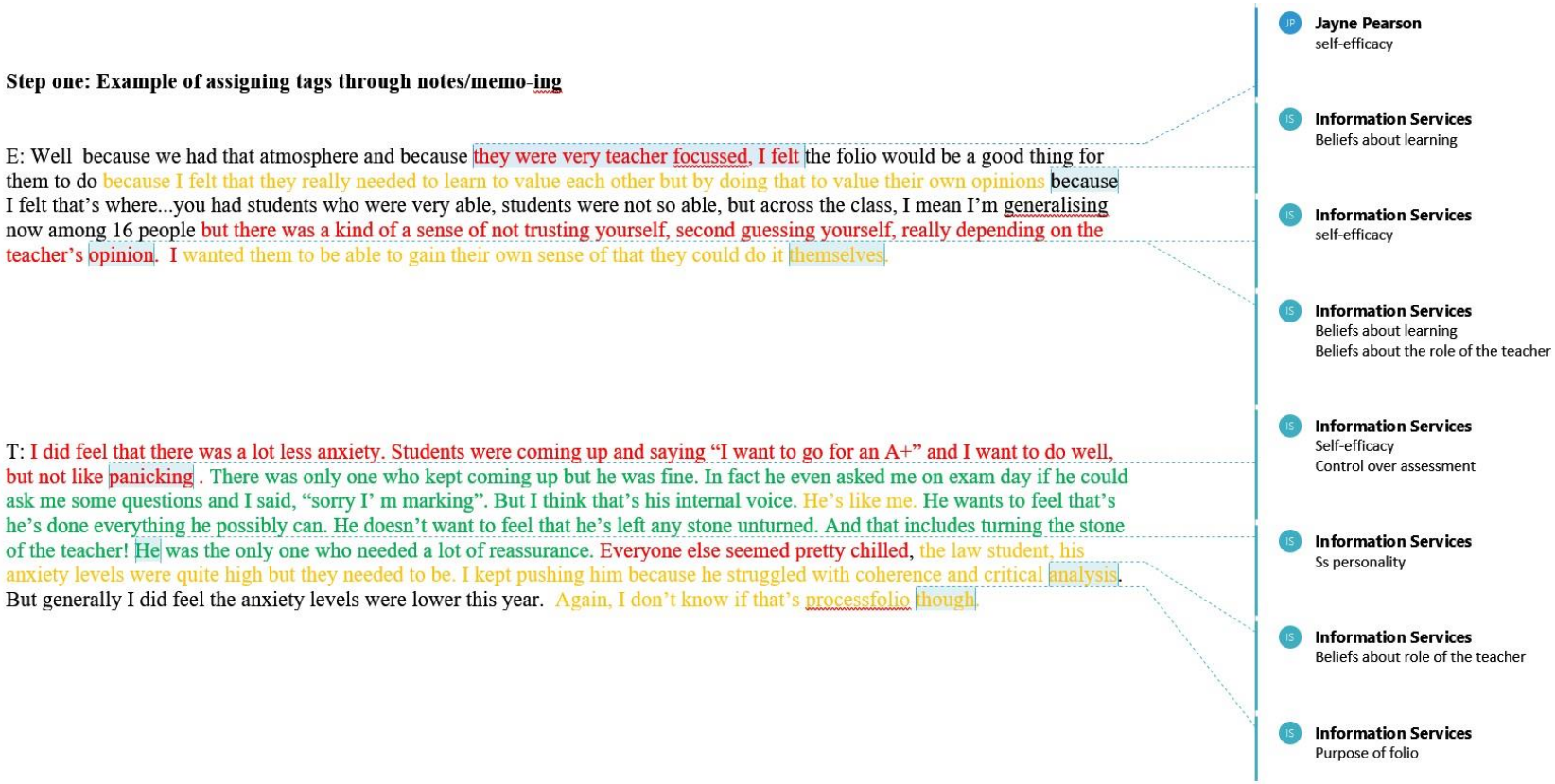
the ability to organise learning and writing processes (feeling and having)	**1.Identifying processes/nature of text creation** **2.Folio as document of process/aid to process**
to reflectively evaluate their choices and processes (feeling and having)	1.Identifying processes/nature of text creation 3.Identifying development/improvement for future goals 6.Noticing mistakes/challenges 7.Learning from mistakes/solving challenges 8.Making writing decisions/ control 9.Constraints to decisions/control 17.Structural/linguistic features
self- efficacy or the belief in ones' own capacities (feeling)	2. Folio as document of process/ aid to process 4.Confidence as writer 5.Stress 10.Self-assessment 11.Criteria 15. Changing opinion of folio 17.Structural/linguistic features
to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations (feeling)	5.Stress 9.Constraints to decisions/control 10.Self-assessment 11.Criteria 12.Focus on grades/outcomes 15. Changing opinion of folio 16.Negative aspects of folio 18.Influence of or comparison with SELTS
to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers (feeling and having)	13.Dialogue with teacher/feedback 14. Peer collaboration

Appendix x). Relational interview Findings

Theme	***Kathleen***	***Harry***
Reasons for participating	Fostering autonomy in students Providing a guide for her as first time on Barksdale pre-sessional Reduce her workload planning materials and marking (online peer forums) A means to avoid or raise awareness of plagiarism	To help my research as a colleague Curiosity Explore aspects of his teaching style
Expectations	Students might make connections between processes and final product Make reading more of an explicit focus on the course	Students might reflect more on their writing Students might develop self-reliance Tutorials might be more " dialogic" rather than " didactic"
Anticipated challenges/concerns (for students)	Increased workload in compiling the folio May only engage instrumentally and take part in order to help my research project	Resistance to extra work Culturally not familiar or comfortable with reflection Imposing agency OR focusing on agency at expense of quality of product Time constraints and high stakes – detrimental to students to focus on anything other than passing course

Anticipated challenges /concerns (for them)	Increased workload in marking the folio as well as product essay (time schedule as on long weekend holiday at end of formative stage)	Not fully understating purpose so can't explain to students Personal autonomy impeded by folio materials and syllabus
Beliefs about academic writing and learning in EAP	We focus too much on mechanics of writing e.g. topic sentences Students conflate IELTS with a construct of academic writing and then are confused Plagiarism policies and pedagogy punitive rather than acknowledging why students plagiarise	Mechanics are important and should be main priority " introductions, topic sentences" Product is more important than process because measurable outcome of learning Product and performance are important "in general life" Reflection is not necessary and can be performative Agency can be dangerous if students don't think they have to follow academic conventions
Beliefs about assessment in EAP pre-sessionals at Barksdale and in general	Reading only a focus as a test skill at Barksdale Timed writing "an exercise in nonsense" which isn't authentic, gives a false construct of writing and only used to ensure against plagiarism on coursework Inevitable that we assess product because that is how students will be assessed on their university degrees (authentic preparation) but also should focus on process	Process is subjective and should not be assessed Timed writing is not useful except to check plagiarism on coursework Assessment of writing better at Barksdale than other places

Appendix xi). Coding Process for Teacher interviews



Step Two: developing codes and assigning themes

Codes	Themes
to feel able to exercise some influence over their assessment situations **ability to organise learning and writing processes** **to reflectively and reflexively evaluate their choices and processes** **self- efficacy or the belief in ones' own capacities** **to participate in dialogic interactions with teachers and collaboration with peers**	**Teachers' opinions about positive impact on students**
Ss culture/attitudes to learning/personality **Technology** **High stakes nature of course** **Technology** **Workload** **Time limit of course**	**Limitations, constraints and challenges of the folio project and folio itself for students**
Own choices/adapting folio **Workload** **Materials** **Teaching styles** **Confidence**	**Teachers' opinions about how the intervention affected themselves directly**
Purpose of folio **Beliefs about assessment** **Beliefs about writing** **Beliefs about the role of teacher** **Beliefs about learning** **Purpose of EAP**	**Teachers' reflections on beliefs about EAP, assessment and their own practice**