Negotiating the Zone of Proximal Development in a Pre-University Advanced Academic Writing Classroom

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The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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Abstract

Grounded in sociocultural theory (SCT) of mind and a social-constructivist view of learning, the present study analyzed in depth the construction of Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD) among an experienced teacher and her students over the duration of a pre-university academic English writing course. The research (a) investigated the teacher’s perceptions of the factors that facilitated the creation of opportunities for learning, (b) analyzed classroom dynamics, participation, and interaction patterns over time to identify the instructional choices most conducive to learning, and (c) examined the factors that facilitated or hindered 3 focal students’ take up of opportunities for learning. Multiple sources of data included in-depth teacher interviews, observation and coding of 70 hours of classroom instruction, the teacher’s and students’ stimulated recalls on selected episodes of classroom interactions, and documents such as handouts, students’ assignments, and the teacher’s feedback on students’ writing.
The teacher’s interviews revealed a dialectic relationship between two types of facilitative factors she implemented: (a) emotional sustenance, achieved by building rapport with students, maintaining dependable codes of academic behavior, and balancing senses of challenge and attainment in students and (b) four instructional design and pedagogical choices: establishing continuity between course components, monitoring students’ progress, providing several types of assistance, and then later withholding assistance to encourage students’ self-regulation. A microgenetic analysis of two instructional units showed how continuity was established through the use of advanced organizers and clear intertextual links. The gradual decrease of teacher talk over the units gave room for active student participation and engagement. Case studies of 3 focal students revealed that these students valued different mediational tools according to their individual developmental histories and goals. They all showed evidence of investment and intentionality with stronger students commanding a larger repertoire of strategies and showing more understanding of the course design and the teacher’s goals.

In sum, the findings indicate that opportunities for learning within the ZPD were constructed through the overlap of multiple interacting factors including emotional sustenance, effective instructional practices, individualized support, and students’ self-regulation and investment. Implications are suggested for deconstructing the ZPD, understanding academic writing teaching and learning, and further research.
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كل الشكر و الامتنان لوالديا طاهر و محبوبه الكنوزي لتشجيعاتهما و تقتتهما
بني و حرصهما على ترسيخ مبادئ الاجتهاد والسعي لتحصيل العلم والعمل
فيتاناً.
حبني و احترامي لكم دائماً.

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iv

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ vii

List of Tables ................................................................................................................ xi

List of Figures ................................................................................................................ xii

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................. 1

1.1. Research Questions ................................................................................................. 8

1.2. Organization of the Dissertation ............................................................................. 8

Chapter 2: Defining the ZPD and its relevance to L2 writing classroom instruction........ 10

2.1. Defining the Zone of Proximal Development ......................................................... 10

  2.1.1. Mediation: The Roles of the Mediator and the Learner .................................. 14

  2.1.2. Intersubjectivity ................................................................................................. 17

  2.1.3. Instruction, Learning and Development .......................................................... 18

2.2. Research on Classroom Discourse ........................................................................ 20

2.3. Second Language Writing ....................................................................................... 24

2.4. English for Academic Purposes ............................................................................ 29

2.5. Interactional Ethnography ...................................................................................... 31

Chapter 3: Method ........................................................................................................ 38

3.1. Overview of the Study Design ................................................................................. 38

3.2. Quality of the Research .......................................................................................... 40

  3.2.1. Researcher Location ......................................................................................... 40

  3.2.2. Validity ................................................................................................................ 42

    3.2.2.1. Observer paradox ....................................................................................... 43

    3.2.2.2. Non-veridicality and reactivity of verbal reports ......................................... 44

    3.2.2.3. Member checks ......................................................................................... 47

3.3. Context of the Study ............................................................................................... 48

3.4. Participants .............................................................................................................. 51

  3.4.1. The Teacher ....................................................................................................... 51

  3.4.2. The Class ........................................................................................................... 52

  3.4.3. The Focal Students ......................................................................................... 54

3.5. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures ...................................................... 55

  3.5.1. Teacher Background Questionnaire ................................................................ 56

  3.5.2. Student Background Questionnaire ................................................................ 56

  3.5.3. Classroom Observation ..................................................................................... 57

  3.5.4. Stimulated Recalls ............................................................................................ 58
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.5.4.1. Teacher Stimulated Recalls</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.4.2. Focal Student Stimulated Recalls</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.4.3. Stimulated Recalls about Writing Samples</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.5. Teacher In-depth Final Interview</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.6. Student Final Interview</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.7. Teacher Comments on One-on-one Conference Meetings with Students</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.8. Think-aloud Protocols about Written Home Assignments</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.9. Other Data and Artifacts Collected</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.9.1. Course material.</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.9.2. Teacher handouts.</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.9.3. Students’ written work and teacher feedback.</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.9.4. Mid-term evaluation questionnaire.</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6. Data Collection Process</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1. Pilot Study</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.2. Main Study</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.3. Data Processing and Analysis</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.3.1. Research Question 1</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.3.2. Research Question 2</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.3.3. Research Question 3</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7. Limitations</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 4: Teacher’s Perceptions of Facilitating Factors

4.1. Defining Indicators of Learning

4.2. Facilitating Factors for the Construction and Take-up of Opportunities for Learning

5.1. Instructional Environment over a Semester

5.2. Two Focal Units

Chapter 5: The Instructional Environment of the Course
7.2. Implications and Further Research

7.2.1. Implications for the definition of the ZPD

7.2.2. Implications for teaching and learning of academic writing

7.2.3. Implications for further research

References

Appendices

Appendix A: Teacher Consent Letter

Appendix B: Student Consent Letter

Appendix C: Teacher Background Questionnaire

Appendix D: Student Background Questionnaire

Appendix E: Classroom Observation Chart

Appendix F: Teacher Stimulated Recall Protocol

Appendix G: Student Stimulated Recall Protocol

Appendix H: Teacher In-depth Interview Protocol

Appendix I: Samples of Focal Students’ Writing
List of Tables

Table 3.1: Profile of the three focal students. .......................................................... 56
Table 3.2: Schedule of writing assignments ............................................................. 66
Table 3.3: Episode coding scheme ........................................................................... 75
Table 3.4: Percent of intercoder agreement ............................................................... 78
Table 4.1: Teacher’s approach to building rapport with Ann: Quotations from comments and SRs. .............................................................. 95
Table 5.1: Percentage of class grouping type to all instructional time (averaged across 21 sessions) .............................................................. 117
Table 5.2: Percentage of co-occurrence of teacher consultation during peer work (averaged across 21 sessions)) .............................................................. 118
Table 5.3: Percentage of time spent on each teacher role to total instructional time (averaged across 21 sessions) .............................................................. 119
Table 5.4: Co-occurrence of types of teacher roles (averaged across 21 sessions) ... 120
Table 5.5: Percentage of time spent on different student roles to all instructional time (N=21 sessions) ...................................................................................... 120
Table 5.6: Co-occurrence of types of student roles in 21 sessions ..................... 120
Table 5.7: Percentage of time spent using different type of instructional material (averaged across 21 sessions) .............................................................. 121
Table 5.8: Percentage of time spent using different types of instructional elements (averaged across 21 sessions) .............................................................. 122
Table 5.9: Map of the 53 episodes that constituted the chain of activity in the unit Sentence Variety .............................................................. 125
Table 5.10: Time spent (in minutes) on each coded category during the unit Sentence Variety .............................................................. 129
Table 5.11: Map of the 20 episodes that constituted the chain of activity in the Summary Writing Unit .............................................................. 146
Table 5.12: Time spent (in minutes) on each coded category during the unit Summary Writing .............................................................. 150
List of Figures

Figure 5.1: Handout for the unit on Sentence Variety _____________________________ 133
Figure 5.2: Chain of activity in the unit on Summary Writing_______________________ 148
Figure 5.3: Two handouts for the unit on Summary Writing _________________________ 152
Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether and how the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) applies to a classroom context. It specifically examines the nature and processes of teaching and learning in an advanced second-language (L2) writing classroom through an analysis of the interactions or instructional dialogues that took place between a teacher and students and among students across time and teaching/learning events. The study adopted an interactional ethnographic approach to trace the establishment of intersubjective spaces within the class, the changes in the nature and features of interactions, and the consequences of these processes for student learning and writing development. Underlying the design of the study is the assumption that the language used in the classroom is a meditational tool, a vehicle for learning/instruction, and that the analysis of this language can offer invaluable insights into how learning and cognitive development take place during instructional activities (in the ZPD).

Vygotskian views on cognitive development have revolutionized the way we perceive and define the processes of learning and instruction (Negueruela, 2008; Newman & Holzman, 1993). Indeed, Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT) has brought a refreshing shift from the exclusive focus on the individual ‘subject’ that characterized Piagetian perspectives (Mercer, 1997), providing educators and researchers with new metaphors and tools to look at and study the formation of higher mental functions as fundamentally social and cultural processes. Within SCT, the individual is seen as “embedded within and constituted by a network of social relations and interactions” and a collection of cultural tools (Kumpulainen & van DerAalsvoort, 2001, p. 1). These
relations and tools mediate the individual’s development. The individual, in turn, affects and changes these relations and the tools that they make available. In this regard, Erickson (1996) explained that the relationship between the individual and the environment, which includes all the interpersonal interactions and activities of the individual, “is one of interpenetration and reflexive constitutive activity” (p. 29).

Erickson went on to argue that the “relation between teacher and learner is radically proximal, characterized by conjoint participation and influence” and that “the learner has the same agentive footing in the interaction as the teacher” (p. 29). It is to be noted, however, that this understanding of the learner-teacher unit as a mutually influencing system is not always fully represented in research that claims to be using SCT as a theoretical framework (Chaiklin, 2003; Gillen, 2000; Kinginger, 2002). Such research tends to adopt a rather impoverished view of the context of development and often fails to represent the multilayered and complex nature of the individuals’ interactions with their environment. This limitation is especially noticeable in the literature about the ZPD, a central concept in the formation and understanding of Vygotsky’s SCT.

Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). The ZPD exemplifies the SCT focus on the social, dialogic aspects of cognition formation in stipulating that a potential, and evidently higher, level of development can be reached through interpersonal collaboration. It also recognizes the distributed nature of cognition, a novel idea to educators and policy makers who are used to measuring individual development in terms
of timed, unassisted, and isolated performance (Ableeva, 2008; Poehner, 2008). As such, the ZPD appeals to teachers’ aspirations to help their students achieve higher levels of development, providing a deeper representation of cognitive development.

To date, a considerable body of research has attempted to define and operationalize the concept of the ZPD. Some studies have suggested that useful help in the student’s ZPD is “graduated, contingent and dialogic” (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994), while others (e.g., Nassaji & Cumming, 2000) have demonstrated how negotiated help in the learner’s ZPD leads to learning. However, these studies included small numbers of participants (typically one or two) and/or provided targeted, one-on-one instruction in exceptional research environments such as tutoring or dialogue journals. There is in fact, little empirical research on how teachers delineate the ZPD in a classroom context and whether and how they adapt instruction to help individual learners and groups evolve in that zone. Therefore, while the importance of situating instructional activity in a ZPD has been established, many questions persist when it comes to understanding whether and how the concept applies in a classroom context where “graduated, contingent and dialogic” help is not always feasible or practical.

Several researchers have lamented the lack of research to address the question of the applicability of the ZPD concept to the classroom context, suggesting that our understanding of the concept itself remains limited until this issue is fully examined. Chaiklin (2003, p. 58), for instance, called for the examination of the argument that interaction in instructional contexts provides “conditions for identifying the existence and the extent” to which maturing cognitive functions that are not yet perceptible through concrete performance have developed. Erickson (1996), on the other hand, pointed out
that this interaction might not be easy to analyze or capture in the classroom context. Specifically, he explained that classroom talk is not always organized as a dialogue where teachers can adjust the type and amount of mediation they provide to a single learner. Rather, the overt verbal exchange that occurs at any given point during class time is only one part of the meaningful interactions that are taking place. In fact, several ‘interlocutors’ might be engaged in simultaneous participation, some of them silently. Erickson added that while “the speaker is speaking, the listener is listening” and “[b]ecause the speaker can see as well as hear, whatever the listener is doing nonverbally (and verbally) is available as evidence that what the speaker is saying is being received by the auditor” (p. 33). Erickson concluded that:

How the temporal organization of classroom conversation works as a learning environment-- as the locus of engagement in the ZPD-- remains an issue for exploration. How the teacher and multiple learners are more or less able interactionally to engage in intellectually stimulating conversation, and how cadence and conversational rhythm may be working in the social and cognitive ecology of group learning as it takes place in classroom conversation, are issues that may well be related. Taken together they present intriguing possibilities for further research. (p. 59)

However, Mercer (1997) was rather skeptical about the outcome of such research. He suggested that the very definition of the ZPD constrains the possibility of its application in the classroom context. He referred especially to the ZPD being an attribute of the learning event and not of the individual learner and wondered “how this concept [the ZPD] should be applied to the analysis of an event in which one teacher is responsible for the advancement of a group of 20-35 children, and in which most learning activity is carried out jointly or in parallel” (p. 18). Mercer doubted that concepts such as
the ZPD that emerged initially from experimental studies of child cognitive development could be useful or transferable to the classroom context (see also Mercer & Fisher, 1997).

In response to this cautious view about the suitability of the ZPD as a working concept in the classroom, Guk and Kellogg (2007) insisted that, given his ideological background and the historical moment in which he lived and wrote, Vygotsky was committed to doing research that was relevant and applicable to public schooling. In particular, they disagreed with the common operationalization of the ZPD as ‘scaffolding’ of a learner by an expert. They noted that “[i]t seems unlikely that an unrealizable student-by-student ‘scaffolding’ conception should be the core of his [Vygotsky’s] pedagogical thinking. What seems much more plausible is that Western epigones may have removed the social context and the socialist content of Vygotsky’s original idea” (p. 282).

The studies that have examined the establishment of the ZPD in classroom contexts differ widely in their designs and the research questions they addressed. To date, Poehner (2009) remains one of the rare thorough articulations of a theory of group and class ZPD in the L2 learning literature. Following Petrovsky (1985), Poehner called for an understanding of the group (or class) as a psychological entity that can support or even match or appropriate the individuals’ learning goals. Poehner outlined two main approaches to Group-Dynamic Assessment (G-DA) and used real G-DA interactions between L2 learners and their instructors to illustrate the range of mediational moves afforded within each approach (which is reviewed more fully in Chapter 2 below). Other studies focused on one focal student and traced his/her development in the social context of the classroom (e.g., Putney, Green, Dixon, Duran, & Yeager, 2000), studies that
reported students’ progress as a group while taking the teacher perspective as a starting point (e.g., Cordeiro, 1994), studies that highlighted several focal students and described their unique learning journeys (e.g., Freedman & Delp, 2007; Freedman, Delp, & Crawford, 2005), and studies that focused on small groups of students within the classroom (e.g., Guk & Kellogg, 2007). In terms of design, most of these studies were case studies with an action research design. Often, they have presented microgenetic analyses of selected excerpts of classroom interactions and students’ development. Students’ development itself is defined differently in different studies. Putney et al. (2000), for instance, gave evidence of students’ integration of the concept “point of view” in the writing of one student, whereas Guk and Kellogg (2007) examined the appropriation of discrete grammatical forms by learners.

It might be premature, therefore, to synthesize this body of research, but it is possible to identify some trends. First, the language of the social interaction that takes place during class time is essential for the establishment of the ZPD; it is simultaneously the vehicle for the establishment of the ZPD and a tool for diagnosing the maturing functions in the zone. It can also contain evidence of development when students appropriate aspects of the classroom language to start thinking about the cognitive tasks at hand. For instance, Guk and Kellogg (2007), who compared linguistic features and meditational moves in teacher-student and student-student interactions in the classroom, found little difference between the two types of interaction and concluded that the two types of mediation in fact created “different ends of the same whole class ZPD” rather than two different types of ZPD. At one end, there is the teacher mediation, which Guk and Kellogg characterized as ‘inter-mental’ and assistive. On the other end, there is peer
(or symmetrical) mediation, which is “bordering on internalization”. Freedman, Delp and Crawford (2005) documented Delp’s teaching practices and her reflections on how to organize coherent class activities while attending to the specific needs of individual students. Delp found that individual students “latched on” to the whole group activities in their own ways, and ultimately “[s]he assumed that students would find the zone where they would be challenged and that they would work within that zone” (p. 120). In a subsequent paper (Freedman & Delp, 2007), the authors pointed out that a detailed analysis of the language used in the classroom could help better understand how learning opportunities were created and taken up by students.

Second, instructional activity in the ZPD is fragile and depends on the cooperation and commitment of all parties involved. Cordeiro (1994), for example, showed how constructing a ZPD in her class required that the teacher constantly reviewed her goals and verified that her understanding of the tasks and objectives of the activities was shared and appropriated by the students. Newman, Griffin and Cole (1989) also demonstrated how discrepancies between teacher and student task-definitions impacted the instructional processes and learning outcomes. As a result, they argued that it is crucial to establish a certain level of intersubjectivity that would facilitate appropriation, to sustain activity in the ZPD. They noted that:

The children may take the [ZPD] in unanticipated directions based on their own appropriation of what the teacher makes available. In this respect, the functional system of the zone of proximal development may not be characterized by an invariant task--the task as negotiated by the child and teacher may in fact change. While the dominant task definition is that of the teacher and the dominant movement is towards the adult system, each step is an interactive construction with a variety of possible outcomes. (pp. 74-75)
1.1. Research Questions

The current study addresses the following questions:

1. What pedagogical activities did the teacher enact to organize and facilitate students’ opportunities for learning in the course?
2. How did the teacher and students progressively co-construct opportunities for learning in class?
3. What facilitated or hindered students’ take up of opportunities for learning?

   The study adopts Tuyay, Jennings and Dixon’s (1995) definition of opportunity for learning, where “an opportunity to learn is one that offers the student a chance to interact with information and to make sense of it” (p. 7).

   The present study addresses some of the concerns expressed above about the suitability of the ZPD as a working concept or a guiding metaphor in the context of classroom instruction. Specifically, the study analyzes interactions in an advanced English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom to identify the features that facilitate or hinder the enactment of the ZPD. This analysis involves a linguistic analysis of the utterances/interactions but also relates the teacher’s and students’ verbal interactions to the overall context of the immediate activities in which these interactions took place as well as the general instructional environment built throughout the activities and sessions over time. The study also investigates the perspectives and insights of the teacher and the students in their real classroom context.

1.2. Organization of the Dissertation

The following chapter reviews the recent SCT literature that defines and discusses the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, as first understood by Vygotsky and later expanded and adapted by other scholars. The chapter reviews related concepts such as the role of mediation and intersubjectivity in instructional situations and the
relationship between instruction, learning and development. The chapter also reviews the literature on the characteristics of classroom discourse and key issues in the teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and second language (L2) writing, in particular. The chapter concludes with an overview of Interactional Ethnography, the approach used to analyze and represent the data in this dissertation. Chapter 3 describes the design and data collection and analysis procedures for the present study. Chapter 4 addresses the first research question by drawing on teacher interview data to describe what she perceived to facilitate the establishment of individual and class ZPDs. Chapter 5, based on the coding and analysis of class activities, examines how the classroom became a context for learning and documents the co-creation of the ZPD through the mapping of the general patterns of interaction in class and the microgenetic analysis of pertinent exchanges that exemplify the creation of opportunities for learning. Chapter 6 presents case studies of three focal students to highlight what facilitated and/or hindered their take up of the opportunities for learning created in class. Chapter 7 summarizes the main findings, highlights implications for the definition of the ZPD, and the understanding of academic writing teaching and learning, and suggests directions for further research.
Chapter 2: Defining the ZPD and its relevance to L2 writing classroom instruction

This chapter reviews relevant literature that informed and guided the focus and design of the present study. I first review the SCT literature about the ZPD and related concepts, focusing mainly on the definitions of and common misconceptions about the ZPD, the notions of mediation, the role of the teacher and the learner in establishing the zone, and the notions of intersubjectivity and development as fundamental conditions for activity in the zone. I then briefly review classroom discourse research, focusing mainly on descriptive models of classroom discourse. I also review and summarize research about the instructional approaches to teaching L2 writing and EAP. Finally, I describe and discuss the theoretical foundations and procedural aspects of interactional ethnography, the main method of inquiry of the present study.

2.1. Defining the Zone of Proximal Development

Defining the concept of the ZPD is problematic on several levels. First, the concept appeared late in the life and writings of Vygotsky (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991); appeared in eight texts only (Chaiklin, 2003); and was discussed in relation to just two contexts: assessment of learning and pretense play (Gillen, 2000). Therefore, researchers often draw on the same limited number of quotations from Vygotsky (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978, p.86, see quote above) but explain them in different ways, sometimes with little or no agreement on the nature of the ZPD and the relationship of the ZPD to Vygotsky’s overall thinking (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003). Second, there is now a realization that earlier mistranslations of Vygotsky’s work have led to mistaken, oversimplified readings of Vygotsky in general, including a misreading of the ZPD and
its relation to instruction and cognitive development. Third, the recent popularity of SCT as a framework to study and approach several domains of knowledge that were not originally addressed by Vygotsky (e.g., Exner, 1990; Gholson, 1998; Leiman & Stiles, 2001; McKechnie, 1997; Spouse, 1998), meant that researchers re-interpreted the theory and redefined the concept to suit their research agendas (Chaiklin, 2003; Gillen, 2000). In this regard, Kozulin et al. (2003) identified at least three readings of the ZPD in recent publications: (a) a framework to explain the emerging psychological functions of children, (b) a concept to explain the difference between assisted and unassisted performance, and (c) a metaphoric space where scientific concepts are taken up by novices with support from teachers or experts (p. 3). Newman and Holzman (1993), Chaiklin (2003), as well as others have returned to the original texts written by Vygotsky in Russian to present more rigorous analyses of Vygotsky’s work and accounts of the ZPD. The following discussion is largely based on their work.

Central to the understanding of the ZPD concept is the notion of the social genesis of cognitive processes and functions. Higher mental functions (i.e., thinking, cognition) appear twice in the development of learners/novices/children, first interpsychologically, during interactions between individuals, and then intrapsychologically, within the individual. This change occurs through a process of internalization whereby “[individuals] construct a mental representation of what was at one point physically present (acoustic or visual) in external form” (Lantolf, 2003, p. 351). Within SCT, the “capacity to benefit from certain kinds of interaction and mediation” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 266) defines the ZPD, and is considered a better indicator of development than independent performance because it shows “the [individual’s] immediate future and his
dynamic developmental state” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 86), and takes into consideration maturing functions that are not ‘captured’ through conventional tests such as IQ tests (Poehner, 2008).

A common misconception, however, is to see the ZPD as a characteristic of the learner. Rather, the ZPD emerges in the course of the dialogic interaction between an expert and a novice, thus allowing the teacher/expert to better gauge the capabilities of the novice and to decide how to proceed so as to offer a learner the appropriate quality and amount of assistance to support the person’s development. In this regard, the ZPD is both the “tool and result” (Newman & Holzman, 1993) of the dialogic interaction and is an attribute of the evolving learning activity, not of the learner (Mercer & Fisher, 1997). Also, the ZPD does not have a predetermined trajectory structured into consecutive stages; it is negotiated between the mediator and the learner/novice as they dialogue (Poehner, 2008). The expert and the novice constitute a mutually influencing system and are both equally involved in the creation of the zone and the co-construction of the new knowledge that ensues. As such, the ZPD is a model of a development process that can be used by teachers to diagnose learners’ potential and guide their practice (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008).

A second misconception was pointed out by Chaiklin (2003). According to Chaiklin, it is often assumed that the size of the zone can be measured in terms of the range of tasks that a learner is able to perform with assistance. Chaiklin insisted that Vygotsky’s original definition referred to development, not learning, of specific tasks. Mastery of an increasing number and types of tasks may be taken as an indicator of development, but it should not be equated with development.
Finally, it would be too simplistic to assume that any and all social mediation in the form of joint activity or collaboration leads to the establishment of a ZPD. In fact, many factors can affect the success of mediation in the ZPD, particularly the interpersonal relationship between the participants. As Stone (1998) has put it, the dialogic interaction does not occur between ‘faceless functionaries’, but rather between individuals who bring different personal histories, agencies, goals, understandings and perspectives to the task at hand. In this regard, Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) highlighted the role of positive affect in enhancing opportunities for learning during joint activity, while Swain (2013) considered that the full range of emotions from positive to negative “are an integral part of cognition” (p.195). Through a series of in-depth readings of learners’ goal-oriented activities and language-learning-related lived experiences, Swain (2013) illustrated how emotions are co-constructed in the moment as a result of interactants’ roles and contributions and also wider social and cultural factors. Poehner and Swain (2016) further explained that Vygotsky saw the cognitive and emotive as a dialectic unity: cognition and emotions “contain”, “define” and “change” one another. They argued that Vygotsky accepted that, at times, one element of the dialectical unity might come to the fore as the other continues to permeate the performance or the interaction at hand. The authors concluded that successful mediation in the ZPD necessarily attends to the learner’s/novice’s emotions even though research and analysis have traditionally missed this aspect of the mediation. They pointed out, in particular, that successful mediation engages learners’ self-regulation and their “awareness of their emotional experiences during L2 learning and how these may be regulated in ways that support rather than inhibit their engagement with instruction” (p.237).
In the following sections, I focus on three aspects of the ZPD that need to be investigated in more depth in order to understand this concept: (a) the role of mediator and the learner in the dialogic interaction in the ZPD, (b) the notion of intersubjectivity, and (c) the Vygotskian perspective on the difference between learning and development.

2.1.1. Mediation: The Roles of the Mediator and the Learner

Mediation is at the heart of the paradigmatic shift that Vygotskian SCT brought to developmental psychology (Gillen, 2000). It departs from the Piagetian focus on the individual as an isolated object of study and recognizes the situated, socially constructed nature of human cognition. As such, it is also crucial for successful activity in the ZPD.

Wertsch (2007) distinguished between implicit and explicit mediation (see also Lantolf & Poehner, 2008). To illustrate implicit mediation, Wertsch gave the example of social and inner speech which are integral parts of the acts of thinking and communicating and thus seldom are they the subject of ‘conscious reflection and manipulation’. In explicit mediation, a mediator ‘overtly’ and ‘intentionally’ assists the learner by introducing a ‘stimulus means’ that is unambiguously recognized by the learner as a mediational tool that changes the course of the activity. Here there are two levels of mediation, mediation by social interaction between expert and learner and mediation by ‘tools, signs and practices’ (John-Steiner, Panofsky, & Smith, 1994) which are subsequently internalised and used to self-regulate.

Discussions of the nature and conditions for appropriate explicit social mediation often focus on the role of the teacher as the expert, the one who is responsible for moving the instructional activity forward and providing appropriate and timely cognitive ‘scaffolds’ for the learner (Cordeiro, 1994; Fernandez, Wegerif, Mercer, & Rojas-
Drummond, 2001). Poehner (2008) pointed out, however, that this perspective gives a limited representation of the process and possible outcomes of mediation. He maintained that, “successful collaboration in the ZPD is dependent upon both the quality of mediation and learner reciprocity” (Poehner, 2008, p. 40). Taking account of learner contributions to the instructional conversation “contextualizes” mediation and ensures that it is sensitive to the needs and level of the learner. Lantolf and Poehner (2008) explained that the ZPD is best measured in terms of the learner’s responsiveness to mediational moves. The learner can choose to request additional support, ask for specific forms of support, or reject the support offered, with each of these responsive acts indicating a different level of development and readiness to the mediational moves offered. The learner can also initiate a move that might take the instructional dialogue into a different direction, not necessarily planned by the mediator. In fact, appropriate mediation cannot be scripted or decided beforehand; it is emergent and dynamic, constantly negotiated between the mediator/teacher and the learner. This characterization of mediation within the ZPD is recurrent in the interventionist dynamic assessment literature where most dialogic interactions take place in dyads. The focus on dyads or small groups raises the question of how teachers can manage mediation in classroom contexts where multiple students can reciprocate in different ways, revealing different levels of development, and taking the dialogue into different directions.

As mentioned above, within a Group-Dynamic Assessment (G-DA), Poehner (2009) illustrated two possible approaches to offering mediation and establishing a group ZPD within a whole class context, namely concurrent and cumulative G-DA. Poehner explained that the class, as a group is “a social system in its own right that might be
supported to function in ways that are beyond the present capabilities of any individual member” (p.477). In concurrent G-DA, the teacher’ role consists in providing mediational moves that engage the whole class even as the teacher shifts focus between individual learners to offer them targeted support and assess their responsiveness:

“concurrent G-DA supports the development of each individual by working within the group’s ZPD” (Poehner, 2009, p. 478). In fact, by virtue of the nature of open interaction in classroom spaces, students are constantly engaged either as primary or secondary interactants. The social relations and roles of class members are “in a constant state of flux” (p. 479) as the students benefit and learn from the interactions between (changing) dyads of primary interactants negotiating a specific support. Poehner (2009) illustrated concurrent G-DA with an excerpt of classroom data where a teacher offered increasingly explicit mediation in two successive interactional turns with two different learners. Poehner suggested that while each teacher-student dyadic interaction was contingent on the student’s immediate response and apparent need, the secondary interactants in the class benefited from a graduated and dialogic mediation. In cumulative G-DA, the teacher aims to “move the entire group forward in its ZPD through negotiations with individual learners in their respective ZPDs” (p.478). Sustained one-on-one negotiations with a primary interactant at a time are also available to the whole class to hear and learn from. Poehner described an L2 Spanish teacher’s approach to cumulative G-DA in the context of a fourth grade mini-lesson on substantive-modifier concord in Spanish. The teacher systematically guided individual students through a series of increasingly explicit mediating prompts, starting from a simple pause to draw a student’s attention to a possible mistake, then extending to the teacher identifying the correct answer and
providing an explanation. Through this systematic approach, the teacher was able to identify and record the level of support needed by each student in the moment but also over time. She was, subsequently, able to track the class’ development by looking at a summary of the students’ abilities (as a group).

2.1.2. **Intersubjectivity**

The notion of intersubjectivity connects and underlies instructional dialogue. Wertsch (2007) explained that more often than not teachers and students co-construct and sustain a dialogue without being in full agreement on the purpose of the activity at hand or the definition of the working concepts they are using. In this paradoxical situation, the teacher may use implicit forms of mediation and gradually integrate more explicit forms when she notices that students are having difficulties. The students, on the other hand, may proceed to talk and act at a level that is beyond their actual level of understanding, a case of “performance before competence” (Cazden, 1997). In this way, they “enter into a basic form of intersubjectivity with more experienced teachers and experts and thereby leverage their way up through increasing levels of expertise” (Wertsch, 2007, p. 188). Through increased explicit mediation and other-regulation, the students ultimately get closer to the teacher’s perspective and a deeper level of intersubjectivity is achieved that facilitates and allows for successful activity in the ZPD.

Newman, Griffin and Cole (1989) related intersubjectivity to the indeterminacy of speech. They noted that any conversational turn, whether completed by the teacher or the student, can be interpreted in several ways depending on the perspective and engagement and goals of the hearer (student or teacher), the context, and so on. However, Newman et
al. noted that it is exactly this indeterminacy of speech that allows “room for movement and change” (p. 11).

2.1.3. Instruction, Learning and Development

One of the essential aspects of successful assistance in the ZPD is that it leads to development, not just learning. Wertsch (2007) noted that development entails qualitative transformation and not mere quantitative improvements that can be measured in terms of speed, efficiency, or accuracy. These aspects of performance might be evidence of learning but are not to be equated with cognitive development. The qualitative transformation associated with development involves the appropriation of the physical (e.g., technical tools, charts, diagrams) and symbolic (e.g., speech) tools that are made available during mediation within the ZPD and their transformation into psychological tools for self-regulation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Lantolf and Poehner (2008) explained that this aspect of development allows learners to gain intentional control over their cognitive functionings. Within a school context, development usually shows in a learner’s ability to supplement, integrate and, eventually, replace empirically learnt everyday concepts with scientific concepts that are typically introduced in instructional settings (Daniels, 2005, 2007; Hedegaard, 1990; Karpov, 2003; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The use of these scientific concepts results from a process of cognitive restructuration, whereby the very “architecture of the mind itself may be transformed” (Guk & Kellogg, 2007, p. 285). This transformation is usually revealed in a deep shift in the way learners talk about these concepts, either in their private or overt speech.

As for the relationship between instruction and development, Vygotsky criticized three dominant positions (van Der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). According to the organistic
view, development should precede instruction; cognitive abilities should be mature enough for the learner to be able to profit from the teaching received. Van Der Veer and Valsiner explained that Vygotsky rejected this view as “pedagogically pessimistic” because it leads to a passive role for instruction whereby it ‘waits’ for cognitive maturity to occur and then merely builds on it. This role is especially problematic in cases where a child shows delayed development. This view also fails to acknowledge cognitive abilities that are in their embryonic stages and therefore not measurable by traditional tests. The authors added that this organistic view is ‘flawed’ because development itself is (at least) partially dependent on schooling. Therefore, to pose that instruction should wait for development to occur when instruction influences and furthers development results in a circular argument.

The second view on the relation between instruction and development posits that teaching (and not maturation) is a major factor in cognitive development. Following Vygostky, van Der Veer and Valsiner (1991) questioned the implied assumption that development eventually coincides with teaching. This is in contradiction with the Vygotskian notion that development is not predictable and that it follows a unique route shaped by the learner’s history, creativity, and goals. The third view reconciles the previous two positions and claims that both maturational processes and schooling determine development.

To conclude, in Vygotskian thinking, the relationship between instruction and development is not a direct one. Instruction may lead to learning if it is based on assistive mediation, and if the learner is engaged and responsive. In this regard, learning precedes development but does not necessarily determine it. As John-Steiner, Panofsky and Smith
(1994) put it “when we discuss the relationship between learning and development from the Vygotskian point of view, we take into account the interaction of a number of variables, including individual sources growing from both biological predispositions and family opportunities, socially patterned interactions and culturally refined tools and practices” (p. 9).

2.2. Research on Classroom Discourse

There is a continued interest in studying classroom discourse to investigate the nature and dynamics of classroom talk and to document and assess the extent and consequences of recent shifts in teaching practices and definitions of knowledge, the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom, and the significance of instruction in general. Several consistent findings have emerged from classroom discourse studies even though they differ in terms of their foci (e.g., teacher vs. student talk), the approach adopted (e.g., systematic observation, linguistic analysis of discourse, ethnographic research), and their theoretical perspectives on teaching and learning (Rex, Steadman, & Graciano, 2006). In this subsection, I discuss findings from this line of research that are most relevant to the present study.

A consistent finding across studies on classroom discourse is that teachers do most of the talking in classrooms. Regardless of the subject being taught or the teaching method adopted, teacher talk accounts for half to three quarters of all classroom talk (Erickson, 1996; Weissberg, 2006). This tendency seems to contradict the recent emphasis on the importance of learner participation and non-transmission modes of teaching (Boyd & Maloof, 2000; Nystrand, 1997; Wells, 2000). It is also well documented that teacher talk is often improvised in response to learners’ contributions
and perceived immediate learning needs (e.g., McNair, 1978). Therefore, even though
teachers talk more, classroom discourse is in fact co-constructed by all people involved in
any given session. Erickson (1996) pointed out, in this regard, that silent learners are also
part of this co-produced discourse, even when they resist instruction and choose to
remain at the margin of classroom discourse.

Cazden and Beck (2003) argued that there are at least two aspects of classroom
discourse that have to be (but are not always) accounted for: (a) the syntagmatic or
sequential aspect of discourse which is captured by an account of the adjacent moves or
speech acts of the participants and (b) the paradigmatic aspect that accounts for the
functional choices that participants make at each new move (among alternatives).
Mehan’s (1979) Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) sequence is probably the most
widely cited and documented model of the sequential aspect of lesson structure.
According to Newman, Griffin and Cole (1989) this triadic dialogue structure shows the
“collaboratively constructed” nature of classroom discourse, but it also reflects the
privileged status of the teacher as the one who has the authority to close the dialogue with
a repair move, ensuring that erroneous student contributions are rectified. Mehan (1979)
also documented how the IRE sequences are embedded in larger topically related sets
(TRSs) that can extend across lessons and show the continuity of classroom discourse
across time and events. Cazden and Beck (2003) concluded that Mehan’s multi-level
model shows that in order to understand effective participation (i.e., participation that
maximizes opportunities for learning) one has to look beyond a single class session or
selected class episodes. Wells (1999) also emphasized the importance of descriptive
models such as that of Mehan (1979) that account for units of analysis that are broader
than the ‘exchange’ as defined by Halliday (1970, 1975, 1978) because they described how exchanges are actually topically related across sessions, and that word meanings, as used and understood by participants constitute thematic systems built over time (see also, Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).

Other descriptive models of the sequential structure of class talk include the responsive model (Gutierrez, 1994) in which the teacher uses the closing turn of the IRE exchange to follow-up and elaborate on student contributions, thus validating learners’ response turn and creating further genuine opportunities for dialogue.

In a third model, the instructional conversation (IC) model (Weissberg, 2006), students are encouraged to talk to each other and build on each other’s turns while the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator of the conversation. The discourse sequence in this model is not as clear cut as in the IRE. Rather, Weissberg identified seven key features of the model. First, turn assignment and turn length are not necessarily determined by the teacher; learners engage in extended turns that involve moves, such as asking questions and restating problems, that are usually initiated by the teacher (typical of the IRE structure). Second, teachers allow longer wait time between questions and follow-up, thus encouraging students to think and participate as in a real conversation. Third, the teacher models not only learning strategies and processes but also participation roles. Fourth, the teacher provides dialogic feedback which provides opportunities to develop arguments not just error correction or evaluation of learners’ turns. Fifth, teachers use several question types (e.g., known-answer questions, authentic questions) to encourage learners to talk and think. Sixth, the teacher “links her own talk thematically and linguistically to previous contributions of her students” (p. 67). Finally, the teacher
engages in cognitive structuring by framing the classroom conversation and suggesting alternative ways of thinking and different perspectives on themes discussed in class.

As Wells (1999) pointed out, however, it is important to understand the choices that participants make at every move and the motivation behind these choices, even within well-established sequences such as the IRE. Wells explained that teachers might use the triadic dialogue for different reasons and to achieve different goals. The same principle applies to student moves; this might be more critical in the case of silent students whose response moves remain implicit.

To conclude this brief and selective review, the classroom discourse literature suggests three main conclusions relevant to this study. First, classroom discourse is co-constructed by the teacher and students even though the teacher might have a more prominent role in directing and organizing the discourse. Second, teacher-student/student-student interactions and exchanges of information are crucial aspects of the classroom discourse; however, to obtain a better understanding of the nature of teaching and learning, one has to look at broader units than one class and examine the thematic relations across classes. Finally, it is important to examine participants’ perspectives on their own contributions to classroom talk and on other participants’ turns and roles. These three points bring to the fore the important role of a detailed analysis of the classroom language, an analysis that is not restricted to quantifying categories of talk, but aims to obtain a holistic perspective on how classroom talk affects and is affected by participants’ turns. The purpose of such analysis would be to understand learning as it emerges in class.
2.3. Second Language Writing

The research questions raised by this study were addressed in the context of an EAP semester-long course with a focus on helping international students seeking admission to North American universities and colleges to improve their L2 writing skills and strategies. In this regard, Ferris (2016) noted that L2 writing is a “higher education issue” because of the growing number of international students, from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and various proficiency levels and needs, who take these academic writing support courses while or before seeking admission to their elected programs. Ferris noted a number of debates that continue to inform these programs, including debates about defining the needs of this student population (e.g., how do their needs differ from those of English native speakers? do they need tailored approaches or will they respond to the L1 writing teaching approaches? what is the status of language structure in such courses?) and determining the suitability of different instructional approaches to meeting those needs.

The history of the teaching of L2 writing in higher education comprises different attempts to address these questions in line with a sequence of theoretical and instructional approaches that have dominated the L2 writing field and language learning theories over the last few decades. Cumming (2016) and Hirvela, Hyland and Manchon (2016) present an exhaustive review of the pedagogical trends that have dominated, in sequence or concurrently, the ‘learning-to-write’ orientation in L2 writing: text-oriented, writer, or process oriented and context oriented approaches. Cumming further focused on the SCT orientation to this field.
The earliest text-focused literature was grounded in structural theories of language, behaviorist theories of language learning, and audiolingual methods of teaching, which tended to constrain researchers’ and teachers’ focus to surface, sentence level textual features and an exclusive concern with structural accuracy. Rigid teaching methods reduced the writing teacher to a language stickler whose aim is to restrict the learner’s “freedom to commit errors” (Coffin et al., 2003; Matsuda, 2003; Silva, 1990). Contrastive rhetoric brought consideration of the writers’ backgrounds in that it sought to understand and help teachers and students anticipate and address the influence of students’ L1 linguistic and cultural backgrounds on their writing in English. In so doing, it put more emphasis on discourse, reader expectations, and textual norms beyond grammar and sentence structure. Studies also investigated issues such as directness and reporting in native and nonnative English texts (Hyland & Milton, 1997) and reader/writer responsibility (Weigle, 2002). Genre analysis approaches can also be classified as text-focused in that they have often analyzed texts deemed of immediate relevance to the training and professional success of L2 learners, but texts in this context are categorized in terms of the purposes and functions they serve and the expectations of the communities that generate them.

Despite an early stigmatization of text-focused research and the pedagogies it defined as limited and inadequate to prepare the L2 writer to face the challenges of authentic communicative demands, the possible contribution of textual analysis is now widely acknowledged, especially in light of the broader focus brought by genre studies and pedagogy that encourages active exploration, analysis and deconstruction of texts, teacher modeling, and peer negotiation of textual purpose and function.
Writer-focused approaches to L2 writing research and pedagogy have been grounded in cognitive psychology and observations of the processes and strategies of good writers. Researchers within this orientation have relied on introspective methods such as think-aloud protocols and stimulated recalls to observe the cognitive processes involved in writing, the sources of knowledge writers draw upon while composing, the factors that influence the writing process, and the differences between the writing processes of skilled and novice writers (Cumming, 1998; Roca de Larios et al., 2002; Weigle, 2002). Two models of L1 writing processes have been influential in this research orientation: Hayes and Flower’s (1980) model that depicted writing as a non-linear process, where writers draw on several sources of knowledge and attend to several cognitive demands simultaneously, and Scardamalia and Bereiter’s (1987) model that distinguishes between a knowledge telling process of writing characteristic of novice writers and a knowledge transforming process often observed in expert writers. These models refined writing as a complex, cognitively demanding, problem-solving activity that entails several interconnected stages (i.e., planning, translation, evaluation, revision, and editing). The writer- or process-approach has shaped instructional methods that encourage writing strategy development, modeling, peer collaboration, and alternative forms of assessment, including multiple drafts and portfolios.

Context-oriented research has recognized writing as an interactive process that connects writers and their readers. Text quality and meaning conveyance are measured in terms of the writer’s success in creating a mutual frame of reference and anticipating the needs and expectations of the potential audience. However, readership awareness can be particularly problematic for L2 writers to master because typical classroom writing tasks
tend to inculcate an impoverished sense of audience in students—usually equated with the teacher/rater who reads to assign a grade (Raimes, 1987). Moreover, the socialization process of L2 learners into academic communities is often complicated by issues of identity, agency, and power (Casanave, 1992; Leki, 2001).

Prior (2006) noted that these consecutive paradigm shifts (Prior & Shipka, 2003; Prior & Thorne, 2014) and the growing influence of sociocultural theories have redefined writing as a distributed, chronotopically laminated and individuated ‘activity’. Writing activity is distributed in that every act of writing is necessarily an act of co-authorship: every author or student builds on norms established over time and through different social practices, integrates resources, tools, and texts created by others for multiple purposes and enacts conventions that were conveyed through interactions with other individuals and texts. Writing activity is also chronotopically laminated as it represents and embodies multiple other ‘sociohistorically dispersed’ literate acts such as learning and writing histories of the writer, the intertextual links between the text being written and other written or read texts appropriated (or not) over time and in other places. Each of these acts forms a layer that shapes the writing process and outcome in distinctive ways. Writing activity is also individuated: writers—whether novices or experts—do not just internalize or appropriate the cultural tools made available to them. They redefine the writing task in accordance with their understanding of what it entails and how it serves their goals. They actively select what to attend to, at what time and at what point in the process, who to call upon for assistance and what kind of support they request. In this regard, Prior (2006) especially highlighted Vygotsky’s (1987) statement that “the central tendency of the child’s development is not a gradual socialization introduced from the
outside, but a gradual individualization that emerges on the foundation of the child’s internal socialization” (p. 259).

In a succinct review of SCT-informed approaches and understanding of L2 writing and the pedagogical implications they entail, Cumming (2016) explained how central SCT concepts such as mediation and the ZPD materialize in the L2 writing class. Writing development occurs when learners “internalize culturally appropriate ways of using language, literacy, and media though their observations, experiences, negotiations, and practices with other people’s uses of them, gradually adopting abilities to use them independently” (p. 76). Cumming explained that SCT studies related to L2 writing to date have focused on two types of learning contexts or settings: (a) one-on-one tutoring and collaboration where teacher and peers scaffold a novice learner through tailored tasks and scaffolding is anchored in strong relationships of trust and respect (e.g., Cumming, 2012; Knouzi, 2012) and (b) computer-mediated writing where collaborative dialogues mediated by computers facilitate peer scaffolding and reveal cognitive conflicts and collaborations.

As noted above, SCT studies exploring the development of writing ability in L2 classes (as opposed to one-on-one tutoring) are scarce. Parks, Huot, Hamers and Lemonnier (2005) documented ESL learners’ appropriation of aspects of the writing process over a four-year period. They found different forms of teacher scaffolding and clear expectations of norms of participation together with ICT-tool mediated collaboration supported student self-regulation and transfer of new knowledge to novel writing situations. Similarly, Farriera and Lantolf (2008) described in detail the role of the teacher in creating a classroom environment conducive to learning through several
learning actions: starting with concept-based explanations that problematize the content being taught, using visual representations to illustrate concepts in a coherent, concise way to ensure retention and internalization, and allowing students to manipulate and apply the concepts under different task requirements, providing several forms of assessment and feedback at different points in the course.

2.4. English for Academic Purposes

EAP as a field attempts to define and understand the conventions and expectations of academic discourse and in turn facilitate the design of materials and teaching approaches that best reflect this discourse (Hyland & Shaw, 2016). This definition makes university-level EAP courses relevant to all post-secondary students irrespective of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Second language learners have traditionally constituted the main student population in EAP programs which has cast a somewhat negative characterization of these programs as short-term remedial programs. However, defining EAP as an introduction to the conventions and practices of an academic culture foregrounds its academic acculturation mission and de-emphasizes the language-level remediation aspect. A key objective of EAP courses is to encourage critical thinking. Typical EAP tasks require a careful work of interpretation and framing so that students’ production is not a mere reflection of original texts (e.g., reading, lectures) but a representation of the learner’s stance towards the topic under discussion. Ultimately, students in EAP programs will be socialized into the literacy and discourse practices of their chosen disciplines and acquire the tools they need to become active and contributing members of their target academic communities.
Hyland and Shaw (2016) listed four key principles of EAP: (a) authenticity of instructional materials and tasks to prepare students for real-world challenges, (b) groundedness, meaning that texts are read and understood with reference to the context where they are generated, read, and negotiated, (c) interdisciplinarity since EAP draws on diverse theories and fields such as discourse analysis, pragmatics, and socio-cognitive theory, and (d) relevance to students’ projected needs. In this regard, Hirvela et al. (2016) singled out reading-to-write as one key aspect of all EAP programs, where students are expected to show awareness and mastery over both the process of reading for meaning and the productive processes of synthesis and critique. Within EAP research and courses, both reading and writing are increasingly seen as “inextricably linked” (Carson & Leki, 1993): both are understood as goal-directed acts of meaning generation and comprehension as results of complex transformations and restructuring of prior content knowledge and schemata (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Davis & Bistodeau, 1993; Horiba, 1996; Walczyk, 2000) and negotiation of writing/reading purposes (Hirvela, 2004). The predominance of integrative (reading-to-write) tasks in academic disciplines (Carson, 2001; Horowitz, 1986) and high-stakes (e.g., TOEFL) tests (Hamp-Lyons & Kroll, 1997; Cumming et al., 2005) justifies and supports the pedagogical focus in EAP courses on tasks such as summarizing, reporting, and drafting reviews and critical responses.

Hirvela (2004) noted, however, that while the research agenda related to EAP and the objectives of EAP programs are better defined now, in-class pedagogical approaches continue to adopt traditional basic approaches that rely heavily on using model texts and encouraging emulation of exemplars without addressing the broader purpose that each
text serves in the target community. Consequently, students may leave a sheltered EAP course context unprepared to face the real communicative challenges and expectations of their disciplines and the possible consequences of writing/reading-related offences such as incidental plagiarism resulting from a poor understanding of the concepts of academic honesty and intellectual property in academia.

Basturkmen (2016) argued that, while reading-to-write concerns have dominated the EAP literature and research efforts, the change in perception of the role of learners in instructional transactions has brought attention to the role of in-class dialogic interaction. A better understanding of the features, direction, and possible impact of this kind of interaction on a student’s ability to engage with the content being covered and willingness to participate in meaningful ways in the classroom discourse is needed. The present thesis study addresses this call and contributes to the growing awareness of dialogic interaction as an essential aspect of the learning context.

2.5. Interactional Ethnography

To address the research questions of this study, I used an interactional ethnographic approach to data representation and analysis. Putney, Green, Dixon, Duran and Yeager (2000) explained that interactional ethnography (IE) combines “a cultural anthropological perspective on the study of social life with an interactional sociolinguistic perspective on the study of language in use” (p. 90; see also, Castanheira, Crawford, Dixon, & Green, 2001; Castanheira, Green, Dixon, & Yeager, 2007; Crawford, Kelly, & Brown, 2000; Cutter, Palinscar, & Magnusson, 2002). Cutter et al. (2002) added that the ethnographic perspective inherent to the IE method allows the researcher to “develop and represent the insider or ‘emic’ perspective of a culture” while the analysis of the evolving
discursive practices of the members of a particular community allows the researcher to understand “the interactional construction of meaning through language” (p. 187). The two mutually informing and complementary perspectives give the approach a strong “expressive potential” (Putney et al., 2000, p. 86) in that it provides “an enhanced language for studying the dialogic, constructed and consequential nature of individual-collective activity” (pp. 86-7). For Putney and her colleagues, IE “provides a systematic way of studying learning as culturally and socially constructed” (p. 87). Castanheira et al. (2007) underlined the interdisciplinary character of the approach and its suitability as an orienting framework for the study of the social construction of life. The social events or episodes where opportunities for cultural knowledge construction and sharing come into being are related to the language used by the members and the interactions that take place over time and across events.

Cutter et al. (2002) highlighted three concepts that are fundamental to IE’s method: a definition of text and intertextuality, opportunities to learn, and the idea of take up. They define text as “the written and spoken language produced in a discursive event” (Fairclough, 1993, p. 138) and intertextuality as a “social construction […] located in the material of people’s social interactions” (Bloome & Egan-Roberston, 1993, p. 331). Cutter et al. stressed that the juxtaposition of texts does not constitute intertextuality. They adopted Bloome and Egan-Roberston’s (1993) view that “juxtaposition must be proposed, be interactionally recognized, be acknowledged and have social significance.” Next, they defined opportunity to learn as an interactional phenomenon where learning results from the individual’s making sense of the information available. Quoting Tuyay, Jennings and Dixon (1995), Cutter et al. argued that “an opportunity to learn is one that
offers the student a chance to interact with information and to make sense of it” (Tuyay et al., 1995, p. 7). They added that “in our conceptual frame, the proposal of intertextual links contributes to the construction of opportunities to learn” (p. 188). Finally, Cutter et al. characterized take up as “the individual or collective appropriation and transformation of knowledge” (p. 188) which can be demonstrated when a student starts using the acquired knowledge to complete new tasks.

Putney (2007) outlined the advantages of the IE approach when applied to classroom research. She argued that it allows the researcher to trace the way that academic content changes over time and becomes increasingly complex, nuanced and sophisticated. The approach can also reveal how participation in the social interactions that comprise classroom social life is “consequential” in terms of what students learn and take up. Through drawing a link between pivotal events and studying the moment-to-moment development in interactions, the researcher is able to locate “the time and places in which the negotiated meaning becomes available and taken up by individuals in the collectivity” (p. 130). As a result, the historicity, the intertextual ties between events, and the intersubjective spaces created become visible and open for examination (see also, Castanheira et al., 2007).

Putney (2007) demonstrated that IE is a suitable and informative investigative method within SCT research. She pointed out especially that the systematic analysis of interactions and intertextuality that the method allows helps reveal the dialogic work that takes place during interactions as well as when and how individuals internalize the language that is available to them in the instructional environment. This perspective is in line with Vygotsky’s (1978) call for a focus on the process of change and “a
developmental analysis that returns to the source and reconstructs all the points in the
development of a given structure” (p. 65). In fact, IE could be considered as one of the
“movie-like” methods that Siegler and Crowley (1991, cited in John-Steiner, Panofsky, &
Smith, 1994), advocated, that is, methods where frequency of observation is high
“relative to the rate of change of the phenomenon” (p. 606) as in the tradition of
microgenetic studies.

Both Castanheira et al. (2007) and Castanheira et al. (2001) pointed out that the IE
approach builds on Bakhtin’s idea of the reflexive nature of the hearer/speaker
relationship, the idea that speakers and hearers read each other as texts with delayed
responses. That is, “sooner or later what is heard and actively understood will find its
response in the subsequent speech or behavior of the listener. In most cases, genres of
complex cultural communication are intended precisely for this kind of actively
responsive understanding with delayed action” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 60).

Several studies have used IE for different research purposes and contexts.
Castanheira et al. (2007), for example, used IE to examine how identity formulations “are
proposed, recognized, acknowledged, and interactionally accomplished by [emphasis in
original], and intertextually and socially significant to [emphasis in original] participants
in the classroom” (p. 175). Their moment-by-moment analysis of the first session of a
mathematics class made visible the interactional spaces created and events that were
jointly constructed by the members of the new community. In addition, IE allowed
Castanheira et al. (2007) to trace the creation of ‘local knowledge’, knowledge that is
‘produced through the talk, actions (doings) and understandings/meanings constructed
across times and events in classrooms” (p. 174). Castanheira et al. (2007) also showed
how this knowledge contributed to the creation of identity potentials for both the classroom group and the individuals within the group.

Similarly, Cutter et al. (2002) used IE to document and examine conversations among a group of science teachers during collaborative professional development sessions as they observed small groups of “identified students” (i.e., students with special needs) working with normally achieving peers. Specifically, Cutter et al. showed how the conversations with and among the teachers helped the teachers recognize, acknowledge, and take up new understandings about the challenges that small-group work might pose to identified students and how best to support those students in instructional settings that foster inquiry and active participation. Cutter et al. argued that IE is suitable for the “analysis of learning that takes place through conversations in a professional development community that has an extended interactional history” (p. 186). They also pointed out that while IE was initially developed and used in K-12 classrooms, it can be applied to any learning site where members of a community co-construct meanings, including such professional-development sites as the one they studied.

Castanheira, Crawford, Dixon, and Green (2001) used IE to compare the construction of literate practices in five different classes attended by an 11-year old vocational student and to examine how this student adapted and partook in the different classes. The analysis of the interactions that were available to the student over time and events across the five subject-area classes differed considerably and had visible consequences for the learning opportunities, the understanding and definition of literacy and text authority, and the student’s identity as a reader, writer, and member of a particular community of practice. Talking about IE, the authors explained that the method
“looks at what is constructed in and through the moment-by-moment interactions among members of a social group; how members negotiate events through these interactions; and the ways in which knowledge and text generated in one event become linked to, and thus, a resource for, members’ actions in subsequent events” (p. 357).

Two other uses of IE, in slightly different contexts, are illustrated by Xu (2006) and Richardson Bruna (2007). Xu used IE as a theoretical framework for the investigation of toddlers’ emotional reactions to separation from their parents/caregivers when going to daycare. She pointed out her choice of the IE method was in response to the complexity of the cultural setting that she was investigating (a childcare program), one that can only be fully studied by “analyzing the meaning of actions and events of people in the observed culture” (p. 663). She suggested that the method allowed her to understand how “all the parts work together to form a whole” (p. 664). Finally, Richardson Bruna (2007) referred to IE as a tool, theory, and method. Richardson Bruna used IE to study transcultural repositioning as an affinity-group practice among teenage Mexicans living in the US. She found that the focus of the method “on the individual in interaction [emphasis in original] with other people mutually constructing each other’s social identities seemed particularly promising” (p. 245).

To conclude, IE allows the researcher to approach the classroom as a culture and to document and trace how the teacher and students evolve and develop both together as a community and as individuals when they interact and create, appropriate, and share the cultural resources of the classroom. Additionally, and as mentioned above, IE is congruent with the SCT view of learning and development and sees social transaction as central to the construction of the ZPD; within the classroom context, this entails a
transaction between individuals and between the collective and particular individuals. As such, the IE approach allows for an investigation at two levels, the developing collective and the individual within the collective (Putney et al., 2000).
Chapter 3: Method

Grounded in SCT and drawing on the concept of ZPD, this research study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of teaching and learning in a classroom setting through intensive data collected over the duration of an academic semester and a fine-grained analysis of the moment-to-moment learning process. To this end, a case study design was most appropriate. Specifically, I adopted an interactional ethnographic approach to analyze systematically how the teacher and students co-constructed key discursive events that promoted or facilitated learning, how they perceived these events, and how these events contributed to the development of the academic writing skills of the university students. Underlying the design and data collection procedures described below is the assumption that individual and collective ZPDs emerged in the interactions that constituted these key events and the learning opportunities that they presented. The study, thus, focused on one single classroom, and collected data from the teacher and three focal students to answer the research questions raised above. This chapter describes the design, context, participants, and data collection and analysis procedures used to address the research questions of the study. The participant names used below are pseudonyms; all other identifying information has been omitted to protect the identity of the participants.

3.1. Overview of the Study Design

The research questions raised in Chapter 1 were addressed through a longitudinal, instrumental (Stake, 2000) case study design that involved multiple data sources including classroom observation, stimulated recalls with the teacher and three focal students about selected excerpts of classroom interactions, stimulated recalls from the
students about three pieces of writing, and an in-depth interview with the teacher. In addition, multiple artifacts were collected throughout the semester, including course materials, student assignments, and teacher written assessments of the focal students’ progress. The study fronts the teacher’s perspective and take on all interactions and processes that took place during class time. However, the teacher’s perspective was corroborated by the perspective of the three focal students.

The case study design allows an in-depth examination of a ‘case’ within its ‘real-life’ context” (Yin, 2006) and therefore offers a firsthand understanding of the phenomena of advanced academic writing, learning, and teaching. I considered the case to be an advanced academic English class focused on the teaching of reading and writing to ESL/EFL students who were seeking qualifications to enter a North American postsecondary institution, including the teacher, students, and the different artifacts and tools they created and used together. The data collection instruments and procedures detailed below were designed to help describe and account for all the relevant elements of the EAP class as a bounded system (Barone, 2004; Stake, 2000), and the analysis shows how these elements interacted and influenced one another.

The study includes one holistic case study and three embedded case studies. The holistic case study focuses on the class as a whole for the duration of an academic session (12 weeks). It includes an analysis of aspects of the interactional space created in class and the teacher’s understanding of it. In addition, the three focal students constitute, each, an embedded single-case case study, which, while related to the holistic case study (i.e., the classroom), and contributing to and shaping it in different ways, has unique characteristics that were examined and then compared and contrasted to the other
participants (Yin, 2006). This design addresses the research questions above because it helps trace how different students with different histories and developmental levels benefited from classroom interactions.

3.2. Quality of the Research

Qualitative research designs, such as case studies, are often criticized for lack of generalizability, questionable validity, and limited reliability. Yin (2006), however, argued that these criticisms are based on a misconception of case study research and design, while Borman, Clarke, Cotner and Lee (2006) proposed dependability and consistency as alternative criteria for rigorous qualitative research in general. They explained that “this can be achieved by researchers declaring their position vis-à-vis the group being studied, triangulating data collection methods, and providing details of data collection and analysis processes” (p. 130).

3.2.1. Researcher Location

I learned academic writing first at high school and then during a four-year English Language and Literature degree program in Tunisia. At both levels, classes were predominantly teacher-fronted and focused mostly on grammar drilling and accuracy in sentence structure. In high school, I was ‘subjected’ to all the exactitudes of the audiolingual method. Writing was limited to the reproductions of exemplar sentences. During my BA program in English Language and Literature, I took a composition class focused mainly on the five-paragraph structure. I believe that my first true understanding, my a-ha moment about the meaning and significance of writing in English, occurred in my first graduate year while I was taking an M.Ed. in English for Specific Purposes and an M.A. in Applied Linguistics simultaneously, at the University of Tunis. These two
programs helped me see the complexity of writing in English beyond the generic five-paragraph essay and the thesis-antithesis structure. Besides, with the new graduate level writing requirements I was facing I felt challenged and intrigued by writing. As I started writing my M.A. thesis, I felt overwhelmingly unprepared. My M.A. (which was about EAP student writing!) was my real first experience in writing an extended English essay.

My first teaching experience was an undergraduate EAP course I taught to students majoring in Archive Administration. I was responsible for syllabus design, material development and teaching and grading. The experience was challenging on many levels. Despite my best efforts, I was not satisfied with my performance. Young, freshly graduated, without special training, coaching, or academic/administrative support, I fell back on the teaching methods I was exposed to as a student. I felt ‘trapped’ in that model, and failed to find the resources and the energy to break ‘the cycle’. My mediocre teaching performance was one of the impetuses for my decision to pursue a Ph.D. and to focus on investigating EFL writing.

My doctoral studies at OISE introduced me to the social constructivist views of teaching and learning; I believe on a theoretical level in the merits of such an approach. I find meaning and logic in the writings of social constructivists and have an affinity with this line of reasoning. However, I still, at times, have some difficulty reconciling my learning experiences with the literature I read. I wonder, for instance, what level of English proficiency I would have achieved had I learned English within a constructivist approach? What aspects of my language learning experience would be different, better, or worse? As such, I came to this research project with a genuine desire to learn and discover what happens in an advanced EAP writing classroom.
During the data collection, I was constantly reflecting on my experience as an EAP student and on my previous EAP teaching experience. I related to the experiences of the three focal students and their struggles because they were similar to what I experienced in my first exposure to English. This shared background and past experiences facilitated my interaction with all three students during the interviews and stimulated recall sessions. There may have been more affinity with the two Arabic-speaking participants because, when necessary, we could use an Arabic word or idiom together. However, these instances were rare, and I believe I built rapport with all three students equally.

3.2.2. Validity

No claims to generalizability are made in the present study; the aim is to achieve an in-depth understanding of a particular case that sheds light on the issues at stake. In this regard, I agree with Calkins (1983) that every case is representative in that it is unique. Triangulation is achieved through the collection of multiple data sources (classroom observation, stimulated recalls, and interviews) and contrasting different perspectives on each data set (results of class activity coding, teacher and student perspectives on selected class episodes).

I support the view that meaning is created in acts of communication where both interlocutors shape the content, direction, and interpretation of the utterances produced in the moment. As such, research sessions (whether interviews, retrospective protocol sessions, or even coding of any given text) create intertextual spaces that depend on and consecrate distributed cognition. In other words, I reject the naïve view that the researcher can or should ‘control’ every aspect of the interaction with the participant.
because such control is not possible and may be counterproductive as it leads to different sets of biases and ethical concerns. I am aware that the data I present may be filtered, to some extent, by my own biases and understandings of the phenomena I observe as well as some limitations inherent to the data collection techniques I used. Consequently, I took a number of precautions to ensure descriptive and interpretive validity, that is, to ensure that the data-based evidence I present is factually accurate and that my reconstruction of the participants’ activities corresponds to their own interpretations, and thus faithfully represents their voices. Following is a description of the precautions I took to address a number of concerns usually raised in relation to qualitative research.

3.2.2.1. Observer paradox

To thoroughly understand how opportunities for learning are co-constructed in class (research question 2), it was imperative to video-record class meetings. Video recording allows the researcher to collect rich, complex interaction data in their natural ecology and to apply multiple fine-grained analyses that are impossible to achieve with any other tool. However, there are concerns with the effects of the Observer Paradox, such as concerns that recording may have contaminated (Speer, 2002; Speer & Hutchby, 2003), corrupted, or even invalidated the data (Hazel, 2016). In the case of video-recording, Labov’s Observer Paradox is intensified by the constant presence of video equipment and the researcher’s setting and manipulation of it. It can also be argued that if “systematic observation of a speaker defines a formal context where more than the minimum attention is paid to speech” (Labov, 1984), then the participants’ awareness that their speech and actions will be eternalized for further scrutiny by an infinite number of people will affect their speech and behavioral patterns even more. Ultimately, what is
recorded and observed may be very different from what is ‘typical’ or ‘natural’ in the target natural ecology.

A number of measures are recommended to minimize the effect of the Observer Paradox. Some researchers have argued that part of the novelty and curiosity provoked by the presence of the researcher and the camera wears off eventually (e.g. Jordan & Henderson, 1995). Others have recommended that researchers be as invisible as possible (e.g., abstain from interacting with the participants or interrupting the natural flow of the observed activity, setting up equipment before the beginning of the activity).

I followed these recommendations during the classroom observation phase of the research. I sat at the same table at the end of the class with the camera behind me during all the observed sessions, and I did not participate in the class discussions. In this regard, Hazel (2016) noted that video-recording allows the researcher to see “embodied attention [from the participants] to the [video] equipment” (p.447) during the recording session, which can indicate the level or extent of distraction created by the equipment. I searched for any indicators of distraction by the video equipment while I was coding the video footage, and I noted only a couple of instances where a student faced the camera and made jokes. The instances occurred during the break time. Overall, there was no obvious indication that my presence altered the course of events in the classroom.

3.2.2.2. Non-veridicality and reactivity of verbal reports

The data for this project include retrospective verbal reports provided by the students and the teacher in relation to selected episodes of classroom interaction. Despite the growing understanding that verbal protocols are orderly reports of immediately accessible information stored in working memory and/or activated information retrieved
from long-term memory, there are nonetheless concerns about the reactivity and incompleteness of verbal reports.

Within an information processing perspective, reactivity of retrospective reports is seen as the result of the participants’ heightened “critical attention” (Stratman & Hamp-Lyons, 1994) to their verbalization of their reported processes, which can in turn increase their learning or alter subsequent learning behavior and/or the participants’ desires to reveal strategies/processes that they perceive as positive or ‘good’ (e.g., Hamp-Lyons, 1994). Within an SCT perspective, Swain (2006a) objected to the idea of verbal reports as “brain dumps”. She argued that verbalization mediates thinking. Verbalizing (languaging) thus creates and ‘solidifies meaning’. Verbalizing results in a verbalized artifact which is easier to manipulate and restructure than a non-verbalized thought. Therefore, verbalization plays a role in learning and cognitive development, as evidenced in the findings of studies such as Chi (2000) and Chi et al. (1994, 2001) and, in an SCT framework, studies such as Swain (2006b), Swain (2010), and Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki and Brooks (2010). Similarly, Smagorinsky (2001) argued that language is not a mere vehicle of thought but an “agent in the production of meaning” that mediates cognition and becomes an integral part of the thought process reported in verbal protocols. Within this view, reactivity is not only unavoidable but also valuable and useful (Swain, 2006a).

Aware of the possible effect of verbalization as expressed by different theoretical orientations, I explained the purpose of the study to the participants in my first introduction to them. I stressed that the project aimed to document, not evaluate, their actual thought processes, and that there was no such thing as a wrong, perfect, or
expected answer. I also emphasized that the research project was unrelated to their course in any direct way and that the teacher did not know who was participating. This explanation helped them see the two activities as separate, thus minimizing the transfer back to the learning context. Moreover, I asked the teacher to explain that the project was separate from the course and would have no effect on her assessments of their overall performance.

There is also a concern about (a) the completeness of verbal report data, that is, whether a verbal report ‘captures’ all the mental states (processes, strategies, and retrievals from previous knowledge) and (b) the veridicality of the data, that is, whether a verbal report is a faithful representation of those mental states only. Ericsson and Simon (1987, 1993) argued that verbal reports are necessarily incomplete because automatized and non-verbal states are not accessible to research participants and, therefore, cannot be reported. An SCT perspective would argue that even automatized and non-verbal states may also be made available through verbalization.

Ericsson and Simon also pointed out that omissions do not diminish the value of the data collected because the reported data should be sufficient to infer the nature of the un-reportable processes. It is possible to posit nonetheless that memory constraints can lead to omissions beyond those predicted by Ericsson and Simon. This limitation is especially problematic with retrospective reports that are collected some time after task completion, as participants might forget the information heeded at the time of task completion even when prompted by stimuli (e.g., Jourdenais, 2001). To address this concern, I played a video recording of the selected class episodes before the participants
commented on them. I played back enough footage to allow each participant to recall the moment we were about to discuss.

Non-veridicality of verbal reports may be more consequential, as it may result in narratives based on participants’ own “theories of mind” (Bowles & Leow, 2005) instead of an ongoing description of their operational thought processes. This concern is especially true with research participants who have a sophisticated understanding of the construct under investigation. To minimize this effect of verbal protocols, I related my protocol questions and the subsequent exchanges with the participants to specific moments of class interactions and asked for descriptions rather than explanations of observed patterns. The phrasing of the protocol questions was revised several times to ensure that the questions did not lead or allow participants to ‘create’ potentially inaccurate narratives.

3.2.2.3. Member checks

Because the answers to the research questions of this project entailed the interpretation of data collected from a teacher and three students, it was important to conduct member checks on my interpretations to ensure that my understanding and representation of their data were accurate. Richards (2003) defined member-checking as a process that “seeks[s] views of member [participants] on accuracy of data gathered, descriptions or even interpretations” (p. 287). Eisenhart (2006) advised that when a participant expresses reservations or disagrees with the researcher’s interpretation of a phenomenon, the researcher has to verify that the participant accepts the interpretation as plausible or change the interpretation altogether so it is more in line with the one proposed by the participant.
I provided the final draft of chapters 4 and 5 below (based on the analysis and coding of the classroom discourse and the teacher’s interviews and stimulated recalls, respectively) to the teacher to read and comment on. Her response was as follows:

I just finished reading both attached documents: the summary of findings and chapters 1 and 2. It was fascinating to read your in-depth analysis and deconstruction of my class during the sessions you witnessed and recorded. It not only accurately reflected my approach to teaching at that time, it also shows that my approach has changed very little. I was especially struck by your comments on the need for instructors to interact with international students very individually and sensitively. That awareness has contributed to continued positive student feedback and success.[ Email message, 16/12/2016]

Only two of the three focal students were available for a member check. I sent each of them their respective case study. They both approved of my interpretations and requested two minor changes. Reema corrected the name of her degree, whereas Ivy asked that I not use one sentence from her transcript because the wording was confusing and did not reflect exactly what she had wanted to say. Both corrections were made and are reflected in the final draft of this thesis.

3.3. Context of the Study

I recruited one teacher and three of her students from an EAP program housed at a large Canadian university (See consent letters in Appendix A and B). The program, entitled ‘Academic English for University/College’, offers several ESL courses with different foci (e.g., development of oral skills, grammar, and literacy). It attracts international students who are preparing to register at a North American university or college. A low-intermediate level in English is required to enter this program. Based on the results of a placement test administered at the beginning of each course session, students are assigned to four different levels: low intermediate, intermediate, high
intermediate or advanced. Within this program, reading-writing classes are offered at different levels, from beginners to advanced. I conducted the study in the most advanced level in the program. A passing mark at the end of this level of the program is accepted as evidence of adequate competence in academic writing to satisfy the admission requirements of most academic programs offered by the Canadian university where the EAP program is housed. Other universities do not recognize the passing grade to complete this course, and they require that students instead obtain certain scores on a standardized writing test to demonstrate their English proficiency.

Three factors justify the choice of this program as the site for my research. First, the program does not have an established syllabus. Therefore, teachers, in consultation with colleagues and following general curricular guidelines, have considerable freedom to decide on the content and sequence of their classes. While there is a textbook that brings unity and structure to courses taught by different teachers, the moment-to-moment decisions on whether and how to adopt the textbook are left to each teacher. Therefore, the teacher has more freedom and latitude to adapt the course content and difficulty level to the needs and levels of the students as she perceives them than would be the case in other instructional contexts, where the teacher is constrained by a strict syllabus.

Second, the 12-week EAP course in this school aims to help the students registered in the most advanced class achieve a level of performance that allows them to satisfy the language proficiency requirements of their elected university program. Students and teachers alike work together towards constant progress in this direction, usually with positive results as evidenced by the popularity and good reputation of the
program. Therefore, the 12-week semester represents a complete set of learning events, long enough to witness and document real progress in a longitudinal research study.

According to the program brochure, final grades are based on language proficiency as demonstrated in “class work, assignments, tests, oral presentations, a writing portfolio, and a final writing, speaking, listening and reading test” (page numbers not identified to protect confidentiality). But the course I studied promises to “help [students] get into the university or college of [their] choice or purely learn English in a rigorous and challenging way”. The brochure also states that the program will help students “develop the language skills necessary to communicate in an academic environment. Language instruction includes strong emphasis on written work. Activities and materials are drawn from authentic academic settings”. The intended outcomes of training in this program include the following: (a) learn to write accurate, organized and well-developed summaries, responses, and essays; (b) improve speed and accuracy in reading and listening comprehension; (c) develop critical reading and listening strategies; and (d) learn academic transfer skills such as annotation, note-taking, summarizing and concept-mapping.

Third, most previous ZPD studies focused on child development or on young students’ learning (typically in elementary or early high school contexts). As a result, most of this research remains close to Vygotsky’s original conceptualization of the ZPD. The present research studied the ZPD in an advanced EAP course and with students who were preparing for post-secondary studies--with the intent to examine whether and how the ZPD applies to mature, educated adults with advanced levels of English proficiency.
3.4. Participants

I approached one experienced literacy teacher within the EAP program with the idea of the research. We met before the beginning of the course session and discussed the procedure and our roles during the research project. In the first day of the course, she introduced me to her class. I presented my project and asked for students’ consent to have all class sessions videotaped and for some students to volunteer as focal students and provide more intensive data. Only one student objected to have his in-class videotaped interactions used as research data. However, he did not object to being videotaped. Any interactions that involved this particular student were not used in this study. Five students agreed to become focal students; however, my analyses focused on three students only in order to address the research questions purposefully. I chose three students at clearly distinct levels of writing competence as evidenced by the quality of their written assignments, overall course grades, teacher evaluations, and each student’s self-assessments. This selection of contrasting cases aimed to highlight pertinent elements of the teaching/learning context created in the EAP class.

3.4.1. The Teacher

It is recommended to use purposeful sampling in case study research (Barone, 2004; Patton, 1990) that targets “information rich cases” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). In this project, ‘information rich’ was defined in terms of length of experience teaching EAP curricula and a successful professional record. For instance, Peterson and Comeaux (1987), who compared novice and experienced high school teachers’ recall and analyses of problem events during interactive teaching, found that experienced teachers recalled more classroom events and that their analysis of classroom events was more principled
than that of the novices. Such ability to provide structured and principled accounts of classroom interactions was particularly important for the present study. Given that the teacher was to be the focal element of the bounded system in this study, I sought advice and recommendations about a suitable instructor from colleagues, teachers, and other staff who were familiar with the program. Kate was strongly recommended. After obtaining permission from the program office to conduct the study, I contacted Kate and discussed my study with her. She agreed to participate and gave me permission to videotape all class meetings, recruit focal students from her class, and have access to all course materials. She also agreed to provide stimulated recalls during scheduled one-on-one meetings.

Kate is an experienced teacher who started her career teaching French in middle public schools. She holds an M.A. degree and a Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) certificate. She had taught ESL students at the same Canadian university for 12 years prior to the present research. She explained that she gained confidence in her practices through experience and a willingness to learn. She said she is committed to students’ academic growth and success but she also did her utmost to offer them comfort and support.

3.4.2. The Class

The class included 13 (7 females and 6 males) students who agreed to being videotaped and having their data used for the research project. They varied in age between 19 and 26, with an average age of 21.8; this average, however, does not include 2 older students who seemed to be in their early to mid-forties and who declined to give their ages. Therefore, the class included mostly young adult students who had just
finished high school or undergraduate studies. There were 6 Chinese, 5 Saudi, and 2 Turkish students who all reported speaking English in addition to their respective L1s (i.e., Mandarin/Cantonese, Arabic, and Turkish). That the students mostly belonged to the same age group and two main original nationalities helped create a positive and cheerful energy in the classroom. The students did not know each other before the beginning of the term. However, throughout the term, I could see friendships forming: students choosing to sit at the same table, consulting each other on assignments, and planning outings after class. These friendships tended to form mainly between students from the same background but not exclusively.

There was some variation in the students’ lengths of previous studies of English, which varied from 3.5 years to over 11 years: 3 students had had less than 5 years of formal instruction in English, 6 students had studied English for 6 to 10 years, and 3 students had more than 10 years of English experience. Questionnaire data suggest that the students were having their first experiences living in an English-dominant country.

Five students stated that they were taking their first course in the EAP program, which meant that they were admitted to the highest proficiency level on their first application. The other eight students varied in their prior enrollments in the program: six students were placed in classes at lower proficiency levels before completing them then being admitted to the highest level at the time of data collection for this study, and two students were repeating the present, highest level at the time of data collection.

The students’ previous experience with English was, to a large degree, similar. There were only two noticeable exceptions: The two older students and the two students with the longest EFL experience stood out in the class, and they seemed to have more
social connections outside the classroom. Four students were planning to pursue university programs at the M.A. or M.Sc. level, one was planning to apply to a Ph.D. program, and the rest of the students were working to meet admission requirements at the B.A. or B.Sc. levels upon completing the course studied for this research.

In a short questionnaire administered at the beginning of the semester, the teacher asked the students to rate their writing skills and to identify the main difficulties they had. The questionnaire also included questions about students’ reading skills and difficulties but only the results of the section on writing are reported here.

One student rated her writing ability as below average, six as average, five as above average, and one as well above average. The writing difficulties mentioned related mainly to grammar, syntax, and vocabulary use. Seven students pointed out difficulties with sentence construction and accuracy or spelling of grammatical items such as verbs. Seven students reported having difficulties with word choice. Three students stated they had difficulty generating and formulating ideas for different parts of an essay, mainly the introduction. As a class, the group of students aimed to improve different aspects of their writing. Eight students stated that they wanted to improve their grammatical accuracy and sentence construction, variety, and complexity; three wanted to develop better vocabulary. Other objectives mentioned by the students included writing in a more academic and formal style and being able to generate ideas.

3.4.3. The Focal Students

The focal students agreed to identify the most important class episodes at the end of each class session and then to meet regularly with me to answer interview questions and provide stimulated recalls in response to footage of selected class episodes. Reema,
Brad, and Ivy (all pseudonyms) presented contrasting cases. Reema was described by the teacher as a good writer who started the course “with a strong potential and did not disappoint” (Teacher SR4). Reema was first admitted in the EAP program at the level just below the present course, completed that lower level course successfully, and made an easy transition into the present class. Ivy was placed in the present course soon after arriving to Canada from Saudi Arabia. She was one of the strongest students in the class. Brad started the program at two proficiency levels below the present course, and completed that and the subsequent course before progressing to the present, most advanced course. He was one of the weakest students in the class; the teacher predicted he would fail the final test. Table 3.1 provides a profile summary for each focal student. The case studies of the three focal students in Chapter 6 provide further relevant information about their backgrounds and learning experiences.

3.5. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

I video-taped 10 out of the 12 weeks of class sessions and I took copious notes structured around a class observation chart. I asked the teacher to perform stimulated recalls (SR) on selected episodes of classroom sessions. The teacher also recorded SRs at the end of one-one-one conference meetings with students, responded to an in-depth interview at the end of the semester, and answered a background questionnaire.

In order to collect data on the students’ experiences and perspectives on their learning, I collected from the focal students (a) a background questionnaire (b) stimulated recalls in relation to selected classroom episodes, and (c) stimulated recalls on selected writing assignments. Reema and Ivy also accepted to think-aloud while completing homework and other assignments outside the classroom.
Table 3.1: Profile of the three focal students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Reema</th>
<th>Brad</th>
<th>Ivy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origin</strong></td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>L1</strong></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of previous EFL studies</strong></td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>High school + university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest degree obtained</strong></td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target university program</strong></td>
<td>MA computer</td>
<td>BA in Commerce</td>
<td>Master of Law (LLM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous courses in the EAP program</strong></td>
<td>One lower level course</td>
<td>Two lower level courses</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-assessment of writing skills</strong></td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Above-average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main concerns with writing- as per students</strong></td>
<td>Generating ideas for introduction; finding supporting arguments; agreement and word forms.</td>
<td>Grammar and verb tenses.</td>
<td>Lexical choice and variety; Spelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing improvement goal- as per students</strong></td>
<td>Including more vocabulary and structure, awareness of developing ideas while writing, focusing on grammar mistakes.</td>
<td>Improving in general; no specifics</td>
<td>Sentence structure, a way to articulate thoughts in academic ways, vocabulary use, correct grammar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5.1. Teacher Background Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix C) collected relevant information concerning the profile of the teacher, including questions about the teacher’s background, age, academic training, and ESL teaching experiences.

3.5.2. Student Background Questionnaire

The student questionnaire (Appendix D) aimed to collect information about the focal students’ profiles, including information on their language background, gender, age, previous academic training, and experiences learning ESL and future career goals. I also
asked the students to specify what aspects of their writing they aimed to improve at the beginning of the term.

### 3.5.3. Classroom Observation

The advanced EAP class usually met three times a week for a total of 11 hours per week. I videotaped class meetings during the first 10 weeks of the 12-week course. I judged that my presence in the last 2 weeks was not necessary and potentially disruptive because Week 11 was an intense week as teacher and students wrapped up the course and readied themselves for the final tests, and Week 12 was reserved for testing.

I placed the camera in an angle at the back of the classroom facing the blackboard. It captured a wide view that included the teacher’s desk at the front of the room and students’ tables. Following Erickson’s (2006) recommendation, raw footage of the classroom interactions was captured on tape as a continuous shot (i.e. no moving of the camera or zooming or panning). The purpose was to obtain a phenomenologically neutral document that was not filtered through my perception or biases about what was important and what was not. The camera was placed at the back of the classroom in an attempt to capture as much of the participants and the ensuing interactions as possible. When something special happened in class, I took copious notes but I did not change the position of the camera to capture such events.

Because interactions are ‘complex’, ‘nuanced’, ‘routine’ and ‘transparent to the participants’ (Erickson, 2006), videotaping was necessary to capture the richness of these interactions and the way they comprised teaching moments and contributed to learning. The footage of class meetings allowed for a detailed transcription and coding and fine-grained analyses that would be otherwise impossible. Videotaping the entire course
allowed me to trace intertextuality, development, and change over time. In other words, it provided a way to trace “the history of relationships, delayed responses within particular cycles of activity and exploring intertextual and intercontextual links” (Putney et al., 2000, p.95).

I took detailed field-notes, focusing especially on the role of the teacher, the changing roles and participation patterns of students, with a special attention to the three focal students, and the themes covered and how they evolved over the sessions and weeks. I used a classroom observation chart (shown in Appendix E) to organize my field notes. Field notes contained comments and remarks that I noted at the time of the interaction in class, and they helped me better interpret the video data at the time of the analysis, giving more context.

I attended the classes as a non-participant observer (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, cited in Cothran & Ennism, 2001). My role was limited to observing, videotaping and note taking; I did not interfere in the dynamics of the class or the interactions between classroom participants. I was aware that a ‘neutral’ role in social contexts is not possible (Van Lier, 1997); as a researcher, I interacted with the teacher and students not only for research purposes but also to build rapport. However, I tried to minimize any effect of my presence in the class during teaching time by setting up all research equipment before class sessions started, leaving the class after everybody else had left, and abstaining from taking part in class discussions.

3.5.4. **Stimulated Recalls**

I collected Stimulated Recalls (SR) about selected classroom episodes from the teacher and the three focal students. SRs are a type of verbal report data collection
method or technique that linguists borrowed from cognitive psychology within the process-oriented approach to language-related research. SR data are collected by asking research participants to report their thoughts, immediately after the completion of a task and stimulated by relevant data such as video or audio recordings and/or people’s own written texts (Ericsson & Simon, 1987, 1993; Faerch & Kasper, 1987; Gass & Mackey, 2000; Green, 1998; Smagorinsky, 1994). The researcher, thus, documents and gains direct access to the participants’ processes, strategies, and knowledge instead of having to infer the nature of these cognitive operations from observable behavioral events (Faerch & Kasper, 1987, p. 9).

Verbal reports, including SRs, were associated with the introspective methods of enquiry which were rejected by behaviorists as speculative and therefore invalid (Wilson, 1994). However, new insights gained from information processing models, rehabilitated verbal reports as rigorous techniques that yield useful data. These models posit that the researcher’s prompts during the SR session (direct questions, audio-recording or video footage of the event/task being investigated) helps the participant activate, organize and retrieve information stored in short and long-term memory.

SRs are commonly used in research that investigates teacher and/or learner cognition (Fox-Turnbull, 2011; Schepens et al., 2007). For instance, Tondeur, Kershaw, Vanderlinde and van Braak (2013) collected SR data from primary school teachers to “explore the black box” of beliefs and practices related to the use of technology in class. “To increase authentic understandings of technology integration”, the researchers asked the teachers to verbalize their thoughts as they played video footage of the teachers’ classroom practices. Baker (2104) used SRs to investigate the connection between
teachers’ beliefs, knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes and their pronunciation teaching practices and techniques. Consuegra, Engles and Wilegems (2016) collected teachers’ SR on videotaped lessons showing gendered student-teacher interactions. Their SR data revealed the thoughts, images and emotions associated with teachers’ reactions to interactions with boys and girls in class.

SRs were also used to collect data from students and learners. For instance, Mykkanen, Perry and Jarvela (2017) investigated Finnish primary school students’ understanding of their own achievement in a classroom context by asking them to comment on video footage of lessons they attended and explain their achievements in specific class episodes. Yu and Lee (2014) used SR to study two EFL students’ motives in participating in group peer feedback activities in an EFL classroom.

A number of measures taken in this project to maximize the validity of the SR data collected were described above. The following two subsections detail the procedures applied to collect SRs from the teacher and focal students in this project.

### 3.5.4.1. Teacher Stimulated Recalls

At the end of each videotaped class meeting (three times a week), I asked Kate to identify the class activity that she thought went particularly well in relation to the entire class or to a particular student. I then located the teacher-selected activity on the videotapes and scheduled a meeting to watch and discuss the footage of the teacher-selected activity as well as activities selected by the focal students. These stimulated recalls or video-based interview sessions (Erickson, 2006) were guided by general questions (Appendix F) aimed at understanding Kate’s perceptions of the moment-to-moment interactions and how they contributed or not to the establishment of a zone of
proximal development. Besides the core questions in Appendix F, I used prompts and further questions when appropriate to follow up on pertinent topics raised by Kate during each session. Erickson (2006) warned that because social interactions are complex, ‘highly selective’, habitual’, ‘information-rich’, and ‘continually forgotten’, retrospective accounts ‘cannot be taken literally for purposes of analysis’ (p. 179). Nevertheless, he conceded that despite all the limitations, recalls constitute valuable sources of information about “the participant’s reaction to the viewing itself [emphasis in original] and this can help the analyst determine how implicit meaning is being (and perhaps was being) interpreted by the participants.” (p. 185).

By focusing on teacher-selected activities, that is, activities that were of special interest to the teacher, I hoped to gain an insight into Kate’s views on crucial moments in the class interactions. In addition, special care was taken to establish a rapport based on trust and a clear understanding of the purpose of the research so as to maximize the efficiency and dependability of the accounts collected during these recall sessions. The purpose of the stimulated recalls and interviews was to gain an emic understanding of the class dynamics. These recall sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

3.5.4.2. Focal Student Stimulated Recalls

At the end of each class session, I asked each of the three focal students to identify important activities that helped them learn or understand a concept better. I then scheduled stimulated recall sessions to discuss the activities chosen by them, their peers, and the teacher. The students’ stimulated recalls were guided by a set of questions (Appendix G) aimed at capturing their perspectives on the interactions featured in the
selected activities. These data were collected for two reasons. First, underlying the present research is the theory that interactions that contribute to the establishment of a ZPD are co-constructed by the participants. Therefore, it was important to corroborate the teacher’s and students’ perspectives on the selected activities. Second, as Chinn (2006) pointed out, it is not always easy or possible to capture individual student’s contributions and development through an examination of their spoken utterances during class time. Chinn explained that some students may not participate overtly in the discussions in class while others may “verbally agree with peers while privately holding different views that they do not express, or they may express agreement with ideas that they cannot produce on their own” (p. 452). These recall sessions were recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis.

3.5.4.3. Stimulated Recalls about Writing Samples

I selected three writing assignments submitted by the students at the beginning, middle and end of the term. I asked the focal students to provide stimulated recalls on these three pieces of writing. I asked them to describe their goals, their writing processes, and their assessments of the quality of the writing so as to examine the language they used in ‘thinking’ about their own writing.

The first essay, the diagnostic essay, was written in class during the first week of the course. It was then rewritten and resubmitted during the last week of the course (Week 10). The interviews focused on the first draft and the rewrite. The students were given the choice to write about one of two topics:

(a) In addition to good grades, what other factors might contribute to a successful university experience? Or

(b) Is it necessary to have a university education to be successful?
I asked the students to provide a SR on the first draft at the beginning of the semester after the teacher had graded and provided feedback on it. I asked them to provide a second SR on the revised version after it was graded and commented by the teacher at the end of the semester.

The students also discussed a benchmark assignment that was submitted in the middle of the semester (Week 5). The students were free to choose a topic of interest to them but the ultimate goal was to illustrate their understanding of the problem-solution essay structure that they had learned in class by posing a problem and proposing a solution that is supported and exemplified.

3.5.5. Teacher In-depth Final Interview

I conducted a semi-structured interview (Appendix H) at the end of the term after all grades had been submitted. I asked Kate to reflect on her experiences with each of the focal students and her assessments of their initial levels, their progress, and how she had helped them develop over the duration of the course. The goal of this interview was to obtain a rich account of Kate’s perceptions of each student’s progress and how it fit in the whole class experience.

3.5.6. Student Final Interview

In the final interview, I asked the focal students whether they felt they had achieved the goals they had set at the beginning of the course, whether the course was appropriate to their level of English and met their needs, and if there were any changes that would have made a difference in their assessments of the course.
3.5.7. *Teacher Comments on One-on-one Conference Meetings with Students*

Kate invited her students to schedule regular one-on-one meetings with her to discuss their writing and any concerns they might have. She agreed to record general comments at the end of each conference session with students. My instructions to Kate were deliberately broad. I asked her to comment on the main points discussed and her overall impressions at the end of each conference. I was careful not to influence her approach to these conference meetings and also not to burden her. The comments varied in length and focus. The one-on-one sessions were scheduled at the request of the students, so the number of sessions per student varied widely. Kate recorded comments about 33 sessions with different students.

3.5.8. *Think-aloud Protocols about Written Home Assignments*

I asked the three focal students to think aloud as they completed some of their writing homework. Reema and Ivy accepted to record their thoughts while working on new essays, completing writing exercises or revising second or third drafts of essays. Brad first agreed but then declined because he found the think-aloud task too demanding and complex.

3.5.9. *Other Data and Artifacts Collected*

During my class visits, I collected several types of documents.

3.5.9.1. *Course material.*

I obtained a copy of the textbook used by all the teachers in the program. The textbook entitled *Essay Essentials with Readings* (Norton & Green, 2008) includes six main parts subdivided into several chapters. The first 3 parts—namely planning, drafting and revising—aim to guide students through the process of effective writing with a special
emphasis on the importance of revising and editing. The fourth part introduces seven types of rhetorical modes: description, narration, process, classification and division, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, and argument and persuasion. Part 5 focuses on ‘the research paper’ and attends to issues such as researching a topic, summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting, and plagiarism. Part 6 presents a review of basic grammar rules and addresses grammatical and syntactic problems such as run-on sentences, sentence fragments, and subject-verb agreement. Chapters start with a detailed presentation of a main theme (e.g., your audience and you) followed by a number of writing exercises that require the production of writing samples that vary from short answers to paragraphs or specific essay parts to full essays.

3.5.9.2. Teacher handouts.

I collected all the handouts that Kate distributed during the semester. These handouts fell into three categories: (a) notes to accompany teacher presentations about some themes (e.g., how to write a summary), (b) practice exercises, and (c) readings that served as support or reference material for student writing. Kate handed out a total of 300 pages of different photocopied material to each student throughout the term.

3.5.9.3. Students’ written work and teacher feedback.

The focal students shared their essays and other written work with me. They also shared the feedback they received from their teacher. Feedback was in the form of marginal comments, overall assessments at the end of the student work, a grade, and annotations on an evaluation rubric.
The students submitted 10 writing samples to be graded (Table 3.2), but it was not possible for me to obtain all 10 samples from each student because of several logistic reasons (e.g., students missed the session or lost a copy).

Table 3.2: Schedule of writing assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Diagnostic writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Profile of a peer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Paragraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Problem solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Problem solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Short answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Short answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>In-class essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Argumentative essay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5.9.4. Mid-term evaluation questionnaire.

Kate administered a short mid-term questionnaire that asked the students to identify their personal strengths in reading and writing, list what needed improvement, explain how the course met their needs, and state what could be different in the course.

3.6. Data Collection Process

3.6.1. Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study in the same program where I was planning to conduct the main study but with a different teacher, in a class at a slightly lower proficiency level (i.e., the second most advanced level in the program). I implemented the same research design as in this thesis over a period of two weeks, using the same procedures and a first draft of the research instruments described above.
The pilot study helped me refine my research instruments. For instance, it became clear that my field notes needed to be more structured and organized. Therefore, I adopted a chart to complete during class observation. I also decided to revise the wording of some interview questions, and more importantly, I revised the research questions in anticipation of the type and quality of data that I realized would be available and accessible in this kind of EAP class. It also became clear that the video data would be extremely valuable given the richness of the interactions. Therefore, I decided to have a running video footage of all sessions which would later be corroborated with my structured field notes. I also concluded that it was more useful to work at the highest proficiency level in the program rather than at lower levels because some students at the lower level had difficulty expressing themselves and explaining their learning processes in English. The pilot data were not used in the main study.

3.6.2. Main Study

As indicated above, I videotaped all class meetings for ten weeks. The class met three times a week (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) for a total of 11 hours on a typical week. Some class sessions were cut short to allow students to attend other activities (e.g., orientation/advising meetings, guest speaker presentations). Some sessions fell on a holiday. Therefore, the actual number of sessions and total instructional time varied from week to week. I attended all class meetings and collected about 70 hours of class footage. During class sessions, I used a chart (Appendix E) to structure my field notes focusing especially on recording the time each activity started, the development of the teacher’s role during the activity, students’ participation and organization patterns, the types of
support material used and the types of follow-up to be done as homework or in subsequent sessions.

At the end of each session, I asked the teacher to identify activities that she thought went well. I asked the focal students to answer the following five questions:

1. Did you learn something new today?
2. Did you understand something better today?
3. If you learned something new or understood something better today, can you tell me when that happened?
4. What helped you learn?
5. How do you know that you learned?

I then located the activities identified by the teacher and the students on the video footage of the class meetings, copying them onto a different CD so it was easier to play them back. I then scheduled weekly one-on-one meetings with Kate and each of the three focal students at their convenience to watch the excerpts and discuss them, guided by the questions of the stimulated recalls protocols (Appendices F and G). Because participants differed in the number of activities they selected at the end of each class session, and because of a number of logistical reasons (e.g., students missing class sessions, busy schedules that did not allow for a weekly meeting), there was some variation in the number of the stimulated recalls collected: I discussed 18 activities with Kate, 18 activities with Reema, 27 with Brad, and 26 with Ivy. These numbers do not indicate the number of SR meetings but rather the number of activities discussed.

The participants chose different activities from the same class session. Therefore, in an attempt to have a core data set, I organized all the SR sessions related to any given class meeting to include the activities selected by the teacher. Therefore, the teacher as well as the three focal students reacted to all the teacher-selected activities. For each
teacher’s SR session, I also included at least one activity selected by the focal students. For the student’s SRs, I ensured that each focal student reacted to the activities that the person had selected as well as (at least) one activity selected by another peer. In other words, the SR sessions were organized as follows:

1. Teacher SR sessions = teacher-selected activity(ies) + at least one activity that was selected by one of the focal students.
2. Focal student SR sessions = teacher-selected activity(ies) + activity(ies) selected by the student being interviewed + at least one activity selected by another focal student.

During the teacher’s SR meetings, I played back the footage of the selected activities and prompted the teacher to think about what was going on in her mind during those activities and how she adapted her teaching to the developing perception of students’ needs and engagement. In the student’s SR meetings, I played back the footage of the activities and asked them why they did or did not select a particular activity and prompted them to recall what they were thinking as the activity unfolded in class.

In addition to the student’s SRs about class activities, I scheduled three writing SR meetings with each of the focal students to discuss three writing samples they submitted as part of their graded work for the course: a diagnostic test submitted on the first week of the term, a benchmark paper submitted on week 5, and a re-write of the diagnostic text submitted on week 10. I interviewed the students about their writing processes, their assessments of their strengths and weaknesses, and their responses to the teacher’s feedback after the teacher had graded, commented on, and returned the essays to the students.
3.6.3. Data Processing and Analysis

The classroom observation and interviews yielded a considerable amount of data and therefore data transcription, representation, and organization was an important step that preceded and facilitated data analysis.

The first step in data processing was transcription. All the interviews with the teacher and the focal students about the classroom events and writing samples were transcribed verbatim using standard spelling and orthography but retaining any grammatical errors made by the participants. The transcripts were laid out in a script-like format (not two columns). For the class data, I conducted a selective transcription (Brenner, 2006). I coded the class video footage with QSR International's NVivo 11 Software and transcribed two full instructional units (see p. 73-74 for meaning of units) verbatim for further analysis (as described below in Table 3.3). I used the following transcription conventions.

- Comma (,): Short pauses of less than 3 seconds
- Three dots (…): Interrupted utterance, false start
- Hesitation markers: (hm, ehh): transcribed verbatim

Data analysis was guided by the research questions. As stated above, to understand how opportunities for learning and the ZPD were co-constructed in the moment and over time during a semester-long EAP course, I triangulated all data that I had collected to obtain a holistic, essentially emic perspective on what happened in class. For the purposes of this study, I combined a detailed in-depth analysis of actual interactions with quantitative data analysis that identified recurring patterns in interactions in the classroom. Guk and Kellogg (2007) and Erickson (2006) warned that the focus on in-depth analyses of interaction data should be shown to be representative of
general tendencies and not idiosyncrasies peculiar to the instances chosen for analysis or reporting. In the following sections I describe the principled procedures used for presenting and accounting for data that aimed to avoid this pitfall. The next subsection and following chapters in this thesis are organized so as to address the research questions.

3.6.3.1. Research Question 1

To answer the first research question (What pedagogical activities did the teacher enact to organize and facilitate students’ opportunities for learning in the course?), I referred especially to the data from Kate’s SRs on specific class activities and her recorded comments following one-on-one conference meetings with individual students. As explained above, the core questions of the SR (Appendix F) were informed by the review of the literature and aimed to guide the conversation to cover issues such as the goal of each activity and the in-the-moment decisions that Kate made in response to the interactions with and among students. The core questions were furthermore supplemented by a number of probes and requests for explanations, examples, and clarifications. This probing is considered a process of concurrent analysis (Yin, 2011) that happens during the interview as it signals the identification of a pertinent point that is likely to inform the research.

At the end of data collection, I followed a number of procedures to store and organize the SR and comments data. I transcribed and created separate Word files for each SR and comment session. I indexed these files by dating and referencing each file to the class activity or student it related to.

A phase of data exploration and disassembling (Yin, 2011) followed in which I created summaries of each SR organized around the core questions of the SR protocol.
This first structured in-depth reading of the transcripts led to the identification of recurrent themes which in turn helped orient subsequent readings of the data. Therefore, even though the initial analysis was guided by the SR core questions, the findings were not restricted by those questions. As the iterative process of repeated reading and analyzing progressed, a list of pertinent themes and sub-themes emerged and the relationships between them became more defined. Themes identified in one SR or comment were then substantiated or revised in the following SRs or comments.

Ensuring validity and reliability was a constant concern throughout this process. The choice of SCT as the overarching theoretical framework for this project certainly shaped my attention to specific themes. However, my theoretical sensitivity (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) was counterbalanced by a member check with the teacher who read and commented on the findings of the project, especially the findings reported in chapter 4 (See Kate’s comment above), and with two of the focal students.

Chapter 4 presents seven key factors (or themes) that, according to Kate, facilitated the establishment of an individual and group ZPD. That chapter documents the prevalence of each of the factors and schematizes the relationships between them.

**3.6.3.2. Research Question 2**

The answer to this question (How did the teacher and students progressively co-construct opportunities for learning in class?) draws mainly on the analysis of the videotaped class meetings, field notes, and the participants’ SR on selected class activities. I analyzed 70 hours of video footage using an interactional ethnographic approach to data representation and analysis. I uploaded all the videos to NVivo, and as I
watched the footage I followed Castanheira et al.’s (2001) recommendation of drawing a structuration map.

*Time-stamped descriptions of the chain of activity:* This consisted in creating a description of all the episodes that took place in class sessions and later served as an indexing system (Crawford, Kelly, & Brown, 2000). I adopted Castanheira et al.’s (2001) definition of episode where episode boundaries are marked by a change in the interactional behavior of the participants visible either through discourse or other contextual clues (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). This definition is in line with Nystrand’s (1997) definition of an episode as a coherent activity with an identifiable goal or objective and Hillocks’ (1999) observation that a change in materials and/or a shift in teacher-student roles and relationships marks the boundaries of an episode. I watched the video footage of each class session and placed a time-stamp at the beginning of each episode. For example, a long activity about paraphrasing may have included several episodes as the teacher moved from a tutorial to pair collaboration to individual work. In this case, the episodes were thematically related and together they constituted the paraphrasing activity, but each episode had a definite objective: the tutorial introduced the topic and helped the students organize their knowledge about the purpose and rules of paraphrasing, the pair collaboration allowed students to scaffold each other as they worked on an assignment together, and the individual work helped students test their knowledge and allowed them to show their understanding of the new concept. In this regard, the episode was the smallest unit of analysis used in this study. A sequence of related episodes constituted an activity, and a sequence of related activities constituted a
unit. For instance, the teacher could revisit the concept of paraphrasing during a different class session. In this case the paraphrasing activities in day 1 and day 2 constituted a unit.

This first step of data exploration resulted in a linear chronological running record of the 70 hours of class meetings. Each stamp included information about the interactional space created in the moment, including the start time of the episode, a description of the activity being carried, the roles assumed by the teacher and students and notes about pertinent aspects of the interaction (e.g., student questions, interruptions, interesting exchanges between teacher and students or among students, or students’ behavior during group/pair work).

This step was conducted simultaneously with a more detailed coding on NVivo (described in the next section). The two steps complemented each other as they represented different aspects of the data. While Step 1 allowed me to have a running record of the data in a hard copy format that was easy to consult and to help locate certain episodes for further analysis, the NVivo coding allowed me to have a detailed understanding of the data and yielded a quantitative account of the patterns observed.

*Coding of class episodes:* I adapted Van Der Heide and Newell’s (2013) coding scheme to code five aspects of the interactional space in the class. The scheme was developed by Van Der Heide and Newell to allow for “rich descriptions of complex instructional ecologies and individual student experiences” (p.303).

Table 3.3 presents the coding scheme with definitions adopted or adapted from Van Der Heide and Newell (2013). The first category in the scheme distinguishes between six types of class groupings: *teacher addressing whole class, students working in small groups, in pairs or individually, teacher offering one-on-one consultation,* and
whole class interacting. I omitted one code that was in the original scheme, namely student presentation, and included it under the category Student Response. I modified the names of the codes teacher addressing whole class (originally Whole class) to make it more descriptive of the activity and teacher consultation (originally Teacher Conference) to distinguish between the one-on-one attention the teacher gave in class (Consultation) and outside class (Conference).

Table 3.3: Episode coding scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grouping</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher addressing whole class</td>
<td>Teacher addresses all of the students during presentations/tutorials or while providing answers and explanations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small groups</td>
<td>Students are working in two or more groups (larger than two).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pairs</td>
<td>Students are working in pairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>Students are working by themselves, e.g., seatwork or writing in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher consultation</td>
<td>Teacher is working one-one-one with a student or small group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole class interacting</td>
<td>Open discussion between students-no assigned partners or small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Interaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling/Giving information</td>
<td>The teacher is telling students how to do something or giving them information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Using a teaching tool (e.g., sample essay), the teacher is demonstrating how to do something or how to do a process procedurally rather than just telling students to do it on their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>The teacher is prompting students to do something rather than just telling them to do it on their own. Students can be in whole class or small groups or pairs as the teacher is providing support for students’ thinking, writing, reading that they can transfer to independent work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>The teacher (actively) listens or watches for an extended time (15-30 seconds at least) in order to respond to what students are doing or saying. Code ‘listening’ only when the teacher appears to be paying careful attention to what may be significant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud</td>
<td>Teacher reads text aloud while expecting students to listen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing visually</td>
<td>Teacher records or presents information, ideas, or experience in written form or other semiotic systems using a range of media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Teacher supervising and assessing student work, often by walking around desks and checking their individual or pair work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing/eliciting/questioning</td>
<td>Teacher poses different kinds of questions (e.g., open questions, leading questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Response</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud or silently</td>
<td>Students read text aloud while expecting others to listen or students read silently at teacher’s request.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral response/recitation</td>
<td>Response to teacher’s questions or comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing</td>
<td>Response to teacher’s open-ended, exploratory questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debating</td>
<td>To engage in argument by discussing opposing points in a structured/planned format that the teacher/students may name a debate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening/writing</td>
<td>Students listen for an extended time. Students record or present information, ideas, or experiences in written form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presentation</td>
<td>Student presents information or demonstrates how to do something to the whole class or a segment of the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open one-on-one interaction</td>
<td>Students work on a particular assignment in pairs or small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on assignment</td>
<td>Students work on assignments individually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Materials</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-made handout</td>
<td>Teacher or students make use of a teacher-made handout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbook</td>
<td>Teacher or students make use of a textbook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteboard for presenting</td>
<td>Teacher or students make use of the board to present information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student text</td>
<td>Teacher or students make use of a student writing sample as a tool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Elements</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation and use of background knowledge</td>
<td>Clear reference to students’ knowledge of the world and of academic conventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of more complex</td>
<td>Use of academic language including metalinguistic terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building continuity</td>
<td>Clear reference to previous class episodes or material covered in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance organizer</td>
<td>Announcing elements to be covered in the future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second category distinguishes between nine distinct teacher roles. The codes monitoring and probing/eliciting/questioning were added to the original scheme to account for teacher behaviors observed in class and marked repeatedly in my field notes. I coded eight types of Student Responses. I added the codes open one-on-one interaction and work on assignment based on my observation and field notes. Under Instructional Materials, I added student text to account for the pervasive use of student’s writing samples as a mediational tool for illustration purposes observed in class. Finally, I adopted the last category Instructional Elements from the scheme developed by Berry (2006).
Coding process: I watched the video footage of each session and marked episode boundaries. With the change of activity, or a change of interaction pattern, goal, or roles and relationships within the same activity, I started a new episode. Each episode was coded for all appropriate codes observed under the five major categories in the scheme. In effect, each episode was coded for the type of Grouping, Teacher Interaction, Student Response, Instructional Materials and Instructional Elements (e.g., an episode could be coded as teacher addressing whole class under the category Grouping, and telling/giving information under the category Teacher Interaction). Under each category, I coded all behaviors observed. For instance, under Grouping, pair work and teacher consultation often co-occurred so I assigned both codes to the same episode. Similarly, I coded all types of teacher interaction patterns as they occurred in any episode.

The coding allowed a quantitative analysis of the 70-hour video footage. I report the time spent on each of the categories coded as a percentage of the total instructional time in each session (calculated as total time in class minus break time).

Inter-coder agreement: To ensure the reliability of the episode coding, a second researcher coded a sample of the video-footage as suggested in the literature (e.g., Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1993; Polio, 1997, 2001). This coding check clarified the meanings of codes and ensured that data units were coded reliably (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The co-coder is an experienced researcher in second language assessment, teaching, and learning. He has extensive experience using NVivo and coding quantitative and qualitative data. He is familiar with the literature on classroom research having conducted research studies about teacher beliefs and practices that involved observation and coding of classroom data. He read the coding schemes and the examples
from the original studies; we discussed and agreed on the definition of codes. Next, he coded about 7 hours of video footage of three different class meetings representing 10% of the data set. His coding resulted in 632 decisions or codes assigned. Table 3.4 below presents the percentage of agreement between our codings by category. It shows that we agreed on 90% (for the coding of Instructional Elements) to 98.6% (for the coding of Student Response) of codes assigned for an overall average agreement of 95.8%.

Table 3.4: Percent of intercoder agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent agreement per category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grouping</td>
<td>98.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Interaction</td>
<td>97.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Response</td>
<td>98.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Materials</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Elements</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total % agreement for coding</td>
<td>95.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two levels of analysis followed the initial quantitative reduction of the data. First, I conducted an in-depth analysis of the interaction patterns in the classroom over the duration of the semester. In Chapter 5, I report on the prevalence of certain codes under each of the five main categories, and the interaction between the coded categories. The first section of that chapter presents quantitatively how time was spent in class, what roles the different participants assumed, and how these roles combined with other functions in the class. This analysis presents a holistic view of the semester and reveals the salient features of the interactional space co-created over time.

While the quantitative analysis allowed for a comprehensive view of the interactional space of the classroom over the whole semester and thus revealed how Kate and her students created a learning environment, it cannot identify when and how specific opportunities for learning were created in the moment. To locate the opportunities for
learning, the data had to be reduced in a principled and representative manner. I therefore selected two full instructional units for further qualitative/microgenetic analyses. I chose to focus on the unit on Sentence Variety and the unit on Summary Writing because they were selected and commented on by the teacher and all three focal students. This agreement on these units as successful units that presented important learning opportunities to the students make them suitable ‘telling cases’ that enhance the findings of this project. For purposes of succinctness and efficiency, I conducted two types of complementary analyses on these two units (rather than conducting the same analyses twice). Both units were transcribed verbatim.

a. The Sentence Variety unit spanned three sessions (October 5th, 7th and 26th) and lasted a total of 200 minutes. The analysis of this unit shows how the five aspects of the interactional space co-created in the classroom that were coded and analyzed quantitatively helped, individually and in combination, to create opportunities for learning. For instance, the analysis illustrates how, during the unit, teacher talk, student roles, and instructional materials enacted moments of learning in the class. This analysis contextualizes the quantitative findings reported in the first part of Chapter 5.

b. The Summary Writing unit was analyzed to show the instructional chain that was created over time and the logical connection between the different parts of the chain. The unit spanned three sessions (November 2nd, 4th and 6th) for a total of 196 minutes. The analysis schematizes the development of instruction by tracing not only the prevalence but also the order and pattern of occurrence of the five major categories coded in this project. Identifying the ‘sequence units’, that is, the visible
actions taking place in sequence, including the grouping patterns, the teacher and student roles and type of interaction between them, brings to light the overall organization and logic of the unit across sessions and highlights intertextual ties across its constituent parts.

3.6.3.3. Research Question 3

This question (What facilitated or hindered students’ take up of opportunities for learning?) is addressed in Chapter 6 drawing mainly on the focal students’ data, including their SR interviews, and Kate’s assessment of their potential and progress over the semester. The three focal students represent three case studies that together illustrate how the students were able to take up the opportunities for learning created in class.

Each case study starts with a comprehensive profile of the focal student focusing on their history as English language learners, their academic goals and their assessments of their English writing. The second part of each case study draws on the students’ SR data to identify the factors that facilitated or hindered their take up of opportunities for learning. An analysis of each student’s perception of the two focal units (Sentence Variety and Summary Writing) contextualizes the facilitating and hindering factors identified from the SR data. It also clarifies whether and how an intersubjective space was created and how the learning opportunity that ensued was taken up and transformed by the students.

3.7. Limitations

Care was taken to ensure that the data collection and analysis procedures were rigorous and valid; however, certain limitations have to be acknowledged and also noted as impetus for further research.
Certain limitations are related to the conceptualisation and the design of the study. Because the project adopted a case-study design, it might be argued that the findings are the result of a unique teaching/learning situation that simply reflects the idiosyncrasies of the participants (e.g., teacher’s experience and temperament, students’ distinctive histories) and their context, and are therefore of little relevance to other instructional contexts and/or to theory building or confirmation. However, it is important to emphasize that the depth of analysis afforded by the case study design would be hard to achieve with a different research design. The design allowed the juxtaposition of four different stances (Kate + three students) about the selected opportunities for learning afforded by the instructional dialogue in class. It also helped define several (if not all) facets of a class ZPD. While the findings reported above may not apply in or describe every instructional situation, they illustrate some exemplary practices that can inform other teachers’ practices and pinpoint aspects of student responsiveness that other teachers should consider.

While the study was conceived and presented as a holistic and longitudinal case study, it could not realistically account for all aspects of the teacher’s or the learners’ experiences. The project aimed to present a comprehensive overview of the full 12-week instructional cycle leading to major decisions about the learners’ academic trajectories. However, the project did not account for the learners’ concurrent experiences in other classes within the same program and other learning and interactive experiences outside the school that may have mediated and/or informed what was happening in the EAP class (e.g., preparing and taking standardised tests, applying to universities for admission). In this regard, analyses of the interview responses assumed that all the participants were
evolving in multiple activity systems that were connected and intersected with the EAP class activity. However, no data or artifacts were collected in relation to these additional experiences or parallel activities. This limitation is particularly consequential to the definition of learning and development in this study. The study captured instances of retention and indicators of development, but it could not capture long-term, sustained development or evidence of transfer of newly acquired knowledge to other writing contexts (e.g., writing an essay for an admission application, or a TOEFL test, or writing for other classes). The use of microgenetic analysis of classroom interactions together with the analysis of the students’ SRs and their participation patterns pointed towards plausible links and some precursors (if not evidence) of learning and development, however, without accounting for the transfer of this knowledge to other contexts, over a longer period beyond the 12-weeks. In short, this study can be said to have “encircled” (Van Gorp & Van den Branden, 2015) learning and development, rather than proved it. As Van Gorp and Van den Branden (2015) argued, gathering the data necessary to reach such conclusive findings remains a methodological challenge because of all the logistics (e.g., time and effort, consent, ethical issues) involved.

The second limitation is related to the data collection procedures. As explained above I took a number of measures to insure that my physical presence as an observer in the class did not disturb the normal progress of the class. I have no reason to believe that it did. With time, my presence became routine for both learners and teacher. On the other hand, my prompts to select class activities to discuss subsequently may have pressured the participants to select class activities even when they did not necessarily think of them as learning opportunities. What is more, the weekly meetings scheduled with the four
participants to discuss class activities that they had identified as opportunities for learning may have altered the regular course of instruction and learning by heightening participants’ attention to their own classroom experiences and their awareness of their learning and participation processes. Specifically, Kate may have verbalised some thoughts or become aware of some issues during the interviews that may have led her to rethink her planning and instructional strategies. She seemed comfortable and confident during the interview meeting; however, this possible interference from my research remains a possibility. As for the students, it is reasonable to posit that the interview questions and their verbalisations of aspects of their learning might have acted as mediation for further learning or altered their regular processes.

Third, some limitations pertain to the data collection instruments used. First, the coding and observation schemes used to code the class activity may have directed the focus of the observation and coding to specific aspects of the instructional activity and classroom interactions at the expense of others that may have gone unnoticed or not recorded systematically. The observation scheme was piloted and revised and the coding scheme was adapted from two coding schemes widely used in research with similar orientations and objectives. Some codes were also added and redefined based on the observation made in class. The combining of the two schemes and the revisions have broadened the scope of the instruments. However, ultimately, the instruments remain limited, by definition, and therefore, it is possible that the structure and content of the instruments may have shaped the results of the study.

Moreover, the very questions that guided the interviews and SR sessions have necessarily shaped the answers of the participants and the study’s results in general.
Formulating questions that address such complex and multifaceted concepts as learning, development, and the ZPD is problematic because the concepts are multidimensional while the language of the researcher during the interview session has to remain plain, sequential, and unambiguous. Despite the deliberate effort to make the wording of the questions open so as to allow freedom and flexibility in participants’ answers and to allow further prompts during the SR sessions, it is possible that the wording of the questions and the prompts may have steered participants’ answers in particular directions.

The fourth limitation of the project is related to data representation, especially the level of transcription used. Van Compernolle (2015) argued that the objectification of interaction through different transcription practices can make certain aspects of talk visible while obscuring others. He explained that broad transcription, like the one used in the present study, omits pertinent information about the mode of speech delivery such as intonation, prosody, interruptions, overlapping speech, and therefore, “tends to draw attention to the content of what was said but obscures how it was said” (p.25). According to Van Compernolle, this choice is “theoretically consequential” as it “indexes a theoretical stance on what is and is not relevant”. It is important to note that, while there was indeed a more prominent focus on the content of the class interaction and the participants’ roles they reveal, it was supplemented, when possible, with indications of some features of the mode of speech delivery (e.g., interruptions and speech overlap, question marks, and hesitations). Moreover, because I coded from video (not just from the transcriptions), these features of speech delivery were available to me during the coding and were therefore taken into consideration in the coding process.
Finally, the study is predominantly interpretative. The answers to the first and third research questions are based almost exclusively on my understanding and analysis of the participants’ SR and interview questions. However, the juxtaposition of the multileveled analysis of the participant interviews which revealed their beliefs and expectations, the objective coding and quantitative analysis of classroom activity, and the in-depth analysis of two full units that was then balanced with the participants’ comments on the same units present a form of triangulation that increases the trustworthiness of the findings. Moreover, following Brenner’s (2006) recommendation to invite the participants to check “if the researcher’s distillation of themes and shared meaning retain coherence with [their] views” (p. 368), I shared a first draft of chapters 4 and 5 of the findings with the teacher. I also invited Reema and Ivy to read and comment on their respective case studies. Their feedback indicated that they agreed with my depiction of what happened in class and my interpretation of their interview and SR data. Despite several attempts to contact Brad, I was not able to reach him to obtain his feedback on his case study.
Chapter 4: Teacher’s Perceptions of Facilitating Factors

This chapter is based on an inductive analysis of the various teacher interview data to describe what the teacher perceived to facilitate the establishment of individual and the whole class ZPD. The chapter specifically addresses the first research question: What pedagogical activities did the teacher enact to organize and facilitate students’ opportunities for learning in the course? The following sections describe seven recurrent themes that emerged from the analysis of 18 SRs provided by Kate about 18 class activities and 33 comments she recorded following one-on-one conference meetings with students. The SRs focused on the factors that promote the establishment of a ZPD for the whole class (with occasional mention of individual students) whereas the comments on conference meetings focused almost exclusively on the construction of a ZPD with individual students. Together, these two sources of information represent the range of interactions in which Kate and her students partook during the semester-long course. The analysis of these two data sets helps identify factors at multiple levels that facilitated the creation of ZPDs.

The linear presentation of the findings in this chapter imposes an itemization of the themes that does not reflect the dynamic dialogic relation between them. These themes are aspects or facets of a coherent approach to the creation of an instructional environment conducive to learning which included the tools used, the nature of relationships established over time, the moral agreement upheld by all parties involved, the overall instructional design of the course, and the pedagogical decisions made ‘in-the-moment’. In other words, all or most of these themes or factors were operating and present at any given time in class.
The first section below describes the indicators of learning the teacher used as gauges to guide her interaction patterns and her instructional choices in class. These indicators helped Kate trace the class’ level of engagement and monitor their learning. Therefore, they constituted the primary reference that helped Kate determine and/or confirm that learning was happening in class.

The second section presents the factors that facilitated the creation and take up of opportunities for learning according to Kate. These factors are clustered into two major categories: (a) emotional sustenance, defined as the routines or procedures that helped create a supportive, inclusive classroom environment conducive to learning and (b) pedagogical choices and instructional design, which covered the practices that helped organize and structure the curriculum in a meaningful way.

4.1. Defining Indicators of Learning

Kate monitored and traced three indicators of students’ learning: (a) body language, (b) meaningful engagement with the content and subsequent evidence of take up, and (c) the ability to apply new knowledge. The first two indicators were immediately evident while the last indicator was confirmed over time.

Kate often judged the success of a given activity based on the degree of visible engagement of the students (most evident in their body language including the direction of their gaze) and their overall attitudes. She explained how she inspected students’ facial expressions, gaze direction, and general body posture to determine if students were on task. She said “I certainly look at their body language ah, if their head is down or if they, th- you you can tell when students don’t really get it.” She added that when students experience some difficulty,
they look quizzical, they look a bit lost. You can usually see it on students. But most students when they understand something they nod and that’s the indicator to me. If they don’t turn the page, if they’re still looking at that original page, that means they don’t quite get it so, I might say I will explain it again just if anybody would like a second explanation. [Teacher SR 2]

For instance, following a lesson on academic vocabulary, Kate deemed that the students “most definitely” benefited from the lesson and that learning happened. Her confident assessment was based on her observation that she “could see the nodding of their heads” [Teacher SR 1], which was interpreted by Kate as a physical sign that new information had resonated with the students.

Second, Kate observed each student’s interactions and participation patterns to verify their level of engagement in the task at hand. She seemed to survey the class’s reactions in real time. She was then satisfied to see different levels of engagement that corresponded to her perception of each student’s academic potential and personality traits. In the fourth SR, she stated,

I think they benefitted in different ways all of them. I wouldn’t say more than others but perhaps differently than others. The strong students would benefit from their sense of mastering what they are good at- that is carrying on discussions and, um antagonizing others […]. The others, because they were given a chance to speak and so they gained some, ah, you know some level of comfort where they didn’t have it before. So yeah I think everybody benefited. That’s my feeling. [Teacher SR 4]

Another form of meaningful engagement with course content occurred when students showed signs of deep processing of new knowledge. For instance, when presented with a list of words to be avoided in academic writing, the students showed an awareness of the conflict between their old lexical choices and the new knowledge. Kate
pointed out that this awareness and the following decision to adopt the new lexis was a sign of learning. She explained,

I think they did learn from it. They probably were puzzled by the fact that ‘nowadays’ isn’t correct but I can see that. I will see when they rewrite their work […] because the fact is they wrote down the correct, word or options rather, and so that will become more integrated in in their choice of vocabulary, I think. [Teacher SR1].

The third indicator tracked by the teacher materialized over time in the form of students’ appropriation of new knowledge and their ability to apply it in new contexts. For instance, following a unit on lexical structural analysis, Kate noted that the students integrated the new information in their casual conversations. She noted,

nobody looked bored and they all recognize a lot of these words but I don’t think they’d ever thought of parsing them, of separating out part of the words. And I noticed that in classes or […] in certain conversations that followed they would talk about [the prefix] ‘re’ -- again you know-- oh yeah that means again. They would remember the lesson and apply it to what we were doing. [Teacher SR 10]

The three main indicators of learning underlay Kate’s assessment of the outcomes of any task or activity in class and therefore her perceptions of what facilitated the co-construction and take up of opportunities for learning.

4.2. Facilitating Factors for the Construction and Take-up of Opportunities for Learning

As explained above, the facilitating factors identified by the teacher could be classified into two main categories: (a) emotional sustenance and (b) instructional design and pedagogical choices.
4.2.1. Emotional Sustenance

One of the key facilitating factors for the establishment of a ZPD over the semester was the constant attention to offer or facilitate emotional sustenance. This section describes the different ways this emotional sustenance was cognized by the teacher and explains how it facilitated learning or the creation of learning opportunities.

Kate seemed to make a conscious effort to create a positive learning environment resting on a foundation of mutual respect and a common understanding of shared rules and expectations of behavior and academic participation. This factor was mentioned in 12 different SRs and all the one-on-one meeting comments. It related to both the group and individual levels. Kate aimed to create an overall strong, supportive learning community but also strived to offer individualized support to specific students.

Emotional sustenance materialized in three distinct but related ways: (a) building rapport, (b) dependable codes of behavior and academic participation, and (c) the balancing of challenge and sense of attainment.

4.2.1.1. Building rapport

Kate strove to create a close rapport with her students by revealing aspects of her personality, life experiences, and interests that would allow them to see her as a relatable and approachable individual and not just a teacher, as explained in the following quotation from the first teacher background interview:

I never leave the class at break time. I hang around ’cause you know the students, most of them don’t have any family here and they don’t have a chance to talk. I don’t want to be their family. I really don’t wanna get involved in their personal lives but I like them! I like them and I want them to see me as more than just--it’s a risk to try to make others see you as more than just a teacher, but I want them to also know that I’m a person with different interests and needs and successes and problems, outside of being a teacher--because then they will, they will relate to me better, I think. I think it’s good to build a
personal relationship without getting too personal, without getting overly involved in their lives. [Teacher background Interview]

Kate also sought to know her students at a personal level. She became aware of their personal and academic histories, their living conditions, and other factors that might affect their academic performance. As the semester progressed, she developed a good understanding of how each student’s personality traits and academic potential affected their performance and the nature of their class participation and social relationships with other students. The one-on-one conference meetings presented a good context for building this personal rapport as Kate listened to students’ concerns and offered reassurance, guidance, and comfort. She also used these sessions to provide detailed feedback on students’ work: She reached an agreement with each student on an individualized ‘action-plan’ to improve their writing and achieve their goals.

The following three quotations from comments on one-on-one sessions illustrate Kate’s approach to building rapport and offering emotional sustenance during private meetings with students:

The purpose of the meeting with Omer was to introduce myself to him and learn about his concerns in class. He didn’t have any other than the fact that there were not very many people other than Saudi Arabians and Chinese in the class and I assured him that, because of the differences in the individuals he would find that this wasn’t to be a problem […] we had a good introduction to one another and I was just very encouraging of the kind of participation I saw that he was capable of having. [Teacher Comment 1]

Cristal is a returning […] student, and all I wanted to say to her is that I thought she was very promising and that she would um prosper hm flourish, rather, as a student who is repeating the same program […] I also said that some of the handouts may be the same since [her teacher of last year] and I work closely together, and that didn’t seem to be a problem for her. I understand that she missed a lot of the classes. She seemed very happy. [Teacher Comment 6]
Fares was my student very sporadically last session. I’m a little concerned about him because his writing skills are so weak and his attendance is not as good as it should be, but I basically had to say to him if he doesn’t continue to come all the time on time that he’s not gonna pass. I think that was a bit of a wake-up call for him. [Teacher Comment 11]

The quotations show how Kate adjusted her approach to the specific needs of each student. She offered reassurance to help Omer overcome his apprehension about not having any other Turkish students in the class (the comment was recorded before a second Turkish student joined the class on the second week of the term). She referred to her long experience teaching in the program and interacting with similar student populations to dissipate Omer’s anxiety. She offered encouragement to Cristal and communicated her belief in her ability to succeed. She also anticipated that the use of the same handouts that Cristal had read in the previous year might be a source of boredom and therefore lead to disengagement. By raising this point, she not only forewarned Cristal of this issue but she also obtained her agreement and commitment to attend to the old handouts with new attention. The comment about the session with Fares was quite atypical. It does not seem to be as positive as the other two quotations (or any other comments in the data set); however, it stems from a concern for the student’s success. Kate felt that Fares needed to understand the repercussions of his behavior at the beginning of the semester so as to ensure the best chances of achievement. The comment suggests that the student was open to this ‘wake-up’ call and did not resist it.

The insights that Kate gained through the one-on-one conference meetings into each student’s potential and constraints later became a tool of class management that helped her interpret students’ behavior. For instance, in one SR, when asked to assess the
class’ reaction to her tutorial on run-on-sentences, Kate noted that one student (Samira) was not as attentive as usual. She pointed out:

I noticed that she [Samira] wasn’t engaged, that she didn’t turn around. But I know what she’s going through. I know she’s got some, a lot of issues and I told her I was aware of them. If she had to hand something in late, I’d be okay with that. [Teacher SR 3]

This statement echoes what Kate recorded at the end of a one-on-one meeting with Samira a few days before the session on run-on-sentences, where she said:

Samira told me how heavily loaded she is with two other programs- one at [Name of College] I believe and the other one is doing the IELTS class and so she takes classes in the morning, she takes IELTS in the evening and she’s really stressed. [Teacher Comment 5]

This example shows how the information shared by the student during the one-on-one meeting became part of the mental map Kate was building about the class. This background information was constantly present and helped Kate interpret students’ behaviors in the moment. Without such information, Kate may have labeled Samira’s loss of focus as a sign of disengagement or lack of interest in the content—which may have led to other consequences such as reprimand or a misjudgment of the student’s commitment to learning. On the student’s end, the reassurance obtained during the one-on-one meeting and the teacher’s understanding of her behavior could only be positive boosts to her confidence and her comfort level in and outside of class.

Table 4.1 further illustrates how Kate’s effort to build rapport during the private conversations of the one-on-one meetings and her assessment of any student’s performance in class were tightly interconnected. The Table presents quotations from Kate’s SR and a comment (in the shaded box) following a meeting with Ann, organized in the chronological order they were recorded. These quotations represent Kate’s
evolving understanding of the academic potential and emotional disposition of Ann--a student who seemed to struggle with some of the content but also had some difficulty finding her space and voice in the class. The quotations also show how this growing understanding helped shape Kate’s interactions with Ann in class to maximize learning potential.

The first quotation is part of Kate’s comment following her second meeting with Ann. In the first meeting, Kate had recognized Ann as an anxious student who would need extra attention and support even though her writing skills and level of class participation were satisfactory. The second meeting was emotionally charged, revealing the extent of Ann’s anxiety and its effect on her academic performance. As the quotation in column 1 shows, Ann was so distressed she considered withdrawing from the program and returning for a later session. Kate offered two solutions--both of them aimed at comforting Ann and eliminating any chance for embarrassment or public humiliation.

First, Kate advised Ann to speak up only when she was sure of the answer. She also committed to be Ann’s accomplice in this tacit plan. This advice might seem counterintuitive at first, because it is generally agreed that teachers should encourage students to speak up and take risks. However, in this case, protecting Ann’s fragile ego took priority over the amount of the student’s oral participation--especially that the teacher was not concerned about Ann’s overall academic standing. The second solution consisted in allowing Ann to schedule more private meetings with the teacher. By offering her time and her complicity, Kate aimed to lower Ann’s emotional barriers and thereby raise her chances to focus on the content.
Table 4.1: Teacher’s approach to building rapport with Ann: Quotations from comments and SRs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kate’s comment following her second one-on-one meeting with Ann</th>
<th>Except from Kate’s SR4</th>
<th>Excerpt from Kate’s SR12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ann presented herself with tears. She’s very upset that she may not pass the program. Her marks are it’s not even a question of marks. It’s a question of feeling that she’s not as ah capable as the other students. She’s very embarrassed when she makes a mistake, and she does sometimes offer answers before she’s had a chance to about what they are and I’d mentioned that to her (as) I told her that she shouldn’t give answers in class, unless she’s absolutely certain they’re correct and I wasn’t gonna ask her questions. This was my offer. I wasn’t gonna ask her questions unless she indicated with her eyes to me that she knew the answer. It was sort of more the public humiliation of not being, what she perceives as not being as as up to the standards of the others students. So she had thought of quit- leaving the program, coming back in January, but her parents have encouraged her to stick it out. She’s gonna need a lot of support. And I offered to see her the next day, um, to go over some of her writing I will see her much more frequently than the other students. She was happy with that. Was it a successful meeting? In the sense that I’m offering her some of the help this student needs- yes I suppose it was. [Teacher Comment 13]</td>
<td>Ann in terms of her oral presentation skills because she’s extremely anxious and afraid to make a mistake and comes down hard upon herself when she does-- so I like to be there just to sort of paraphrase for her so that, it makes it clearer to the others what she’s trying to say and then she doesn’t feel um, she doesn’t feel, that she’s gonna be criticized (I mean) she just doesn’t take criticism or that there’s a lack of understanding. [Teacher SR 4]</td>
<td>I did [intervene in student grouping] at the beginning. I don’t anymore. I know that Ann had difficulty with Fares and Ahmad and I think it was simply cultural. She was also just getting her feet wet I think in the class. She’s much more comfortable now. I don’t see, ah clashes with anybody […]. For the most part any grouping is okay with me now. At the beginning no it wasn’t but I think the shy students have found their voices. [Teacher SR 12]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second quotation in Table 4.1 (column 2) is an excerpt from a SR about a class session on paraphrasing that included small group work. Knowing that these small group interactions could be stressful for Ann, Kate took the role of mediator to ensure that Ann had a chance to convey her message clearly and thus participate fully in the group conversation and that the other students could hear Ann’s academic contribution unclouded by her language choices or tone. By doing so, the teacher continued to protect
Ann and mediate opportunities for her to participate fully without running the risk of feeling embarrassed or inadequate. Without this mediation, Ann might have opted to withdraw from the conversation to avoid embarrassment or have taken a risk that would be emotionally taxing to her. The teacher’s subtle intervention took Ann to an intermediary space between silence and full exposure—a safe space where Ann could lean on the teacher’s scaffold.

The third quotation was recorded in mid-October, one month after the second one (i.e., midway through the semester). Kate explained that at the beginning of the semester she used to put some thought into grouping students in a way that minimized conflict and maximized meaningful interaction but that she did not feel the need to do that anymore. Extrapolating from the example of Ann, Kate stated that, with time, each student seemed to have found his or her space in the class, thus making teacher mediation unnecessary for grouping.

The previous examples show how Kate built rapport with individual students and how the emotional sustenance that she offered to every student helped create a positive instructional environment where students had different options to participate. The knowledge the teacher gained about her students’ potential, character and disposition helped her also make instructional decisions. For instance, when commenting on an activity about paraphrasing, Kate stated that she was aware that most students would find the activity challenging. However, she capitalized on a strength that is not typically academic: their motivation for talking and interacting. This strength emanated from their individual personalities but also from the collegial atmosphere that was created throughout the semester. Kate stated:
I knew that they didn’t have skills in paraphrasing but […] I didn’t wanna load them with too many lessons on how to do this work. I just tried to tell them to put in their own words without really giving them the steps in paraphrasing that was gonna come next. But it’s what I knew about them. I knew that they loved to talk and they loved to discuss so I thought this was a perfect activity for them, and it was. It worked very well. They liked it. [Teacher SR 4]

This instructional decision resulted in a situation where students accepted to tackle an exercise that was slightly beyond their current level of development. In a situation with a high risk of error and thus embarrassment and loss of face, the students were comforted by the level of support and friendly interactions that ensued--an obvious result of the cohesive and inclusive classroom context that was created over the weeks.

4.2.1.2. Dependable codes of behavior and academic participation

The early definition of codes of behavior and expectations of academic roles and participation is a second form of emotional sustenance that helped foster a dependable positive learning environment that in turn facilitated the creation of opportunities for learning. The dependability of these rules and roles was key. There was in fact a consensual agreement on a set of rules and the definition of roles within the classroom community. Some of these rules were spelled out explicitly by the teacher at the beginning of the semester. Others were enacted and enforced more subtly throughout the course. The following three codes (answering questions to the satisfaction of the student, addressing mistakes and concerns in the moment, and holding students accountable for their own learning) can also be presented as aspects of the instructional design of the course (treated below); however, in this section I focus on the emotional aspect of these factors.
Answering all questions: The first dependable rule that Kate enforced systematically was that questions were welcome at any time and would be answered to the student’s satisfaction. It was especially the dependability aspect that fostered a learning context that encouraged students to take risks and pose questions even when they were not sure how to formulate their questions or pinpoint the issue at hand. For instance, during an activity about subordinate clauses, Hichem raised his hand and posed a question that was not clear. Kate used a number of clarification questions and prompts to help Hichem clarify his question before she answered it. Later sections in this thesis focus on the teacher’s scaffolding work, but in this section it is important to note that Hichem did not hesitate to raise his hand just to signal that he had a difficulty. The student trusted the teacher will not only accept the question but will also work with him to reach a better understanding of his concern and then address it in a satisfactory way.

Another telling example happened during an activity on summary writing. There was a fleeting moment of tension following a question raised by Tom. Kate described the incident as follows:

In yesterday’s class when […] Tom asked me after they’d finished analyzing the essay written by a first-year university student- why are we doing this? I thought he was questioning it but, he was actually thinking about it because I asked him- I turned the question to him, and I said why do you think we’re doing it? And he said exactly what I would’ve said which is: to understand, or to see a model that we can use when we do our own essay writing. So he wasn’t questioning me. He was just asking the question to seek a confirmation of what he felt. So it was interesting. [Teacher SR 10]

This incident shows that Tom did not hesitate to pose the question about the relevance of the summary activity. The choice of words may have created a moment of tension where the teacher felt he was questioning her choice and planning in a
confrontational manner. However, by giving Tom the opportunity to further think and verbalize his thoughts, Kate dissipated this tension and turned a moment of doubt into a teachable moment. In fact, not only did Tom confirm his understanding of the goal of the activity, he also shared it with the rest of the class. That Kate was open to the question and used it as a teachable moment may have reinforced the general feeling that any kind of question was welcome and would find an answer.

While several mechanisms were put in place to encourage students to ask questions, Kate built in several other opportunities for revisions and repetitions. For instance, she decided to include a review on run-on sentences “mostly for specific students but it doesn’t hurt to have a review for everybody because not everybody speaks up” [Teacher SR 3]

*Addressing concerns as they arise:* The second dependable rule was that concerns or difficulties raised by any student would be addressed immediately. In fact, when I asked Kate if she changed her plans to attend to issues or concerns raised by students in class, she contested my use of the word “change”. She explained that addressing questions and mistakes as they arise in the moment are part of the lesson plan. The flexibility to divert from the lesson plan is built-in to her very planning. She said:

[I did] not really [change the lesson plan] except that you know for instance once someone used the word ‘recently’ instead of ‘nowadays’ I had to explain the difference. As mistakes emerge then I would get them to explain to me what’s the difference between ‘recently’ and ‘nowadays’. They had to think about that. I don’t think it changed because I’m always open to dealing with questions that arise and mistakes that arise. [Teacher SR 1]

In a different class session, Kate realized that the students were struggling with the point she was teaching. She decided in the moment to schedule another session to
allow the students more time to process the new information. As she shared her plans to schedule another lesson with the class, she not only showed that she was sensitive to their reactions, but she also shared the responsibility in this temporary ‘failure’ by acknowledging that the material made available was not sufficient or accessible. She explained her rationale as follows:

I felt it was such an important mistake that a lot of students make that it would have been helpful to reinforce it in the next class because it’s such a basic mistake, that seems to be common to one half of my class. So it was partly not so much a response to Jassem and Ahmad […] but noticing that-- being aware that this is a problem. So it needs an extra review. [Teacher SR 3]

Kate also spoke repeatedly about pair-work and small-group activities as another optimal venue for addressing students’ concerns [Also addressed in section 2 below]. Kate often listened in on pair/group interactions and facilitated punctual learning opportunities as she refereed debates or settled grammatical disputes. The resolution that took place during those ‘semi-private’ interactions about a matter of immediate relevance and urgency for the students was more likely to be taken up. She described her approach as follows:

They’ll come up to me and say Brad told me to do that. Is that correct? […] I don’t mind telling them what the right answer is because I know they’ll learn from it. [Teacher SR 13]

Students are responsible for their learning: The third dependable rule was that students are accountable for their own learning. Kate indicated clearly (in the interviews and in class) that she expected students to not only follow but to participate fully and effectively and show signs of progress and learning. This accountability rested on a foundation of support and complicity between Kate and her students. In fact, public
exchanges in class were often the extension of private conversations and enacted tacit agreements between the teacher and specific students (cf., the agreement between Kate and Ann mentioned above in Table 4.1).

In one instance, Kate explained why she asked Cristal to answer a specific question in class. She said:

_I had a one-on-one [conference] with her. We talked about formulaic language, and that’s why I felt comfortable asking her to explain what it was. That way it reinforced it for her, because for her it is a problem and for a lot of Chinese students._ [Teacher SR 1]

Implicit in Kate’s request that Cristal defines ‘formulaic language’ to her classmates was the expectation that Cristal be able to provide this information. Kate deemed that the explanation she provided to Cristal during the private meeting was understood and expected that Cristal should be able to relay this information to her classmates. There were two levels of emotional sustenance here. By following up and referencing a private conversation, the teacher demonstrated her expectation of student learning. She also used this moment to create a moment of power for Cristal, allowing her to assume the role of expert (in training). This was Cristal’s moment to shine in front of her classmates, but privately Cristal must have been aware that she was being tested.

*Balancing challenge and sense of attainment:* Kate’s SRs referenced her constant attention to monitoring students’ engagement and sustaining motivation. Specifically, she strove to balance the level of difficulty and interest of the content presented in class. She tried to bring variety, was willing to revisit when she noticed that the content was too challenging to the students, and she mediated students’ performance to mitigate challenge.
The choice of material and pace of instruction was often dictated by an analysis of students’ needs but also a concern for their levels of engagement and projected attention span on any given point. For instance, when Kate was planning a unit on sentence construction, she explained her rationale as follows:

I saw in their diagnostic writing that was an issue so I tried to do it in a way that was not too repetitive because they’ve done this before. So my purpose was to show them how to make clauses […] and also to try to do it ah interactively […] not to make it so repetitious and so boring for them. I think it worked pretty well. [Teacher SR 2]

Kate in this case avoided boredom by varying the interaction mode during one phase of the lesson on sentence structure. In fact, she switched from tutorial to open-class interaction to stimulate the students’ interest and break the monotony of teacher-fronted presentation.

In other instances, Kate assessed the amount of time spent on any given activity. During the lesson on run-on sentences, she sensed that the students needed more practice but decided to delay that to the next session because the unit was becoming too long and tedious. She deemed that continuing the unit in the same session would be counter-productive. She explained: “you can only spend so much time on one grammar point before it becomes, tedious and learning is gone--is finished.” [Teacher SR 3]

Sustaining students’ motivation and interest was also one of the main reasons behind the Kate’s decision to segment a unit on affixes on two different consecutive sessions. In fact, she explained that, the handout she used was too long to be processed efficiently in one session. She therefore segmented the information into manageable, meaningful chunks. She also allowed students time to work on the content independently as homework, thus giving them the opportunity to review the content and apply it. On the
second session, she brought more variety by changing the interaction mode as she assigned a group task. She explained her rationale as follows:

In order to maintain the variety of activities in the class and to keep up the pace, I would never do a handout of that length, of that substance all in one class. These exercises are more challenging and I wanted them to work together because some of the students don’t do the homework as you know so at least they can learn from those who have […] so it’s learning for everybody. [Teacher SR 12]

The balancing of challenge and sense of attainment also took the form of mediation aimed at empowering weak students and allowing them to participate fully in group activities. It was already mentioned above that Kate mediated some student interactions in group work to facilitate communication between students with incompatible temperaments so as to foster group cohesion. In other cases, she assisted weak students who were not able to participate independently in peer review tasks by underlining errors (i.e., pointing them to the right direction, narrowing down the number of possible problems but letting them finish the work), which might boost their confidence and their motivation to engage in more challenging tasks:

So I will often go to the weaker writers who are peer editing, have a quick look at the work that they’re editing and, maybe just underline things and say find out what’s wrong with these. [Teacher SR 6]

4.2.2. Instructional Design and Pedagogical Choices

Kate spoke of several pedagogical practices and instructional design decisions aimed to facilitate the creation of opportunities for learning. The next four subsections document how she described and rationalized these choices.
4.2.2.1. Coherence and fluidity

A careful reading of the teacher’s SR revealed two lines of coherence or continua that Kate juggled in order to facilitate learning in class. The first one ran horizontally through the episodes of every session and subsequently connected all sessions together. The teacher explained repeatedly the organizational fluidity of the course and the logical connection between different building blocks. The second continuum connected the different components of the learning space that she created for the students, beyond the classroom. Kate seemed to acknowledge, integrate and connect components such as one-on-one meetings with individual students, course material, curricula of other courses taken by the students, and shared knowledge of the bigger community and current events.

Coherence of the course content: The teacher started each session by writing a detailed outline of the session on the board. She then explained the rationale and the connection between the different components of the session and also made explicit references to previous units or activities of immediate relevance.

Looking at the organization of the course throughout the semester, there was an obvious logic in the progress and sequencing of the units. Kate worked on building blocks that were later used as foundations for the teaching of new content.

In SR 9 about a class activity on writing topic sentences, the teacher detailed her rationale for scheduling and sequencing different interconnected episodes, leading to the independent production of a problem-solution essay. She said,

I know that on Friday we’re doing [problem solution] as an in-class writing, […] so I figured, they’ve already been introduced to some of the language of it, but I haven’t really introduced it so I’m doing step-by-step and then put it together today and Wednesday […]. I did it piece by piece and then put it all together. I don’t wanna just do cause-and-effect writing let’s say so I also did paraphrasing, and all these things are tools
that they’ll be using throughout whatever they write or read. […] I know Friday is the day they’re going to be writing about a problem in their home country, and a solution to it so today I’m gonna give them practice on the article that I gave them so I’ve given them two articles about problem-solution to think about the division of sort of those ideas. [Teacher SR 9]

This quotation shows Kate’s approach to sequencing content so that it gradually led the students to take advantage of the information presented in an optimal way. The revision of old knowledge and the gradual introduction of new material “step-by-step” paved the way for the assimilation of the new knowledge and afforded the students the means to finish the final task of independent writing. Scheduling basic units first also allowed the teacher to introduce ‘the language’ (i.e., metalinguistic terms) that later became tools that both teacher and students could use to further learning.

This approach was consistent throughout the course as attested by this second quotation from SR 15 about a unit on lexical structural analysis:

I think this strategy is much harder because they have to use clues that are in the text like, commas or brackets, or dashes. I was going to be doing comparison and contrast in the next class so that was kind of an introduction- that’s the reason, I chose this particular vocabulary strategy at this point ‘cause I knew it was kind of a segue into doing compare-contrast. [Teacher SR 15]

*Coherence between course components:* There was continuity between the different components of the course. This point was illustrated above with the example of the teacher’s request that Cristal present a definition of “formulaic language” to the class based on the teacher-student interaction in a private meeting. Building a bridge between what was discussed in private and the public discussion in class certainly created a learning opportunity for Cristal--if not for the whole class.
The reverse connection also occurred where Kate planned to follow up on a point raised in class during the private meeting with a student. The teacher explained this point in SR 1 when she commented on an in-class interaction with Jassem who asked why the expression “as society develops” was not acceptable. She said,

I was trying to say that our language is so specific that every word has to have a meaning and ‘society’ doesn’t really ‘develop’. It’s a phrase that he has learned to mean something different than we do in English. I think he understood it. Maybe not. But in a one-on-one conferencing […], you know when I see it in his writing then I can comment on it, and see if he understands it. [Teacher SR 1].

Kate also used a number of tools that served different purposes but were fundamentally coherent because they all built on a common set of references. For instance, she explained how her feedback on students’ writing built on codes and hints that were already introduced and explained explicitly in class. During an activity on academic vocabulary, Kate discussed and analyzed a list of common lexical mistakes with her students. In the SR, she explained that she was aware that some students would continue to commit the same lexical mistakes but that she also expected that a simple hint would suffice as a reminder to refer them back to the tutorial:

They’re aware of them [lexical mistakes]. You know, if I underline them they’ll say oh yes I remember that’s wrong. [Teacher SR 1]

Two mechanisms are evident in this example. First, the quality of the first explanation, which was exhaustive and interactive between the teacher and the students, helped create shared knowledge. The teacher’s role consisted in identifying the common lexical mistakes as a necessary foundational building block, scaffolding the students to help them deconstruct their common errors and understand the advantage of the proposed alternatives. Subsequently, the teacher was able to use subtle hints as reminders. The
nature and amount of feedback and the type of annotations used was a tool that built on and was coherent with what was done in class.

Moreover, Kate used a number of assessment tools that not only helped diagnose strengths and weaknesses in students’ performance but also formed a tangible bridge between teaching/learning and assessment. These tools enhanced the coherence between the content proposed and taught by the teacher and the performance criteria that the students were expected to demonstrate. These tools included assessment rubrics and checklists attached to major writing assignments. Kate explained the role of these tools as follows:

I mean I remember what I’ve covered […] the marking rubric, students will see what their areas of weakness are. If that area of weakness is checked off the next writing then I know that they haven’t made the progress they should have. Do I keep a track? No I don’t. I don’t photocopy, but I do I usually remember what their weaknesses are. Today, I’ll have a better idea. Today they’re doing in-class peer editing, so I’ll be looking for, you know, any indications of xxx and I’m gonna put on the board a checklist, and the checklist indicates some of the things we’ve covered. [Teacher SR 2]

4.2.2.2. Monitoring progress

Besides supporting the coherence between different course components, the assessment rubrics and checklists also served to monitor students’ progress. These written records of students’ performance over time made student progress and shortcomings visible and trackable. Kate talked at length about a number of other measures she implemented to monitor student progress and development, explaining how this information helped her make instructional decisions. These measures included the tracking of students’ development through multiple rewrites of the same assignments, the
use of test results to pinpoint students’ exact needs, and adaptation of teaching material to meet those needs.

Kate incorporated several opportunities for editing and re-writing assignments. Her approach not only allowed students access to multiple sources of feedback and inculcated in them a belief in the value of feedback and editing, it also allowed her to track evidence of students’ learning (or lack thereof) throughout the different drafts. She described her approach:

I make certain that they hand in both the first draft and then the edited draft together so I can see the changes. Always. […] All drafts have to be stapled together, and then if their writing can be rewritten and most of them can, then I’ll have three drafts stapled together: the first one, the peer edited one […] then the rewrite so we see all three. [Teacher SR 13]

By monitoring the students’ performance and understanding their weaknesses and what they stemmed from, Kate was able to tailor her teaching to meet the specific needs of her class—even as she was using handouts and teaching a curriculum that was designed for a large and diverse student population. For instance, while using a handout used by all teachers in the program, Kate chose to concentrate and expand on one section of the handout that was most problematic for her students, based on her reading of their diagnostic test results. Her rationale was as follows:

I went through the different kinds of sentences but I found that students despite the fact that they’ve done adjective clauses in all of their classes they still make mistakes. Especially the Arabic students, they have problems with actually construction of the clauses not placement of them- that’s another, that’s a separate issue. [Teacher SR 2]

Kate further explained that she tailored the unit to her class: Reviewing the structure of [the clause] is one thing which is part of the lesson. The other part is making sure that it clearly refers to the noun and its position and that’s how I adapted, how I emphasized that part on the board. [Teacher SR 2]
This quotation shows the direct impact of the writing test results and the teacher’s understanding and monitoring of students’ weaknesses in shaping instruction. This awareness resulted in a unit that was unique to this class and contingent on their immediate needs, thus maximizing the students’ chances of learning.

Another form of monitoring, besides tracking signs of learning and identifying specific needs and tailoring instruction to meet those needs, occurred when the teacher varied tasks within the same unit to trace the students’ abilities to perform under different settings, from tutorials to mechanical exercises, to tasks that demanded integration of content and show more autonomy and control over the information. For instance, Kate described how the unit on word parsing and analysis included several of these tasks:

I did think it wasn’t so easy but, and then after that I believe I gave them another reading. [...] This is where they had a punctuation-based clues. That’s the reason I chose this reading, because they were able to apply that the information from that handout. [Teacher SR 15]

4.2.2.3. Gradual withdrawal of assistance

Kate talked about several types of assistance that she provided to her students but also different forms and paces for withholding assistance and support.

Kate argued that when she assigned work, she ensured students had specific and detailed instructions on the type of exercise, what was expected from them, how they were supposed to perform it, and the rationale behind it. While the statement of goals and description of procedures did not always guarantee that the students would appropriate those goals, they allowed the teacher to define what was to be learned. Subsequent references to the same unit or content knowledge was often less explicit and less scripted. For example,
I give them detailed instructions for everything. For everything. Because, just to give them the task and say this is what you should do, without having the tools to do it is im-
very difficult. So I try to give them step-by-step instructions for everything, and then hopefully I won’t have to do that in future assignments-- not to the same degree. [Teacher SR 4]

This gradual decrease of instructions was observed at two levels or two time-lines (a) along the semester, as instructions and explanations were more detailed and directive/prescriptive at the beginning of the term and less so as the term proceeded, and (b) along any given unit as the instructions were gradually withdrawn when students gained more independence and autonomy.

Typically, Kate organized units in a way that gave the students increasing autonomy and responsibility over the material at hand. For instance, the unit about paraphrasing started by a tutorial, followed by a number of exercises. The first question of every exercise was always done as a class, with Kate thinking aloud with her students and modeling the answer for them. The students then worked in small groups:

I really did follow the way it was organized in the handout which I thought made a lot of sense. Then did each of the exercises. We always did one together, and then, worked in groups so every group had to figure out what each of the words meant through xx analysis. [Teacher SR 10]

The initial stage of class collaboration and teacher modeling enhanced students’ confidence and resulted in a trusted model that had the approval stamp of the teacher. It modeled not only the end product by giving the final answer but also and more importantly the thought process that led to it. The subsequent stages of small group and (typically) individual work later gave all students increasing autonomy preparing them for independent work.
The withdrawal of assistance was also evident in cases where Kate concluded a unit with a challenging task that appeared slightly beyond the students’ level. This calculated challenge pushed the students beyond the comfort zone they had reached with the teacher’s assistance and compelled them to synthesize all the resources they had amassed to complete the task. In the following quotation, Kate described her rationale for introducing a challenging task at the end of a unit on affixes:

I think they found the second part really hard which was good because I wanted them to do it in a reverse order, that is, they see a root and they have to figure out what a prefix is […] they had to know their grammar, to know that they need adjective, and also to say well what prefix can I use or what suffix can I use to make it appropriate to the meaning so there’s a lotta work involved in each of these and they probably found it harder, more challenging but very rewarding once they found they got their answer. [Teacher SR 12]

4.2.2.4. Attending to students at different levels

As explained above, Kate took every possible opportunity to know the students at the personal and the academic level. She seemed aware of the strengths and weaknesses of every student and kept track of each student’s progress and/or persistent issues. The previous sections described how she adjusted her instruction (overall design and in-the-moment decisions) to the emerging needs of the students. This subsection focuses on another point raised by Kate as facilitator of learning, which was individualized attention and scaffolding to students with different potentials and abilities.

Kate insisted repeatedly that she geared her teaching towards the strongest level because the class was the highest level in the program, and passing this class qualified students for admission to a university program:

They are the highest level and I don’t slow down. […] I don’t simplify the language which is important because this is the language they’re gonna experience outside of the classroom. I have to gear it to that. And if the others can’t handle it then, they may not be
ready to leave the program so, I’m not going to, dumb down my language or reduce or simplify my language-- is a better word. So I expect them to rise to that level, absolutely. I mean in terms of some of the students who can’t manage the pace or understand everything then my responsibility is to settle that matter on the one-to-one conferencing but I try to gear it to the highest rather than to the lowest student. [Teacher SR 10]

The previous quotation mentions one-on-one conferencing as one of the strategies or tools that Kate used to support the weaker students while she maintained an advanced level for the rest of the class. The teacher explained that most of the weaker students were in fact able to follow what she said in class, but they had trouble integrating and applying what they learned.

There is a couple of students who need an explanation but most of them say that they understand what I’m doing. The individual differences are most obvious in the writing and that’s something I have to handle on one-on-one basis because everybody is at a different level. [Teacher SR 10]

Besides the one-on-one private meetings, Kate talked also about three other strategies that she used in class to assist weaker students: providing opportunities for meaningful participation to all students, teacher-student consultations during small group work, and facilitation of peer collaboration.

Kate was aware that stronger students tended to be more vocal and could possibly monopolize classroom interactions. She therefore called on shy, weaker students to give them an opportunity to express their thoughts (cf., the subsections above about the tacit agreement behind these invitations to talk in class).

I try to ask a whole variety of students so that everybody gets involved--doesn’t always happen of course. [Teacher SR 1]

She also respected the students’ pace. Doing so required some tactful class management practices to balance the pace and needs of all students. For instance, when
Jassem posed a question about possessive clauses, Kate asked him to wait until the entire class finished writing so that everybody could benefit from the answer:

I don’t like to rush students. There is no point in taking up questions until everybody’s finished their work, because they may have the same question. That’s why I held off on doing it [answering Jassem’s question]. [Teacher SR 2]

However, the strategy that Kate used most consistently to support weaker students was offering teacher-student consultations during small-group, pair, or individual tasks. She typically walked around desks, listening in on conversations and offering advice, additional explanations, and instructions. These private conversations within the public space of the class and in presence of other students allowed Kate to offer punctual support to weaker students as they needed it (before they could schedule a proper, longer conference meeting after class). It offered the weaker students support and allowed them to participate fully and complete the task at hand:

I usually go over to a person whose work is weaker than others and just make sure he or she is on task. [Teacher SR 4]

The students who are weaker-- I will just give them attention within the class time […] I go up to students to make sure that they are completing the work. If they haven’t, there are reasons for it. One, they don’t understand it. Two, it’s probably because they don’t get it. So I go over and speak to those students and see if I can help them. [Teacher SR 7]

It is reasonable to expect that these interactions resulted in tailored mini-lessons that helped the weaker students overcome their difficulties and better understand what was expected of them. A case in point would be the example quoted above where Kate helped the weaker students provide peer feedback by underlining or hinting to errors in peer essays.
Kate also facilitated ample opportunities for peer collaboration, either while answering routine exercises, in group projects (e.g., research and presentations) or in peer editing tasks. She explained that she did not try to form groups according to abilities and that she believed that mixed abilities grouping would benefit both the strong and weaker students. At the most basic level, the group work externalized inner dialogue thus making it more amenable to analysis and correction:

Rather than having an inner dialogue, they were having a dialogue with others. [Teacher SR 4].

I think there is a mixture of students in all these groups. There are some who are strong and some who aren’t. I think it really helps the weak students to be with the stronger students in the sense that they also help--the stronger students help the students with articulating their ideas and clarifying the ideas so it’s a really good learning experience for them. [Teacher SR 4]

There is always a stronger student in that group or two stronger students, even though I don’t tell them where to sit. They will learn from them. That’s why I keep saying remember this is a group activity. If you don’t understand the answer, before asking me, speak to someone in your group. If none of you understand it, then I’ll come over. [Teacher SR 7]
Chapter 5: The Instructional Environment of the Course

This chapter investigates how the classroom as a context for learning helped create a zone of proximal development. It addresses the second research question: How did the teacher and students progressively co-construct opportunities for learning in class? The findings reported in this chapter are based mainly on the coding and analysis of the activities observed in the class, supplemented by field notes taken during classroom observations, and the teacher’s and the focal students’ comments in the stimulated recalls where appropriate. The chapter is organized in two main parts. First, the chapter presents an overview of the semester-long course. In this first section, I examine the different formats of class organization, the distribution of the teacher’s and students’ roles, as well as the types of materials, and the range of instructional elements used. The second part offers a more detailed look at two units of the course, namely a unit on Sentence Variety and a unit on Summary Writing. The analysis situates the two units within the overall map of the course and shows how they were built and sequenced so as to create a meaningful, coherent learning experience for the students. The detailed analysis contextualises the findings reported in the first section and illustrates how they apply to specific units.

5.1. Instructional Environment over a Semester

This section presents a detailed overview of the instructional environment co-constructed by Kate and her students during the semester. The overview describes the types of interactions and roles assumed by the participants and the tools and supports made available. The findings reported here are the result of the coding of 70 hours (recorded over 21 class sessions) on NVivo using the coding scheme described in Chapter 3: I recorded 21 class sessions, which varied in length as sometimes sessions were shortened to accommodate other program activities. The total instructional time recorded was 70 hours.
As described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.6.3.2), the unit of analysis in the following section is the ‘episode’. Episode boundaries were marked by a change in the interactional behavior of the class and/or the roles assumed by the teacher or students or the materials used. The findings in the following section are reported in terms of ‘episode duration’ (not number of episodes). For example, a five-minute episode represents 8% of a one-hour session. Many of the types of interaction and roles assumed by the teacher and students occurred concurrently, as explained below, resulting in calculations of percentages for each type of interaction or role that sometimes exceed 100% of the total instructional time.

5.1.1. Grouping

I coded every class episode in terms of the type of class grouping taking place: teacher addressing the whole class, small group work, pair work, individual work, teacher consulting with individual students, and whole class interacting. Table 5.1 presents the percentage of time spent in each grouping type proportional to all instructional time. On average, teacher talk addressed to the whole class represented 34.7% of all instructional time. It varied from 12% to 61.7% of instructional time in individual class sessions. Specifically, this duration represented less than 30% of instructional time in nine sessions, between 30 to 45% of time in eight sessions and 50% or more of instructional time in four sessions. Episodes coded under teacher addressing whole class were mainly episodes where the teacher offered direct instruction or a tutorial on a focal point.

Time that the class spent in open interaction (i.e., open discussion between students) was the second most important category accounting for an average of 29% and up to 61.7% of instructional time in individual sessions. It represented less than 30% of instructional time in
eight sessions, between 30 and 42% of instructional time in 11 sessions and more than 55% of
time in two sessions.

Table 5.1. Percentage of class grouping type to all instructional time (averaged across 21
sessions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher addressing whole class</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>9.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher consultation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole class interacting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Teacher consultation* with individual students represented 24.7% of all instructional time,
accounting for up to 76.2% of time in individual sessions. The teacher spent over 50% of
instructional time consulting with individuals or student groups in three sessions, between 25%
and 39% in eight sessions and below 25% of time in eight sessions.

Table 5.2 shows the percentage of time that teacher consultation co-occurred with small
group, pair, or individual work. These are instances where the teacher assigned tasks to groups,
pairs, or individuals and then walked around desks to consult with individual students or groups.
The conversations during these consultations were not recorded but field notes indicate that they
were mainly focused on answering questions, discussing assignment requirements, and
addressing students’ tentative answers. Table 5.2 shows that, on average, Kate spent more than
half of the time allocated to small group work consulting with the students, either individually or
in their respective groups. Teacher consultation co-occurred with over 65% of time allocated to
small group work in 13 sessions. A similar pattern is evident for individual work, where Kate
consulted with individual students about 36% of the time allocated to individual work. In 13
different sessions, Kate consulted with students during over 50% of individual work time. Co-
occurrence of consultation during pair work was less frequent, with an average of 14% of total pair work time. In fact, Kate consulted with pairs in only three sessions (100% of pair time in each session). These patterns of interaction suggest that Kate intervened to offer tailored support when students worked individually or in small groups but withdrew this kind of support during pair work, thus maximizing student-to-student interaction.

These results show that, while Kate spent a considerable amount of time addressing the class as a group, there was ample opportunity for individualised interaction between her and individual students and among students as well. This distribution of types of grouping suggests a balance between an authoritative teacher role as instructor and her role as mentor. This balance was maintained in almost every individual session: out of 21 sessions, 17 included instances of at least five types of grouping (e.g., session 9 included all six types of groupings while session 10 included 5 types of grouping).

Table 5.2: Percentage of co-occurrence of teacher consultation during peer work (averaged across 21 sessions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Consultation</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher consult.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during small group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work to all small</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher consult.</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during pair work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to all pair work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher consult.</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during Individual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work to all individual work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.2. Teacher’s Interaction

Table 5.3 presents the percentage of time Kate spent assuming different pedagogical roles (See Table 3.3 in Chapter 3 for definitions of the terms). On average, 58% of instructional time included instances of probing, eliciting answers and questioning. This category was present in at least 50% of instructional time in 14 sessions. In other words, in 14 sessions, more than half of Kate’s instructional time included instances of probing and elicitation of answers. Telling and giving information was the second most prevalent teacher role. It was present in 13% to 67.5% of
instructional time in different sessions. There were instances of *telling/giving information* in over 50% of instructional time in 10 different sessions. The third most prevalent teacher role was *modeling*, with instances of modeling present in an average of 40.4% of instructional time. In 8 different sessions this role occurred in over 50% of instructional time. *Monitoring* was present in 38% of instructional time, and it was present in over 50% of instructional time in eight different sessions.

Table 5.3: Percentage of time spent on each teacher role to total instructional time (averaged across 21 sessions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Role</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telling or giving information</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing visually</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing/eliciting/questioning</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These four different teacher roles were present in 19 out of 21 sessions; the first two sessions did not include instances of *modeling*. These roles often co-occurred in the same episodes as shown in Table 5.4. *Giving information* and *probing* co-occurred most often. Combined, they were present in 38.4% of the instructional time. *Modeling* and probing together were present in 34.1% of instructional time while *giving information* and modeling together were present in 29.4% of instructional time.
Table 5.4: Co-occurrence of types of teacher roles (averaged across 21 sessions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of time spent on both giving information and modeling</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of time spent on both giving information and probing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of time spent on both modeling and probing</td>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.3. Students’ Roles

Table 5.5 presents the mean percentage of roles assumed by students in relation to total instructional time per session (See Table 3.3 in Chapter 3 for definitions of the terms). Reading aloud or silently, listening/writing, giving oral responses and discussing were the most prevalent roles assumed by the students. Student reading aloud or silently assumed 41.5% of instructional time. The typical scenario would be one where students read instructions or followed silently as the teacher read from a handout or gave information. Listening/writing typically occurred while the teacher gave tutorials. Oral responses consisted mainly in providing answers and responses to the teacher’s and peers’ questions, whereas discussion occurred mostly in group and pair work. Students engaged in all four roles in 18 out of 21 sessions but in different proportions.

Table 5.5: Percentage of time on different student roles to all instructional time (N=21 sessions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student role</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud or silently</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral response</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debating</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening/Writing</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presentation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open one-on-one interaction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on assignment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.6 shows that these roles often combined in different episodes. *Reading aloud or silently* and *listening, viewing, and writing* co-occurred in 27.7% of instructional time on average, whereas *reading* and *oral responses* co-occurred in 18.5% of the total time, and *oral response* and *listening/writing* co-occurred in episodes representing 17% of instructional time.

Table 5.6: Co-occurrence of types of student roles in 21 sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading and oral response</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and listening/writing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral response and listening/writing</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.4. Instructional Materials

In terms of *Instructional Material* used, Table 5.7 shows that 54.2% of instructional time was supported by the use of teacher-made or teacher selected handouts. The second most prevalent material was *students’ texts*, which supported 31% of instructional time and accounted for up to 79.31% of instructional material use in some sessions.

Table 5.7: Percentage of time spent using different type of instructional material (averaged across 21 sessions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handout</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbook</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteboard</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student text</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.5. Instructional Elements

Table 5.8 shows that the most prevalent *Instructional Elements* were *activation of background knowledge* and the *promotion of complex language*, accounting for 57.3% and 34.5% of instructional time on average. These elements were also observed at every session
Table 5.8: Percentage of time spent using different types of instructional elements (averaged across 21 sessions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activate Background Knowledge</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Complex Language</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicit Basis of Statement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on Learning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Continuity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance Organizer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2. Two Focal Units

The following two sections describe how two course units unfolded: the unit Sentence Variety and the unit Summary Writing. Both units spanned over three class meetings in October and November respectively. Sentence Variety was taught during the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 5\textsuperscript{th} weeks of the semester and the Summary Writing during the 6\textsuperscript{th} week. The two units were selected for analysis because (a) they both spanned more than one session and (b) they were selected and commented on by Kate and the three focal students, who agreed that these were successful units that presented important opportunities for learning.

The analysis is based on three main sources: field notes taken during class observations, verbatim transcription of all class interactions during the two units, and the teacher’s SR statements about the two units. The following two sections highlight how the facilitating factors identified by Kate (in Chapter 4) and the findings of the class interaction coding materialised in real time. A microgenetic analysis of pertinent interactions further pinpoints and illustrates the construction of opportunities for learning as they were experienced in real time in the classroom. Each section starts with a map of the chain of activity in each unit (Tables 5.9 and 5.11 below) that shows the progression and reveals the underlying logic of the unit’s organization across the different sessions. For the unit Sentence Variety, the second part of the analysis uses the results
of interaction coding and microgenetic analysis of classroom excerpts to illustrate how the
different pedagogic choices coded for this project (namely, types of grouping, materials used,
teacher and student roles, and instructional elements) facilitated the creation of opportunities for
learning. For the unit Summary Writing, I trace the formation of an instructional chain through
the different episodes in the unit to highlight the fluidity and continuity between episodes over
time.

5.2.1. Focal Unit: Sentence Variety

The unit on sentence variety spanned three sessions in October (the 5th, 7th, and 26th). It
was introduced by the teacher as one of the features of good academic writing taught in previous
sessions. In the SR related to the session on 05/10, Kate stated the rationale behind this unit as
follows:

We talked in the previous class about what makes writing academic and I went through a whole
list of, I think, nine or 10 points of how writing becomes academic. I try to go through each of
them in different classes and one of the main contributors to academic writing is using sentence
variety. [Teacher SR 2]

A close reading of the map of the chain of activity of the unit Sentence Variety (see Table
5.9, where grey cells indicate episodes of student practice work and the white cells indicate
teacher-dominated episodes) reveals the coherence and cyclic pattern of the unit organization
over three sessions. As explained in Chapter 4, the teacher sequenced course units and episodes
within each unit in a coherent and fluid way that facilitated learning while students tackled
increasingly complex content. She also insisted on making this coherence and her logic visible to
the students. To this end, Kate used multiple advance organizers at transitional points in the unit.
She started the session on 05/10 by clearly stating the goal of the unit to the class. The advance
organizer alerted the students to the number of sentences they needed to learn to use, provided a
map of the unit (i.e., a review followed by practice) and clarified the goal of the unit (i.e., achieving variety when writing). Moreover, by labeling the lesson as a “review” and “remind[er]”, the teacher defined her role and the students’ roles and the nature of background information assumed for this unit:

So what I’ve got here for you is a kind of review of all the different kinds-- the four kinds of sentences. We’ll go through them quickly and then practise using them to remind you how you can achieve the variety in sentence types. [Class of 05/10]

Later in the session, she continued to refer to the map of the unit and made clear where the class stood in relation to that map. In the following quotation, Kate signalled the move to the third sentence type, named the sentence type, and defined it using metalinguistic terms that were already explained and adopted previously in the session:

Let’s look at the third type of sentences which is the complex and that’s what’s going to have one independent clause and a dependent clause. […] Remember, the more important idea is the independent clause and the less important is xxx -- that’s why it’s called subordinate-- is in the dependent clause. Here, the main clause is underlined twice. [Class of 05/10]

The approach remained consistent in the following session which started with another reminder/advance organizer where Kate foregrounded the essential shared information needed for the unit (i.e., the definition of main and subordinate clauses). She then defined the focus of the episode and signalled the organisation of the next ones (i.e., three types of subordinate clauses):

Remember that subordinate means less important than the main clause and they’re also called dependent clauses. Whatever you call them, as long as you understand they are not main clauses so they can’t stand on their own. First type and there are 3. First is adjective, second, adverb, and the third is noun. [Class of 07/10]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref.</th>
<th>Description of class episodes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05 October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>T. Explains goal of the unit: Achieve sentence variety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>T. asks students to define clause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>T. takes up answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Students read H.O silently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>T. reads through the HO and focuses on clause connectors: subordinators, coordinators, conjunctive adverbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>T. defines Simple Sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>T. models constructing a simple sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Students work individually on exercise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Students write answers on board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Answers taken up by class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>T. Invites definitions of compound sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>T. explains FANBOYS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>T. models first answer to exercise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Student work individually on exercise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>T. explains conjunctive adverbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>T. models answering first question in exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Students work individually to answer the rest of the questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Students discuss answers in groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>T. defines complex sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Practice exercise: T. deconstructs a sentence that she made up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Students work individually and in pairs to answer rest of exercise questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Students write their answers on board. Answers are taken up in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Break. One student consults with T.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>T. Reads Hand Out about Complex Sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>T. models one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Individual work on exercise to identify sentence types in text created by T.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Students writes answers on board. Answers are taken up in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>T. gives instructions for Exercise to create a paragraph with all sentence types using information from previous activity on Twitter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Students work individually to create their paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>T. monitors students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>T. shares the text she created. She deconstructs the text with the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ref.</td>
<td>Description of class episodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>T. gives a summary reminder of main points covered in previous session: meaning of subordination, adjective, adverb and noun clauses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>T. defines and explains the difference between restrictive and non-restrictive clauses reading from handout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>T. assigns exercise about identifying sentence parts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Students work on exercise individually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>T. defines and explains adjective clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>T. models answer to exercise on identifying adverb clauses and its purpose in a paragraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Students work individually on the rest of the questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>T. defines and explains noun clauses as the third type of subordinate clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>T. models 2 examples of sentence combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Students work individually to finish the rest of the exercise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>T. introduces the new lesson: Reducing clauses to phrases. She relates it back to the unit on sentence construction (adjective clauses are a type of dependent clauses).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>T. deconstructs a complex sentence to show the position and function of a phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>T. reads handout. She draws a model of an example sentence for illustration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Students work individually to answer practice exercise question (identify adjective clause and reduce it to phrase). T. walks around desks and offers consultations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Class correct exercise together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>T. models first answer to a new exercise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Students work individually to finish exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Class share and correct answers together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>T. asks students to identify adjective clauses in a text they already read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>T. stars a tutorial about ‘adverb clauses’ with examples from Handout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>T. models answer to first question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Student answer the rest of the questions individually, while T. offers consultations with some students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Grey cells indicate episodes of student practice work and the white cells indicate teacher-dominated episodes.

The previous three quotations illustrate how Kate implemented at least two of the factors she identified as facilitative of the creation of opportunities for learning: (1) coherence, fluidity and clear ‘road signs’ allowed students to see the logic of the unit and the connection between different episodes to achieve the same goal, (2) the language used also helped define the shared
knowledge and the nature of the roles assigned to everyone in the class. Students were expected to bring knowledge of sentence types to be able to participate fully in this class.

The following paragraphs further illustrate how the pedagogic choices made in class helped implement the facilitating factors identified by Kate in Chapter 4 and support these findings with excerpts from the transcripts of the class meetings. The following analysis is based essentially on the findings reported in Table 5.10, which shows the number of minutes spent on each of the five coded categories (i.e., Grouping, Teacher Interaction, Student Response, Instructional Materials and Instructional Elements) across three different class meetings devoted to Sentence Variety. As explained above, each episode could be coded for more than one category (e.g., teacher addressing whole class under Grouping + teacher-made handout under Materials).

5.2.1.1. Grouping.

Table 5.10 shows that most of the teacher talk to whole class took place in the first session (05/10). During that session, Kate offered a tutorial supported by a long handout that detailed all the types of sentences and dependent clauses (e.g., adjective, noun, adverb clauses). The 58 minutes were spread throughout the session (i.e., the teacher did not talk uninterrupted for 58 minutes). In fact, the tutorial was often interrupted by students’ questions or the teacher’s prompts and comprehension checks. Besides these brief interruptions, the teacher organised the tutorial into distinct sections following the organization of the handout, stopping at the end of each significant section to assign a task to students. In this manner, the 58 minutes of teacher talk and the 43 minutes of individual student work were intermingled, following a cyclic pattern of teacher talk follow by students’ individual work time. This pattern is reflected in the shading in
Table 5.9 where grey cells indicate episodes of student practice work and the white cells indicate teacher-dominated episodes.

In the following class meetings, the teacher talk continued to represent a considerable portion of the time spent on the Sentence Variety unit; however, Table 5.10 shows a clear decrease in the total amount and proportion of time spent in teacher talk. For instance, during the third session (26/10), the class spent more time working on assignments in groups or individually than attending to a teacher tutorial. On the other hand, in this session the teacher spent her time offering individualised consultations to students.

These findings illustrate Kate’s attempt to offer different kinds of assistance to her students, from a detailed tutorial, to allowing ample opportunity for practice and correction, and to offering individualised consultations to different students. The change of proportions of each type of interaction or grouping over time showed a gradual decrease in straightforward teacher talk to more interactive exchanges which allowed a gradual increase in student control and autonomy.

The teacher talk was often interrupted to allow for questions, inquiries, and requests for further clarifications from students. As explained in the previous chapter, such interruptions were encouraged by the overall supportive classroom environment and the shared understanding that questions and queries are welcome and honored. The following two excerpts of the class interactions show how these interruptions created impromptu opportunities for learning.
Table 5.10: Time spent (in minutes) on each coded category during the unit Sentence Variety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grouping</th>
<th>05 October</th>
<th>07 October</th>
<th>26 October</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher talk to whole class</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair work</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual work</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher consultation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole class interacting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Material used                   |            |            |            |
| Teacher-made handout            | 85         | 29         | 48         |
| Textbook                        | 0          | 11         | 0          |
| Whiteboard for presenting info  | 33         | 18         | 17         |
| Student text                    | 39         | 0          | 15         |

| Teacher role                    |            |            |            |
| Giving information              | 61         | 21         | 37         |
| Modeling                        | 61         | 32         | 44         |
| Discussion                      | 9          | 0          | 0          |
| Coaching                        | 25         | 16         | 15         |
| Listening                       | 3          | 4          | 15         |
| Reading aloud                   | 36         | 18         | 14         |
| Representing visually           | 30         | 18         | 19         |
| Monitoring                      | 55         | 12         | 16         |
| Probing eliciting questioning   | 56         | 25         | 55         |

| Instructional elements          |            |            |            |
| Activation and use of background and relevant schema | 57       | 39         | 55         |
| Promotion of more complex language and expression | 56       | 39         | 55         |
| Building continuity             | 67         | 33         | 27         |
| Advance organizer               | 0          | 11         | 0          |

| Student role                    |            |            |            |
| Reading aloud or silently       | 60         | 25         | 55         |
| Oral response                   | 29         | 7          | 33         |
| Discussing                      | 9          | 0          | 0          |
| Debating                        | 8          | 0          | 41         |
| Listening, viewing, writing     | 50         | 16         | 31         |
| Open one on one interaction     | 0          | 5          | 9          |
| Work on assignment              | 44         | 23         | 24         |
In the first quotation, Hichem interrupted Kate’s listing of the right answers to an assignment with a vague question about the meaning and/or correct use of the connector ‘yet’. Instead of asking Hichem to clarify his question or providing a direct answer, Kate turned the question back to the class and thus started a five-turn exchange where she led the students to the understanding of both the meaning of ‘yet’ and a justification of its use in this particular case. In other words, instead of answering one specific question, Kate took Hichem’s query as an opportunity to cover all aspects of the issue. She first broke down the problem into more essential questions: in order to justify the use of “yet” in the sentence, one had to understand the meaning. With hints and probes, she led the class to verbalise the exact meaning of “yet”. In this case, even wrong and approximate answers were useful because they helped students narrow down their understanding of the meaning of “yet” until Shawn ventured a suggestion that was taken up and elaborated by the teacher. What started as a routine assignment correction led to an opportunity for learning the meaning and usage of the connector “yet”. As explained in Chapter 4, the environment of support and trust encouraged Hichem to pose his question. Kate’s acceptance of the interruption reinforced the code of trust and the overall understanding that questions are welcome and will be answered. What was verbalised became available for all to process and understand. Within this process, there is also clear evidence of co-incidence of assessment and teaching as described in Poehner (2009). As Kate managed this conversation, she provided carefully graduated mediation (in the form of questions and probes) to engage the group in a meaningful activity where students pooled their mental efforts to cooperatively reach a better understanding of the meaning and use of “yet”:

Teacher: So let’s look at these answers and see, there should be a different one for each. First one is ‘and’, second one is ‘but’, third one I wrote down for you, make sure you don’t include the word ‘not’- ‘nor are energy sources going to increase. 4 is so, 5 is yet, what about N6
Student: what about N5
T: N5 can you explain why yet is correct. What does yet mean? Hichem
Hichem: but
T: it doesn’t mean but. It’s not the same as but. What do you think?
Jassem: xx
T: you’re getting close.
Shawn: show surprise
T: Surprise. Exactly. It’s not the expected result. […] [Class of 05/10]

Similar opportunities for learning occurred following consultation with individual students--another type of grouping coded for this project (teacher consultation). Typically, after consulting with a student, the teacher realized that a point needed to be clarified and she brought it back to the whole class:

[Teacher interrupts her consultation with one student]
T: If you find you have lots of ands and buts, try to eliminate those and make complex sentences. Here is an example of what I mean [takes sheet of student she was working with]. This is a common problem and I’m just going to write it on the board to show you what you should try to avoid. [Writes on board] Ok, can anyone see what I would underline or suggest to you to change. What’s wrong with this? ‘Twitter is a communication service and it allows family and friends to stay in touch’
Student: and
T: Yes, exactly. Instead of saying ‘it allows’ because you have the same subject, Twitter and it--so if you have the same subject in the same sentence then simply make an adjective clause out of it. It makes it more concise ‘is a communication service which allows’ so if you have a sentence like that with an ‘and’ with the same subject, make an adjective clause out of it. [Class of 05/10]

In this case, Kate noted a problem in one student’s writing that she deemed was relevant to the whole class. The issue of the overuse of coordinators ‘and’ and ‘but’ was addressed in the preceding tutorial. However, when Kate noted a student committing the same mistake again, she used the student’s sentence as an example and prompted the class to think of ways to correct it. Thus, the teacher allowed the class to think through a concrete example. This was also an
opportunity to demonstrate to the class how to avoid this issue using the newly acquired knowledge (i.e., using an adjective clause).

5.2.1.2. Material used.

Table 5.10 shows the amount of time (in minutes) that the class spent using each one of the four types of pedagogical materials available (i.e., teacher-made handout, textbook, whiteboard, and student texts). The Table shows that teacher-made handouts were the main instructional support in the unit on Sentence Variety. In fact, the handouts used in the three sessions contained the tutorial, the supporting examples as well as the prompts for the practice assignments (e.g., Figure 1 below).

Handouts: Use of examples: An important feature of the handouts was the considerable use of examples to illustrate almost every point. The excerpt below is a transcription of the teacher talk as she introduced the handout in Figure 1:

Teacher: First of all, simple sentence does not necessarily mean subject-verb and object like ‘I teach the class’. That’s a simple sentence but it’s a boring sentence so there are ways of making it more interesting. It has one independent clause but look at the example I’ve given you. ‘I enjoy playing tennis’ or ‘I enjoy playing tennis with my friend every weekend.’ It is still a simple sentence. Why? Why isn’t it something more even though it has more than subject and verb?

Student: It has too many words

Teacher [laughs]: ‘with my friend every weekend’ is a phrase. It’s not a clause. It’s a simple sentence. ‘I enjoyed playing tennis’ plus a phrase ‘with my friend every weekend.’ [Class of 05/10]

These examples were presented to illustrate focal points. Kate also consistently deconstructed the examples into their constituent parts to demonstrate how different parts served specific functions in the sentence. Each example thus became a tool to help the students visualise the new knowledge being discussed and see how it is applied in real authentic use. In this case,
the deconstruction of the example helped Kate introduce the idea of the difference between a clause and a phrase.

Figure 5.1: Handout for the unit on Sentence Variety

*Students’ texts:* A considerable amount of time was spent working on students’ texts, usually written on the board for display and ease of reference. Typically, at the end of each
task/assignment, Kate asked students to write their answers on the board. The whole class, then, discussed, approved, or corrected the answers on the board. The following excerpt illustrates how the students’ texts (i.e., assignment answers) became an impetus for the creation of opportunities for learning:

[Teacher invites students to write interesting simple sentences on the board. Each sentence deals with an assigned topic (e.g., write a sentence about the topic 'Understand new words')]
Teacher: Let’s look at some of the examples that the students put on the board. Number 2, 'Understand new words' is the topic. ‘Today I understand all the new words that our teacher gave us to memorize.’ Is that a simple sentence?
Class: No
T: What kind of sentence is it? It’s a good sentence but it’s not a simple sentence
Class: xxx
T: It’s a complex compound sentence. Why?
Class: xx
T: Well, it’s got an adjective clause ‘that our teacher has given us to memorise’ is an adjective clause giving us information about 'words'-- all that refers back to words. [...] ‘Today, I understand all the new words’ that is fine. The rest we have to eliminate. [Class of 05/10]

The interaction quoted above followed the tutorial about simple sentences (Fig. 1) and Kate’s modeling of the answer to the first question of the practice exercise. With two questions (“is that a simple sentence?” “What kind of sentence is it?”), Kate led the class to understand that the sentence on the board was a complex compound, not a simple, sentence. Because the whole unit was a review, Kate assumed that the class knew or had some understanding of what a complex compound sentence and adjective clause are. Therefore, in the last turn in the interaction, as she deconstructed the sentence, Kate built on the shared knowledge of what a simple sentence is and announced what would be tackled next (i.e., complex compound sentences and types of clauses). In this interaction, the teacher was pushing the class forward to the next level of sentence complexity. There would be ample opportunities to define complex
sentences, but at the end of this interaction, the students had the opportunity to reactivate what they knew or started to develop a nascent understanding of what complex sentences are.

5.2.1.3. Teacher’s roles

Table 5.10 shows that Kate assumed all nine pedagogical roles coded in this project. However, there was a notable disparity between the proportion of time spent in each role, with *giving information, modeling, monitoring, and probing/eliciting/questioning* being the predominant roles. The Table also shows that while the durations of *giving information* decreased over time, *modeling* and *probing* remained the most prevalent roles in the second and third sessions. In fact, during the first session (05 October), *giving information* was the most prevalent role (61 min) as Kate presented her tutorial. In the second and third sessions (07 and 26 October), *giving information* was the third most prevalent role (21 and 37 min respectively). This trend suggests that, after the first exhaustive tutorial, there was no need for extended explanations.

The following excerpts from classroom transcripts illustrate how the teacher facilitated the creation of opportunities for learning while assuming the four most prevalent roles.

*Teacher giving information:* Kate typically 'gave information' during the tutorials or in response to specific student’s questions. The following paragraphs highlight three characteristics of the teacher talk coded as *giving information*: use of mediating tools such as mnemonics and graphs, the deconstruction of examples, and the tailoring of instruction to the specific needs of the class:

Teacher: So with a coordinator, you use an independent clause + coordinator + independent clause. Now look at page 2. You’ll see the coordinators; there are 7 of them only. I don’t know how you learned them but I always teach them by using the acronym FANBOYS. Is that how you learned them? I have no idea who developed the acronym but it works so those are the only 7 you
can use. The thing I wanted to mention is the punctuation. The coordinator is always preceded by a comma. [Class of 05/10]

In this quotation, the teacher used two mnemonics. First, she used a mathematical equation to simplify the construction of the compound sentence. She also used a widely known acronym that facilitates memorization of the seven grammatical coordinators. Field notes indicate that the acronym FANBOYS, which stands for the coordinators for, and, nor, but, or, yet and so, was later appropriated by the students and used recurrently by the class.

As the teacher provided information she constantly included examples to illustrate. Some of these examples were already included in the handout but many examples were improvised in the moment in response to a perceived need for further details or explanations. In the following quotation, Kate was explaining that the coordinator 'and' can only be used to connect two equal ideas:

Teacher: Equal ideas. ‘The Japanese consume a lot of rice and they eat more fish than meat'. Now what do I mean by equal ideas here.
Student: Two independent clauses are equal.
T: Two independent clauses are equal in importance. Why? [pause] Because they’re all about the Japanese. It would be wrong-- let me give you an example where using ‘and’ would be wrong. The Japanese consume a lot of rice and rice is healthy for your diet. Why are they not equal?
Students: xx
Teacher: Can you tell us Tom?
Tom: different categories...
Teacher: Yes, different categories. Every time you use ‘and’ you have to ask yourself is it about the same subject. The subject isn’t rice. The subject is Japanese. [Class of 05/10]

The first example sentence in this quotation was part of the tutorial on the handout. However, the second counter-example that the teacher created to illustrate a wrong usage of 'and' was improvised in the moment. The counter-example served to clarify the concept at hand, allowing the students to move from a mere repetition of what the teacher said in her tutorial (i.e.,
two independent clauses must be equal) to a more advanced level of abstraction where they classified the subjects of each clause. Like all the illustrative examples appearing in this chapter, this quotation from the classroom transcript just shows Tom uttering the appropriate answer that was then taken up by Kate. However, the verbalisation of the thought process that the teacher was aiming to model and the enunciation of the correct answer, which was then validated and taken up by the teacher, made this information available to the whole class, including students who might not be able to reach such answers by themselves.

The following excerpt of the teacher 'giving information' about adjective clauses illustrates another pertinent feature of the teacher's explanations. Kate relied on her expertise to direct the students to a recurrent issue in their understanding and use of adjective clauses. This resulted in a tutorial that was targeted and immediately pertinent to the students:

Teacher: Adjective clauses. They give or modify information about a noun. What modify means is change so if you have a simple noun like desk, modify means nice desk or beautiful desk, big desk. It gives information about a noun and gives information about a whole idea. The biggest problem students have is the clause must follow directly the noun/idea it modifies. It can’t be at the end of the sentence like this [board]. I’ve seen xxx even doing this. So here is your adjective clause ‘which was outlined in lesson one’ but what is it giving information about-- it’s giving information about course work so it must be following-- it must be directly-- it can’t be at the end of the sentence. And that’s one of the problems the students have. They must follow the noun directly [...] [Class of 07/10]

Teacher modeling: The previous sections included several instances of the teacher deconstructing sentences and examples. All these instances can be considered examples of teacher modeling as she showed students how to understand the process of sentence construction. However, the most obvious instance of modeling was in the form of the teacher solving the first question of each assigned practise exercise or creating texts to be deconstructed by the students, as illustrated in the following interaction. In the class excerpt below, Kate invited the class to
answer the first question together. She did not provide the answer immediately. She modeled the problem-solving process she expected the students to apply to solve the rest of the questions. The leading questions (i.e., “what is the main independent clause?”; “what is the most important information?”) pointed the students towards the first step in answering the question: identifying the independent clause. By insisting that Shawn reads the answer and repeating it after him, she verbalised the answer, validated it, and gave time to the rest of the class to process it:

Teacher: Can we do the first sentence together and then you can continue with the others. So here it’s written on the board. What’s the main independent clause? What’s the most important information, Shawn?
Shawn: xx
T: Can you tell us what’s the main independent clause?
Shawn: It starts with two until before that
T: So can you read over the main clause?
Shawn: Two Mississauga brothers appeared in court yesterday in Brampton for bail hearings after a hi-speed multi-vehicle that…Great and the ‘killed 2 women and slightly injured 7’ how would you describe this clause.
Class: xx
T: How would you describe that clause? What kind of clause is it?
Class: Adjective
T: Adjective clause, so it’s a subordinate clause ‘pileup that killed 2 women and injured 7’. […]
[Class of 05/10]

At the end of the interaction, the teacher pushed the class forward to name the sentence parts.

*Teacher monitoring:* Throughout the unit Kate monitored students’ learning consistently. The most basic way of monitoring was through the use of comprehension checks. The following quotation illustrates this point, as Kate not only checked that everyone was ‘on board’, but also asked students to rephrase what she had said previously to ensure everybody was in agreement
about the instructions she had just given. The interaction resulted in the identification of a subtle misunderstanding of what the teacher said, which Kate corrected immediately:

Teacher: Any questions about what to do? Can someone—Samira, What is it that I’m asking you to do? I just want to make sure everybody is clear about the assignment.
Samira: write about the information that we have about Twitter and we should write xxx or choose between simple and compound.
T: Ok, exactly, but except for four sentences. 10 pieces of information that should be included in three sentences, ok? It doesn’t matter what order you combine the sentences, try at least to have 2 complex sentences and a simple or may be a compound. It’s up to you as long as you have a variety. [Class of 05/10]

*Teacher probing/eliciting/questioning*: This feature of teacher talk was unambiguously predominant and documented in the field notes and then confirmed in the classroom interaction coding. Kate rarely gave answers or information without giving the students an opportunity to try to formulate answers first. These instances of elicitation and probing led to agreement on definitions of shared knowledge, as illustrated in the following quotation:

Teacher: ‘What is a compound sentence— if you remember it? Do you remember what it is? Tell us Farah.
St: 2 subjects, 2 verbs.
T: She’s got the idea.
St: Independent clause with a coordinator
T: yes, exactly. 2 independent sentences; that means they can stand alone and have one word that connects them so that makes a compound sentence. The problem is that compound sentences are misused and overused. [Class of 05/10]

The continuous elicitation in the form of questions led the students to rethink their responses and pool their knowledge to reach correct answers. The same thing happened in the following quotation, as Kate led the students to verbalise an explanation, which made a fine distinction between the concept of equal ideas in independent clauses and the concept of thematic connection between clauses. The verbalisation was then made available to all the class:
Teacher: Why we use a semicolon there. You could use a period. Why is the semicolon there appropriate?
Student: because they’re connected
T: Yes, they’re connected. They’re not equal so it’s fine to use a semicolon. […] [Class of 05/10]

The above quotation is another example of the teacher leading the students to verbalise what was assumed to be shared knowledge. This in turn helped students with different levels of ability benefit from the lesson. Students who knew the answer consolidated their knowledge by having it validated and verbalising what was otherwise tacit knowledge. The students who did not know the answer or were not able to articulate the subtle difference between equal idea and thematic connection were now aware of the difference.

Another noticeable feature of Kate’s teacher talk was the use of ‘why’ questions. The following quotation illustrates a typical use of why questions and the teacher’s rationale behind it. Her goal was to get factual answers but also to help the students understand the reasons behind them. Being able to explain an answer obviously denotes a deeper level of learning:

Teacher: Do you think it’s better to have the adverb clause at the beginning or at the end?
Class: xx
T: Why? Not just ‘because’. There has to be a reason.
Student 1: it’s a gut feeling
T: a gut feeling
Student2: it makes the sentence more strong.
T: I agree with you, it is but it doesn’t explain why? Do you have any idea?
Student 3: It depends on the situation and the main idea.
T: I think that probably that is pretty close. The main idea is left at the end. The main idea is ‘I meet my friends’ so that’s important so if you wanna leave your readers with the main idea ‘I meet my friends’ ‘before I study for an exam’ is less important. It’s the condition so yeah, I like it. I think it gives variety. You could do it the other way around but this is a good way to do it. [Class of 05/10]
Instructional elements: The four instructional elements coded for this project were used consistently in every session and over time. The following excerpts from the classroom transcripts illustrate how these elements helped create opportunities for learning.

The previous sections included several examples of the teacher using probes and questions to activate background knowledge and schemata--one of the most predominant instructional elements coded during the semester. As explained above, these elicitations helped verbalise assumed knowledge to make it available to students with different abilities and further reinforced the understanding that students had an active role to play. These exchanges seemed to empower the students as they were positioned as active participants with valuable knowledge capital.

The other prevalent instructional element was the promotion of complex language. Kate consistently defined and used metalinguistic terms. Her definitions were linguistic and conceptual. In the following excerpt, for instance, she explained the meaning of the word ‘subordinator’:

Teacher: I just want to go through the words you use when you connect the clauses. The first group of words that connects clauses is called subordinators. Sub means below so it’s less important than the main words or the main clause so all the words under subordinators will be in a clause that is less important than the main clause. Think of it that way.

This linguistic definition was presented as a cognitive mediating tool to help visualise the function of the subordinator. By highlighting the prefix ‘sub’ and making an explicit connection between its lexical meaning and the function of the subordinate clause in the sentence, Kate created a mnemonic reference that was more likely to be retained and recalled.

Later in the same session, Kate explained to her students (and thus drew their attention to) the importance of understanding and using metalinguistic terms:
Field notes indicate that the students appropriated these terms and started using them consistently and increasingly correctly to think about their sentences and the structure of their writing.

5.2.1.4. Students’ roles

The three most predominant roles assumed by the students were reading, listening/writing, and working on assignments. The three student roles are not amenable to open analysis because they did not have a tangible product (i.e., the first two were mostly silent and the last one was not recorded); however, the previous sections included several examples of opportunities for learning created while the students were mainly attending to tutorials (i.e., listening, reading) or consulting with the teacher while working on assignments.

Student oral responses: The second most prevalent student role coded, oral response, was the impetus for the creation of opportunities for learning. As reported above, Kate routinely elicited answers and probed students to provide examples, explanations, or comments on the materials and content at hand. Field notes and classroom interaction analysis indicate that these probes and elicitations were not always formally formed questions, and they often resulted in fast-paced exchanges between the teacher and students or among students. Kate often did not call on specific students to answer, leaving the floor open to whoever wanted to contribute to the exchange. This pattern is exemplified in the following excerpt from the class of 05/10:

Teacher: I can create a very boring simple sentence. ‘I enjoy reading English material.’ It is correct but it’s not very interesting. What would be an interesting way of creating a simple sentence with those words, those ideas?
Student: Usually, I enjoy reading English material?
The opportunity for learning in this excerpt materialised in at least three ways. First, students who volunteered answers found validation in the teacher’s acceptance of their answers as correct. It is not possible to investigate the inner dialogue that co-occurred with every student’s formulation of his/her answer. But field notes and video footage indicate that some of these answers were uttered with hesitation while others were formulated as questions, which suggests that these students were not always in full control of the ‘simple sentence construction’ as they ventured answers. They were either testing a possible understanding or seeking confirmation of a nascent notion that they did not fully control yet. The positive class context that encouraged and valued contributions facilitated these students’ hesitant responses, and the teacher’s validation seemed to have settled any inner questions or conflicts they may have had.

Second, Kate took up some answers as opportunities to show how some of the information covered previously applied to the specific examples or answers. In line 7 of the extract above, the teacher deconstructed the students’ answer using the metalinguistic terms she had explained a few moments previously, thus creating an opportunity to contextualise the theoretical explanation and integrate the metalinguistic terms in the class’ repertoire in a fluid way. Third, in lines 9 to 11 above, a student gave an inappropriate answer by repeating the
initial simple sentence ("I enjoy reading English material"). The teacher’s answer indicated to the student subtly that the answer was inappropriate and referred her back to the instructions and the information she needed to correct her answer. It was not clear in the video if the student consulted the handout or if she later corrected her answer. However, it is reasonable to posit that Kate’s answer drew the student’s attention to a gap in her own understanding of the concept at hand or to the instruction of the exercise. Both gaps could be addressed during consultation with the teacher or through careful attention to the ongoing conversation with other students.

*Students working on an assignment:* As explained above, work on assignments followed teacher tutorials. Typically, Kate ended each tutorial with a comprehension check and did not move to the practice exercises until she obtained the class’ consent and confirmation that the tutorial was clear. However, once students started working on assignments they often raised questions and seemed to realise gaps in their understanding of the material. These questions and queries were optimal opportunities for re-explaining the same concepts in new contexts and addressing the same issues from different angles. For instance, in the following excerpt, Kate had a new opportunity to explain the concept of coordination between equal ideas following the students’ mistaken answers. The concept was addressed and exemplified in the tutorial but students’ work on the assignment revealed their failure to grasp the concept and/or apply it to a new linguistic context.

Students working on assignment. [ex. P.4 of HO4]

Teacher: ‘What’s the coordinator to use here. Anybody wants to guess
St: so
T: so means result
St: xx
T: let’s look at sentence number 1. ‘The accident at the nuclear power plant at Three Mile Island in the US created fears about the safety. The second sentence ‘the disaster in Chernobyl in the
Soviet Union confirmed them.’ Are they equal in importance- are they the same idea, nuclear power accidents.
St: No
T: Yes. They are. It should be ‘and’
St: [hesitant]
T: Well, let’s look at the subject in N1. ‘The accident in Three Mile Island. The disaster in Chernobyl so accidents in nuclear power plants so they’re equal so use ‘and’

[Class of 05/10]

5.2.2. Focal Unit: Summary Writing

Kate introduced the unit on Summary Writing as “extremely, extremely important for writing in academic levels at university, college”, a skill that “is not easy but can be done”. She also insisted from the beginning that the unit was a review, thus suggesting that the students were responsible for showing an appropriate understanding of the basics of summary writing from their previous experiences. At several points in the unit, the teacher made clear connections to previous relevant units covered during the course, such as the units about paraphrasing and taking notes.

Table 5.11 describes the sequence of episodes that constituted the unit over three sessions. Analysis of the chain of activity of the unit reveals that the unit was centred on the creation of three student texts, with differing levels of teacher support and scaffolding and student collaboration. Figure 5.2 schematizes the chain of activity for the creation of each text. It reveals a clear pattern of decreasing teacher support and increasing student independence. It also highlights essential intertextual connections that made the unit coherent and increasingly complex.
Table 5.11: Map of the 20 episodes that constituted the chain of activity in the Summary Writing Unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Description of episode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>November 2nd</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teacher probes students to reactivates background knowledge of summary writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher explains 4 steps of writing a summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Students read Handout Criteria of Good Summary silently and then ask questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher explains how she wrote a summary applying the 4 steps she introduced previously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Students work individually to fill in the blanks of teacher summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Class discusses answers to deconstruct the teacher model text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Group discussion of the main idea of the text Kampala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Teacher leads discussion of main idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Class discusses supporting ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Teacher leads discussion of the supporting ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Teacher assigns homework: complete summary of Kampala article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>November 4th</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Teacher comments and explains checklist that the students will use to offer peer feedback on homework assignment (summary of Kampala)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Students work in pairs to provide feedback on peers’ drafts + Teacher consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Classes works together to create an outline for a summary to be done at home using the notes they took on the article “Miraculous survivors”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Small group work + Teacher consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Students work individually to complete outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Teacher assigns homework: complete summary of Kampala article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>November 6th</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Students edit their peer’s summary homework + Teacher consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Teacher assigns homework: complete summary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.2.1. Gradual withdrawal of assistance

Figure 5.2 shows the gradual withdrawal of assistance at three levels: over each chain, within each session, and over the duration of the unit. Each row represents a chain of activity that started with considerable teacher presence and led gradually to more student independence. For instance, the first chain of 02/11 (i.e., first row) started with an extensive teacher tutorial about
four steps in the writing of summaries. While this phase of the chain included some student intervention when the teacher prompted the students to recall and verbalise their previous knowledge of summaries, it was teacher-dominant as Kate explained the concepts of main and supporting ideas, the types of reporting verbs, the importance of acknowledging sources, and the need to add ‘linking/coherence devices.’ In the second phase of the same chain, the students worked individually to complete a summary that the teacher wrote. The class then came together to discuss the possible answers and agree on a final version of Text 1 of the Summary unit. In this case, the teacher provided or helped reactivate the relevant background knowledge with the tutorial using the handout and scaffolded the students’ first attempt to write a summary by modeling a summary and limiting their contribution to filling in the blanks. After the students’ attempt to work individually, the teacher called on the entire class to discuss individual answers, thus offering validation and further explanations where needed.

The second chain of 02/11 started with a phase that balanced teacher and student contributions, and although the discussion was led by the teacher, the students’ answers were the main impetus for the development of the conversation. The chain ended with an assignment to be completed individually at home (Text 2). Therefore, over the session of 02/11, there was a visible increase in students’ active involvement from the first to the second chain.

A similar pattern appeared in the two chains that constituted the class of 04/11. The first chain started with a teacher tutorial to explain the checklist that the students were about to use in their peer-review activity. Here again, Kate offered a structured review of the main points covered in the tutorial from the session of 02/11 before working with student pairs to revise a summary that the students wrote as homework (revise Text 2).
**02 November**

1. Teacher tutorial about 4 steps of writing a summary.

   Students fill in blank to complete draft summary written by teacher.

   Class discusses answers.

   **Text 1**

2. Alternating small-group and teacher-led discussion of main and supporting ideas in a familiar article.

   Assigned homework: Write summary of familiar text discussed.

   **Text 2**

**04 November**

3. Teacher explains checklist to be used for peer-feedback.

   Pair work + teacher consultation to provide feedback on homework **Text 2**.

   **Revised Text 2**

4. Class collaboration to write an outline for a familiar article.

   Small group work + teacher consultation to write outline of a familiar article.

   Assigned homework. Write summary of a familiar article.

   **Text 3**

**06 November**

5. Pair work to provide feedback on homework **Text 3**.

   Assigned homework to edit **Text 3**.

   **Revised Text 3**

---

Figure 5.2: Chain of activity in the unit on Summary Writing
The second chain of 04/11 was longer and saw the class progress from a whole-class collaboration to brainstorm the outline of Text 3 to small-group work to write a first draft of the outline for a summary of a familiar article that the class had read and discussed in a previous session. The session concluded with the assignment to work individually at home to finish the drafts of the summaries.

During the session of 06/11, the teacher’s role was minimal, giving way to more peer collaboration. This pattern is reflected in Table 5.12 that shows the time spent (in minutes) on each of the aspects of the interactional space of the class coded for this project. The Table shows that during the session of 02/11, Teacher talk was the most prominent category of verbal interaction, while in the following sessions (04/11 and 06/11) Teacher talk became less important giving way to more pair work and one-on-one teacher consultations.

The Table also shows a heavy reliance on Teacher-made handouts in the first session that slowly gave way to work on Students’ texts which constituted the main support material in the second session and the only source material in the third session.

5.2.2.2. Coherence and fluidity through intertextual links

Figure 5.3 shows the number of intertextual links assumed and used for the unit on Summary Writing. It is to be noted that all the articles that were summarised were familiar articles that the class had discussed and deconstructed in previous sessions. Using material that does not pose any comprehension challenges illustrates the point made by Kate (in Chapter 4) about the importance of balancing challenge and a sense of attainment. While tackling a challenging concept such as summaries, Kate alleviated the burden on students by using accessible material. This management of cognitive burden was one of Kate’s goals and, in her
understanding, it was designed to facilitate the creation of opportunities for learning by channeling all the students’ attention to the target concept.

Table 5.12: Time spent (in minutes) on each coded category during the unit Summary Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>02 November</th>
<th>04 November</th>
<th>06 November</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grouping</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher talk to whole class</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group work</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual work</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher consultation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole class interacting</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials used</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-made handout</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbook</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteboard for presenting info</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student text</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher role</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving information</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recitation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing visually</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing eliciting questionning</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional elements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud or silently</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral response recitation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debating</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening, viewing, writing</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presentation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open one-on-one interaction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on assignment</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second level of intertextuality was evident in the connection and fluidity between the mediational tools used to support the Summary unit. Figure 5.3 juxtaposes the two handouts used in 02/11 and 04/11. The first handout (02/11) summarised the four main steps of writing a summary and was covered by the teacher as a tutorial. The second handout (04/11) was a checklist that the students used as a reference. The Figure shows the direct connection between the two documents. Almost every point addressed in the tutorial was then reiterated in the checklist (as indicated by the arrows that connect the reiterated points). The information covered was similar, but the function of each document/tool was different. The first document was used as a record of the teacher’s explanation of the main criteria of good summaries. It could be used as a reference or a reminder that the student could consult at any time. In contrast, the second document was to be used by the students as a working tool. It assumed a certain level of understanding of the features of a good summary and so could assist a student to apply this knowledge to provide feedback to a peer or oneself. In other words, the first document positioned the student as receiver of information while the second document was designed to ‘push’ the student to act as an expert and to start using the acquired knowledge actively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student role</th>
<th>02 November</th>
<th>04 November</th>
<th>06 November</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud or silently</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral response recitation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debating</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening, viewing, writing</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presentation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open one-on-one interaction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on assignment</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5.3: Two handouts for the unit on Summary Writing

Criteria for a Good Summary

1. A good summary acknowledges the original author
   - it refers to the writer and the title of the work in a formal way
   - it presents the writer’s ideas objectively, without your opinion or interpretation
   - it reminds the reader of the writer’s name (family name only) periodically in the summary

2. A good summary contains only the most important information.
   - the topic (the general subject of the article)
   - the main point that the author makes about the topic (the thesis)
   - the supporting points that support or explain the thesis

3. A good summary is much shorter than the original writing
   - It is generally 25-30% of the original length

4. A good summary paraphrases any information taken from the original writing
   - paraphrasing shows you understand the text

SUMMARY: PEER EDITING CHECKLIST

1. Content:
   - Read the summary carefully. Put a question mark beside or above anything you are unsure about.
   - Does the summary give you a good idea of the original article? Yes/Not so clear
   - If the information is incomplete or unclear, ask your partner.
   - The length is approximately 25-30% of the original article

2. Language and structure
   - The author and source are identified. Make sure the structure of the subject, reporting verb and main idea are correct.
   - The writer has used several reminders in the summary that he/she is still summarizing. (As the author states/the article also states/ in his opinion/ in the view of the article)
   - If the writer includes a quote from the article, he/she has incorporated it into the summary writer’s own sentence.
     - the quotation is correctly punctuated
     - the quotation is exactly the same as the original phrase or sentence
     - the quotation is important and well-chosen. It is clear why the writer chose it.
   - The writer has used reporting verbs and expressions to keep the summary objective (his/her personal opinion is not expressed)

   - Verb tense:
     - The writer has used the present tense to summarize ideas, opinion, facts, or general truths.
     - The writer has used the past tense only to refer to actions or situations which clearly took place in past time.
   - Sentence structure:
     - Sentence variety (including clauses and/or phrases.
The third level of intertextuality was evident in the recurrent use of students’ texts as both assessment tools and teaching materials. Every student text (Text 1, Text 2, and Text 3) was first generated in collaboration with teacher and peers before it was revised and refined individually. The drafts that were written individually were then brought back to the class for further comments and feedback. This constant movement between the collective and the individual allowed:

1. The individual student to take advantage of the collective support
2. The individual student then had the opportunity to try out and test the newly acquired knowledge.
3. The individual had another opportunity to obtain further collective support and feedback in relation to a completed text.

Each finished text reflected the effort, support and collective expertise of the group but also the distinctive voice and knowledge of its author. This carefully orchestrated co-authorship mediated individual students’ writing and learning and allowed individuals to write at a level that they probably could not achieve alone. Here, there is clear evidence of the interaction of the group and individual ZPDs: Individuals benefit from the group expertise; subsequently, their growing expertise is added to the group capital. The group and the individual develop in tandem.
Chapter 6: Students’ Take up of Opportunities for Learning

This chapter addresses the third question of this study (i.e., What facilitated or hindered student’s take up of opportunities for learning?) by presenting three comprehensive case studies about three focal students. Each case study starts with a general overview of the student’s history as an English language learner including the student’s and teacher’s assessments of their strengths and limitations. The second part of each case study draws on interview and SR data to identify the factors that, according to each student, facilitated or hindered the student’s take up of opportunities for learning. As observed in Chapter 3, based on self-assessment data and teacher’s in-class comments and feedback on written work, Reema, Ivy, and Brad seemed to be at different developmental points.

A comparison of the problem-solving essays they submitted on Week 5 of the course shows this difference clearly (see Appendix I). Ivy received an A grade with glowing comments from Kate:

Wow, [Ivy]! I’m blown away by this thoughtful, articulate composition, your language describing the problem was extensive and academic, as was the language suggesting your proposed solution. It was a pleasure for me to read this and learn from you. Would you allow me to distribute your re-write to the class?

Brad, on the other hand, received a C+ with the following comment:

[Brad], the problem you described should have been clarified xxx to China. This was not clear. The proposed solution was partly clear, but some language problems. Made some of it difficult to understand.

I was not able to obtain a copy of Kate’s feedback to Reema but her essays and her overall performance in the course were in the C+ to B+ range.
6.1. **Reema: A Self-regulated, Goal-oriented Student**

At the time of the data collection, Reema was 23 years old, had a B.Sc. in Computer Information Systems from a Saudi University, and had 12 years of English language studies. She was seeking admission to an MA program in Electronic Commerce at two different Canadian universities and was taking an IELTS preparation course so as to meet the admission requirements of those universities. Reema presented herself as a “good student” who always finished her homework and strove to obtain good marks, which in turn motivated her further. She was happy overall with her writing but expressed some concerns with her vocabulary and creativity. She stated,

> I think I write good but it’s not very good ’cause I have the same template each time. And the same word […] it’s not so creative. It’s just simple idea, you know? […] I don’t use much of complex sentence. Sometimes I read my classmates essay, they have very academic word, you know? Many academic or new vocabulary. I use my own you know words? It’s academic but not so new like them you know? [Reema Interview 1]

This awareness of her writing potential was newly developed. In fact, she recalled that in high school she considered her writing to be good but only because the expectations and assessment criteria were different from those in the EAP program:

> I was good cause I think we memorize the passage, so we didn’t make a big effort to do anything, you know? […] we make the writing and it’s correct. [Reema Interview 1]

University-level EAP classes were more demanding and helped direct her focus to the domain-specific content and vocabulary; however, the most significant shift in Reema’ writing occurred when she was placed at the second highest level in the EAP program. Her experience was positive and intensive. She credited that course for her first sustained and structured introduction to the criteria of academic writing in English.
6.1.1. Progress over the Semester

At the beginning of the semester Reema stated that writing was the most difficult skill for her and that her goal was to improve her writing performance and “be aware of some grammar.” Transition to the highest level course seemed smooth for Reema who felt she was mainly reviewing what she had done in the previous, lower level class.

At the beginning of the semester, Kate thought Reema “had potential to be a strong writer.” She explained,

I felt that she was really-- had excellent listening and oral skills, and understands things. She really understands. She’s a really deep thinker in many ways and she has a good command of the language so that she uses a variety-- you know-- good language in writing. I knew she’d be good because she-- the first things that she showed me had great potential and she didn’t disappoint me in that way. You could see strings in her writing. You could say that she had ah good language ah, range um you know she had grammar problems but easily easily fixed […] You can tell by the way she constructs her sentences, the language she uses. [Teacher SR 2]

At the end of the semester, Kate noted that Reema did not make “vast progress” mainly because she missed a number of sessions due to health issues, but Kate added that, when in class, Reema was a “strong participant” and that “she was always able to catch up and to be part of what we were doing so I think she’s done fine.” [Teacher SR 4]

Reema’s grades varied from C+ to B+. Kate’s comments highlighted some positive aspects of Reema’s writing, such as her ability to develop pertinent ideas and present organised paragraphs. Kate also drew Reema’s attention to certain shortcomings in her writing such as wordiness, lack of variety and originality in sentence structure (e.g., monotonous subject-verb forms), and some grammatical mistakes such as run-on sentences and subject/verb agreement.
6.1.2. Valued Mediational Tools

Reema valued the teacher’s explanations and tutorials and found the practice exercises the most helpful mediational tools over the semester. Reema attended to Kate’s tutorials conscientiously and pinpointed the logic and explicitness of her explanations as the main aspects that facilitated learning for her. In the SR related to the lesson on X-list (i.e., academic alternatives to common words), Reema explained that the information presented was not new; however, she appreciated that Kate gave ‘logical’, ‘sensible’, and convincing’ reasons to justify the use of academic vocabulary:

She gave me a logical reason why to avoid using these words. Like for ‘nowadays’ it’s old-fashioned and you can use instead of this ah ‘recently’. And like for ‘people’ it’s too general. It need to be specified like students or, employee. [...] maybe I heard it before but I like- I have a convincing reason, to not use it. I found her reason sensible. She’s absolutely right for ah like her reasons. I found it ah very reasonable. [Reema SR 1]

This ‘logical’ explanation, combined with Reema’s recognizing the use of vague words as a weakness in her writing pushed her to stay focused during the tutorial and to make a conscious decision to start using more academic vocabulary in her subsequent writings.

Reema valued the explicitness of the teacher’s explanations. For instance, during the lesson on the use of context clues to guess word meanings, Reema said that Kate’s explicit and graded attention to all aspects of context clues helped her organize what she knew intuitively. She explained that she may have been using these clues routinely but the explicit cataloguing of the names, definitions, and functions of each strategy was “helpful” to her:

I like get the main idea of this one, like the rules and what I should do. I know it. I know it like ah just in general but not as a rule like this one, yeah so this is like ah kind of new [...] But to know the like the exact definition of each one and what’s ah are they’re using
for..yeah very helpful..ah to know the right way to use them and ah what’s ah like the
difference between each one and when to use it correctly. [Reema SR 16]

Practice exercises were another valued mediational tool that Reema perceived as
facilitating learning. She saw the exercises as an opportunity to test her knowledge and
seek validation of her learning. She specifically sought confirmation of her answers
during the correction phase. She said,

When you first receive a first impression it’s okay. But you don’t realize your weakness
until you do the exercise and know the correction, and match the correction and she
explains why this and why this not. [Reema SR 7]

6.1.3. Agentive Stances and Other Facilitating Factors

Two factors appeared to have facilitated the responsiveness to and take up of
opportunities for learning for Reema:

(a) She took full responsibility over her own learning by making conscious
decisions to remain on task and participating actively in class to maximize her
learning. She specifically set goals and monitored her learning process and her
performance.

(b) She recognized the intertextual links between the different course components
and between what she learned in the previous and the present level courses. This
awareness of the course’s logic was directed by Kate’s advance organizers and
explicit indicators of links.

6.1.3.1. Responsibility for learning

Her responsibility manifested itself in Reema’s constant monitoring of her learning
process, her active participation in class, and in the goals she set for herself. Reema
seemed to distinguish between two types of information when processing any new
content: information that needed to be understood and practised until it became internalised and automatized versus factual information that could simply be memorised. This distinction helped Reema organize her learning and decide what strategies to apply when faced with a difficulty. For instance, while correcting mistakes related to the use of the APA style, she decided that she needed to review the handout provided by the teacher to memorize the APA guidelines. However, during the unit on paraphrasing, Reema set a goal of reaching automaticity in sentence construction: until it became “natural”.

Second, Reema was constantly testing herself. Because most of the information presented in the present course was not new to her, she often tried to anticipate what the teacher was about to say, aiming to test her knowledge. For instance, during the unit on run-on sentences, Reema said that she kept verifying or evaluating what she knew about run-on sentences against what was presented in class. When she identified a conflict between her current knowledge and the new information, Reema often asked the teacher for clarification (during or after class). When her knowledge matched what was presented, she seemed to welcome the reassurance in the accuracy of her knowledge:

I correct it in one way, and she corrected it in another way, and both are correct. [Reema SR 3].

Third, Reema was aware of what she was ‘supposed to learn’ in almost every class activity we discussed during SRs. Not only did she understand the teacher’s goals, she also adopted them and strove to achieve them. This level of intersubjectivity was mostly evident in Reema’s ability to articulate the goals of each unit in a way that was coherent with that expressed by the teacher in class or in the SRs. Moreover, Reema was able to personalise every unit or class activity to further her learning. For instance, while discussing the unit on lexical structural analysis, she was able to relay the teacher’s goal,
but Reema further explained how she directed her attention to one aspect of the unit that was most challenging to her. For Reema, this selective attention did not lead to fragmentation or compartmentalization of knowledge. Her targeted attention remained coherent with the overall goal of the unit:

I know that there is like a syllable for the word and some of them like prefix and suffix for like making it ah negative. I know this, but ah, I’m not used to practice them. I just ah know the words. You know? […] I just know this, without know that it’s has, a syllables or anything you know, um to distinguish between the forms and which to use ah like, ah the adverb the adjective, the noun, yeah, and what is for ah negative form. [Reema SR 9]

### 6.1.3.2. Recognizing intertextual links

Reema had a holistic view of the course, so she often related units to what had previously been presented. Several of her comments showed the gradual development of her understanding of specific points in the course. For instance, Reema’s understanding of the concept of “formal writing” developed over time as she integrated more aspects of formality in her writing. She especially welcomed reviews because they made these connections clear and allowed her to build on her existing knowledge.

Reviewing […] that’s not a bad thing. I will learn from it. But ah, you know […] yeah to review it. (That’s) will ah strong my writing. [Reema Interview 1]

I’ll learn it as a beginning, ‘cause ah may be I understand it in a different way in [lower level course] ah maybe I can use it better. [Reema SR 2]

### 6.1.4. Response to Focal Units

#### 6.1.4.1. Unit on sentence variety

Reema explained the development of her understanding and use of sentence variety from a first phase where she used to refer to a list of rules of thumb while writing to a second phase where she developed some automaticity:
I can’t remember these rules, you know? Just ah I write it it’s probably correct, but I can’t remember the rules (that ah) independent adverb adjective…it just ah become a natural writing. [Reema SR 2]

She was aware that sentence construction and sentence variety presented a recurrent problem in her writing, and so she welcomed the unit on sentence variety as a useful review. She especially valued and benefited from the teacher’s tutorial being consolidated with several practice exercises. Reema also underlined the use of metalinguistic terms and highlighted the connection between them as a positive aspect of the unit:

Listing the words that should be used for the adverb and the adjective, and ah make it a different like comparing between the. [Reema SR 2]

While doing the exercise, you actually know that if you are understood the idea or not. If I make mistakes in the exercise I will ask why is this ‘cause I understand it this way and it appears to be in a different way…because something I knew before so I think ah…I think the exercise are the more the most helpful…so during the whole period of exercise, I’m learning like ah these stuff and reviewing. I think most of them are match what I knew before. [Reema SR 2]

Reema experienced some difficulty in distinguishing between complex and compound sentences, but she did not ask for clarification from the teacher. Rather, she deemed that her notes based on the tutorial and the handout contained all the information she needed. She therefore, decided to review both resources at home and refer back to the practice exercises to learn the difference. This agentive stance showed how she took full responsibility for her learning and her ability to recognize and capitalize on the resources afforded by the class and teacher.
6.1.4.2. Unit on Summary Writing

Reema valued the structured presentations of the components of a summary. She found them easy to follow and refer to. Her account of what good summaries are replicated the main points addressed by the teacher in the tutorial:

For the beginning there was all the steps for writing a summary. I review it before I start writing my summary, ah I like underline the main idea and the supporting idea and each support idea has examples and the technical use of ah like ‘in his article he mentioned’ and the quotations, and then apply to the summary. [Reema SR 10]

We know the headlines of writing a summary then ah practice it by doing the exercise of writing; I think all complete each other. [Reema SR 10]

When asked how each component helped her, she said “we know the headlines of writing a summary then ah practice it by doing the exercise of writing, I think all complete each other.” [Reema SR 10]

To conclude, Reema seemed to exercise a dynamic movement that extended inward to identify weaknesses, backward to trace progress, and forward to identify future challenges. She was never idle. Her mind was constantly moving in the three directions and relating these three trajectories. This holistic process allowed Reema to build a coherent view of her competence and gave meaning to the three goals and to her learning journey. Every endpoint (identified weaknesses, future goals, and learned points) was only meaningful in relation to the two others. It was a puzzle that only made sense if the three pieces were put together. Reema seemed to create an ongoing inner dialogue to reconcile the three endpoints.
6.2. Ivy: Engagement and Drive Build on Strong Proficiency

At the time of data collection, Ivy was 22 years old. She had obtained her degree in Law Studies in Saudi Arabia and was aiming to pursue her post-graduate studies in Canada to eventually obtain an MA in Law. Upon arriving in Canada, she first registered in a private language school for two months. She then applied to the EAP program, and was placed at the highest level in the program.

Ivy stood out in the class because of her oral fluency in English. She had lived in Canada for seven years as a child (from age 2 to 9) and started learning English in kindergarten at age five. Upon returning to Saudi Arabia, she maintained an advantage over her classmates when she resumed English classes in Grade 7 in the Saudi public school system. Ivy felt that the two-year interruption in her English training was a ‘loss’ but admitted that she always had ‘excellent English.” She talked about a special attachment to the English language:

I somehow consider it [English] a language that has been there with me and I just need to exercise it a little bit to just remember it. [Ivy, Background Interview]

One of the most remarkable themes in Ivy’s interviews was her vocal criticism of her English learning experiences in Saudi. At the Junior High and High school levels, she criticized the curriculum for being grammar-heavy and exam-focused. She summed up the reading and writing components as follows,

We will memorize a piece. We will memorize it word for word, like a reading passage. And that’s how I did in my high school. The last exam was just memorize a piece, read it back to back, practice and give it back to them. A+. [Ivy, Background Interview]

She also criticized the classroom management and dominant interaction dynamics in comparison to the dynamics she experienced in Canadian schools as a child. She said,
It wasn’t like the system here where there is always interaction. No. It’s mostly-- I open the book and first the teacher would explain the new things we learned in class and then afterwards you do so some activities and the whole class participates but it’s not between students like here. [Ivy, Background Interview]

At the university level, Ivy was required to attend and pass a one-semester course, which she found challenging but manageable. The course involved “vocabulary, heavy reading, specialized meetings” and the final exit exam included short answers and multiple-choice questions.

6.2.1. Progress over the Term

At the beginning of the semester Ivy was articulate in defining her goals. She explained that although she could probably pass the TOEFL test and gain admission to university without taking the present course, she had chosen to enroll because she wanted to improve her language skills. She specifically argued,

[I aim]to improve my writing skills, especially with the legal field and I’m starting to read legal books of law, so this is my goal, to get into a university Master’s program and I can’t do that until I master the English language. [Ivy, Background Interview]

She found the present course “challenging”, especially the writing component. However, Ivy understood the organization of the course and enjoyed the sessions. At the beginning of the semester, she noted,

I think the system is really good here because the teacher first gives us an assignment and then we review it and then we are given another one, the same topic until we get the right one. This gives you more confidence in your writing and you won’t repeat the same mistakes. [Ivy, Background Interview]

She rated her writing skills as “average” and identified “sentence structure, writing something long and clear” as her main weaknesses. She was aware that her writing might be superior to that of her classmates, but she still considered writing a “big
dilemma”. Especially sensitive to not understanding all the rules of written English, Ivy was not able to identify or correct her writing with indirect or implicit teacher feedback:

My goal was to enhance my writing ability. This was my biggest dilemma or problem and academic English was a mystery to me so I wanted to be better in terms of writing. Especially writing. I want to be better in listening and reading but I think writing was the most important because I was thinking of how it would be later. The implications. And if I want to study […] actually, in [the private language school], the teacher would take, would correct my mistakes a few times when we wrote. But I didn’t know what were the rules. What were the rules for academic writing. So it didn’t feel comfortable. And any corrections that the teacher corrected me --because I didn’t know the rules-- I didn’t learn it. [Ivy, Final interview]

By the end of the semester, Ivy felt that she had made considerable progress, especially at the level of her understanding of essay organization, discourse features, and stylistic choices. Kate’s feedback on Ivy’s written assignments was positive. She noted Ivy’s over-reliance on simple sentence structures (subject-verb order) at the beginning of the year. Her grades varied from A to B on first drafts and from B to A+ on rewrites.

Kate recognized Ivy as a strong student and commended her for staying focused and motivated throughout the term:

I thought she was probably in many ways, too good for the class, ah so so good in this class, that maybe she’d be bored but she never felt that way at all, surprisingly. But, she is what you would call a really, strong [xxx] student. Came in strong and went out stronger.[Teacher, SR 4]

She described the areas of development she observed in Ivy’s writing as follows,

Partly organization, partly grammar. She has a good but not a very strong grammar base, surprisingly. I mean she’s so fluent in her speaking that you can be misled and think she’s a native English-speaker. […] teaching her not just organization but teaching her, to write more concisely- she would write long run-on sentences and she learned not to do that. She learned how she could avoid repetition so these are easy things to teach, and she picked them up quickly.[Teacher, SR 4]
Kate also noted that most of Ivy’s progress was made based on the class content and interactions—as opposed to one-one-one conferences. She explained that Ivy did not request these conference meetings and that they did not seem necessary.

I didn’t have that many [conference meetings] with her. She didn’t request them […] A couple of times, I went over some of the things that she did in my class ah for writing, but there wasn’t that much to-- that wasn’t self-explanatory from my comments on her writing.[Teacher, SR 4]

Kate qualified Ivy at the end of the semester as an ‘outstanding writer’. She advised Ivy to publish two of the papers she wrote for the course in the program’s student magazine.

6.2.2. Valued Mediation Tools

Ivy identified several features of Kate’s teacher talk and aspects of the course design as mediational tools that she appreciated and responded to positively.

6.2.2.1. Features of teacher talk

Ivy praised Kate’s instructional approach and her communication skills. She especially highlighted the clarity of her enunciation, her willingness to address all queries, and her expertise in answering all questions:

I think [the teacher] is like one of the best teachers I’ve had in English. Really. She's one of the best teachers. She manages to wrap the class and teaches a lot of information in a few hours, so fast and she answers the questions. She manages to do it all. And she answers our question and this is the most important thing. And the way she answers the question is what impresses me. Like, she knows what our difficulty is. […] Yeah all of the questions that are asked in class, I think she answers them in a rational way. Something that appeals to us. […] When I asked her question she brings an answer that appeals to me. I can understand it.[Ivy, SR 10]
Ivy described Kate’s tutorials and answers to specific student questions as “rational.” Ivy’s use of the description “rational” was somewhat vague and inconsistent as she used it to refer to the straightforwardness of the teacher’s answers, her use of examples to clarify focal points, her explication of the rationale behind rules and the structure of the tutorials.

In the SR about the X-list, Ivy found the straightforwardness of the teacher’s answer useful. The “simple” answer that explained why “society develops” was not a good expression included a factual clarification and offered an alternative expression to use:

She tries to simplify the thing. […] When she said, ‘the society doesn't develop. There are aspects that develop’”. So her explanation was kind of simplifying the matter and it was very rational. [Ivy, SR 1]

Similarly, in the SR about the use of phrasal verbs, Ivy liked the teacher’s straightforward justification for the inappropriateness of phrasal verbs in academic writing. She also drew on her experience as a reader to validate Kate’s comment:

The teacher said that we shouldn't use phrasal verbs. It is better to use a single verb. It's more academic.[…] Yeah. I used to use phrasal verbs. But it's not formal. But I didn't know that before […] It makes more sense. I think the teacher gave us handouts that… Academics try to use single verbs. Always use single verbs. It's better to explain the meaning. And I noticed that it makes it better. It makes the writing better. [Ivy SR 5]

Second, “rational” also meant “supported by concrete examples” because Ivy found examples easier to remember:

[The teacher’s] answers are relevant. You can relate to her answers. […] Because when you relate to an example you remember it. It's better for the memory […] It's something rational. (p.3) [Ivy SR 10]
Third, Ivy valued the explicitness and structured analysis embedded in Kate’s explanations. Ivy seemed to note and respond positively to the teacher’s step-by-step procedural explanations. For instance, Ivy argued that the procedural explanation of depersonalized writing (i.e., *how* to achieve depersonalized writing) helped her understand a concept that was somewhat familiar but still obscure to her:

I remember in the other course I took, it didn’t make any sense to me because we weren’t introduced to how to do it. [Ivy, SR 15]

Similarly, she credited the ‘unique way’ the teacher presented run-on sentences for her new understanding of the concept. Her quotation below suggests that Kate presented the segment as “a solution to a problem”. The solution consisted in a list of three possible techniques to avoid run-on sentences:

I actually learned this even in high school in Saudi Arabia, but I didn't learn it in this unique way. Like, we have three things to do. We can combine it with a conjunction or we can make it into an independent clause. So I didn't learn it in this way but I remember the teacher back home teaching us that we shouldn't put a comma here. We should put a full stop. We didn't learn how to solve the problem. [Ivy, SR 3]

Ivy noted the same ‘problem-solving’ approach in the activity about reducing clauses to phrases. She explained that she had a vague understanding of clause reduction from previous courses but the structure of the presentation in the present course and the focus on the techniques of reduction led to a better understanding of the concept:

I didn't understand it in a structured way. But after this, it's more understood that you can reduce it. The techniques how you reduce it. [Ivy SR 14]

6.2.2.2. Aspects of the instructional design and pedagogical choices

The second mediational tool valued by Ivy related to aspects of the course design, such as the logic of the organization and sequencing of units in a way that allowed her to
consistently build on previous shared knowledge. This perception was in line with the findings reported in Chapter 5 about the fluidity and intertextual links between course units. For instance, Ivy explained how revisiting the same point helped reinforce the nascent understanding that she had reached at the end of the first tutorial about dependent clauses:

At this session I didn't understand what adverb means, what pronouns are. I kind of just understood it a little bit. But in the second class, with repetition, I got it. She repeats some things and sometimes she gives us new handouts. [Ivy, SR 2]

Second, Ivy appreciated the typical sequencing of class episodes whereby tutorials were followed by practice exercises that were first done in groups then modeled to the class before each student had the opportunity to work individually. The group discussion and the validation that came from the class correction were useful to Ivy and helped her gain a deeper understanding of some points. For example, during the unit on combining sentences, she said,

One thing I like is the way that the exercises are done. Our group takes three or two and then we discuss it and put it on the board. So this way, we can see what the other students did and where they got it wrong, where they got it right. […] At first, it's new. If I don't apply it I can forget it. So, after that, when she gives more activities and in more discussions, I think is more rooted. [Ivy SR 10]

When the teacher would ask us to do this exercise and then later we would take it up, sometimes in small groups… This helps because even if I make a mistake, my friend would pay attention and we would all try to get to the new… To the right answer. (p.15) [Iv, SR 9]

Ivy welcomed the opportunity to work in small groups in general. She saw discussion in a positive light and as one of the positive aspects of the course in general:

I think it was a group discussion. I think it's like the best way. I like this class because we talk to each other and we can ask the next person. [Ivy, SR 19]
6.2.3. Facilitating Factors

Underlying Ivy’s agentive stance were two main facilitating factors. First, she had an awareness of her writing weaknesses in English. Even in the cases where she did not have the tools to improve her writing or correct her mistakes, she knew that something was wrong, either from repeated teacher feedback or from a comparison of what she read and her own writing:

I really have a problem with articles. I use “a” in a wrong way or “the”. I used too much “the” so I thought this was a problem that I had and I need to focus on this to understand if there are certain rules for the articles. [Ivy, SR 25]

Second, because she was preparing for an advanced degree (an MA, as opposed to the rest of her classmates who were applying to Bachelor’s level programs), Ivy had developed a better understanding of the writing requirements of her discipline and future career. Consequently, she was able to recognize the most relevant points to her and directed her attention accordingly:

Passive, I think is important for legal writing. This is why I'm interested in writing and passive. [...]I think when I learned it in high school, it was just a grammar thing. Change the tense. But here, when to change is important. [...] I thought that it was important to know when. So I tried to focus on when the sentence can be changed and when it cannot. [Ivy, SR 13]

6.2.3.1. Agentive stances

Ivy exercised her agency in several forms during the course. First, she took full responsibility for her own learning by setting goals and monitoring and measuring her understanding by testing herself through exercises and examples.
She also drew on all the resources available to her to solve conflicts. Her previous training as an EFL student, her expertise as an avid reader in English, and her knowledge of Arabic stylistics served as constant references that Ivy used to define her new understating of good academic writing in English.

The typical learning process Ivy described started with the identification of a pertinent learning point that she either perceived as a weakness in her writing or a crucial skill for her future writing needs. She then made a conscious decision to focus by first pinpointing the affordances that she needed to focus on and then taking special measures to internalize that knowledge/practice. She consistently aimed for automaticity rather than a passing understanding.

Setting goals: SR data show that Ivy identified the teacher’s goal for each activity accurately. She also appropriated the teacher’s goals, transforming them into personal motives. This process is clear in the following quotation about the class unit on combining sentences:

This is something new. Anything. Any activity, or chapter or handout. I can see that this is something new. I need to focus right now. I have to focus because it's going to be helpful. This is what I think about. So, you know when you see something that's going to help you later, I focus. [Ivy, SR 10]

In the class about formal vs. informal vocabulary, Ivy recognized the teacher’s goal and related it to her own career objective:

In this program most of the students want to go to university, they want to send applications to the universities. They’re going to have a lot of essays, so she [the teacher] wants to make sure that we don’t get into these mistakes. Things we think that are good to write, they are not. [Ivy, SR 1]
Based on this assessment, Ivy made a conscious decision during the activity to not use some of the informal lexical items highlighted by the teacher. Not only did Ivy adopt the goal set by the teacher, she also projected future situations where she would implement it in her writing:

I was thinking that I should avoid it. I should be sure that I do not use these things in my essays later. [Ivy, SR 1]

_Self-scaffolding:_ Besides setting goals, one of the strategies Ivy used to achieve her learning was to self-scaffold (c.f., Bickhard, 1992; Knouzi, Swain, Lapkin, & Brooks, 2010; Moscolo, 2005). When faced with a difficulty, Ivy tried to self-explain the material, and in so doing self-scaffolded her own understanding. For instance, during the episodes about dependent clauses, Ivy felt that the class was going too fast for her and feared she might be left behind. After identifying dependent clauses as crucial for sentence variety, which she deemed important, Ivy started working intensively on the handout that the teacher had distributed, to self-teach and self-explain the content, reading line per line and changing them into didactic questions to guide her understanding:

The thing that helped me is repeating over the handout. I try to speculate what this means, what this means [...] ‘Oh yeah, like restrictive clause. What's a restrictive clause? They define the meaning of the noun. You do not use this. [Ivy, SR 2]

_Monitoring her learning:_ Ivy used the assigned exercises to measure her learning. She assessed her answers by comparing them to the answers modeled by the teacher or her classmates. When she made mistakes, she pushed herself to focus more and find opportunities to practice and improve, as evident in the following quotation from the SR on the episodes about vocabulary use:
Well I know [I learned something] when I make it right. But if I do a mistake then I need to practice more to get it right the next time. But in this activity, I spent time to do it but I got it right so I thought I learned it. [Ivy, SR 5]

**Resolving conflicts:** Ivy drew on all resources to reach a better understanding. The two main references were her native Arabic and the previous training she had in English. Reference to Arabic, for instance, helped her analyze and understand her learning process and therefore pinpoint the origin of her weaknesses, as evidenced in this quotation:

> I was actually trying to remember that [whether I did paraphrasing in Arabic]. Because I have this problem so I said [...] why this was kind of difficult to do? Is this an English problem or is it a general problem with me? So I remember yes. We had to do it at some point. I remember this. We had to paraphrase [in Arabic]. I think it's in the writing class. But it was difficult. Even if in Arabic. [...] I think paraphrasing legal stuff is difficult. More difficult. English has its ways to paraphrase more than Arabic. I don't know. I think the sentence in Arabic structure is [...] But I think in English, we have some ways. English has a lot of synonyms. But I don't know how it should be in legal writing. [Ivy, SR 11]

However, when there was a conflict--notably between what she was being taught in the EAP class and her knowledge of Arabic stylistics or what she was taught in English classes in Saudi--she resolved to adopt the new teaching. This approach emanated from her critical stance vis-a-vis the EFL teaching approach in Saudi Arabia. She made a conscious decision to “abandon” any old knowledge that conflicted with what she was being taught in the EAP class. Ivy saw this as a pragmatic and efficient measure that should spare her the burden of analysis and comparisons. When she was aware of conflicts she decided to be categorical in adopting the new version of any opposite teachings:

> And I was critical of that [EFL approach in Saudi]. I was always angry. Why do I have to write the same paragraph when I'm asked on the exam? [...] So this is one of the aspects that I'm critical about in our educational system. [Ivy, SR 6]
I just focused… Try to abandon my Arabic knowledge and just try to focus on the new things that I need to pay attention to. Because it's going to be more valuable for me. Then maybe after years I will go back to Arabic and enhance my language in Arabic. Which is important, I think. [Ivy, SR 6]

6.2.4. Response to Focal Units

6.2.4.1. Unit on Sentence Variety

Ivy chose to discuss this unit during the SR sessions because she believed sentence variety was an important aspect of academic writing. When asked to define the goal of the unit, her answer was in line with that of the teacher and denoted an awareness of the goal of the unit itself and how it related to other criteria of academic writing that the class had covered previously. Ivy’s definition showed how she was expanding her understanding of academic writing as she progressed in the course. For instance, she did not see the focus on subordination as an isolated grammatical point but related it to the quality and flow of writing:

The teacher was trying to teach us how to reach sentence variety in academic writing. We had to write certain sentences and give them variety. This is how it should be in academic English. She was giving us ways to do that. And one of the ways was Subordinate clause. Using this clause… I think she called it necessary or not necessary. It's necessary when it defines the noun and is not necessary when you can remove this clause and it gives the meaning so you separate it with a comma. I didn't use to understand this very well. [Ivy, SR 2]

This quotation also shows how Ivy appropriated the teacher’s metalinguistic terms and integrated them into her own language. As she explained in the quotation, these terms were unfamiliar to her before the session, but she adopted them immediately.
Ivy explained that both the teacher tutorial and the handout she distributed were helpful to her. She directed her attention to both resources to maximize her understanding:

When she stopped, I would read the handout and when she talks I will listen to her. [Ivy, SR 2]

6.2.4.1. Unit on Summary Writing

Ivy identified summaries as a problematic area in her writing but also recognized them as an important requirement of her future professional writing. She therefore made a decision to pay attention and set a well-defined goal, namely learning how to represent the original text’s controlling and supporting ideas. While attending to the tutorial and doing the excersise, Ivy drew on three main resources. First, she referred to her knowledge of summary writing in Arabic, The contrastive analysis led Ivy to conclude the rhetorical differences between English and Arabic would prevent her from transferring her knowledge from Arabic to English:

I think I told you that I have a problem with summarizing my ideas. Even in Arabic it's a problem. So I was trying to catch up on how to cut the information. Can you shorten the information? […] When I read the text, I used to think that every part of information is important. But as I explained before, in Canada I think that the writing style is about controlling ideas and main ideas. Everything is structured. But in Arabic, we didn't learn it that way. It's just summarize the main point. That's it. And we may vary on what the main point is.[…]I didn't understand it [how to write summaries] in Arabic. […][Ivy, SR 2]

Second, the unit took place in the 6th week of the course when Ivy had developed an increasingly sophisticated definition of the requirements and expectations of academic writing in North Americia. Ivy was able to apply what she had already learned so far to summary writing.
Finally, Ivy built on what she had learned in a previous EAP course she took at the British Council in Saudi Arabia:

I don't remember if in the course we learned how to summarize but we learned how to write paragraphs. And in that course I was introduced to the ideas. And there was a controlling idea, this kind of thing. It was unique to me at that time. [...] When I came to this program, it's enforcing every class. This way of writing. You should have a main idea... So here, I was trying to understand what the controlling idea is and where the supporting idea is and which is the most important part to include in the summary. [Ivy, SR 20]

In terms of her responsiveness and appropriation of learning opportunities afforded by the unit, Ivy reacted differently to different components of the unit. She attended to the tutorial presented by Kate and seemed to appropriate the language used by the teacher. She found the first exercise of deconstructing the model text summarized by Kate challenging. Finally, she enjoyed working on the final assignment where she was asked to summarize a familiar text.

As explained above, Ivy drew on all available resources while attending to the teacher’s tutorial. Building on her previous knowledge, she was able to find coherence in what the teacher was presenting. Eventually she appropriated the teacher’s language and thinking as shown in these quotations:

The teacher said that you have to just include the most important and paraphrasing in your own words. So... It made sense to me. [Ivy, SR 20]

They [teacher-created model summaries] are helpful. Because we want to know the standard. So when I see her present a model, I can see what is acceptable and what is not. I can have new information. [Ivy, SR 20]
The unit included an exercise where students were asked to fill in blanks in a summary created by Kate. Ivy did not find this activity helpful; nonetheless, she stayed on task:

I think this one wasn’t helpful. I wasn’t focused. I thought it was difficult […] What I did was that I try to catch up with the teacher and understand… […] It [the teacher’s model summary] helped me in the sense knowing that there is a structure that I have to follow. Yeah it was helpful but it was kind of difficult at the beginning. [Ivy, SR 20]

This quotation shows that by staying on task, Ivy was able to identify a relevant learning opportunity even within an activity that was difficult overall for her. While she may have failed to provide the expected answers to the exercises, she focused on reinforcing her understanding of the structure of summaries.

The last activity of the session, which consisted in drafting a summary of a familiar text, was more interesting and useful to Ivy:

I think I was prepared. I found it more interesting to write by yourself rather than just having instructions. Strong instructions. I think this one was her homework. I think we started it in class and then finished it off. So I even enjoyed it at home. I think I recorded it. [Ivy, SR 20]

This quotation suggests that Ivy was anxious to start practising what she had learned thus far. It also explained the reason she did not enjoy the previous exercises, which seemed artificial to her.

Ivy did well on the summary assignment, even though she did not feel confident in her ability to write a good summary at the end of this session. In fact, at the end of the session, she set a new goal for herself to find opportunities to practise summary writing:

That I need more practice. Yes, that's what I thought. […]Because I think it's going to take a big portion of my studies when I go to university. I have to summarize this point [Ivy, SR 20]
6.3. Brad: A Struggling Student

Brad was disciplined and punctual. At the time of the data collection he was 21 years old. He had studied English for 8 years in China in middle and high school. After he graduated from high school, Brad did not attempt to register in a Chinese university. He, rather, registered in private English language classes to improve his English because his goal was to attend university in North America and in particular at a Canadian university.

At the time of the data collection Brad was in his third semester in the EAP program. He was first placed at the lowest level in the program then passed through classes at subsequent levels. His experience in the program had been positive, and he seemed to enjoy it. Brad stated that writing was his main concern, rating his writing skills as average. He estimated that grammar, and in particular verb tenses, were the most problematic areas in his writing. His goal was to improve his level of English in general and obtain a B grade at the end of the course, which would allow him to apply to the undergraduate program in Commerce.

Brad was a shy student and rarely participated in classroom interactions verbally. There was no tangible evidence of his contribution to the class dialogue, even though the teacher often designed activities that called for student participation and contributions. Therefore, neither the teacher nor I as an observer could determine if and how he benefited from the classroom interactions. Given that “successful collaboration in the ZPD is dependent upon both the quality of mediation and learner reciprocity” (Poehler, 2008, p.40), there was no clear, traceable evidence of reciprocity from Brad—at least not in a verbal form.
Brad presented a special and interesting case because he believed that he was improving but was in reality making little and inconsistent progress. Kate did not see this slight progress as significant or sufficient. She also was not sure how to gauge Brad’s abilities or pinpoint his exact problems so as to address them. My analysis of Brad’s comments, interviews, and SRs aimed to understand how Brad perceived the opportunities for learning offered in class and what factors facilitated or hindered his access to and integration of these opportunities for learning.

The analysis revealed two levels of interaction with the opportunities for learning afforded in the class. At one level, Brad exerted his agency in deciding if and how to attend to certain information that was being made available. This agency took three distinct forms, explained and exemplified below: investment, compliance, or resistance. At another level there were hindrances that interfered with Brad’s agentive stances and ‘derailed’ his agency. These hindrances can be described as ineffective strategies or factors beyond his immediate control. For example, Brad tended to adopt an oversimplified or reductionist view of several concepts of academic writing. He sometimes misunderstood the goal of the teacher and often he had an inflated perception of his own abilities and the quality of his essays.

6.3.1. Progress over the Course

Brad was a weak or struggling student as evidenced by the little improvement he made over the semester, his teacher’s assessments of his performance over time, and his assessments of his own performance.

Brad’s essays showed little improvement over the semester. I obtained a total of 13 drafts between first drafts, rewrites, and second rewrites of six writing assignments
from Brad. First drafts were marked between C and B- while rewrites and second rewrites were marked between C+ and B+. There was no distinct pattern of improvement over time (i.e., from first draft to rewrite). Most of the teacher’s comments focused on the quality of Brad’s arguments and issues of coherence (e.g., inconsistency between topic sentence and ideas developed in the body paragraph).

Kate also described Brad as a struggling or weak student. Kate made a number of statements about Brad in SR4:

[Brad] is one of the poorest writers in the class […] he’s the weakest. [Teacher SR 4]
He didn’t advance very much. [Teacher SR 4]
He is still a weak student. His organization is good but he doesn’t have the language to express himself- limited vocabulary and sometimes he chooses wrong words. [Teacher SR 4]
He doesn’t seem connected. [Teacher SR 4]
He needs another session. I can’t imagine that he’ll pass. [Teacher SR 4]
It’s hard to know how much he participates because he’s very shy, it doesn’t mean he doesn’t understand-- I mean I think he does understand. [Teacher SR 4]
Part of it with him is, maybe, I was… I didn’t really understand him. I didn’t have a relationship with him the way I did with everybody else in class […] he’s very quiet, he’s very shy. I don’t think I really knew him. I mean maybe I should have made more of an effort to talk to him and be-- although I tried to make small talk. [Teacher SR 4]

These previous observations show that Kate saw little progress in Brad’s performance over time, which she attributed (at least in part) to her not succeeding in establishing a strong rapport with him.

On the other hand, Brad seemed rather satisfied by his progress. He felt that he improved over the semester, especially his abilities with grammar and verb tense, which he identified as problematic areas at the beginning of the term (in his questionnaire data).
6.3.2. Valued Mediational Tools

Brad valued *practice exercises* and *supporting examples* as the most useful mediational tools afforded in class. He appreciated the concreteness and tangibility of exercises. He seemed to welcome the opportunity to manipulate the new information that was being practiced and the validation from the teacher and class when they corrected these exercises. Brad also suggested that he used these exercises as reminders that he could later consult and refer to:

I like mm learn by exercise because it can help me to remember and ah, and ah like exercise like something I can touch, and I can, ah, keep it. [Brad SR 3]

[The most helpful part] is, ah, I think, do the exercise by myself first then ah mm compare the answer teacher give us. [Brad SR 3]

In addition, Brad used supporting examples to test his understanding of new information or material presented. In the following quotation, Brad explained how he used the examples of adverbial clauses reduced to phrases (provided on the handout) as practice exercises to test his understanding of the concept of clause reduction and his ability to reduce clauses correctly. Practice exercises and examples were closely connected for Brad in that he seemed to use them for the same purposes:

I learn the rule of the reducing adverbial clause to phrase and ah I look at the examples and ah like do the example as practice like exercise so I can know how to reduce it and ah sometimes ah what I can cannot reduce. [Brad SR 15]

I think both [Practice exercises and examples] are important because you can’t ah study just with the example, I also need to do some exercises to practice. [Brad SR 11]

This tendency was further confirmed in the SR about the activity on paraphrasing, which included several examples and exercises that Brad seemed to find useful:
Practice so I can I feel I’m understand better and ah mm even though I ah we learned about the paraphrasing the information and skills but if I don’t do some practice or exercise you know I think it’s not useful for me. [Brad SR 12]

Brad later explained how he purposefully used the examples and exercises to further his learning:

When I finish paraphrasing I ask for [Teacher] to check my paraphrasing and she will find some mistakes so I can know which part I should I need work I need to work. [Brad SR 12]

Indeed, practice exercises and examples were consistently the only two mediational tools Brad seemed to value. He did not mention the teacher’s presentations, pair work, or other types of materials as useful or notable resources. It was not possible to trace which exact exercises or examples benefited Brad the most. Examples and exercises varied widely as shown in Chapter 5. Some were part of the teacher’s tutorials; others were framed as a group activity. A closer look at the type, function, and timing of each exercise and example would have helped pinpoint what aspect of these tools appealed the most to Brad. Notwithstanding this limitation, it is possible to posit that Brad was aware of his learning style and what ‘worked best’ for him. He seemed to seek validation in the exercises and examples. He also measured his developing understanding of new concepts by his ability to answer exercise questions and deconstruct examples. However, the absence of any explicit reference to teacher tutorials (which accounted for a considerable amount of class time) is intriguing. It was not possible to establish whether Brad did not value the tutorials or found them too linguistically and conceptually complex, beyond his level of understanding, or if he was actually able to follow the tutorials but sought validation in exercises. Brad may have used the tutorials to obtain a preliminary
understanding of concepts then sought confirmation in doing the exercises and examples and it is this confirmation that counted as learning for him:

Like one or two students will write his paraphrasing on board and I can check what [Teacher] will explain so I will compare and find what is ah what I would ah learn from another example. [Brad SR 12]

I think they are all give me clearly how a short answer looks like, so ah like the information exercise and the model from classmates ah they like build a house, the house is the short answer like what she looks like so I can have an image in my mind. (p.19).

[Brad SR 24]

Brad’s descriptions of practice exercises and examples as the most valued mediational tools derived from Brad’s answers during SR meetings to the direct question, “What was the most valuable part of the activity?” Other mediational tools may have been useful, as indicated below, but these data just show which tools Brad selected for discussion and perceived consciously to be useful.

6.3.3. Three Agentive Stances

Three agentive stances were evident in Brad’s comments about the 27 class activities discussed during the SR sessions: investment, compliance, and resistance. These stances either facilitated or hindered his learning.

6.3.3.1. Investment

Brad’s SR included several instances that showed his engagement with certain mediational moves and tools provided in the course. This investment was rooted in two distinct motives: (a) resolving a conflict that Brad perceived between his existing knowledge and what was being presented in class and (b) his awareness of a gap in his current knowledge or understanding of any given point. Underlying both stances was his conviction that what was being presented was acutely relevant and useful for his future
university studies. Often these motives co-occurred or combined during one single classroom moment. The investment manifested itself in conscious decisions to use available resources to make sure his understanding was correct and acceptable.

*Resolving conflict:* There were several instances when Brad became aware of a conflict between his existing knowledge and what the teacher was presenting in class. This awareness typically led to an explicit recollection and articulation of the old knowledge and an identification of the exact site of conflict. Because this conflict often involved a comparison with what Brad was taught in China, Brad consistently chose to adopt what he considered the Canadian version because he perceived it as naturally more relevant to the requirements of success in Canadian universities and the expectations of native speakers of English.

For instance, during the class on the X-list, a list of academic vocabulary equivalent to informal words, he compared the Chinese and Canadian teachings. He said,

I find the many things are different from I what learned in China so and ah I I think ah in China we learn not like academic styles. Just for studying it. [Brad SR 1]

Brad then gave the example of the word “nowadays”, which was taught and accepted in China but was included on the X-list. He related his decision to stop using “nowadays” to the new awareness of how it is perceived by native speakers of English and his long term plans of going to university:

I want to change and I find ah maybe it’s [nowadays] not good for academic writing, and because I think in university we should write more academic, yeah, so I try to, I try more academic style because I want to attend university. [Brad SR 1]

During a mini-lesson about paraphrasing, Brad became aware that his understanding of paraphrasing was inaccurate. As he realized that paraphrasing entails
more than the mere substitution of original words with synonyms, he made a conscious decision to adopt the new definition being presented:

- In [lower level course], I just change some words and may be also keep some parts of the original, but now I should do the big change in [name of course]. [Brad SR 11]

- Paraphrasing I guess. I also will use it in university so may be the final test this term if I want to use another material or whatever then I should paraphrase the resource so I guess paraphrasing is important. [Brad SR 11]

Brad’s evaluation of the activity about paraphrasing is related to his seeing its immediate relevance to his writing in an actual, authentic situation. He therefore made a conscious decision to “remember the steps” and use them in his essays.

*Filling a knowledge gap:* Brad showed engagement when he recognized a gap in his knowledge or when he recognized the point being discussed as a recurrent problem in his writing. In these cases, Brad directed his attention to ‘patching’ the gap by finding meaningful connections between his existing knowledge and the new knowledge being presented. He typically tried to recollect what he knew and augment it with the new information. These were instances where there was no conflict and Brad was able to expand or refine his existing knowledge. For instance, he recognized the activity on run-on sentences as a “review” of a grammar point that he saw as a recurrent problem in his writing. He verbalized his thought process during the activity as follows,

- I remember what I learned before and compare what she [Teacher] told is… the information she told us. [Brad SR 3]

In this particular case, the investment entailed more than focus and directed attention, as it required supplementary application. In fact, Brad found the content
slightly beyond his ability level but his motivation to learn how to avoid run-on sentences led him to pinpoint the ‘take-away’ point:

[The teacher’s explanation of run-on sentence was] more higher, more difficult than [lower level course] […] like [lower level course] is 100% and [this level] is maybe 120%. […] I learned about the semi-colon, because in [level] 50 the teacher didn’t tell us. [Brad SR 3]

Brad reported a similar thought process during the activity on the use of the passive voice, which he recognized as one of his weak points:

Because in [lower level course] I- just the teacher ask us to use this maybe one or to two times in essay so I feel I didn’t learn it in better. I can say I’m poor in the passive voice.[…] In [that course], I didn’t focus on this because the teacher didn’t ask us to use more in the essay so I didn’t focus on it. Now, the teacher is asking us to use it more and more if you can.[…] The information is the same. The problem is I didn’t focus on it. It’s a problem. [Brad SR 12]

This quotation suggests that the teacher also played an important role in leading Brad to identify passive voice as an important point to attend to. This congruence shows that the teacher’s framing of any given point—the subtext of the presentation—was as important as the quality of the explanation itself because it directed the student’s attention to certain points. Therefore, through a combination of awareness of his weaknesses, the teacher’s direction, and Brad’s readiness to attend to the passive voice, learning happened. Not only did Brad make a decision to use the passive more often in his writing, but he was able to verbalize his understanding of the rhetorical function of the passive voice in a sentence, and the nature of the mistakes he used to make:

Some events happens before another event so I should be careful of this, sometimes I can use may be I think my problem may be is here [Time reference] past or past continue may be sometime and the present perfect [how to convert the active to passive] Now, when I write, wrote my essay I will think about use more passive voice in the sentence. [Brad SR 12].
6.3.3.2. Compliance

Compliance was an agentive stance taken by Brad when he saw little value in the content presented or the activity assigned to the class yet he remained on task. This process happened mainly when he felt that the information or activity was not relevant to him immediately or in the future or when he considered that he already knew what was being presented. In these cases, Brad either chose to focus on one aspect of the activity and ignore the rest or he made a ‘mental note’ to use the mediational tools like handouts as a physical reference when and if he needed them in the future, without much investment in the moment. This stance was evident in Brad’s comments on the activity on “current events”. Kate described the lesson as a complex activity that involved several steps such as researching a critical current issue to report and discuss in class. She also explained that she designed it as an exercise in critical reading and writing, which situated a summary activity in a meaningful communicative task (i.e., select a news item article, critique it, summarize it, and comment on it to the rest of the class). Brad, on the other hand, understood the segment as a general writing practice. He did not see the urgency or the uniqueness of the exercise. Thinking that this was one of many to come at the EAP program and later in the university, he did not feel the immediate need to explore the teacher’s goal and to focus fully. Therefore, he didn’t see this activity as one that presented a learning opportunity.

Following are Brad’s statements in the chronological order they occurred during the SR related to the activity on “current events”. First Brad’s description of the activity reproduced verbatim one part of the message conveyed by the teacher during the presentation of the activity (i.e., the part about note taking). Not only did Brad repeat the
teacher’s rationale, he also showed evidence of having internalized the teacher’s insistence on the importance of the activity of note taking:

I think it’s useful and ah we will take some notes and ah . . . mm because she told us the note-taking is very important for the academic and study and ah, mm . . . and ah we can question for the articles, and find some, maybe find some new ideas. [Brad SR 4]

In subsequent comments Brad stated that, while he understood that the summary component of the activity was necessary and an expected part of his academic career, he did not find it interesting. He also found it difficult to complete. The combination of lack of interest and level of difficulty led to disengagement from the task, especially that one component of the activity that involved group work, which usually made Brad uncomfortable:

I think it’s useful but I think summary is not interesting…But I know I should do summary. [Brad SR 4]

I just find that the summary is hard. It’s sometimes you should ah find another word ah instead of the some words in the article. So I it’s it’s hard. I think it’s hard. [Brad SR 4]

Brad also explained his disengagement by his perception that such activities were recurrent and would always be part of his training in the EAP program and in his university classes later:

I think we are always do some writing so I can ah I can find some solution to solve my problem so I think it’s not important because I we are al- always mm do writing and ah, I can find the words to instead of another. [Brad SR 4]

I know writing will like ah even though I’m in (university) I also have to do writing so it’s a long time. [Brad SR 4]
It is difficult to trace the exact effect of this disengagement or compliance; however, in this case, there is evidence that Brad did not benefit from the activity and missed the learning opportunity that it presented. In fact, when asked what he learned from the activity, he stated that he learned some factual information from the article that he researched which was about Nobel Prize winners. Brad’s answer suggests that he missed the point of the segment, making his learning point marginal to the main goal of the teacher:

[I learned] some new words. And ah, some information about them, about the prizewinner. That’s all. [Brad SR 4]

In another activity where the teacher helped the students deconstruct one of their peers’ texts as a model, Brad said,

When I do this activity I didn’t focus on how it helped me. I just may be, maybe I take out and ah look them so I can find ah some something can help me and ah may be when I’m writing reports I can take them out and ah ah check my reports. [Brad SR 6]

This quotation suggests that Brad decided in this case to keep the model as a physical reminder, but he did not attempt to focus on any specific points. He was not able in this case to relate the presentation of the model student essay to the overall goal of the activity or his developing writing knowledge in English. It seems that while he trusted that the teacher would only share a model text that exemplified good report writing, he only intended to use it as a future reference.

6.3.3.3. Resistance

There were clear instances of resistance to some forms of corrective feedback. Brad said,

Yesterday, I feel when I finish my writing, I feel it’s okay, it’s good but if someone check and they find the mistakes, may be some parts are better I can learn from them and some
parts I think myself my idea it’s okay so I keep and like some revolution. Revolution, we grow up. I learn from others and also keep some good thing about myself, keep the good thing, ah strategy sentence. [Brad SR 13]

Nonetheless, there were a lot more instances of investment on Brad’s part than of compliance or resistance. Out of 24 SR recalls, 19 showed clearly Brad’s willingness and drive to understand and integrate the opportunities for learning afforded by the class. In other words, Brad took several initiatives to “support the teaching opportunities” to use Van Lier’s (1997) words.

6.3.4. Complicating Factors and the Gradual Development of Concepts

The previous section alluded to some complicating factors that underlay Brad’s agentive stances. These factors affected his learning: (a) Brad seemed, at times, unable to integrate course material or see the connection between different course or unit components, which resulted in compartmentalized knowledge, (b) he had a tendency to over-rate his abilities, and (c) he seemed to misunderstand the goals of some class material and activities. As a result, Brad was not always able to pinpoint what he was supposed to learn or recognize if learning actually happened.

His account of how he developed an understanding of the components and function of topic sentences gives a rare glance into Brad’s learning process. In the following quotation (in which the names of the courses are concealed to preserve confidentiality), Brad explained how he reacted to the teaching of topic sentences in his previous courses and present course in the EAP program:

I think [Course 1] it’s just mention it and do some exercise and then it’s all over […] it’s just told you some information about the top- how to write a topic sentence and then do some exercise and it’s over. [Course 2] we have some class for the topic sentence, so ah I think that time I can write a good topic sentence but ah in [the present course] I find that I
need improve […] I think because of the judge of the level [of the present course],
teachers are more strict, so I think I need to improve my topic sentence. [Brad SR 5]

The quotation shows that in his first introduction to the notion of topic sentences
Brad missed the goal of the class, dealt with the new concept as “some information”, and
limited his role as learner to “doing some exercises.” This, in fact, exemplifies the
compliance that Brad showed during some classes in the present course as well: he stayed
on task, and completed all exercises, but he did not make any effort or was not able to
integrate the new information into his writing practice. With the end of the unit in his first
course in the EAP program, Brad turned the page on topic sentence and “it [was] over”.

In his second course in the EAP program, Brad assumed that his topic sentences
were “good”, implying that he was content with his learning. However, Kate’s feedback
in the present course showed that topic sentences were a constant problem in Brad’s
writing. What is more, his new assessment and resolution that he needed to work on his
topic sentences were not in relation to specific criteria of good topic sentence writing but
to his assumption that Kate’s judgment was too strict.

A similar pattern was evident in Brad’s account of how he learned paraphrasing.
He first explained that in China he believed that paraphrasing consisted in replacing
words with synonyms. This understanding persisted even after his second course in the
EAP program:

In [the previous course] I just like change some words and may be also keep the original
some parts of the original and […] now I should do the big change in [the present
course]. [Brad SR 11]

Kate’s class on paraphrasing seems to have alerted Brad that his understanding of
paraphrasing needed “changing”. He also qualified this change as “difficult.”
The last two quotations illustrate the development of Brad’s understanding of two different concepts. They reveal that compliance, as an agentive stance, was Brad’s attempt to deal with material or concepts beyond his level. What ensued was a cycle where Brad’s failure to integrate concepts and to assess his level accurately resulted in limited investment in the class (e.g., focusing only on finishing exercises rather than learning from them), which in turn prevented him from taking full advantage of the new material. It is not possible to determine the extent of ‘learning’ that happened when Brad was caught in this cycle. But it is safe to say that while there were precursors of learning, there was also lack of control over the material or concepts. This dilemma was manifested clearly after the activity on the language of cause and effect. Brad did the exercises in class but did not have a full understanding of the function of the language of cause and effect. He then forgot to use that language in his homework essay. He said,

I think I didn’t use this [language of cause and effect in my homework essay]. I dunno I just keep writing so, I didn’t remember this so I didn’t use this. But I find ah when I finish my writing yesterday night but in this morning I find oh my God I didn’t use the language of cause and effect [so I revised] yeah today. I feel so bad. I forgot to using this in my ah the paragraph of the problem solution. [Brad SR 10]

That he was able to remember and later to revise his essay to include the language of cause and effect shows that he had a nascent understanding of this language but with very limited control over it. Brad was using it as an accessory, an add-on. His use was ‘compliant’ but that might be the first step that would eventually lead to the full integration of this feature into his writing.

6.3.5. Response to the Two Focal Units

The following two sections describe Brad’s response to the two focal units detailed in Chapter 5 above.
6.3.5.1. Unit on Sentence Variety

Brad selected this class activity as an important one and wanted to discuss it in the SR meeting. He explained in the SR that he did not learn about sentence variety in China but was introduced to the notions of clause and variety in previous courses in the EAP program. However, he was aware that his understanding of clauses was basic and that he had limited control over sentence structure:

I know [about the clauses] but ah not use ah very often. [Brad SR 2]

He found that the practice exercises and the handouts were the most important parts of the unit and the most useful for him. Brad used these tools as physical reminders of what was happening in class. He said,

I usually remember things by picture and images. So this exercise ah look like picture so I if I review them I can-- I mean the sentence like a picture, and ah when I saw it I can remember the information, ah like I remember the word like pictures. So may be one word is one picture. A little picture and ah they combine ah become big picture so, and ah when I saw them I can remember. [Brad SR 2]

This investment in remembering and cataloguing sentence types seems to have paid off since sentence complexity was one of the few areas where Brad’s writing improved.

6.3.5.2. Unit on Summary Writing

Brad valued the different guided exercises done in this class. He was also able to distinguish the function of each exercise:

The first exercise we just put them in the blank so it’s like a model, but it’s like it can help the second one can help us to like make a plan to write the summary more clearly. [Brad SR 20]

The organization of the unit was also a positive point for Brad:
I think the most is more organized and ah like before we write about summary and I can have a plan outline about it and may be can take a few less time to write summaries. [Brad SR 20]

When asked to compare his understanding of summary writing before and after attending the unit, Brad felt confident that he had learned how to write summaries (at least to a certain extent).
Chapter 7: Discussion of Findings and Implications

The purpose of this project was to describe if and how a group ZPD was co-created in an advanced EAP class. An interactional ethnographic approach to data representation and analysis framed the study, revealing not only the patterns of co-regulation and knowledge co-construction that shaped the instructional space but also how they intersected with the participants’ individual beliefs, motives, and agency. Data were collected continuously over the 12-week duration of a full academic semester and included observations and coding of classroom activities, interviews, and stimulated recalls from the teacher and three focal students. Following is a recapitulation and discussion of the main findings organized by my three research questions in relation to the literature on (class) ZPD. The final section suggests further informative analyses of the data set that could be undertaken and implications for theory and practice that build on the findings of the present thesis.

7.1. Summary of Findings

7.1.1. What pedagogical activities did the teacher enact to organize and facilitate students’ opportunities for learning?

Two categories of facilitative factors related to the creation and maintenance of emotional sustenance and specific aspects of instructional design and pedagogical choices were identified by the teacher. Analysis showed the connection between the two categories to be organic, supporting the idea that a group ZPD was established within and over the course and had several interconnected and mutually dependent dimensions, including cognitive as well as emotional and relational dimensions.
Teacher interviews and SRs revealed the teacher’s beliefs and conceptualisations of her roles and those of the students and by extension the type of community she was aiming to establish during the term. While the literature on teacher beliefs often shows that their beliefs and actual practices do not necessarily match, understanding a teacher’s ways of positioning herself and her students can clarify what happens in class and the rationale behind it. Kate’s interviews identified seven facilitative factors that I classified under two major categories: emotional sustenance and aspects of instructional design and pedagogical choices.

First, the teacher strove to create a positive learning environment resting on a foundation of mutual respect and a common understanding of shared rules and expectations of behavior and academic participation. To build a strong rapport and a cohesive class community, Kate revealed aspects of her personality, life experiences, and interests that allowed the students to see her as a relatable and approachable individual. She also sought to develop a good understanding of how each student’s personality traits and academic potential affected their performance and the nature of their classroom participation and social relations with other students. The data suggest that Kate’s commitment to this goal was powerful and consistent and contributed to the establishment of a strong rapport with most students (e.g., Anna, Reema, Ivy), possibly to varying degrees. There is some indication, in this regard, that the rapport with Brad was not particularly strong. It is not possible, based on the data available, to fully understand why, though it seems to be due to a complex interaction of several factors (e.g., Brad’s initial lower level, some aspects of Brad and/or Kate’s characters and backgrounds). However, I consider that Brad’s case lends further evidence for the dialectical
relationship between emotion and cognition: Limitations in one necessarily affect the other.

Moreover, Kate established clear and dependable codes of behavior and academic participation. Over time, these codes came to constitute a class-community charter. It included rules that governed and regulated the teacher’s behaviour and responsibilities as well as students’ roles and expected contributions. Examples included rules such as teacher answering questions to the satisfaction of the student and addressing mistakes and concerns in the moment. There was also a shared understanding that students were responsible and accountable for their own learning. Within these supportive practices, the teacher also strove to balance challenges and a sense of attainment by segmenting content into manageable chunks and sustaining students’ motivation and engagement through mediation.

Besides emotional sustenance, Kate spoke at length of a number of instructional design decisions and pedagogical choices geared towards the creation of opportunities for learning in class. The teacher referenced four pedagogical choices that were intended to empower students and help them see themselves as capable learners, maximize learning in the class, and “establish a cohesive sense of responsibility” (Putney & Broughton, 2011, p.94) shared by teachers and students alike toward learning and towards one another. First, Kate planned for a logical continuity that connected the course content over time and created building blocks that constituted shared knowledge that expanded over time. Further, Kate made this continuity and connection visible to the students through the use of different semiotic tools such as advance organizers and reminders. There was also coherence between the different course components (e.g., tutorials, one-
on-one meetings with students) that helped the teacher bridge what was discussed in private meetings with individual students with the public discussions in class.

Second, the teacher talked about a number of measures she implemented to monitor students’ progress and development, including the tracking of students’ improvements through multiple rewrites of the same assignments, the use of test results to pinpoint the students’ exact needs, and adapting teaching materials to meet those needs. Kate also varied tasks within the same unit to trace the students’ abilities to perform under different requirements—from answering questions during tutorials, to mechanical exercises, and to tasks that required integration of content to show increased autonomy and control over the new information.

Third, the teacher described several types of assistance she provided for her students but also different forms and paces for withholding assistance and support. Typically, Kate organized instructional units in a way that gave the students increasing autonomy and responsibility over the material and content. For instance, Kate always modeled the first answer to each exercise she assigned. She then allowed time for group collaboration on subsequent questions and eventually assigned individual work.

Finally, the teacher insisted that she geared her teaching towards the strongest level of the students’ abilities. However, she also ensured that all students obtained scaffolding that was appropriate to their levels. Kate incorporated opportunities for meaningful participation at different proficiency levels, thus allowing weaker students to have a voice and a role to play within the classroom dynamic. She also offered one-on-one consultations with individuals during pair or group work. Moreover, by providing
ample opportunities for peer collaboration, Kate ensured weaker students could benefit from peer support and scaffolding.

The teacher illustrated how she implemented her beliefs in class and how she traced their effects on students’ learning through three indicators of engagement that guided her interaction patterns and her instructional choices (namely, students’ body language, their interactions and participation patterns, and evidence of knowledge integration in new contexts over time). Anecdotes and examples from events observed in class showed clear links between the teacher’s statements and instances of co-creation of opportunities for learning between teacher and students.

It is important to emphasize the organic or dialectical relationship between the two major categories of facilitative factors identified by the teacher (emotional sustenance and instructional choices). All the teacher’s statements that foregrounded the instructional choices were actually anchored in larger considerations and a concern for providing a positive learning environment. In other words, the concern with emotional sustenance underlay every statement. My classification of teacher’s statements into the two distinct categories was primarily methodological, reflecting the degree of emphasis on one category or the other since the distinction (as per the teacher’s statements) was never binary. In fact, there is ample support in the data for the argument made by Swain (2013) and Poehner and Swain (2016) about the dialectical relation between the cognitive and the emotive. The cognitive and emotional processes described by Kate contained and shaped one another.
**7.1.2. How did the teacher and students progressively co-construct opportunities for learning in class?**

A quantitative overview of patterns of interaction supplemented by a microgenetic analysis of two focal instructional units showed the range of roles assumed by the teacher and students throughout the term. The intersubjective space created in class allowed the students to have a voice and play an active role while the teacher directed the flow of interaction smoothly between open whole-class dialogues and more private small-group or one-on-one interactions.

The interactional ethnographic approach made visible the patterns of interaction and mediation that were co-constructed over the duration of the term. It helped describe how the teacher’s beliefs detailed above came into life in the class and how the resultant practices were constructed in particular moments by the teacher with the students’ complicity.

The overview of the instructional environment co-constructed by Kate and her students during the semester revealed the types and structure of interactions, the distribution of roles assumed by the participants, and the tools and supports afforded in this instructional space. Analysis showed that, *teacher talk, students’ open interactions* and *teacher consultation with individual students* accounted each for about one third of instructional time (34%, 29% and 24%, respectively). At the same time, *teacher consultation* co-occurred with 59% of all small group work, 14% of pair work, and 36% of individual work. In other words, while the teacher spent a considerable amount of time addressing the class as a whole, there were also ample opportunities for individual interactions between the teacher and individual students and among students as well. This
distribution of types of grouping showed a balance between an authoritative teacher role as instructor and Kate’s role as mentor.

The teacher assumed a variety of pedagogical roles. Half of the instructional time included instances of teacher probing and eliciting answers. *Telling/giving information* was the second most prevalent role while *modeling* was the third most prevalent, followed by monitoring in the fourth position. These roles tended to co-occur in the same class episodes.

Analysis of student roles showed that *reading aloud/silently* was the most prevalent role, followed by *listening, providing oral response*, and *discussing*. These roles often combined, showing that the students were engaged in different ways in any given activity.

In terms of instructional materials used, the analysis revealed that teacher-made handouts and materials were the most prevalent type of materials followed by student texts which consisted mainly in the use of student-generated texts (e.g., test answers, essay drafts) as an instructional support to discuss elements of good academic writing. Analysis also showed that activation of background knowledge and the promotion of complex language were the most prevalent categories of instructional elements used.

Microgenetic analysis of two focal units supplemented the quantitative overview and helped illustrate how opportunities for learning were created in the moment and how each of the coded categories facilitated the creation of a class ZPD. This analysis highlighted how the facilitating factors identified by the teacher (for research question 1) and the findings of the class interaction coding materialised in real time. Analysis of
pertinent interactions during the two focal units helped pinpoint and illustrate the construction of opportunities for learning as they were experienced in real time in class.

The microgenetic analysis of the unit ‘Sentence Variety’ highlighted the fluidity of the unit and the teacher’s uses of advance organizers and metalinguistic terms to help define the content to be learned as well as the contribution she expected from the students (i.e., defining her roles and those of the students). The analysis also revealed a gradual decrease of teacher talk and steady increase of students’ open participation, which reflected a gradual withdrawal of teacher assistance and an increase in student autonomy. The analysis also helped further define aspects of teacher talk that were often used--namely mediating tools such as mnemonics and graphs, the deconstruction of examples, and the tailoring of instruction to the specific needs of the class--and how they each helped create opportunities for learning.

Analysis of the unit on Summary Writing revealed three types of intertextual links between the unit components. Drawing the chain of activity during the three sessions that constituted the unit on Summary Writing revealed how the first chains were predominantly teacher-dominated and served as building blocks for later chains. The analysis of the instructional materials used revealed that students’ texts were repurposed as models and/or examples to deconstruct, analyse, and thus illustrate pertinent points that were already covered in the teacher’s tutorials. Another level of intertextuality was observed between the content of different instructional supports (e.g., handouts and student checklists used during peer reviews).

The teacher’s uses of graduated mediation and her calibration of the emerging needs of the students in the moment led the students to perform and process information
that was slightly “beyond their current level of independent functioning” (Poehner, 2009, p.471). Indeed, a number of the interactions reported and analyzed above illustrate processes of concurrent Group Dynamic Assessment as described by Poehner (2009):

Kate orchestrated the individual students’ effort and contributions to frame joint activities that advanced the class ZPD.

In this way, a state of intersubjectivity was created where students were introduced to more complex knowledge but were also given tools to process and to reach appropriate levels of understanding. These tools included pointed examples when the teacher noticed malaise in the class, deconstructing examples to further illustrate and model specific points, and accepting and addressing student questions. Deconstructions, models, examples, and answers to questions helped bridge gaps that were too wide for some students to cross by themselves.

7.1.3. What facilitated or hindered students’ take up of opportunities for learning?

Three case studies highlighted the differences and similarities in the agentive stances assumed by three focal students. These analyses revealed the complex and unpredictable intersections between classroom instructions or mediation, and material affordances on the one hand, and the learners’ agency and different facets of their histories, goals, and personalities, on the other hand.

The three focal students differed in several aspects such as gender, ethnicity, their previous learning experiences, their current English proficiency levels, and the quality of their writing. Brad was a struggling student who made little progress over the semester whereas Reema and Ivy were more proficient and showed more control and development over time.
The three case studies highlighted the differences and similarities in the agentive stances assumed by the three students. First, the three students valued different mediational tools. While Brad attended to practice exercises and supporting examples and used them as references, Reema attributed value to the teacher tutorial and practice exercises. Ivy on the other hand was more articulate about specific aspects of teacher talk that she considered helpful (namely, clarity, explicitness and ‘rationality’) as well as aspects of the course design such the coherence and fluidity of instructional units.

All three students showed evidence of investment and intentionality in their learning, often manifested in their attempts to (a) resolve conflicts between their old knowledge and what they were being taught in class and (b) fill gaps they perceived in their understanding of given points.

Both Reema and Ivy assumed full responsibility for their own learning by taking the initiative to further their understanding of the content being taught. Ivy, however, stood apart in the range of strategies and agentive stances she applied. She constantly set and refined her goals, sought opportunities for self-scaffolding, and monitored her learning. Brad, on the other hand, showed evidence of mere compliance with some instructional materials and instructions when he failed to understand and appropriate the goals of the teacher or when he did not see the value in the content presented. He also resisted some forms of corrective feedback.

The three case studies revealed the complex and unpredictable intersections between classroom instructions, mediation, and material affordances on the one hand, and the learners’ agency and different facets of their histories, goals, and personalities, on the other hand. While the classroom interactions, dialogues, and other tools were made
available to all, students’ experiences of the class and ultimately their appropriation (or lack thereof) of selected educational points was shaped by particular individual factors.

7.2. Implications and Further Research

The findings of the study contribute to understanding the ZPD as a working metaphor, best practices in teaching EAP writing, and the nature of learning by diverse language students. The findings also raise some questions and draw attention to some methodological and conceptual considerations worth pursuing further.

7.2.1. Implications for the Definition of the ZPD

The findings of this study contribute to ongoing debates around the definition of the ZPD in classroom contexts. The project started by noting the scarcity of research about the suitability of the ZPD as a working metaphor to characterize classroom instruction and learning. The research extended the available literature by examining different aspects of the instructional space over a full learning cycle (i.e., one full semester leading to graduation). The findings substantiate Cumming’s (2016) statement about the growing understanding that,

a skilled teacher need not (indeed, probably cannot) attempt to construct a ZPD with all students at once, but rather can strategically organize students into groups performing long-term, sequenced writing tasks that are within--and which advance when accompanied by additional dialogue with the teacher and other students--students’ ZPD.

(p. 78).

Several examples reported above show evidence of successful mediation strategically provided by the teacher to establish a ZPD with a particular student or a particular group of engaged students. However, there is also evidence that
much of the success of this mediation depended on a student’s responsiveness (cf., Poehner, 2008, 2009). Furthermore, the study not only catalogued the pedagogical activities that the teacher enacted to organize the instructional space of the classroom over time, it also schematized the organic and mutually dependent relationship between what was characterized as emotional support mechanisms and what counts as conventional pedagogical choices. The study also shows how these activities were received, appropriated or resisted by the students. The findings expand Newman, Griffin, and Cole’s (1989) metaphor that described the classroom as ‘a construction zone’—with multiple concurrent work areas and spaces that involve at times peer groups, pairs of students, or a student in consultation with the teacher—by documenting how work done in each space and the opportunities for learning created in each act of interaction or collaboration adds to the overall capital of the classroom, shaping the learning potential of the group.

One essential finding from this study that enhances understanding of the ZPD is that the coherence, continuity, and progressively complex and multilayered interaction between these multiple spaces, and the balance created in attending to the affective as well as the cognitive aspects of learning, seem to be the two crucial factors that create successful learning experiences. Continuity, coherence, and progressive complexity facilitated the creation of a “spiral, passing through the same point at each new revolution while advancing to a higher level” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 56), a process which Vygotsky considered as an essential element leading to development over time. In this regard, the classroom space created by Kate bore a close resemblance to the one created by Delp in
Freedman and Delp (2005). In both classes, the ZPD was created in a dialogic space where teacher and students alike shared the responsibility of moving forward individually but together. The present study further illustrates how this dialogic space is not necessarily confined to the physical space of the classroom. Additionally, by focusing students’ SRs on several class episodes that included appropriated as well as missed opportunities for learning, the study showed and illustrated the range of learners’ contribution to the classroom dialogic space.

Second, the analysis showed that instructional practices were anchored in a strong relation that was built over time on a foundation of trust and mutual respect of intellectual capabilities and potential. Aspects of these relations were presented by the teacher as crucial facilitating factors, supporting the renewed interest in the relational aspects of the ZPD that many researchers had neglected in favor of its cognitive dimension. Walker and Gleaves (2016), building on Goldstein’s (1999) and Noddings’ (1986) notion of the ethic of care, explained that the:

pedagogic bonds [between teacher and students] hold at their center notions of reciprocity, the situation of the ‘other’ and the significance of reflexivity in responding appropriately. In turn, caring teachers translate these concepts into coherent bodies of practice whereby they respond to students with timeliness, know students with insight, encounter students with authenticity and treat students with consistency. (p. 66).

Analyses in this thesis documented these aspects of caring teaching in the context of the classroom observed here, thereby presenting a concrete example of how English language teachers can integrate attention to the cognitive and emotional dimensions of the ZPD in their teaching.
7.2.2. Implications for teaching and learning of academic writing

Kate implemented most of the recommended best practices of second language writing instruction documented in previous research: creating opportunities for students to develop self-regulation, developing instructional arrangements and routines so students could experience and learn to control the composition process (from researching, to planning, drafting, and editing--in collaboration and individually), setting and justifying clear goals, and deconstructing and modeling exemplar texts in a way that showed the complexity of composition and reading processes (Graham & Perrin, 2007).

The study has documented exemplary writing instruction in several ways. Most notable was the teacher’s use of modeling of writing processes and the deconstruction of written texts. These two teaching practices are perhaps the two pedagogical tools that best substantiate the interpsychological to intrapsychological move described in Vygotsky’s definition of the ZPD.

Tappan (1998) explained that modeling and imitation provide a level of subtle assistance that help learners “grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 88), especially if there is an overall environment of confidence and trust that facilitates dialogic interactions where students can exercise their agency and redirect the conversation so as to reach a satisfactory understanding or elucidate ambiguities. Mariage (2001) and Berry (2006) agreed that deconstructions and modeling unveil and break-down the complex process of composition and showcase exemplary writing products. Berry (2006) further clarified that the process at play is not a mere acquisition (i.e., accumulation) of knowledge but a transformation of knowledge whereby students appropriate what they are ready for and negotiate what is made available on the
basis of their respective individual repertoires. This dynamic allows for different levels and forms of pertinent participation that extend from peripheral to central. What transpires is not a transfer of knowledge from one mind to another but a redefinition, a negotiation and co-creation of a new understanding that is not necessarily identical to a teacher’s plan but is personally meaningful to each student. Wertsch (2007) argued that such tools help student “leverage their way up through increasing levels of expertise” (p.188), which is the essential factor in the establishing and maintaining of a state of intersubjectivity. In this intersubjective space, students have a voice and an active role to play. The teacher in this study seems to have further extended this space in multiple directions by diversifying the patterns and forms of interaction and directing the flow of communication smoothly between open whole-class dialogues and more private small-group or one-on-one interactions. Throughout the term, there was visible evidence of the three components of mediated activity defined by Prior (2005)--externalization, co-action, and internalization--all three facilitated and expressed through organized, supported teacher talk, open and purposeful interaction between teacher and students and among students, and the affordances of multiples opportunities to experiment with texts and writing processes.

The study also contributes to understanding the nature of learning in classrooms with students from diverse backgrounds and achievement levels. In this regard, the findings are in line with Prior’s (2006) account of learning activities, where “people are not only socialized (brought into alignment with others) as they appropriate cultural resources but also individualised as their particular appropriations historically accumulate to form particular individuals” (p. 55). The three case studies showed these different
layers at play as the students were attending to the materials and instruction afforded to them, which in turn showed how active each individual was in shaping and transforming the learning and teaching materials. Individualization in these cases involved references and reassessment of past learning experiences, new understandings of L1 and L2 rhetorical conventions, goals, and long term objectives.

The data also illustrate Van Compernolle’s (2016) distinction between verbal/open participation and active reception. Compernolle explained that traditionally active visible participation is acknowledged as a sign of engagement, encouraged, and often rewarded with no regard for the silent processes that may be at play in a student’s mind during socially mediated activity. He further argued that reception, often labeled as “passive”, should instead be recognized as one dimension of participation where the learner is “active[ly] engaged] in observing and attending to the talk-in-interaction.” (p. 113). He therefore suggested “doing receiving” as a better term to describe hearer activity during interaction. The three case studies showed the different ways that Brad, Ivy, and Reema “did receiving” in class. Reema and Ivy occasionally participated orally in class but they were not the most vocal students. Brad spoke only when addressed by the teacher. However, the interviews of the three students showed the range of agentive stances and intentionality they applied to make sense of the classroom discourse and achieve their personal goals. Learning happened at the junction of teacher/tool mediation, learner active participation, and intentionality in harnessing and capitalizing on all relevant past learning experiences. These findings have direct implications for teacher development and training. There is a need for teachers (new and veterans) to re-examine their perceptions of what counts as legitimate or valuable classroom participation and to
think of learning and assessment tools that account for and reward the range of possible participation patterns.

7.2.3. Implications for further research

In terms of research methods, interactional ethnography proved to be a valuable tool that helped locate and deconstruct opportunities for learning as they occurred in this class. However, more detailed analysis focusing on specific aspects of the interactions and tracing their evolution over time could certainly reveal more pertinent facts about the nature of the classroom interactions. Questions and examples are two elements of class interactions that are worth examining in depth. While the analysis reported above alluded to the consistent use of questions (teacher- and student- initiated) and examples to promote inquiry, it would be interesting to build a model of the pattern or sequence of use of these elements. For instance, what is the difference between questions asked by the teachers and those posed by the students (in terms of timing, phrasing of the question, moves that precede and follow a question)? How are examples framed and developed? These are some of the aspects of class interactions that remain “undertheorized” (Walker & Gleaves, 2016) because of the complex and fast-paced nature of classroom discourse. Of course, additional analyses building on the findings offered in the present thesis could also usefully be conducted in other contexts of language instruction, with learners of languages other than English, focused on other aspects of literacy and communication such as reading or speaking, with learners of different ages and abilities, and with teachers of various degrees of experience and skill.
References


Skukauskaite, & E. Grace (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 177-192). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.


Appendices

Appendix A: Teacher Consent Letter

Dear xxxxx

Thank you for volunteering to take part in the research project entitled *Negotiating Opportunities for Learning in an Advanced Academic English Classroom Context: An Interactional Ethnographic Study*. The study is undertaken in partial fulfillment for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at OISE/UT, under the supervision of Prof. Alister Cumming.

The study aims to examine how learning and development take place in the classroom context. It compares teacher and student perspective on classroom activity to show how they reach a mutual understanding of the purpose and practices of the class.

I would like to attend all the class meetings of (class name) and videotape the first three units and then one of the last units of the course. I also would like to schedule a one-hour meeting at the end of each week of videotaping (three meetings over the first three weeks of the course and one meeting towards the end of the semester) to discuss some aspects of those sessions. At the end of the study, I would like to schedule another one-hour meeting for a last interview. Therefore, your participation in the project will involve about five hours of your time in total. I will also ask for your permission to keep a copy of all class materials and handouts.

You are not under any obligation to participate in this study; participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time, for any reason, if you wish, and you may refuse to answer any questions. In the case that some students object to being videotaped or to having excerpts from their interactions in class used for research purposes, I will not include them in the study. I will keep all information about you and your students fully confidential. No information from the research will be given to any other teachers or program administrators. I will use pseudonyms to identify you and your students when I write up results of this research and will conceal any personal information that might identify you. I will store the recordings of classroom sessions in a locked filing cabinet, then destroy them five years after the research is completed.

If you consent that I conduct this research in your class, I can offer to share with you a copy of a summary report on this study, which you may find informative. As noted above, it will conceal information about individual students.

If you have any questions about the research, I would be happy to answer them. If you have any questions about the rights of participants, please contact the Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

If you agree to this research, please keep this letter for your future reference and sign and date the second page and return it to me.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I will look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Student Investigator
Ibtissem Knouzi

Thesis Supervisor
Professor Alister Cumming

Program: Second Language Education, Curriculum Teaching and Learning, OISE/UT
I have read Ibtissem Knouzi’s letter of ------- and agree ____ do not agree ____ (please tick one) to have the research project *Negotiating Opportunities for Learning in an Advanced Academic English Classroom Context: An Interactional Ethnographic Study* conducted in my class.

Name:  
Signature:  
Date:
Appendix B: Student Consent Letter

I am a Ph.D. student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. I am asking for your permission to (a) attend this course (exact name of the course here), (b) videotape a few class meetings at the beginning and end of the term, and (c) recruit five students whom I will ask to provide information on their learning experiences in this course. The title of the study is Negotiating Opportunities for Learning in an Advanced Academic English Classroom Context: An Interactional Ethnographic Study. In this study I am interested in looking at how students learn in a classroom context.

The study is undertaken in partial fulfillment for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at OISE/UT, under the supervision of Prof. Alister Cumming.

Let me give more information about what the study involves:

1. Videotaping: I would like your permission to attend all class sessions from July 6th to September 25th. I will observe your classes and take notes about the classroom activities and organization. I will also videotape a few sessions at the beginning of the semester and again towards the end in September.
   I need to make these videotapes to be able to make detailed analyses of the classroom activities afterwards. Nobody will ever see the videotapes that I make. Also, when I analyze the tapes, I will not refer to you by name. I will not give details that might help identify you by your teacher, the program administrator or your colleagues.

2. Five volunteer students: I need to recruit five students who will provide more information about their background, their goals in taking this course and their learning experience in this class. I will meet with these students 5 times outside class time at a time and place that are convenient to them. I will also ask to get a copy of all written work that these students produce for this course (assignments, homework, etc.). I expect that these students will contribute about 5 hours of their time for the study, in recognition of which I will offer them an honorarium of $50 each. Your teacher will not know who these five students are.

You are not under any obligation to participate in this study; participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time, for any reason, if you wish, and you may refuse to answer any questions or complete any task(s). If you object to being videotaped or to having excerpts from your interactions in class used for research purposes, I will not include you in the analysis. I will keep all and any personal information you provide fully confidential. No information from the research will be given to any teachers or program administrators. I will not use your real name when I write up the results of this research and I will conceal any personal information that might identify you. I will store the recordings of classroom sessions in a locked filing cabinet in my office, and then destroy them five years after the research is completed.

If you have any questions about the research, I would be happy to answer them. If you have any questions about your right as a participant, please contact the Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

If you agree to this research, please keep this letter for your future reference and sign and date the second page and return it to me.
Thank you for your consideration of this request. I will look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Student Investigator
Ibtissem Knouzi

Thesis Supervisor
Professor Alister Cumming

Program: Second Language Education, Curriculum Teaching and Learning, OISE/UT
Appendix C: Teacher Background Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project. The following questionnaire has been designed to collect some non-identifying background information. The information you supply will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this study. Please complete the questionnaire. This will take you about 5 minutes.

Please choose a pseudonym:

Age (group):  20-30: ……  31-40 ……  41-50: ……  50 or more: ……

What is the highest degree that you have obtained? ………………………………………

What is/was your main field of study? (Major courses taken)…………………………

What type of teacher education training did you have in teaching ESL? ……………………………………………
  L2 reading and writing?…………………………………………………………
  English for academic purposes………………………………………………

What classes are you teaching this year?………………………………………………

How long have you been teaching in this program? In other programs?
………………………………………………………………………………………….

How many years have you taught Academic English in particular? What levels have you taught previously/for how long?
………………………………………………………………………………………….
………………………………………………………………………………………….

Do you speak any other languages besides English? (Please specify)………………
Is English your first or second language?…………………………………………….
Appendix D: Student Background Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project. The following questionnaire has been designed to collect some non-identifying background information. The information you supply will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this study. Please complete the questionnaire. This will take you about 5 minutes.

Please choose a pseudonym: ……………

1. Gender: Male\[\] Female\[\]
2. Age:……….
3. Native language: ……………
4. How long have you studied English (excluding the current term): ……years
5. Have you spent any sustained time in an English speaking country?  
   Yes\[\]  No\[\]
   If yes, please specify country(ies) and duration of stay……………………………………
6. Do you use English outside of school? If yes, please specify  
   ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
7. Why did you register for this course?
8. What university and program will you apply to after you finish this course?
9. How do you rate your reading skills (compare to colleagues in the last English course you took)?  
   Well above average  Above average  Average  Below average
10. How do you rate your writing skills (compare to colleagues in the last English course you took)?  
    Well above average  Above average  Average  Below average
11. What are some of the main issues you have with reading in English?  
    ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
12. What are some of the main issues you have with writing in English?  
    ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
### Appendix E: Classroom Observation Chart

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Student Participation Patterns</th>
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<td>Activity Focus&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Classroom Organization&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<sup>1</sup> Aspects of academic writing focused on, such as text production, organization, rhetorical structure, planning, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Small group work, whole class activity, pair work, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Overall sequential organization of the interactions (teacher/student-initiated, question-answer sequence, group conversation, etc.)
Appendix F: Teacher Stimulated Recall Protocol

I have here a video-recording of the classroom sessions I observed this week. We will watch the episodes that you identified as important or successful and then I will have some questions to ask.

Can you please describe this segment?

What was the goal of this activity/task?

Please stop the tape when you notice a point when (a) you changed what you originally planned to do and/or (b) you changed or expanded your plan to accommodate what you perceived as a need/misunderstanding by the student.

What prompted this change?

What direction did you take instead?

Were you able to achieve the initial goal of the activity/task?

In retrospect do you see other ways you could have engaged the students more/better?

How did the course of this activity change (or not) the way you conducted the next activity/task?

Do you think that the students understood and benefited from this activity/task? Could you give specific examples of students who did and students who did not, with explanations?

What do you think facilitated or hindered student understanding?
Appendix G: Student Stimulated Recall Protocol

I have here a video-recording of classroom sessions I observed this week. We will watch a few episodes (one at a time) and I will have a few questions to ask.

Can you please describe this segment? What happened? What you were doing? What the teacher was doing?

What do you think was the goal of this activity/task?

Did you participate in this activity?
   If yes, how? How did your contribution help you understand? What is your assessment of the responses you got to your contribution?

   If not, why? What were you thinking as the interactions were going on?

Did you learn something new from this activity? Did you get a better understanding of something you knew already? Or did this activity add nothing to your knowledge?
Appendix H: Teacher In-depth Interview Protocol

1. What was your initial assessment of this class in terms of their starting level?

2. How did you tailor your lessons to address the needs of students at different levels?

3. What indicators did you rely on to identify the initial level of each student?

4. What indicators did you rely on to assess the development of each student?

Now I would like to focus on five students that were in your class this semester: [Names]. Please think back to your experiences with them, your assessment of their level, their contributions to classroom activities, and your assessment of the progress they made over the course of the term. We will talk about them one by one and I will ask you the same questions again (questions 1 to 4 above in relation to each student)
Appendix I: Samples of Focal Students’ Writing

*Problem-solving essay submitted in Week 5 of the course*

**Reema’s essay**

Undergraduate students assume that attending universities will allow them to receive relevant subjects and practical training which will expand their awareness of the field. The problem is that some universities provide a poor quality of experience to their undergraduate students. Studies indicate that the financial crises may cause many subjects to be canceled because of their costs. Some jobs also will be eliminated; for example, the university of Calgary warned recently that 200 campus jobs could be lost. As a result of the global economy the class size will be increased in order to include hundreds of students, which will diminish their focus. Furthermore, there will be insufficient resources for teaching undergraduate students, which narrows their skills.

Some researches suggest that applying the following solutions could solve theis problem. First, reducing the number of students by putting some students on hold, which helped students to stay focus during lectures. Second, encouraging students to use a customized online textbooks and quizzes un order to improve their academic realization without coiming to university. Third, advice students to arrange one meeting each week to their group f study and professors due to share and discuss their ideas and experiences. Finally, introduce undergraduate sudents to students’ union, which allow them to take advantage of senior students’ background. It is expected that occupying these solutions may made a significant improvement in undergraduate students’ experience.

**Ivy’s essay**

In 2007, Saudi Arabia opened the first legal department that would provide female students with legal education. This was initiated after the increasing demand for female legal advisers and female law professors who would fill the gap in some governmental positions. As soon as the department was opened, hundreds of female students signed with hopes of taking role in reforming the judicial and social system. The problem that these female graduate encountered was in obtaining a lawyer’s license. The system adopted by the ministry of justice required law graduates to apply through the ministry for two years of supervised training. After that they will be eligible to obtain a lawyer’s license and to put their names in the certified lawyer’s list. Female applicants, however, were rejected with no valid justification from the ministry. The minister was interviewed a number if times and asked about thus problem. The explanations given for this attitude were that the current judicial system is not prepared yet for females participating in the legal field, that female participation in the advocating from would violate the general social-religious rule of the prohibition of mixing between men and women in public places. As a result, female law graduates are unable to practice their field of study in the form of advocating. This problem also resulted in making law firms (which are owned and operated by men) fearful of training female graduates because of the vague attitude of the ministry and the conflicting perceptions of what constitutes the general prohibition.
The most widespread solution that the conservatives propose is for the ministry of justice to establish a female section in each court, where the female lawyer and her client would communicate with the judge and other participants in the courtroom via a conference room. This solution is problematic because it would strengthen the rule of no mixing as well as take many years and millions of riyals to achieve.

The most effective solution that would guarantee applying the law and include long-term amendments in the judicial system is for the pro-human rights movements, lawyers and prospective lawyers to join a campaign for applying the lawyers’ legislation. The lawyers legislation states the word ‘applicant,’ without specifying male or female. It is also important for the prospective female lawyers to mobilize and form a group that carries their demands and coordinates with the Association of lawyers to push the opposing institutions to apply the law and this discrimination that violates the constitution and the conventions ratified by the Saudi government. This solution would have better impact on the whole reformation process in the kingdom and would promote human right which puts our society in a better place.

Brad’s essay

In the present some university professors find most students misunderstood what they should do in university. There are some unnamed surveies are shown that around 70% of the university students have this thought. Because of the strict system in high school, teachers always watch students in different subjects and use some rules to avoid cheating on exams. Moreover, in the final term of high school, on wrong information that students student can study at university by easy way. It will be stated by most high school teachers. A large number of Chinese student do not have a strong self-control. Therefore according to this big situation, most students gradated from high school will be lazy, absent to their subject’s classes and cheat on exams.

The Chinese government and all universities have planed to develop solutions to adopt this problem. Universities encourage the roll call should be done by professors at the beginning of classes, it is not available on students. Because they find a way to against the roll call which just do this activity and run away later. The most promising one is work of students in high school should be alleviated and in university should be added. The result of this proposed solution is students can be inable to do more works in high school and affect by the wrong information from high school teachers. It also help students have a successful university experience. In conclusion, this proposed solution will be adopted in all provinces. Students will obtain a strong self-control.