THE ACADEMIC LITERACY SOCIALIZATION OF MEXICAN EXCHANGE STUDENTS AT A CANADIAN UNIVERSITY

by

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Abstract

Academic exchanges have become very popular worldwide as part of the internationalization of higher education. While the benefits of study abroad have been well documented, mostly using large-scale surveys, detailed information about the individual experiences of sojourners and the outcomes of these experiences has been lacking. Addressing this gap, this qualitative multiple-case study explores the second language (L2) academic literacy socialization experiences of foreign students studying abroad at a large Canadian English-medium university. The focal participants are six undergraduate Mexican students enrolled in the MCMU-WCU Joint Academic Exchange Program (a pseudonym) for either one or two academic terms between 2005 and 2006. Triangulated data sources included interviews with focal and secondary student participants and with two instructors, focus group interviews, written assignments, questionnaires, writing logs, and field notes.

The main goal of this investigation was to yield rich understandings of the learning resources and opportunities available to the participants and how these impacted their L2 academic literacy development and performance during their stay. The study also examined participants' reentry experiences in Mexico and their perceptions of the significance of their academic experiences in Canada once they returned to their home contexts. This study draws on the language socialization framework (Duff, 1996, 2003; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, b), the "community of practice" concept (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), and social network theory (Milroy, 1980, 1987) to provide an ecological perspective of the students' socialization into host L2 academic literacy practices. Based on these theories, five parameters that emerged for the analysis of students' experiences from a sociocultural perspective are examined and illustrated.

While this study does not yield findings that can be generalized to the wider population of study abroad students, it does contribute with "analytical generalizations" (Firestone, 1993) by illustrating how the three main theories informing this study can be combined in novel and productive ways to understand students' experiences of study abroad. Finally, suggestions for future exchange students, instructors and institutions sending and receiving international L2-speaking students are presented together with directions for further research.

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List of Acronyms

COMM	Commerce
CoP	Community of practice
HE	Higher education
INoP	Individual network of practice
LAST	Latin American Studies
L1	First language
L2	Second language
L2S	Second language socialization
LPP	Legitimate peripheral participation
MCMU	Multi-campus Mexican university
NES	Native English speaker
NNES	Non-native English speaker
OAP	Oral academic presentation
PHIL	Philosophy
POLI	Political sciences
SA	Study abroad
WCU	Western Canadian University

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To Jorge, Rocío and Serena

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

Increasingly, many higher education (HE) students worldwide choose to take part in study abroad programs with the primary goal of enhancing both their educational and life experiences as a result of their sojourn. Consequently, overseas programs that promote mobility between tertiary level institutions in different countries have continued to proliferate. Britain and Australia, located among the five top destinations for international students, constitute concrete examples of how student mobility has soared. Australia has increased the number of foreign students by over 1000% since 1994, a trend that actually started over two decades ago. And of the 153,400 overseas students in Australia in the year 2000, 47% were attending HE institutions.[1] While student mobility is not a new invention of our postmodern era, what our times can be credited for is the institutionalization of organized study abroad programs (Haug, 1996; Teichler, 1996, 2004), which have become a popular internationalization strategy (Knight, 2004).

People working in the HE sector as well as students who choose to study abroad often hold genuine beliefs and expectations about the anticipated academic and personal benefits of the sojourn experiences. However, it would be naïve to maintain that the increase in student mobility results primarily from this idealism. Unfortunately, the potential "business" of education has also spread in different ways, and in some cases international students are welcome mainly because they have become a prominent economic resource to finance their local university peers. Interesting debates have appeared around this issue. For instance, two articles in *The Economist*, published on September 18, 2004 and January 13, 2004 respectively, center their argument on the profitability of international students; these constitute just a few examples of the current debates on the topic found sometimes even on the front page of newspapers and

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[1] It is important to note that HE experienced the greatest growth in overseas student numbers, doubling between 1994 and 2000, while the number of students in the school sector remained almost the same. (Source: Year Book Australia 2003, a publication by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.)

magazines. And in a rather recent speech on globalization in higher education addressed to the Centre for Reform in the UK, Ivor Crewe--president of Universities UK and Vice Chancellor of the University of Essex--asserted that "the presence of students and faculty from overseas is no longer an optional mildly exotic ingredient in campus life. It is what makes it possible for the academic enterprise to continue" (Crewe, 2004, p. 2). Crewe emphatically claims that UK universities need to adapt to an internationally competitive market. In the foreseeable future, besides the US, the UK will have to compete with Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Africa in order to attract overseas students. The case of universities in other countries, including Canada, is no different.

    With so much student mobility, there are current efforts at bringing together general information of different types (e.g., study abroad research results, study abroad programs offered) that relates to this phenomenon worldwide. For instance, the US Institute of International Education (IIE) published in 2003 a groundbreaking new *Atlas of Student Mobility* that displays and analyzes information such as the most popular places of origin and destinations of these students seeking education outside of their home countries, providing a current view of international education students' trends and patterns worldwide. An important mandate of the IIE is to work together with the British Council and IDP Education Australia and others to create a global focus on international student mobility. The possibilities for study abroad are thus expanding, and although only a very small percentage of students worldwide--around 2 million, what could be called "the privileged few"--currently have access to this type of experience, it seems that with the growth of study abroad programs offered by universities and colleges, and an increase in the sources of financial support for individual students as well as study abroad programs, the overseas experience will eventually become the norm in HE. The economic forces pushing for this move in HE are too strong to be ignored.

    Paralleling the spread of study abroad programs as a global phenomenon is the spread of English as an international language, with its consequent implications for the media, the workplace and education (Duff, 2005). English tends to be a very popular language of instruction, not only in inner circle countries (Kachru, 1985), where it enjoys the status of a national or official language, but also in countries of the outer and expanding circles, where it has the status of lingua-franca. This means that a large

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proportion of the study abroad population is likely to experience at least part of their sojourn (such as the academic aspect of it) in English. This fact can be quite challenging for non-native English speaking international students, particularly as they are normally expected to perform according to the standards of the host institutions to which they are newcomers, but with the additional disadvantage of doing it in a foreign/additional language.

Given that literacy practices permeate academic activities across disciplinary fields, participation in academic literacy activities constitutes a crucial aspect of HE students' lives. Thus, it is essential for university students to possess effective academic literacy practices in order to succeed. However, as is acknowledged by second language academic writing researchers, becoming literate in different discourse traditions is a challenging, complex, and lengthy process (e.g., Belcher & Braine, 1995; Casanave, 2002; Leki, 2003a, Shi & Beckett, 2002; Prior, 1995; Spack, 1997a, 2004; Zamel & Spack, 2004; Zhu, 2001). Thus, non-native English speakers (NNESs) expected to understand and produce academic texts in English may be profoundly affected by the pressure to perform effectively in an L2 for a number of interrelated reasons. In addition to linguistic limitations, even in the case of NNESs with high language proficiency levels, novice L2 academic writers also face the difficult process of becoming acquainted with new disciplinary and institutional contexts and their associated sociocultural/academic practices. And as noted in Zamel & Spack (2004),

> Even learners who have successfully completed courses in their first language may find the transition to doing this work in English disorienting. Students whose values and expectations are in conflict with those of the U.S. [or Canada] college classrooms will struggle, and may even resist, as they attempt to make sense of unfamiliar approaches to academic study. (p. x)

This process can be very unsettling and fraught with struggle, particularly for NNESs in a new country, who may try to reconcile contradictory desires to adjust to and resist new ways of practicing academic literacy, thus making the whole academic experience all the more cumbersome. A third compounding factor relates to the fact that academic literacy activities usually take place in situations where the stakes are high (e.g., course assignments and exams). Leki (2003a) notes in relation to NNES post-secondary students in English-medium contexts that "[h]ow these writers develop L2

literacy is important because of the high stakes involved in them. It is through literacy experiences that much college learning takes place (...) and is displayed" (p. 81). Therefore, anxiety and other affective performance-related factors may interfere with optimal performance.

Furthermore, in the case of short term study abroad exchanges, the significant and rapid adjustment L2 speaking students may be expected to make in order to conform to the academic literacy norms and values of the host university may not be realistic (Casanave, 2004). While the findings in the literature usually point to the many benefits associated with the L2 academic socialization of these students while abroad, this study attempts to show a more balanced picture by drawing attention not only to the positive impact of the exchange, but also by focusing on some aspects (e.g., the emotional impact of feedback students receive) that seem to be overlooked in many study abroad investigations and which need to be considered in order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the experience.

1.1 Study purpose and research questions

In light of the rapidly increasing number of HE study abroad programs, there is a need for research that explores issues related to these educational experiences. The main purpose of this investigation is to better understand how a group of exchange students were socialized into the academic literacy practices of their new academic context abroad in Canada, as well as the impact of this socialization on the students during and after the exchange. By means of in-depth explorations of the experiences of this study's participants, the purpose is to produce and analyze thick descriptions of their academic literacy practices in an L2 context. So far, study abroad research along these lines has been very limited (see Chapter 2 for a review). In addition, this study aims to provide concrete evidence of the impact that an academic exchange has on the students' academic literacy practices once they return to complete their degrees in their home university. To date, most study abroad investigations have focused either on students' experiences while abroad, or else--though to a smaller degree--upon their return to their home country. This study therefore addresses another gap in the literature by exploring the participants' experiences during and after the exchange.

The following questions guided the study:

Q1: What are the academic literacy practices valued and required in Canadian undergraduate content courses as perceived by the participating Mexican students?

Q2: How do the participants negotiate the process of their L2 socialization into the academic literacy practices and expectations of the host university?

Q3: Once the students return to their home university, what do they perceive to be the biggest impact of their academic sojourn? In particular, what is the significance ascribed to their L2 academic socialization through literacy practices in Canada upon their return home?

1.2   Defining academic literacy

In a recent state-of-the-art article, Paltridge (2004) notes that

> There are those who view academic literacy as a singular phenomenon, comprising a set of skills to be acquired and problems to be fixed. A different view would see the development of academic literacy as a socialization process through which we explain "university culture" to our students so they can learn the requirements through a kind of apprenticeship. (p. 90)

My dissertation work is closely aligned with the second view identified by Paltridge, whereby academic literacy is conceptualized as a form of social practice (Halliday, 1985). This more recent perspective on academic literacy reflects the "New Literacy Studies" orientation (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1986, 1996; Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 1984), which goes beyond the cognitive aspects associated with this concept (i.e., reading and writing as skills that can be developed independently from the context in which they take place) by showing that a more accurate understanding of literacy takes account of the social contexts and the ideological orientations in which the acts of literacy are fostered and enacted (Wiley, 2005, citing Gee, 2001). Inspired by the work of these scholars, L2 researchers like Hawkins (2005) elaborate on the notion of literacy by highlighting that

> a focus on language and literacy development as situated social processes (...) involves understanding the acquisition of languages and literacies as always occurring in and through interactions with others in specific (social) contexts. (p. 60)

This definition of literacy foregrounds the situated nature of literacy development (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000), and attempts to shed light on how literacy is developed by linking the reading and writing activities to the social contexts in which these are defined and practiced, and by referring to these as "literacy practices." This broader notion of literacy helps us to explain why, in spite of their advanced L1 and L2 academic literacy proficiency, the participants in this study found certain aspects of their host university academic literacy practices challenging.

There is also another development that has taken place in the L1 and L2 literacy literature: a shift from talking about "literacy" to referring to "literacies" (or biliteracy, multilingual literacies, and multiliteracies).[2] This change foregrounds the "multiple approaches to knowledge" (Zamel & Spack, 1998, p. ix) implicit in the revised notion. As noted by these authors,

> Collectively, classroom experiences across the curriculum require that students become fluent in multiple ways of reading and writing. In other words, students are expected to be conversant in a variety of academic literacies. (pp. ix-x)

I also find value in highlighting this multimodal aspect of literacy, and therefore embrace the revised terminology by combining my use of "academic literacy practices" and "academic literacies" throughout my dissertation.

1.3 Dissertation organization

Seven chapters follow this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical approaches that guided this investigation and includes a review of relevant literature. Studies that have employed the perspectives of second language socialization and communities of practice (sometimes together) are reviewed and analyzed in light of how they relate to the current investigation, and the notion of "individual networks of practice," coined for this study, is introduced. An overview is also included of previous work on study abroad programs and populations, with special emphasis on research

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[2] The concept of multiliteracies is also employed in monolingual contexts, and some of the current research in this vein also embraces the notion of multimodality (Kress, 2000) in conjunction with multiliteracies, thus taking account of the increasing significance of cultural and linguistic diversity while simultaneously integrating different semiotic systems (e.g., visual, audio, and special patterns of meaning) into the original notion of literacy.

focusing on second language acquisition and, within this body of research, on advanced academic literacy development.

The qualitative case study methodology selected for the design of this research project is explained in Chapter 3, which also includes descriptions of the Multi Campus Mexican University (MCMU) – Western Canadian University (WCU) exchange program in which the students participated, my focal and secondary participants, the courses they took, as well the procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 features the six focal participants of this study, providing readers with information about the students' personal and academic backgrounds, their reasons for taking part in an exchange, their expectations of their study abroad experience in Canada, and their plans for the future. Such detailed information is crucial in order to obtain a better understanding of the aspects that influenced the students' academic literacy socialization in WCU and their continuing socialization and re-entry back in their home campuses.

Chapters 5 through 7 report on the data analysis. Chapter 5 serves as a backdrop to the next chapters, and it addresses mainly the first research question, which aims to reveal the kinds of literacy practices of the different courses the participants took at WCU. In Chapter 6 I address the second research question, and thus I focus on the tensions between adjusting to and resisting their academic literacy socialization into the norms and practices of WCU in Canada. I present my interpretations of the focal participants' investments in seeking language socialization opportunities during their academic exchange in Canada. I examine how their actions and their access to key resources and people affected their English academic literacy practices within the WCU context. I do this by focusing on the focal participants' academic literacy trajectories vis-à-vis five parameters that I propose as a useful model to investigate students' L2 academic literacy socialization. These parameters include: the participants' individual networks of practice, their team work experiences, their access to and use of course resources, the feedback and grading practices they obtained, and their access to and use of institutional support. Special emphasis is placed on how the participants exercised their agency in determining when to comply with the host university academic literacy rules, thus portraying their academic literacy socialization as a highly contested, negotiated process. In Chapter 7 I focus on three interrelated themes (i.e., positionings, negotiations and investments) that

emerged from my interpretations of the participants' experiences vis-à-vis the parameters discussed in the current and also the previous chapters, and which add another layer to the interpretations of the characteristics and repercussions of their academic literacy socialization. I then address the third research question and examine these themes in connection with participants' perspectives about the significance of their exchange in Canada a few months after their return to Mexico.

Chapter 8 concludes this dissertation with the theoretical contributions of this work, its limitations, and also includes implications for pedagogy and future directions for research in the areas of academic literacy, study abroad, and L2 socialization.

1.4   Significance of the study

This qualitative multiple-case study yields insights that will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors and processes involved in the L2 academic literacy socialization of NNES exchange students in an English-medium post-secondary context. In bringing together the views of the students, some of their instructors, and the researcher, this dissertation aims to present a multi-layered picture of the students' academic literacy socialization. By addressing a gap in the study abroad literature as well as in the literature on advanced second language advanced academic literacy, this thesis brings together these two areas of research in a novel way.

The study aims to make important pedagogical contributions. It is hoped that the findings will benefit future participants of the MCMU-WCU exchange program, as the academic experiences of the MCMU-WCU study participants that are included in this dissertation will reveal key information that will most likely influence their sojourn expectations and choices. Furthermore, the findings should be of interest to the larger field of L2 education in light of the pedagogical suggestions for instructors and universities receiving foreign exchange students. Instructors across disciplinary areas (in particular those of Commerce, Political Sciences and Latin American Studies) are likely to benefit from my analysis of issues related to feedback and grading practices, instructions and assignment types, team work, and students' L1 academic literacy practices that they may currently be unaware of; knowledge of these issues might serve as

a catalyst for transforming some of their instructional and feedback practices in order to better address the needs of an increasingly multicultural/multilingual student population.

Finally, this dissertation also aims to make some important contributions in relation to theory-building about how to examine and theorize L2 academic literacy socialization in a study abroad context, as well as after the students return to continue their home university contexts. Inspired by theories of second language socialization (Duff, 1995, 2003; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, b; Ochs, 1988; Zuengler & Cole, 2005), communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), and the notion of individual networks of practice (which draws on social network theory, e.g., Milroy, 1980, 1987), I propose a comprehensive model to investigate L2 academic literacy socialization which integrates factors so far not usually brought together analytically, and suggest that this model could be employed in future investigations in a similar manner.

Chapter 2

SECOND LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION, ACADEMIC LITERACY, AND STUDY ABROAD RESEARCH

2.0 Introduction

As the number of "nontraditional" (i.e., international, multilingual NNES) students in higher education has continued to increase over the past decades, so too has the interest in research on students' experiences in foreign contexts. In particular, given the rapid proliferation of study abroad programs, there have been calls for studies focusing on the second/foreign language learning experiences of sojourners (DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Freed, 1995a). Following trends in second language acquisition, applied linguists' and L2 researchers' agendas have broadened in scope from focusing exclusively on the linguistic and cognitive processes and resulting gains of residing in the target language culture, to considering social processes and other contextual factors involved in a learner's study abroad experience. The sociocultural dimension of L2 language learning has thus been foregrounded, as demonstrated in recent studies that explore L2 learning from a more holistic and situated perspective (e.g., Bayley & Schecter, 2003; Belcher & Braine, 1995; Duff, 1995, 1996, 2002; Duff, Wong & Early, 2000; Kobayashi, 2003; Lantolf, 2000; Morita, 2000, 2004; Norton, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Poole, 1992; Prior, 1995, 1998; Schecter & Bayley, 2002; Spack, 1997a, 2004; Willett, 1995).

Qualitative research methodologies employing ethnographic techniques and drawing from multiple sources of data (e.g., in-depth interviews, student and researcher diaries, in situ observations, student-produced documents) have contributed to furthering our understanding and broadening our perspectives of learners' experiences within their contexts of immersion. The insights yielded by investigations of such a detailed interpretive nature have therefore played an important role in complementing the findings produced by quantitative studies (Duff, 2002; in press a). (See more on this in Chapter 3.) The shift from quantitative to more qualitative inquiry, or a blend of these two complementary, rather than competing paradigms, is paralleled by the emergence of sociocultural and poststructuralist theoretical approaches. One such theoretical lens is called "language socialization" (LS), a framework originally developed in the early 1980s

by linguistic anthropologists Bambi Schieffelin and Elinor Ochs and their colleagues. Although LS was developed with first language (L1) learners in mind, it is currently considered among the most promising theories to explore L2 learning from a sociocultural/sociolinguistic perspective, with numerous studies having already been produced by two generations of L2 Socialization (L2S) researchers. (Refer to Duff & Hornberger, in press, for the most current review and examples of research conducted in LS.) Accordingly, the qualitative investigation reported on in this dissertation, which focuses on a group of NNES (Mexican) exchange students in a Canadian university, employs the L2S perspective to explore the learners' L2 academic literacy practices in a new academic environment, aiming to illuminate sociocultural dimensions of the learners' experiences.

In this chapter I provide an overview of L2S theory and its relevance to this investigation. I also introduce the notions of "Community of Practice" (CoP) and "Individual Network of Practice" (INoP), which I drew on to analyze some aspects of the participants' academic literacy socialization. Next, I review key traits and findings of previous L2 academic literacy studies and identify the main themes of published study abroad investigations that have informed this project. In each section I identify gaps in the literature, some of which I aim to address in this study. Thus, the information in this chapter serves as backdrop for the interpretations of data found and reported in the remainder of this dissertation. Throughout the other chapters I make comparisons and either support or provide counter-arguments for the research synthesized here.

2.1 Second language socialization theory and research

The LS theoretical perspective briefly introduced in the first section of this chapter lends itself well to the exploration of linguistic and cultural processes and interrelationships in L2 learning (Duff, 1996, 2003; Duff & Hornberger, in press; Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, b; Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Watson-Gegeo & Nielsen, 2003; Zuengler & Cole, 2005). In language socialization theory, the locus of learning is the learner embedded in and interacting with his/her social context, and the aim is to understand "how persons become competent members of social groups and the role of language in the process" (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, p. 167).

Since its inception over twenty years ago, the LS paradigm has been refined and re-defined, and while the original work on first language socialization by Schieffelin and Ochs (1986a, b) continues to serve as the cornerstone of this theory, new developments have also been associated with it, especially by L2 researchers who have employed this perspective (e.g., Bayley & Schecter, 2003; Duff, 1996, 2003; Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002; Kobayashi, 2003; Morita, 2000, 2004; Watson-Gegeo, 1992, among many others). Language socialization refers to:

> the lifelong process by means of which individuals--typically novices--are inducted into specific domains of knowledge, beliefs, affect, roles, identities, and social representations, which they access and construct through language practices and social interaction. (Duff, 1995, p. 508, citing Ochs, 1991; Poole, 1992; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, 1986b)

This process begins from the moment individuals come into contact with other people. While much of the earlier LS research focused on socialization into and through language in childhood, LS is a lifelong process, as Duff's definition above indicates. Thus, Ochs and Schieffelin (in press) also note that

> language socialization transpires whenever there is asymmetry in knowledge and power and characterizes our human interactions throughout adulthood as we become socialized into novel activities, identities, and objects relevant to work, family, recreation, civic, religious, and other environments in increasingly globalized communities. (n/p)

Kulick and Schieffelin (2004) remind us that "the language socialization paradigm addresses the lack of culture in language acquisition studies" (p. 350), and that LS research aims to explore how different subjectivities, stances, and positionings are negotiated and achieved through the use of language itself. Indeed, the concept of agency is key in trying to understand how individuals negotiate new practices, identities, and patterns of participation in their target communities. (I come back to the notion of positionings, agency, and identity in Chapter 7.)

New trends in L2S theory challenge certain assumptions previously maintained by LS research; for instance, that the stability of the target language norms should be taken for granted. Rather, newcomers should be seen as being immersed in fluid, hybrid, dynamic, multilingual and multicultural social contexts, which in some cases can be

perceived as unwelcoming and indeed may be hostile in some cases (Norton, 2000). Duff (2003) notes in this regard that:

> Language socialization is a process marked by peaks and valleys, progression and regression, times of learning and forgetting, of belonging and not belonging, of speaking and being silent, and all the tensions, confusion, and points in between. (p. 333)

As a result, accommodation cannot be taken for granted, and in fact partial accommodation or even resistance might characterize newcomers who refuse to adjust to their new contexts, or who feel rejected by them (see Duff, 2003; Morita & Kobayashi, in press). In this sense, the bi-directionality and the contingent nature of L2S must be taken into account. Furthermore, the early anthropological research and theory featuring people's affiliation to a single community (i.e., the idea that people seek membership in one community at a time), while suitably representative of many "small-scale" societies, is inadequate in understanding contemporary contexts of migration and globalization. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to think of people's negotiation in terms of their synchronic participation in multiple communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) (and as I argue later, the composition of their individual networks of practice).

Language socialization theory also draws increasingly on perspectives on learning that emerged in the 1990s, particularly on the notion of CoPs (Bronson & Watson-Gegeo, in press). For Lave and Wenger (1991), learning is viewed as a situated activity, and the process through which learning takes place has been termed legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). LPP is a complex concept, associated with social structures involving power relations. Newcomers are seen as peripheral participants in their respective new communities who are moving from *partial* participation to *full* participation by means of the guidance provided by more experienced CoP members (referred to as "oldtimers"). However, traditional models of expert-novice relationships have been recently questioned, since the assumption that oldtimer individuals (who are by default assumed to be the experts, when they actually may not be) are always willing and able to share their expertise with novice newcomers is faulty (e.g., Duff, in press b; Leki, 2001; Morita, 2004).

A final defining characteristic of L2S research relates to its qualitative, longitudinal nature. Ethnographies of communication, ethnographic case studies, or case studies employing ethnographic techniques, this investigation being an example of the latter, have been identified as the hallmark of L2S research methodology. Bronson and Watson-Gegeo (in press) note in this regard that LS has increasingly become an umbrella term under which studies that do not strictly adhere to the defining characteristics of the theory have been placed. Bronson and Watson Gegeo propose a taxonomy of LS studies that includes three categories: in the first category are studies that focus on LS as a topic (e.g., Bayley & Schecter, 2003), yet without really employing the research methods advocated by LS theory or the theory itself. In the second category are studies that employ LS as an explicit theoretical framework or approach. Research of this kind draws on the ontology and epistemology of LS theory, but fails to follow a longitudinal design. In the third category are LS studies that follow a longitudinal, ethnographic design and draw on linguistic anthropology, and consider both macro-and micro-dimensions of the contexts under investigation. The third type of studies also usually perform discourse analysis of oral interactional data. The present study draws on features of both the second and third categories outlined above. The focus is placed on the role played by academic literacy practices in socializing students into their new academic contexts and also on students' acquisition of these new literacies and language skills.

The LS approach has been employed by a number of researchers interested in the academic discourse socialization of L2 learners (e.g., Bronson, 2005; Duff, 1995, 1996, 2002, 2006a; Harklau, 2003; Kobayashi, 2003; Morita, 2002, 2004; Poole, 1992; Zappa-Hollman, 2007). This new and very fruitful line of research has demonstrated the effectiveness of the approach in examinations of the role of oral interactions, negotiations, and scaffolding in socializing learners to target spoken discourses. Duff (1995), for instance, focused on how students in dual-language (DL) Hungarian-English high school programs in Hungary enacted the "felelés" (a traditional form of recitation used as an institutional assessment tool), which at the time of the study was being replaced by other types of oral interaction and assessment, particularly by teachers in the English-medium classrooms. Among other findings, her study demonstrated the usefulness of the LS theory in revealing the macro and micro-political contexts of

instruction that shaped the original "felelés" and in turn led to its reform. Her study also shows that LS is indeed a contested process, which was illustrated in that case by means of the resistance and negotiations of the recitation practice between students and their more traditional Hungarian DL teachers.

Morita (2004) illustrated how six Japanese women in a Canadian university negotiated their participation/non-participation in graduate courses where students were expected to interact spontaneously in different types of conversations (e.g., large class discussions, small group discussions, presentations, etc.). Morita was able to unpack the different meanings of Japanese students' "silences" by drawing on both LS and CoP perspectives, and revealed that despite their seemingly passive actions the students were indeed exercising their agency to negotiate their participation and language learning in classroom contexts.

Several L2S studies share a common focus on oral academic presentations (OAPs) in Canadian university classrooms. Kobayashi (2003) looked at presentations from "behind the scenes," that is, he investigated how out-of-class experiences impacted in-class performance. His detailed examination of the discourse and content negotiations of a group of Japanese undergraduate learners demonstrates the role of peer collaboration and scaffolding in language learning both inside and outside classroom contexts. And Morita's (2000) work studied how TESL graduate students were socialized into OAPs by observing and performing this activity. Her LS-informed analysis yielded a detailed description of the identifying features of OAPs, the expected ways of presenting, and students' apprenticeship into this academic discourse tradition. Similarly, Zappa-Hollman's (2007) investigation examined how students across disciplinary fields (e.g., History, Anthropology, Biochemestry) were socialized into OAPs, revealing among other things, how the participants negotiated the challenges (linguistic, sociocultural and psychological) that they faced when preparing for and delivering an OAP. The study also illustrated how attempts made by more expert native English speaker (NES) classmates to scaffold novice NNES students were not always effective.

Duff's (2006a) work examined the academic socialization of Korean undergraduate exchange students into the different discourses and practices of courses across disciplinary areas at a Canadian university. Her study reveals that although native

speaking models are considered to be an important source of socialization, for a variety of personal and contextual reasons many Korean students failed to connect with Anglophone speakers. As a result, much of their socialization came through practicing English and exchanging information about the target academic culture with students from Korean and other national (Asian) backgrounds who were more accessible to them.

The studies reviewed so far have focused on socialization into *oral* academic discourse practices. In contrast, socialization into *written* discourse practices has so far been explored less. Bronson's (2005) recent investigation illustrates a very successful attempt at extending the use of L2S theory for the analysis of the academic literacy trajectories of four international graduate students negotiating texts and feedback in a US university context. Through an analysis of the "critical incidents"[3] that illuminated the students' socialization, the resources they tapped into in order to gather knowledge of the target literacy conventions, and the challenges the students experienced as part of their socialization into new academic literacy practices, Bronson's study corroborates the usefulness of L2S theory in producing a holistic account of the students' learning experiences. There are other studies on academic literacy/writing which do not explicitly follow an LS approach, yet which do share many characteristics of LS research in light of their ethnographic nature, their view of practices as pre-eminently social and situated, and their focus on the fluid, contested, negotiated nature of academic literacy practices (e.g., Casanave, 1995, 2002; Leki, 2003a; Spack, 1997a, 2004; Prior, 1995, 1998). I examine some of these studies in more detail in Section 2.3.

The present study is an attempt to further illustrate the usefulness of L2S theory in examining the contexts of literate discourse socialization. In addition to taking account of the participants' backgrounds and histories to make sense of their experiences, I propose and illustrate five parameters of analysis (students' individual networks of practice, team work, course resources, feedback and institutional sources of support) described in

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[3] Bronson (2005) draws on the "critical incident method" used as a research and teaching tool in various disciplinary fields and contexts. He defines this notion as "episodes when the participants learned something important about the academy, academic language, or themselves as language learners and, as a consequence, changed their self-image in a significant way and/or decided on a particular course of action" (pp. 55-56). Critical incidents are seen as catalyzers of metacognitive knowledge, and therefore as an important aspect of language socialization; they can range from single episodes (e.g., a single interaction) to a series of concatenated episodes. In this study, I employ the notion of critical incidents along the same lines as Bronson (2005).

Chapter 6 through which I attempt to derive a situated, holistic, comprehensive understanding of the internal and external factors that shaped the participants' academic literacy socialization. I also suggest that this model could potentially serve as point of reference for future L2S investigations in the same vein.

2.2 Individual networks of practice

Previous studies investigating HE student retention and adaptation have shown that the relationships students establish early on in their new academic contexts are of paramount importance for their motivation and performance (Beder, 1997; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). It has also been argued that the level of stress students experience in a new academic environment is exacerbated when students fail to benefit from adequate social support. Wan, Chapman & Biggs (1992) explain:

> Social support refers to the extent to which students have a network of friends in the host culture who offer them encouragement, support, and advice. Friends within the social support network operate both to help interpret the new culture to the international student and to reinforce the individual's self-confidence. (p. 609)

These views are also shared by research on the adjustment of international NNES students to Western English-medium HE settings both at the undergraduate (Myles & Cheng, 2003) and graduate levels (e.g., Braine, 2002; Ferenz, 2005). The common underlying principle appears to be that students' social relationships affect their socialization into the target academic culture.

In my search for an adequate notion that would allow me to illustrate the complex networks of relationships that mediated the different practices of my participants, I was surprised by the great diversity of frameworks and terminology used to account for these relationships. Among the most popularly chosen notions are "support network," "social network," "social/academic relationships" and "communities of practice." While there is partial overlap among these concepts, some of which have been theorized more than others, each of them seems to highlight a particular aspect which might be ignored by one or more of the others (see discussion below), resulting in an incomplete picture. In light of this, drawing upon the interconnected theoretical approaches of "social network" and "communities of practice," I developed the notion "individual network of practice" (INoP), which I believe more adequately addresses my research goals. In what follows, I

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first provide an overview of the relevant aspects of each theoretical approach which informed my theorization of the INoP notion. This is followed by an application of this concept as one of the parameters I considered for the analysis of the participants' L2 academic literacy socialization at WCU.

The introduction of "social network" as an analytic construct is attributed to Barnes (1954), whose work later served as basis for anthropologists Mitchell (1969) and Boissevain (1974). It is identified as a useful concept to bypass Marx's more abstract notion of "social class," which seems more useful at the macro level but which is hard to specify and identify at the micro level, especially since individuals are not often conscious of their social class. In contrast, people seem to be conscious of their social network affiliations, whose overt characteristics make them also observable to an outsider (Feagin, 1982). Social network analysis is now an established paradigm popular among sociolinguists who have adopted it to study the influence of social networking on the linguistic practices of speech communities (e.g., Lippi-Green, 1989; Milroy, 1980, 1987; Santa Ana & Parodi, 1998). Despite its limited use in the fields of applied linguistics and L2 research, a recent study by Ferenz (2005) has demonstrated its applicability to examine advanced L2 academic literacy in an EFL context (Ferenz, 2005).

According to social network theory, an individual's social network can be defined as a map including all the informal social relationships in which the person is embedded. The units that make up a social network are identified as "nodes" which are "tied" (i.e., related) along a continuum of strength and/or proximity, and these relationships are usually displayed graphically, with the nodes represented by points and the ties by lines radiating from the different nodes to the "core" (i.e., the center of the network to which all ties are connected). Social networks can be studied at various levels of complexity, identifying its different "network zones" (e.g., first order, second order, etc.) as well as their "structure" and "content." The people who are directly tied to the core are said to belong to the "first order" network zone. As Milroy (1987) explains, "each of these people may be in contact with others whom ego [the core] does not know, but who could come into contact with via his first order zone. Although a third, fourth and nth order zone could be distinguished, the first and second order zones appear, in practice, to be the most important" (Milroy, 1987, pp. 46-47). The structure of a network is identified by

means of its density, which is measured by calculating the number of people linked to the core who are also connected among each other. The content characteristics of a network are specified by analyzing the nature of its links, which can be "uniplex" (i.e., a node which is connected to the core in a single capacity) or "multiplex" (i.e., a node which is connected to the core in more than one capacity). A network's density and content can be calculated using two simple formulas (see Milroy, pp. 50-51).[4]

Among other uses, social network analysis is concerned with understanding the complex structure of relationships and identifying the roles of individuals within the networks in order to explain phenomena (e.g., social behavior, in the case of anthropologists; speech variation, in the case of sociolinguists). Social network, as a concept, also resonates with social practice theories by postulating that knowledge (i.e., meaning-making) and learning are the result of negotiations among members of a given network rather than being primarily determined by the cognitive and psychological characteristics of individuals. The concept has also been useful in assessing the "social capital" (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) of individuals, equating the relationships people establish to investments: "individuals engage in interactions and networking in order to produce profits" (Lin, 1999, p. 31). These profits, commonly referred to as "returns," can be of two main types: instrumental (e.g., wealth, power, reputation) and emotional/expressive, thus contributing to the physical and psychological health of individuals (Boissevain, 1987; Lin, 1999), both kinds of profits eventually contributing to the individual's cultural capital. In L2 research, a social theory-informed notion of investment was proposed by Norton (1997, 2000), Norton Peirce (1995), who views L2 learning as an investment individuals make with an expected return of symbolic and materials resources.

The CoP framework introduced earlier in this chapter also views learning as the result of a social process (i.e., situated learning). Whereas the concept of "network" denotes social relationships among interconnected individuals (regardless of whether their ties are weak/distant or strong/close), the concept of "community" implies a

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[4] While I will draw on these notions to inform my analysis, I will not include these calculations since the quantitative results do not seem to address the kinds of questions my work aims to answer.

stronger kind of relationship, usually over a substantial period of time.[5] A second distinction is that while CoP members are related through mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and shared practice (Wenger, 1998), members of a social network are not necessarily related through these three constitutive elements of CoPs; instead, their connection is role-based (see Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). Hence, while CoP research builds on the notions of apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990) and legitimate peripheral participation to account for the process of becoming a CoP member (i.e., novice learners are guided by more expert members to acquire the target practices and eventually be granted full membership), social network research differs in how it examines the processes of participation, membership and learning.

The issues of power and identity construction are implicated in both approaches (as well as in LS theory). According to the CoP framework, an individual's personal identities and social identities are viewed as being defined in relation to their membership status; i.e., whether they are marginal, peripheral or legitimate members of their respective communities of practice. In turn, differential power relationships are implicated in the membership granting process. Similarly, social networks are believed to have a direct impact on people's identity construction (Hogg & Terry, 2000), and power and identity emerge when the hierarchical nature of the network ties is considered.

For the purposes of my dissertation, although both notions (CoPs and INoPs) are appealing, if employed independently neither of them appears to fully capture the complex social landscape of my participants. For instance, on the one hand, I find the CoP notion useful for examining the participant's team work experiences and relationships. On the other hand, the notion is not very helpful for accounting for my participants' social involvement in non-CoP-based relationships to which the defining characteristics of CoPs (e.g., mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared practice) may only partially apply. In such cases, the notion of social networks seems to be a better match.

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[5] The lifecycle of CoPs is currently under scrutiny, as Lave and Wenger's framework does not elaborate on this, therefore leaving open the question of how long CoPs last or even whether there is a minimum amount of time before CoP identification can take place. For an interesting debate on this and other aspects of the CoP framework refer to articles by Davies (2005), Eckert & Wenger (2005), Gee (2005) and Meyerhoff (2005), all published in issue 9 (4) of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*. The CoP framework as a research tool for L2 studies has also been recently examined by Haneda (2006) and Barton and Tusting (2005).

Based on similar observations, Brown and Duguid (2001) combined the social network framework with the notion of communities of practice and coined the concept of "networks of practice," also known as NoPs. According to the proponents of this concept, "[p]ractice creates the common substrate [between both frameworks]. With the term *network*, we also want to suggest that relations among network members are significantly looser than those within a community of practice" (p. 205, italics in original). To a certain extent, the NoP concept appears useful for examining my participants' social interactional landscape since the absence of the word "community" makes the notion more inclusive of relationships that are less tight (in terms of proximity, strength, as well as permanence). However, NoPs has been developed to study extremely large groups of interconnected people (e.g., all workers in a large factory); groups, which despite sharing many CoP-like attributes, would not be considered a community as such because not all its members would be likely to ever meet, for instance. Brown and Duguid (2001) identify disciplinary NoPs, for example, as cutting "across heterogeneous organizations, including, for example, universities, think tanks, or research labs." (p. 206) In this sense, NoPs becomes a useful notion to study what could be identified as "loose macro-CoPs."

In search of a concept more attuned to the examination of an individual's personal relationships, I draw on the notions of social networks and communities of practice (in conjunction with its modified version of networks of practice) to propose the concept of "individual network of practice" (INoP). INoP denotes all the social ties of any given individual, whether weak/distant or strong/close, relevant to the phenomenon under study (in this case, their L2 academic literacy socialization). A person's investment in their own INoP is also associated with expected returns of two main kinds: affective support and academic support. However, not all nodes necessarily contribute to both types of return, nor do they do so at equivalent levels, or homogeneously over time. My dissertation is mainly concerned with analyzing how students' L2 academic literacy socialization benefited as a result of their INoP interactions.

The different INoP constitutive elements are represented as ties (i.e., the connections), nodes (i.e., the individuals with whom a person connects) and clusters (i.e., these are labels or identity markers grouping nodes of the same kind), all of these visually displayed in connection with the core (i.e., the individual's whose INoP is represented).

Typically, an INoP will include a variety of clusters (presumably, the larger the social exposure of the individual, the larger the number of clusters and nodes in their INoP) with ties along the strength/proximity continuum. Nodes (which can be uniplex or multiplex, as explained before) are tied to the core through one or more clusters.

In sum, in this dissertation I draw on the CoP and INoP notions and show their usefulness in examining academic literacy from an LS perspective.

2.3   Second language academic literacy studies

Several researchers in immigrant-receiving English dominant societies have explored NNESs' literacy practices beyond the context of the ESL/EAP classroom by focusing on the experiences of international and/or immigrant undergraduate and graduate students in different disciplinary areas across the curriculum (e.g., Adamson, 1993; Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999; Belcher, 1994, 1995; Belcher & Braine, 1995; Braine, 1995; Broson, 2005; Casanave, 1995, 2002; Connor & Kramer, 1995; Connor & Mayberry, 1995; Currie, 1993, 1998; Ferenz, 2005; Fu, 1995; Harklau, 1994; Ivanič, 1998; Leki, 1995,1999, 2003a; Leki & Carson, 1993, 1997; Prior, 1991, 1995, 1998; Riazi, 1997; Shi & Beckett, 2002; Spack, 1997a, 2004; Sternglass, 1997; Zamel, 1993, 1995; Zamel & Spack, 1998; Zhu, 2001).[6] The findings of these studies have raised our awareness of the kinds of needs, strengths, and weaknesses students bring with them to their new contexts, and have yielded quite sophisticated (albeit still incomplete) understandings of the kinds of expectations involved in interpreting and producing academic texts in a second language.

Taken as a whole, an overarching finding of these investigations reveals the contextually-grounded nature of academic literacy: we now view it as involving more than possession of the skills to read and write; it involves being able to read and write in particular ways that address the expectations of those who will be the co-constructors and simultaneously audience and assessors of the discourses produced. Spack's (1997a, 2004)

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[6] Readers should note that most of the studies cited here are identified as "second language writing" research. Indeed, not all of these studies even employ the notion of literacy, and of those which do, not all conceptualize this notion in the ways that more current literacy theorists do. Despite this, all these investigations are considered as part of a bigger enterprise, and they have contributed to our understanding of different aspects of literacy.

longitudinal study of a Japanese college student's academic literacy development over a three-year period exemplifies this point and suggests that an individual needs to be familiar with the linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural knowledge of the contexts in which the literacy events are embedded in order to succeed. (Refer to Kucer, 2005, and Prior, 1998, for a similar view.) Yet, as Spack indicates, much of this institutionally-contextualized knowledge seems to remain hidden to newcomers, who depend on their ability to unpack the tacit norms and expectations of their host academic communities. Along the same lines, Cananave (2002) notes that in order to achieve competency in academic literacy, students need to learn to play the textual, social, and political literacy "games" of academia. Furthermore, "learning to write [and I would add, read] in academic settings is about change in ways of thinking, using language, and envisioning the self" (p. 36).

To recapitulate, these studies point out some key issues and aspects that future academic literacy research should consider. Namely, that we need to keep in mind a broader notion of literacy and integrate all its multiple dimensions when exploring learners' experiences; that academic literacy research should concern itself with the contextual (institutional and political) forces that underlie literacy practices; and acknowledge that through literacy events individuals co-construct their multiple identities.

With respect to this last point, issues of identity and subjective positioning have recently been explored by several L2 writing researchers (e.g. Cadman, 1997; Canagarajah, 2002, 2003; Casanave, 1995, 2002; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Hyland, 2002; Ivanič , 1998; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Kubota, 2003; Shen, 1988; Starfield, 2002; and Thesen, 1997). These studies represent complementary perspectives on identity research that highlight the bi-directional impact of academic literacy and identity construction. For instance, Starfield's (2002) study of the identity negotiations of two novice writers (a Black NNES student and a White NES student) as they composed an essay for a first-year Sociology course in an English-medium South African university, shows that there are sociohistorically shaped unequal power relationships that impact the way people negotiate their identities. Based on Clark and Ivanič's (1997) and Ivanič's (1998) analysis of writer identity, Starfield (2002) argues that student success is

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dependant on the kinds of identities they construct, and that developing an authoritative self seems to be the key to success. In order to negotiate an authoritative discoursal self in their texts, students draw, among other things, on their own "textual" capital,[7] a notion that refers to the discourses students bring with them and that constitute their autobiographical self. Consequently, those who lack the kinds of valued textual capital have a very hard time trying to negotiate an authoritative voice in their academic writing.

Canagarajah (2002, 2003) also states that there is an interplay between different dimensions of our self which has considerable implications for writing. His work on multilingual writers' identities draws on the notion of "voice," which he defines as "a manifestation of one's agency in discourse through the means of language" (Canagarajah, 2003, p. 267). He sees this rhetorically constructed voice as negotiated in relation to three dimensions: historically defined identities (such as race, ethnicity, and nationality), institutional roles (like teacher, student, researcher), and ideological subjectivity, which he explains as our positioning according to discourses such as "authoritative native-speaker/blundering non-native speaker" (p. 267). Taken together, these dimensions represent the values of the dominant ideologies in the society. While Starfield's (2002) research highlights the impossibilities of developing a successful identity through writing when the autobiographical self (i.e., the textual capital) people bring with them contradicts ideologies and beliefs valued in the dominant society, Canagarajah (2002, 2003) offers a more flexible perspective, whereby any novice writer has the potential to adopt discoursal strategies that will allow them to develop a textual critical voice (i.e., the kind of voice valued in Western academia). Hirvela and Belcher (2001) also approached identity through the concept of voice. For these authors, identity and self-representation are "voicist" terms that form part of what they call the "architecture of voice" (p. 91). Voice is defined as a "metaphor [that] has to do with feeling-hearing-sensing a person behind written words, even if that person is just a persona created for a particular text or a certain reading" (Bowden, 1999, as cited in Hirvela & Belcher, 2001, p. 85). In this way, voice is mostly seen as a textual manifestation of people's identity (or, in Ivanič's terms, the self-as-author).

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[7] Starfield's notion of "textual" capital draws on Bourdieu's (1990) theory of social capital. Textual capital exemplifies a kind of "symbolic" capital, as notion proposed in Norton Peirce (1995).

Researchers interested in the area of feedback have also examined identity issues in connection with the kinds of responses L2 learners receive from experienced writers (typically, from instructors and tutors) (e.g., Carless, 2006; Higgins, 2000; Higgins, Skelton, & Hartley, 2002; Ivanič, Clark & Rimmershaw, 2000). Because written comments and grades may be the only kind of feedback students receive on their work in courses across the curriculum (as opposed to ESL/EAP/ESP classroom contexts where other types and sources of feedback may be offered), they are bound to have a strong emotional impact on students. Issues of power differentials between feedback givers and receivers have been identified, and these, together with examinations of the characteristics of the feedback offered to students have led to the conclusion that feedback positions students in various ways. In turn, these positionings may either facilitate or hinder learners' possibilities to improve their work. In sum, as Paltridge (2004) notes, "students are positioned by the person who has set the assessment task and who has control over them in terms of what they might say and how they will value what they say" (p. 91, citing Ivanič & Simpson, 1992).

Researchers interested in other areas of L2 writing have examined the kinds of discourse features and writing tasks across different disciplinary fields (e.g., Braine, 1989, 1995; Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984; Casanave & Hubbard, 1992; Johns, 1997; Hale et al., 1996; Samraj, 2002, 2004). These studies show that whereas different "genre systems" (Swales, 1990) may be identified as characteristic of particular discourse communities, some labels (e.g., research paper) may not necessarily mean the same thing in all contexts (Samraj, 2004). In short, "there is no such a thing as the one-size-fits-all academic essay that can be written in all areas of study" (Paltridge, 2004, p. 90). The existence of less "traditional" and much less studied "genres" or types of written tasks which may pose greater difficulty to novice NNES students than composing a research paper or an essay has also recently been underscored. For instance, Leki's (2003a) investigation of Yang's (a Chinese nursing student in the US) experiences writing Nursing Care Plans (NCPs) shows that while her skill at writing traditional research papers was acceptable for most of her instructors, it was the NCPs that posed the biggest challenge for her, since in addition to requiring knowledge of specific technical terms and of ways to reduce written language expression effectively, they also demanded cultural

and sociolinguistic awareness of the kind that newly arrived non-native speakers unfamiliar with the sociocultural context would have to acquire. Among other things, by illustrating how Yang struggled to complete the NCPs, Leki's study reveals a disjunction between the types of writing preparation students receive in ESL courses (which usually focus on traditional composition practices, e.g., the five paragraph essay) and some of the kinds of writing tasks students are expected to complete in content courses across the curriculum. The study also shows that many of the writing tasks students are expected to complete in the course of their career training in school do not necessarily match the kinds of writing demands they are expected to fulfill once they are working (see also Parks, 2001; Parks & Maguire, 1999).

Also in relation to writing tasks, researchers have revealed that tasks are always subject to multiple interpretations. In exploring EAP needs analysis for academic writing tasks, Prior (1995) concluded that the task the professor assigned was not the same as the task the students understood (i.e., there were multiple task interpretations). His study also revealed that students drew on many sources other than the professor's instructions to complete the task: students made inferences based on their prior school experience, the models offered in the assigned readings, and their perceptions of the professor's personality and intellectual biases. As a central argument, Prior reminds us that tasks are to a great extent shaped by the multiple histories, activities, and goals that participants bring to and create within seminars. Other studies (although not in the L2 writing area) lead to similar conclusions about task interpretation and performance (e.g., Coughlan & Duff, 1994; and Mohan & Marshall-Smith, 1992). What these investigations highlight is the importance of investigating the nature and role of context in order to make sense of the academic literacy experiences of learners.

The studies discussed in this section have strongly shaped my research questions as well as my data interpretations. In particular, the reconceptualization of academic literacy, the identification of the emotional aspect of feedback and the role it plays in positioning students, and the negotiated nature of task interpretations are aspects that I attempt to address and further explore in the analysis chapters of this dissertation.

2.4 Study abroad terminology

The umbrella term "study abroad" is used to refer to educational activities in a foreign country that encompass internships, educational programs, and student exchange opportunities. In general--and also in this dissertation--study abroad refers to organized university programs for HE students who leave their home countries to pursue credit-bearing academic study in a host country. While some overseas students are independent, most of the literature has focused on students that have access to the overseas experience through official agreements in place between their home and their host universities.

Another distinction that emerges from the literature is that study abroad is a term that has been usually employed to characterize the experiences of US-based students traveling abroad, while those based in other countries are normally referred to as "exchange," "foreign" or "overseas" students when outside their home countries (Coleman, 1998, in press). This means that, almost ironically, study abroad does not typically describe experiences of foreign students in the US (these students are usually referred to as "international"), even though the number of American students abroad compared to the number of foreign students in the US is miniscule.[8] While "study abroad" refers to American programs, Europeans have their own version usually known as "residence abroad" or just "the year abroad." The term "student mobility" is also popular among Europeans. It thus follows that there is no simple way to make a clear-cut distinction among these concepts, especially when they have been employed so haphazardly in the different research areas. Below I include a brief definition of each of these terms, with the intent of clarifying their meaning in the context of this dissertation. It should be noted that some overlapping among terms occurs, and additional interpretations and uses are also possible.

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[8] Some researchers and organizations have looked into this matter, trying to figure out why US students are not particularly drawn to study abroad. Among the motives identified for their staying at home is the fact that American students are not required to become bilingual to secure a job, and until now, academic/professional experience outside the US has not been necessarily valued in the job market. This situation is changing as this dissertation is written, and Americans are starting to acknowledge the importance of study abroad in our global world. Consequently, study abroad opportunities among US based students are becoming more plentiful, and the Open Doors (2005) report shows that the number of American students abroad is on a dramatic increase. For a more in-depth analysis of this issue, refer to Bollag et al. (2004), Gardner & Witherell (2004) and Levin (2001).

"Overseas" and "foreign" are descriptors that have been used to classify those students that are not nationals of the country in which they are studying, and who are usually holders of a student visa.[9] "International" is also a word that has been used to refer to this type of student population. But as mentioned above, most of the literature seems to have restricted the use of "international" to refer to foreign students based in the North American countries, while students based in other countries (mostly in Australia and Europe) have been usually called "overseas" or "foreign" students (Levin, 2001). Aside from this distinction, the constructs seem to apply equally to any individual studying in any country other than that of their origin.

"Exchange" students share with overseas/foreign/international students the characteristic that they are pursuing academic development in an institutional context outside of their home country. However, a distinction that has sometimes been highlighted because it may lead to different findings than those derived for the overseas/foreign/international student population is the fact that exchange students usually take part in a program that has been organized and agreed upon between the home and the host institution. Also, while international students' fees are usually paid to the host university (because these students may not even be enrolled at a home university at the time of the study-abroad experience), exchange students usually continue to pay their fees to their home institution. In addition, an exchange usually involves an agreement between both participating institutions to send and receive students. Several exchange models exist, with variations in the types of length, the types of courses/academic activities expected from exchange students as well as the work load, the methods for evaluating students, and so forth (see Sowa, 2002, and Goodwin & Nacht, 1988, for more details about the different models of student exchange programs).

Finally, the word "sojourner" is employed here based on Ady's (1995) definition, which states that sojourners, unlike immigrants or refugees, do not seek permanent

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[9] This again, depending on the kinds of agreements/relationships between the host country and the student's country of origin/citizenship. It would be inappropriate to generalize that all overseas/foreign/international students hold visas while they study abroad. The term "visa" student has also been employed to refer to foreign students (mostly in SLA/L2 research), but it seems this label suffers from the obvious limitation of inadvertently leaving out overseas students who, while not needing a visa in their host country, still share all other characteristics that are of interest to the researcher.

residence in the host country. They typically stay abroad for as long as their study or temporary work experience lasts, and then move somewhere else (usually back to their home country, although mobility across several countries also seems to be an increasingly popular phenomenon, especially in Europe).

In short, the term study abroad is the most encompassing of all (e.g., an exchange program is one kind of study abroad program), and like some of the other terms, it can be used to refer both to the students as well as to the programs and the overall experiences. This is my rationale for its prominent use in this work.

2.5   Study abroad research

Over the last thirty years or so, the field of SLA has experienced an increase in the number of studies focusing on foreign language acquisition by sojourners (e.g., studies by Brecht & Davidson, 1991; Brecht, Davidson & Ginsberg, 1990, 1993; Carroll, 1967; DeKeyser, 1991; DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Freed, 1995a, 1995b; Ginsberg, 1992; Urdaneta Hernandez, 1996; Parr, 1988; Pellegrino, 1998; 2005; Regan, 1998; Stevens, 2000). As Freed (1998) notes, "prior to the early 1990s there were a series of sporadic and unrelated studies which explored the language learning experiences of students who had been abroad" (p. 33). Most of these investigations relied on test scores to determine language development levels pre- and post-study abroad (e.g., Carroll's (1967) survey, which focused on the language proficiency of college students majoring in French, German, Italian, and Russian). Other test-based investigations were conducted, mostly in Britain, between 1969 and the early 1990s (e.g., Dyson, 1988; Magnan, 1986; Milleret, 1990). Most of these studies employed the ACTFL/IRL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) as an assessment tool to measure the language growth of study abroad students, and they reaffirm the positive impact of a stay abroad in the target language environment on students' improvement in linguistic proficiency.

However, because these studies relied exclusively on test scores, they fail to provide any insights regarding the language development process itself, and the factors that may have affected it (Freed, 1998). Also, the students' perspectives are not considered in that literature. Other shortcomings relate to the kinds of tests employed to track students' achievement. For instance, the OPI has been criticized for presenting just

one global holistic score, thus failing to account for different aspects involved in language use. Researchers also found that the language development of learners at higher proficiency levels is hard to track because it is not linear (Huebner, 1998).

Departing from an exclusive focus on language tests scores to determine the linguistic impact of study abroad periods, more recent investigators have employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to explore issues in this area. Among these are large-scale studies, some of which were commissioned by organizations or institutions that provided financial support or that organized the study abroad programs on which the research later took place. The largest investigation on study abroad issues completed by American scholars in the 1990s focused on the acquisition of Russian by US students, and the findings were reported in a series of publications (Brecht & Davidson, 1991; Brecht et al., 1990, 1993; Ginsberg, 1992). Although these large-scale investigations were helpful in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the support programs for the mobility of students and they shed light on many pragmatic issues related to study abroad, they revealed little or nothing about the actual individual experiences of the students.

Noting this gap, researchers interested in non-program evaluation information but rather on the impact of the study abroad program on the students and on the experiences they had while abroad, have conducted studies of a different nature. Several individual studies, including a growing number of doctoral dissertations (e.g., Farrell, 2006; Hernandez de Santis, 2004; Levin, 2001; Mendelson, 2004; Shougee, 1999; Urdaneta Hernandez, 1996; Waldbaum, 1996), explored language acquisition by students in a study abroad context. Some studies have tried to answer the question of whether or not length of stay has an impact on second/foreign language acquisition. A common belief--some call it a "myth" (Levin, 2001; Mendelson, 2004; Wilkinson, 1998a, 1998b)--is that the acquisition of a foreign language is accelerated and improved in all respects as a result of spending a prolonged period of time in the country where target language is spoken. This assumption was first claimed by Carroll (1967), who is credited with having published the first investigation on study abroad and foreign language acquisition. Also, some researchers claim that in most cases, language acquisition takes place even when it is not the primary objective of the sojourn experience (e.g., Barrows, 1981; Carlson et al.,

1990). A number of studies sought to test the contention that studying a foreign language abroad yields better results than studying it at home (e.g., DeKeyser, 1991; Dewey, 2004; Dwyer, 2004; Freed, Segalowitz & Dewey, 2004; Guntermann, 1992a, 1992b, 1995; Lafford, 1995, 2004; Matsumura, 2001; Möhle, 1984; and Stevens 2000), revealing that language acquisition does not inevitably occur as a result of residence in the target language country, particularly when learners opt not to interact in the foreign language during their stay abroad.[10] Other investigators have also reported similar findings, especially when students abroad choose to mingle with co-nationals instead of establishing new relationships with locals (e.g., Pellegrino, 1998, 2005; Wilkinson, 1998a, 1998b).

Another group of studies have focused on the impact of out-of-class activities and socialization on language learning. For instance, Parr (1988) distributed a series of questionnaires to US students in Spain. The major findings derived from this study stress the importance of establishing friendships with target language speakers in order to better (and more quickly) acquire the L2 language in a true immersion context. Parr claims that studying a second language in the classroom is not sufficient to maximize language acquisition, and therefore the role of relationships is crucial in motivating the students to learn the language and to enhance the possibilities of exposure to the target language in a meaningful context. However, much research indicates that foreign students usually have problems establishing friendships with host students during their sojourn (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Hull IV, 1981; Klineberg, 1981a, 1981b; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Segawa, 1998). Segawa (1998), for example, notes how problems of language communication hindered the process of establishing relationships between the Japanese student participants and their Anglophone Canadian peers. Other researchers have reported similar experiences, where study abroad participants prefer to establish networks with peers from their home country in order to speak their L1 instead of choosing to mingle with host nationals (e.g., Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2004; Pellegrino, 1998, 2005). The role of students' social interactions with locals and the importance of extracurricular activities have been highlighted not only in relation to language acquisition, but also in

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[10] Refer to Lafford (2006) for a recent comprehensive review of studies that compared Spanish SLA in study abroad versus at home contexts.

relation to students' adjustment to the new culture and to their acquisition of foreign cultural knowledge and values (Kim, 1994).

While abroad, students experience transformations in different areas. They may become aware of new academic norms and values, they can be expected to gain fresh perspectives on the world, to experience L2 development, and so forth. In addition, "the journey outwards in terms of gaining global perspective is also a journey towards self-discovery" (Shougee, 1999, p. 61). Yet only a few study abroad investigations have explicitly focused on the relationship between language learning and identity development. In most cases, the literature mentions in passing that "changes in the self" result from contact with other people in other cultures during the stay abroad period, but scarcely any details are provided about how this transformation of the self is in fact perceived by the students and the people who surround them. In addition, identity does not mean the same in all studies that employ this concept. Rather, multiple notions of identity have been explored: e.g., racial identity (Ng, 2003), national identity (Berwick & Carey, 2000), personal identity and social identity (Levin, 2001), sometimes more loosely defined and less theoretically supported than others. In general, when identity issues are explored, they are included within the whole "benefits package" of the study abroad experience. That is to say, shifts or changes in people's identities are usually explained as a by-product of the period of time the individual stayed overseas. In the case of study abroad students, because their sojourn experience may not necessarily involve prolonged periods of time, identity changes may not be perceived by the students during the period of their stay away. However, reentry to the home environment is prone to challenge newly acquired notions and frameworks, and recently established as well as older relationships may also be modified as a result of the period of absence in the home country or presence in the host country. All these in turn can be expected to transform the ways in which students perceive themselves, and can potentially influence the identity negotiations they perform as they seek entrance into (and exit from) different social groups.

2.5.1 Academic literacy development during study abroad

The acquisition of academic competencies has been the focus of attention of a group of researchers interested in finding ways to help academic sojourners adjust to their new educational contexts. Many studies have examined the academic literacy of international students in a second language (refer to Section 2.1), yet the *study abroad* literature that has explored this topic is minimal. Indeed, in a recent review of studies of language learners within study abroad contexts, Churchill and DuFon (2006) point out the lack of research on this topic, and conclude that "given the scant attention that literacy has received in SA [study abroad] research (...) this would appear to be a rich area for further investigation" (p. 3).

Among the few investigations in this area, the works by Kline (1998) and Shi and Beckett (2002) stand out. Kline's (1998) was an ethnographic case study of the L2 literacy development of eight US students during an academic-year study abroad program in France. Contrary to most studies on literacy that focus on the cognitive aspects of the acquisition of reading practices, Kline designed her study to explore L2 literacy development from a social practice perspective that emphasizes contexts and interactions between readers and texts, the environment, and other people. Literacy is viewed in her work as "context and culture-specific ... multifarious ... and ideologically bound. (...) It emerges through processes of acculturation, socialization and apprenticeship ... and thus is intimately tied to identity" (Kline, 1998, p. 147). Although her study only explores the reading aspect of literacy, her study does make some novel contributions and established an important precedent for subsequent academic literacy explorations in overseas contexts. In particular, her emphasis on reading as social practice is in sync with current "broad" views of literacy that challenge "narrow" conceptions of literacy that focus on the psychological and cognitive aspects of acquisition of reading and writing, yet ignoring socio-contextual factors.[11] In addition, her study presents both an emic as well as an etic perspective, thus including perspectives which were missing in previous studies on the same topic in similar contexts.

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[11] For an overview of current notions of literacy, refer to Williams' (2004) excellent chapter which summarizes what he calls the "narrow" and "broad" views, and to the definitions provided in Chapter 1.

Shi and Beckett (2002) conducted studies on the academic writing development of a group of Japanese undergraduate exchange students in a Canadian university. Based on analysis of interview data and two written texts produced by the participants (one at the beginning and the other one at the end of the eight-month period abroad), the authors examined the kinds of written tasks that their participants were asked to do in the English context, focusing also on the types of conventions these students learned about academic writing in that language. In addition, they asked students to speculate about the impact of their newly acquired writing forms on their L1, once they returned to Japan. An interesting finding of this study is that, in the process of gaining awareness of the English writing style, most of the exchange students developed a preference for this style over their old Japanese one. This meant that upon their reentry to the academic context in Japan, students would have a choice between English and Japanese forms of writing (which the authors refer to as a "dilemma"). An important conclusion the researchers reach is that "academic staff should be aware that international students might bring with them perspectives and traditions of written communication that differ from those of English" (Shi & Beckett, 2002, p. 52), and they should not only focus on what students' lack, but they should also keep in mind that students are facing a process of adaptation, and resistance can be a stage in that process.

2.5.2 Post-exchange investigations

The bulk of L2 study abroad research in higher education contexts has documented a wide spectrum of learners' experiences concerning their linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural dimensions, with most studies focusing on the period *during* which the exchange takes place and a subgroup of them also considering the *pre-departure* period. A growing percentage of the more recent research draws from data revealing students' perspectives, thus counterbalancing the previous neglect of sojourners' own voices (as discussed above in connection with Kline's (1998) study). As a result, although there is still much to learn, our current knowledge of students' views on their preparation before their exchange and their experiences while abroad has increased significantly. In contrast, although some investigations have documented, for instance, students' linguistic, psychological, sociocultural and cognitive transformations/development immediately

after the exchange, there is very little research that reports on students' *post-study* abroad views on how *they* assessed the significance of their sojourn once they returned to their home social, study and professional contexts. Indeed, as also noted by others, "even though colleges and universities remain committed to the assertion of positive outcomes from international education generally, we know surprisingly little in any systematic and empirical sense about the lasting effects of a year-abroad" (Berwick & Carey, 2000, p. 39, citing Berwick & Whalley, 2000; Coleman, 1997).

This lack of research is even more extreme in the area of L2 academic literacy. A few exceptions are some partly related investigations conducted by Berwick and Carey (2000), Jones (1997), and Shi and Beckett (2002)--coincidentally, all examining Japanese students' issues upon reentry to their home country. The studies focused on the entire study abroad "cycle" of before, during and after the exchange, yet none of the above cited studies includes in-depth interpretations of the students' post-exchange perceptions. Of the three projects, only Shi and Beckett (2002) focused exclusively on writing aspects, while the others did so more peripherally.

Clearly, there is a need for in-depth investigations that explore the L2 academic literacy socialization of learners during their sojourn, since only a few studies to date have addressed in detail this important aspect of the students' academic experiences. There is also a need for studies that follow up the students once they return to their home contexts given that most of the existing literature fails to examine how the sojourn may affect students' future professional, personal, and academic lives.

In summary, the array of literature on study abroad has revealed many aspects of students' experiences overseas. Study abroad is highly complex, and to better grasp its real value we need to go beyond studies that quantify linguistic achievement and cultural impact. Notwithstanding the increasingly prolific work of researchers interested in international students' academic writing experiences, there are still many gaps that merit close attention. In brief, the kinds of writing practices (both products and processes), the types of contexts and populations, and the approaches that can be employed to focus on this SLA sub-area have not yet been exhausted. For instance, study abroad students' academic writing development has not been the focus of the vast majority of investigations on this topic. And what is more, there is a tendency to generalize the

findings on international students' experiences to other foreign sub-populations, such as exchange participants. Or vice versa, in some cases where exchange student populations were indeed the focal individuals of the investigations, the research questions do not address issues specific to this kind of overseas student, and therefore the findings are deemed relevant to all international students involved in L2 academic writing. However, there is potential for differentiating among the kinds of overseas populations in various ways. For instance, by looking at their academic background (i.e., international students with little or no prior academic writing experience may cope with different challenges than, say, exchange students that arrive in the host country with an already acquired set of L2 academic literacy practices). Also, the lens can be shifted by means of exploring the value attached by students to the L2 academic writing adjustment and the impact of the study abroad experience upon their return to their home universities. The role of students' goals for participating in the study abroad exchange can also be explored in relation to their impact on students' academic writing learning. And finally, the spectrum can be broadened by examining the role that institutions can play in assisting students in their academic writing development, which in turn can lead to specific pedagogical implications for the institutions involved in sending abroad or receiving the exchange students.

An interesting issue brought to the fore by Casanave (2004) relates to whether or not issues of politics, ideology, and cultural constructs such as critical thinking (which have been lately addressed in SLA research) may "apply differently to populations of immigrant students in ESL settings than they do to international students who plan to return to their home countries after being educated in an English medium academic environment," (p. 199) which is precisely the case of study abroad students. Taking into account Casanave's point, we should ask ourselves: Do we really need to force study abroad students to fully adjust to their host institution norms and values? Is it equally fair to the students, their peers, and their instructors if we expect them to adapt and adopt new behaviors and competencies? Studies that attempt to shed some light on this issue are needed, and this is therefore one of the aims of this dissertation.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter I introduced the theoretical framework of LS and the notions of CoPs and INoPs, which have guided the data collection and analysis of this investigation. I also reviewed previous studies that are relevant to my dissertation project either due to their use of similar theories, research methods, and/or topics of inquiry. I have also identified areas for further research, some of which I attempt to address in my dissertation. In the next chapter, I will provide an overview of the research methodology I employed, as well as detailed information about the research context, participants, and the steps followed in collecting and analyzing the data.

Chapter 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Qualitative case study

As indicated in the introductory chapter, the research questions guiding this investigation aim to examine the *kind* of academic literacy practices in which the participants were involved as well as the *processes* of L2 academic literacy socialization during their stay abroad. The study also attempts to shed light on the *impact* of the academic experiences in Canada on the participants once they returned to their home university in Mexico. The exploratory nature of the research questions calls for a research methodology well suited for the in-depth investigation of phenomena. Therefore, I have designed this investigation as a multiple-case study.

Qualitative case studies constitute a research methodology with a long tradition. In education, case studies have been influenced by the theory and methods employed by qualitative researchers in the fields of sociology, history, anthropology, and psychology (Merriam, 1998). In second language acquisition and in applied linguistics research, case studies have also gained popularity (Duff, in press a), and in recent years we have seen a significant increase in the number of study abroad investigations as well as investigations on academic literacy development that have been fruitfully studied using qualitative case study methods.

A case is defined as an integrated system with boundaries that can be clearly defined (Stake, 1995). In addition to their boundedness, some further characteristics are to be found in qualitative case studies. Namely, case studies are *particularistic* (i.e., they focus on a specific event, program, or phenomenon), *descriptive* (i.e., a "thick description" results as the end product of the investigation), and *heuristic* (i.e., they provide fresh understandings of a phenomenon, via discovery, extension, or confirmation of what is already known) (Merriam, 1998). In this investigation, a case study design has been selected due to the characteristics mentioned above, and the rich interpretive accounts resulting from this study help illuminate the process and outcome of the participants' academic literacy and identity transformations.

Furthermore, case study research offers a valuable choice to conduct studies that are guided by "who" and "why" questions, rather than by the more quantitative "how many" and "how much" questions. This means that case studies are useful tools to approach phenomena from a different angle, one that allows for naturalistic interpretation rather than from an angle that emphasizes clear-cut, objective results. For researchers who draw on social-constructivist, feminist, critical, or poststructuralist paradigms, the case study method represents an attractive option (Hatch, 2002). Hence, given the interpretive purposes and the sociocultural theoretical orientation of my project, case studies are an appropriate choice.

This investigation employed a qualitative *multiple* case study design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003), where the focus of inquiry was placed on more than one case (i.e., on six focal student participants). In this project, each focal participant is considered an individual case, and both within- and across-case analyses were performed. It is believed that the inclusion of multiple cases enhances the trustworthiness (reliability) and the potential generalizability of the study (Merriam, 1998).[12] It should also be noted in this regard that generalizability of the findings to a wider population is not the aim of the study, and that instead the emphasis is placed on particularization, on the uniqueness of each case (Duff, in press a, 2006b; Stake, 1995). Still, this study aims to make theoretical contributions that will allow to make "analytic generalizations" (Duff, in press a, 2006b; Firestone, 1993; Yin, 1989); that is, generalizations not to other populations, but to theory.[13]

In many ways, this study shares the characteristics of an ethnographic case study: it follows a longitudinal design and traces the development of participants over time, it

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[12] In this respect, it should also be noted that the issue of inference and generalizability of qualitative research designs has sparked much controversy among traditionally called "quantitative" and "qualitative" paradigm researchers. Also, among qualitative researchers two different positions are represented: those who seek to achieve generalizability and who claim it is possible in qualitative research, and those who reject the traditional concept and instead choose to highlight the internal validity, reliability and careful reasoning of their research.

[13] Donmoyer (1990), Duff (2006b), Firestone (1993) and Yin (1989, 2003) explore the issue of generalization in qualitative research, and suggest that "analytic generalization" (as opposed to "statistical generalization," Yin, 2003, p. 32), which involves development of theory that could be applied in further studies, should be the aim of qualitative case studies. Indeed, analytic generalization is viewed as one of the strengths of qualitative inquiry.

focuses on a delimited sample of cases, it examines cultural practices and cultural knowledge development (in this case, in relation to academic literacy), and it employs many of the data collection and analysis strategies also typical of ethnographic research However, observational classroom data, which constitutes a main type of data collected by ethnographers, is not included in this study.[14]

Among the strongest advocates in favor of qualitative case studies of academic literacy are Braine (2002), Casanave (2002; 2004), and Paltridge (2004), who have expressed their preference for this type of methodology in order to access the stories of academic literacy learners that case study researchers then may recount as literacy auto/biographies (Casanave, 2002; 2004; Connor & Mayberry, 1996) and portraits of the learners' academic literacy transformations. The use of case study research in my study, moreover, is in great part based on the successful investigations of this kind carried out by other researchers. Exemplary qualitative case studies of academic literacy issues, such as those conducted by Angelova and Riazantseva (1999), Casanave (1995, 2002), Leki (2003a), and Spack (1997a), to name just a few, have not only set an important precedent for future investigations, but also demonstrate the legitimacy and poignancy of qualitative case study as a valuable methodological option which, through rich in-depth narrative accounts, provides a window into people's lived, perceived and desired academic literacy experiences.

3.1 Research context

The study took place at two main sites: the host university setting in Canada, hereafter referred to as Western Canadian University (WCU), and the home university campuses in Mexico from which the participants of this study came. Most of the data were collected at the WCU site. Pseudonyms are used to refer to all institutions and to all the participants of this study in order to ensure their anonymity.

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[14] Observational data would have allowed me to examine the participants while engaged in actual text production of academic texts, for instance. Unfortunately, gaining access for research purposes to individuals' private domains (e.g., homes) or even public domains such as classrooms has increasingly become more difficult. Hence, without denying the richness of data that observations would have added to this study, I am still confident that the triangulation of many other first hand sources of participant data allow for an in-depth examination of their L2 academic literacy socialization.

WCU is a large public university, ranked among the top five research universities in Canada, and among the top 40 universities worldwide. WCU has a strong internationalization mandate, and one of the strategies pursued to fulfill this mandate is by means of offering international students the possibility to take courses at WCU as part of an exchange program. As a result, WCU has established partnerships with over 130 universities across the world, and almost 600 international students arrive at WCU each year. In the case of the participants of this study, they have access to WCU within the framework of a joint academic program established in 2000 between WCU and Multi-campus Mexican University (MCMU). An average cohort of 70 MCMU students per academic term chooses WCU as their exchange destination, which speaks to the popularity of this joint academic program.

MCMU is one of the largest private universities in Mexico, with over thirty campuses spread across that country. MCMU enjoys the reputation of a vanguard institution in terms of both its technological development as well as its internationalization policies. Like WCU, MCMU also has an internationalization mandate, and the students of this institution also have access to exchanges in over 130 countries worldwide. In fact, MCMU offers degrees with an international modality (i.e., an international track). Students enrolled in this modality are required to take part in at least two academic exchanges (one of which should be done abroad) during the course of their degree. This option is evidence of the importance ascribed to foreign academic exchanges by MCMU, and consequently, how crucial (sometimes inevitable) it is for MCMU students to take part in a study abroad experience.

MCMU is a leading institution in terms of technological developments and the establishment of academic partnerships with other HE institutions worldwide. Currently, MCMU has international on-site exchange offices in Barcelona, Boston, Dallas, Hangzhou, Madrid, Montreal, París, Washington, and Vancouver. This allows MCMU to maintain close links with the institutions involved in each alliance, and also facilitates the provision of on-site support to MCMU students during their exchange period.

Students for MCMU-WCU Joint Academic Program are recruited by taking into consideration the following multiple factors: their willingness to participate in a study abroad experience (an experience which is strongly encouraged at MCMU); their

financial resources to afford study abroad-related expenses (only a few merit-based scholarships are also offered by MCMU; usually 2 or 3 per cohort each academic term); their high academic performance at MCMU; and the required level of English language proficiency as measured by the TOEFL (only students with a minimum score of 550 on the paper-based exam).

Candidates who are selected as exchange participants can choose to enroll in a variety of programs. Students can either opt to complete a "certificate of specialty" (see below) or simply take courses related to their program of studies at MCMU, or take courses not offered at their home university. Most regular credit courses from the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, and the Business Department at WCU are open to MCMU students, and the credits earned at WCU are easily transferable to MCMU.

"Certificates of specialty" are offered in over 20 fields of study. To receive an internationally-recognized WCU certificate, students must complete at least 15 credits (5 courses) from that certificate. Some certificates take a term to complete, and some take a year. Others take a combination of a fall or winter term and a shorter summer term, such as the Logistics certificate. Start dates are flexible, offered at the following times:

Table 3.1 Possible Study Periods for MCMU Students at WCU

a. September to December (Term 1)
b. January to April (Term 2)
c. September to April (Term 1 & Term 2)
d. January to August (Term 2 & summer)
e. September to August (Term 1, Term 2, & summer)
f. May/June to December (summer & Term 1)
g. May/June to April (summer, Term 1, & Term 2)

3.2   Research participants

I first met the summer 2005 (S05) MCMU-WCU academic exchange cohort--a group of over 50 students--at their program welcome orientation meeting which I was given permission to attend by the exchange program Director, Ms. Gutierrez. At this meeting, I gave students a general overview of the purposes and characteristics of my

study, which I described as "an opportunity to share and reflect on their academic life and academic literacy practices during and after the exchange," and I invited them to volunteer as participants. Those students interested in learning more about the study wrote their e-mail address in a sign-up sheet so that I could send them a description of my project (i.e., the main goals, the expected impact of the study, and their expected level of commitment and involvement, among other important information. (See Appendix A.) A total of 31 students gave me their contact information, and after e-mailing all of them the document with more details, 20 replied expressing their strong interest in participating.

Originally, I had planned to include two or three participants in the summer and conduct a few interviews with them in order to pilot the questions and determine the overall focus of the study. But given my familiarity with this program through my previous engagement as research assistant for a related investigation two years before,[15] and also in light of the large number of motivated potential participants, I went ahead and distributed consent forms to all 20 students who e-mailed me. I later set up a first round of interviews with all those who contacted me again with their signed forms (12 students in all). Of these original 12 students, 7 had come to do a six-week exchange experience during the summer only, while the other 5 would also return to WCU in the fall of 2005 (F05) to complete their academic exchange experience. I was particularly interested in following these 5 students, since I hypothesized that their longer exposure to the Canadian academic system would most likely have a greater impact on them than on those who only came for the short summer program. Fortunately, these 5 students agreed to participate in the next phases of the study. Still, I was also interested in including in my sample participants who only came for the summer, since I presumed that some useful additional findings might be derived from comparing the experiences of students in the summer only, with those who came in the summer and fall, and those who came in the fall only.[16]

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[15] My role as a research assistant for Dr. Duff's SSHRC-funded project familiarized me with the MCMU-WCU program and context, and also facilitated my future access to the site.

[16] Nevertheless, since this comparison does not fall under the main purpose of my dissertation, I include information in this regard whenever I consider it appropriate, but I do not include a separate section discussing the comparison of the three groups in detail.

During the exchange program welcome orientation session in the first week of September I met the students in the F05 cohort (again, a group of 60 or so students). Following the same procedure as in the summer, I was able to attract 34 potential participants. In addition to the five S05 - F05 students I had interviewed in the summer and whom I continued to interview in the fall, I interviewed 12 other participants. After the first F05 interview round, two participants dropped out, and I carried on data collection with the remaining ten students from the F05 term plus the five students from the S05 - F05 terms. A first classification of the participants thus naturally derives from taking into account the length of the students' stay abroad, which also coincided in most cases with the duration of my data collection while they were in Canada. This classification is illustrated in Fig. 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Study Participants
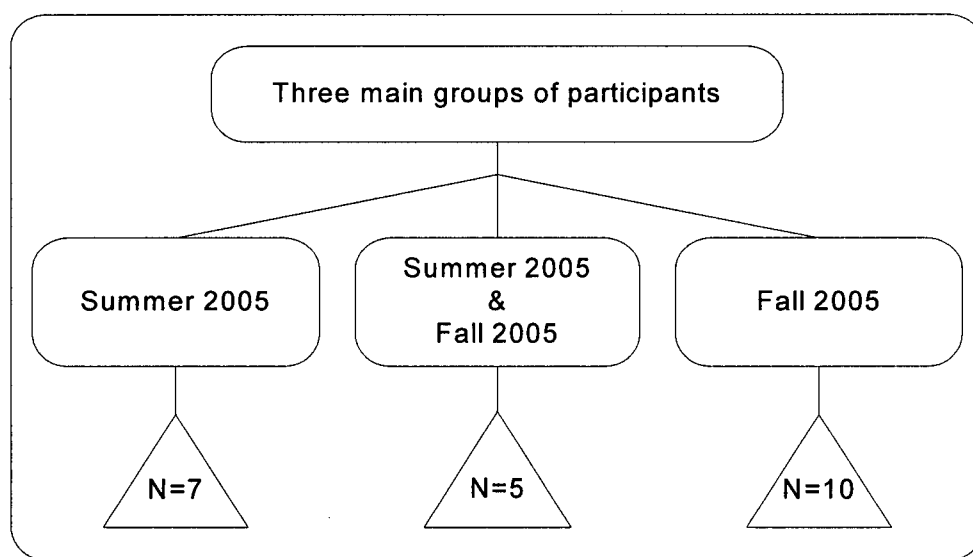
The study participants can further be classified into two main categories: focal participants and secondary participants. I collected data (via interviews, writing samples, e-mail exchanges, and so forth) from all 22 participants. However, the participants had diverse levels of involvement with the project; some were more invested by participating in more interviews, by providing me with more samples of writing, by keeping a more detailed assignment log, and by maintaining closer contact with me during all phases of the study. It is from this smaller group of students that the six focal participants of this

study were selected. Of these six participants, three arrived in Canada in the summer of 2005 and hence were able to engage in the project since phase 1 of the study, and the other three arrived in Canada in the fall of 2005, and thus engaged in phase 2 of the study (refer to the research project timeline below for more information about the different phases of the study).

As mentioned before, one of the usual requirements to produce a rigorous qualitative case study is to focus on a relatively small sample, paying close attention to detail and to a very comprehensive set of factors related to each case and also across cases. Hence, since focusing equally on the academic literacy experiences of all 22 participants would defeat this purpose, the findings reported in this study are based primarily on the practices and lived experiences of the six focal participants. In Chapter 4 I include a detailed profile about each of these students.

The remaining 16 students that participated in this study are considered "secondary" participants. Although their experiences are not revealed in this study with the same amount of detail and emphasis as for the focal participants, these 16 students are still considered key informants. In many cases, they were classmates, friends, and/or team members of the focal participants, and thus the information these secondary participants contributed served multiple purposes. For instance, it was useful as a way of verifying (i.e., cross-member checking) some of the data provided by the focal participants (e.g., about assignment instructions; classroom dynamics; instructor availability, personality and teaching style; and their views about the MCMU academic system). In addition, secondary participants often brought up interesting topics in the interviews, and these sometimes were included in my subsequent interview guides for each participant.

The MCMU-WCU exchange students were given the possibility of completing a certificate of specialty, as mentioned above. However, not all students went to WCU to complete a certificate. Of the 12 students that participated in the summer 05 data collection period (phase 1), only the 5 students (those who later returned in the fall) were interested in doing the certificate option. The other 7 only went to WCU for the six summer term weeks, during which they took two courses. And of those who participated

during the fall data collection period exclusively, only three completed a certificate.[17] (Appendix B includes details about the participants' courses and certificates, where applicable.)

3.3 Data collection

Qualitative case studies aim to produce holistic, interpretive accounts of phenomena, and this has direct implications for determining the sources of information for the researcher, as well as the types of analysis to be performed and the final products to be constructed. Usually, one type of data is not sufficient to achieve the rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973) that characterizes solid qualitative case studies. Consequently, data for this project were drawn from various sources, and this information was triangulated during the different stages of analysis.

Approval to conduct this project was granted by the Behavioral Research Ethics Committee at the University of British Columbia, and written support was also given by the MCMU-WCU Joint Academic Program Director. In order to have access to the participants' experiences and perceptions about the exchange, multiple and diverse kinds of data were gathered (see timeline in Section 3.5) between May, 2005 and April, 2006. The data set includes individual interviews with participants, focus group interviews with participants, individual interviews with two instructors, background information grid, written documents, writing logs, questionnaires, e-mails, chat sessions, researcher field notes, and miscellaneous sources.

Since the participants and I shared the same L1 (Spanish), although I come from Argentina not Mexico, the participants were allowed to complete all questionnaires, grids, and logs in this language. The identification of initial themes and patterns, as well as the coding of data, however, were done in English from the outset, and the quoted excerpts from data originally in Spanish were translated into English for this thesis.[18]

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[17] Note here that: (a) some students originally wanted to complete a certificate in the fall, but because some of the required courses in which they needed to register were not offered, they were unable to do the certificate option, and (b) some students dropped one of the five required courses for the certificate during the first few weeks of the exchange, and as a result they could not complete the certificate.
[18] The fact that the much of the student participants' data were gathered in Spanish has both pros and cons: while this meant that the data collected was most likely richer (more abundant, more detailed, and in more

All interviews with student participants were also conducted in Spanish, their language of choice for this activity. The students unanimously indicated that while they felt proficient enough to carry out the conversation in English, it was only in Spanish that they could fully and freely communicate with me their feelings, and that speaking in English would have prevented them – in most cases – from expressing their ideas with the same level of complexity as they did in their mother tongue. Transcription conventions are included in Appendix C.

Interviews are viewed as interactions that are co-constructed by the interviewer and the interviewee, where "the interviewer and the subject act in relation to each other and reciprocally influence each other" (Kvale, 1996, p. 35). Therefore, researchers are advised to be "conscious of the interpersonal dynamics within the interaction and take them into account in the interview situation and in the later analysis of the finished interview" (p. 35). In light of the large number and level of detail of interviews, this constitutes the main kind of data collected for this study. However, to further counterbalance the subjectivity of information obtained through interviews, these data were cross-checked with information gathered by means of other data sources, some of which were produced by the participants for purposes other than this research (i.e., this could be considered more "objective" data). Sample interview questions with student participants and instructors are included in Appendix D.

Table 3.2 summarizes the kinds of data collected and analyzed, and classifies them according to the source that produced them (i.e., the researcher, the participants, both, and so on). Each type of data source is explained in detail below.

Table 3.2 Data Sources

Source	Type of data
Structured by researcher & completed by participants	- background information grid - writing logs - questionnaires A & B
Generated by Participants (students [S] & instructors [I])	- written assignments [S] - written feedback [I]

depth) than if it had been collected in English, it also added an extra step to the data analysis process: that of translating from Spanish to English.

Source	Type of data

Co-constructed by participants and researcher	- individual interviews with participants:
	   - *focal:* N = 4-8 w/ each; *secondary:* N = 2-6 w/ each
	   - Total: S05 N = 22; F05: N = 56
	- focus group interviews with participants:
	   - *mixed focal and secondary:* N = 3 total

Generated by researcher	- field notes, memos
Readily available	- websites - course materials (readings, handouts, course outlines) - official (institutional) documents

(i) **Individual interviews with students (in Canada)**: Each student participant was interviewed between five and eight times. The interviews were digitally audio-recorded and lasted an average of 50 minutes. The first interview usually followed a semi-structured design, where students were asked to provide some background information about their previous study abroad experiences, their English language proficiency, their reasons for participating in the current exchange program, and their expectations. Subsequent interviews followed Patton's (2002) *Interview Guide Approach*. This interview guide technique "provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate the particular subject" (p. 343), thus characterizing the interviews as rather flexible yet still following a common guide of topics to explore. I also conducted text-based interviews (Odell, Goswami, Harrington, 1983) whereby I elicited information about how students wrote specific texts. I raised questions concerning issues such as language, content, organization, use of resources, time spent working on an assignment, and where applicable, interpretation of feedback received by the students. The interviews were transcribed, whenever possible prior to the next interview with the same participant. This allowed for the generation of questions for the subsequent interviews, which aimed at obtaining both general as well as specific information about their experiences in WCU, with a particular focus on their academic literacy practices. In total I conducted 22 interviews in the summer term (June – July, 2005) and 56 in the 2005 fall term 1 (September –

December, 2005), totaling 78 interviews, roughly 65 hours of audio-recorded data of this kind. All interviews with participants were conducted in Spanish and later translated into English by me.

(ii) **Focus group interviews with students (in Mexico)**: In addition to interviewing individually all of the students while they were at WCU, I also conducted some interviews when I visited them in Mexico a semester after their return (in April of 2006). Most of the data in Mexico were gathered by means of three focus group interviews I conducted on the MCMU campuses of Monterrey, Guadalajara, and of the Mexican Federal District. These interviews were also audio-recorded, and they lasted an average of 90 minutes each. While in Mexico, I also conducted individual interviews with two participants; these complement the data gathered in the focus group interviews.

(iii) **Individual interviews with instructors (in Canada)**: Two instructors were interviewed between December, 2005 and February, 2006. These sessions were also audio-recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted in English, and they lasted an average of 50 minutes each. I tried to interview as many instructors as possible, yet only two finally agreed to participate in the study, whereas three other instructors I contacted showed interest in the study but either argued they had no time for the interview or else did not reply to my messages when I tried to make an appointment with them. Of those interviewed, one (to whom I refer as "Instructor C") taught three of the most popular Commerce courses taken by the participants (these were required courses for those registered in the Logistics certificate), and his classes usually included a large percentage of Mexican students (up to 50%). Therefore, I was particularly interested in obtaining his perspective about the Mexican student population in his classes. The other instructor, "Instructor A" (who co-taught the course with "Instructor B," whom I did not interview) taught a Latin American Studies course which one of the focal participants took and which two of other focal participants dropped after realizing the course was harder than they expected. Given that the focal participant reported having so much trouble with the

reading and writing activities of this course, I felt the need to obtain the instructor's perspective about the academic literacy demands of his class and about his experience working with NNES international students, particularly with Mexicans.

(iv) Background information grid: Prior to the first interview, the participants completed and e-mailed me a grid with relevant factual personal background information (such as campus of origin, planned length of stay at WCU, course work in which they were enrolled, previous experience traveling or studying abroad, preferred contact information, academic average at MCMU, TOEFL scores and a self-assessment of their English proficiency. (See Appendix E.) This proved to be a very effective method of collecting factual information about each participant, as it allowed me to go to the first interview with some previous knowledge about each individual, and the completed grid became a point of departure for the first interview.

(v) Written documents: Three main types of written documents were collected: course outlines, course reading materials, assignment guidelines and prompts, and copies of the writing assignments students handed in. Whenever possible, students shared with me their original copies, which included their TA or instructor feedback. Students brought these documents with them to the interviews, and they served as the basis for text-based interviews aiming to tap into the participants' tacit knowledge about their text production.

(vi) Writing logs: The students completed a writing log in which they detailed the characteristics of each assignment as well as the procedures to develop it, any challenges they faced, any relevant comments they wanted to share with me, and their reactions to the feedback obtained. All focal participants completed the log, and they sent me updated versions of it as the semesters advanced (The writing log template is included in Appendix F.)

(vii) **Questionnaires:** upon their return to MCMU, students were sent two questionnaires. Questionnaire A (2 pages long) included a section where students were asked to provide information about their final course grades at WCU and their current course work at MCMU. A second section included a set of open-ended questions that invited them to reflect on their re-entry experiences both in school and in other contexts (e.g., with their family and loved ones), and about their perceived impact of the recent exchange at WCU. Questionnaire B (3 pages long) invited them to reflect retrospectively on their academic literacy practices while at WCU, and on the same practices upon their return to Mexico. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections, and included a mix of multiple-choice items followed by open-ended questions. Students were invited to share any additional comments they wished to make. All focal participants returned the completed questionnaires A and B. (Both questionnaires can be found in Appendix G.)

(viii) **Electronic mail (e-mail) and hotmail messenger (msn) communications:** In addition to the data described above, I maintained regular contact with the students mostly by means of e-mail and msn communications. These were more spontaneous exchanges of information, which in most cases complemented the information provided via the other sources. All e-mail and msn communications were saved and organized in such a way that they could be easily retrieved for analysis, which the students were aware of.

(ix) **Researcher field-notes:** interview notes were taken by me during the interviews, and these raw notes were turned into narrative form whenever possible immediately after the interviews took place. These write ups included a record of topics covered during the interviews (since, in addition to the questions designed for each interview, other spontaneous questions emerged as the interviews evolved), as well as an initial identification of patterns and themes that resulted from a first approach at interpreting the data. Different font types and colors, and the Microsoft Word highlighting and comments functions were employed to easily classify the information recorded in the notes.

(x)   **Miscellaneous sources**: In addition, information was gathered by consulting other relevant sources: the MCMU-WCU Joint Academic Program website (which provided details about the certificates and packages offered), the WCU website for International students (which included details about activities and resources available for international students), conversations with the MCMU-WCU Joint Academic Program Director, conversations with key people in charge of exchange programs in campus Monterrey and campus Guadalajara, course websites, and the WCU and the MCMU respective internationalization mandates.

3.4   Research project timeline

As mentioned before, this study had four main phases. Table 3.3 below details the steps followed in data collection and analysis of data.

Table 3.3 Research Project Timeline

Phases	Dates	Description of activities
Phase 1	April 05	Approval from Ethics board to conduct research project
	May 05 (week 1)	Recruitment of participants in the summer (S05) term
	June - July 05	Data collection (in Canada): - individual interviews with 12 participants (2 each) - e-mail exchanges with participants - collection of samples of written work; feedback - participants' assignment writing logs - course outlines - participants' grades - researcher field notes
	August 05	Transcription of interviews Initial analysis in preparation for phase 2: - identification of emergent categories, themes and patterns, initial coding, triangulation
Phase 2	September 05 (weeks 1-2)	Recruitment of participants in the fall (F05) term
	September – December 05	Data collection (in Canada): - individual interviews with 15 participants, 5 of whom also participated in Phase 1

Phases	Dates	Description of activities
		- interviews with instructors - personal communications with MCMU-WCU exchange program Director - e-mail exchanges with Mexican participants - collection of samples of written work - participants' assignment logs - course outlines - participants' grades - researcher field notes Data transcription and analysis (recurrent, ongoing) - coding, memoing, visual displays, identification of main/salient themes and patterns while triangulating data
Phase 3	**January –** **April 06**	Data collection (in Mexico) - e-mail exchanges with participants back in Mexico - post-exchange reflective questionnaires A & B - interviews with participants in Mexico (focus groups & individual) - visit to three MCMU Campuses (Monterrey, Guadalajara, Federal District) Data transcription and analysis (recurrent, ongoing) - coding, memoing, visual displays, identification of main/salient themes and patterns while triangulating data - theory development
Phase 4	**May 06 – 07**	Dissertation writing

Following a tradition in qualitative research, data collection and analysis were done recursively, with identification of preliminary categories, themes and patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Contact summary sheets were completed for each participant, and coding, memoing, and visual displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were performed from the first stages of data collection. The findings of individual data types were triangulated with other available data sources, and within-case analysis (Merriam, 1998) as well as cross-case analysis were performed (Yin, 2003) as the themes were synthesized and tested. These different forms of data triangulation proved very valuable, leading to both proving or disproving initial interpretations and theories generated. For instance, one focal participant's interview data suggested that her team performance for an oral presentation had been very highly appraised by the instructor and classmates, and that the feedback they received from the mentor team and the instructor was all positive and included very few suggestions for improvement. However, since I also interviewed another participant who was a member of the same team, I had access to another insider's viewpoint of this specific event. The data I gathered from this participant included detailed descriptions of the kinds of feedback received by classmates as well as the instructor, and her own view

of the group performance was more critical and therefore constituted richer data quality. This resulted in adjustments of my interpretations of the participants' performances and of the significance of the feedback they obtained.

At all times, the theoretical perspectives employed in this study guided data collection and analysis. The final interpretation of findings resulted in pedagogical and research implications, as well as in an extension of the applications of the theories that framed this study. Figure 3.2 includes a visual representation of sample data triangulations conducted in this study.

Figure 3.2 Data Triangulation Examples

focal participant A
interview data

copy of assignment   instructor A feedback

focal participant B
interview data

focal participant A interview data   copy of assignment

focal participant D
interview data

assignment prompt   instructor C interview data
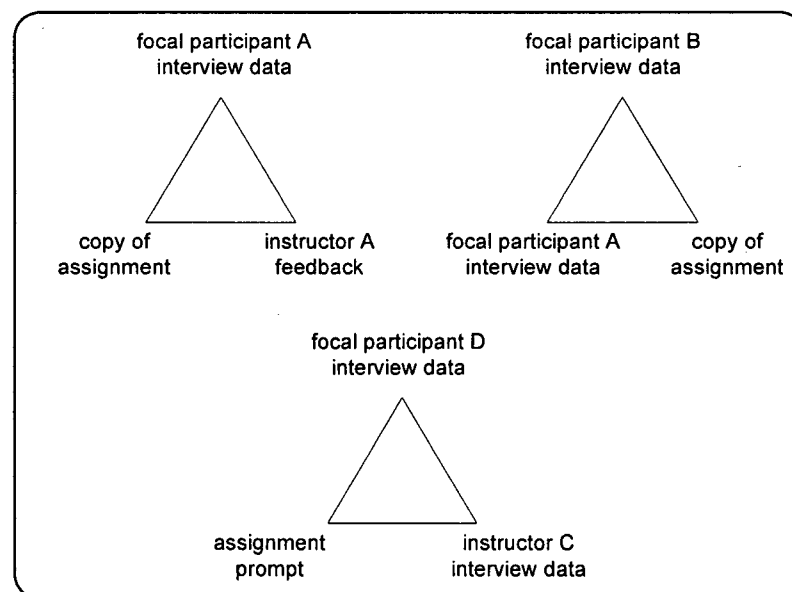
As mentioned above, all data gathered in this study were triangulated. Data triangulation pursues the aim of checking whether "the phenomenon or case remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as persons interact differently" (Stake, 1995, p. 112), thus adding credibility and robustness to the study. Member-checking was performed as a triangulation strategy, where initial research findings were shared with the corresponding participants and where their feedback was considered to further proceed with either more data collection or analysis (depending on the stage of the project at which the data and findings were shared).

3.5 Data analysis

In order to design the study and for the subsequent stages of data collection, analysis and thesis writing, I consulted several research methods publications (e.g, Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a, b; Duff, in press a; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 1997, 2000, 2001; Stake, 1998). These works significantly shaped and aided the research process. I found particularly useful Yin's (2003) study protocol for the first stages of the project, and later on I relied quite heavily on the guidelines found in Bodgan and Biklen (2003) and in Miles and Huberman (1994), which are very helpful in illustrating the researcher how to initially organize data around patterns and categories (both participant self-identified as well as interpretive) which serve as the basis to later on derive theoretical understandings.

The major common feature across qualitative strategies of inquiry is the inductive, recursive, iterative nature of data collection and analysis, which tends to blur the temporal boundaries between these two. However, there is a general agreement to refer to two moments of data analysis: *informal* (preliminary or initial) data analysis, which starts at the outset of the study, and a more *formal*, later moment, after data gathering has finished, when data analysis turns even more intensive and keeps the researcher busy for most of the time. Both "moments" are very important, since early data analysis has a direct impact in the amount and kinds of data to be collected, and this eventually also determines the final focus of the investigation. Formal data analysis becomes a critical stage in the interpretation of information; it is the stage at which (most of) the triangulation of data takes place, and it demands deep thinking to allow for theorization.

While in the process of collecting and analyzing the data, I also continued to read relevant published works. As I kept on reading, I made journal entries on how specific published studies or parts of studies aided my analysis, and I kept detailed records of how to link some key pieces to my own study in order to later include them in the thesis. I found this memoing method quite effective, especially since after reading so much, it is usually hard to keep track of who said what, or where it appears in the literature. I feel this ongoing memoing activity was an integral part of the research process, and it influenced my data collection and analysis. Figure 3.3 visually displays the different

stages of data collection and analysis carried out in this study; the analysis steps were repeated several times until the final report version presented here was achieved.

Figure 3.3 Stages of Data Collection and Analysis
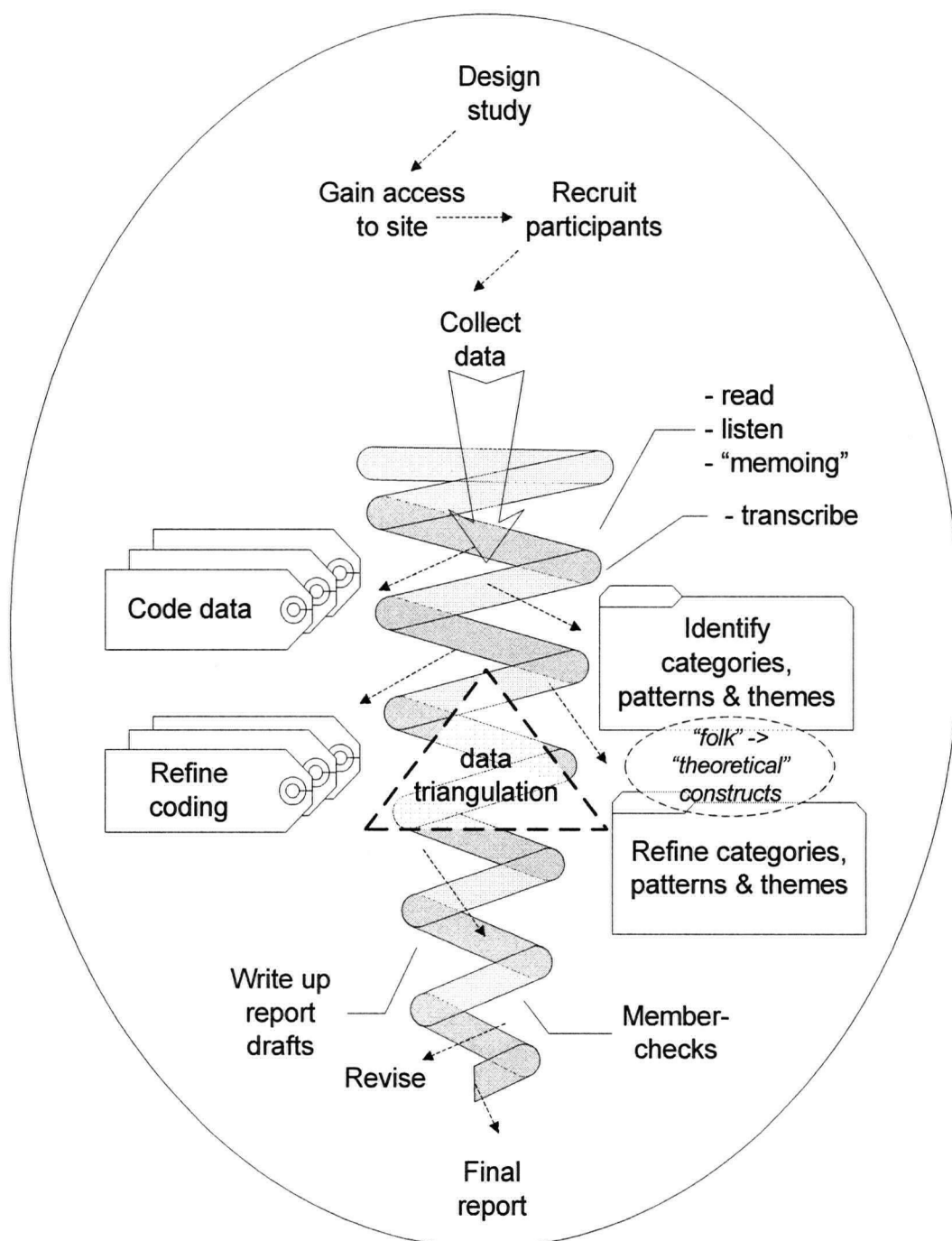
3.6 Trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations

Published guidelines about qualitative research methods underscore the importance of establishing the trustworthiness of inquiry in order to assess its quality (e.g., Creswell, 1998, 2003; Duff, in press a; Firestone, 1993; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Traditionally, the concepts of validity, reliability and generalizability have been employed to assess the credibility of all kinds of research. However, since these concepts were originally developed to assess research that follows positivist criteria, they assume that researchers are in search of an objective observable truth (in contrast with the interpretivist criteria, which assume no objective truths exist). Consequently, over the past years there has been a re-examination of the applicability of these notions in qualitative case study research (Duff, in press a; Gall et al., 2003), and alternative concepts based on different assumptions that better match the characteristics and objectives of qualitative interpretivist studies have been proposed: credibility, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998).

The credibility of a study lies in the congruency of the findings with "reality." Merriam (1998) reminds us that reality in qualitative research is understood not as an objective, fixed phenomenon; rather, it is conceptualized as multidimensional, fluid and therefore constantly changing. Researchers thus are "interpreters" of realities more so than objective observers of it. Qualitative research should therefore aim at capturing the "multiple realities" (i.e., the multiple perspectives) of the phenomenon under study. Following Gall et al. (2003) and Merriam (1998), several strategies and criteria were implemented and followed in this study in order to enhance its credibility: (1) triangulation of multiple data sources, within and across participants; (2) member-checks: sharing initial analyses and findings with the participants, and addressing their feedback in subsequent report drafts; (3) performing extensive data collection during a one-year period (in addition to being familiar with the research context through a previous related study in which I worked as a research assistant); (4) sharing analyses and drafts with colleagues; (5) self-reflection of my research positioning and subjectivities.

Dependability and consistency refers to "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam, 1998, p. 206). I have attempted to address these aspects by including detailed explanations of the design of this study, as well as the different steps

followed throughout the entire research process. In terms of generalizability (or transferability), I have indicated that extending the findings of this study to other populations or to the larger population from which the sample was drawn is not my aim; instead, I attempt to produce particularistic, detailed accounts that yield in-depth understandings of the cases under investigation. However, I do aim to make "analytic generalizations" (Duff, 2006b; Yin, 1989) about language socialization theory and its usefulness to explore academic literacy socialization processes. These aims are congruent with the objectives of research following a language socialization perspective. Efforts were made to include a representative sample of the larger population of "typical" MCMU exchange students at WCU. To achieve this, I followed several criteria when choosing the focal participants, who were selected from a larger pool. First, the participants chosen were considered "good participants" in light of their openness to share their experiences and views, and their commitment to the project. Second, a balance between the number of participants who had stayed for one and two academic semesters was sought. And third, representation of the variety of courses and disciplinary backgrounds of the larger population was also sought. By including a sample of focal participants as well as a larger sample of secondary participants who came from the same research context, I have tried to enhance the potential generalizability and credibility of this study.

This study closely followed UBC's ethical research guidelines to ensure sound research practices were carried out. Hence, during recruitment procedures I clearly stated to prospective subjects that their voluntary participation was sought, and that they were entitled to withdraw from the study without suffering any penalty should they change their mind any time throughout the research process. Also, anonymity was ensured to participants by means of the use of pseudonyms for all individuals involved, and course nomenclatures were also modified for the same reason. Any information participants decided to keep confidential has not been included in this final report, earlier drafts of which I shared with the student participants in its different analysis and composing stages. All participants were provided with a detailed description of the research purposes and procedures prior to their agreement to participate, and they were asked to sign a form

consenting to their voluntary participation as described above. Consent forms are included in Appendix H.

3.7   Researcher-participants relationship

Although I had not met the participants prior to the commencement of this study, my familiarity with the research context and the MCMU-WCU Academic Program Director facilitated my entry to the site. I was presented to the students by Ms. Gutierrez, who introduced me as an "oldtimer" at WCU and as somebody whom they could consult and trust. I introduced myself to the participants as an Argentine-Canadian doing research on the experiences of international students studying abroad, as was also once my case.

In approaching the participants, my initial aim was to establish a successful relationship based on mutual trust and respect. I tried to achieve this by openly stating my research objectives as well as their expected involvement and rights. As a form of reciprocity for their participation, I strove to help the participants in ways that would not compromise the data collection (e.g., sharing with them information about life in Vancouver, suggesting inexpensive places to go shopping for groceries). As I discuss in the last chapter, the participants mentioned that they had appreciated the opportunities for reflection and the development of meta-cognitive knowledge through their involvement in this study.

In light of our shared Latin American background, there were many commonalities between the participants and myself which brought us closer. At the same time, there was a generational gap between us: they were undergraduate, single students in their early twenties, whereas I was a married graduate student ten years their senior, now established in Vancouver with my young family. This distance played both in my favor as well as to my disadvantage at times: on the one hand, the students' seemed to feel comfortable around someone who had been around for a while and who could serve to them as an informal advisor (for academic as well as non-academic topics). In case of emergencies, they all knew they could count on me as a resource (and in fact, on two occasions my family was able to support two participants who were in need of help). On the other hand, the generational distance as well as some of the differences in our cultural backgrounds sometimes interfered with my understanding of the participants' ways of speaking and

their worldviews. In order to minimize the impact of this disadvantage, I consciously strove to ensure that whenever I encountered unfamiliar concepts I double-checked what the participants meant.

3.8 Summary

In sum, this investigation was designed as a qualitative multiple-case study, following the procedures described in several qualitative research methods (Duff, in press a; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995, etc). To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, different kinds of data were collected and triangulated during recurrent data analyses. The main aim of the study was to explore the individual participants' L2 academic literacy socialization processes and therefore there I do not attempt to generalize the findings of this study to other populations (or to the larger population from which the sample was drawn). Still, this investigation aims to extend the language socialization framework introduced in Chapter 2 by employing it for the study of academic literacy processes in novel ways, thus contributing with "analytic" (or theoretical) generalizations.

The research context and the participants were purposely sampled based not only on my access to them but also, and most importantly, based on the need to examine the experiences of the increasing population of Mexican students in a largely international Canadian campus that shares similarities with other large campuses in this country. In the next chapter, I include a detailed description of the six focal participants and further account for my rationale behind my selection of participants.

Chapter 4
FOCAL PARTICIPANTS' PROFILES

4.0 Introduction

This chapter includes a condensed biography of each of the six focal participants. Detailed information about the students' personalities, their life in Mexico, their English language proficiency, their previous study and/or experiences living abroad and their expectations for the current exchange is necessary in order to have a better understanding of their motivation for studying abroad, their goals and expectations, and their investments in interacting socially and academically within their new contexts of immersion. While this kind of information is missing in many published study reports concerned with L2 issues, in-depth knowledge about such details helps bridge the distance between the reader and the experiences of the participants (Duff, in press a). In the area of study abroad research, there has also been a call for a more clear identification of the characteristics of the sojourn context and of the sojourners under study. Coleman (in press) notes that it is currently very challenging to synthesize findings of study abroad investigations because many individual reports fail to clearly state the degree of comparability and generalizability of their findings. To help address this limitation, he proposed a framework for study abroad research which includes a series of parameters (some of which are discrete categories while others are continua) that he believes should be explicitly stated in every study abroad investigation. This chapter thus attempts to address both calls, from second language acquisition (SLA) and from study abroad research.

All participants were female, in their early twenties at the time of the study, and they were all single. Whereas the large pool of participants from which these six primary students were selected also includes male students, the gendered sampling strategy results from my closer contact with female (rather than male) participants. Although I established good rapport with students from either gender, females seemed more comfortable sharing their feelings (i.e., the emotional aspect of the exchange experience) with me in addition to facts about their academic experiences; in contrast, males tended to be more reserved. As a result, the data I collected from most female participants is

richer because it includes more detailed information about various dimensions (i.e., cognitive, psychological, affective, relational) of their experiences. Still, I am aware that this gendered sampling strategy inevitably impacts the kinds of inferences than can be drawn from this investigation, as also does my perspective as a female researcher.

Before each individual short biography, the participants are described as part of a group with whom they share some commonalities about their campus of origin, their length of stay in Canada, and their course choices at WCU. The first group includes Liliana, Natalia and Lorena, all of whom came from the MCMU – Monterrey campus and spent both the summer as well as the fall term in WCU. The second group includes Nelda and Isabel, who came from the MCMU – Guadalajara campus, and Raquel, from the MCMU – Mexico City campus. These last three participants only spent the fall term at WCU. Table 4.1 summarizes some of the main traits and background information about each of the six focal participants.

4.1   Liliana, Natalia and Lorena

Liliana, Natalia and Lorena knew each other prior to traveling to Canada. Liliana and Natalia were already very close friends; they were both senior students in the final stages of the same program of study, they knew each other's families back home, and they had already started making plans for the future which involved working jointly on a new entrepreneurial project. Lorena, on the other hand, was a more junior student (like Nelda, Isabel, and Raquel, see section below). Although she came from the same campus as Liliana and Natalia, mainly because she was pursuing a different degree back at home, she was not closely acquainted with them until they met during their exchange in Canada. During the summer term, Liliana and Natalia were best friends, yet they also forged new relationships with Lorena and some of her other Mexican friends, who came from different MCMU campuses, but all of whom were enrolled in the same certificate of specialty at WCU. Liliana, Natalia and Lorena took the same courses during the Summer semester, and they also took most of the same classes during the fall semester (see Chapters 3 and 5 for more details). For one of the courses in which they were required to work in teams for an optional assignment, the three of them worked together.

Table 4.1 Focal Participants' Profiles

	Liliana	Natalia	Lorena	Nelda	Isabel	Raquel
MCMU Campus	Monterrey	Monterrey	Monterrey	Guadalajara	Guadalajara	Mexico City
City of origin	Monterrey	Mexico City	Saltillo	Guadalajara	Zacatecas	Mexico City
Semester at MCMU	7th – 8th	7th – 8th	5th- 6th	6th	6th	7th
TOEFL	585	573	653	> 550	590	> 550
Years of English study	11	12	>13	9	>13	>13
MCMU average	82/100	89/100	97/100	93/100	93/100	83/100
WCU average[1]	72.4 (87/100)	75.5/100 (89/100)	79/100 (92/100)	72/100 (87/100)	73/100 (87/100)	70/100 (85/100)
Summer accommodation	Cherry Tree House	Cherry Tree House	Cherry Tree House	N/A	N/A	N/A
Fall accommodation	Concrete Towers (shared dorm)	Concrete Towers (shared dorm)	Brick Residence (individual room)	Cherry Tree House (shared dorm)	Cherry Tree House (shared dorm)	Rental apartment outside campus (shared unit)
Previous study abroad experience	None	None	1 year in Belgium during senior high school	1 semester in Canada, during senior high school	None	2 months in Cincinnati, during senior high school
Exchange expectations	- obtain certificate - improve English	- obtain certificate - improve English	- obtain certificate - improve English	- improve English - learn about another culture	- improve English - learn about other cultures	- learn about other cultures
Future plans	- work in Toronto or start a new company - pursue graduate work in the future	- start new company or work on a company - pursue graduate work in the future	- participate in another exchange - pursue graduate work in the future	- participate in another exchange - do master's degree at a Miami university	- work in a company	- travel as a tourist around Europe - find a job in Mexico

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[1] There are differences between the WCU and MCMU grading systems. Even though both use a 100-point scale, the WCU pass grade is 50 whereas the MCMU pass grade is 70. Hence, with a grade of 60/100, for instance, a student would have passed a course at WCU but if that grade were transferred to their MCMU academic transcript, the course would be failed. To avoid this conflict, a formula $[Y = (3X + 130)/4]$ was used to convert the scores. The average values between parentheses reflect that conversion.

LILIANA

Liliana came from Monterrey, where she lived in a detached home in a residential neighborhood with her mother and two siblings. Her father lived in another home nearby, and Liliana maintained close contact with all family members. While visiting Liliana in Monterrey, I could sense she was a person who enjoyed family life; she had a rather close relationship with her mother, and shared a room with her younger sister, with whom she also got along. Life in Monterrey for Liliana was synonymous with a comfortable living standard. Although the MCMU campus was about a 25 minute ride from home (depending on traffic), Liliana didn't mind the commute as she drove her father's car through the busy streets of Monterrey. Of all campuses I visited in Mexico, Monterrey campus was not only the biggest, but also among the oldest and largest. The university's president's office as well as all the major central administrative offices are located on this campus, which hosts one of the largest MCMU campus libraries, cafeterias, and sports facilities.

During the exchange, Liliana was dating her boyfriend, who visited her in Canada half way through the fall semester. While reinvigorating for Liliana, this visit together with her mother's visit a few weeks after was quite destabilizing for her, since she was torn between taking some time off from school in order to enjoy her special Mexican company and travel around with them to get to know new places, or work on her assignments and study for one of her midterms, which coincided with one of the visits.

In the MCMU-Monterrey campus, Liliana was a good student enrolled in a Bachelor of International Commerce program. She once told me that her average (82/100) had dropped a few years earlier because she had to work long hours (from 4 pm to 12 am) for 1.5 years of her undergraduate program, and she hoped that during her stay at WCU she would be able to increase her average back to 85 or so. Liliana's command of English was good enough for her to enjoy oral conversations. She felt confident, having taken lessons in English for over 11 years, and a course on written and oral communication prior to the exchange. With a TOEFL score of 585, Liliana was above the score of 550 required to participate in the exchange, and although TOEFL scores are not a direct predictor of language performance in disciplinary content area courses, compared with other Mexican students whose scores were closer to 600, Liliana could have been

expected to experience certain difficulties. However, as I discuss later on, her main challenges were related to becoming adjusted to a new academic culture, and language proficiency thus seemed to play a lesser role in her case.

For Liliana, being an exchange student was like a dream come true. She had hoped to be able to participate in a study abroad experience since she started her university degree, but it was only now, close to her graduation, that the opportunity materialized. Initially she had planned to go to Spain, but she changed her mind and decided that her experience in a North American English-speaking university would not only keep her closer to home (at least on the same continent), but also it would serve as a chance for her to practice and improve her English proficiency. Moreover, since she chose to do a certificate of specialty at WCU, she believed that this additional credential would in the future bring her many rewards. Liliana thus went to WCU with high expectations; she had invested much energy and resources in trying to make this experience possible, and she was hoping to make the most out of it by obtaining two main benefits: the certificate (her priority) and improved English language proficiency, which she identified as a second yet still very important goal of the exchange.

During the summer term she took two courses (the same ones as Natalia and Lorena), and she was happy with her performance and with the overall exchange experience. It was the fall semester that confronted her with challenges she was not quite ready to face, as she was unprepared to deal with what she described as a massive amount of reading and weekly essay writing for one of her courses (PHIL 4A), mainly. The following chapters include a detailed analysis of these and other associated challenges, as well as of the different strategic behaviors developed by Liliana to not only pass her course work, but also benefit from the exchange experience in another dimension. One semester after her return from WCU to Mexico, Liliana reflected back on her sojourn and said to me:

> The exchange also helped me value my family more, and helped me become aware of what I would lose if I had continued with the same rhythm I used to follow before I left. So, the exchange made me realize what I had at home, we [all family members] also became aware of this and are now more united. And you also learn to orient yourself better - if you get lost, you ask! I think that this was even more important than the academic part of the exchange. I got in there with some

expectations, and left with more. (…) Because originally I
thought that the benefits would be limited to the English
language and the certificate, and that was it. But apart from
improving my English and obtaining my Certificate in
Logistics, I have all these benefits, which I think are even
more important.

(Liliana, Focus group interview, Monterrey: April 5/06)

As will be revealed in Chapter 6, the participants' access to local students as well as
the social relationships they established in Canada played a key role in the participants'
academic discourse socialization. Therefore, it is important to examine details related to
the students' accommodation. In Liliana's case, during the summer term she lived in
Cherry Tree House, a large campus building which is actually the residential complex for
Japanese students of the "Reiko-WCU Academic Exchange Program." This residence is
used during the summer time mainly by students from other universities, whereas during
the rest of the academic year it houses a mix of Reiko university students and other
visiting students at WCU. Liliana shared a four-unit dorm with her friend Natalia and
with other two Mexican exchange students. Sharing a room with fellow Mexicans in
some ways brought her closer to home, yet Liliana had looked forward to having a "truly
Canadian" study abroad experience in the fall, when she expected to be placed in a
residential complex known as "The Concrete Towers" which had a high concentration of
local WCU students.

Closer to the end of the exchange, the participants had mixed feelings about
returning home. On the one hand, they realized that their "adventure" was close to the
end, and many said they would miss Vancouver, their new friends, and their life as dorm-
residents at WCU. On the other hand, they also looked forward to being reunited with
their loved ones, to eating their favorite Mexican foods, and to going back to their
familiar academic culture. In Liliana's case, I noticed that her anxiousness to return to
Mexico was on a steady increase from the beginning of November, and it peaked by
December, when she told me "I feel like I'm in jail now, I have my calendar pinned to the
wall, and I cross out the days as they go by!" (Liliana, I#7: December 12/05)

NATALIA

Natalia was originally from Mexico City, but searching for a less hectic living place she headed for Monterrey, where her older married sister lived. Natalia decided to participate in the exchange program at WCU because of the opportunity to do the certificate and also in light of the good reputation of this university. She had other two exchange destinations in mind: Germany and England. But after studying German for two terms she realized that an academic exchange in that country would be too much for her to handle because of the language, so she thought it made more sense to study in an English-speaking country given that she had studied English for twelve years. The MCMU-WCU exchange was her first experience studying abroad.

Initially, Natalia was doubtful about her capabilities to do the certificate, since it was specifically designed for engineers and she was a Bachelor of International Commerce student. But after having a conversation about this with her advisor and with other students in Monterrey, she was highly motivated to do it and also more self-confident about her academic preparation to deal with the disciplinary demands of the exchange program. In the end, Natalia was able to successfully complete the certificate. However, she dropped one of her fall courses shortly after the beginning of that semester, when her concerns about the numerous writing assignments for that on-line course overwhelmed her (see Chapters 5 and 6 for more detailed analyses).

At the MCMU-Monterrey campus, Natalia was a very good student. Her average was 89/100, and she hoped to maintain it during the exchange. Like Liliana and most other Mexican MCMU students, Natalia spent over a decade taking English lessons. Her TOEFL score was 573, and she intended to improve her language proficiency as a result of the exchange. She was eagerly looking forward to making Canadian friends, but she was aware that this would be quite hard during the summer term because of the large percentage of Mexican students in both summer courses she took as well as in the Cherry Tree House residence. She therefore had high expectations in terms of the new social relationships with non-Mexican students she was hoping to establish. However, as the following dissertation chapters show, Natalia's expectations in this regard were unfulfilled.

After the summer term, Natalia first returned to Mexico for a couple of weeks. She then joined her sister, who was temporarily working in England, and who invited Natalia to spend a month with her. She also toured around other European countries (France, Spain, Italy and Scotland) before heading back to Mexico City to spend another two more weeks with her parents. On the first week of September, Natalia was back in Vancouver, Canada, looking forward to her fall semester, and feeling slightly more at home at WCU this second time. In her first fall interview she commented:

> We already know where to find things, which buses to take, where to get our bus pass. We even managed to buy second hand books this time! (…) and in this way we saved lots of money, because the books are really expensive here. We feel much more relaxed this time because we already met people in the summer who have come back for the full year. So you know what you're up to, you know you have to read a lot!
>
> (Natalia, I#3: September 12/05)

And it was precisely this last activity, reading a lot, which seemed to overwhelm Natalia. Reflecting back on her first few summer weeks at WCU, she told me that even though all Mexicans had been advised by the program director (Mrs. Gutierrez) and by the exchange program assistant to read the course materials from the first day of classes, she now realized that "You don't really know it until you live it!" (Natalia, I#3: September 12, 05). Natalia now warned the new incoming Mexican exchange students about the need to read throughout the entire semester, but she guessed that, as in her case when she first got to WCU, others would most likely disregard the advice to keep up with their readings.

LILIANA and NATALIA: Like two peas in a pod

During their stay in Canada, Natalia and Liliana spent most of their time together: they kept track of each other's whereabouts, they shopped and spent their leisure time together, and they took almost all the same courses and also completed most course assignments with their mutual support. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, this friendship would become very relevant to the participants' academic discourse processes and outcomes.

While they were good friends prior to this exchange experience, their shared time in Canada certainly strengthened their bonds and brought them even closer to each other. When I visited them four months after their return to Mexico, I could see that they had each grown not only individually into more independent beings, but they also seemed to have been able to continue to sustain and further develop their friendship. They are currently working jointly on their brand new business: an on-line based company that aims to export a selection of fine Mexican products to different world destinations.

LORENA

When she arrived in WCU in the summer of 2005, Lorena was a third year (5th semester) student in the Bachelor of Industrial and System Engineering Program in the MCMU-Monterrey campus. She was enrolled in the "international modality" (or track), which implied that instead of six courses she was expected to take seven courses per semester at her home campus, and also, some of her classes there were taught in English. Lorena thus told me she was very comfortable in this language, which she had studied at a bilingual school and then in senior high school for a total of over 13 years, plus she was used to practicing English in some of her Mexican university classes. With a TOEFL score of 653 and an average of 97/100, Lorena had been awarded a partial tuition scholarship in recognition for her academic merit, and she had high expectations about her academic performance at WCU. In her first interview she mentioned that she expected to obtain marks over 90: "I don't like just to pass, I like to work as hard as I can" (Lorena, I#1: June 8/05). Still, like most other study participants, she was aware that going to a new university most likely would bring new challenges. So while she hoped to keep up her high academic record, she was also preparing herself to make some concessions which she believed were worth making for the sake of having the experience of living abroad:

> I would like to maintain this average. I don't know if this is possible, but I feel that it is worth sacrificing the average a little bit for the sake of having the living abroad experience. And academically, I'm just hoping it is as demanding as in Mexico. Because we're used to a certain work rhythm, we know we have to get to work, which requires self study, so for my study abroad experience to be complete I

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hope to be challenged in similar ways as I am challenged at
MCMU.
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(Lorena, I#1: June 8/05)
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Close to the end of her sojourn, Lorena reflected on her performance at WCU and
on the overall assessment of her exchange. To my query about what she thought of her
experience in Canada, she answered:

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It was very constructive. My average will go down, but I
think it's worth it. I could have stayed there [in Monterrey]
and could have maintained my high average, but I would have
missed this living experience! And I am convinced that this
taught me a new way to work - it involves more analysis and
more classroom interaction.
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(Lorena, I#6: December 6/05)
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In Monterrey, she lived in the student residences which are usually used by
Mexican non-local students, where she shared a room with a long-time roommate and
friend. Next door, in the male area of the residences, lived her younger brother. Lorena's
parents resided in Saltillo, a smaller city located a few hours' drive from Monterrey.
Therefore, she was used to living on campus during the week, and traveling back to her
home town during the weekend, where she met her family and other loved ones.

It was in great part thanks to her parents'encouragement that Lorena embarked on
her study abroad experience choosing WCU as her destination. Many years ago, her
mother had visited Vancouver, and she still cherished wonderful memories about the city
and about WCU, which she held as a very prestigious academic institution that would
benefit her daughter's education. [20] Furthermore, being enrolled in the international track
also implied that during her degree Lorena was required to participate in a year-long
academic exchange to take place in a foreign university. Therefore, studying abroad was
in Lorena's mind for a very long time, and her family had been preparing for this--
mentally as well as financially--from the moment she started her program at MCMU.

Lorena's previous experience living abroad had taken place during senior high
school, when she spent a year living with her family in Belgium. Yet Lorena did not seem
to think her prior exchange experience had much of an impact on how she prepared for

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[20] Lorena's parents were university teachers in Mexico, and therefore –according to Lorena – they made a
high investment in their children's education.

her current sojourn, since she considered that because she had lived with her own family in Belgium, this time it would be radically different. And in many ways I believe this was true, as I discuss in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

During the 2005 summer term, Lorena lived at Cherry Tree House, where she shared a suite with three other Mexicans. Like Natalia and Liliana, Lorena was also looking forward to the opportunity to live with non-Mexicans during the fall term. She had applied for housing at two residences, and she was finally placed in an individual room (with shared bathroom) at the Brick Residence. While originally Lorena thought that an individual room would give her more privacy, by the end of the exchange she wondered if perhaps she would have had an even greater time had she enjoyed the company of a roommate. Also, because the Brick Residence was located at one end of the campus (very close to Cherry Tree House), Lorena felt slightly isolated compared with those living in more centrally located residences. For instance, those living in the Concrete Towers were close to the WCU Student Building, which housed different cafeterias and fast food restaurants in addition to small shops, a computer access station, a postal office, a cinema, and a few other entertainment options. The Concrete Towers were not too far from a WCU village, a non-university owned series of stores which also included some restaurants and cafes used by the university community on a daily basis. In addition, while the Brick Residence had the advantage of being located in a quieter campus area, it was also relatively distant from the classrooms in which Lorena's classes were taught. She was happy, though, that at least one of her Mexican friends (a secondary participant in this study) lived in the same residence, and thus she usually had her meals with this friend. Meal times were indeed something that most Mexican participants felt alienated them from non-Mexicans, given that both their food types as well as the 3 pm timing of their main course in Mexico was very different from those of Canadian students and of students from other nationalities. In a later chapter I further develop this idea in relation to how it became a factor that affected Lorena as well as other students' in terms of the opportunities for socializing with non-Mexican students.

Lorena was already used to looking after herself while living on the MCMU-Monterrey campus. Therefore, she seemed quite an expert compared with other MCMU exchange students in Vancouver who for the first time found themselves far from their

nuclear families, learning to manage their budgets, doing their laundry, cooking their meals, and feeling responsible for every decision taken. Still, as Lorena would point out, in Mexico she was subconsciously aware that in case of an emergency her parents were just one hour away on the road, and that was reassuring to know. Also, because at the MCMU-Monterrey campus residence a nightly record was kept about her return times, she felt that there was always somebody who would eventually be watching after her. In Canada, on the other hand, student residence policies were different; alhtough there were strict rules to enforce security measures and there were residential advisors in charge of the students in the different residential clusters (e.g., a cluster was made up of about 15 rooms per floor in a six-floor "house"), students were not expected to report their incoming/outgoing times. In this sense, Lorena felt that, for the first time in her life, she was truly on her own.

As I write this dissertation, Lorena is packing her suitcases once again. This time she is headed for a one-semester study abroad experience in Australia. With her, she now takes a wealth of knowledge about what it means to be really far from home, and she now has a much better understanding about what she might have to negotiate in order to achieve success as a foreign student at an international host university and to make her overall experience of living abroad pleasant, rewarding, and exciting. Chapter 8 explores in more detail the impact of the WCU study abroad experience on Lorena's academic literacy practices upon her return to Mexico.

4.2 Nelda, Isabel and Raquel

Common aspects among the experiences of Nelda, Isabel, and Raquel are that they arrived in Vancouver in the fall of 2005, and that their exchange lasted one semester only. In addition, all three took at least one Political Sciences (POLI) course and at least one Commerce (COMM) course, and they all had originally enrolled in a Latin American Studies (LAST) class, but Isabel and Raquel dropped it while Nelda went ahead and completed that course.

NELDA

Nelda was a 6th semester student in a Bachelor of Communications program at MCMU-Guadalajara campus. She was the middle daughter of three, and the only one currently living with her parents. (Her oldest sister had an American husband and lived in San Diego, where Nelda's mother and part of her extended family were from, and her younger sister was studying in the U.S.) Enjoying the privilege of living in one of the oldest and most prestigious private neighborhoods in Guadalajara, Nelda was used to a rather luxurious living standard which was in marked contrast with the more modest accommodation and overall living style she had access to in Canada.

Nelda and Isabel, who were very close friends already in Guadalajara, chose to live in the same WCU campus residence, Cherry Tree House, albeit in different suites. They thus had different roommates, but they still spent most of their free time and a great part of their class time together, as they shared classes and friends. In Guadalajara they also attended most of the same classes together, and thus their daily routine at the MCMU-Guadalajara campus had many things in common. In fact, their decision to participate in the WCU exchange program was partly influenced by the fact that they both had study abroad plans. They both had hoped to be able to do a certificate relevant to their career interests, but unfortunately for them, WCU did not offer it at the time of their sojourn. Because they were unable to find another certificate that matched their interests within a one-semester time frame, completion of a certificate (as in Liliana's, Natalia's, and Lorena's cases) was not possible for them.

This was actually the second time for Nelda in Canada: when in senior high school, she had participated in a four-month exchange program at a Canadian high school in Calgary. However, she viewed that experience as too distant from her current life, and therefore minimized the impact it might have on her experience living in Vancouver. And like Raquel (see section below), Nelda's past experience living abroad had involved residing with a local host family. While she was glad to be back in Canada, her original plan was to participate in an exchange experience in Miami, given that schools in that area are well known for their leading programs on communication and film. However, because MCMU did not have any joint academic agreements with any schools in Miami at the time, she searched for other viable possibilities, among which WCU stood out.

In any case, Nelda knew that she wanted to take part in an exchange that involved studying and living in an English-medium context, as improving her English proficiency was one of her goals. I was unable to obtain data about her TOEFL score, but it must have been over 550, which--as mentioned before--is the minimum score to be accepted for the WCU exchange program. Having studied English for nine years, Nelda told me she was quite confident. However, the prospect of having to write essays in her L2 made her very uneasy at the beginning of the semester. "The last time I wrote an essay in English was when I was in Calgary – so that makes me nervous!" (Nelda, I#1: September 22/05). Adding to her nervousness was the fact that she was not used to writing very long assignments in Mexico. The Latin American Studies (LAST) essays in particular rose her stress level to the limit. Already quite frustrated at the beginning of the term, Nelda told me in despair:

> I thought this class [LAST 1A] would be the easiest, but it's the hardest one instead! The readings – and I don't understand when they speak. Even though I do my readings before every class, I don't know what they are talking about.

(Nelda, I#5: September 22/05)

As I later illustrate in this dissertation, Nelda felt so overwhelmed by her LAST 1A essay writing assignments that she managed to obtain permission from her instructors to write them in Spanish. Her experiences with other course assignments were also causing her stress, and by the third interview, Nelda was wondering "Why can't I do it here when in Mexico I always do so well?" (Nelda, I#3: October 13/05). She was indeed having great difficulty to make sense of what more experienced classmates and roommates tried to explain to her about the WCU system:

> I told my roommate about this class, and do you know what she said? 'Everything works out at the end!' And I hate that. I just want to know – I want to keep track of how I'm doing. (...) For them [WCU locals] the final exam is like the whole course!

(Nelda, I#3: October 13/05)

While Nelda had been made aware of the academic demands that would most likely challenge her, by the fifth week of her four-month stay abroad in Canada she was overwhelmed by some of her classes. She believed it was quite discouraging and unfair

that her grades were not as high as in Mexico and thus did not reflect the high level of effort and dedication she was putting into it.

When I visited Nelda in Mexico a semester after her return, she shared with me her plans to go to Argentina for a second exchange experience. She dreamed about going to Buenos Aires and mingling with local students she expected to befriend much more easily than her classmates in Canada, mainly because of the cultural and linguistic closeness of Latin American people. The most recent news I have from Nelda tells me that she is having a wonderful time in Buenos Aires, studying at a large private university, living on her own in a downtown apartment she rented for a few months, and this time feeling much more relaxed, particularly in terms of the academic demands she needs to fulfill.

ISABEL

Isabel was also a 6th semester student in a Bachelor of Communications program at MCMU-Guadalajara campus. Originally from Zacatecas, a five-hour drive from the city of Guadalajara, Isabel chose to study at the MCMU-Guadalajara campus because she was looking for a bigger campus than the one at her home town. Similar to Liliana's case, Isabel also initially wanted to study abroad in Spain. Even though she had studied English for most of her life, Spain appeared to her to be a smart option in terms of the university language demands. However, her parents preferred Isabel to choose a destination that was closer to Mexico, and in particular, in a country they considered safe enough to send their daughter. As Isabel said to me, "since they pay, they decide" (Isabel I#1: September 16/05). In the end, the choice of WCU was considered a wise option by Isabel, who realized that the opportunity to brush up on her English and to be in contact with people from diverse cultures were two strong reasons to be happy and thankful for the study abroad opportunity she had.

Isabel was a very observant person who was eager to meet people from different cultures. She confessed to me that before getting to really know her Korean roommates, she had wished to share a suite with Anglophone Canadians. In fact, during the first week of the exchange she reported feeling upset and disillusioned that there were not many Canadian students living close by in her residence. Yet after a very short period of

discontent, she discovered wonderful people in her new Italian, Chinese and Korean friends. She also enjoyed it very much when they interacted in their different languages, and indicated that before coming to Canada she had considered starting with French lessons, but that she was currently very motivated to learn an Asian language since her new friends had piqued her interest in the non-Western world. She then said: "This is so cool. It also helped me to open up my mind to discover parts of the world that for me did not exist until now." (Isabel I#1: September 16/05). In fact, this kind of self-discovery was one of the reasons that encouraged her to participate on an exchange. She was aware that "going abroad changes you" (Isabel I#1: September 16/05). And this was something she was ready for.

Isabel was also very reflexive about her performance at WCU, constantly comparing the WCU with the MCMU systems. And as the term progressed, like Nelda, she also felt very frustrated and discouraged by the grades she was getting. So while in her first interview she still sounded very positive and expectant about her academic performance, in the second interview her frustration and anxiety are revealed. This is evident in the following exchange between her and me:

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S = Sandra
I= Isabel
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S: It's been a while since our first interview. How are you
    doing?

I: Yes, it was almost the beginning of the term then, when I
    still had no idea about what this would be like! (…)

S: And how is it going so far?

I: It's been okay - just fine I should say. This week has been
    much more relaxed in comparison to the previous two weeks.
    Because between the midterms, and all the assignments we had
    to hand in (…) it was quite hard. I was busy all the time. It
    was too much - too many things, and everything was heavy type
    of work. And then, like the first week we had to hand in
    things, I had exams. And the second week they returned us
    some of the work, and I was like "oh no, but I'm doing really
    badly." It was like "oh no, what's happening!" (…) For me,
    in my mind, a 50 is like a Fail. But they [her roommates and
    Mexican friends] tell me "no, but a 50 is a good grade!" And
    they told me that I'm not doing so badly. And I'm having
    trouble to accept that I'm doing okay in spite of the 50 -
    that that's an acceptable grade.
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This excerpt, which reflects Isabel's opinions about the heavy work load of WCU and the emotional impact of her low grades, is representative of the entire corpus of her interview data, as she reiterated the same ideas in all her interviews. Isabel also mentioned to me that she was unhappy about the fact that she had worked really hard in Mexico in order to improve her average and qualify to study abroad, only to lower it as a result of her academic performance at WCU. In spite of these negative feelings, she was still very positive about the overall experience and managed to develop several academic survival strategies around her L2 literacy experiences, in some cases even taking advantage of her non-native English speaker exchange student status, which otherwise seemed to negatively affect her.

## RAQUEL

Raquel was in the 7th semester of a Bachelor of International Relations degree. Whereas out of the 22 participants of this study 10 came from the MCMU-Monterrey campus, the largest of all MCMU campuses, Raquel was the only student I met from the MCMU-Mexico City campus. There were also quite a few students in the fall 2005 cohort (and also participating in this study) that came from the Mexican Federal District campus, which is located relatively very close from Raquel's campus; but as she would let me know, she felt that students tended not to mingle with students from other campuses.

Raquel struck me as a very unique individual in many respects. In addition to feeling somehow isolated or perhaps ignored by her fellow Mexican exchange peers from other campuses, she seemed to have a personal cultural immersion agenda that interfered with any potential opportunities for getting together with fellow nationals. She was indeed quite straightforward about this when stating that "I specially came all the way here, so there's no point in spending time with other Mexicans" (Raquel, I#1 F05: September 14/05). Raquel was also among the few MCMU students who chose off-campus accommodation; she lived in an apartment a few minutes away from campus

which she had rented together with two Mexican friends she had met at her home MCMU campus.

As for her course work at WCU, Raquel was among the smaller group of students who took mostly Political Sciences (POLI) classes. She was also enrolled in a Commerce (COMM) class plus in a Latin American Studies (LAST) class from which she eventually withdrew. Even though she was unable to register for a certificate of specialty (this would have taken her a full year, a length of time she was not sure she would like to spend abroad when she just got to WCU), she was happy about the prospect of taking POLI classes because they sounded very relevant to her career interests.

Every time I met Raquel she had a new anecdote to share with me about either her English language use experiences (examples of instances in which due to lack of socio-linguistic background knowledge she felt awkward) or about her new international friends, who came from different parts of the world (e.g., Iraq, Nepal, Australia, Korea, Cyprus). Raquel's drive to make her exchange experience truly international was evidenced by her active involvement with the WCU larger student community. Through the International Relations Student Association of which she was a member, she had access to conferences, camping opportunities, and other events that she thought contributed to making her feel part of "this [WCU] world."

In addition to her multi-cultural immersion expectations, Raquel also hoped to excel in school. She feared though that her English proficiency might interfere with this, especially because after she received the feedback for her first POLI written assignment she confirmed that in spite of working hard and dedicating long hours to doing research and writing an assignment, her grades were much lower than she anticipated. By the third interview, Raquel was truly worried about her academic performance and, like most other MCMU study participants, felt that her large investment in the assigned work (including the readings) did not pay off, at least not in the ways desired. Also, due to a very troublesome experience with two team work classmates, Raquel reached a high level of despair. In fact, close to the end of the exchange she concluded that "I was very eager to work with other people in order to learn about their cultures, but I realized that this is quite hard." (Raquel, I#4 F05: November 22/05).

Back in Mexico, Raquel reported going through a hard re-adaptation process:

My return was quite complicated … Returning home was
pleasing. When I arrived I realized how much I had missed my
parents and my sister (…) I remembered how comfortable it is
to be at home and know that there's always food in the fridge
and that I don't have to look after every cent (…) Going back
to school was much more traumatic. It frustrated me that my
teachers were not as well prepared (…) Studying at WCU was
synonymous with an intellectual challenge, but when I
returned I felt very unmotivated.

(Raquel, e-mail communication: April 25/06)

## 4.3 Summary

The detailed background information about the participants included in this chapter
is considered relevant to the analysis of their L2 academic literacy socialization in
Canada, as will be illustrated in subsequent chapters. Readers are reminded that although
the participants, all single young women, do not represent a completely homogeneous
group (e.g., they come from different MCMU campuses and regions in Mexico, some
come from a higher social and/or economic status than others), they do seem to challenge
the typical image of "third world" students whose access to sojourn experiences may be
very limited. Instead, on the basis of the biosketches provided in this chapter, we can see
that, for the most part, these are privileged students with different kinds of sociocultural
and economic capital: many of them have had prior or subsequent opportunities to travel
internationally, they come from a highly reputed private university, and their families are
wealthy (or at least economically comfortable). As shown in subsequent chapters, these
are factors that shaped the participants' social and academic experiences abroad, and
which should therefore be considered in future studies that aim to provide a holistic
account of students' experiences. In the following chapter, the participants' L2 academic
socialization at WCU is examined vis-à-vis the different kinds of assignments and
literacy practices in which they were involved.

# Chapter 5

## ACADEMIC LITERACY PRACTICES AT WCU:
## MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

### 5.0  Introduction

This chapter addresses the first research question: What are the academic literacy practices valued and required in Canadian undergraduate content courses as perceived by the participating Mexican students? The data for this chapter come from interviews with the participants and two course instructors, course outlines and assignment prompts, the participants' assignments (including feedback samples from instructors), their reflective writing logs, and a retrospective reflective questionnaire completed by the participants upon their return to their home university.

The chapter begins with a descriptive summary of the courses in which the focal participants were registered (Section 5.1), followed by an overview of the academic literacy activities in which they engaged (Section 5.2). This information is included in Table 5.2, and it is placed at the beginning of the chapter (rather than at the end), as it is meant to provide readers with background knowledge that contextualizes the subsequent chapter sections. The chapter then includes the main themes that emerged from the participants' individual academic literacy socialization trajectories and which I have synthesized after performing within-case and across-case data analysis (Sections 5.3 to 5.5). For each theme, I present an interpretive account synthesizing the experiences across participants, including illustrations drawn from the data to support the claims made. The chapter closes with a summary and discussion of findings (Section 5.6).

### 5.1  Participants' courses

As already briefly outlined in Chapter 3, the students that participated in this study were registered in regular content area courses that WCU local students took as part of their respective programs of study. The participants doing a "certificate of specialty" took two required courses in the summer term, May-June 2005 and during the fall term they took three additional required courses plus two electives, totaling a workload of five courses from September to December, 2005 (with exception of Natalia, who dropped one

of the electives and thus only took four courses in the fall). Students *not* enrolled in a certificate of specialty (i.e., Nelda, Isabel, and Raquel) had relatively more freedom to choose which courses to attend, as they were not required to fulfill any specific course requirements.[21] Nevertheless, they were still expected to have a workload of five courses in the fall term, and most of them actually wanted to do so in order to obtain the maximum possible course work credit towards their home university degrees. Both Nelda and Isabel fulfilled this expectation, whereas Raquel initially registered in five but later dropped one of her courses (the Latin American Studies course, which Isabel also dropped in exchange for another Political Sciences course). Table 5.1 includes a detail of the courses taken by the focal participants during the summer and fall terms.

## Table 5.1 Focal Participants' Courses

| Academic Term | Courses | Lorena | Liliana | Natalia | Isabel | Nelda | Raquel |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Summer | COMM 3A 01 | X | X | X | N/A | | |
| | COMM 3E | X | X | X | | | |
| Fall | COMM 2A 01 | | | | X | | |
| | COMM 2A 02 | | | | X | | |
| | COMM 4A 02 | | | | X | X | X |
| | COMM 4B 02 | | | | X | X | |
| | COMM 4B 03 | X | | | | | |
| | COMM 4E | X | X | X | | | |
| | COMM 4G | X | X | X | | | |
| | COMM 4H | X | X | X | | | |
| | COMM 4L 01 | X | | | | | |
| | COMM 4M | | X | X | | | |
| | LAST 1A | | | | D | X | D |
| | PHIL 4A | | X | D | | | |
| | POLI 1A 01 | | | | X | | |
| | POLI 2A | | | | X | X | |
| | POLI 3B | | | | | | X |
| | POLI 3D | | | | | | X |
| | POLI 3E | | | | | | X |

(D = course dropped)

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[21] Students were perplexed and usually complained to me about how stressful and frustrating choosing courses had been for most of them. Even though these courses were selected from a menu of choices available to MCMU students (rather than from the larger pool of courses available to local WCU students), the participants regretted that not enough detailed information about each course was available to them in advance, and that often they would find out--only too late--that they had not made a wise or appropriate course selection.

As can be seen, Lorena, Liliana and Natalia (all completing the same certificate of specialty) took many courses together; Isabel and Nelda had three course overlaps, whereas Raquel only shared one course with two other focal participants.

The data corpus includes information about these 19 different course topics, formats (e.g., frequency, delivery styles), class size and other details.[22] This information was valuable in the analysis of the academic literacy socialization experiences of each participant. Details about the individual course characteristics are provided in Chapter 6 in terms of specific students' academic literacy socialization trajectories. I include here the following characteristics shared across some of the courses: (a) most courses usually had one instructor; some also had teaching assistants (positions normally filled by graduate students who performed marking and/or lab duties); (b) classes in the summer usually met twice per week for three hours each time during a six-week period, whereas fall classes usually met twice per week for 1.5 hours each time during a 13-week period (except for the online Philosophy course, for which students were expected to log onto the course web-site one weekly evening for a three-hour period in addition to checking the site constantly for updates and information posted by the instructor); (c) With respect to the number of students enrolled in each class, in Commerce courses there was an average of 38 students per class, in Political Sciences the average was 140 (the range was 64 to 267 students), in the Latin American Studies course there were 50 students, and in the Philosophy class there were 32; (d) Whereas Mexican students could expect to have around five co-national classmates in Commerce courses (in some cases more, up to 20), fewer Mexican students were enrolled in other subject area classes (between two and three).

## 5.2 Overview of assignments

The purpose of this section is to provide readers with an overview of the different assignment types and characteristics, to contextualize the students' experiences discussed in subsequent sections and chapters. I have included below a synthesis of the assignment

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[22] The data corpus also includes detailed information about all the courses in which the secondary participants were enrolled. A summary of this information as it pertains to the focal participants is included in Appendix B.

types which I have labeled in most cases following the same terminology used by the course instructors.[23] The characteristics included in the description of each assignment type should be interpreted rather broadly, keeping in mind that even though each label could be seen as representing a particular academic genre (Swales, 1990), ultimately the assignment characteristics were determined by the instructors in each course, and as this dissertation also hopes to show, they were also co-constructed by the students.

Following Casanave's (2003) work, the assignments are defined and analyzed as "artifacts for evaluation;" that is, texts that:

> are produced in a social and political context where writers and their writings are compared to other writers and their writings, and where institutional norms, instructor and gatekeeper criteria, feedback, and decisions of powerful evaluators help determine what "success" means. (p. 88)

This dissertation thus examines the impact of these artifacts on the students' second language academic literacy socialization during study abroad by first identifying the different artifact types, analyzing how they were produced, and looking at their impact on students' academic and personal lives.

As shown in Table 5.2, for each course the students were required to do multiple assignments of different types, ranging from short paragraphs to extensive term papers. Students were expected to double-space and type their assignments. All assignments involved learners in academic literacy practices to varying degrees. The data corpus for this project includes multiple samples of the different types of assignments included in Table 5.2.

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[23] Some previous research analyzed undergraduate academic tasks (e.g., Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984; Johns, 1981; Kroll, 1979), course syllabi and writing assignments (e.g., Horowitz, 1986; Braine, 1989), and which has suggested classifications of tasks. However, none of the typologies neatly matches the writing assignments I identified in this study. Furthermore, while my aim in identifying the main characteristics of these assignments serves the practical purpose of being able to provide an overview of what I suggest can be called "typical" tasks, readers are reminded that ultimately each assignment had characteristics that were specific to each course. In turn, each assignment was interpreted and enacted in unique ways by the participants (echoing the findings of Coughlan & Duff, 1994).

## Table 5.2 Course Assignments

| Type of assignment | Characteristics | Course | Participant |
|---|---|---|---|
| Case study analysis | This type of assignment required students to read a particular case (usually a published business case), and critically analyze it based on a questionnaire guide. Numerical operations were also required sometimes. The length of the assignment was between five and ten pages. | COMM 4A 02<br>COMM 4E<br>COMM 4B 03<br>COMM 4L 01<br>COMM 4M | Isabel, Nelda, Raquel<br>Liliana, Natalia, Lorena<br>Lorena<br>Lorena<br>Liliana, Natalia |
| Paragraph/ Short essay | This type of assignment required students to answer three to five questions in paragraph form. The paragraphs ranged between 150 and 500 words. | PHIL 4A<br>COMM 4B 02<br>COMM 4G | Liliana<br>Isabel, Nelda<br>Liliana, Natalia, Lorena |
| Long essay | Longer essays were up to five pages long, double-spaced.<br><br>Students usually had to write three to four longer essays per course in which this type of assignment was given. Assignments were mostly individual (except for COMM 4L 01). | LAST 1A<br>POLI 1A 01<br>POLI 3D<br>PHIL 4A<br>COMM 4L 01 | Nelda<br>Isabel<br>Raquel<br>Liliana<br>Lorena |
| Business plan | This was done in teams. It involved at least two stages: submission of a two/three-page executive report (on which the teams were given feedback they needed to incorporate in their final business plan), and the final business plan, which was a longer comprehensive document with several sections (up to 40 pages). | COMM 4B 02<br>COMM 4A 02<br>COMM 4B 03 | Isabel, Nelda<br>Nelda, Isabel, Raquel<br>Lorena |
| Oral presentation & brief report | Oral presentations were done in teams. They involved group meetings; reading of various sources to gather background information/content; elaboration of PowerPoint slides; and writing up of a brief report (up to five pages long) to be handed in. | COMM 2A 01<br>COMM 2A 02<br>COMM 4B 02<br>COMM 4G | Nelda<br>Isabel<br>Isabel, Nelda<br>Liliana, Natalia, Lorena |
| Term paper | These were written either individually, in pairs, or in groups. They were between 15 and 20 pages long, and required substantial research .<br><br>The assignment usually involved several steps: (a) hand in an outline/proposal for research paper and receive topic approval from instructor, (b) hand in draft (short) version of paper and receive feedback from instructor and/or peers, (c) hand in full paper. | POLI 2A<br>POLI 3E<br>POLI 3B<br>COMM 4E<br>COMM 4H | Isabel, Nelda<br>Raquel<br>Raquel<br>Liliana, Natalia, Lorena<br>Liliana, Natalia, Lorena |
| Midterm | They typically required students to compose short paragraphs (150-200 words), answer multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank items, and in some cases also to write longer paragraphs (400 words), and solve numerical problems.<br><br>Students had to sit for one midterm exam per course that required it. | COMM 2A 01<br>COMM 2A 02<br>COMM 4H<br>COMM 4E<br>COMM 4A 02<br>POLI 2A | Nelda<br>Isabel<br>Liliana, Natalia, Lorena<br>Liliana, Natalia, Lorena<br>Nelda, Isabel, Raquel<br>Isabel, Nelda |

| Type of assignment | Characteristics | Course | Participant |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | POLI 3B | Raquel |
| | | POLI 3D | Raquel |
| Final exam | Done in class. Two main types were identified:<br><br>- Type A: required solution of mathematical problems, answering short essay questions (one page long)<br><br>- Type B: required answering multiple choice items, answering short questions, and writing a short essay (2 pages long)<br><br>Unless students had a final report to hand in, they usually had a final exam per course. | COMM 4E<br><br>POLI 3E<br><br>POLI 3B<br><br>POLI 3D<br><br>LAST 1A<br><br>PHIL 4A | Liliana, Natalia, Lorena<br><br>Raquel<br><br>Raquel<br><br>Raquel<br><br>Nelda<br><br>Liliana |

## 5.3 Reading as unexpectedly overwhelming

The participants indicated that reading was a very taxing activity, particularly because in Mexico they were not required to do any kind of "preparatory" reading (i.e., reading prior to attending a lecture) whereas at WCU they were expected to do so. Consequently, since exchange students were unfamiliar with and unaccustomed to the WCU reading practices, the associated reading demands were perceived as overwhelming. Table 5.3 summarizes the main reading practices of both academic cultures as described and interpreted by the participants.

Since they usually referred to each academic culture as a "system," this is also the term I have used, as I believe it reinforces the notion that students tended to view each academic culture as highly systematic and cohesive in spite of some contradictions they also identified. Data for this table (and for Table 5.4) come from interviews and writing log and questionnaire entries from both focal as well as secondary participants.

### Table 5.3 Contrasting Reading Practices

| Characteristics | MCMU "system" | WCU "system" |
|---|---|---|
| "Prep" reading | • No reading in advance (i.e., before class) of relevant class content materials is necessary.<br><br>• Instructors present all new material in class and explain it as is on the book. | • Reading before class is essential to understand each class.<br><br>• Instructors assume students have read the assigned readings since classroom lectures and discussions serve the purpose of internalizing and extending content. |

| Characteristics | MCMU "system" | WCU "system" |
|---|---|---|
| | | • New content not always explained in class; students need to read course materials on their own. |
| Gate keeping practices | • Instructors talk about specific reading material in class only if it has been assigned as homework, in which case they check if students have read it. | • Instructors rarely discuss the assigned readings in detail. Instead, they discuss the topics. Calling on students to check if they have read the assigned materials is not often done. |
| Frequency | • Few homework readings assigned per semester (e.g. two or three per semester). | • Many readings assigned per week. (e.g., two or three per week) |
| Length (per reading) | • Up to ten pages, on average. | • Up to thirty pages, on average. |
| Language-medium | • Most reading materials are in Spanish, although in some cases they are in English. Class discussions and assignments, however, are in Spanish (except for students in the international track). | • All reading materials and related classroom discussions and assignments are in English. |

Reading before each class at WCU was something all students were strongly encouraged to do, since class lectures and discussions were usually based on reading materials that had been pre-assigned for each class. All WCU courses had either a required or recommended textbook and/or a required reading packet, and in some cases readings were also made available through the respective course website. Many of the course outlines included a detailed section with a list of the weekly topics and assigned readings, plus explicit statements about instructors' expectations regarding the readings, as illustrated in the following course outline extracts:

COMM 2A 01/02:
This course is designed to sharpen your ability to diagnose and solve a broad range of organizational problems. **Through readings, lectures, cases, and experiential exercises, we will introduce you to frameworks from the social sciences** that are useful for understanding organizational processes and teach you how to apply these frameworks to particular situations. **Readings are provided to give theoretical groundings for each day's discussion, and are a starting point for our discussions. You are expected to show a high level of commitment to the course by carefully reading the assigned material prior to coming to class each day. You**

**should come to class ready to absorb lessons from the applied examples of the readings that we will discuss.** We do not believe in passive learning. If you put in the appropriately high level of effort we assure you this will be a course you will not forget. (p. 1, emphasis added)

You will be working primarily from a textbook and a purchased packet of materials that contain cases and exercises. (...) To understand the materials covered in this course and do well in the examinations **it is crucial** that you read the materials **BEFORE class sessions** so that you can contribute thoughtfully to the class discussions and exercises. (p. 2, emphasis in original)

COMM 3A 01:
**I encourage you to have the required readings done *before* you come to class.** Some will be discussed in class. Others will not. From time to time, I'll recommend additional sources, which are optional. (p. 2, italics in original, emphasis added)

COMM 4G:
Readings for each class are indicated in the attached course outline. Most of the readings are available online. **Students are expected to read the required readings before class.** (p.2, emphasis added)

COMM 4M:
Preparation of case analyses and class discussions provide a key learning experience. Consequently, **it is imperative that each student come to class well prepared and able to contribute to the discussion.** At least 2 hours of preparation should be spent on each case before class.
(pp. 1-2, emphasis added)

COMM 4B 02:
There will be a course package that includes case studies and some background readings. The case studies will be the basis for much of our classroom discussion. <u>Obtaining the course package is mandatory.</u> (...) Class participation is very important in a case-based course. I view class discussion as a way of learning from each other (...) You cannot possibly make insightful remarks if you have not prepared for class.
(p. 2, underlined text in original)

Great emphasis was therefore placed by instructors on students' responsibility to read before each class, as shown in the course outlines through word choices such as "you are **expected** to show a high level of commitment to the course by **carefully**

**reading** the assigned material," "it is **crucial** that you read," "it is **imperative** that each student come to class well prepared," "obtaining the course package is **mandatory**," and by statements such as "students are responsible for materials covered in lectures, class discussions, and assigned readings" (POLI 3B, p. 1). In most cases, students received a class participation mark, which usually accounted for 10 to 15% of the overall course grade. As the first course outline excerpt shows, instructors indicated that in order to make meaningful contributions in class discussions and be granted a high participation mark, students were expected to show their high commitment to the class by carefully reading the assigned materials on any given topic.

In addition to the required reading materials, students were often encouraged to consult other sources of information that could contribute relevant knowledge (i.e., background knowledge as well as current knowledge). For instance, the Latin American Studies instructor advised students to "keep up to date with news from Latin America" (Course outline LAST 1A, p.1). The course outline also included a statement that encouraged students to read about Latin American history and culture, and a website url plus a list of optional books the students could consult for further relevant information were also provided. Along the same lines, the following statement included by a Political Sciences instructor in his course outline also encouraged students to actively search of additional reading sources (e.g., mainstream print media as well as leading journals) to enhance their learning process:

```
Even though it is not a course about current events, it will
make an effort to integrate some contemporary events and
issues to enhance the critical understanding of global
politics. Students should keep abreast of contemporary
international events by either reading the mainstream print
media or listening to the major broadcast media. Students can
also benefit immensely by following the debates on
contemporary issues that appear in leading journals.

(Course outline POLI 2A, p. 1)
```

As mentioned above, the participants made numerous allusions in the interviews to their heavy reading load at WCU, which in turn prompted me to gather information about their home university reading practices. I collected some of the data on this topic by means of a retrospective reflective questionnaire distributed to all participants approximately two months after their return to Mexico. Below I have included sample

responses they provided when asked to comment about whether or not they read (or used to read) before each class, both during their exchange at WCU and after their return to MCMU.

Reflective Questionnaire A prompts:
- Do you usually read before attending MCMU classes? Why?
- Did you usually read before attending WCU classes? Why?

Natalia

(At MCMU)
Not really. It's not necessary to read before class, since I'm taking wrap up courses now. I only have to read for one class, but readings are never more than 2 pages long.

(At WCU)
Yes, because I wasn't capable of following the instructor in his class. They [instructors in general] assumed that you know what they were talking about, and the instructional pace was much faster than in Mexico.

(Natalia, Questionnaire A)

Lorena

(At MCMU)
Sometimes. I only read when I have time, after doing my homework, since I think that homework is more important ((than reading)) in the MCMU system. Instructors almost never test you on what you read, plus they explain in class all the topics included in our readings. But our home assignments count towards our final course grade. Generally, I only read when I know that we'll use the course reading for a class discussion.

(At WCU)
Almost always. At WCU we also discussed our reading materials in class, and our oral contributions were part of a participation mark. Moreover, even if it wasn't a discussion topic, the instructors didn't explain the readings in class (unlike most MCMU instructors). Instead, they assumed we knew the topic and they just answered our doubts or complemented the readings with other materials or with their own experiences in their respective fields.

(Lorena, Questionnaire A)

The questionnaire entries show that the students recognized the centrality of reading in the WCU academic culture: reading materials in advance was seen as crucial to

scaffold their lecture comprehension and to facilitate their classroom participation. Besides this, the motivation for reading in each academic context was also described as different: reading before class at MCMU only happened when students knew they would have to be accountable to their instructor for their reading homework. Or, as Natalia told me when referring to her reading habits in Mexico: "we read [something] just when we need to hand in a summary; we don't read in order to prepare for a class" (Natalia, I#3 F05: September 12/05). In contrast, acquiring a reading habit in WCU was seen as necessary to prevent falling behind. Yet, the students would usually concern themselves with acquiring a reading habit only once they realized its importance after facing a "critical incident" (e.g., in preparation for an exam, feeling overwhelmed by the vast amount of unread materials that accumulated over the weeks, which resulted in the students' awareness of their need to modify their study strategies). In this respect, the participants that had spent the short summer term at WCU felt that their knowledge about the centrality of reading in the host academic culture placed them in an advantageous position over the "new" students that arrived in WCU for the first time during the fall. While the "oldtimer" exchange students were eager to share this knowledge with newcomer Mexican students, they were not surprised when their advice was not taken seriously, as they also had been incredulous at first:

> You don't learn it until you live it! You don't do it until you need it. And it's kind of funny to see the "new" [F05 MCMU exchange] students, when they just arrive. I told one of the new girls - I think she's from Puebla - that she'd better read. Because I tried to explain to her that if you don't read, then you have a pile like this ((gestures with hands)) and you won't be able to read it all at once. And that's kind of funny - you take it as advice, but at the same time you think 'no, no.'

(Natalia, I#3 F05: September 12/05)

In addition, the participants also mentioned in their reflective questionnaires and interviews that their assigned readings in Mexico were not only fewer, but also much shorter when compared to those in WCU. For all these reasons, reading at WCU constituted one of the most pervasive and in most cases extremely overwhelming activity for almost every Mexican exchange student, including secondary participants. It was

often perceived as so highly time consuming, that no matter the effort and time investment, the students found it hard to keep up to date.

As Table 5.3 and some of the excerpts above illustrate, unless a reading was assigned for a special class activity, the participants were not usually required to read the required course textbook prior to attending their MCMU classes. Even though their home university instructors tried to instill in them the practice of reading by suggesting optional materials, the lectures covered all the course content. In turn, only the content covered in the lectures was included in the assignments and exams. Therefore, students and instructors acted under the shared assumption that teacher input and classroom-based activities (such as small group discussions) became the primary source of information that students ought to learn. As a result, reading was mostly characterized as an optional, perhaps even peripheral, activity that could complement instructor lectures.[24] In contrast, lectures and class discussions at WCU were seen as a complement to the readings (not the other way about), as shown in the quoted text below:

> **Lectures** are drawn from multiple sources and **will either supplement or complement the materials covered in the textbook.** Lecture outlines are posted on webCT every week. Students need to read the outlines and follow the required readings before coming to class.
>
> (Course outline POLI 2A, p. 1, emphasis added)

Therefore, this suggests that another reason to explain why students found the reading demands so heavy is related to their being unaccustomed to similar practices, and to the more peripheral status ascribed to reading in the respective academic contexts.

In addition, the participants viewed reading as demanding due to the cognitive overload they experienced when reading in their L2. Cognitive overload took place when a combination of extreme language and cognitive demands exceeding the participants' capabilities led them to feel overwhelmed. For many students, comprehension was described as slow and sometimes hard as they were trying to process new content in English. In Nelda's and Liliana's cases, their Latin American Studies and Philosophy readings, respectively, were seen as particularly challenging due to their obscure content

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[24] Indeed, most participants confessed--somewhat guiltily--that unless a particular reading was assigned for homework or unless they were doing research for an assignment (e.g., final paper) they usually did not invest much of their time in reading class materials.

in addition to the fact that they were English texts. Both students reported their reading comprehension limitations adversely impacted their performance in these courses. Nelda, for instance, mentioned that while she thought the LAST course would be the easiest one (in light of her Latin American background), it turned out to be the opposite because of "the readings – and I don't understand when they talk (…) Even if I read, I arrive in class and I don't know what they're talking about" (Nelda, I#1 F05: September 22/05). This, she explained to me, negatively impacted her performance in the first LAST essay assignment, on which she scored 60/100. In response to her instructor's observation that she had failed to understand the article she discussed in the assignment, Nelda commented to me that "this is what I was telling you – that this is my problem in class. I don't understand the readings, and obviously if I understood something different, the result won't be what he expects" (Nelda, I#2 F05: October 13/05). She also had a similar frustrating experience with a pop quiz, for which she had to read a book on Mayan mythology. Once again, Nelda's grade was 6/10, and while she thought that the main problem was associated with the purpose of the quiz (i.e., it required students to demonstrate knowledge of very detailed information instead of referring to the main ideas discussed in the book, which was what Nelda focused on to study), she also thought that part of the problem was due to a language issue, arguing that even though she had read the book, had made summaries of each character and the plot characteristics, she still thought she might have lost some details while reading the story: "I could write about what each character did, but I won't remember whose arm was cut off during war – and besides, perhaps I didn't even realize that his arm had been amputated!" (I#2 F05: October 13/05).

Liliana's data point to her struggles to make sense of her Philosophy course readings:

> I don't know if it's my English or if it's because it's too philosophical, but I spend way too much time. It's a lot of material and many of the readings are very complex. Some are easy, but others – I have to read them three or four times and even so, I don't understand them!
>
> (Liliana, I#6 F05, November 24/05)

She also recorded similar comments on her writing log. Since she had trouble comprehending the PHIL texts, Liliana asked her Australian friend and roommate (Susan) to read some of these, in the hope that she could help her unpack the text meanings. However, Susan also found them challenging, and thus Liliana continued doing her assignments always being uncertain about whether or not she had "gotten it right." Indeed, she was not sure either about her interpretation of the assignment prompts for this course. "In one of my essays I got a higher grade [than in her first PHIL essays] even though I didn't understand the instructions very well. So, Natalia told me then that it's a matter of not understanding him!" (Liliana, I#6 F05: November 24/05).

Even in cases where the participants reported no major reading comprehension difficulties due to content, the data still suggest that they experienced cognitive overload due to reading in an L2, since this process was much slower than in their L1. For instance, most of them reported looking up words in the dictionary (a strategy which decreased as time progressed, though), and they also reported having to concentrate more that when reading in Spanish (e.g., they needed to be in a quiet place, possibly alone, with no background noise, not even music). Furthermore, while in Spanish they felt they had the ability to just browse a text to extract its key ideas, reading in English demanded that they paid more attention to detail, and it usually also required that they re-read portions of the text several times, all of this slowing down the whole process. Consequently, preparing for each class and studying for exams were perceived as demanding a longer time commitment to reading than they were used to in their home university context. This is alluded to, for instance, in the excerpt below, which comes from an interview with Isabel during the first half of the exchange.

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S = Sandra
I = Isabel
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43. S: So, when you say you dedicated a lot of time to studying, if you compare it to how much you are used to studying in Mexico, would you say it's more or less the same time?

44. I: More! I think more - well, **I think more because for me, studying for an exam involves sitting down an evening and you finish. And this was not like this; I sat for an evening, and then the day after, and then another time for two hours, and then the whole night. It's really like more effort than I would normally put into for one exam.**

45. S: And why do you think that's so?

46. I: I don't know. Well, besides I felt more pressured. **It is harder for me to study [at WCU] because it's not like you read it and that's it. Here you have to read it and re-read it before you can assimilate it.** So I had my notes in hand, and then "oh, what was that word again?," so I have to check. So it's much slower. Yes, I feel it's so much slower. So, for instance, the other day we were studying new concepts, and it was so hard for me because I was studying them in English. And then, **I had lots of doubts,** but **I thought of them in Spanish, so I had to translate them into English.**

47. S: So, do you translate all the time?

48. I: Not all the time. But in some cases, for instance, if there is a word I don't understand so well – but **I need to understand it first in Spanish,** I need to understand the concept. But then **I also needed to write it in English,** because the exam will be in English. So for instance, for COMM 2A 02 we studied a lot in Spanish. So I studied all the terminology in Spanish, but the exam did not involve much composing. But this one yes, so if I studied in Spanish, by the time I had to write for the exam I would have felt I had no words! So **I had to study all the terms in English. So that's harder, and I think that <u>that</u> took a lot of my time.**

(Isabel, I#2, F05: October 28/05)

In turn 44, Isabel contrasted her time commitment to studying in Mexico with her increased time commitment to studying at WCU, adding in turns 46 and 48 an explanation that accounts for some of the reasons she believed made the whole process slower and more demanding: she had doubts, she needed to translate from English to Spanish in order to internalize the content, yet she needed to be able to write in English. All this, in her view, made it harder and more time consuming.

The other focal participants also echoed Isabel's comments about how much more time consuming they felt studying for an exam at WCU was, and how this was particularly so because the reading materials were in English while their learning process still seemed to naturally occur in Spanish. Hence the constant translation practices that Isabel and others engaged in. Similarly, Liliana mentioned that while reading in Spanish she usually underlined text to highlight the main ideas, the underlining technique did not

seem to work for her when reading in English. Instead, in order to better comprehend, internalize, and remember the content, she needed to write her own summaries of the text, a more demanding process that is also significantly more time consuming than underlining or highlighting.

The cognitive overload that reading in a second language imposed on them was particularly high during timed-tasks such as midterm and final exams. This is illustrated, for instance, in the excerpts below where Isabel (first excerpt) and Nelda (second excerpt) shared with me their frustration at not being able to do their best in a test despite having studied a lot:

Isabel's excerpt

10. I: In COMM 2A 02 - it's [the midterm exam] all about filling
       in little bubbles [like TOEFL], and everybody has the same
       test. And **I felt that the problem in this case wasn't that
       I didn't know, since I had studied really hard, but I felt
       that because the exam involved large amounts of reading
       and it was timed, I felt the time pressure. In Spanish I
       would have been able to do it, but in English it's as if
       your ideas go away. There were some questions that, after
       reading them, I wondered what they were asking. And I
       really didn't understand.**

11. S: Was it multiple choice?

12. I: Yes. But if I really didn't understand what it was saying,
       then I just answered something. **I couldn't afford to spend
       much time on any single answer because there were 80
       different questions** [vignettes with five multiple choice
       options each]. **So I felt this was really difficult, I**
       should have read it more calmly.

(Isabel, I #2 F05: October 28/05)

Nelda's excerpt

N = Nelda
S = Sandra

27. N: COMM 2A 01 was **one of my favorite subjects - it's really
       easy,** lots of common sense. It has to do with organizing a
       company, the company's value, it's very easy! **But the
       midterm was so hard! I got 42/100! I know - I felt so bad!**
       I was the only student in my class who failed. The average
       in that course has always been around 71, our instructor
       told us that it's [the midterm] always been hard. But I
       was the only one who didn't get at least 50! So I

approached her and she said – she told me that she was aware that I participated in class and that I – I could have recited the book to you, **I knew the stuff**! But **the exam involved answering 80 multiple choice questions– each question had five options, and some were right but they were not the best option, so that made it harder.** So I already talked with her [the instructor] and she told me that she knew that it wasn't ((that I failed)) because I wasn't interested in her class. And it was – **we were supposed to spend one minute per question, but I had to re-read each question like two or three times – they were like scenarios, like vignettes – so I wasted a lot of time. Like – for the last 15 questions I didn't even manage to read! It was like** …

28. S: Do you think you spent more time than the others?

29. N: <u>Yes!</u>

30. S: Why?

31. N: Well, because **I wouldn't understand the story at first, perhaps I didn't understand a word and therefore I had to go back and that took me longer.** I didn't even read the last 15 questions – that is, I read them but it was like 'yes, yes, yes,' I just had to fill out some bubbles – I just couldn't leave them blank! And I don't know – **this past week I was very depressed, but then I realized it wasn't me – that instead it's really a generalized problem** because there was like a 12 point average deviation, lots of **people who got lower grades and most of them were Mexicans.** I know six Mexicans taking the same course, and they all got forty something – thirty something. So, that didn't make me feel better, but **it made me realize that I wasn't doing anything wrong – rather – that I was studying the right way, but this is a common problem across Mexicans.**

32. S: And why do you say so?

33. N: I think that they experienced what happened to me. **Lack of time.**

34. S: But, if you had to do the same exam in Spanish, would you have had enough time?

35. N: Yes. **It's a language issue.** Besides, there were many – since they were like stories not questions, there were many unfamiliar words, so you had to read it again in order to make sense of it!

(Nelda, I #3 F05: October 27/05)

The excerpts above reveal Isabel's and Nelda's strong engagement with and commitment to the COMM 2A[25] course: they had invested more time studying for the exam than they regularly spent when preparing for exams at MCMU, and they enjoyed the course and participated in class. Furthermore, they both claimed to be familiar with the content, which Nelda even characterized as "easy." Despite all this, neither of them performed very well. Isabel barely managed to pass with a grade of 52, while Nelda was the only student in her course section to fail the exam. Yet, neither of them attributed their low grades to lack of knowledge, instead arguing that the exam format (i.e., 80 vignettes with multiple choice options, thus involving mostly reading comprehension) was to blame, as it imposed on them extraordinary cognitive and linguistic demands they were unprepared to cope with in English in such a limited time frame.

Thus, even though Nelda and Isabel seemed to have done everything they were expected to do in order to prepare for the COMM 2A midterm exam (e.g. they gave themselves enough time to study, they read all the materials and learned the course content), it was their lack of familiarity and training with one specific type of academic literacy activity that positioned them as deficient students, even though they were not. In fact, it could be argued that Nelda's observations in relation to the large number of Mexican students who failed the test and her subsequent comments in turns 31-33 about this being a "problem across Mexicans" achieve two things: first, they serve as further evidence to support the view of the exam as consisting of a highly demanding academic literacy activity for which the MCMU students were under-prepared; second, Nelda re-states the issue as a problem common to all students like her instead of as an individual problem. This can be seen as an attempt on her part to reposition herself as a good student in spite of this pitfall. Whether she did this in order to re-construct her student image for herself or for the interviewer is unclear; perhaps her comments had a dual intentionality. Yet what appears evident is the fact that Nelda's observations had a personal positive

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[25] There were several sections of the course COMM 2A, all of which were taught by the same instructor. Consequently, the course goals, contents, readings, assignments and exams were common across sections. Isabel took section 02 while Nelda took section 01.

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effect in that they restored in her some of the self-confidence she had lost.[26] In any case, both interview extracts above strongly support the suggestion that the participants' grappled with numerous and diverse kinds of reading challenges, and that these reading challenges seem to have had a profound impact on their academic performances and on their self-perceptions as competent students.

5.4 Reading as rewarding

The portrayal of reading as excessive was shared by almost all participants. Nevertheless, in spite of perceived high demands associated with the expectations and standards vis-à-vis the practice of reading at WCU, some participants also discovered a unique value in it. For instance, Raquel welcomed the challenge and saw it as an opportunity for personal and academic growth, particularly in relation to the practice of reading prior to attending classes:

> I notice the difference **when I go to class having read the materials in advance. This is something I like about here. In Mexico I feel we are treated like high school students.** They [instructors] assign a reading and the following class they control if we read. But **here it's different.** I like the fact that if you don't read, it's your problem. If you refuse to read, and if you don't attend your classes, well, that's your problem! And **I like this approach – it makes me want to read and go to class!**

> (Raquel, I#1, F05: September 14/05)

The reading practices at WCU seemed to serve as a motivating force for Raquel, who felt genuinely compelled to read the materials in order to be able to fully engage in the class content: reading in advance was rewarding. Furthermore, as the quote above shows, Raquel contrasted her home instructor's reading gate-keeping practices, which she despised, by indicating that they made her feel like a high school student. There is a strong resistance in her voice to being patronized, in a sense, and potentially chastised (with a low grade) by her MCMU instructors for failing to read assigned materials. There is also a self-proclaimed alignment with her WCU instructors and the more autonomous reading practices they seemed to favor. Indeed, I would suggest that Raquel's statement

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[26] This, in turn, leads us to consider the emotional impact of failure (or near failure), an issue that I further discuss in relation to feedback and grading practices in Chapter 6.

goes beyond merely embracing the reading practices at WCU; what she seemed to ascribe great value to were the contrasting underlying conceptualizations about the learner that she argued each university promoted through academic literacy activities, for instance. That is, whereas MCMU promoted a model of "dependent" learner by imposing reading as a duty and enforcing this reading policy by means of a system based on punishments and rewards (e.g., instructors evaluating students on their knowledge of the occasional assigned reading homework), WCU promoted a model of "autonomous" learner by giving students the freedom to manage their reading loads, thus transferring the responsibility of measuring their learning on an ongoing basis to the students themselves (something I already made reference to in the analysis of some of the course outline excerpts included in the previous section). I will further elaborate on the "dependent" versus "autonomous" learner models in a later section, as I analyze these conceptualizations in relation to other academic literacy practices and also to other participants whose views contrast Raquel's.

Finally, some participants also viewed reading as rewarding in that it became an opportunity to further develop their English language proficiency, which was one of the goals of the academic exchange for almost everyone I interviewed. More positive aspects about the impact of being socialized into the reading practices of WCU are further discussed in Chapter 7.

5.5 "Surviving" academic writing at WCU

While reading was mostly perceived as overwhelmingly time consuming, writing was described as demanding and challenging. In some cases, when I asked participants whether they thought writing their assignments was hard, at first they did not seem particularly troubled by it. After all, as they would usually remind me, most of them had been writing in English from an early age, and some of them had even taken English-medium courses at their home university. So at first sight, writing was not always perceived as posing a big challenge. However, once the participants had a chance to discuss their assignments, their interviews, writing logs, and reflective questionnaires revealed that despite an apparent comfort with writing in an L2, the students were indeed challenged to conform to WCU academic literacy standards and values with which they

were just becoming familiar with. In addition to the format and language issues, students also reported having problems meeting the expected level of critical analysis demanded by their instructors. In what follows I provide a more detailed explanation of these issues, as well as examples extracted from some cases that were particularly telling.

As shown in Table 5.4, the participants identified several mismatches between both systems vis-à-vis assignment format, frequency, instructions, source of content, level of analysis, feedback and grading practices. The students argued that one of the main reasons why they could obtain high grades (>90) in Mexico was due to their familiarity with the MCMU academic system. By the same token, they thought that their main issue at present was that they still were unaware of the rules of the WCU "academic game" (Casanave, 2002), and they believed that mastering this new academic culture--something which they knew would take some time--would enable them to achieve better success. They also enjoyed the possibility at MCMU of tracking their course performance on a weekly basis and found WCU's tardy assignment return practice very troubling, especially since it left them wondering about their performance, which in turn significantly contributed to raising their levels of emotional stress (this issue is further addressed in the section on feedback practices, in Chapter 6). In sum, the participants seemed to find value in comparing both academic cultures, especially in order to try to account for the reasons underlying some of the unexpected obstacles they had to overcome at WCU, and in the most extreme cases, to a sensible justification for their fears, disappointments, and failures.

Table 5.4 Contrasting Writing Practices

Characteristics	MCMU "system"	WCU "system"
Format	• Assignments usually have no word limit; sometimes the longer the better. • Format aspects (e.g., citation, font size) do not usually affect grade.	• Assignments usually specify a word limit. Marks are deducted if work exceeds prescribed word limit. • Format aspects affect grade and therefore should be taken care of.
Frequency	• Weekly short (1-5 pages) homework tasks • 1 major final paper. • Four partial exams; last	• Very sporadic tasks. Three or four assignments per course. • 1 major final paper. • 1 midterm and 1 final

Characteristics	MCMU "system"	WCU "system"
	partial exam is called final, but it only includes content of last part of course.	comprehensive exam that include content of entire course.
Instructions	• Straightforward instructions; there is one "correct" way of completing the assignment.	• Instructions are sometimes open and/or ambiguous; there are multiple ways of approaching an assignment. Multiple solutions possible.
Source of content	• Assignments can be completed drawing mainly from class explanations; some supplementary reading occasionally needed.	• Not all content comes from class lectures. In most cases, reading of additional sources is necessary in order to gather sufficient information for the assignment.
Level of Analysis	• Assignments are expected to include factual information mostly. Critical literacy is not systematically encouraged.	• Assignments are designed to develop students' critical thinking/literacy skills. Writing should reflect depth of thought and personal stance.
Feedback	• Graded assignments are returned to students within one week. • Students continuously measure and track their performance on each course based on grades and feedback obtained in weekly assignments, and by monthly reports prepared by instructors.	• Graded assignments are returned to students either several weeks after, at the end of the course, or are never returned to them. • Students are not able to keep close track of their performance by means of their grades. No monthly reports are prepared by instructors.
Grading	• Grading scale: 100 points. 70 is pass mark. • A "good" grade is at least 85/100, according to instructors and students. • Participants' average grades at MCMU: 90/100	• Grading scale: 100 points. 50 is pass mark. • Bell curve used by many instructors following WCU grading policy. Marks over 50/100 are "good" enough, according to local students. • Participants' average grades at WCU: 74/100
Language-medium	• Spanish (students' L1)	• English (students' L2)

Of interest is the fact that initially, students appeared to perceive both academic cultures as relatively similar. In my early interviews with participants, when prompted to comment on their academic experiences as WCU they offered answers like the following:

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S = Sandra
L = Liliana
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S: With respect to the type of assignments you have to do here,
    would you say that they are of the same level of difficulty
    as the ones you're used to doing in Mexico?

L: I would say they are very similar in that sense. For
    instance, we were just assigned two other works, one of which
    is like a major assignment, and it requires more time, you
    need to do it better. But I would still say it's more or less
    the same. The level of difficulty is the same.

S: Okay, because I heard Ms. Gutierrez [MCMU-WCU Joint Academic
    program director] say that studying here is more demanding.
    Do you feel that's so?

L: I haven't felt any difference so far, honestly.

(Liliana, I#1 S05: June 08/05)

However, as the semester advanced and the students gained familiarity of the host academic culture, they seemed to modify their perceptions and progressively identified several differences between their home university and the WCU academic systems. In the sections that follow, I will provide more details about these differences, while in Chapter 6 I will explore *how* students became aware of the academic literacy practices valued and promoted in WCU and how they became agents of their own socialization by choosing to adjust to, resist, or ignore these practices.

5.5.1   Being "critical" writers "with a voice"

One of the major goals of WCU courses was to prepare students for the "real world" by involving them in higher-order thinking activities. For instance, the Philosophy course instructor stated that one of the course objectives was to "to provide the tools – the concepts and the vocabulary – to think critically, on an ongoing basis, about the moral issues ..." (Course outline PHIL 4A, p. 1). Similar statements can be

found in many other WCU course outlines, where emphasis was placed on encouraging the development of students' creativity and their analytical skills. Therefore, many course assignments pushed students to demonstrate they were critical thinkers; that is, students' writing was expected to convey a sense of authorship, which Greene (1995) defines as "the critical thinking skills that students use in their efforts to contribute knowledge to a scholarly conversation, knowledge that is not necessarily found in source texts but is nonetheless carefully linked to the texts they read" (p. 187).[27] Thus, the academic texts students composed should reflect that their arguments were not only strongly grounded in the literature, but also that they evidenced the development of a critical personal stance on the course subject matter. As is discussed in what follows, this expectation constituted a big challenge for many participants.

The interview data corpus includes numerous references to the participants' self-proclaimed struggles vis-à-vis learning how to write something that shows depth of thought, which displays a profound knowledge of the topic under discussion in addition to evidence of a personal stance. Clearly, this is not necessarily something that challenges non-native speakers only, since becoming a critical reader and writer takes years of training and practice, even in an individual's first language. And as Belcher (1995) notes, while subject area teachers assume students will eventually reach a level of subject matter knowledge saturation, at which point they will be able to naturally become critical readers and writers, this does not seem to be a realistic view. Rather, Belcher indicates that "student writers, whether native or nonnative speakers, are not automatically made critical through subject-area reading" (pp. 135-136) and therefore need to be trained in order to engage in knowledge transformation instead of merely regurgitation (Belcher, 1995; Cumming, 1995). Yet, in the case of international NNES students, the cognitive challenge entailed in developing critical thinking skills and abilities is compounded by

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[27] In close connection to the notion of authorship is the concept of authorial "voice," which has been explored by several scholars doing research on L1 and L2 writing issues (e.g., Ivanič, 1998, Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Hyland, 2002; Starfield, 2002). For instance, voice is conceptualized as a powerful metaphor that helps to examine "the complex question of how writers establish an authorial presence or identity in their writing" (Hirvela & Belcher, 2002, p. 84, in reference to Elbow's, 1994, work). As has been acknowledged in the literature (e.g., Belcher & Hirvela, 2001; Elbow, 1994; Ivanič, 1998), "voice" has been conceptualized and examined in various complementary as well as contradictory ways. In this chapter my analysis emphasizes the notion of voice as authorial presence in connection with students' efforts to demonstrate a critical stance, whereas in Chapter 6 I analyze issues of voice in connection with students' desires to maintain text ownership, emphasizing how the text is part of the students' identity.

the fact that their written artifacts should be in their L2. Furthermore, the participants in this study believed that the challenge to conduct critical reading and writing of texts was also associated with their lack of engagement with previous home academic literacy experiences of a similar kind. To illustrate this, I draw on an example that comes from the three participants during their summer portion of the exchange. Liliana, Lorena and Natalia were given the following prompt for their first written assignment for course COMM 3A 01:

```
Your first paper will be a one to two page critical review of
a [subject matter specific] website. The review should
include a brief description of the organization (business
scope, location, and so on), as well as highlights of the
website (i.e., strengths and weaknesses) from a functional
standpoint.

(Course outline COMM 3A 01, p. 4)
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This was a brief two-page double-spaced assignment which the students seemed to have approached without much trouble other than looking up unfamiliar words in the dictionary, as shown in their writing log entries. Each of them spent less than two hours to choose the website, navigate it to familiarize themselves with its format and content, compose their critical review, revise it, and proofread it. Liliana, for instance, described the whole process as follows:

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First I had to read the assignment instructions in order to
know exactly what he asked for and then I looked for a
website. I checked out the site and extracted the information
I needed to start my work. I had to use the dictionary
because I didn't know how to write some words, but I had no
problem.

(Liliana, Writing log S05: entry #1)
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Lorena also mentioned that she had relied on her previous experience when doing similar assignments for MCMU courses, which boosted her confidence. However, much to the three students' surprise, none of them received what they thought was a good grade. Both Natalia and Liliana obtained 7 ¾ out of 10, while Lorena obtained 7 ½ . The students' writing log entries reflect their disappointment and puzzlement at receiving

what they considered a relatively low grade[28] on an assignment that asked them to share their personal views:

> The instructor didn't give me any written comments about my assignment. **I felt a bit disappointed with the result because he asked for my opinion, which can't be really assessed.**
>
> (Natalia, Writing log S05: entry #1)
>
> The instructor mentioned [in class] that our essays were fine. However, **I received a lower grade than I expected.**
>
> (Lorena, Writing log S05: entry #1)
>
> **It wasn't what I expected because I got 7 and since these were my opinions about a website, I didn't think that personal opinions could be graded.**
>
> (Liliana, Writing log S05: entry #1)

Liliana also brought up the same issue during her first interview in the summer:

15. S: So until now, based on the work you had to do, do you think it's similar to what you have to do in Mexico, or is there any difference?

16. L: The classes are fine, I understand everything. But today, for instance, I got my assignment back, and – **it's not a bad grade** – because it's almost an 8. But I didn't feel like – we were asked to give our opinion about a website, and I wonder, how can you evaluate an opinion? **Opinions are not supposed to be graded, it's your opinion!** If it was like a concept or something like that, okay. But I was really surprise by how they evaluate here – it <u>is</u> stricter.

17. S: Do you have the assignment with you?

18. L: Yes.

19. S: Can I see it?

20. L: Sure.

21. S: And were you given clear instructions to do this?

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[28] Readers might disagree with the students' opinion about 7 ½ being a low grade. However, we need to take into account their own conceptualizations of what constitutes a "good" or acceptable grade. This is discussed in detail in the section on feedback and grading practices in Chapter 6.

22. L: Yes, well we were told that we had to look for the internet site of a company. And we had to assess the advantages and disadvantages, what one could improve, and something else that you'd like to add, like an opinion. So there **I included what I thought was an advantage, but you see, he gave me 7 ¾ out of 10, which I think is too much [what was deducted]. In my opinion, at least according to the way I am used to doing things in Mexico, personal opinions are not assessed in the same way. This would have been okay there, I would have been given a higher grade.** But perhaps, like they say, WCU is stricter. So I just need to get used to it.

(Liliana, I#1 S05, June 8/05)

The data extracts illustrate that the students' prior knowledge (i.e., their schemata) about how to approach and how to evaluate an assignment like the website analysis in question differs from the new norms they were confronted with at WCU. Apparently, none of the three participants was aware that demonstrating the development of a critical authorial stance was one of the main components (and aims) of the assignment, or else they thought that including a personal opinion equalled evidence of depth of thought and engagement with the assignment. Furthermore, they were unaware of the criteria employed to assess their work, which happened to be judged according to how effectively they managed to perform a critical analysis. In this sense, similar to the participant in Riazi's (1997) study who did not assume she was expected to provide a critical stance in a review assignment, my participants and their instructor in this course had different perceptions about the goals of the assignment. Based on the participants' reflections, it seems that the main reason for this mismatch was due to differences between the participants' L1 literacy practices and the target practices.

By the end of their summer portion of the exchange, even if they still found it hard to develop an authorial stance, the students seem to have become aware of these differences:

L = Liliana
N = Natalia

L: I think that here it's different – students are taught how to think. In Mexico, the assignments for instance, I think there is more liberty to do copy and paste! But here they use Turn

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It In.[29] We take much longer, because we need to analyze things and give our opinion. In Mexico, on the other hand, it's easier to do copy and paste and develop your idea based on that paragraph you copied. We're not really used to being forced to think. And also, the final exams here were difficult for us because we had to apply all the content of the course in one practical case, and justify our choices, which meant that we had to really show the teacher that we learned that, it wasn't just about knowing a concept, it was knowing how to apply it.

N: Yes, in Mexico we have perhaps the same type of assignment but instead we just have problem sets, so we're usually just asked to solve problems and if our calculations are okay, then that's it. But here, in addition to that, we have to justify why, and we also have to account for the consequences of our choices, and explain what the potential consequences are.

(Liliana & Natalia, I#2 S05: July 7, 05)

Summarizing, through their engagement in classroom discussions, assignments, and exams (and team work, as discussed in Chapter 6), the students gained awareness of ways of working with texts which were thus far unknown to them. Namely, the participants gained a better understanding of the expected level of cognitive engagement for the interpretation of texts and subsequent application of knowledge in the production of academic discourse.

5.5.2   Conforming to word/page limit expectations

In many cases, students were asked to write paragraphs (also called "short essays" of 150 – 500 words) and longer essays of up to five pages. The biggest challenge students faced in this case was to avoid exceeding the prescribed number of words in the short essays, since doing so would be penalized with a lower grade. As in the case of Zhu's (2001) Mexican graduate students in the US, the participants in this study also reported having problems sticking to the two-page limit because this space was not enough to convey all the information they knew and wished to include. A close examination of the documents produced by the participants reveals that if they had exercised more economy

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[29] Turn It In is a popular digital service used at universities across Canada and the US that checks for the originality of students' work.

of words, in most cases they would have been able to better synthesize their knowledge and thus still stick to the limit. Yet it is true that this contradicts the academic writing practices of their home institution, where they were not usually given a page or word limit and where, in fact expanding on and embellishing the text usually translated into earning some extra marks. Once again, like the participants' in Zhu's study, the page limit made them terribly anxious and in some cases they became obsessed with it. This is illustrated, for instance, in relation to a series of four assignments that Lorena, Liliana and Natalia had to do for COMM 4G. There was a common main instruction for these assignments, which read as follows:

> Assignments are given to get students to think through issues. Assignments should be typed and are to be handed in at the end of class on the due date. Late submission will not be accepted. **Word limits are given for assignments, they are to be adhered to strictly. You may write less but not more.**
>
> (Course outline COMM 4G, p. 2)

In addition to these general guidelines, students were given specific prompts for each assignment. For instance:

> Provide an outline of the likely sources of economies of scale in ships and the diseconomies to which they may give rise. **You are limited to 150 words.**
>
> (Assignment 1, COMM 4G, question 1)
>
> What is the appropriate balance between local government autonomy with respect to taxation and land use versus the broader provincial and national strategic interests in port industries? **Limit to 175 words.**
>
> (Assignment 4, COMM 4G, question 2)

The three focal participants shared similar problems in adhering to these word limits, and they repeatedly complained in their interviews about the teacher's strict policy, as they thought it was too extreme. Besides, as I further elaborate on in Chapter 6 in relation to students' negotiations and agency, eventually they realized that despite the teacher's specific order not to exceed the word limit, she did not seem to count the words, after all. By the time the students became aware of this, however, they were already half way through the term.

Whereas sticking to the prescribed word limit appears to be the most common challenge students grappled with in relation to assignment length expectations, in some cases the students faced the opposite situation: it was hard for them to write as much as they were being asked to do. For example, Lorena indicated that her COMM 3E instructor expected 250-word answers (approximately half a page) to his questions, yet she thought she could very effectively respond to them in just two or three lines. Other students also faced similar difficulties. For instance, Isabel explained to me why she had received a mark of 14.2/20 on one of her midterm exams:

> Honestly, I squeezed my mind and wrote everything I knew, but **I ran out of words**. Because – it's like **in Spanish – okay, you have an idea and you can write it in three pages, but I can't do this in English**. It gives me a lot of work, and it's even worse on an exam, with the time pressure.
>
> (Isabel, I#2 F05: October 28/05)

Liliana also mentioned that she did not understand why she would be given so much space (four pages) to write on an exam, when she felt that she could provide a very complete answer in three quarters of a page. In all cases, the students argued that it was quite frustrating for them not to be able to use the same techniques for lengthening the text (i.e., stretching it without necessarily adding more content) that they could very easily use in their L1.

5.5.3 Writing in an L2: Issues of language and conventions

Writing guidelines included in the course outlines stated that students were expected to write work of "professional" quality. That is, not only the content, but also the format and the language mattered:

> **A professional appearance in polished English is an essential prerequisite.** Few people can do this without spending substantial time and effort. (...) Ultimately you are judged not by what you know but by what you communicate.
>
> (Course outline COMM 4L 02)
>
> Guidelines for assignment:
> - **Maximum 5 pages, typed, double-spaced, plus a cover page and appendices** (if required).

- **Content, clarity and grammar will be considered.**

(Course outline COMM 4A 02)

In addition, the two instructors I interviewed mentioned that clarity of expression, coherence, cohesiveness, and content were aspects they took into account when evaluating students' assignments, which coincides with the descriptions included in most course outlines and in assignments that featured an evaluation criteria sheet. My textual analyses of the students' assignments, which include instructors' feedback in most cases, reveal that the students dealt with linguistic difficulties that were related to either one or a combination of the following: lack of familiarity with required genres (e.g., executive summary, persuasive essay, case study report, research paper); inappropriate use of language (e.g., prepositions, word formation, articles, spelling, parallel constructions, relative clauses); register inconsistencies (mixing formal and informal language), and lack of lexical variety.[30] Some of these are illustrated in Chapter 6, in relation to feedback.

Previous studies have found that students' L2 writing may be scaffolded by the use of L1 writing knowledge (Johns, 1990; Riazi, 1997; Shi & Beckett, 2002; Spack, 1997a, 2004). This finding coincides with some of my participants' views, some of whom argued that their strong L1 writing skills benefited their L2 writing, particularly in terms of the textual organization, as in Isabel's case:[31]

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[30] I classified students' mistakes according to the types listed above. Frequencies and number of mistakes were counted for at least two assignments each that the focal participants did. However, a micro-linguistic analysis of students' mistakes is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and this information is therefore used mainly as background data to support the more general comments I provide.

[31] A controversial area of research known as contrastive rhetoric examines the influence of L1 cultural frames on L2 writing (e.g., Connor, 1996, 2002; Leki, 1991, 1997; Ostler, 2001; see Casanave, 2004, for an overview). On one side of the debate is research that originated in the work of Kaplan (1966, and softer claims in 1987, 1988), and which claims that difficulties in writing result from differences across cultures, with some studies showing improvement in students' use of L2 rhetorical patterns as a result of an academic immersion experience in the target language context (e.g., Shi & Beckett, 2002); on the other side are arguments questioning and disproving this claim (e.g., Kubota, 1992, 1997; Leki, 1997; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Zamel, 1997). In a related discussion, Spack (1997b) also questions researchers' and teachers' tendency to label students according to their culture group, since this can lead to stereotyping them. My analysis of students' writing did not attempt to address the contrastive rhetoric debate, and I have therefore not analyzed the data trying to answer the question of cultural differences. Nor did I want to suggest that students' cultural backgrounds were static or fixed. Instead, my study aims to show that while the participants shared a common educational background (which included identifiable general traits about

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We need to write quite a few essays for my Political Science
courses - but since I'm a Communications major, I'm very used
to reading and writing essays. I know how to write a thesis
statement and support it and that stuff. We do this much more
often than students in other majors.
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(Isabel, I#1 F05: September 16/05)

Nevertheless, despite her high L1 academic literacy proficiency, Isabel also indicated that while she was comfortable writing in Spanish, doing the same in English was much harder. Other participants still felt constrained in terms of the level of sophistication they could display in their L2 writing (see reference to Lorena, above). It was thus mostly their inability to produce "elegant" writing which perturbed students. Additionally, all participants found that their assignments at WCU demanded more time. According to them, this was mainly due to their unfamiliarity with the WCU system and to what some of them referred to as the "English factor." Nelda, for example, said that her time investment on writing assignments in Canada was much bigger than in Mexico, where she usually was able to do short assignments in a matter of a day or so. In contrast, assignments at WCU took her almost a week:

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What I realized is that even though my school in Mexico is
hard, if I have an assignment for tomorrow, I know I can do
it in one day. But here - for instance, I have another essay
due on Tuesday ((in a week's time)) and I'm already working
on it! It's like I need more than one day to work on my
assignments, and this is - in Mexico we only need more than
one day when we work for the bigger assignments, but I
realized that even for the easiest assignments we need more
than one day (...) Like, in Mexico I know I would need one day
to write an essay of this kind, and in one day I can do a
good job, and here I need like five days.
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(Nelda, I#4 F05: November 24/05)

Despite the participants' self-proclaimed struggles, except for a few cases, students passed their written assignments and exams, and the feedback they received from instructors did not generally indicate that they had problems to interpret what students wrote, although instances where instructors suggested proofreading by a native speaker

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their familiar home academic culture), each of them experienced their academic literacy socialization in unique ways.

were found in the data (refer to Chapter 6, Section 6.1.4, for further elaboration on this and on other aspects related to feedback).

In addition to linguistic issues, I looked at the students' knowledge of writing styles and citation conventions. The participants were familiar with at least a basic knowledge of publication styles (usually either MLA or APA), but they indicated that their MCMU instructors did not always seem to pay much attention to format aspects when evaluating assignments. For instance, double-sided final copies were usually permitted,[32] double-spacing research papers was not always necessary, and stylistic convention consistency was not usually among the evaluation criteria. In addition, it appears that their home instructors had a laxer attitude[33] vis-à-vis citation practices when compared to the WCU instructors, who in most cases required that students submitted their work through the Turn It In website to screen their text and identify any potential instances of textual borrowing.

The use of sources is a relatively newly researched area in the literature on NNES international students' L2 writing,[34] with special attention given to plagiarism particularly as it concerns non-Anglophone international students enrolled in Western English-medium HE institutions (Angelil-Cartier, 2000; Barks & Watts, 2001; Bloch, 2001; Bloch & Chi, 1995; Canagarajah, 2002; Casanave, 2004; Currie, 1998; Dong, 1996; Howard, 1995, 2000; Pecorari, 2001, 2003; Pennycook, 1996; Shi, 2004; Sutherland-Smith, 2005). The issue of "textual borrowing" (Shi, 2004), also viewed as a "survival strategy" (Currie, 1993) or as "patchwriting" (Howard, 1995) has been explored, consequently increasing our knowledge of the reasons underlying students' textual borrowing practices, and contributing with insights from institutional, instructors' and students' perspectives. Research shows that plagiarism is a very complex concept to unpack, "a multi-layered phenomenon encompassing a spectrum of human intention"

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[32] Such a detail might seem irrelevant to the reader; however, on at least one occasion, a student's assignment (at WCU) received lower grades because of double-side printing (instead of single-side).

[33] I would like to note that this information is based exclusively on students' accounts, and therefore the instructors' views are not reflected. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to interview MCMU instructors to corroborate the students' opinions, and therefore I treat this finding as extremely partial.

[34] The spread of the use of computers and access to on-line information has also added a new dimension to the discussion of plagiarism (Bloch, 2001).

(Sutherland-Smith, 2005, p. 83), and that it is not restricted to L2 writers only, although English proficiency problems, and/or unawareness of or unfamiliarity with Western citation practices may have a negative impact on their citation practices (refer to Shi, 2004, for an overview). Also, it has been recently demonstrated that first language and task type may strongly influence students' textual borrowing (Shi, 2004). In this project, however, plagiarism did not emerge as a salient issue (at least not among the research participants).[35] This might be so because, according to the participants, they were made aware of citation conventions on their MCMU campuses. In addition, Ms. Gutierrez, the MCMU-WCU Program Director, warned students against performing textual borrowing. (See Chapter 6, Section 6.1.5 for further details on this.)

In spite of the students' self-proclaimed knowledge of citation and stylistic conventions, I found some instances revealing inadequate mastery of these rules. While the stylistic inconsistencies were not always identified by the instructors in their feedback, citation problems tended to be noted in their comments: "Who says [this]? Cite if it's from a book. If it's the prof in class you're off the hook." (Isabel, POLI 1A 01, short essay #1, TA feedback entry #1. Comment written in the margin.) Overall, though, it seems students made a concerted effort to acknowledge their sources,[36] and when textual borrowing took place (as in the case above) it was most likely an instance of inadvertent plagiarism which did not lead to harsh consequences.

5.5.4 Writing as "torture"

For some students the academic literacy demands were perceived as so formidable and they became such a big hurdle that the students even went so far as to withdraw from the courses. For instance, Natalia was registered in PHIL 4A, an online course. One of the main requirements was writing multiple essays, an activity that seemed to frighten and

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[35] Because plagiarism is such a delicate issue with potentially harsh punishments for those practicing it, researchers may find it difficult to gather data that reveals cases of textual borrowing that were unnoticed by the corresponding authorities. Even when this is possible, ethical issues (e.g., respecting the participant's confidentiality vs. denouncing academic dishonesty) complicate the picture.

[36] For example, for her LAST assignments Nelda was required to use the MLA style, which she did not know. Yet she contacted me asking for help, and also looked for a copy of the manual and some guidelines available through the Internet.

intimidate Natalia from the outset, in particular due to the instructor's warning to NNES students:[37]

> **I'm very scared about this course** [PHIL 4A]. I was reading the course outline and the instructor wrote that **if English is not your first language, you may consider dropping the course because the writing component of the course is very important,** and I know he's not going to feel compassion for us, Mexicans! So I'm quite worried about this one; I don't know if I should drop it, or if I should go to the Writing Centre for assistance, I don't really know.
>
> (Natalia, I#3, F05: September 12/05)

Natalia submitted the first two assignments, and by then she realized that the academic literacy demands of this course were making her exchange experience too stressful. Over a month later she told me she had withdrawn from that course because the weekly essays were just too much for her.[38] She explained to me:

> I **don't like writing essays.** I just **suffer too much.** And this was every week, and **this was torture for me!** So first I thought that I could ask for help, I could have someone check them for me. But then, what would I do on the final exam? This was just **too much pressure for me.**
>
> (Natalia, I#5, F05: October 28/05)

In addition to Natalia, another focal participant (Liliana) and three secondary participants (Alejandra, Mercedes, and Salvador) were originally enrolled in PHIL 4A, and while only Natalia dropped out (in her own words, feeling like a "coward" for doing so), all other participants felt equally burdened by the academic literacy demands of the course (both by the readings, which were short but hard to grasp, and the writing assignments). Two of the other students considered withdrawing as well, yet they refrained from doing so only because their course fees were not refundable. In the following chapter I provide further details about students' struggles with the academic literacy activities, including those related to this course.

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[37] I confirmed the veracity of this information with all other four participants enrolled in PHIL 4A.

[38] Natalia decided to drop the PHIL course in consultation with her parents, given that she had already paid the course non-refundable registration fee (about $600 CAD) and was aware that it was a large sum of money that would be lost. Also, because PHIL was an optional course (i.e., it was not part of the certificate of specialty), withdrawing from it did not dramatically affect the students other than from the financial point of view.

5.6 Summary and discussion

Drawing on the collection, triangulation and interpretation of multiple data sources, in this chapter I first presented an overview of the courses and the different academic literacy activities in which the exchange students were involved, and then interpreted their insider perspectives about their engagement and performance in these situated discourse practices.

There are a number of interesting findings revealed in this chapter. For instance, whereas much of the current literature has demonstrated that writing from sources can lead students to perform unacknowledged (sometimes also inadvertent) textual borrowing, this did not emerge as a salient issue in this study. Nevertheless, in spite of the participants' self-proclaimed familiarity with citation practices and stylistic conventions, students indicated that they felt that WCU was stricter on these matters than their home university (e.g., many WCU instructors asked students to submit their work through Turn It In), which in turn might have acted as a strong deterrent to plagiarism.

Another finding relates to the participants' use of strategies to cope with the academic literacy demands of WCU. Similar to the case study participants in Riazi (1997) and Leki (1995), the students employed a series of strategies to maximize their academic literacy outcomes. For example, underlining or highlighting as they read, writing summaries and sharing these with peers (further discussed in Chapter 6), looking up words in the dictionary, using their L1 knowledge about different academic genres (e.g., essay, research paper), among others.[39] However, as noted before, the students arrived with a whole set of expectations about the WCU academic system, yet there were several mismatches between their assumptions and their actual experiences in the host academic setting. While students were able to capitalize on some of the academic literacy strategies they brought with them, in the process of being socialized into the target academic culture, they progressively became aware of the mismatches and, as I further elaborate on in Chapter 6, they transformed their practices to adjust to or resist the host academic culture.

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[39] An in-depth examination of the strategic academic literacy knowledge the students brought with them to WCU as well as the knowledge they developed and then took back to their MCMU contexts is discussed in Chapter 7.

Even though none of the students found the texts particularly difficult to understand (except for the PHIL and LAST texts, which were short but very different from the style and content students were used to handling, and thus were perceived as challenging), reading could be summarized in one word: overwhelming. This aspect should not be overlooked, as most of the students' achievements and failures were in fact dependent on their success at developing quick and effective reading practices. The fact that all this wealth of knowledge about academic literacy practices was to be learned and internalized in such a hasty manner is problematic since, as L2 language socialization research shows, the process of becoming familiar with new practices and of gaining access to new academic communities takes time (Bronson, 2005; Duff, 1995, 1996, 2003; Kobayashi, 2003; Morita, 2002, 2004; Morita & Kobayashi, in press). Yet time is something that the exchange students did not have much of, considering that their academic sojourn lasted between four and eight months only.

The findings also reveal that one of the biggest challenges students faced was learning how to successfully manage their time due to the heavy workload and to the more autonomous approach to learning that characterized the WCU academic culture. This echoes the results from previous studies that have focused on issues around the academic enculturation of NNES speakers (e.g., Abel, 2002; Ferenz, 2005; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Johns, 1997; Myles & Cheng, 2003). Whereas the MCMU students were advised to keep up to date with their readings and plan for their assignments ahead of time, they did not always take this advice seriously. This is something I was able to observe throughout the data collection period, and which is nicely captured in Natalia's comments: "You don't learn it until you live it! You don't do it until you need it."

Learning to manage their time not only had an impact on students' grades, but also on their life outside class. That is, unless the participants learned to optimize their time investments, academic literacy activities could potentially take over most of their free time, thus limiting their availability to engage in non-academic activities oriented towards informal social interaction. This is unfortunate, given that, as Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) suggest, there seems to be a positive association between students' involvement in extracurricular activities and their adaptation to the host context and their academic involvement.

Another finding relates to the students' perception of writing as highly demanding, particularly when it required demonstrating their critical analysis skills and a writerly authority.[40] In the most extreme cases, writing was even considered a form of "torture." Throughout their exchange, the participants were involved in multiple and diverse writing activities (case study report, short and long essays, research papers, and so on). Interestingly, while most students originally anticipated no difficulties in approaching and completing these activities, over the course of the term their perception of the demands associated with them changed. With time, the participants realized that in spite of their high TOEFL scores, their previous L2 writing experiences in English, and their high academic average at MCMU--all of which boosted their confidence as being linguistically and academically well equipped--there were certain unforeseen challenges (such as writing with a voice, linguistic problems, conforming to word/page limits, etc.) they grappled with as they engaged in the academic literacy activities of their respective courses. That is, their assumptions about encountering familiar academic writing practices were not always met. As a result, the participants were left with the choice to either attempt to learn about the target academic literacy norms and use this knowledge to adjust their practices accordingly, or else to resist these norms (by ignoring or defying them) and suffer the consequences. I come back to this issue in Chapter 6, where I explore how participants became aware of the WCU academic literacy practices and interpret their reactions and responses.

Finally, another finding relates to the students' tendency to compare and contrast the MCMU and the WCU education systems. The participants arrived in Canada with a comprehensive set of expectations about their academic exchange at WCU, including preconceptions about the nature and the level of difficulty of the academic literacy practices they would encounter. The findings reveal that the participants initially relied fundamentally on their home academic literacy experiences, particularly their (usually bilingual Spanish-English) high school and their university practices. Consequently, they continuously compared and contrasted, either consciously or unconsciously, their familiar MCMU academic culture with the new WCU academic culture they were trying to become acquainted with. While in many instances the students' views about the two

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[40] Presumably, local students also encountered some of the same challenges faced by the participants.

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systems differed slightly, particularly among students from different disciplinary areas, for the most part there was general agreement in portraying both academic cultures in the ways described here.[41] As time progressed, they engaged in multiple diverse academic literacy activities which led them to modify some of their initial interpretations. By the end of the exchange the participants shared a common view about the existence of identifiable differences between both academic systems; they also accounted for these differences as a way of understanding and perhaps even justifying some of their frustrations and mishaps (such as poor grades).[42] This finding coincides with the findings of previous work that has examined cultural patterns reflected and promoted in North American and Mexican education systems (Kras, 1988). Mexico Connect, an online resource with comprehensive information about Mexico, features an article comparing Canadian and US education with Mexican education, suggesting that:

> For the Mexican, the educational base is deductive reasoning; moving from the global towards the particular. However the last critical step of translating from the particular to application, or how to implement, is not emphasized. (...)The Mexican student is drilled in concepts and ideas. Credit is given for examinations, not participation or class work. The student learns to focus on the intellectual and on recall, rather than how to use the knowledge on a day to day basis. (...)Where the Mexican student receives a broad education, their northern counterparts focus on specific areas and achieve a greater depth of knowledge. What are the implications of all this? Mexico produces citizens and employees who have an excellent general knowledge of the world, Mexico, culture and current affairs. But it also produces people who have learned to conform; that form is better than substance; a reluctance, due to training and concern over losing face, to resolving problems

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[41] I would like to emphasize that the comparison of two academic literacy practices included here does not aim to essentialize academic cultures and characterize them as fixed and easily defined. On the contrary, especially in educational contexts like WCU, which have become what some researchers call "contact zones" (Pratt, 1991, Singh & Doherty, 2004) "transculturation" rather than acculturation may take place (Zamel, 1997). Additionally, the fact that there are many within and cross-disciplinary differences within each culture should also be kept in mind to avoid overly simplistic interpretations of the academic literacy practices students are expected to master.

[42] For organizational purposes, these difficulties were analyzed in detail in relation to reading, on one hand, and to writing, on the other. However, I would like to highlight that both, reading and writing, are intricately intertwined and therefore the mutual impact on each other should not be overlooked (Belcher & Hirvela, 2001; Grabe, 2001; 2003; Hirvela, 2001; Spack, 1988). Based on the students' reports, L2 reading scaffolded their L2 writing (as well as their classroom participation and their engagement with the class subject matter), since students relied on the texts they read as sources from which to write their assignments and exams.

directly and implementing new or different techniques. (Mexico Connect, 1996-2006, n/p)

Although I do not intend to draw unwarranted generalizations about the Mexican education system,[43] there are some interesting coincidences between the quoted text above and the findings of this study which I believe merit attention. For instance, according to the input gathered from the participants, students in Mexico were expected to recall large volumes of information that were mainly transmitted to them in their class lectures. Their knowledge of this content (rather than their processes and abilities) was frequently and regularly evaluated through weekly assignments and monthly examinations that mostly required knowledge "reproduction." As a result, students often succeeded (and managed to obtain grades on the high 80s – 100s range) with relative ease as long as they devotedly attended classes, paid attention, completed their daily homework and had a good memory. In contrast, their study abroad experience at WCU engaged them in processes of knowledge "construction" which were in marked contrast with their familiar MCMU practices. This process of knowledge construction is based on constructivist models of instruction, which, as noted by Jonassen (1994),

> strive to create environments where learners actively participate in the environment in ways that are intended to help them construct their own knowledge, rather than having the teacher interpret the world and insure that students understand the world as they have told them. (n/p)

Given that the study participants were used to instructional models that valued objective knowledge transmission (e.g., assignments typically had one possible – and therefore correct – solution which students could obtain from classroom lectures), the socioconstructivist approach to education fostered at WCU involved the participants in new ways of learning which demanded that they modified their expectations (about instruction, evaluation, knowledge generation) and study habits (e.g., time devoted to reading and to completing an assignment).

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[43] First of all, the small sample and qualitative nature of this case study precludes any generalizations. In fact, my aim is to provide in-depth descriptions and interpretations of particular students' experiences. Secondly, as I mentioned earlier, I do not support an essentialist view of cultures of any sort. Instead, I view cultures as hybrid and fluid, particularly in contexts such as WCU, which represents an institution with a larger number of international students and also staff, therefore giving way to the convergence of many cultures. This is not to say, however, that despite this hybridity the identification of certain patterns that seem to be salient in terms of academic literacy practices, in this case, is not possible.

The students viewed the autonomous learning model as challenging and demanding, whereas the dependent learner model was seen as convenient: "you arrive in class and pay attention, that's it! That's your student role. So it's more convenient, in a sense." (Lorena, I#5 F05: November 14/05). At the same time, they also acknowledged the benefits of the independent model, leading some students to complain about their home academic culture, wishing they would be treated more like the young adults they were than like high school students (Raquel, interview data). Thus, it appears that in being socialized into new ways of practicing academic literacies, some participants developed a more critical stance towards their own home practices. This latter aspect is elaborated on in Chapter 7 in relation to the students' return to their home country.

Chapter 6

FACTORS SHAPING STUDENTS' L2 ACADEMIC LITERACY SOCIALIZATION ABROAD

6.0 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the characteristics and expectations associated with the participants' academic literacy practices at WCU. Complementing the findings of Chapter 5, this chapter addresses the second research question: How do the participants negotiate the process of their L2 socialization into the academic literacy practices and expectations of the host university? I approached this broader question by addressing the following sub-set of questions during the data collection and analyses: What factors seem to significantly shape the students' academic literacy socialization during their exchange?, and What crucial sources of information about the academic literacy values, norms, and expectations of WCU do students have access to, and how do they take advantage of them? The focus of this chapter is thus the students' experiences both inside and outside the classroom, and the role of internal as well as external academic and non-academic factors in shaping their L2 academic literacy socialization. In particular, I examine how their actions--whether deliberate or unconscious--and access to key resources and people affected their English academic literacy practices within the WCU context. I do this by focusing on the focal participants' academic literacy trajectories vis-à-vis five parameters labeled as follows: individual networks of practice, team work, course resources and assignments, feedback, and institutional support. Table 6.1 includes the definition of each parameter as they are used in this dissertation.

These concepts are further defined and illustrated by means of examples drawn from the participants' academic literacy trajectories included in the following sections. It should be noted that even though I try to capture the complexity and multifaceted nature of the participant's L2 academic literacy socialization, the illustrations provided here only represented a limited number of typical examples and should also be seen as one of the multiple possible interpretations.

Table 6.1 Academic Literacy Socialization Parameters

Parameter	Definition
Individual network of practice (INoP)	INoP denotes the informal social ties of any given individual, whether weak/distant or strong/close, relevant to the phenomenon under study (in this case, their L2 academic literacy socialization).
Team work	Team work refers to groups of typically 3-5 students working together on a course-sponsored project. Students were sometimes given freedom to choose their team partners while other times these were assigned by their instructor.
Course resources	Course resources include materials developed or compiled by the instructor, such as course outlines, handouts, readings, and websites.
Feedback	Feedback refers to the responses students received about their writing (assignments and exams) from instructors, teaching assistants and/or people they consulted (e.g., proofreaders).
Institutional support	Institutional support denotes the sources of information and help that the students had access to during their academic sojourn at WCU.

Data for this chapter come from interviews with the focal participants and the two instructors, as well as from interviews with some of the secondary participants. The focal students' writing assignments, their reflective writing logs, and the course outlines also provided useful information.

The chapter is organized into five main sections, each of which examines the participants' academic literacy socialization experiences vis-à-vis a different parameter. In Section 6.1 I will examine participants' INoPs; in 6.2 I address their team work experiences; in 6.3 I analyze their use of course-related resources; in 6.4 I look at feedback practices; and in 6.5 I examine their access to and use of institutional support. The chapter ends with a summary and discussion of findings. Figure 6.1 includes a graphic representation of the academic literacy socialization parameters introduced here.

Figure 6.1 L2 Academic Literacy Socialization Parameters

Host academic context

6.1 Individual networks of practice

The notion of INoP was found to be a useful analytical construct to examine the nature and impact of the participants' interpersonal relationships on their academic literacy socialization. An INoP takes into account ties, i.e., connections with people, which do not necessarily belong to or may not be visible in a community of practice as defined by Wenger (1998). Thus, the INoP construct complements the more commonly used notion of CoP, which in this case was employed to examine students' team work participation and negotiations. In order to re-construct the participants' INoPs, I gathered extensive relevant data, most of which was collected via interviews and personal communications (msn as well as e-mail) with the participants. Interviews with each participant were triangulated with interview data from other participants (both focal and secondary) who were identified as nodes in their INoPs. The resulting INoP representation was shared with the pertinent participant, who provided me with feedback, which was included in the final INoP version. In what follows, I provide an illustration of

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a focal participant's INoP which is later compared with portions of another participant's. These two examples were selected mainly because of the richness of the ties included in the participants' INoPs (i.e., their variability and the contrast between them). Other participants' INoPs were also equally complex. Inclusion and a full discussion of all other focal participants' INoPs is not possible due to space constraints, as the INoP is one of five parameters examined. However, I suggest that even though not all participants' INoPs are included, the examples provided here show the usefulness of the analytical construct in accounting for the inherently social and distributed nature of the participants' academic literacy socialization.

6.1.1 Liliana's INoP

As mentioned in previous chapters, Liliana spent both the summer as well as the fall terms in Canada, and her INoP includes nodes from the entire period she spent abroad. Even though Liliana met many more people during her sojourn than the number included in her INoP, those with whom she had purely incidental contact have not been identified as nodes. Eight clusters, 25 nodes and 45 ties were identified (see Fig. 6.2). In this section, I explain the role played by these nodes and clusters in Liliana's L2 academic (literacy) socialization.

Liliana's *Mexican friends* cluster includes ties to Natalia (focal participant), Lorena (focal participant), Nancy (secondary participant), Salvador (secondary participant), Gerardo (whom I interviewed several times) and Miranda (whom I never met). Liliana made an (unconscious or conscious) investment by including these people in her INoP, which in turn, provided her with two kinds of return: affective and academic. Except for Gerardo and Miranda, all other Mexican friends are multiplex nodes (i.e., they were linked to Liliana in more than one capacity). Natalia was Liliana's best friend, her summer 2005 (S05) roommate, her classmate in six out of seven courses, and her group work partner on multiple occasions. She was her closest source of emotional support abroad and therefore the person to whom she confided all achievements and frustrations. Liliana and Natalia spent most of their in-class as well as their outside class time together, shopping for groceries, sightseeing, socializing with friends in common and of course, talking.

Figure 6.2 Liliana's INoP

In addition to non-academic related talk, Liliana's and Natalia's daily interactions included exchanges of opinions about instructors' personalities, teaching styles, positive as well as negative qualities they identified in them, comments about MCMU classmates in general and also about particular students they met in class. Since Liliana and Natalia were MCMU program classmates, they constantly compared both academic systems. For instance, they evaluated the level of strictness of WCU courses with the equivalent courses in their home university, and assessed their instructors' vis-à-vis their academic background, professional experience and pedagogical practices in a comparative manner. When doing homework, Liliana and Natalia worked jointly to interpret assignment prompts, share summaries and notes, and exchange additional relevant resources they

found and tips they had learned from others in class. Indeed, they seemed to turn each assignment into a collaborative effort regardless of whether these were expected to be completed individually, in pairs or in teams.

The affective and academic support Liliana received from Natalia was in fact mutual: both had a comparable investment in each other and since they were academically equally strong and they complemented each other's English language proficiencies,[44] they seem to have benefited in equivalent ways. Also, these two kinds of support were strongly interrelated. For example, both students felt extremely upset with their COMM 4G instructor because they did not enjoy her teaching style, they thought the assignment prompts were too ambiguous, and they felt that the teacher graded them unfairly (see further discussion on this in Chapter 7). Lorena, who took the same class, also shared their frustration and powerlessness, and thus all three students would sometimes vent their feelings to each other as a way of confirming their views, releasing tension, and making strategic decisions about how to approach future assignments based on the limited feedback they received from the instructor and on the information they might be able to gather informally (e.g., by looking at non-Mexican classmates' graded assignments in order to compare their grades and assignment qualities against their own).

Liliana befriended Nancy during the S05 term and their ties were strengthened during the fall term, when they took other courses together and worked jointly for some course assignments. Nancy and Lorena were more junior students than Liliana, and they both ranked at the top in terms of academic performance at home,[45] and also at WCU, when compared to the performance of fellow Mexican students. Liliana enjoyed doing team work with these students because she considered them very responsible and academically strong (in addition to being nice people). In fact, as noted in Liliana's writing log entries, on several occasions she relied on their knowledge and expertise in order to solve some of her assignments, and whenever in doubt she resorted to them for help, although usually only after consulting with Natalia.

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[44] For instance, Liliana and Natalia usually proofread each other's work, and according to them, while one of them was better with prepositions, the other one was better with transitions words.

[45] Nancy's and Natalia's MCMU average was 97/100; they both were granted merit-based partial scholarships to participate in the MCMU-WCU academic exchange.

Liliana's group work experiences involved Natalia in all cases except for one course (COMM 4 M), in which Liliana worked with a local non-Mexican classmate (Iris) and three other Mexican students (Rafael, Juan and Andres; these three were weak ties since Liliana only had very limited contact with them, even during their team work efforts). Iris, on the other hand, was a stronger tie since besides working with Liliana on the COMM 4M group assignment, she also usually chatted with Liliana and Natalia about course-related matters. Team work experiences became other instances of joint socialization into the academic practices of WCU through negotiating assignment prompt interpretations, the content to be included, as well as the entire writing process with the team work members. However, as discussed in the next section, the negotiations and outcomes of group work were not always predictable and did not always materialize in the ways envisioned.

Salvador, another mutiplex tie, became a key source of emotional and academic support in relation to PHIL 4A, an online course which required weekly readings and short essay assignments. Initially, Natalia was also registered in this course, but shortly after completing the second essay she withdrew due to the heavy demands that the literacy activities for this course imposed on her (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion). Hence, after Natalia dropped out of the class Liliana continued sharing her arduous weekly experiences with her, yet she no longer counted on her academic support for content-related aspects of this course. It was Salvador who became Liliana's main resource, especially closer to the final exam date, when they shared summaries, exchanged study tips, discussed course-related issues via msn, and practiced together the day before the exam. In addition, since Salvador had a friend who had already taken PHIL 4A, he had access to information that would turn out to be very helpful for their exam preparation.[46]

Gerardo, a uniplex and weaker tie, was also from the MCMU-Monterrey campus, which might have slightly contributed to the initial connection made between him and Liliana. Liliana, Natalia, Nancy, Miranda, Salvador as well as Gerardo's other friends

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[46] For example, Salvador was aware that in past years the same instructor expected students to know all course topics in association with the authors they read on each topic, something that had not been specified in study guidelines provided by the instructor. This information influenced the ways in which Liliana and Salvador studied for their final PHIL exam.

would usually spend some of their free time together, sharing meals and socializing (often in Gerardo's residential unit). Their similar background (cultural, linguistic, knowledge of the MCMU culture), interests (e.g., home pop-culture, food) and needs (e.g., affection, affiliation) seemed to not only bring these students together, but they also brought them closer to their home country, which they missed increasingly as the months went by. Towards the end of the second semester abroad, when Liliana could not wait to return home, these friends provided her with the affective support she most needed at that time. Had it not been for them, her final weeks of the exchange would have been very miserable, which in turn, would have most likely impacted her academic performance negatively.

Whereas Natalia, Lorena, Nancy and Salvador were both in Liliana's "Mexican friends" as well as in her "Mexican classmates" clusters, she had other Mexican classmates with whom she had a positive relationship but not nearly as strong as the one with the people in the friends cluster. Nevertheless, she still established a connection with them which rewarded her with an instrumental return (e.g., through exchanging views about the WCU system, clarifying assignment objectives, and sharing practical tips, such as where to make photocopies, etc.) as well as incidental opportunities for socializing which did not lead to a stronger and more lasting relationship. Marilu and Franco (weaker ties) were classmates during the summer, and Analia, Alejandra, Soledad (closer ties), Rafael, Juan, and Andres (weaker ties) during the fall. These last three students were also Liliana's team mates in one of her courses (see above), but except for Andres, who she identified as a hardworking student, the other two were described by her as lazy (in Rafael's case) and stubborn (in Juan's case), which my have accounted for her low investment in these relationships.

It has been argued that accommodation arrangements can have a strong impact on relationship formations (see Wilcox et al., 2005), and this became very clear in Liliana's case. During the summer she lived in a four-dormitory unit at Cherry Tree House with Natalia and two new Mexican friends called Angela and Yolanda; these were the people with whom Liliana shared much of her free time as well as the personal physical space

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available to her.[47] As her post-exchange reflection reveals, these people had a significant affective impact on Liliana. Yet, while on the one hand she appreciated her Mexican companions, on the other hand she was eager to share a dormitory with local students who (she hoped) would expose her to a different culture and would also force her to practice English. Unfortunately, Liliana's expectations were not fully met during the fall given that she found irreconcilable incompatibilities with three of her five roommates. While she developed a close friendship with one of them (Susan, an Australian exchange student who at the time of the project had spent a few months at WCU already) and she also managed to have a friendly relationship with Cathy (a Canadian student whose home town was a few hours drive from the WCU campus), her efforts to connect with the three "hostile" students did not seem to pay off.[48]

Living with mostly unfriendly roommates (or friendly ones who were not often in the dorm, as in Cathy's case) led Liliana to look for alternative environments where she could enjoy her free time. Naturally, since Natalia lived just two floors up in the same building (The Concrete Towers), Liliana usually went to Natalia's dorm unit, where she befriended Rachel and Neela.[49] As a result, Liliana also found in these non-Mexican girls the comfort of good company which supported her during her sojourn. Rachel and Neela were senior biology students whose familiarity with the WCU system contributed to Liliana's and Natalia's socialization into the WCU academic culture. For instance, Neela and Rachel explained to them that it was common practice for instructors to be very strict at the beginning of a course as a way of encouraging students to work harder, but that

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[47] Even though Liliana felt more comfortable with her S05 roommates than with three of her five roommates, she still preferred the fall residence living arrangements in light of the extra physical space she had and the more central location of the residence.

[48] In fact, these three students (who were all locals and shared a common Asian background) have not even been included in Liliana's INoP because they virtually ignored Liliana and the other two roommates. "They sometimes don't even reply when I say 'hi'," she usually told me. I would like to note here that Liliana (sometimes together with Susan) made several efforts to improve the relationship with these three roommates. However, she gave up trying after several attempts that yielded no positive results. Liliana was disgusted by their neglect of housekeeping duties (such as washing their own dirty dishes and sharing vacuuming and washroom cleaning, for instance) and nonchalant attitude towards her.

[49] Liliana concluded that her incompatibility with her three unfriendly roommates was more related to their personality traits than to their Asian backgrounds, given that she found Rachel and Neela very amicable despite their cultural differences.

eventually instructors rewarded good students with higher grades in recognition of their efforts. This type of information not only calmed down Liliana and Natalia after they obtained low grades in their midterms, but also gave them hints about how to navigate their student lives in a culture they were just discovering.

Susan and Cathy also contributed to counterbalancing the unfriendly environment created by Liliana's roommates. Furthermore, they were among the very few native English speakers with whom Liliana maintained closer contact (given that her interactions with local classmates, for instance, were often quite limited and superficial). Susan's tie, in particular, strengthened with time. For example, she joined Liliana, Natalia and some of their mutual friends during socializing activities (e.g., sharing meals at a friend's home) and even made plans to visit Liliana the following summer.[50] Consequently, her trust and level of comfort with Susan also grew with time, which prompted Liliana to rely on Susan's expertise as an Anglophone student who had already spent a few months at WCU to support her academically. So, although Susan was not a local student, her native command of English was trusted by Liliana; Susan's interpretations of the PHIL 4A readings, for example, would be accurate. When Susan also found the readings were hard to understand, Liliana confirmed her perceptions about the inaccessibility of the subject matter of this course. Susan also volunteered to proofread some of Liliana's essay assignments, and although her feedback was not necessarily thorough, Liliana appreciated her help, incorporated her suggestions for improvements, and felt reassured that a native speaker had been able to grasp her ideas. Although Susan and Cathy were in different disciplinary areas, they still contributed to Liliana's academic socialization in Canada via conversations about characteristics as well as expected standards of the WCU system (e.g., what constitutes a good grade, how much time is typically devoted to studying for exams and completing assignments, what constitute typical instructional approaches, tips for maximizing benefits for class lectures, how to interpret instructor feedback and grading practices, etc.).

Aside from the ties Liliana either forged or further strengthened during her stay abroad, she also maintained close contact with some of her family members who she

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[50] In fact, my visit to Liliana in Mexico was followed by Susan's a few months after. Thus, at least during the first six months after Liliana's return home, she still kept in contact with Susan, and although less often so (and only via e-mail or msn) she also kept in touch with Cathy.

either visited (her aunt and cousins in Toronto) or who traveled to Canada to visit her (both her mother and her then boyfriend). While Liliana's family ties in Mexico would include a much larger number of nodes, only those connections that were physically instantiated in Canada were included in her INoP, given that they had direct repercussions on Liliana. For instance, after visiting her family in Toronto Liliana re-assessed her post-graduation plans and she contemplated the opportunity to move to Eastern Canada to work as an employee of her aunt's company. In addition, because Liliana spent her summer vacations in Toronto, her stay abroad felt to her much longer than it felt to all others who had returned to Mexico between the S05 and the F05 terms, a fact which made her very homesick by the second half of the fall. Her mother's and boyfriend's visits alleviated this feeling, but only for the duration of their stay. And, in the case of her boyfriend, because he visited Liliana during a busy time of the term, his company negatively impacted her academic performance, as she had less time to concentrate and dedicate to work (e.g., Liliana failed one of her midterms and admitted to not having been able to study as much as she should have).

Summarizing, the analysis I have included in this section shows that Liliana's investment in INoP ties afforded her two kinds of return, affective and academic, both of which had a strong connection with her socialization into the WCU academic culture, including its attendant literacy practices. The people in Liliana's INoP provided her with emotional support as well as with key knowledge she lacked as a newcomer to the host academic system. Although the density of her INoP was not considered in this study (i.e., I have only displayed all ties to the core but did not include the inter-connections),[51] the identification of uniplex and multiplex ties reveals that the people Liliana mostly benefited from (i.e., received both kinds of return) were multiplex ties: other individuals who in addition to being her friends, were also her classmates and sometimes also team mates at WCU. These results become even more salient when Liliana's INoP is considered against those of other participants. By way of an example, in what follows I

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[51] Only partial network zone and density analyses were performed. For example, the *Mexican friends* cluster was identified as extremely dense, with all its nodes being of the first order zone except for Cierra (whom Liliana met through Yolanda). However, since these two network aspects were not central to my study, I have not included them in my dissertation.

include my analysis of a portion of Raquel's INoP, a participant whose INoP structure and content were significantly different from Liliana's.

6.1.2 Raquel's INoP: A comparison

Raquel, another of the focal participants in the second set originally presented in Chapter 4, and two Mexican friends she knew prior to the exchange (Hugo and Lucia) shared an apartment located off-campus. Hugo and Lucia were multiplex nodes tied to Raquel in their capacity as friends and roommates. The three studied at the same MCMU campus, but they were pursuing different degrees and had different disciplinary interests. Both were more junior students than Raquel: Hugo was only in his fourth semester while Lucia was in her sixth. Whereas Liliana's relationship with her Mexican close friend and S05 roommate, Natalia, was identified as one that provided both parties with mutual benefits, this did not seem to be the case in Raquel's relationship with Hugo and Lucia. Even though she had a positive relationship with Lucia and Hugo, these two peers went through difficult adjustment periods during their Canadian sojourn. In Lucia's case, she was quite homesick and cried very often during the first month of the exchange. As a result, Raquel spent much of her time counseling her friend. Hugo was also very homesick; according to Raquel, he locked himself in his room for most of the time, listening to music and just being by himself. His exchange ended abruptly after he never returned from a visit to Mexico during the Thanksgiving holidays, leaving Raquel, Lucia, his instructors and classmates in shock. Hence, due to the special circumstances just described, neither of Raquel's closest Mexican friends and roommates appears to have had the same kind of effect on her academic socialization as did Liliana's Mexican friends and roommates.

At the same time, another cluster in Raquel's INoP was constituted by international friends, all of whom she met during her stay at WCU, and most of whom were also classmates (i.e., these were also multiplex ties). In light of her strong cultural immersion agenda, it is not surprising that Raquel sought to include people from different nationalities and cultures in her network; besides, this was also facilitated by the fact that Political Sciences courses had a more diverse student enrollment than Commerce courses, for instance. Consequently, Raquel connected with students from different parts of the

globe: Korea, Taiwan, Iraq, Nepal, Croatia, Cyprus, Chile, and Canada, among others. With them, she usually enjoyed conversations about diverse topics, and although these were not necessarily academically-oriented, Raquel gathered much information via these informal interactions about other ways of life, idiosyncrasies and worldviews. In this case, the return she obtained from these ties was mostly related to the access she gained to other cultural frames.[52] In contrast, the academic return she received from these people seemed to be very limited, except for Amanda. This was a Canadian student originally from Kelowna (a city located about a five-hour drive from WCU) who Raquel met in her POLI 3B class. Since Amanda was taking a Spanish course at WCU, Raquel offered to help her practice for her future Spanish oral presentations in exchange for help to proofread Raquel's POLI 3B essays in English. Another node in Raquel's INoP was Stephanie, an Australian girl who had just finished her degree and was about to leave Vancouver by the time Raquel met her. In addition to socializing with Stephanie, Raquel counted on her to improve her oral English skills. To that end, she asked Stephanie to teach her new slang words and colloquialisms, correct her pronunciation and point out her mistakes. Occasionally, Stephanie also proofread some of Raquel's POLI essays.

A smaller cluster included four female classmates of different nationalities (a Canadian, a Taiwanese, a Chinese and a Chilean student) who were tied to Raquel through team work also. As the next chapter section illustrates, two of these team mates in particular led her to a quite frustrating and unexpected experience of course-sponsored academic collaboration. This not only deprived Raquel of the unique opportunity to benefit from the scaffolding of more "expert" classmates who could have potentially guided her socialization into the WCU academic system (including negotiation of jointly written text), but also left her with a gloomy impression about what is entailed in working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

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[52] For instance, through her Cypriot friend Raquel learned that camels represented a common investment in that country, and that in order for her friend to be able to travel overseas to study at WCU, his family had to sell seven of these animals. What struck her as different from her Iraqi friend is that while they were both the same age, he had first hand experience living in a country at war, which made her realize how fortunate she was. And from her Korean classmates she learned about their careful attention to covering their skin from the sun. These are just a few examples that form part of a long list of informal cultural lessons that Raquel gathered throughout her stay abroad in Canada.

In comparison with Liliana, Raquel's INoP included more diversity in terms of the nodes' sociolinguistic backgrounds, thus giving Raquel greater access to different cultures. Conversely, Liliana's nodes included a large number of co-national Mexicans (N=20), and except for Susan, her other connections with non-Mexicans or local students were very limited. Furthermore, the closest ties in Liliana's network were linked to her in several capacities (as friends, classmates, team mates), thus rewarding her with ample opportunities for social/academic-related interactions with both kinds of return. In contrast, Raquel's ties to most nodes (even if multiplex) were weaker than those in Liliana's INoP, which may also have contributed to her receiving mainly one type of return (affective). In sum, by including these illustrations, I suggest that an examination of the participant's INoPs is helpful in obtaining a more complete picture of their academic literacy socialization while abroad.

6.2 Team work

The second analytical parameter that emerged from the study (see Fig. 6.1) and is also related to students' INoPs was the role of team work in students' academic socialization. Throughout the semester, the students participated in different course-sponsored team work experiences (also known as "group work" or "group projects"). Closely collaborating with peers in joint course-sponsored projects involved students in several kinds of negotiations and was thus identified as another useful parameter of their socialization into the WCU academic literacy practices. According to WCU instructors, students were expected to be trained how to work for "the real world." Hence, learning to collaborate with team partners was viewed as one of the main intended course outcomes. This course objective was conveyed in the respective course outlines, as exemplified in the extracts below:

```
COMM 3A 01:
Working in teams is an opportunity for you to learn from each
other. It also develops coordination and problem-solving
skills. Your future employers will be looking for evidence of
these skills. Downside risks of teams (such as free-loaders
and personality conflicts) are ever-present. Developing your
ability to overcome these problems will serve you well later
in this life. (p.6, emphases added)
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COMM 4M:
In the business environment, more emphasis is being placed on
group problem solving and team building activities.
Therefore, by building and working together in your own team
you will experience a similar activity to that you are likely
to experience in the work place. (p. 2, emphasis added)
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Team work was therefore seen as an apprenticeship opportunity whereby students would learn how to provide feedback and communicate decisions to each other, emulating at least one aspect of the workplace. In addition, the idea that conflict could take place and that effective negotiation skills were necessary for successful team work experiences was sometimes explicitly stated:

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You will learn how to deal with conflict and communicate
feedback to others during this part of the term, and in the
process of working on your group project you will no doubt
experience many opportunities for negotiation.
(COMM 2A 01/02, p.1)
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Unsurprisingly, team work was a salient type of practice for the participants, each of whom on average participated in three different group projects. Three main kinds of projects were identified: (a) *case study projects*, which often involved analysis and discussion of a published case, writing up of a brief report and a group presentation); (b) *term projects*, which often consisted of research and information gathering about an assigned topic and writing up of a 20-page report for submission at the end of the course; and (c) *development of a business opportunity* in which teams had fictional roles as entrepreneurs and investors. As entrepreneurs they put together a full business proposal; as investors they assessed other teams' business plans. Below, I first summarize the main patterns identified vis-à-vis the participants' team work constitution and dynamics; I then draw on the CoP notion to deconstruct the team work negotiations of two participants' whose experiences were particularly telling.

6.2.1 Configuration characteristics

Despite the participants' self-proclaimed intentions to befriend local people, a number of factors interfered with the emergence of spontaneous contact between Mexicans and domestic students, both inside and outside the classroom context. The participants mentioned repeatedly in their interviews that meeting local students was

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easy; however, going beyond exchanges of greetings was hard. This situated team work projects as potentially unique opportunities for the participants to engage in more sustained conversations with non-Mexican students. In turn, these social/academic relationships could possibly contribute to their socialization into the WCU system and its concomitant academic literacy practices. This applied mostly to the fall term, since during the summer term the Mexicans outnumbered non-Mexicans classmates, which made teaming up with domestic students difficult.[53]

Yet even during the fall term, when classes included a more culturally diverse student body, not all participants seemed eager to work with non-Mexicans. There were students who actually preferred to work with compatriots exclusively, others who preferred mixed teams, and a few others who were eager to work with local as well as other international students. Those in the first group usually argued that working with fellow Mexicans was easier because of their shared knowledge about group work dynamics, their similar expectations about time investment in group work projects (i.e., frequency and length of meetings) and work load distribution (e.g., Mexicans were used to dividing the assignment into parts and allotting one section to each group member, whereas non-Mexican peers seemed to approach the assignment together from beginning to end). Besides, many participants thought it was easier to negotiate their work in their L1. The students who preferred mixed groups indicated that Mexican team mates were needed in order to feel "at home," while locals were crucial in light of their familiarity with the WCU academic culture and their stronger English writing skills. In contrast, those who preferred to work with non-Mexicans were usually students with a strong cultural immersion agenda.

To better understand the reasons that led to particular team work configurations, however, additional factors need to be considered in conjunction with the Mexicans' preferences. For instance, in some cases instructors formed the groups, or in other cases they stipulated that groups were to be culturally diverse, thus preventing the formation of Mexican-only teams. (The latter situation applied mostly to Commerce courses, which

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[53] Since local WCU students tend to seek summer jobs, they take fewer courses between May and August. Consequently, summer term classes usually include a higher percentage of international students than courses offered during the rest of the academic year. For example, out of 44 students in the COMM 3A 01 class, 20 were Mexican.

had a higher enrollment of Mexican students than Political Science, Latin American Studies or Economics courses.) Hence, those participants with a low cultural immersion agenda who were allowed to choose their team mates usually ended up working with other Mexicans.

To some extent, team work choices became strategic, as MCMU students consciously selected whom to work with based on their personal priorities. While many favored the affective support that working with fellow Mexicans afforded them, others prioritized the academic and linguistic rewards they could receive from locals that were already acculturated to the WCU system. An examination of the participants' group work configurations illustrates this claim. Lorena, for instance, had to do at least one group project for each of the five courses she took (see Table 6.2).

Except for COMM 4B 03, where Lorena worked with two Mexican and two local Canadian classmates, in all other cases she chose to work with Mexicans exclusively. Furthermore, seven out of nine Mexican team mates were also her friends, and with four of them she worked in multiple teams.[54] Lorena could have chosen to join non-Mexican teams in all cases, but instead she valued the benefit that her already strong connection to her multiplex ties afforded her: she knew they were academically strong, responsible students, and this appears to be the main reason that accounted for her team partner selections.

Table 6.2 Lorena's Team Work Configurations

Course	Team work partners
COMM 4E	2 Mexicans
COMM 4H	3 Mexicans
COMM 4B 03	2 Canadians 2 Mexicans
COMM 4G	3 Mexicans
COMM 4L 01	3 Canadians

[54] Lorena worked with Nancy, Alejandra, Soledad, Liliana, Natalia, Analia and Miranda. The first five students were all interviewed, as they also participated in this study, which allowed for a very robust triangulation of information in relation to the participants' team work experiences.

Nelda worked in teams for three of her five courses (see Table 6.3). Her COMM 2A 01 team included five Canadian classmates (all of whom were first year students).

Table 6.3 Nelda's Team Work Configurations

Course	Team work partners
COMM 2A 01	5 Canadians
COMM 4A 02	1 Mexican 1 Canadian 1 Japanese 1 Swiss
COMM 4B 02	3 Mexican ·

Her all-Mexican team included two friends (one of whom was Isabel, focal participant), and another Mexican student from that year's cohort who asked to join Nelda's team because she had no other partners. The third team included students from a variety of backgrounds, a fact which Nelda appreciated because she felt that this diversity led to better group integration: "I like it because it's not like there's only Canadians and you are the one that's different." (Nelda, I#2: October 13/05) When reflecting upon her team work configuration strategies, it seems that none of these teams matched her "ideal" group constitution, although the third team was quite close to doing so:

> I prefer to work with people from here - that is, me, and another Mexican, but at least three Canadians because most of them know how to do market research, they are from here, and above all because they will find it easy to write our work.

(Nelda, I #1: September 22/05)

The excerpt above also supports the idea that team work choices were indeed strategic. So far, I have accounted for what appears to be the main rationale underlying the participants' team work selections, suggesting that the students had contradictory feelings about working with non-Mexicans. Despite their original intentions to learn about the local culture and practice English with Anglophone classmates, most participants preferred to work with fellow Mexicans; thus, potential instances for L2

academic literacy socialization were not fully exploited. The consequences of these choices may therefore have impacted their academic exchange experiences beyond their knowledge, an aspect that is further discussed in Chapter 7.

In addition to analyzing team work configurations I also focused on the participants' views of internal group dynamics with the assumption that examining their team work negotiations helps illuminate their academic literacy socialization.[55] Previous research has shown that L2 teachers and investigators as well as instructors across the curriculum may have a skewed image when it comes to NNES students' social/academic relationships with NES peers. Leki (2001), for instance, found that the course-sponsored group projects of her participants--six NNES international students in a U.S. university-- "were not so positive even though they were a salient factor in the students' academic experiences" (p. 47), and that the high quality of the final product masked the unsatisfactory experiences of some of the group members, leading instructors to remain unaware of this situation. Despite reports that reveal the negative side of group work (e.g., Carson & Nelson, 1996; Leki, 2001; Melles, 2004), there is a tendency to overrate its benefits by overlooking some of the problems concerning peer collaboration, thus favoring a mostly positive image of team work. This image continues to prevail among instructors, including those in this study (as shown in the beginning of this section), who also endorsed this type of activity by highlighting its role in preparing students for the workplace.

As already argued, team work was also identified as a salient factor in my participants' academic sojourn, whose peer collaboration experiences partially resonated with those reported by Leki (2001). In what follows, I draw on illustrations from two focal participants in order to provide a more detailed account of the kinds of negotiations experienced by these students as they engaged in team work with non-Mexicans. The

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[55] Similar to Leki (2001), my access to most of the teams' inner workings was restricted. In addition to scheduling conflicts, ethical reasons also prevented me from collecting observational data from these groups since not all its members were my participants. Hence, my interpretations are based on analyses of interview data with the participants and one instructor, from information in course outlines, from the final drafts the teams produced, and from additional informal communications with the participants. For a study which focused on the "behind the scenes" of group projects, refer to Kobayashi (2003), whose work focused on Japanese NNES students' negotiations while preparing for an oral academic presentation in an undergraduate course in an English-medium university.

examples chosen represent illustrations of critical incidents in the participants' academic socialization and they constitute very rich illustrations of issues that were reported by other students as well. I first provide an interpretive narrative account of each participant's team work negotiations and then employ the CoP framework to understand how issues associated with legitimate peripheral participation impacted the students' socialization into the target WCU academic culture.

6.2.2 Natalia's team work negotiations

After her first term in WCU, Natalia's level of confidence increased tremendously and her anxiety in turn decreased as a result of her successful experiences in the two WCU summer term courses. Consequently, at the beginning of the fall, Natalia considered herself well prepared for the academic demands she was about to embark on. By the second week of September she told me "I feel more relaxed. We met people in the summer. (...) You already know what you're up to." The summer term had also socialized her into the reading practices at WCU:

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You already know you have to read. (...) I wasn't used to
reading before class. But you notice the difference when you
read and prepare for class. (...) You take better advantage of
the instructor's knowledge and experience.
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(I#3: September 12/05)

Still, Natalia was aware that the fall term would probably demand more effort and time investment due to a heavier course load (and associated work load) and also because, as instructors themselves put it, the summer courses were easier because students were expected to do fewer quantitative analyses (Instructor, COMM 3A01 & COMM 4E, field notes.) Like many other participants, Natalia believed that working with fellow Mexican students was convenient because of their shared linguistic, cultural and academic backgrounds. At the same time, she was aware that working with co-nationals defeated one of the main purposes of going on an exchange abroad, and she therefore looked forward to the term as a second chance to connect with local students. However, most of her teams included Mexicans only, except for her COMM 4M group, where she

worked with four Asian-background students.[56] Of note is the fact that she would have also preferred to work with Mexicans in this course, yet a series of circumstances finally led her to work with this team.[57] Notwithstanding these circumstances, Natalia displayed an optimistic attitude at the outset, when she thought: "this is going to be a good opportunity to get to know people from here" (Natalia, I#3, September 12/05).

Unfortunately, learning to work cooperatively with her local team mates became more challenging than anticipated. In early October, Natalia seemed quite frustrated at not being able to function like a "true" team. At this time, the groups were supposed to start working on their first assignment ("Case I;" this was a study project type (a) as described above, worth 20% of the total course grade). However, something went wrong even before they started working together: Natalia's team mates had decided to meet but failed to inform her about their plans. Unexpectedly, she received a call from them complaining that she was not at the library, where they were all waiting for her. At this point, Natalia was already upset and feeling excluded, suspecting her team mates had secretly planned the meeting. Putting her feelings aside, she headed for the meeting place, yet when she arrived there she realized that her team mates were referring to a different library from the one she had in mind.[58] She then phoned them back to clarify the exact meeting location, only to find out that they were laughing at her disorientation, something which angered her and led her to decide not to join them for that particular meeting:

> I phoned her and she [the team mate] said "you do know which
> library I'm talking about, don't you?," and then the other
> girl started laughing. And I got all upset and decided not to
> go. (...) They assume that I know many things, but no — I'm new

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[56] Natalia was not sure whether the students were of Mainland Chinese or Taiwanese origin, but she identified their common Asian ethnicity by their physical characteristics, plus their communication among themselves in Chinese. These were Generation 1.5 students whose families had immigrated to Canada when the children were still young, which might account for their Chinese-English bilingualism. Furthermore, they were very familiar with the academic culture because they were fourth-year WCU students.

[57] The course instructor had requested that teams include students from a diversity of backgrounds. However, most students disregarded his request and partnered instead with their friends. Liliana and Natalia were initially together, yet the instructor split their team because it had too many members and Natalia was left with no choice but to join the team of Asian students.

[58] There are over a dozen library branches in the WCU campus, which may be a source of confusion for newcomer students unaware of this fact. In Natalia's case, she explained to me that while her team mates had agreed to meet at the largest library branch, she thought they were meeting at a smaller branch that was inside the building where Natalia took most of her classes.

here! And they are not new, and on top of things, they are
friends.

(Natalia, I#5: October 28/05)

In an attempt to understand the rationale behind her team mates' behavior, Natalia
pointed out that she was excluded not just due to her novice student status at WCU, but
also because she was not their friend. This situation positioned her as a double-outsider.
Thus, to some extent, even though she did not condone their attitude, she found at least
two reasons to justify her group integration problems. I will come back to this issue later.

As a responsible student, Natalia hoped to make useful contributions to her team
despite having missed the first meeting. Hence, she requested their meeting notes and
based on these she volunteered to write a portion of the first assignment draft, which she
subsequently sent to them. Yet once again, as shown in the quote below, they resisted
Natalia, this time by rejecting her contributions:

> I wrote the introduction and sent it to them. But they re-
> wrote it completely! They removed everything I had written.
> And since then we've met again (…) but it was just a waste of
> time. (…) I - I don't know - but I don't like working with
> them! (…) They don't take me into account. They take down
> notes of some of my ideas, but many times I say something and
> they only take it seriously when someone repeats what I
> already said. I don't like working with them because it's
> like - you make an effort to share your opinion, but it
> doesn't count.

(Natalia, I#5: October 28/05)

Natalia's frustration is evident in her comments about how she resented not being
considered a valuable team member. To make matters worse, Natalia sometimes
struggled to understand her team mates speak, which added to her feelings of being left
out.[59] This first group assignment (Case I) was handed in without much of Natalia's
input. Despite the two group meetings she attended and additional e-mail exchanges to
negotiate the assignment, it comes as little surprise that Natalia did not feel genuine
authorship of the final report they submitted; her voice had been neglected. Up to this

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[59] Natalia had trouble understanding their rapid speech; sometimes she was not even sure whether the
students were communicating in English or Chinese. She felt that if they spoke more slowly her
comprehension and participation would improve. However, during the first few weeks they collaborated,
none of her team mates seemed to be aware of or even willing to accommodate Natalia's needs.

point, due to her positioning as a marginal participant, she had not only been denied a contributing role, but she had also failed to gain further knowledge about the WCU academic system, and more specifically, about ways of collaborating in a joint academic written assignment project. In spite of these harsh initial weeks, Natalia was determined to turn this challenge into an experience with a potential positive outcome; she wished to become more tolerant and open-minded and could only hope her team mates would eventually also do the same:

```
Although I don't enjoy working with this group, this is like
a challenge for me to try - I know I won't change their ways
of thinking nor will they change mine, but I'm trying to
become more tolerant, and I also hope they realize that not
everybody works like them.

(Natalia, I#5: October 28/05)
```

In the following weeks, the team had to work on their second assignment (Case II, worth another 20% of the final course grade). The team had already received the results of their first project, for which they obtained 79/100. "Not bad," according to her team mates, knowing that other teams had scored lower grades, "but we need to work much harder for the next one, which is more difficult," said one of them (Natalia, I#5: October 28/05). Natalia realized that she would continue to be rejected unless she did something. She considered venting her feelings with her team mates, but she was afraid that communicating her frustration to them might backfire and ignite a conflict that she wished to avoid. Hence, instead of confronting them, she embraced a more subtle strategy which involved trying to continue to demonstrate that her contributions would benefit their work. In addition, when she was unable to follow their discussions, she used suggestive facial expressions to convey her frustration and willingness to understand. A few weeks later, partly as a result of her strategies, and partly because Natalia was the only one who had done all the course readings, her team work experience took a dramatic positive turn:

```
S = Sandra
N = Natalia

S:  How's your team work for COMM 4M going on?
```

N: We met yesterday, and I'm very proud of myself because I
    didn't despair! And I managed to understand them. But I also
    think that they look at my face - and they kind of realized
    that if they don't speak louder I won't hear them. I met with
    them for three hours or so. (…)

S: And do they listen to you now?

N: They take me into account now, yes. They realized that I work
    - and I was the only one who read the book chapters - they
    didn't read them! And so now they involve me more, they say
    "do you remember that chapter?" and if they didn't remember a
    concept, they asked me and since I was able to answer - it is
    like I gained their respect a bit. And they take into account
    my ideas now. Yesterday I participated a lot, and they took
    down notes of what I said. They've changed so much.

    (Natalia, I#6: November 22/05)

Her strategies seemed to work, and as the excerpt above shows, Natalia's team
mates eventually accepted Natalia as a legitimate group work member and therefore
appreciated her contributions. As the following extract shows, being granted a more
central participatory role also implied being fully involved in their assignment
negotiations, which in turn granted her access to other students' thinking frames and
collaborative work styles.

N: I noticed that in the case studies - here ((at WCU))they ask
    you to analyze the financial situation, or the company's
    opportunities, and you come up with some ideas, but it's like
    we're not used to thinking "that far." Normally we work on
    three ideas and that's it, like we get stuck there. And with
    them [the team members] it was like "Okay, we're tired now,
    so let's just each of us think what we could do, and then
    let's meet again," and like - we don't do this in Mexico. We
    meet once and whatever we come up with at that time - we work
    on that. And in Mexico we actually divide up the work. But
    here no - we all worked together, and if we got stuck, we
    brainstormed individually about that point and the next time
    we met, we improved it.

S: And do you enjoy this approach?

N: Yes, I think that the analysis is more complete than the kind
    of analysis we're used to doing.

    (Natalia, I#6: November 22/05)

Even though Natalia was familiar with case study analysis at MCMU, her team work experience at WCU introduced her to different ways of approaching and interpreting a seemingly similar academic literacy practice. Specifically, she realized that case studies of the kind she used to do in Mexico could be analyzed in more nuanced ways by going beyond the obviously stated and by applying critical thinking skills. In great part, she learned this through observing and participating in team work with local students, and this was therefore something she might not have learned had she not joined a team that included WCU students.

Back in Mexico, Natalia further reflected on the role her team work experiences at WCU played in helping her discover new ways of learning. She said:

```
N:  For me the most important thing was learning how to be more
    tolerant, and to realize that "my method" of doing things is
    not the best one, or the one everybody should have. And I
    learned that with the Asian team, since I had to concede a
    lot - because I was the only Mexican among four Chinese, who
    were all friends, and you were nobody, and whatever you said
    was not considered by them. But I also think they learned to
    respect my ways of being, and both they and I made an effort
    to do well in the course.

    (Focus Group Interview, Monterrey: April 5/06)
```

By way of this example, I have tried to foreground the role that Natalia's engagement with course-sponsored team work with local students played in her socialization into a new academic culture. As the interview data show, Natalia's concerns and the eventual conflict resolution spanned the whole academic term, constituting one of the most significant experiences associated with her social/academic life at WCU.[60] Her team work experiences modified her conceptualizations of what constituted "effective" ways of doing academic work. Namely, with her team mates she learned about other approaches to analyzing the case studies she was also used to solving--albeit in a different

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[60] The value and benefits of conducting a longitudinal investigation are further demonstrated in this case. Had I not followed up Natalia's team work academic experiences throughout the entire period of the exchange (and beyond) I might have potentially reached inaccurate or premature conclusions about her team work negotiations and outcome. Yet because my data collection includes the beginning, end, and all points in between Natalias's experience with her team, I am confident that my interpretations are well founded and therefore, although still subjective, represent a reliable account of the events in question. (Spack, 1997a, 2004, makes a similar argument about the value of longitudinal case studies and exemplifies how her research findings changed in time, as she followed Yuko (the participant) throughout a three year period.)

way--in Mexico, and she discovered that her thinking could be pushed beyond limits known to her thus far.

Despite its rough start, several positive outcomes were identified as a result of Natalia's engagement with team work experiences: she claims to have become more tolerant and understanding of other people's ways of working; her team's performance was positively evaluated by her instructor (her team obtained higher grades than those of other participants who worked with Mexicans only); and she was socialized into "critical" academic literacy approaches. As further discussed in Chapter 7, team work experiences such as this left a lasting imprint on the participants' future social and academic lives.

6.2.3 Raquel's team work negotiations

Raquel, whose INoP I introduced in the previous section of this chapter, was also engaged in team work. In contrast with Natalia, Raquel had a strong cultural immersion agenda and therefore initially seemed extremely eager to work with non-Mexican classmates, not so much for the advantages that collaborating with English-speaking students would afford her when writing the assignments, but rather because she was interested in learning about other cultures, as demonstrated in her first interview:

```
We still haven't formed our teams, but I don't really want to
work with other Mexicans. I want to work with people from
other places (…) I would like to ((get to know them)) because
they have very different cultures and worldviews.
```

```
(Raquel, I #1: September 14/05)
```

Like Isabel and Nelda, Raquel was enrolled in COMM 4A 02, a course that required students to work in teams for a big project assignment worth 30% of the overall course grade. Their project was of type (c) described in Chapter 5. More specifically, it called for the development of an international market strategy for a product in a country of their choice (excluding Canada and the U.S.). Students were expected to collect and analyze relevant information about the target environment in order to develop their marketing strategy, which they had to put together in a 20-page written report (worth 20%) and present to the class in a 15-minute oral presentation (worth 10%) at the end of the course. Groups were assigned by the instructor. Isabel worked with a Mexican, two students from

Hong Kong and a Canadian student; Nelda teamed up with a Mexican, a Canadian, a Swiss and a Japanese student, whereas Raquel's team included a Canadian, a Taiwanese, a Chinese and a Chilean student (all female). The first three were WCU students whereas the Chilean girl was on a one-year exchange program. As mentioned earlier, Raquel's high level of investment in establishing new intercultural relations went beyond merely paying lip service to it, as she sought opportunities to meet non-Mexicans both inside and outside the classroom. Indeed, she was very excited with the prospect of working with students from other parts of the globe, as illustrated in the interview excerpt below:

```
S = Sandra
R = Raquel
```

26. S: And do you have to work in teams?

27. R: Soon I'll have to work in groups for my Commerce class. We
       have to export a product, so we need to meet and choose
       the product, the country, and so on. But we still haven't
       done anything - we'll meet like in two weeks, so there's
       still time for that.

28. S: Great, so it looks like all's going well then!

29. R: Yes, all's going really well.

(Raquel, I#2: September 26/05)

The first step of the assignment, due on October 5th, involved making the choice of the product for export, and Raquel's team decided to market sun care products to Korea. In my third interview with her in early November, Raquel recounted to me the product and country selection process as follows:

R: Our project is about sun care products in Korea.

S: How come you chose that?

R. Well, you just had to choose a product and a country. Some
    teams, for example, chose pizza in China, so that involved
    finding out the number of pizzerias there and all that. So we
    chose this.

S: And who came up with the idea? Did you vote?

R: Well, we started talking about lots of things - we couldn't
    choose Canada or the U.S., we had to choose another country.

```
So we started looking at what others had chosen and we
realized that many were interested in the food sector -
pizzas, or doughnuts, or pancakes - and we didn't want to do
the same as everyone else. So, nobody seemed to have chosen
the area of beauty, so we chose that. We still haven's began
- we're meeting this Friday for the first time.
```

(Raquel, I#3: November 1/05)

Both interview excerpts above portray a very democratic and rational image of Raquel's team work experience. According to her, the product and country choices her team made resulted from a common agreement among team members about what they liked and wanted to do. However, as time progressed, Raquel's initial optimism about the potential rewards of working with non-Mexican students did not seem to materialize in the ways she envisioned. In a later interview, which took place after her first meeting, Raquel's enthusiasm had almost disappeared; instead, she felt puzzled and disappointed:

```
With this group the experience is very strange. This is the
first time I have to work with people from Asia. They are a
bit strange, a bit too strict. They always want it their own
way. It's been three weeks since they say "for tomorrow you
have to do this and that" - and I didn't even agree with
their decisions about what I should do.
```

(Raquel, I #4: November 22/05)

Raquel's frustration is conveyed by her choice of words to describe her team partners, whom she referred to as being "strange" and "a bit too strict," always willing to have it "their own way." Additional interview data reveals that this was a very dysfunctional team where two members imposed themselves as "leaders" (the Asian students), a third student (the Canadian) was the group's "outlier" who usually remained silent (much like in the case of Ling, from Leki's 2001 study), while Raquel and the Chilean student were positioned as "outsiders," since their input was constantly neglected. Whereas in an earlier interview Raquel had hinted that the process of choosing the sun care products for export to Korea was the result of seemingly unproblematic group negotiations, in a later interview she told me a different version of the same event. Most likely as a result of the unequal power imposed by the leaders over the rest of the team, Raquel now identified these two students as bossy and dictatorial, arguing that rather than choosing a product that suited everybody's likes and interests, the leaders

announced their product choice and disallowed the other students' opinions. By remaining silent, the outlier seemed oblivious to the leaders' behavior. In contrast, Raquel felt upset and powerless, feelings that also applied to her Chilean team mate with whom Raquel would usually reflect on their group experiences. Together, they questioned their leaders and proposed different ideas for their consideration. However, their joint efforts to counterbalance the leaders' unilateral decisions were unsuccessful; as a result, Raquel finally resigned herself to the fact that no matter how hard she tried, the leaders would never accept her or the others.

In the end, there was very little room for content negotiation: the leaders also decided on the product's production and distribution chains and composed the written report that was handed in. Raquel's contribution for this project was limited to doing some background research and to the creation of the product brand logo, a task she was assigned by the leaders (she would actually never have chosen to do it because she did not consider graphics among her strongest areas). In the eyes of the instructor, the team successfully completed their assignment; a passing grade was given to them based on the final product (the written report and the academic presentation). In Raquel's memory, however, this would remain as one of the most frustrating collaborative attempts in her academic history. Unlike Natalia's case above, Raquel's resistance to being positioned as an outsider did not alter her team mates' behaviors, since her marginal status was never changed. Davis's (2005) notes that:

> Individuals do not have open access to communities based solely on their desire to be part of that community and to take part in its practices. While practices may define the community, the community determines who has access to that practice. (p. 557)

Hence, it seems that Raquel's high investment in establishing ties with non-Mexicans as well as her strong academic background and her desire to contribute with her input were insufficient for her local team mates to grant her access.

6.3   Course resources

The third parameter concerns students' access to and use of course-related resources such as outlines, handouts, readings and websites, given that these were intended as first-hand sources of information about the kinds of academic literacy norms and behaviors

valued in the host academic context. I therefore describe the nature of the resources available to the students and analyze how these seem to have affected participants' L2 academic literacy socialization as they engaged in course-related assignments.

The first course resource students had access to was the course outline (already briefly discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to reading and participation expectations). Although there is some variation in the format, length and content of course outlines, in general they included detailed information about the course goals and objectives, the topics to be covered, required texts and other materials, preferred means of communicating with instructors (e.g., office hours, phone and e-mail contacts), instructors' expectations in relation to class participation, assignments, standards, and deadlines. An appended section with a list of topics and resources students should consult on a class-by-class basis was also part of some course handouts. In addition, instructors who used Turn It In also included an explanation about how it worked and the steps students were to follow when submitting their documents.

Course outlines also specified information about WCU grading practices (e.g., grading scales) as well as the evaluation components and criteria for each course. In cases where students' grades were scaled following institutional departmental policies (i.e., marks were distributed according to a fixed mean and distribution), a statement like the one below was sometimes included in the course outlines:[61]

```
Adjustments may be made to your individual grades in order to
be in compliance with the faculty grading standards
established November, 2000 for the class average.
(Course outline COMM 4M, p. 3)
```

As mentioned in Chapter 5, some course outlines also detailed instructors' classroom participation expectations, emphasizing students' responsibility for their own learning process, and providing students with some hints about how to make good contributions, as illustrated in the extracts below:

```
A critical component of the course is spirited, informed
discussion. (...) Try to figure out the connection prior to
class between the readings and the rest of what has already
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[61] Statements about grade scaling policies were only found in a few course outlines, however. This is further discussed in the discussion section of this chapter.

been covered earlier in the term. Readings will normally not
be fully reviewed separately - you are assumed to have read
and understood them. This private preparation enables you to
successfully contribute to the class.(...) Excellent
participation also builds on what your classmates have said
to move the conversation forward - not repeating what has
already been said. (...) Quality is rewarded, not quantity.

(Course outline, COMM 2A 02, p.4)

Adequate participation is measured by:
- No more than 2 absences without official excuses.
- Being able to respond adequately to questions posed by
  the instructor in proportion to the class size.
- Asking critical and insightful questions in proportion
  to the class size.

(Course outline, COMM 4E, p.3)

Usually, course outlines included general guidelines about the characteristics and
expected content and format qualities of assignments, as shown in the two extracts below
(both of which come from courses taught by the same instructor):[62]

Written assignments: There will be two. Details will follow
shortly. Papers will be graded on both content and
presentation. If you write a great paper but don't proofread
it carefully, you will be disappointed. I will discuss
specific concerns in class.

(Course outline COMM 3A 01, p. 4)

The proposal must include the following (please use these
headings and format):
• Topic or descriptive title
• A short paragraph showing the subareas that would be
covered in this topic (can be in point form)
• How it is related to course

[six other related points follow, together with details about
paper length and format]

(Course outline, COMM 4E, pp. 4-5)

Such information was later complemented with handouts with detailed information
about the specific assignment in question. For instance, for the final COMM 4E

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[62] COMM 3A01/02 and COMM 4E were required courses for all the participants enrolled in a Logistics
Certificate.

assignment, the instructor provided students with a check list which they were expected to submit together with their final report. The same instructor also distributed copies of a handout including detailed information about how to write term papers and case study reports. This ten-page document made reference to format issues (e.g., spacing, stapling, cover pages, page layout, page and word limits, numbering), content issues (e.g., paper organization, quality of content), plagiarism issues (with a list of resources to consult, including references to style manuals), language issues (this section included a list of "typical" mistakes and examples of proper language use), register and style issues (e.g., differences between informal (conversational) and academic registers), and a list of miscellaneous pointers to keep in mind. The handout was given to the COMM 3A 01/02 students in their first class, and the instructor spent about thirty minutes explaining its purpose and going over some of the examples and advice included. He also addressed his message to NNES students, in particular, by indicating that those were the most typical mistakes non-Anglophone students made.

Students were expected to read the course outlines and handouts and keep in mind that information. While it is hard to assess the exact impact of these documents on the students' academic literacy socialization (i.e., it is hard to measure how much they contributed to it; see Morita & Kobayashi, in press, for a similar claim), the data suggest that they were indeed of great use to the students. Some participants, for instance, showed me hard copies of the course outlines and other handouts which were full of their hand-written notations and information that they flagged with sticky notes, comments on the margins or underlined /highlighted sections, thus serving as evidence to support their claims that they had consulted these materials. In general, the participants reported thoroughly reading these documents at least once during the term, and also commented on their usefulness in guiding them in some of the aspects involved in writing an assignment (e.g., expected format, content and organization), although there was no handout that could help them figure out other more specific aspects of the assignments (such as the goals), which participants were ultimately left out to interpret and clarify through other means (e.g., talking with peers or their instructors).

The participants also usually checked the list of scheduled topics and readings for each class. They reported that while some of their MCMU instructors produced similar

(detailed) course outlines, throughout the term they often made so many adjustments (particularly in relation to content) that by the end, what was covered in class did not always reflect much of the information included in the course outline. In contrast, WCU instructors, according to the participants' reports, usually followed their original course outlines very closely, and therefore they were taken as reliable referents by the students.

Required course textbooks and additional reading packets were another important source of information as well as a locus of socialization into the linguistic and stylistic repertoires of each course and/or disciplinary area. With a few exceptions (e.g., Raquel, who was enrolled in a COMM course even though her background was more aligned with the POLI courses she took), in most cases the participants were enrolled in courses for which they had the required subject area background and therefore felt properly equipped to handle the content of their WCU courses. Furthermore, some participants had done some of the MCMU course readings in English, in which case they were also very familiar with the disciplinary terminology and main conceptual ideas not just in Spanish, but also in English. Still, as noted in Chapter 5, despite their advanced English proficiency most students reported dealing with language-related issues such as lacking variety in vocabulary to make their texts sound more sophisticated (e.g., limited knowledge of transition words and adjectives, which ended up in several instances of repetition) and struggling with structural problems (e.g., mixing up verb tenses, using the wrong pronouns and prepositions). Hence, students resorted to their textbooks and readings as sources of not only content, but also as L2 linguistic and stylistic models particularly in the process of writing assignments and studying for exams.

It should be noted, however, that textbooks and readings were not always appreciated in such a positive light. As discussed earlier, rather than aiding students' comprehension of course-related subject matter, texts were sometimes so complex and hard to understand (as in the case of the PHIL and LAST articles) that students did not feel any tangible gains (neither linguistic nor conceptual) as a result of their engagement with these readings. On the contrary, the participants resented the obscure nature of these texts and despite their efforts to improve their reading comprehension (e.g., by asking an Anglophone speaker to read the texts and discuss them afterwards), they ended up with incomplete or faulty interpretations. This, as illustrated before, usually had an adverse

impact on their writing. Another negative side of reading materials was identified by participants who found textbooks to be less useful than other types of reading resources (e.g., journal articles, published reports and case studies, websites). This was mentioned in relation to books that included time-sensitive information, arguing that by the time these are published, some of the data is already outdated and therefore no longer equally relevant as other materials that have shorter publication time cycles and therefore reflect more current facts:

> You're expected to read a whole book, but if you come think about it, this book was written at least four years before you started your degree, and even though you're reading a book that is relevant to your interests, the problem is that it's not up-to-date.
>
> (Liliana, I#7: December 12/05)

Finally, most courses (in particular, COMM courses) also had websites which included a number of links to online content resources and also served as a communication forum among all classroom community members. Some course websites, for example, included a page where students were encouraged to post questions and answers about the readings and assignments. Websites were thus designed as a platform for fostering the exchange of information in an accessible way. Students were expected to check the course sites on a regular basis, since instructors sometimes posted notes informing students about changes in the topics or readings assigned for the following classes. Lecture notes or slides produced by the instructor were also usually made available to students via this medium.

The participants reported logging onto the course websites in order to download posted handouts, slides and readings for most courses. Some courses had a "Q & A" or a forum page. However, unless their postings were considered as part of a participation mark and were thus counted towards the final grade, most participants did not seem to take advantage of this course feature. For instance, once the PHIL instructor clarified to students that their informal forum postings would not be graded, Liliana stopped making contributions to the site (although she still kept reading other people's postings). Data from the COMM 3A 01/02 and COMM 4E instructor (Instructor C) also supports the claim that the participants' (as well as other Mexican students') online participation was

minimal. Instructor C indicated that he enjoyed having Mexican students in his class because they usually participated a lot, whereas the Chinese students in his class were usually very quiet.[63] Yet when it came to their online participation, the Mexicans seemed to fall behind: Upon checking the number of entries Mexican students had made in the Q & A page of the COMM 4E website, the instructor confirmed – actually quite surprised by the outcome – that none of the postings had been made by Mexicans. Instead, he then reflected, they preferred to e-mail him or ask him questions in person, right before class.

Of the six focal participants, only three (Isabel, Nelda and Liliana) reported logging onto the course websites more frequently. The first two students did so because it was a course requirement (i.e., students were asked to share their business plans and negotiate mock investments through the website platform), and because the instructor made frequent changes to the assigned course readings. However, whereas many of their classmates posted questions and answers, both Isabel and Nelda preferred to remain quiet in cyberspace. Liliana's use of course websites was mostly related to her PHIL on-line course, through which she downloaded all reading materials, posted her assignments, and received the instructor feedback.

6.4 Feedback

This fourth parameter concerns the feedback students received on their written work, which in some cases was limited to a grade and in other cases took the form of general and/or detailed comments.

Over the past two decades, the topic of feedback on students' written texts has emerged as a very productive albeit controversial research area in L2 writing. Debates over which kinds of feedback exist and seem to yield better results (e.g., teacher, peer, tutor, no feedback, self-correction, student-teacher conferences), the focus of feedback

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[63] "Chinese" and "Asian" were the two labels used by this instructor, almost interchangeably, as if they were synonymous, and regardless of the exact cultural background of the students (some of whom were from Hong Kong, others from Mainland China, and others probably from Korea). Although the instructor probably used these labels as a shorthand and his intention was far from typifying students, the use of such descriptors reminds us of a tendency in both classrooms and research to apply categories to groups of people who may be more heterogeneous that they are depicted, consequently leading to stigmatization and stereotyping. Some scholars have recently started to question the impact of our labeling practices on students' identities, inviting others to do the same. (For further discussion on this, see Clark & Gieve, 2006; Duff, 2002; Kubota, 1999; Morita, 2004; and Spack, 1997b, for example.)

that should be embraced (e.g., on form or content) and the order in which this feedback should be offered, the different purposes and forms used to convey feedback (e.g., praise, criticism, suggestion; narrative comments, symbols, codes), and the kinds of errors to be identified (e.g., treatable vs. untreatable errors), among others, have dominated researchers' agendas in search of a better understanding of how feedback is enacted and of the impact it has on students. (For comprehensive reviews refer to Ferris, 2003; Hyland & Hyland, 2006a.) The results are far too complex to be summarized here, yet what has emerged as a salient and consistent finding in L2 writing research is that students seem to expect their teachers to provide them with feedback, and regardless of whether or not students eventually decide to address the feedback they receive, they are usually frustrated in the absence of teachers' comments and corrections (Cumming, 1995; Ferris, 1995; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hyland, 1998; Leki, 1991) since they rely on this information in order to improve their writing. With these ideas in mind, in what follows I first illustrate the kinds of feedback the participants received and then examine issues connected with feedback and grading practices which affected the participants' academic literacy socialization.

6.4.1 Kinds of feedback

The participants received feedback from different sources: from their instructors and teaching assistants they obtained feedback mostly in the form of grades, general comments about the quality of their assignments, and depending on the course, they also received detailed feedback on the content and form of their work (see examples in the next section). Interestingly, despite the instructors' emphasis on the importance ascribed to the presentation (i.e., format and style) and communicative aspects of the assignments (i.e., clarity and accuracy of writing), my analysis of their written feedback reveals that these aspects were not always considered in the evaluation. Furthermore, mistakes were not necessarily acknowledged all the time. For example, students' language problems were often left uncorrected or even unidentified. Within a single assignment, sometimes a few mistakes were noted, while others were ignored (or perhaps remained unnoticed). It might be that in those cases instructors employed a correction-free approach of the kind

advocated by Truscott (1996, 1999).[64] Thus, except in cases where instructors specified how much each criterion was worth, it is hard to measure the actual impact of the linguistic problems on the students' assignments grades. Yet what clearly emerges as a salient finding is that students attributed some of their poor grades to language issues (usually reporting lack of vocabulary as the main source of struggle).

In a few courses for which students worked in teams on a bigger project such as a business plan, they received feedback on the different stages of their project (e.g., outline of proposal, half way through the project, and final version). This feedback usually focused on the content aspect, and it was meant to help students improve the quality of their work, whereas feedback on the composing aspects was usually absent. In most courses, however, the participants received feedback on their final assignment version only, revealing that the emphasis was placed on the assignment product rather than on the process of composing the assignments.

Aside from the feedback instructors and TAs gave them, the participants sometimes also received feedback from classmates, although this usually took place only when peer feedback was a required course component. For instance, in a Commerce course in which Isabel and Nelda were enrolled, the instructor assigned a double role to each team: in addition to working on their assignment, each team was in charge of mentoring another group of students. According to Isabel, one of the main problems her all-Mexican team confronted was that they "weren't sure about how to compose this type of document [an executive summary]. (...) Another great difficulty is that all of us are Mexican and we didn't have anybody [within the team] who could check our English" (Isabel, Writing log, entry #7). Thus, she found the comments provided by their mentor team to be very useful in helping them realize some of the inconsistencies and weaknesses of their work:

> Our mentors said that our business plan was not very clear. They mostly focused on our ideas, but they also said we had many language mistakes, and that we should be careful because this is a business plan and it has to look professional. They said something like "your idea is okay and we manage to understand it, but your business plan is not very clear. It's not easy to read, and your ideas are mixed up." And they also told us that for our presentation we should include more

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[64] The growing literature on teacher written feedback has made significant contributions on this topic. For the most recent extensive review, refer to Hyland and Hyland (2006a, 2006b).

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text, not just images. (…) They told us that the organization
is wrong, for instance, and that we included a section we
should have skipped, and we split a section we shouldn't have
split. And they also said we mixed formats, and we shouldn't
do that.
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(Isabel, I#3: November 18/05)

Isabel and her group took this feedback into consideration in order to produce their

business plan. In response to the mentor team's comments, they made a concerted effort

to have their work proofread by an Anglophone speaker, and they also looked for copies

of a "real" business plan, which they obtained through the host family of one of the team

members. They used these resources to improve their assignment, and although they still

had some language mistakes and format inconsistencies in the final version, they were

satisfied with their results and proud about their efforts. They also acknowledged that

some of the improvements were indebted to the feedback received from their mentor

team and from their instructor, who gave them verbal feedback on their executive

summary and presentation before the final business plan was handed in.

6.4.2 Playing a "guessing game"

As already mentioned in Chapter 5, there were mismatches between the students'

home academic literacy practices and those at WCU courses, yet students were not

always aware of the differences or sometimes even if they were, they chose not to

accommodate their practices from the outset. It was usually only after a critical incident

took place, such as failing an exam or receiving a poor grade, that students gained

consciousness about the potential adverse impact of ignoring these differences.

Unequivocally, all participants mentioned at least once during the interview phase or else

in their writing logs that they were shocked by some of the grades and responses they

received. These critical incidents became instances of socialization, with further data

suggesting the contested and frustrating nature of this process, as I illustrate below.

It was hard for students to adjust their mental frames to the host academic culture

practices, particularly when these did not seem to reward them in expected ways, or when

they contrasted with their existing schemata. The interview excerpt below is one such

example: by being told that the work social scientists do can always be improved and

therefore would never be granted a full mark, Isabel was socialized into her instructor's

view of how work is usually appraised differently by the corresponding disciplinary communities. The data also shows that she was clearly puzzled not only by her grade (which was lower than she expected), but also because her own conceptualizations of what constituted a good grade contrasted those of her instructor:

> It was shocking when I got the exam back – because 80 is not that good in Mexico, where a 90 is ok. And when I got it back they [the instructor] tell me "it's perfect," but I don't know – everything was ok but I got 8 out of 10. But the instructor said this is the highest grade (…) and I was told that you can only get 10 out of 10 when you're doing math – operations – but that in the social sciences everything can be improved, so you can't get the maximum. This is quite frustrating for me – if he's telling me that my work is 'perfect', then why don't I get a full mark?

> (Isabel, I#3: November 18/05)

When instructors failed to explain their rationale for lowering marks, students were not only upset but also felt at a loss, since they were not sure how to modify their practices in order to improve their work, as shown in the excerpt below.

> L = Liliana
> S = Sandra
> N = Natalia

1. L: (…) And this instructor, even if you're very specific, he doesn't give you all the points.

2. S: How come?

3. L: For instance, on the midterm he asked us a very easy question, and we developed it fully. Like, "what are the types of merchandise that need to be shipped by plane?" And we described everything, we learned all the merchandise by heart, and even so, he didn't give us a full mark.

4. S: Oh, I see, your grade.

5. N: Yes, let's suppose it was worth a maximum of 10 points, he only gave us a 7. (…)

6. S: And do you have any idea of why?

7. L: Well, one classmate asked him about an assignment. She got 8, and we got 7 ¾, remember I told you?

8. S: Yes.

9. L: And the instructor said that her assignment was very good,
   and that 8 was a very good mark. And he didn't say
   anything else. And for me a good grade is 10 out of 10.
   But he didn't say anything else.

(Liliana & Natalia, I#2: July 7/05)

Like Isabel, Liliana, Natalia and Nancy (in the excerpt above) wondered why they had been given a lower grade despite their instructor's verbal remarks about their work being of good quality. Based on their positive assessment of their assignment ("we described everything ...," turn 3), the students would have given themselves a higher grade, perhaps even a full-mark. Yet in light of the grades and feedback they received, the students became aware that their expectations and assumptions about what constituted top quality work and what was viewed as a high grade differed from those of their teacher. However, because the instructor "didn't say anything else," the participants were unsure about what they should do to improve their performance in future similar assignments.

The participants were also unaware that it was common practice for WCU instructors to grade the first assignments very strictly as a way of encouraging students to work hard until the very end of the course. This contrasted with the participants' home practices, where they could expect to obtain full scores even on their first course assignments. The picture is complicated by the fact that there were substantial differences between the MCMU and the WCU grading systems: 70 was the pass grade in MCMU, whereas 50 was the pass grade at WCU. Hence, any grades below 70/100 were viewed by MCMU students as disgraceful and as cause for concern, thus adding to the emotional rollercoaster effect of feedback. The section of this chapter discussing the participants' INoPs shows that the participants' local roommates and local friends (i.e., longtimer WCU students) became a primary source of information to interpret the meaning and impact of the feedback and grades they received. This is illustrated, for instance, in the excerpt below, where Isabel refers to how her roommates and friends tried to persuade her to change her ways of looking at grades, and to think that despite the grade she obtained she was still doing okay, according to WCU standards, especially considering that these were just the first grades she received:

> For me, in my mind, a 50 is like a <u>fail</u>. But they [roommates and friends] tell me 'no, but a 50 is a good grade!' And they told me that I'm not doing so badly. And I'm having trouble accepting that I'm doing okay in spite of the 50 – that <u>that's</u> an acceptable grade.
>
> (Isabel, I#2: October 28/05)

A final point concerns the fact that in Mexico, MCMU students were evaluated through more numerous but shorter assignments and exams whose results were reported to them on a weekly basis (see Chapter 5). This allowed them to track their performance and, based on this, make strategic decisions about time and effort investments. In turn, being able to measure their performance on an ongoing basis lowered their anxiety and stress levels. At WCU, however, this was not possible given that grades were often reported back to students long after assignments were handed in, thus leaving them guessing not only whether they had passed or failed, but also whether they were on the right track with regard to the academic literacy strategies and approaches they practiced. In this sense, MCMU students were playing a guessing game about the feedback and grading practices of an academic system unknown to them.

6.4.3 Feedback: Power, grades, and emotions

From the participants' perspective, they made a big investment studying for their exams and working on their assignments, but the return (i.e., grades obtained) was not always viewed to be commensurate with their efforts. When they received poor grades after having spent a particularly long time working on an assignment, the impact on the student's morale was devastating, especially when they depended on getting a good grade to pass a course. Raquel, for example, was very disappointed when she discovered she had scored 18/30 in her POLI 3B essay:

> I obtained a really poor grade, 18/30, this is just above half of the points. (...) I've been looking at other classmates' grades, and I realized that they were all quite low – I think the highest was 25/30. But even so, I'm disappointed because this is the essay to which I dedicated the longest time – and I really scored well below my expectations. (...) That day I felt like – damn it! since – well, I didn't do well in that midterm and so, then I spent so much time on this essay to save me, and again, damn it!

Finding out that 25/30 was the highest class grade provided her a certain degree of relief,[65] since this meant that the instructor had marked the assignments very harshly (a fact he even conceded to the class). Nevertheless, because Raquel had received a 66/100 on that course's midterm, she had hoped that the essay would "save her" with some extra points that would improve her average. Instead, this poor grade placed her in a very tight situation: she knew that she depended on delivering an extremely good performance in her final exam in order to pass the course with a grade she could be proud of. At this point, maintaining her MCMU average was no longer her main goal; instead, her objective shifted to passing her courses.

Another example comes from Nelda, who had to write four essays which accounted for 60% of the LAST 1A final course grade. Her first essay was based on the analysis of an article dealing with Mayan cultures. She reported spending three days researching information, reading the materials (some of which were available through the course website), composing the essay and revising it based on feedback she received from a Canadian friend, who suggested she correct certain grammar mistakes (see my discussion of this assignment in relation to the cognitive overload students experienced, Chapter 5). Much to her surprise though, the results were well below her expectations, as her writing log entry shows:

> It wasn't what I expected; I didn't expect a 90, but neither a 60. He [instructor A] told me that I had applied the content we saw in class, but that he hadn't been able to fully understand my essay because I had confused a few things. I didn't expect such a poor grade and now I feel very pressed for the next essays.

(Nelda, WL entry #1)

Given that the essays were worth a significant percentage of the final course grade, Nelda felt pressure with the remaining three essay assignments. Yet because she had already tried her best on the first one and she had already done what her instructor suggested as a possible way of mitigating her linguistic deficiencies (i.e., have her essays

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[65] This resembles the case of Nelda, who felt reassured after finding out that many other Mexican students had also struggled with the COMM 2A 01 midterm exam she failed.

proofread by an Anglophone speaker), Nelda was unsure about how she would be able to improve her future writing, as illustrated in the interview excerpt that follows:

```
I'm not doing okay in LAST. There are four essays which are
worth 60% of the course grade. In the first one I got 60,
which is low. And I am worried about this class, because you
can't get extra points doing something else, so the essays
are very important. And I'm mostly worried because - it's not
like I didn't do my best so that next time I can say "well,
this time I'll do it well, I'm going to get myself a tutor
who can help me." No - now it's like, what shall I do, if I
already did all this for my first essay?

(Nelda, I#2: October 13/05)
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Her instructor A[66] feedback consisted of a comment praising her effort but also clearly pointing to language as an issue particularly related to her NNES status:

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Very strong effort. I recognize that English is your second
language so it is best to have a friend proofread your
essays.

(Nelda, Instructor A feedback, LAST Essay "A")
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It has been suggested that good feedback should include a balanced number of comments (or items) of three main types: praise, criticism, and suggestions (Hyland & Hyland, 2001), and that comments with a focus on both form and content are usually appreciated by students. The rest of her four-page essay included the following feedback entries:[67]

Table 6.4 Nelda's LAST Essay "A" Instructor Feedback

	Type & focus	Location & type of problem	Feedback details
#1	Criticism FORM	(p.1) Wrong vocabulary item	crossed-out word "rude" and included suggested term above ("sacrilegious")
#2	Praise CONTENT	(p.1) Good point	check mark on top of word
#3	Criticism FORM	(p.1, footnote) Wrong citation convention	name of author crossed-out
#4	Praise CONTENT	(p.2) Good point	"good" written on right-hand side margin
#5	Criticism	(p.2) Lack of connection	Comment on right hand-side margin: "it

[66] In this course, Nelda had two instructors: A and B. Both attended all classes, but instructor A was in charge of the course website and essay A, while instructor B was in charge of essays B, C, and D. They both shared lecturing and marking duties equally.

[67] Feedback was classified into three different types: praise, criticism, and suggestions, following the work of Hyland & Hyland (2001).

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	Type & focus	Location & type of problem	Feedback details
	CONTENT	with other part of text	is referred to later with some other skeleton"
#6	Praise CONTENT	(p.2) Good point	Check mark on right-hand side margin
#7	Criticism FORM	(p.1, footnote) Wrong citation convention	name of author crossed-out
#8	Praise CONTENT	(p.3) Good point	Check mark on right-hand side margin
#9	Praise CONTENT	(p.3) Good point	Check mark on right-hand side margin
#10	Criticism FORM	(p.3, footnote) Wrong citation convention	name of author crossed-out
#11	Criticism CONTENT	(p.4) Incomplete claim	Comment on left hand-side margin: "primitivist trope also"
#12	Praise CONTENT	(p.4) Good point	Comment on right hand-side margin: "good point"
#13	Criticism FORM	(p.4, footnote) Wrong citation convention	name of author crossed-out

As shown in the table above, Nelda's instructor provided her with one suggestion (focused on form) and an almost equal number of praise and criticism comments (#6 and #7, respectively), which were relatively balanced vis-à-vis their focus on content and form (although many of the feedback entries referred to the same type of error, e.g., entries #3, #7, #10, and #13 all identify a quadruple instance of the same problem, thus reducing the actual variety of feedback.) The instructor's effort in trying to provide Nelda with some hints about which exact areas of language and content should be addressed in order to produce a better essay is acknowledged. However, even with this feedback, Nelda was uncertain about how the comments she received from LAST essay A would benefit her writing of future LAST essays. Praise comments like "good point" made her proud and boosted her confidence, yet the lack of specificity about precisely which aspects of the argument were considered strengths did not provide her with the necessary information to capitalize on this kind of feedback. In fact, this is what prompted her to contact instructor B (who was in charge of assigning and marking the next three essays), hoping she could obtain more hints about what she should do to improve her following assignments: "I told him 'I don't want you to change my grade; I want to know what you expect me to improve in my next essays.'" (Nelda, I#2 : October 13/05). In addition, she mentioned to him her struggles to follow his lectures and the class discussions, which evoked a very sympathetic response from her instructor B, a fluent Spanish L2 speaker,

who suggested that Nelda hand in her future work in Spanish. Her grades in her subsequent essays were all higher (82, 88, and 78), and her final grade (75/100) was just slightly under the course average, according to the LAST instructor, whom I interviewed.[68]

Other instances of instructor feedback further suggest that language was an issue not only identified by the participants but also by those who assessed their written work, and that a very common suggestion students were given to address this problem was to have their work proofread by an Anglophone person. When Isabel received her first POLI 1A essay back (in which she scored 3.5/5), her TA had written the following comments on the last page of her short (two-page) essay assignment:

```
(Written in point form in original):
        • English here is difficult to follow
        • Have your papers corrected by an Anglophone before
          passing them in.
        • I know it's hard when English is not your first
          language, so I have not docked you much this time.
          I know you are trying!
        • Good example
        • Would have been better to stick with one principle
        • Make clearer thesis statement

(Isabel, TA feedback, POLI 1A short essay #1)
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The feedback above includes one praise comment ("good example") which refers to Isabel's choice of topic, two criticisms about the content of her essay ("make clearer thesis statement", "stick to one principle") which also serve the purpose of suggestions to improve future work, and one criticism about her language use ("English here is difficult to follow"). There is also a statement that gives Isabel credit for her effort ("I know you are trying!"), and at the same time positions her as a handicapped student with respect to her NNES status ("I know it's hard when English is not your first language"). As in

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[68] There was at least one other Mexican student and a few other international students in this course, but Nelda was the only student in her class who wrote the essays in Spanish. Even though the official WCU language policy stipulates that English is the language of instruction, handing in work in Spanish for this course was possible because it was offered as part of a program on Latin American Studies. In fact, instructor B mentioned in his interview that he wished another (weaker) Spanish-speaking student in his class had accepted his offer of writing the essays in Spanish, which she refused to do.

Nelda's case, the advice is to have her work checked by an Anglophone person, which further reinforces students' positioning as weak writers who depend on the assistance from more experienced English writers to succeed in what they do (I come back to this issue in Chapter 7).

In addition, a statement such as "I have not docked you much this time" also reveals another issue implicit in the feedback process: that of power. Drawing on Layder's (1997) work, Higgins (2000) notes that "if we locate the process of giving and receiving feedback in a social context, then we must also consider the role of power. Power is ubiquitous in social life and can be viewed as closely linked to discourses and associated practices" (p. 4). Instructors are viewed as legitimate models of the appropriate discourses and practices, and in their tutor role they are granted power to exert control over their students. This is achieved, for instance, through feedback and grades. And even though exertion of control over the students is ultimately aimed at helping them learn, there are implications of this unequal relationship associated with the students' emotions and identities. Carless (2006) suggests, in connection with this topic, that "the asymmetrical power relations inherent in the assessment process risk invoking negative emotions, which may form a barrier to learning from feedback" (p. 229). As shown by some of the data samples included above, failing grades and critical feedback made students aware of some of their weaknesses and socialized them into the expected values and standards of the host university. At the same time, they added a burden to the students which they were not sure how to remove.

In short, feedback became an instance of socialization into what constituted effective/ineffective ways of writing at WCU. The nature of the feedback in conjunction with the grades students received throughout their academic journey left a strong imprint on them. On the one hand, feedback could unintendedly position participants as deficient learners due to limited mastery of English or unfamiliarity with the expected academic literacy standards (see discussion section). On the other hand, it could boost their confidence and serve as a motivating factor to continue working hard, and it provided them with helpful information to learn more about different aspects of the academic literacy practices of the host university. In addition, similar to the findings of research that examined disciplinary faculty's views (Zhu, 2004), the analysis of the kind of

feedback instructors offered the participants also suggests that there is a tendency for faculty across the curriculum to be mainly interested in texts as a finished product, and that they believe it is someone else's job to help students become better writers.

6.5 Institutional support

The fifth and final parameter concerns different forms of institution-sponsored support that were available to the participants. This support includes sources of information and help that the students had access to, such as university online resources, libraries, writing tutors, the university writing centre, the MCMU-WCU joint academic program staff, teaching assistants, instructors, non-academic staff (e.g., librarians, counselors) and services for international students. It therefore encompasses human as well as material resources. Also, it covers home as well as host university support, both distant and on-site. I first tap into the kinds of support available to the students followed by an examination of their significance in the students' academic literacy socialization abroad. Table 6.5 summarizes the sources of support available to the students, which I discuss in the following section.

Table 6.5 Sources of Institutional Support

Source of support	Kind of support
MCMU Exchange Programs Office	- website with study abroad information and resources - trained staff to assist students in selection and application processes
MCMU program staff	- academic advisors to support and assist students in application and course selection
MCMU-WCU Joint Academic Program Office	- staff (Director, coordinator, secretary) to assist students: *prior to the exchange*: with application and course registration, accommodation *during the exchange*: with advice and help with logistics; always available in the office and also in case of emergencies *after the exchange*: with transcripts and miscellaneous matters
WCU Office for International Students (OIS)	- staff, programs and services (both social and academic-oriented)

Source of support	Kind of support
WCU Writing Centre	- tutoring services (face to face and online)
WCU Library system	- website with tips and writing guidelines/samples; lots of online resources and links - library staff (particularly helpful while searching sources)
WCU Counseling Office	- counselors to help students in distress
WCU Student Society	- counseling, tutoring, and recreational activities
WCU academic and non-academic staff	- advice, guidance, some tutoring (for specific course assignments)

6.5.1 Support available

Even before embarking on their academic adventure abroad, students had access to sources of information (such as the main MCMU website page on exchange programs and also brochures about the different opportunities available to students) as well as dedicated staff from the "MCMU Office of International Exchanges" that could assist them in the process of selecting a suitable academic exchange opportunity and subsequently applying to the program of their choice.[69] Students' program advisors in their home campuses also played a role, albeit to varying degrees in each case, in supporting students and assisting them with the application and course selection process. Once students were accepted in the WCU program, the staff based in the MCMU-WCU office in Canada assisted students with the selection and registration of courses, they made their on-campus residential accommodation arrangements, and they were available to provide information concerning the MCMU-WCU program and life in Canada (e.g., living costs, medical insurance, etc.).

Prior to the departure, MCMU exchange students were required to attend a session on their home campuses. This session was attended by students headed for exchanges in diverse destinations worldwide, and therefore the kind of information communicated to

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[69] On my trip to Mexico, I visited the central MCMU Office of International Exchanges located in Monterrey, where I had informative conversations with office staff members who kindly explained to me the application process, showed me the resources available to MCMU students, and shared with me the kind of information and resources available to study abroad candidates.

them was very general (e.g., it addressed typical needs, challenges, responsibilities and benefits of students while abroad). Upon their arrival in Canada, students were officially welcomed by Ms. Gutierrez, Director of the MCMU-WCU Joint Academic Program, as well as by other MCMU staff members (all Mexicans residing in Vancouver), in an orientation session that took place before the beginning of their semester abroad.[70] Attendance in this 1.5 hour session was mandatory since the aim of this meeting was to present students with crucial information about life in Vancouver (e.g., tips about the public transportation system, shopping for groceries, where to see a doctor, who to contact in case of an emergency, etc.) as well as their life as MCMU students in WCU. Ms. Gutierrez, who led the sessions, hoped to help prepare students to handle the academic demands of WCU as well as to encourage them to find a balance between their social and academic life while abroad. To this end, she shared with the students a list of tips and warnings. For instance, she talked about the heavy reading load and the overall academic literacy demands that characterized the WCU academic system. Several times she reiterated that she could not overstress the importance of keeping up to date with readings, and encouraged students to make wise decisions regarding work load distribution and time management (i.e., by being strategic about how they divided up their time between course readings, writing assignments, and other academic demands). Having taught in Mexico for over 20 years, Ms. Gutierrez drew on her knowledge of the MCMU academic culture to highlight any potential aspects of the students' academic experiences in WCU which she anticipated they might find challenging. She did so, for instance, by sharing anecdotes of students who had either succeeded or failed in previous years. The three tips quoted below illustrate the type of advice offered by Ms. Gutierrez on the orientations sessions:

> Tip 1:
> "Try to work in teams that include students from other places. Do not just stick together with your fellow Mexican classmates."

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[70] I attended two of these sessions, one at the beginning of the S05 term and one prior to the term. I had also attended another orientation session in the W03 term, while working as a research assistant to my supervisor, collecting data for another project conducted with the MCMU-WCU Joint Academic Program population.

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Tip 2:
"Try to keep up to date with your readings. Remember that
studying four or five days before the exam won't give you
enough time. Nobody will be after you here. You won't feel
any pressures to read and study, but don't think that this
makes it easier for you!"


Tip 3:
"Be aware: remember that copying and pasting are punished
here, and when you use somebody else's words or ideas,
remember to cite your sources! Once, we had a student who got
into deep trouble because he used a graphic without
acknowledging the source, and as a result he was accused of
plagiarism, and I had to go and explain [that the rules in
this respect are laxer in Mexico]."

(Ms. Gutierrez' welcome message, field notes: September 1/05)
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She also reminded students about their roles as ambassadors of their home university and of their country. By all means, students should stay out of trouble, not just for their own sake, but also to maintain the high academic as well as social reputation that made the agreement between the MCMU and the WCU institutions possible. She shared stories of past exchange students who had impressed professors and classmates with their stellar performances, which in some cases opened up doors for future postgraduate opportunities at WCU. Her message also included other less positive stories of students who had made wrong decisions (such as getting involved in fights and landing in hospital, with police charges), and could only hope that these examples would remind students of the serious consequences of their own decisions. She also indicated she was available to the students at any time, and provided them with her cell phone contact and emphasizing that she should be among the first people to know if students were in trouble.

Ms. Gutierrez reassured all students that "MCMU students are brilliant, maybe even more brilliant than the local students," and then added "but people from here [WCU] are more tenacious" (Ms. Gutierrez' welcome message, field notes: September 1/05), by this suggesting that Mexican students were indeed very capable, but they should constantly remind themselves that their efforts to do their best ought to be consistent. At the same time, she was aware that in addition to their academic goals, students also wished to

travel around and get to know local people. Hence, she strongly encouraged them to seek opportunities to socialize with non-Mexicans to balance their social and academic life. As tip 2 above shows, Ms. Gutierrez's advice to the students was to try and maximize their stay abroad by establishing ties with non-Mexican people, since it was through them that they could learn about the WCU system and the local culture. She also promoted the activities organized by the WCU Office for International Students (OIS) and strongly recommended that students take part in some of these.

The OIS was created by WCU in order to address the increasingly diverse population of the university. Apart from having staff members who are very familiar with the most common needs of newcomer foreign students, OIS offers services and programs aimed towards the integration of international students into the WCU local academic community. Such services and programs--the majority of which are free of cost or else require a minimum fee-- mostly address the social side (e.g., city tours, trips to close by tourist landmarks, dinner/lunch events, celebration of Canadian and international festivities/holidays, etc.), although there are a few initiatives that also aim to support students' academic experiences (e.g., the "buddy" program, which brings together newcomer and oldtimer WCU students to share academic experiences, as well as language programs which include English conversation classes). This information and many more details covering different aspects of life in Vancouver and at WCU are readily available via the OIS page in the WCU website, which also includes a downloadable manual meant to help students figure out what their academic and social life may look like during their stay in Canada.

Like many other North American universities, WCU also has a Writing Centre whose mandate is to support students' writing efforts. It does not provide editing services, rather, it offers (limited) tutoring sessions aimed to help improve academic writing skills. Equipped with highly trained, competent writing tutors (as claimed in its website), the centre offers a drop-in service whereby interested students can make an appointment to receive feedback on their work. Although the service is free of charge, students are limited to one weekly one-hour appointment only for which they need to sign up in person. Another caveat relates to the centre's hours, since it runs from 9am to 4pm on weekdays only. However, in addition to face-to-face consultations, students can also

benefit from free online tutoring. This is meant for students who have very specific questions about parts of their work: they can submit sections that do not exceed 250 words and within 24-48 hours, they can expect to receive a response from a writing consultant.

The WCU library system also offers different kinds of support to students and the larger WCU community. In conjunction with the Writing Centre, the library hosts a website with a number of examples, tips and resources specially designed to guide students in the process of performing different kinds of writing: from essays, to research papers, to theses. Strong emphasis is placed on how to ensure academic integrity by avoiding intended and unintended plagiarism. Another kind of support comes through the librarians, who are trained to assist library users with their resources searches. The WCU boasts one of the largest research libraries in Canada; it has over 20 branches and divisions, and increasingly most of its resources and services are available online.

Counseling services are also available through the Counseling Office, which aims to support WCU students, faculty and staff with any personal, relational, career or educational concerns they may have. Assistance is offered to help individuals cope with problems such as stress, anxiety, anger management, depression and concentration issues. Appointments are free of charge to the WCU community. WCU also has a student society which, among other services and activities (some recreational), offers counseling and tutoring on a drop in basis.

Course instructors (which included faculty members dedicated to both research and teaching, as well as lecturers, dedicated 100% to teaching), teaching assistants, as well as other staff (e.g., secretaries, advisors) were available to students, some of them by appointment, others on a drop-in basis. As already mentioned, instructors played a key role in informing students about the academic literacy expectations in their courses. This information was passed on to the students informally in class, in the course outlines, in assignment guidelines and through the feedback they provided.

6.5.2 Students' use of support

The availability of support did not translate into students making use of it as much as they should or could have. As discussed below, these sources of support were

sometimes considered less accessible or useful than intended. Also, even though the participants were made aware of the kinds of help they could resort to, for a number of reasons they sometimes failed to take full advantage of them.

From the MCMU institutional point of view, the information about the different exchange destinations provides study abroad candidates with the necessary details to make informed choices. [71] While all participants (focal and secondary) visited the MCMU exchange website and gathered helpful information to make decisions and to apply for the exchange program at WCU, many of them were dissatisfied with what they characterized as a very bureaucratic application process that involved collecting documentation, filling out forms, and having these signed by different people before submitting them, suggesting instead that the MCMU administrative system could take care of some application steps because all this student data was supposedly on file.

Yet a particular aspect that the participants thought should be improved was the course selection process. Many of the participants relied on their MCMU program advisors for their assistance with this matter. Those advisors who had previously tutored students that participated in the MCMU-WCU academic exchange were familiar with the application process and the kinds of courses students could take, and therefore seemed to provide crucial assistance to the participants in this regard. In contrast, advisors who had not had the same experience, understandably, appear to have been less helpful to the students. In some cases finding equivalent courses in WCU was a straightforward job; in other cases, however, the equivalencies were not very evident and thus students and their advisors were left making guesses as to which courses would make the best choices (in terms of how they matched the students' background, interests, and requirements to complete their MCMU programs). Even though there were certificate packages (as explained in Chapter 3), which included a list of core courses and a menu from which students could select their optional course credits, in the end because even students participating in the same certificate were at different stages of their degrees in Mexico (and were also enrolled in different disciplinary fields), their course backgrounds were heterogeneous and therefore course selection turned into a sort of strategic game which

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[71] This statement is based on my informal conversations with MCMU staff, which included a meeting with the Vice-Director of the Office of Internationalization at the Monterrey campus.

most students disliked. However, as the participants indicated in their interviews, the MCMU-WCU staff in Vancouver was fortunately very helpful in assisting them with these and other matters, particularly prior to their arrival in Canada:

> The secretary was a resource to me prior to arriving here.
> (…) Before I got here, they [staff at the MCMU-WCU office]
> helped me with everything. (…) For example, they sent me an
> e-mail letting me know that the courses I had chosen were too
> heavy, so I made a change and switched one of my courses to
> an easier one.
>
> (Isabel, I#3: November 18/05)

Liliana also found the MCMU-WCU program secretary very resourceful and helpful: "When I was trying to find out which courses I could transfer to my program in Mexico, nobody knew very well, except for the secretary. She knew everything" (Liliana, I#6: November 24/05). Knowing that they could always rely on Ms. Gutierrez in case of emergencies was very comforting to the participants, as was the idea that she was very knowledgeable of the inner workings of the WCU (and MCMU) system. As mentioned in the previous section, the orientation session facilitated by Ms. Gutierrez provided the participants with much useful information about their social and academic life in WCU. Yet, most participants indicated that even though they were aware of Ms. Gutierrez' good intentions in advising students to do their readings and to keep in mind that the WCU system could be challenging for them, her words came too early for those of them who, as newly arrived students, still believed that their exchange would be more about "having fun and meeting other people and places" than "learning and studying," therefore considered some of the information they were told as irrelevant or exaggerated.

Despite Ms. Gutierrez' availability, none of my participants seemed to believe that they should consult Ms. Gutierrez in case they had academic problems unless they were in an extreme situation (e.g., about to withdraw from a course). "For me, this is an MCMU office, it's not a WCU office. So, I wouldn't go to them if I had a problem with WCU" (Isabel, I#3: November 18/05). Instead, they thought they should deal with their problems directly with WCU instructors, as illustrated in Nelda's case (when she failed one of the midterms): "I prefer to talk directly with my teachers and figure out what I can do to improve my grades. I prefer to try on my own rather than talk with Ms. Gutierrez and listen her tell me "you have to try harder" (Nelda, I #3: October 27/05).

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With regard to the activities and services offered by the OIS, except for some of the tours and trips organized by this office, the participants did not make use of their services in spite of having been made aware of the "buddy" program, for instance, or the English conversation classes. Most likely this is due to the participants' close contact with other Mexican students with whom they quickly established ties that covered their social (and some of their academic) needs.

Out of the 22 participants of this study, only one of them reported making use of the Writing Centre tutoring services a few times during his exchange. While the rest were aware of this service, they indicated that a number of factors prevented them from taking advantage from the help of a trained tutor to improve their writing. The most common reason was that the participants worked on their assignments almost until the last minute before the deadline, and they therefore did not have a draft copy of their work ready for a tutoring session that needed to be scheduled almost a week in advance. A second reason concerned the centre's limited hours of operation of the writing centre: students said they would have been able to benefit more if it was open during evenings (since most of their course work was during the morning and afternoon hours, thus coinciding with the centre's hours) and weekends. Also, some participants would have probably resorted to the writing centre tutors if they did not have anybody else who could proofread their work (although, as discussed in a later section, the situation is more complex than this). Interestingly, none of the students reported using the online tutoring services; in fact, students had probably forgotten that they could do so. I suggest this based on students' comments about how they were bombarded with information during the first week of their exchange, yet precisely because they received so much information at once, they were unable to recall all of it for later use. On a related note, the participants also lamented that despite the availability of support and resources, they often felt lost when trying to find relevant information and they felt they needed time to get used to how things were organized in WCU. Even navigating the WCU websites was a daunting task for most participants. For instance, both Natalia and Isabel mentioned that they found the MCMU library website much more user-friendly in order to locate and download articles online, whereas surfing the WCU library website felt more like entering a labyrinth, never knowing for sure whether the path chosen would lead them to their destination:

"The library website is very complicated, and it has many functions which I didn't know how to use" (Isabel, WL entry #2).

Still, the participants reported using the online library resources (e.g., online journals and databases) more often than the physical library. While only a few participants mentioned that they benefited from the assistance of a librarian, those who did were impressed by their dedication. Isabel, for example, consulted librarians when she was looking for sources for one of her research papers. Without their guidance, she said, she would have been lost.

None of my participants reported making use of services provided by the WCU Counseling Office or the Student Society, but they mentioned that if they should have needed non-academic advice they would have consulted their residential advisors before approaching someone else.

With respect to the support available through the university's academic staff, the participants reported asking instructors and TAs for help mostly during class time, right before or after, or else via e-mail, but they did not make use of office hours. They mostly approached instructors and TAs when they wanted to clarify the assignments, or when they sought guidance in order to successfully complete their work. For instance, Isabel e-mailed her POLI 1A 01 research paper outline to the TA for this course, from whom she obtained guidance about the organization and content of her paper. In response, her TA sent her suggestions and links with helpful content for Isabel's assignment. Isabel mentioned:

> I had many doubts about this assignment. First I chose a topic -I wanted to do my paper on the topic of Justice System, but I ended up writing about Federalism, because in the beginning I didn't understand anything (...) So I sent her [TA] an e-mail and she e-mailed me back with suggestions and three links to websites. But then I told her I had changed my mind and wanted to do another topic because I was desperate – I couldn't understand a thing. And she said that most likely it [the Justice System] was different in Mexico, that's why. And she sent me another e-mail with two links, things were really well explained in one of them. (...) And so she sent me some other sources and looked at what I had and told me which ones I should use.
>
> (Isabel, I#4: December 6/05)

Nelda did the same a few times. Instructors also mentioned that the Mexican students in their classes would usually e-mail them in addition to clarifying points before or after class. For example, the COMM 3A 01/02 and COMM 4E indicated that he was aware that NNES students sometimes had trouble following his lectures (although he blamed himself for speaking too fast sometimes), and therefore made a conscious effort to assist them during class as well as out of class time:

> I also go to class ten to fifteen minutes ahead of time so that students can ask me questions, and often the Mexican students have questions regarding clarification, and I also try to stay after class for ten minutes, plus I have very long office hours, and students can come and talk to me and can, can try to understand.
>
> (COMM 3A 01/02 & COMM 4E Instructor, Interview: December 13/05)

Data from the participants confirms that this instructor was indeed very accessible to students and that through e-mail communications and clarifications done in class, he managed to convey helpful information to them:

> You e-mail him and he's usually very quick to reply. And also if somebody asks something which he thinks is worth sharing with the rest of the class, he asks for permission to that person and shares it with everybody. So yes, he's very accessible.
>
> (Natalia, I#2 S05: July 7/05)

Four other participants mentioned the same in their interviews. Liliana indicated that this instructor made a big effort and taught his classes very well (although she also noted that some of the vocabulary he included in his slides sounded unfamiliar to her, which made it hard for her to study from his handouts). Natalia added that she thought this instructor was very interested in making sure students understood him. For example, he requested student feedback on his teaching by means of an anonymous survey, which Natalia viewed as a concrete attempt to offer "a good service."

Another instructor mentioned that students in general (regardless of their local or international/exchange status) did not make use of his office hours at all:

> I mean, they e-mail, Nelda e-mailed me quite a lot, and she sort of caught me before the class, so - maybe she had a class during the office hours. But they generally don't come to office hours any way. (...) I don't think that any students

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ever come to office hours in all the time I've been here
[WCU] - except once maybe, just in passing.
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(LAST 1A Instructor, Interview: February 21/05)
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In summary, it seems that the participants had access to a number of sources of support, some of which they used more than others. Also, while certain patterns of use were identified across participants (such as their limited use of instructors' office hours), resources were ultimately accessed differently by each student, depending on their needs and circumstances, their awareness of the sources of support, as well as their academic investments. I will come back to this topic in the next chapter, when I analyze students' utilization of sources of support and view them as either missed or seized opportunities for academic literacy socialization.

6.6   Summary and discussion

This chapter focused on the factors that affected the participants' socialization into the academic literacy practices of the WCU courses in which they were enrolled. During their stay abroad in Canada, the participants navigated the academic world of WCU by means of their engagement with multiple assignments that required knowledge of advanced academic English literacy as well as mastery of disciplinary, institutional and course-specific literacy practices. As I discussed in previous chapter sections, this knowledge was partially accessed through informal interactions with members of their INoP, with members of their team work CoPs, with instructors, TAs, as well as through course-related materials, feedback, and other sources of institutional support. Together with the participants' prior L1 literacy experiences (as discussed in Chapter 5), these factors are attributed to promoting the participants' socialization into the local WCU academic literacy practices. Figure 6.3 includes a graphic representation of the internal and external factors that shaped the participants' academic literacy socialization at WCU.

The participants' socialization was achieved by means of academic-related interactions with more experienced students as well as with newcomers who shared similar backgrounds, concerns and goals (i.e., the people in their INoPs as well as those in their team work CoPs). It was also achieved by means of establishing academic discourse community and classroom community expectations, by providing/receiving

academic literacy models, and by negotiating assignments with instructors and peers. In light of this, I suggest that no account of L2 academic literacy socialization would be complete unless these parameters are considered. In fact, I examined multiple factors (rather than looking at one factor in particular) since I view each of these factors as being part of a much larger "ecology" of academic socialization, as shown in Figures 6.2 and 6.3.

Previous research has shown that NNES graduate students, for example, rely heavily on the skillful guidance of academic advisors who serve as mentors and sources of target academic literacy conventions and expectations (Belcher, 1994), and that "the composition of a writer's social network affects L2 advanced academic literacy acquisition and practice as disciplinary enculturation" (Ferenz, 2005, p.339). Similarly, the findings of this study suggest that in order to shed light on the participant's L2 academic literacy socialization we need to examine their contact and interactions with other individuals who may have influenced the participants' views and experiences in significant ways. Even if the final act of writing is done individually by a single person typing on one computer, this study shows that the participants relied heavily on observing, sharing, and negotiating practices with other people. A close analysis of the participants' experiences points to the close interconnectedness among the parameters examined. For instance, students relied on their INoP ties in order to interpret some of the target academic literacy demands and common practices (e.g., feedback and grading),

Figure 6.3 L2 Academic Literacy Socialization Factors

some of which were explicitly stated in course outlines and other documents produced by instructors or the institution, but which were still hard to grasp by newcomers on their own. Also, the participants often relied on the emotional support provided by INoP members, particularly when they confronted issues related to low academic performance (e.g., poor grades, negative feedback).

The analysis of the participants' experiences in relation to the second parameter reveal that their engagement with course-sponsored team work also shaped their academic literacy socialization, albeit in ways that were not always predictable. For the most part, the literature on group work has focused on the many benefits that working with local Anglophone students affords international students in English-medium academic contexts. A standard assumption, as Leki (2001) notes, is that "the domestic student may be more familiar with local, institutional, and linguistic conventions and requirements and (…) may be able to scaffold learning for their English learner colleagues" (p. 40). However, this assumption appears to be overly optimistic and simplistic. Leki's investigation (2001) pointed to the saliency of group work in the students' academic experiences, also revealing that in most cases the NNES students assessed their group work experiences primarily in a negative way. The data of this study coincides with Leki's findings, and in addition points to the existence of great power differentials between some of the participants and their domestic team mates. As in other L2 studies concerned with the academic discourse socialization of NNES students in English-medium postsecondary contexts (e.g., Bronson, 2004; Casanave, 1992; Kobayashi, 2003; Morita, 2000, 2002; Zappa-Hollman, 2007), issues of access, accommodation, resistance, and multimembership in different learning communities were found to be prominent in the participants' experiences, particularly in relation to team work. One example comes from Natalia, who--like Ling and Yang, two of the NNES students in Leki (2001)--initially thought that she "would be working on an equal footing with [her] domestic counterparts and would have something to teach them as well as to learn from them" (p. 60). Instead, her contributions during the first few weeks were either rejected or ignored, even if her ideas were later picked up by someone else, i.e., by a group insider.

I suggest there are multiple reasons why Natalia was denied access by her team: first, she was viewed as an outsider due to her newcomer status, a situation that was compounded by the fact that she was a NNES speaker. These two aspects seemed to have led to power differentials between Natalia and her local team mates, who positioned her as a novice despite the fact that she was a senior undergraduate in the last year of her program at MCMU, and who did not seem to care whether Natalia understood them or not during their first project assignment meetings. Moreover, she was also marginalized due to her status as outsider of the self-constituted CoP of friends that her four team mates belonged to (see figure 6.3).[72] Davis (2005) characterizes self-constituted CoPs as having "no codified means of entrance or recognized routes in, for example, by formal training or qualifications" (p. 566), thus making it hard for outsiders, like Natalia, to join them.

Figure 6.4 Natalia's Blocked CoP Access

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[72] Presumably, her team mates may also have marginalized her as a result of their prejudice about Natalia's Mexican origin (i.e., for being a so-called third world country citizen). However, since I did not interview her team mates, this suggestion is merely speculative.

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A careful analysis of the data collected throughout the semester during which Natalia worked with this team shows that she was eventually granted legitimacy as a team member once her team mates realized that Natalia's input was valuable despite her newcomer/NNEST status. They also granted her access to their team work CoP once they realized that Natalia did not mean to gain entry to their self-constituted CoP of friends. In addition, Natalia's proactive resistance to being positioned as an outsider also played a significant role in her gaining access as a legitimate peripheral participant, thus demonstrating that it took both sides of the party to accommodate, accept, and transform their attitudes and behaviors. In the final weeks of her exchange, Natalia felt proud not only about her team's academic success, but also about her own achievements in managing to negotiate her identity as a capable, resourceful and therefore legitimate team member.

The example from Raquel's unsuccessful team work negotiations further illustrates the contested nature of L2 socialization in academic contexts. Her collaboration efforts and learning experiences with local students yielded unexpected, undesired outcomes which bring to our attention issues of power differentials that may emerge and adversely impact the entire process. Despite Raquel's resistance to being positioned as a marginal CoP member, those in the team who succeeded at constructing an "expert" self-image ultimately exercised control over the other team members by determining their degree of participation and making decisions about the value of their contributions.

These illustrations therefore also remind us that:

Newcomers must be granted enough legitimacy to be treated as potential members. (…) Only with legitimacy can all their inevitable stumblings and violations become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect or exclusion. (Wenger, 1998, p. 101)

Indeed, this study also points out that, as Duff (2003) noted, "the issue of access to target communities and accommodation cannot be taken for granted in L2 socialization" (p. 327). In fact, resistance can come from both newcomers as well as target community members. (Refer to Norton, 2000, for similar arguments.)

In short, this finding suggests that the intention to join a CoP does not per se grant access: even before engagement with practices can occur, legitimacy needs to be granted

(Wenger, 1998; Davis, 2005). Gaining membership in their team work CoPs was fundamental for the participants, since once they were granted legitimacy, they were not only able to make contributions, but also benefited from the discussions about the content and the format of their assignments, and thus were able to learn about new ways of approaching a writing activity they may have been used to solve and interpret in a different way.

The parameter of feedback highlights the central role it plays in socializing students into new academic literacy practices. In higher education contexts, feedback has been identified as crucial, particularly written feedback comments, since this is usually the only kind of response students obtain. Hence, students are largely dependent on the comments they receive in order to gather the necessary knowledge to improve their future work (Higgins, 2000; Hyland, 1998). Since feedback serves as a means of conveying information "about university values and beliefs, about the role of writing in learning" (Ivanič et al., 2000, p. 47) it is viewed as an important locus of language socialization into target academic literacy practices, as was demonstrated through some of the examples included in Section 6.1.3. However, beyond the realm of the language classroom, "writing is merely a medium by which students are judged on what they know of specific subject knowledge" (Hyland & Hyland, 2006a, p. 86), and therefore its potential as academic discourse socialization tool is often not fully realized. Indeed, recent studies examining the views on feedback held by HE instructors across the curriculum suggest that despite students' wishes to obtain feedback both on form and content aspects, disciplinary faculty mostly believed that the first type of feedback was the job of language educators (Zhu, 2004), a view that also comes across through the kinds of feedback (and the kinds of absent feedback) on my participants' work. Based on the data, it is unclear whether the participants' instructors consciously opted to ignore students' mistakes in some cases, or whether even if they did not mark them on students' papers, they exercised what Norton and Starfield (1997) identified as "covert language assessment in academic writing" practices, whereby the lack of linguistic proficiency was taken into account to grade the students' work without the students' awareness of this. What did become evident through the instructors' comments is that their standards were high, and that when these were not met by the participants, a common response was to

request that they have their work checked by an Anglophone speaker. As is further discussed in the next chapter, this type of feedback positioned students, most likely unintentionally, as deficient learners/writers.

Recent and ongoing language socialization research focusing on feedback practices in higher education points out that there exist institutional forces that may affect the process of giving feedback in subtle ways, yet bearing important consequences on students' performances, identities, and academic socialization. Even in cases where instructors may be sensitive to students' desire for detailed comprehensive feedback, a combination of institutional forces such as too great an instructional workload, lack of recognition of the faculty's teaching efforts, and official grading policies (which may sometimes remain hidden to students) have been identified as reasons that prevented, rather than facilitated, formative feedback that contributed to students' L2 academic literacy socialization (Séror, 2006).

The data of this study also suggest that the participants were often unaware of the feedback and grading institutional practices, and were therefore left to play what I have called a "guessing game," not only wondering when they would receive feedback, but also trying to understand the rationale behind their grades, when the comments they were given did not suggest any major difficulties to justify their marks.

A further finding related to feedback concerns its affective impact on the participants. Feedback has recently been characterized as an emotional process (Boud, 1995; Carless, 2006; Séror, 2006) which in addition to communicating values and norms, constructs writers' identities and competencies (Ivanič et al., 2000; Starfield, 2004), consequently affecting their motivation and self-confidence. It is seen as an emotional business in that "[t]he student makes an emotional investment in an assignment and expects some 'return' on that investment" (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2001, p. 272). For students who are new to the academic culture, unfamiliarity with the implicit grading rules and standards of the host context can escalate the demoralizing effect of unexpected feedback and poor grades. I come back to this issue and explore the students' positionings and identities that resulted from the feedback they received.

The findings also illustrate different ways in which instructors attempted to socialize students into target literacy practices: by means of their course outlines, their

assignment guidelines, their course websites, their lectures, the reading materials they assigned, and the feedback they provided. The institution also provided students with access to resources which could potentially contribute to their academic socialization. However, availability and access to resources did not necessarily guarantee participants' use of all of these potential socializing mediums. That is, the participants could have maximized their academic literacy socialization by relying more on the sources of information and support they had at hand (e.g., the Writing Centre, the "buddy" program, the ESL conversation classes).

In the following chapter I examine in more depth some of the themes already more cursorily analyzed here (e.g., positionings), by taking into account all five parameters and also including data from all participants. Thus, one of the aims of the following chapter is to add a further layer of theoretical abstraction to the data analysis and interpretation. In addition, I include the findings that address the third research question, which focuses on the participants post-exchange views.

Chapter 7

POSITIONINGS, NEGOTIATIONS, INVESTMENTS AND RETURNS: EXPERIENCES ABROAD AND AT HOME

7.0 Introduction

In this chapter I shift my attention to a discussion of three interrelated themes that emerged in Chapters 5 and 6. These themes, which add an extra layer of data interpretation, are concerned with the participants' positioning and identity constructions, their negotiations while navigating the host academic world, and their investment in opportunities for academic literacy socialization, as well as the returns they obtained during their stay abroad. Figure 7.1 visually represents these three interconnected themes, which are now also included in the graphic illustrating the factors affecting the participants L2 academic literacy socialization (Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.1 L2 Academic Literacy Socialization Themes

Later in this chapter, I also examine the perceived returns on the participants' investments once back in their home contexts. I do this by addressing the third research question: Once the students return to their home university, what do they perceive to be the biggest impact of their academic sojourn? In particular, what is the significance ascribed to their L2 academic socialization through literacy practices in Canada upon their return home? The chapter ends with a brief summary of the findings reported here.

Figure 7.2 L2 Academic Literacy Socialization Factors and Associated Themes

7.1 Discursive positioning and identity constructions

In my analysis of the interaction between multiple factors (parameters) examined in the previous chapter, I tried to provide an integrated and organic perspective (i.e., similar to what Kramsch (2002), Leather & van Dam (2003), and van Lier (2000) call an "ecological perspective") of the participants' L2 academic literacy socialization. By examining their engagement in context-specific academic literacy practices, I attempted to illustrate the following: that the participants' language learning, more specifically, their learning of academic literacy discourses and practices, occurred through social interactions located in a specific temporal, social and political context, and space, and that the literacy practices in which students participated acted as language-mediated tools that shaped their socialization into unfamiliar academic discourse practices. I also suggested that students actively constructed their learning contexts by making personal investments; for instance, by choosing who to study or work with and what to pay attention to (e.g., what kinds of feedback, tips and advice).

The findings suggest that the participants experienced different types of positioning as a result of their contact and interactions with individuals in their INoPs, CoPs, and resources in the host academic context. Positioning, as I use it here, "is the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 47). Two interdependent kinds of positioning are identified by Davies and Harré: "interactive" (i.e., which results from what one person says about another person), and "reflective" (i.e., which results from an individual's self-alignment or non-alignment with a position). Positioning theory thus attempts to provide an alternative concept to "role" by employing a spatial metaphor which suggests flexibility and dynamism: a person's positioning is ever-changing.

Closely connected with positioning are the concepts of "identity" and "agency." The notion of agency I adopt for this study is effectively captured in Duranti's (2004) definition, which conceptualizes it in terms of three interconnected properties:

> Agency is here understood as the property of those entities (i) that have some degree of control over their own behavior, (ii) whose actions in the world affect other entities (and sometimes their own), and (iii) whose actions are the object of

evaluation (e.g., in terms of their responsibility for a given outcome). (Duranti, 2004, p. 453)

Thus, "agents" are entities involved in a "causative chain" (Duranti, 2004, citing Talmy, 1976, 2000; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). There is variation in the degree of agency depending on whether or not an agent's actions are performed willfully or not.

In turn, identity can be understood as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world" and "how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2000, p. 5). As I illustrate below, during their academic literacy socialization process the participants experienced both interdependent kinds of positioning: interactive and reflexive. These positionings resulted in diverse identity constructions that sometimes were imposed on the participants, while other times they were adopted by them. These identities were also sometimes resisted and at other times tacitly accepted. The findings also show that their identities were multiple and also in constant flux, and that when participants could successfully exercise their agency, they ultimately chose to make salient those identities that brought them the greatest return on their investments (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). In the next sections I illustrate this in relation to the participants' team work experiences, their feedback interpretations, and their perceived attitudes of instructors and TAs, since these emerged as the contexts and situations where the most salient positionings (to students and to me) occurred.

7.1.1 Positionings in team work

In Chapter 6, I provided a detailed discussion of the team work experiences of two participants, Natalia and Raquel, and illustrated their negotiations of membership in their respective team work CoPs, showing how despite their efforts, while Natalia finally managed to become a legitimate member, Raquel remained an outsider. In this sense, I suggested that the participants were positioned by their team mates as non-legitimate members of their respective team work CoPs, and that this illustrated the contested nature of socialization processes into a new academic culture. Whereas the participants sometimes resisted imposed positionings, there were instances where they tacitly accepted and therefore reinforced the identities assigned to them, even if these further

marginalized them. This is revealed, for instance, by examining Lorena's positionings in her different team work experiences. On the one hand, in her Mexican teams she was identified as the "expert/oldtimer" member in light of her high academic performance in MCMU and her strong English proficiency. Students not only sought her advice when completing individual assignments, but they also relied heavily on Lorena when composing their group assignments. For example, she would usually take the lead and type the notes of their group discussions, organize them into a coherent text, and produce the first assignment draft which would then go through revision rounds amongst team members. In short, Lorena was positioned as a key member whose contributions significantly shaped the team work product.

On the other hand, in the mixed group that included local students, Lorena was relegated to a marginal status. For instance, in her COMM 4B 01 team, Lorena worked with two Canadian students who, according to her, were very nice and also very patient when they (i.e., non-Anglophone team mates) did not understand them. Yet despite these positive characteristics, interview data shows that Lorena was by default positioned as a less capable student: "I know they want to work with us, but, unavoidably, we are 'the Mexicans' who – they perhaps think that we don't know that much, so we get together but they do all the work." (Lorena, I#5 F05: November 14/2005) And although she disliked this situation, she ended up giving into this positioning by aligning herself with her Canadian team mates' assumption that language limitations and unfamiliarity with the system automatically rendered her as a novice who had little (if anything) to contribute:

S: Why do they [Canadian team mates] think that you don't know?

L: Because – and they are right about this, because they have to
     check whatever we write. And besides, we don't know much
     about the WCU system whereas they are in the 4th year, then
     it's like they know more.

(Lorena, I#5 F05: November 14/05)

7.1.2   Positionings in feedback

As already mentioned, the emotional dimension of feedback should not be overlooked. Higgins (2000) notes in this respect that "if a student is made to feel that they

have poor writing skills then this may affect their self confidence and therefore self-identity and the way they present themselves to others in the future" (p. 6). Thus, the messages conveyed through feedback played a role in positioning students as more or less capable or deficient, or as relatively successful or unsuccessful. One example of this kind of positioning occurred when Isabel's and Nelda's instructors, respectively, suggested in their feedback comments that they should have their work checked by an Anglophone speaker before submission. Even though the instructors may not have meant to do so, comments of this kind stigmatized the participants as more deficient NNES students who were incapable of producing high quality work on their own, and rather than empowering the students, they made them more aware of their weaknesses. As a result, the participants usually lost their confidence as writers for their future assignments, as shown in the cases of both participants.

Furthermore, the suggestion to have their work checked by an Anglophone speaker was sometimes troubling for a number of reasons. In the first place, not all participants had access to English speaking friends, and even in cases where they did, their friends' NES status did not automatically qualify them to provide proper assistance with their discipline-based writing. Secondly, whereas some participants reported having contact with several Anglophone speakers, mostly through their residences, asking of them a favor such as thoroughly going over their assignments seemed quite inappropriate, even exploitative, to some of them. This is illustrated in Isabel's quote below:

> Living in the student residences gives you access to people who can sort of take a quick look at your work. But if you really want to find someone who revises paragraph by paragraph – then no – besides, I feel very sorry because it's really a lot of work. And besides, when you're at the stage where you could show it to someone you're also close to the deadline. I feel very bad asking them two hours of their free time – so I usually just ask them to take a quick look.
>
> (Isabel, I#4: December 6/05)

Thirdly, and even more importantly, the participants were not always fond of asking other people to revise their work for fear that the revised product might not reflect their original ideas and voice. In this sense, some of the participants felt very proud and also

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protective of their writerly identities, and were not ready to resign them for the sake of obtaining a higher grade and satisfying their instructor's demands:

> I want to try my best … but I don't really want to give my work to somebody else so that they re-write it for me. I know I can get 15 out of 30 on my own, and I think I'd rather have that than 30 out of 30 with an essay someone else wrote.
>
> (Isabel, I#2 F05: October 28/05)

Closely connected with feedback are the grades that students received, which in some cases were the only kind of response to their work, and which also positioned students in different ways. For instance, Isabel's poor grade (52/100) in one of her midterms aligned her as a weak student, a stigma which became even more salient in her case because even though this was an individual assignment grade, performances were compared against those of her team mates in that course, which lead her to feel incompetent:[73] "All my team mates got 70s, so I thought 'I'm the team's dope!'" (Isabel, I#2 F05: October 28/05). Another example comes from Nelda, who recounts that when she found out she had failed the COMM A2 01 midterm (see discussion in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.1) she was almost on the verge of desperation because at that point, she feared she would fail more than one of her courses. This was particularly troubling for her given that this was the first time in her student life that she fared very poorly in academic-related work, and to make matters worse, she was unsure about what she could do in order to improve it:

> I felt terrible. Very sad, very depressed, very stressed – because – like I told her [the instructor] I have never ever failed an exam – anything! Plus – I am a very good student in Mexico! And just – to get here and get a 40/100, that was like "what's going on?" And like I said to her, if this was my only course – I would be able to take this better (…) But the problem is that it's the same for all courses. In every course there's a chance I may not pass, so it's like – I thought I would do okay in this course, so failing was like – (…) Perhaps I should study differently, but I don't really know how.

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[73] For this course, students were required to work and study in teams. Teams in which all members scored over 70/100 were given bonus points. In Isabel's team, she was the only one who scored less than 70, consequently feeling extremely guilty and ashamed.

Hence, failing an exam (and also fairing poorly on other assignments, as in the LAST essay discussed in the previous chapter) situated Nelda in a vulnerable position, since her chances of passing her courses were jeopardized. But even more significantly for Nelda was the fact that her identity as a high academic achiever (i.e., her MCMU student identity) was being challenged: "I have never ever failed an exam – anything! Plus – I am a very good student in Mexico!" According to her, this newly acquired identity was not representative of her "true" learner identity, and the data suggests that being positioned as a bad student probably affected Nelda even more so than the poor grades she obtained. This was demonstrated in her efforts to re-construct her "good" student image with her instructors (in the LAST and COMM 2A 01 courses), to whom she communicated her concerns and desperation. The underlying message she intended to convey to them was that she was indeed a capable student whose grades misrepresented her efforts, dedication and intelligence.

7.1.3 Positionings in interactions with instructors, TAs and peers

The interview data shows that discursive positioning also occurred in classroom interactions with instructors and peers.[74] In the excerpt below, for example, Lorena mentioned that she felt she (and all Mexicans) received "special treatment" (i.e., a kind of patronizing) because of her status as a non-Anglophone:

> Some instructors try to give you like – special treatment because you're from Mexico and because English is not your language, and it's like in some ways they underestimate our capacity.

(Lorena, I#4 F05: October 17/2005)

Similar statements were made by other participants. Further data from the participants' interview reports shows that the "special treatment" involved, for instance, instructors making direct comments about non-Anglophone students' more limited English proficiency or their lack of background on certain topics discussed in class.

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[74] While classroom observation data would strengthen these claims, I believe these arguments are reliable given that my interpretations are based on triangulation of cross-case interview data and some supporting documents which confirm the "special treatment" non-Anglophone students were granted in class.

Arguments of this sort were also made by the two instructors I interviewed for this project, as well as by the PHIL instructor, who specified in his initial e-mail to registered students that NNES speakers would find his course particularly challenging due to the heavy writing component.

Peers also contributed to positioning Mexicans (and other NNESs) as less capable students, and this was usually evidenced when the participants engaged in team work with local students. Like the Asian students in Duff (2002), this explicit alignment with a non-local status positioned Lorena and other Mexican classmates in two ways: sympathetically, as students who were entitled to lack knowledge of certain topics that local students were supposed to be aware of and as people whose language mistakes would not be criticized because English was their L2; at the same time, it positioned them less sympathetically, as students who were presumably less knowledgeable and proficient than their local counterparts.

The participants had mixed reactions to these alignments: on the one hand, they enjoyed being positioned in a sympathetic way and appreciated that instructors were aware of the diversity of their student body, and showed patience and a certain level of compassion for those who were non-Anglophone newcomers. For example, Isabel felt relieved when her TA told her that her work would not be judged too harshly because she was an exchange student, whereas the work of an international student pursuing a complete degree at WCU would be assessed more strictly. Nelda also enjoyed the special treatment she received from her LAST instructor, for example, who allowed her to hand in the assignments in Spanish. Liliana and Natalia were in the same class for which Lorena mentioned that the instructor was compassionate with non-Anglophone students, and they also were pleased that this instructor displayed what they characterized as a "friendly" attitude towards the Mexicans, and that he was aware of their needs. On the other hand, and particularly as time progressed, the participants became slightly uncomfortable with the "special treatment" they were given, in some cases wishing that it stopped:

L: The COMM 4E instructor always asks "Have the Mexicans
   understood?" or whether the Mexicans this or that. And I know
   he means to help, but sometimes it's just "too much."

```
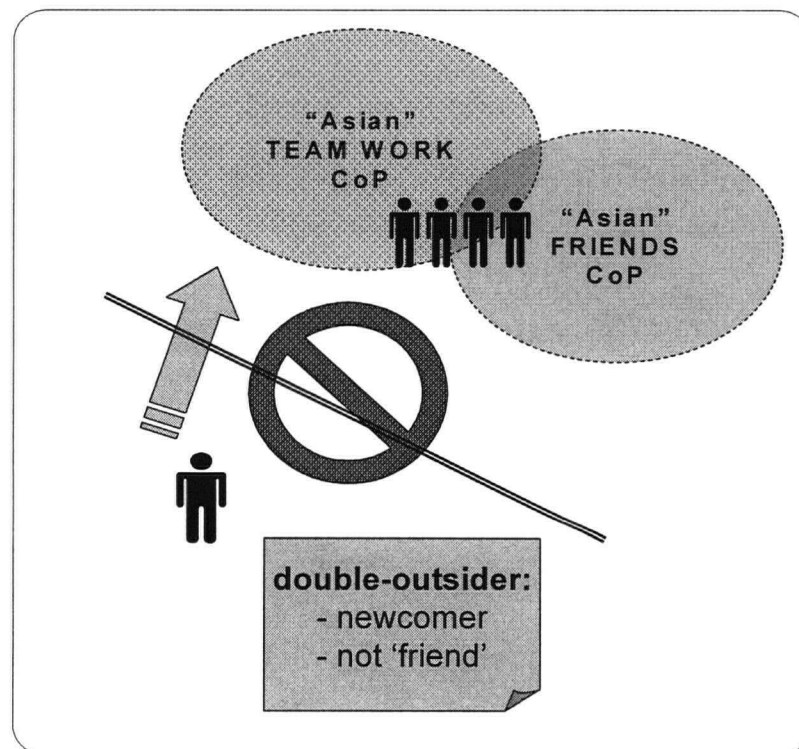S:   And has your perspective changed with time? Did you like it
     in the beginning?

L:   Yes, initially I really liked it - because I could tell he
     cared about us. But there's a point when you just say "ah!" -
     it's just too much.
```

(Lorena, I#4 F05: October 17/05)

Hence, the participants were in a constant struggle with their different positionings: while they wished to receive the same treatment as local students (i.e., they wanted to be positioned as proficient learners who could manage and deliver effectively), they also hoped instructors remembered their non-local/non-Anglophone status and exercised a certain leniency, particularly when grading assignments. The downside of being labeled "exchange students" was that they could be positioned as deficient learners as a result of their NNES status, and this is something they wished to avoid:

```
And then there are instructors who don't really care whether
you're Canadian or not. They grade your work as if you were
Canadian. And I want to be treated like a Mexican! ((small
laugh)) I have this contradictory feeling. This has been
quite hard for me - finding a balance. I mean, I'm not
Canadian, but at the same time, I don't want to be given too
much of a special treatment, since I don't want to be
underestimated.
```

(Lorena, I#4 F05: October 17/05)

Isabel's excerpt below also reveals a similar contradictory feeling: she wished to function and be treated like a local WCU while simultaneously being identified as an exchange student, particularly if she did not perform as well as expected. By mentioning that she wanted to retain authorship of her work even if it did not meet the local standards (i.e., it did not rank as highly as that of native speakers'), she resisted being positioned as an ineffective writer. Her resistance involved defying some of her instructors' suggestions to have her work proofread by an Anglophone speaker, as discussed earlier. Yet at the same time, she recognized that, ultimately, if things went wrong, she wished to make her NNES/outsider status salient, since this would save her from harsh criticism and a poor performance:

```
S: And do you like it or not when they are more lenient
   towards you?
```

I: I don't like it - it's okay if they help me, for instance,
if I don't understand something and I ask them for help.
But if I'm here on an exchange, I'm supposed to be writing
here so that I am evaluated here, according to their
standards, otherwise I would stay in Mexico. I don't
really like the idea of getting my papers re-written - If
they're going to fail me, then let it be so. Although it's
easier to say so than actually - when you are in a
situation, feeling the heat from the fire, you say "I am
exchange!"

(Isabel, I#4 F05: December 6/05)

In sum, discursive positioning occurred in various kinds of contexts and situations
(e.g., by means of written and verbal comments, and patterns of participation in team
work), and the most common identities students were affiliated with were related to their
NNES and newcomer status. These identities usually positioned the participants as
incompetent learners who required assistance from others to successfully understand and
perform their academic literacy activities. Even if the comments and actions of the host
individuals were well intentioned, they often had the unintended effect of portraying
participants as deficient learners whose skills and performance were inevitably lower
than those of their local counterparts. Table 7.1 summarizes the positionings presented in
this section.

Table 7.1 Participants' Sample Positionings

Positioning context/source	Example
Team work	• Natalia's initial positioning as outsider. • Raquel's continuous positioning as marginal participant. • Betty's (reflexive) positioning as expert/oldtimer in Mexican teams; as novice/weaker writer in mixed team.
Feedback	• Isabel's and Nelda's instructor feedback positioned them as deficient writers. • Isabel's poor grades (self)positioned her as the team's "dope." • Nelda's poor grades (self)positioned her as a "bad student."
Interactions with instructors, TAs and peers	• Positionings as less capable English writers by Lorena's, Liliana's, Natalia's, Isabel's, and Nelda's instructors, TAs and peers.

7.2 Negotiating the WCU academic culture

Previous research focusing on the academic discourse socialization of international university level students for whom English is their L2 (e.g., Bronson, 2005; Casanave, 1995; 2002; Kobayashi, 2003; Morita, 2002, 2004; Riazi, 1997; Spack, 1997a, 2004, to name a few) has brought to our attention the kinds of tensions and negotiations that sometimes remain unnoticed by the academic community of classmates, teachers, and researchers, unless students' perspectives are explored by means of detailed, in-depth investigations. For example, Morita's (2004) research on the (non)participation of six Japanese graduate students in a new English-medium university context challenges traditional stigmas associated with Asian learners by identifying multiple meanings behind the silence of her participants in their respective classroom communities. Her findings revealed that these seemingly passive students were in fact very active learners who exercised their agency in negotiating their academic socialization in the host context. Likewise, in trying to find their way while traversing the paths of the new WCU world, the participants of this study were constantly involved in negotiations. Table 7.2 summarizes the different kinds of negotiations illustrated and discussed in this section.

Table 7.2 Participants' Negotiations

Negotiation situation	Source of resistance	Agency	Outcome
Poor grades & Feedback	• Nelda's resistance to "bad student" identity.	• Talked with her instructor and brought up her "high academic achiever" identity in Mexico.	• Instructor acknowledged her participation in class, repositioning her as a good student who made an effort.
Assignments	• Natalia's & Liliana's negotiations of assignment content.	• Discussed familiar content they had easy access to.	• Obtained good grades.
	• Raquel's negotiation of assignment viewpoints.	• Ignored instructor's own beliefs/viewpoints.	• Felt proud of standing by her convictions.
	• Nelda's negotiation of assignment language.	• Approached instructor	• Obtained permission to write in Spanish.
	• Liliana's and Natalia's negotiations of assignment word limit.	• Ignored word limit in future assignments.	• They were able to write more complete ideas. Grades went up.

Some of these negotiations were related to the identities they resisted because they positioned them as outsiders or as deficient learners. For instance, I presented data showing how Nelda resisted being positioned as a "bad student" by approaching her instructor and portraying herself as a responsible student who was in fact a high achiever in Mexico. Additionally, negotiations took place vis-à-vis other aspects of their academic experiences. The participants found ways to negotiate different aspects of their assignments with the aim of benefiting their performances. For instance, whenever they could, they tried to include content with which they were familiar instead of venturing into discussions of topics that were new to them and therefore made them feel like novices. Illustrations of this argument come from Natalia and Liliana, for example, who for one of the course final projects (COMM 4E course) that required performing a critical analysis of a company's structure and production, instead of choosing to write about a Canadian company, they wrote about a Mexican one. Both felt more comfortable discussing the Mexican company, and besides, they reported that they had easier access to Mexican business information (which they obtained through Natalia's sister, who was an employee of the company they analyzed) than to Canadian sources.

The instructors were sometimes aware of these negotiations, and at least in the case of those I interviewed, they showed a great level of understanding towards the students' content negotiations. In fact, they might even encourage them:

```
Well, I think the students - when they do something they're
interested in - that they're really interested in, then they
do better. And so - I mean, I let them do the Mexican stuff in
the same way I let the Hong Kong students do the Hong Kong
topics or I let the Chinese do them on Chinese topics. I let
the students do topics that they're oriented towards, that
they themselves are oriented towards.
```

(Instructor C, Interview: December 12/05)

However, content negotiations could sometimes pose a risk. For instance, for one of her POLI essays Raquel wrote about a topic from a viewpoint which she knew would be considered by her instructor as too "idealistic," yet she still chose to do so – despite the risk of being criticized – because she thought it genuinely reflected her position. Another example already discussed in Chapter 6 comes from Isabel, whose assignment

negotiations were related to the language of the assignment, where she obtained permission to write her LAST essays in Spanish.

In some cases, the participants' assignment negotiations involved defying their teacher's instructions. In one such instance, the participants were Liliana and Natalia, both of whom worked on a series of individual assignments (short essays between 100-500 words) for course COMM 4G. The prompts stipulated that students were expected to adhere strictly to the word limit, and that marks would be deducted if students ignored these instructions. Both participants initially respected the word number restrictions, even though they claimed that they could have done a better job had they been able to write more.

```
Here she circled some words and wrote a question mark. It
seems as if she wants me to explain more. But if I had
explained more I would have gone over the word limit!
```

```
(Liliana, WL entry #6)
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In both cases, their grades were lower than they expected: Liliana obtained 3.5/5 in her first assignment and Natalia 3.75/5. However, discovering that other classmates who had exceeded the prescribed word limit were not penalized led both of them to partially ignore the word limit in future assignments:

```
I no longer care so much about the word limit, not after I
saw that this classmate went over the word limit and she
still got a full mark! I needed more space, but didn't write
more because the instructor said she would deduct some marks
if we did go over the limit. And now she says she wants that
additional information. So in these assignments [subsequent
ones that she brought to show me], I just went over by 20 or
30 words, or so.
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(Natalia, I#5: October 28/05)
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In subsequent assignments, both participants' grades improved significantly even though neither of them agreed to the word limit. Natalia's and Liliana's examples provide an illustration of negotiations that resulted in response to the instructor feedback they received as well as from observing the work of other classmates and comparing their performances, all of which led them to re-define aspects of the assignment prompts.

I therefore suggest that the participants found themselves performing multiple and varied kinds of negotiations which responded to contextual as well as personal factors.

The findings indicate that when certain identities and positionings were unfavorable to them, or when feedback and assignment prompts were problematic, for instance, the participants exercised their personal agency with the aim of shaping and constructing (i.e., negotiating) favorable learning opportunities and outcomes.

7.3 Investments in opportunities for L2 academic literacy socialization

One of the main motivations behind the students' decision to participate in an exchange in Canada was the opportunity to practice and refine their English language proficiency. A commonly held assumption shared by all participants was that taking part in an exchange such as the MCMU-WCU Joint Academic Program afforded foreign students an immersion opportunity in the local language and culture. This assumption is largely fuelled by institutions, individuals, as well as the media, which promote academic exchanges, often mentioning that contact with local people is one of the main advantages of residing abroad. However, judging from the experiences of some of the focal participants of this study, the opportunities readily available for establishing close, ongoing contact with host country individuals at times proved to be more elusive than real. At the same time, occasionally there were concrete possibilities to meet and establish bonds with locals, yet the focal participants were not always proactive in taking advantage of these situations. The students' efforts and actions to interact and collaborate with local students could be viewed as investments in potential opportunities for L2 academic literacy socialization that were not always fully realized, a point I explore in the following section.

7.3.1 Interacting with target language/culture speakers

Work on intercultural communication has shown that NNES international students' adjustment to the host culture is influenced by internal factors (e.g., student preparation and knowledge about the host culture prior to departure) as well as external factors (e.g., institutional support and social contact in the host culture) (Kim, 1994). In an academic environment, students' access to faculty members, teaching assistants, classmates, support staff in addition to others in their social settings (e.g., roommates) are assumed to afford students multiple and diverse opportunities for interaction (Myles & Cheng, 2003).

Yet, previous studies have shown that individuals highly invested in developing the target language found themselves silenced--for a whole range of reasons--in the presence of the very same people that they wished to connect with (Duff, 2002; Morita, 2004; Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). Cultural differences, personality traits, positionings and identities, as well as language proficiency were among the issues identified as factors that prevented rather than enabled individuals to actively participate in class or to seek interactions with local people. As a result, these individuals may have missed potential opportunities for socialization into target languages and practices.

Interestingly, the participants' interview data mostly suggest that language was not perceived by them as a barrier that significantly affected their participation in informal conversations with non-Mexicans, since they reported having a high level of comfort socializing in English. In fact, many of them indicated that they felt more comfortable speaking in English with non-Mexicans (including Anglophone speakers) than with Mexicans, since they felt that while the former would compliment their English (e.g., with comments such as "Wow, how come your English is so good?"), the latter interlocutors tended to judge them. Instead, what emerged as problematic was that domestic students had already developed their own individual networks of practices and communities of practices and therefore seemed less motivated to extend their ties to newcomers. As a result, MCMU students connected mostly with fellow Mexican peers, and most social (out-of-class) interactions took place in Spanish. This was not always a matter of choice, but rather an unavoidable circumstance, as some of the participants explained:

```
They [the local WCU students] already know each other.
They've taken courses together for a long time (...) and so
they are friends. So it's hard to make friends with them
because they already have their own groups. They've done all
their degree here.
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(Isabel, I#2 F05: October 28/05)
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The Canadians don't go beyond "hello" - they're in their
world.
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(Lorena, I#4 F05: October 17/05)
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Another deterrent to socializing with domestic students concerned incompatibilities between their background and interests:

```
I met many people in school, in my classes. But I don't go
out with them. You socialize in class, but not outside. They
have a different culture, other plans. (...) In class we talk -
I don't know - if you have doubts, or about your plans for
the weekend, what you've been doing, like how you do in your
courses. But just in class. We don't really talk about
things.
```

(Nelda, I#3 F05: October 27/05)

Isabel also reported that domestic students had their own plans (in the same way she, as a domestic student in Mexico had her own interests and activities planned), and this made it more difficult to join them. (Similar to the findings in Duff, 2002, 2004, and 2006a.)

A further aspect that seems to have shaped the participants' interpersonal investments concerns their cultural immersion agendas, as I already mentioned in Chapter 6. Participants whose priority was to meet people from local and other cultures sought multiple and varied opportunities for interactions with non-Mexicans. For example, Raquel chose to work with a mixed group that included locals as well as other international students (see discussion below, however); she contacted the WCU International Relations Student Association, through which she had access to conferences, camping opportunities, and other events that brought her closer to the local/international cultures; and she befriended classmates from a great diversity of backgrounds (e.g., Iraq, Nepal, Korea, Cyprus, etc.). As discussed before, Raquel's investments in these relationships rewarded her with the opportunity to practice English and to access new experiences and worldviews.

Summarizing, either due to their limited access to local students' networks and communities, or to their low investment in cultural immersion (despite contradictory declamatory statements), several participants seemed to have missed potential opportunities for gaining access to knowledge about the target WCU academic practices. Yet this is not to say that L2 academic literacy socialization did not take place; indeed, as revealed in Chapters 5 and 6, throughout their sojourn in Canada the participants became aware of many aspects that characterized the host academic culture, and as time

progressed, they went through different levels of resistance and adjustment to the new norms and values. Ironically, many of the insights gained by the participants were the product of interactions and negotiations with fellow Mexican exchange students. In a sense, the participants and other Mexican peers exercised a form of mutual scaffolding among novices to the culture, and through this collaborative process they gained knowledge and expertise about target academic literacy practices. By the end of the exchange, while the participants still positioned themselves as relative novices and outsiders, they reported feeling much more confident and comfortable, and predicted that if they stayed an extra semester, their academic socialization would be almost on a par with that of oldtimers in the WCU culture.

7.3.2 Collaborating with local students

As discussed previously, course-sponsored group work projects that involve collaboration between NNES and local students have traditionally been viewed as opportunities for NNES to practice English and to gain insights about the target academic culture values and expectations (refer to Chapter 6). The findings of this study reveal, on the one hand, the need to re-examine the mismatches between the participants' proclaimed goals and their real intentions to connect with NES students, and on the other hand, the need to re-examine the claimed benefits of this type of collaboration.

I mentioned previously that several participants, when given the choice, preferred to work with Mexican classmates because they felt more at ease teaming up with them (e.g., Lorena, Liliana, Natalia), while others preferred to work in groups with a strong Mexican component but which also had some Canadian representation (e.g., Isabel and Nelda). Student team work composition choices had consequences in two main respects: a) the participants' degree of exposure to the local academic culture, and b) their opportunities to practice English. It could thus be argued that opting to collaborate with Mexican classmates precluded the participants from potentially benefiting from the guidance and expertise of more English proficient, oldtimer classmates whose "textual capital" (Starfield, 2004) and access to local sources of information could be expected to be great assets. In other words, choosing not to collaborate with local students could be viewed as opportunities for L2 academic literacy socialization that were ignored.

However, as demonstrated in Raquel's team work negotiations, investments in collaborating with local students did not necessarily reward her in the ways she expected. The unexpected, undesired outcome of Raquel's team work investments suggests the highly contested nature inherent in the academic literacy socialization process (see Duff, 2002, 2003, in press b; Morita & Kobayashi, in press).

7.3.3   Learning from assignments, resources, and feedback

The participants had many opportunities for L2 academic literacy socialization by means of their engagement in academic literacy practices. Students were involved in a series of course assignments which required mastery of content knowledge and also demanded a highly sophisticated command of disciplinary registers and genres. As newcomers and L2 English speakers, the participants reported many situations in which they struggled to perform according to their instructors' expected standards, thus evidencing a gap between the knowledge and skills required and those possessed by the participants. At the same time, it was their ongoing engagement in academic literacy practices that socialized the participants into the expected target values and norms. That is, the participants gained awareness and knowledge through practice. By the end of the exchange period, the participants reported that their multiple engagements in course assignments led to improvements in their English writing and also increased their level of confidence in their own abilities.[75]

Notwithstanding these claims, a critical examination of the participants' investments in the academic literacy activities they performed suggests that they could have maximized the academic literacy socialization had they taken advantage of available resources such as institutional sources of support, course-related materials, and feedback. I already mentioned that the participants did benefit from many of these resources, but that they also ignored (or lacked awareness) of many others. For instance, a) all but one of the participants consulted with tutors from the Writing Centre, b) none of them participated in academic-related activities and programs sponsored by the Office of

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[75] This statement is based on interview data mainly, although students' improvement in grades may also serve as further evidence of the accuracy of their claims. Nevertheless, these are subjective claims, from the standpoint of the interviewees.

International Students at WCU, c) few students actively contributed to online discussions in forums or Q&A sections of their course websites, and d) few participants reported consulting their instructors and TAs during office hours (refer to more detailed discussion on this in Chapter 6). Even though it is impossible to predict or measure the influence that using any of these resources would have had on the participants' performances and learning, it seems reasonable to hypothesize, based on how their use of other resources benefited them, that all these represent opportunities that could have enhanced their academic experiences and enculturation.[76]

The participants' investments in discourse socialization can also be examined in terms of their efforts to produce work of high quality. Whereas for the most part they reported making what they viewed as "huge" time investments (e.g., spending a whole week to work on an essay for which they would have dedicated one afternoon had it been in Spanish and in the MCMU context), occasionally the participants also admitted doing work in a rush and being aware that it was below the required standards. For instance, in one of her COMM short essay assignments Natalia reported having spent one hour only, and was therefore not surprised when she found out her grade was just above half of the maximum score. Similarly, several participants also indicated that while they were aware that writing several drafts of an assignment and showing them to the instructor and/or a tutor would benefit the final product, they admitted not being able to do this because they often finished their work right before the deadline. Once again, the outcome of these choices the participants made resulted in opportunities for academic literacy socialization not seized.

Perhaps one of the most obvious instances of missed opportunities was exemplified in Nelda's illustration regarding three of her LAST essay assignments. Although most of the materials she researched and read in preparation for her writing were in English and served as target academic literacy models, the fact that she wrote the essays in Spanish precluded her from further practicing her target academic literacy skills. Consequently, despite her success in passing the course and the learning that took place (content-wise, mainly), Nelda missed three concrete L2 academic literacy socialization opportunities.

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[76] Once again, however, a more complete understanding of the participants' use of resources can be reconstructed only if factors other than their access to these sources are considered in the picture. That is, the issue is more complex than it seems, and I have alluded to some of this complexity in Chapter 6.

Finally, as already mentioned, feedback was also identified as a factor that could potentially contribute to familiarizing students with target academic discourse expectations. Yet, as illustrated in the previous chapter, much of the feedback the participants obtained was in the form of grades and/or comments which assessed their writing as a final product instead of viewing it as part of a larger learning process. Besides, marginal comments such as "good job," "well done," "great effort" did little in terms of indicating students which aspects of their work were worth preserving and building on in the future. And constructive criticisms and suggestions (such as having their work proofread by a native speaker, or making sure ideas are clearly stated in the opening paragraph) raised their awareness about the need to improve their work, but did not provide them with specific tactics about how to do this. It could thus be argued that while most of the feedback the participants received did communicate to them whether or not they had performed up to the standards, more often than not they engaged in a guessing game, trying to figure out exactly what they had done wrong, or what they could do to improve in the future.

I mentioned before that institutional forces had an impact on some instructors' feedback giving practices. One source of confirmation for this claim comes from one of the instructors I interviewed, who commented the following:

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A sessional lecturer doesn't do research, so a sessional
lecturer only has to teach, so you might as well try to teach
as well as you can.

(Instructor C, Interview: December 13/05)
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Trying to teach "as well as you can" involved accommodating to students' needs and abilities (see Chapter 8, pedagogical suggestions) as well as guiding them as much as possible throughout the process of working on assignments, including the feedback stage. Yet in the case of those instructors with extremely large classes to attend,[77] and/or busy research agendas and high pressure to publish, it comes as little surprise that students were left waiting for weeks (sometimes months) to receive feedback. Unfortunately, this

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[77] In the most extreme cases, some of the classes in which the participants were enrolled had 300 students; others around 150. More commonly, however, classes had 45 registered students or so, which is still a relatively large number in order for one instructor (or a TA) to provide detailed feedback in a timely fashion.

implied that the comments were received by the students too late for them to incorporate them in future works, thus representing another instance in which potential academic literacy socialization opportunities were only partially realized. In this last case, however, the onus was not on the students but on those who provided the feedback.

7.4 Participants' post-exchange views

This section addresses the third research question, and thus it focuses on the participants' perspectives about how their academic sojourn affected their experiences upon their reentry to their home social and academic contexts (with more emphasis placed on the latter). The data for this post-exchange portion of the study come from: two questionnaires (A & B) with closed as well as open-ended items, multiple e-mail communications and MSN chat sessions, and individual and focus group interviews conducted with the participants during my stay in Mexico. In 7.4.1 I address the main reentry issues reported by the participants; in 7.4.2 I examine the significance of the exchange on the participants' home academic (literacy) practices, and in 7.4.3 I report findings related to non-academic outcomes of the exchange. These results are also discussed in terms of the overriding themes in this chapter and dissertation of positionings, negotiations, investments, and (perceived) returns.

7.4.1 Reentry issues

By the end of their one or two-semester stay in Canada, it was time for the participants to pack their belongings and go home. After all, their most salient identity at WCU was that of Mexican sojourner (exchange student). Most of them were ready for to return, yet they still reported mixed feelings about this transitional moment: on the one hand, they were excited about the thought of returning to their loved ones, to their homes and belongings, and to their favorite foods. Liliana, for example, could not wait to be back in Mexico, and as mentioned in Chapter 4, in her last week abroad she felt like a prisoner, counting the days she had left in Canada. On the other hand, in giving closure to this chapter of their lives, they felt sorry that Vancouver (and all that it meant: school, friends, independence, and so much more) would become part of their histories. Hence, it

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was indeed a transitional moment characterized by much excitement but also some nostalgic feelings, with some participants more anxious for their return than others.

Once they arrived in Mexico, the participants reported going through a period of readjustment which followed the initial exhilaration of reuniting with their family, intimate friends, and other friends. Storti (1997) refers to this as the "honeymoon" of reentry to the home context, which is characterized as a period of sheer excitement to be back in a familiar setting surrounded by loved ones. This two-week or so period, according to Storti, ends when the excitement of others who are thrilled with the sojourners' return calms down, and when the reality of life starts to sink in. It is at this stage that sojourners normally start to realize that they have changed as a result of their stay abroad, and may thus experience what has been called "reverse culture shock," "reentry syndrome," or "reentry shock" (Casteen, 2006; Storti, 1997; Westwood et al., 1986). Returnees may start missing their newly formed INoP ties and CoP memberships abroad, as well as positive aspects of the sociocultural environment they left behind. Indeed, they may start to form a romanticized picture of their living abroad experiences which often leads to strong desires to return to the host country. A "reacculturation" (Martin, 1984; Martin et al., 1995) period follows, where returnees re-adjust to their home contexts. This re-adjustment, however, may not necessarily imply that individuals necessarily go back to their pre-sojourn lifestyles and routines. Indeed, affective, psychological and cognitive changes in individuals may lead them to integrate elements and perspectives from the host and home culture into their post-exchange lives back home. This last phase of the reentry period is an easing back into familiar practices, a process also characterized by tensions between resistance, adjustment and negotiation. My data analysis suggests that the participants went through the transitional moments described above, and that they were often self-conscious about their different reentry stages.

The experience in WCU made the participants aware of aspects of their home academic culture that they either liked or disliked, and they found themselves negotiating their old and new academic practices. In addition, coming back home as "returnees" positioned them in both advantageous and disadvantageous ways. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 5, one of the participants' main critiques of the MCMU system was

that they felt students were treated by instructors like high school students, as opposed to WCU instructors, who treated them like adults. Another critique was that they thought that WCU students were taught how to think beyond the obviously stated, they were trained how to be critical readers and writers. In contrast, they characterized MCMU as a system that fostered knowledge reproduction and therefore did not teach them to become independent thinkers. Consequently, when the participants returned to MCMU, some of these perceptions they had formed during their stay in Canada were reinforced. Even though the students were happy to be back in a familiar academic system, they also became resentful about the aspects of their home academic culture that they thought could be changed and improved. Raquel, for instance, described her reentry in school as a traumatic experience:

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Going back to school was much more traumatic. It frustrated
me that my teachers were not as well prepared (…) Studying at
WCU was synonymous with an intellectual challenge, but when I
returned I felt very unmotivated. None of the courses I took
in the past semester challenged me. This seems terrible to
me!!! I feel like studying at MCMU is very easy, and we are
not challenged, somehow they underestimate our capacities,
with respect to our homework, to the way we're treated by
instructors, even like the attendance system and those
things, they started to irritate me! It was like – from
having all the freedom and all the responsibility entailed in
being a university student [at WCU] to going by to high
school!!! I have to admit this was rather complex, and it
goes on now. Presently I continue to feel nostalgic in that
sense!!

(Raquel, e-mail communication: April 25/06)
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Isabel and Nelda also reported going through a post-exchange stage during which they felt displaced in their own home school contexts, thus (although only momentarily) positioning themselves as outsiders in their familiar contexts. Nelda went as far as stating that MCMU now "bothered" her. Additionally, whereas during the time they studied abroad the participants reported missing the weekly assignments and feedback that allowed them to closely track their performance, once they went back to the "old" system they claimed to have gotten unused to it, consequently making it hard for them to re-adjust:

```
I = Isabel
N = Nelda
S = Sandra
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I: When I returned it took me like a month to re-adjust to life in Guadalajara, which is supposed to be my home now. For me it was like things were kind of chaotic. And I would talk with everybody about this and they would say it was the same for them.

S: What do you mean, you talked with everybody?

I: All who participated in the exchange and returned. We said – like it was so much work to adapt there, and then come back – and it was like re-adapting again here, to school, to other schedules, another rhythm of life, another academic style. I mean, I knew it from before, but it became unaccustomed to it.

N: Even school bothered you!

S: Here?

N: Yes, it was like – "MCMU"

S: What bothered you?

N: Well I don't know – school bothered me! And I told Isabel, "I want to leave – I want to go on vacation, I'm not enjoying it here!" It was like our classes were no longer the same. They were different.

S: Why? Was it because of the teachers, or because of the kind of classes?

N: No, it was just because we were back.

I: Besides, I think, I don't know – at WCU we only had like assignments or the midterm and the final, and here we have partial exams all the time! And we also have homework for each class. And – it was so hard to get used to WCU, but in the end we adjusted, we got used to not having so much homework to hand in. So, you're back here and it's like – the MCMU clock is ticking, everything's more accelerated, so this really stressed me, because I had already lost this MCMU work rhythm – which is like, different, like a completely different model. Yes, the first month of my return [to school] was definitely extremely stressful.

(Isabel & Nelda, Focus group interview, Guadalajara: April 6/06)

In Lorena's case, an aspect that made her reentry harder was that as a result of her two semesters abroad, she was no longer studying with her original MCMU cohort. Thus, in most of her classes she was now taking courses with new classmates, which meant she had lost all of her old study groups. This, she felt, was not necessarily a negative consequence of the exchange, i.e., an unwelcome and unanticipated return on her investment, but rather a situation that gave her some extra work:

> I had to make an effort to meet new people here. I didn't know anybody in the classes I took this semester, even though we're in the same program. (...) This wasn't something that affected me, but it made my return to school more difficult. It would have been easier if I had stayed, I would have continued studying with the same group of friends I used to study with before. But that would have meant giving up all the benefits of the exchange!
>
> (Lorena, Focus Group - Monterrey: April 5/06)

Thus, returning home involved renegotiating their cultural membership and practices within their home institutions, and this was a process that required substantial time and effort. Despite these struggles, the participants felt they were in a privileged position, compared with students who had not participated in an exchange program, in light of their greater awareness of other cultures and academic practices, which became part of their cultural capital.

7.4.2 Academic (literacy) outcomes of the exchange

The findings suggest that as a result of the L2 academic literacy socialization in WCU, the participants acquired or further developed a series of practices which they later tried to apply in the MCMU context. For instance, Isabel mentioned they became more self-conscious of their writing and their need to proofread their work, even in Spanish:

> Looking for an Anglophone speaker to proofread my texts was useful and it helped me improve my style. This is something I now do for my Spanish work, too.
>
> (Isabel, Questionnaire B)

She also indicated that her Spanish writing style had changed as a result of her intensive writing practice in English. She now tried to avoid unnecessary words, and therefore tended to write more concise texts:

I learned that English is a language in which ideas are
written in a direct, straightforward manner. I liked this and
now I try to change my style a bit by writing shorter and
simpler sentences.

(Isabel, Questionnaire B)

I think that (…) I got used to writing in English, and now
obviously half of my vocabulary was in English and half in
Spanish, so the things I wrote were much shorter and concise,
and the same, shorter paragraphs. So now I think I've changed
my writing - I write shorter, with less "adornment."

(Isabel, Focus group - Guadalajara: April 6/06)

Isabel and Natalia began to use different ways of flagging parts of the readings
which they considered important (e.g., by using post-it notes, underlining text, and
writing brief notes on the margin):

Something I used a lot at WCU is the technique of sticking a
post-it with notes on the pages I found important. In that
way, I could go back to the page when I needed to use it
knowing exactly what it referred to.

(Isabel, Questionnaire B)

Before going to WCU I used to highlight a lot. But now I find
it's even better to just underline the main ideas and write a
brief explanatory comment on the margin. For example, I just
write short words like the definition of the problem, or the
reasons, or the results, etc. (…) I have realized that now I
complement my old technique with the one I learned at WCU.
(…) I like it more this way, since it's more helpful to
analyze the reading.

(Natalia, Questionnaire B)

Lorena made sure she looked for the big picture in a text before performing a
detailed analysis. This was a strategy that her MCMU teachers had taught her, but which
she did not start using until she went to WCU:

My MCMU teachers had always mentioned how useful it is to
skim a text before actually starting to read it in detail.
However, this is a strategy I had never used until I went to
WCU, and I think it's a great way to improve your
comprehension. (…) I'm currently taking a course here which,

with respect to the reading load, it resembles a lot the WCU
courses (there are tons of readings!!!)A strategy that has
been really helpful is that of skimming, which I started
using at WCU, since the readings are usually quite long
(around 30 pages) and on topics I'm not familiar with. So I
first skim the texts to get an overall idea of their content
before reading them in detail.
(Lorena, Questionnaire B)

And Natalia mentioned the importance of organizing their ideas before starting to
write their assignments:

I think that throughout my stay at WCU I discovered
strategies that helped me with my homework, like
brainstorming, synthesizing, among others. Close to the end
it was much easier to write my final assignments.

(Natalia, Questionnaire B)

Isabel said that she was now more aware of the useful resources that she could find
in the library instead of relying exclusively on the sources available online:

I learned how useful it is to go to the library in search of
information and look for books more so than Internet sources.
I also learned the "post it" technique for the books and all
that – I could have learned that here, I know, but I had
never used it. At WCU I had to do it may times, so now I see
myself doing it again.

(Isabel, Focus group – Guadalajara: April 6/06)

And Nelda indicated that she had learned how to cite in the MLA system, which she
then started to use at MCMU:

I learned how to cite very well. (…) I mostly learned the MLA
system because I was used to APA. And two of my WCU classes
required that I use MLA, so I had no choice but to learn it,
and that's what I use now.

(Nelda, Focus group – Guadalajara: April 6/06)

Thus, interestingly, this suggests that as a result of their English academic literacy
practices in Canada, the participants' writerly identities were transformed and
foregrounded to some extent, and these new orientations to reading/writing seemed to
permeate their L1 academic literacy practices.

In their interviews, the students were prompted to reflect on whether or not they thought that they had participated in the exchange at the right time of their lives or their careers. Regardless of the different program stages the participants were at, most of them agreed that, indeed, this had been the right time to go abroad. Liliana, for instance, thought that one of the reasons why it was the perfect moment is that she already had strong background knowledge of the subject matter:

> I think I really benefited from going last semester because I
> already had a solid knowledge base, which allowed me to
> compare the Mexican and the Canadian perspectives of doing
> international commerce - which actually are not that
> different.

(Liliana, I#8: April 5/06)

However, there seemed to be positive as well as more negative aspects of participating in an exchange so close to finishing their degrees. For one thing, students who went abroad in their final semesters were left with fewer elective course choices, which meant that in some cases they registered at WCU in classes that did not match their interests. Another disadvantage the students reported was that they could not apply most of the strategic knowledge they developed through their academic literacy socialization abroad because when they returned to MCMU they only had a few courses left, and most of these followed a seminar format which did not require performing many assignments of the kind they used to do in WCU. Liliana made the following comment in this regard:

> The difference with Lorena [a younger student] is that she
> can apply these techniques because you learn to read.
> Because, what I did for instance is I would read the text and
> underline it and then read it again, several times, until I
> understood it. And here now that I'm back I only take two
> classes, both of which are very practical, they involve
> numbers, and I'm not really applying any of the techniques I
> used at WCU. But Lorena is taking more classes that involve
> composing and essay writing, so she can apply it [the
> knowledge].

(Liliana, I#8: April 5/06)

In the focus group interview, Lorena commented precisely on this aspect, confirming Liliana's claims, and also adding that as a result of her academic literacy practices in Canada, she now felt her work at MCMU was much easier:

> I am at an earlier stage of my degree than all others, so when I came back, I still had to take many courses, and there are many classes for which I have to read, and I feel now that I have the advantage of having to read for hours and hours at WCU, so here I feel it's easier now.
>
> (Lorena, Focus Group Monterrey: April 5/06)

Like Liliana, Natalia, who was registered in the last two courses of her program, also reported that few opportunities emerged in her home academic context to put into practice the strategies and abilities she had acquired abroad:

> I think that I am not able to apply right now everything I was able to improve about my ways of reading and studying because this is my last semester, and it doesn't involve so much theory. I have to do more practical projects now, I don't have to read. You get unused to reading, it's like to lose the reading rhythm you had after four months of intensive reading and of being working or busy all the time.
>
> (Natalia, Focus Group - Monterrey: April 5/06)

One her courses was the equivalent to the PHIL class she had dropped in WCU. For this course she was assigned readings but, unlike WCU, her instructor did not expect the students to come to class prepared:

> I think I already lost the work habit I had developed at WCU. Because, for instance, I only needed to read for one of my courses, Ethics, but I was the only one in class who did the readings, but you went to class and he asked if you read, and if people said "ooops, no," he said "it doesn't matter." He doesn't ask you - you don't need to read to go to class. So, after a while I got lazy and then I didn't read them any more ((laughs)).
>
> (Natalia, Focus Group - Monterrey: April 5/06)

Thus, Natalia added, she felt that she had acquired a set of new academic literacy strategies, yet these were currently "on hold" because she had no opportunities to use them:

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It's like you develop an ability, but you don't do it
consciously until you have to use it again. So right now I
feel that I have put this ability "on hold," and I think that
unless I put it into practice again, I'm going to lose it.
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(Natalia, Focus Group – Monterrey: April 5/06)

Still, as Natalia's excerpts below illustrate, she believed that her analytical skills

could be transferred to her L1 context:

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I realize that I am much more analytical now. For instance,
every little thing I write now in my work, it's like now I
know the reason for it. (...) Now I feel that when I write
something, I know why I am saying what I'm saying.
```

(Natalia, Focus Group – Monterrey: April 5/06)

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I became more analytical than before, I now make drafts of my
work and lists of concepts that I want to include in my
assignments or presentations.
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(Natalia, Questionnaire A)

In turn, Liliana indicated that she now felt that as a result of her ample practice

writing essays in WCU, she could now write more clearly and quickly:

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WCU changed my writing style. After writing all those essays
and assignments I have now also become a faster writer and I
think I can write my ideas more clearly.
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(Liliana, Questionnaire B)

Even though one of the participants' goals in going abroad was to improve their

English language proficiency by means of practicing "real English" with local people, in

most cases because the participants' INoPs did not include Anglophone speakers, the

students had fewer opportunities to practice English outside the classroom context than

they had originally hoped for. Interestingly, a few months into their return to Mexico,

some participants seemed to change their recollections of how much they had spoken the

target language, and their statements about this topic contrast some of their statements in

their interviews abroad. For instance, Isabel mentioned that her stay in Canada had

ultimately led her to lose her fear of speaking English mostly because she was expected

to communicate in that language "all day." As a result, she now felt much more confident

about her spoken abilities. In addition, she also mentioned that her reading abilities improved (a point I further discuss below).

> Well, living abroad was very helpful for me. This was the first time I lived in a foreign country, and I had to use English for everything. I mean, I had been abroad many times already and had used English many times. But it's different. In Canada you need to speak English all day and you need English to communicate all the time. I mean, I've been learning English since kindergarten, but it wasn't until I was there that I really spoke it. Because - the truth is that I wasn't used to speaking English. I knew how to write it, I knew how to read it, but I wouldn't speak it. It's like - like now I lost my fear of speaking English, and Canada helped me a lot in this sense. In the same way that now I feel I can read much faster in English, I am more confident.
>
> (Isabel, Focus group - Guadalajara: April 6/06)

Similar views were shared by other participants:

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Li = Liliana
Lo = Lorena
N = Natalia
S = Sandra
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S: With regards to your knowledge of English, did you feel any change?

Li: Yes, as I mentioned to you before. You're no longer afraid of making a mistake. There [in Canada] you had no choice but to speak English, and if you made a mistake you had no choice, so you became more fluent. And the reading was became more fluent. You no longer read[

Lo [with your dictionary beside!

Li: Exactly. If you don't understand, you re-read things and try. And this also applies for the essays. For instance, my roommate used to read my PHIL essays, and she would tell me "look, here you've got a mistake," and she would help me correct it. So, well, I feel like I've improved both my grammar and my fluency, although I still have pronunciation difficulties.

Lo: That's something that never changes! ((laughs))

Li: So yes, I feel my language has improved.

```
S:   And how about you, Natalia?

N:   I feel that my oral language has improved. At the beginning I
     had problems to structure things, but after struggling so
     much, having to talk to express myself, and listening to
     English so much, it was like I no longer had to think so
     much. And I also felt the same when I was writing. At the
     beginning I paid a lot of attention to how I structured my
     sentences: subject-verb, and so on. And then by the end it
     came faster.
```

(Natalia, Liliana & Lorena, Focus Group – Monterrey: April 5/06)

As shown in the extract above, Liliana and Natalia also found that they had managed to improve their spoken proficiency as well as their reading skills. Natalia also mentioned that she felt that she could now write faster in English because she no longer paid as much attention to grammar. However, not all participants seemed to share this view. For instance, Diego (a secondary participant who took Political Science and Economy courses) claimed that his academic literacy socialization at WCU made him a more careful writer: he was not more cautious and meticulous, and paid attention to differences between oral and written discourse which he previously used to ignore. This, he claimed, rather than make him a faster writer, made him a slower one:

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And with the writing the opposite happened: instead of making
me a faster writer, I am now more cautious. Since I speak an
advanced level of English, I used to think that what I wrote
was okay, because I wrote more or less the way I speak. But I
had some very strict instructors in terms of formal writing,
and that made me realize that many of the things I wrote
would have been accepted if I had spoken them, but they were
incorrect for formal writing styles.
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(Diego, Focus Group – Monterrey: April 5/06)

Diego's example shows, once again, that students' writerly and textual identities changed as a result of their academic literacy practices abroad. In his case, while Diego used to feel very confident about his L2 writing skills prior to the exchange, studying abroad revealed to him some writing weaknesses which, in turn, prompted him to position himself as a less effective L2 writer despite his advanced level of language proficiency.

7.4.3   Non-academic outcomes of the exchange

As could be expected, the exchange experience left a strong impression on the participants. For four out of the six focal participants, the Vancouver exchange was their first experience living far from their parents and other relatives. Yet all six focal participants (as well as most secondary participants), regardless of whether or not they had previously lived on their own, concurred that residing in a foreign country made them more responsible, and also brought to their attention the importance of looking after themselves. This applies even to students like Isabel, who was from Zacatecas but lived independently in an apartment in Guadalajara, and to Lorena, who was originally from Saltillo and lived in a student residence in Monterrey. Given that they were outsiders to their campus cities, both students reported that prior to the exchange they felt like strangers in their own country. However, they later mentioned that it was only during their stay in Canada that they experienced feeling really like a foreigner (while they were abroad). And with this, came the responsibility to make sure they took good care of themselves, since they did not have any relatives living close by who could assist them. Thus, living by themselves made the participants feel they were more independent. Some even claimed that for the first time in their lives, they felt like young adults who were in charge of their own well-being. This very same feeling challenged some aspects of their home reentry. In short, their stay abroad contributed to the emergence of new identities as young, responsible adults.

An additional outcome of the sojourn relates to the participants' development of an international perspective. That is, the participants' contact with people with diverse backgrounds and their exposure to and participation in different aspects of the host culture(s) led them to view themselves as "citizens of the world" who were able to accept different worldviews and who were therefore more tolerant and open-minded. Although the students' reflections in this regard were often rather vague, with comments along the lines of "I learned about many cultures" or "I became more aware of other parts of the world which I previously did not know much about," in a few cases the participants also commented on specific, concrete ways that contributed to their development of an international perspective, such as in Isabel's excerpt below:

I feel like I learned a lot and besides I learned things
from an international perspective. For instance, we
developed a business plan with a structure which I know
would work in Mexico and in any other Western country.

(Isabel, Focus Group - Guadalajara: April 6/06)

Another clear illustration comes from participants who claimed to have become more tolerant as a result of their contact with people from other cultures, as in Natalia's case (with her Asian team mates) and Liliana's case (with her Asian roommates). Natalia's post-exchange comments in this regard also suggest that she became more open-minded as a result of her challenging experiences abroad. In the following excerpt, she was responding to my question: "Do you think that there is anything that makes you different from those students who haven't had a chance to go abroad?" To this, she replied:

I do think there is a huge difference. It's your openness to
new ideas, or simply that you stop thinking only about what
surrounds you. When you're asked to think about a case [of
the kind discussed in Commerce class], for example, you don't
just think about Monterrey or Mexico. It's like the world
opens up to you and you start thinking about what it would be
like in other places you've been to. Also, I believe it shows
in your attitude when something doesn't work as you expect,
like if you don't agree with the way someone else thinks or
does, but you no longer despair. Now you try to solve things
some way, in different ways. I think that's the difference
between someone who went abroad and someone who hasn't.

(Natalia, Focus Group - Monterrey: April 5/06)

In sum, the participants reported several outcomes of the exchange (see Table 7.3). My analysis suggests that these resulted from the participants' investments and negotiations during their stay abroad. Given that my data collection in the post-exchange period was, by design, more limited than during their stay in Canada (e.g., it includes fewer interviews with the participants, very few samples of writing, and no instructor interviews) my interpretations of the participants' experiences are based primarily on their own perspectives about the impact of the exchange on different aspects of their lives. Still, I was able to identify common issues related to their reentry periods and their re-socialization into their home contexts, and I also suggest that the participants acquired

linguistic, (meta)cognitive and sociocultural knowledge which positioned them advantageously in comparison with other MCMU classmates who had not taken part in an exchange.

Table 7.3 Outcomes of the Study Abroad Experience

- Gained awareness of feelings towards loved ones
- Developed independence
- Became more tolerant, patient, and open-minded
- Learned to manage a budget
- Changed personal priorities
- Became aware of positive and negative aspects of the home and the host culture
- Developed global awareness/international perspective
- Improved comprehension of spoken and written English
- Improved English pronunciation
- Improved grammar and written fluency
- Increased English vocabulary knowledge
- Reduced fear and anxiety to speak English
- Became more self-sufficient (i.e., independent learners)
- Became more critical/analytical readers and writers
- Learned to manage time and workload
- Developed a series of effective reading strategies
- Developed a more straightforward writing style
- Performed exhaustive library research

The findings also show that even though during their time abroad the participants seemed to focus on the many challenges they faced on a daily bases when confronted with the various academic literacy practices in which they were engaged, once they returned to MCMU some of their views seemed to change and they saw their past socialization experiences in a much more positive light. The study also suggests that back in Mexico, the students' positioned themselves as individuals better prepared to deal with any future opportunities for studying or working with people from different parts of the world. In short, the study reveals that the students positioned themselves not just as returnees who needed to negotiate their reentry into the home context, but also as more strategic and effective students and as more autonomous, open-minded individuals.

7.5 Summary

In this chapter I elaborated on three main themes that resulted from a more abstract level of analysis of the data presented in previous analysis chapters as well as in retrospective interviews. The language socialization perspective employed in this study involves interpreting data by taking into account as fully as possible participants' sociocultural contexts and language-mediated activities and interactions. As a result, the notions of positionings, negotiations, and investments (and related concepts such as agency and identity) are key to reaching a deeper understanding of the multidimensional impact of the students' experiences. The second part of the chapter examined the participants' reentry adjustment and their perspectives of the exchange upon their return to their home academic contexts. The study revealed that the participants' return to Mexico involved a series of stages, from excitement to frustration to re-socialization into their familiar home and school contexts, one that is similar to processes of acculturation. This finding is consistent with the results of previous study abroad investigations (Casteen, 2006; Storti, 1997; Sussman, 1998). In addition, several positive outcomes of the study abroad experience were reported by the participants, such as becoming more tolerant, autonomous and open-minded individuals, and possessing a whole range of new strategies and abilities that made them more effective readers and writers. In this way, the study suggests that the participants' investments abroad rewarded them with several returns back home, although these rewards were not always predictable.

Based on the findings of this and the previous analysis chapters, in Chapter 8 I include a series of recommendations for future research on L2 academic literacy socialization as well as a number of pedagogical implications for future exchange students and for instructors and institutions sending or receiving international students.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

8.0 Introduction

This final chapter includes a recapitulation of the findings of this study followed by an analysis of the main theoretical contributions and some implications for pedagogy in higher education contexts with NNES international student populations. Based on the findings, suggestions for future exchange students are included here, together with recommendations for instructors on how to better address the needs of students from diverse sociocultural and academic backgrounds. The limitations of this investigation are also addressed in a later section, together with recommendations for future research.

8.1. Recapitulation of findings

The findings of this study reveal the complexity that characterizes the process of L2 academic literacy socialization. This view is supported by other studies focusing on different aspects of the same theme (e.g., Angelova & Riatsanzeva, 1999; Belcher & Braine, 1995; Bronson, 2005; Canagarajah, 2002; Casanave, 1995, 2002; Riazi, 1997; Shi & Beckett, 2002; Spack, 1997a, 2004; Zamel & Spack, 1998). Collectively, these studies have revealed that becoming academically literate in a second language is an arduous, lengthy, unpredictable process which can be best understood by means of in-depth, ideally longitudinal, qualitative inquiry. The first question this study sought to investigate concerns the kinds of academic literacy values and norms promoted in the Canadian university courses in which the participants, who were part of a larger cohort of Mexican students, were registered. The data suggest that the participants, all highly literate L1 and also very proficient L2 speakers, identified mismatches between the kinds of academic literacy practices promoted in their home and those of the host academic culture. For example, reading loads, the type of analysis required, and the amount and frequency of assignments, among other aspects, seemed to differ in both academic contexts. In great part, this contributed to the participants' perception of WCU as a more rigorous and difficult system.

The second question thus sought to illuminate the ways in which the participants became aware of this disjunction. The findings revealed that through their engagement in different academic literacy activities, the participants gained both awareness of and practice in various aspects of normative academic reading, writing, and social interaction (e.g., in connection with team work) within the host university culture. Yet while the participants may ultimately typically have written their individual assignments on their own, this study also shows that there were many factors that shaped their academic literacy socialization into the target practices. These factors were analyzed in terms of five parameters, which included the participants' individual networks of practice, their team work experiences, their access to course resources, the feedback they obtained, as well as their use of various kinds of institutional sources of support. The interaction among these different operational concepts was illustrated, and as a result the participants' L2 academic literacy socialization was portrayed as a multilayered and socially highly distributed process where a variety of factors, both internal and contextual, shaped their experiences and practices.

Academic literacy socialization is also understood in this study as a highly contested, negotiated process, where the contexts of learning are not always necessarily welcoming to newcomers, and where more "expert" Anglophone classmates (or instructors) may not always be as helpful as expected. Indeed, they may not even be available for support. Like other investigations which found international students learning about the local culture and seeking support from co-national peers or other international students instead (e.g., Duff, 2006a; Myles & Cheng, 2003), this investigation revealed that many of the people who scaffolded the participants' academic literacy socialization were non-local, non-Anglophone individuals who were included in the participants' INoPs. The study reveals that the participants made investments of different kinds in their study abroad experience and that they expected two main types of return from these investments: affective and academic. In combination, these rewards provided them the emotional connections they needed while abroad, as well as key knowledge about how to interpret and how to perform target academic literacy practices (e.g., how to interpret readings, instructors' feedback and grades, or how to approach a written assignment).

The findings also reveal that the participants were not always aware of the many sources of institutional support available to them; that in some cases they were aware but chose not to tap into them for a number of reasons; and that as a consequence many potential opportunities for L2 academic literacy socialization might not have been fully realized. The analysis of the nature of feedback the participants were given shows that in addition to being another source of socialization, feedback had the unintended effect of positioning students in different ways, more often than not as deficient learners. Feedback in the form of comments and/or grades thus had a strong emotional impact (Carless, 2006; Higgins, 2000) on the participants, and this should be factored into their academic literacy socialization. As Bronson (2005) notes, "it is imperative to remain mindful of how comments casually written in the margins of a paper may echo in the halls of someone's memory and heart for years to come" (p. 391). This study has also shown that instructors' feedback practices are institutionally situated and are therefore produced within certain constraints that may preclude students from having access to a more dialogic approach to assessment.

Finally, an analysis of the participants' views about the significance of the exchange suggests that the L2 academic literacy socialization that took place in the study abroad context seemed to have an impact on their subsequent home academic literacy practices, although this varied from student to student, depending on their stage in their academic careers in addition to other personal and contextual variables. Another finding was that the students became critical of some aspects of their home academic culture, and that changes in their personal and academic lives during their stay abroad made their reentry periods challenging.

8.2   Main theoretical contributions

Some contributions to theory were identified as a result of this investigation. The first one relates to the application of the language socialization approach to the study of NNES university students' academic literacy trajectories. While other studies have demonstrated the usefulness of this framework to investigate mainly *oral* academic discourse socialization (refer to Duff, 2003 and Morita & Kobayashi, in press), there is scant research on *written* discourse socialization in academic contexts (Bronson, 2005;

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Spack, 1997a, 2004). This study constitutes an attempt to extend the L2S framework to the domain of academic literacy and multiliteracies. To that end, the goal was to provide evidence of the situated nature of literate activity, presenting an alternative interpretation to more positivist conceptualizations of academic literacy which tend to represent more deterministic views of how academic literacy artifacts are acquired and produced. In short, my aim was to illustrate the potential of LS theory to explore the trials, successes and failures of a student population that has so far been relatively neglected.

I suggest that the notion of "individual networks of practice" that was coined for the purposes of this investigation serves as a useful tool to examine the role of social/academic interactions and support involved in the L2S academic literacy process of learners, proposing it as complementary to the CoP notion commonly used to explore their social contexts. My rationale for using the INoPs construct stems from the realization that not all the participants' relationships seemed to be necessarily attached to CoPs. In fact, the notion of CoPs (which was helpful for analyzing the students' team work experiences), proved to be too restrictive in that not all the participants' relationships seemed to be defined in the terms proposed by Wenger (1998). That is, while the participants were involved in informal scaffolding and apprenticeship processes with the members of their respective INoPs, their relationships did not necessarily share the CoP constitutive features of mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. My observations coincide with recent critiques of the CoP notion, which point out difficulties in defining the meaning of practice, in identifying what counts as shared enterprise, and in delimiting the temporal aspects of CoPs (Davies, 2005).

The five parameters used in this study to explore the contextual factors that seemed to affect the participants' academic literacy socialization are proposed as a model that could be employed in future research exploring academic literacy from a situated, holistic perspective. This study demonstrates that analyzing the participants' experiences in terms of these five dimensions sheds light on their investments, negotiation, resistance, and resulting positionings and identity constructions, all of which are closely aligned with the L2S framework. It is important to note the inherent interconnectedness and dynamism of the constitutive elements of this model, as well as the fact that at any given point in time, one parameter may be more salient than the others, and that this situation may then

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change. For instance, for Isabel the parameter of feedback was significant in her socialization when she received grades that did not match her expectations. As a result, she not only thought she would fail her courses, but she also realized she needed to take action and find ways to improve her performance. She sought help from individuals in her INoP, who calmed her down and shared with her a different perspective of the situation, which later helped Isabel to adjust her own assumptions and understand some of the tacit rules of the academic host culture. By way of this example, I have tried to show how feedback was a salient parameter and how the INoP parameter came into play as a result. Isabel's experiences should be analyzed in light of the interactions between these two parameters in order to obtain a more holistic understanding of her experiences.

While the L2S framework has been successfully used to examine academic discourse socialization in some recent research, what still remains an area of contention is the question of how to document and evaluate the outcomes of L2 disciplinary socialization and not just experiences or processes of socialization (Morita & Kobayashi, in press). It has been suggested that the difficulty lies in determining "what counts as a relevant outcome or as evidence of socialization" (Morita & Kobayashi, in press). Indeed, relevant outcomes are said to be unique to each individual, and should therefore be assessed according to each learner's personal goals. In the present study, the outcomes of the participants' L2 academic literacy socialization were not quantified in terms of specific cognitive, linguistic, or sociocultural gains. Instead, I examined the intended and unintended effects of their socialization into new academic literacy practices at two main levels: at a more abstract level, the outcomes were interpreted in relation to the resulting positionings and identity affiliations of participants; at a more concrete level, the outcomes took the form of emic and etic perspectives on participants' specific academic achievements and failures, and also included their post-exchange views. Several concrete outcomes were also presented as strategies the participants claimed to have developed and were now applying in their Mexican academic contexts.

As mentioned in the opening chapter of this dissertation, this study sought to bring together two areas of research so far not explored together: L2 academic literacy development and study abroad. Churchill and DuFon (2006) recently noted that "research on study abroad is potentially as rich as ever and we are only beginning to reveal its

complexities" (p. 27). The present investigation illuminates some of these complexities. Furthermore, by focusing on both the "during" and "after" phases of study abroad, the contributions of this study address a current gap in the literature concerning the after-effects of such exchanges. In the section on future directions I provide suggestions about other potential areas of study abroad and L2 academic literacy that I believe merit investigation.

8.3 Pedagogical implications

Several pedagogical suggestions can be derived from this study based on information provided by the participants, the two instructors I interviewed, and my personal interpretations of the data and relevant literature. The suggestions are classified according to the three targeted audiences considered here: universities and other higher education institutions that offer study abroad programs and/or have large numbers of international students; instructors across the curriculum who teach multilingual, non-traditional students; and potential exchange students.

8.3.1 Suggestions for institutions receiving and sending students abroad

As mentioned in earlier chapters of this dissertation, while academic exchanges can be traced back a long time in history, we are arguably currently witnessing a dramatic global expansion of this phenomenon. Educational institutions at either end of the exchange experience (i.e., receiving and/or sending students) must therefore realize that with the potential benefits of an academic sojourn there are numerous associated responsibilities.

As shown in this study, one of the main issues the participants reported concerned time management. Due to a very heavy reading and assignment workload, the participants found it at times impossible to keep up with their coursework. In other cases, the participants did not follow the advice about doing readings on a regular basis, and as a result they were faced with an overwhelming accumulation of readings to digest in a very short time. The study also shows that the participants eventually adjusted and managed to better assess the amount of time they needed to invest in different required academic literacy activities they had to complete. However, for many participants the

beginning of their experience was perhaps unnecessarily difficult, and some of the most bitter moments they experienced could have been prevented had they been better prepared to face the demands of their new academic context. Indeed, the participants reported that prior to their departure they had attended an orientation meeting on their home campuses. However, because the meeting was meant for students going to diverse destinations around the globe, much of the information given was too general and easily available through other sources (such as the Internet), yet key information about WCU was missing. I therefore suggest that institutions sending students abroad should do a better job at informing students of specific characteristics of the host educational context. With the increasing number of MCMU students visiting WCU every year, I assume it would not be too hard to compile detailed information about the different courses previous exchange students have taken and make this information available to future exchange students going to WCU. Such data could be collected by means of a detailed exit questionnaire and a debriefing session upon the students' return to Mexico. It could be made available to future exchange students during the pre-departure orientation session at their home campuses, together with a list of contact details of students from the same program that have just returned to the country. Presently, some MCMU students have found their own ways of gathering this information; however, this depends on their luck in finding someone who has attended WCU. I therefore recommend that a more systematic compilation of information needs to be put in place.

A related suggestion is to involve students in reflective practices prior to and after the exchange. Previous research (e.g., Jackson, 2005) has demonstrated the positive outcomes of integrating teaching and research by training students to become ethnographers of their own cultural experiences abroad (e.g., keeping detailed diaries and filling out pre- and post-departure questionnaires and participating in reflective interviews). Jackson proposes this form of evaluation as a fruitful avenue to make students more aware of positive and negative aspects of their experiences.

> In this process, they can personally benefit by becoming more aware of the strengths and weaknesses in their communication skills and can set realistic goals for future intercultural encounters. Students can also play a very valuable and significant role in helping to improve the learning situation of future sojourners. (p. 276)

This view is supported by this study, since the participants also mentioned greatly benefiting from the reflective process in which they were involved as a result of their participation in this research. Some of their comments in this respect are included below:

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I think that participating in the project made me conscious
of the changes I was going through, and also - about the
differences (…) perhaps [if I had not participated] I would
have returned home and I wouldn't have analyzed my
experiences - like in the interviews, were I reflected on the
obstacles or on the benefits.

(Natalia, Focus Group - Monterrey: April 5/06)


I think that [in the interviews] were like therapy - and I
vented my feelings and became aware of the things that were
happening to me. Because - it's only when you say it that it
kind of sinks in - it becomes reality. And I realized that
yes, school was really pressing me, so when you asked me
things it was like this helped me to organize my thoughts.

(Isabel, Focus Group - Guadalajara: April 6/06)
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This study also showed that the participants modified some of their perspectives about their experiences abroad once they returned to their home contexts. Therefore, we need more research of a longitudinal design which captures students' views at different moments of their educational experiences, and which also includes their reflections (post-exchange) on the impact of their sojourn.

The findings also suggest that whereas there were many resources that could offer academic and non-academic support to the participants (as well as to the larger population of WCU students), the participants often failed to take advantage of them. There is probably a need to emphasize this kind of assistance not just when the students first arrive, since that is when they feel bombarded with so many details that they are then lost in a sea of information. Instead, it would benefit students to be reminded, at least several times during the first two months of their stay abroad, that these resources exist and that they are likely to benefit from using them.

Myles & Cheng (2003) indicate that "intercultural contact and effective communication among different cultures can only be achieved if everyone in the academic community is prepared to make it work" (p. 259), and they indicate that for cultural "mixing" to occur, intercultural contact should be formally structured within the

program. However, this cannot take place unless instructional and non-instructional staff are prepared to handle non-traditional students. As illustrated in this study, even small details such as showing awareness of the diversity in the class and demonstrating an empathic attitude can have a big positive impact on the students. It is the institution's responsibility to ensure their staff receives training in this regard.

8.3.2 Suggestions for instructors

This study points to the need for educators and institutions to critically examine the composition of their student body and acknowledge its diversity, in the first place. As noted by Morita (2002),

> given the growing diversity in the classroom as well as the increasingly international and interdisciplinary nature of academic communities, instructors as well as institutions can no longer assume that they are dealing with monolingual, homogeneous groups of learners or colleagues. (p. 190)

Becoming aware of students' differences in linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds is an initial and necessary step towards the process of internationalization that so many universities claim to embrace. However, this acknowledgement should be done in such a way that non-traditional learners are not discursively positioned as outsiders or as learners with limited proficiencies, or as members of homogeneous cultures, in this way, essentializing them (Spack, 1997b). As demonstrated in this study, some of the identities assigned to the participants prevented rather than facilitated their learning and their integration as legitimate members of their classes.

On a practical level, instructors are encouraged to ensure that international students are able to follow their lectures and discussions. The participants reported that they appreciated the efforts made by TAs and instructors in trying to bridge cognitive, linguistic or cultural gaps. This can be done in several ways. The Commerce instructor I interviewed for this study provided some examples of the kinds of actions he takes in order to accommodate to the needs and strengths of his international students:

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I do not do any true or false [items on tests] because
anybody with an English language problem has problems with
 true or false. So, I tend to use multiple choice rather than
true or false, and then I use short answer and long answer,
where they have to write in English, okay? One of the
handouts that I do give out, which came out of my program
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that's called the Provincial Instructor's Diploma Program a
while ago, when I took it at [name of school], that I do go
through in terms of what do the various verbs mean - and I
give out this handout. And they seem to be quite interested
in that. Because I say 'circle the verb in the question,'
don't just start with the question. Find out what the
instructor's asking. But that again is not just for them
[Mexicans] it's just for everybody in the class - the Chinese
take it and Koreans - just as much as they do.

(COMM 3A 01/02 & COMM 4E Instructor, Interview: December
13/05)
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Hence, avoiding certain kinds of test items and instead using unambiguous multiple choice formats is a suggested alternative. This instructor also gave students a handout with many examples of language rules and uses, as well as lists of words that students could refer to when writing short and long essays. Other ways in which this instructor tried to address students' needs was by doing comprehension checks at different points in his lecture. He also made sure to arrive a few minutes before class, and encouraged students to e-mail him and visit him during office hours.

Instructors should also keep in mind that students who speak English as an additional language may need more time to read than Anglophone speakers. Hence, when planning for exams, it would be wise to avoid including too many items that involve extensive reading, particularly during timed tasks. Also, assigning in-class reading should only be done when sufficient time can be provided for students with different levels of proficiency. This of course can also be problematic, since some instructors and students may complain that useful time is wasted by those who are slower readers. Indeed, finding a balance is perhaps the most challenging aspect of all.

In addition to considering students' backgrounds, instructors are advised to take into account students' assumptions and expectations, particularly since these may clash with those of the local institutional and/or classroom culture. For instance, students may have particular assumptions about their roles and the instructor's roles in the class, and these may influence their participation as well as their attitude towards course content. This is particularly important for students from educational backgrounds that differ significantly from those of their host academic context. (See Morita, 2002, for detailed examples in relation to classroom participation.)

Needless to say, educators are encouraged to avoid putting students on the spot by either calling on them to provide answers, or by pointing to students' language mistakes in such a way that they feel diminished. The same instructor quoted above said he always tried to be tactful in his responses to students:

> I will never make fun of a student if I don't understand an answer. And I will get around that - diplomatically, so that they always, always, always know that they're not going to be made fun of. I've heard some instructors making fun of the people's answers, and I don't do that. I encourage them not to make fun of them, no matter how bad the answer is.
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> (COMM 3A 01/02 & COMM 4E Instructor, Interview: December 13/05)

Some participants of this study felt uncomfortable when called upon to provide an answer, especially when although they were paying attention in class, they found it hard to follow the discussion taking place.

Including a variety of instructional activities is also seen as a way to maximize students' academic literacy socialization. Encouraging international students to work in mixed teams that include both local as well as international and perhaps also co-national students may be a good idea. However, as this study (and also Leki, 2001) suggests, it is important not to overrate the opportunities for learning and interaction that can result from team work. Instructors should strive to monitor group dynamics, although this cannot always be done easily, since students usually meet out of class in order to collaborate. Perhaps, giving teams time to work on their assignments during class (for short periods) might allow instructors to identify tensions among group members, in which case they could serve as mediators.

Another key suggestion concerns the need to debrief with exchange students about assessment practices. All too often, the students reported frustration and disorientation because they were unfamiliar with the host university grading scales, and also because the feedback they received came too late to help them improve future work. Also, students often reported feeling that their grades were unfair, and that the teachers' positive verbal comments on their work did not match the marks they got. I suggest that a better way to motivate students and keep them on task is to provide feedback on a more regular basis. In addition, the feedback process needs to be demystified in such a way that

students know upfront what the institutional (or particular classroom) grading and feedback policies are. Carless (2006) proposes "assessment dialogues" as a way to "clarify 'the rules of the game', the assumptions known to lecturers but less transparent to students" (p.230). He then includes a series of suggestions about the content of these assessment dialogues between instructors and students, some of which are quoted below:

- Unpacking assessment criteria or involving students in generating or applying criteria;
- Reminding students that grades for assignments are awarded on the basis of these criteria and not other factors, such as performance in class, attendance, appearance, gender, or ethnicity; low grades do not imply a rejection of the student, and hard work does not guarantee a high mark;
- The marking process itself; what tutors hope to achieve through their written annotations and how students might utilize them.

(Carless, 2006, p. 231, point form in original)

These recommendations should be kept in mind by instructors who wish to contribute positively to the educational experiences of their students.

8.3.3 Suggestions for future exchange students

Students who are considering embarking on a study abroad experience are encouraged to do extensive research about the society, the country, and the academic institution they will visit. The importance of preparing before going abroad cannot be underestimated. Noting any aspects that are unclear or are potential sources of difficulty can be a useful strategy.

Returning to the issue of time management, students are encouraged to follow some of the suggestions made in Abel (2002); for example, use a calendar to plan study and recreation times (and make sure to find a balance between both); plan to study or work on assignments every day rather than leave things to be done close to the deadline (this would not only reduce the stress that usually comes when trying to finish work at the last minute, but also will allow students to seek feedback from proofreaders); and schedule time to do readings and review materials each day.

Students are encouraged to establish connections with people from diverse backgrounds, since including local people as well as students from other ethnic and

linguistic backgrounds in their INoPs might be beneficial. As Trooboff, Cressey and Monty (2004) advised:

> To go abroad and not get involved in the local culture, even with good grades, misses the point of the experience. And, to get involved in the culture and make the most of these opportunities while flunking every course or doing poorly, is equally problematic. A balance of student motivation in these two dimensions of the successful overseas experience – cultural involvement and academic performance – is essential. (Trooboff et al. 2004, p. 204)

Finally, students ought to be aware that they share responsibilities with instructors and classmates in creating the optimum learning environments and conditions. One way of doing this, for instance, is by approaching instructors and TAs to inform them about their education and L1 backgrounds and any difficulties they might have. Instructors, TAs and classmates cannot be expected to guess these, yet they need to be aware of the students' needs in order to help them. This study shows that the participants who approached their teachers usually felt that teachers displayed a more understanding attitude afterwards. Many of the challenges and effective strategies connected with academic literacy socialization outlined in this dissertation, although examined here for Mexican exchange students specifically, might also apply to students from other linguistic backgrounds as well as to some local native speakers of English.

8.4 Limitations of the study

One of the main advantages of qualitative case studies lies in the richness and depth of information gathered, which usually provides access to a level of detail that cannot be obtained in large-scale investigations or in quantitative surveys. Nevertheless, it is important to remember the disadvantages and limitations associated with this type of research method. One such limitation is the difficulty extrapolating from the findings of this study to other contexts: the uniqueness of the experiences of the six focal participants should therefore be foregrounded, and any comparisons made across participants or populations should always be considered tentative and subject to confirmation.[78] Also, it

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[78] However, this study aims to contribute with "analytic generalizations:" the parameters examined in this study might be helpful for future academic literacy investigations drawing on language socialization theory, and the notion of INoPs has the potential to be further theorized for its implementation in academic contexts.

is important to remember that the participants of this study come from just one country (Mexico), whereas the international student population at universities includes students from all over the world. Furthermore, the participants come from "privileged" socio-economic backgrounds and therefore have had access to many resources and opportunities that other exchange students may not. Consequently, they cannot be considered representative of other exchange student populations, or even of other Mexican students studying abroad who may come from less affluent backgrounds. Furthermore, the six primary focal participants were all single, female young adult Mexican students interested in participating fully in a study such as this one (with a female Spanish-speaking graduate student researcher). Some of the views, expectations, and experiences of others, both male and female, in the same cohort with less outgoing personalities might have been quite different.

While I have attempted to represent an emic perspective through the inclusion of their voices in a number of ways (using journals/logs and interviews), it is impossible to cover all variables and aspects involved in international academic sojourns. I am not able to see inside their minds directly; plus my subjectivity permeates every single step, from the design of questions, to the gestures I may have used during the interviews, my interruptions, my selective skills, to my interpretation of the data and the final conclusions drawn from it. In addition, while I strived to establish strong bonds with the participants, they may not always have been straightforward about their opinions. They also exercised a selective strategy in choosing what to tell me and what not to. And it is precisely those untold stories I did not have access to which I presume could lead to co-constructing different portrayals of the participants' experiences or realities. In fact, the robustness of this study could be enhanced if classroom observational data as well as "behind-the-scenes" observations had been collected.[79] Also, while the findings derived from the focal participants' data were cross-checked with those of a larger number of

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[79] In fact, given that all interviews were conducted in Spanish and I never spoke English with my participants, it would be hard for me to objectively assess their English proficiency either inside or outside the classroom.

secondary participants, I was unable to do the same with the data from instructors because of my limited success in recruiting them to participate in the study.

I wish to share some additional details about methodological aspects of my investigation which have inevitably impacted, in positive and negative ways, the amount and depth of the data I was able to collect for this phase. First of all, when the participants were recruited they were informed about the different questions and stages of this study, and they were thus aware that their voluntary participation was expected to continue for a few months following their return to Mexico. Yet, in a qualitative longitudinal study, the long-term commitment that is expected of participants can become a challenging aspect of data collection, and certainly when data collection switches from face-to-face contact to more indirect ways of communicating with the participants (e.g., electronic communications). Perhaps one of the reasons why a relatively small number of investigations have focused on the post-exchange period stems from the fact that once the study participants return to their home country, the researcher's access to them may be dramatically reduced. Additionally, the participants' interest in the study may dwindle precisely because they no longer feel the need to reflect on an aspect of their lives which, for most of them, is part of the past. Another reason why researchers may find it hard to follow up on participants' experiences relates to access and proximity to the participants' home contexts: the expense and time to travel long distances to meet the participants, for instance, may prove quite challenging.

In my experience, the participants returned to their busy academic and social schedules, and all of a sudden the extra time they had to take part in my research project while they were in Canada was occupied by duties and activities they may not have been able to take part in while abroad.[80] Still, I was very fortunate to have a group of highly engaged and diligent participants who continued to communicate with me on a regular basis, and who promptly and thoroughly replied to my messages, sending me the

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[80] For instance, many of my participants mentioned that in Mexico they used to do lots of extra curricular activities (e.g., practicing sports, going to the gym, playing music with a band, going shopping with friends, attending music and language lessons, participating in youth clubs, going to the cinema, visiting friends and family). In contrast, when they were at WCU most of the participants were exclusively dedicated to school, and while they also had a social life, most of their daily routine was on campus, where most of them, and also I, resided.

documents and information I would request them. Also, I was fortunate to visit the students in Mexico, where I conducted individual as well as focus group interviews five months after the participants returned to their home country. These became very rich and therefore enlightening data sources that I triangulated with the information they provided me in the questionnaires, e-mails and chat sessions I collected between their departure from Vancouver in late December, 2005, and the end of April, 2006, when data collection was ended.[81] Meeting the students in their familiar home[82] and academic settings also allowed me to view them in a different light: as full participants of their diverse communities, as extremely confident students who knew their own academic system inside out, and as individuals with immediate access to many resources (material and symbolic) which were less readily available to them in Canada.

8.5   Directions for further research

Where do we go from here? Arguably, study abroad and academic literacy research constitute very fertile areas which deserve to be further explored independently, but even more so, together, particularly for the sake of providing further insights into the needs and strengths of the growing international and transnational higher education student populations. Notwithstanding the increasingly prolific work of researchers interested in international students' academic writing experiences, there are still many gaps that merit close attention. In brief, the kinds of writing practices (both products and processes) and cultures, the types of contexts and populations, and the approaches that can be employed to focus on this research area have not yet been studied comprehensively.

There is a tendency to generalize the findings from international students' extended experiences to other foreign sub-populations, such as short-term exchange participants. However, the goals of these two similar but yet distinctive student populations differ in some respects. Future research could explore in more detail the nature of such

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[81] Most participants returned their completed questionnaires A & B in March, 2006. E-mail communications and msn sessions were ongoing between December, 2005 and April, 2006. To this date, I continue to maintain contact with most focal participants as well as some secondary participants with whom I developed friendship bonds as a result of our many hours spent together while they were in Canada.

[82] In Mexico I visited four different participants' homes, and in some cases I had the opportunity to meet their parents, siblings and friends.

differences, since such knowledge might benefit all parties. In addition, this investigation focused on a particular group of learners (Mexican exchange students). Therefore, future studies should investigate students from the diverse backgrounds represented in educational contexts like WCU (i.e., Western, English-medium higher education institutions). Studies focusing on other groups of students, representing very different cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds and trajectories, would provide us with further insights about L2 academic literacy socialization.

One potentially fruitful line of further research concerns the feedback practices of instructors as well as other kinds of feedback usually offered to students, particularly since the responses students receive have been identified as key aspects of their educational experiences (and thus one of the parameters presented in Chapter 6). Future studies that include micro-analysis of linguistic features of the feedback provided from a critical discourse analysis perspective might reveal issues that have not been explored so far and were beyond the scope of this study. Also, it would be interesting to compare exchange/international students' interpretations of feedback with those of local students.

This study focused on the written academic discourse socialization with less attention paid to oral academic discourse socialization or on the connections between these two.[83] Future investigations could examine how students' opportunities for and engagement in oral production (e.g., in classroom discussion, oral presentations, informal conversations) may impact their academic literacy socialization and vice versa.

While the benefits of studying abroad continue to be touted by universities and other marketers of such exchanges, we need far more research that continues to document the experiences of overseas students before, during, and after their stay in a foreign country. Instead of making sweeping generalizations about the many unquestioned advantages of studying abroad, prospective academic sojourners should also be advised of the potential challenges they might face as well. As researchers and educators concerned about the well-being of future generations of students, we should strive to find ways to improve our pedagogy and to respond to issues in transnational higher education in the 21st century.

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[83] My master's thesis (Zappa-Hollman, 2001; Zappa-Hollman, 2007), on the other hand, focused on the oral academic discourse socialization of NNES international students.

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Appendix A
Recruitment Notice

Opportunity to discuss your academic literacy experiences at [WCU]! [84]

Dear [MCMU] Students:

My name is Sandra Zappa-Hollman, and I am conducting a research project about the academic literacy (reading and writing) experiences of Mexican exchange students at the University of British Columbia. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Language and Literacy Education (LLED) at UBC, and my academic advisor is Dr. Patricia Duff, an Associate Professor in LLED, UBC.

I am looking for [MCMU]-[WCU] exchange students who would like to participate in my study, which is part of my doctoral dissertation research.

My study focuses on the academic literacy experiences of Mexican students reading/writing in English, their second language. I want to explore the kinds of issues (challenges, difficulties, advantages) that [MCMU]-[WCU] exchange students may have when reading/writing for regular course assignments in [WCU], and how any knowledge gathered while at [WCU] influences future academic literacy practices once these students return to Mexico.

Participation in this project, which is voluntary, involves being interviewed by me several times during your stay in [WCU] and possibly also when you return to Mexico, and maintaining e-mail communication with me about your academic literacy experiences (a total of 32 hours of involvement for the whole project is anticipated). Since I am Argentinean, I am a fluent Spanish speaker. Therefore, any communication with me can be done either in Spanish or English, the language of your choice.

In this project you will be invited to share with me information that will prove useful for future exchange students, for [WCU] instructors, and for the [MCMU]-[WCU] Joint Academic Program.

If you think you might be interested in participating in this project and therefore would like to know more details about it, please contact me by e-mail at   . I will be very happy to share with you a detailed explanation of the purposes and procedures of this investigation.

Your participation in this project will be very much appreciated. Although no remuneration will be paid to participants, a $20 gift certificate will be offered after their interviews are conducted.

Thank you in advance for your help, and have a great time at [WCU]!

Sandra Zappa-Hollman,
PhD Candidate, LLED, UBC

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[84] This is a translation from the original document, which was in Spanish.

Appendix B

Participants' Certificates and Courses

Focal Participants' Certificates and Courses

Participant	MCMU campus	MCMU degree sought	Certificate of Specialty	Semester of study	WCU courses	Semester abroad
Liliana	Monterrey	Bachelor of International Commerce	Commerce	7th	COMM 3A 01 COMM 3E	SUMMER 05
				8th	COMM 4M COMM 4G COMM 4E COMM 4H PHIL 4A	FALL 05
Natalia	Monterrey	Bachelor of International Commerce	Commerce	7th	COMM 3A 01 COMM 3E	SUMMER 05
				8th	COMM 4M COMM 4G COMM 4E COMM 4H PHIL 4A [Dropped]	FALL 05
Lorena	Monterrey	Bachelor of Industrial & Systems Engineering – International Modality	Commerce	5th	COMM 3A 01 COMM 3E	SUMMER 05
				6th	COMM 4G COMM 4E COMM 4H COMM 4L 01 COMM 4B 03	FALL 05
Nelda	Guadalajara	Bachelor of Communication	N/A	6th	COMM 2A 01 COMM 4A 02 COMM 4B 02 POLI 2A LAST 1A	FALL 05
Isabel	Guadalajara	Bachelor of Communication	N/A	6th	COMM 2A 02 COMM 4A 02 COMM 4B POLI 1A 01 POLI 2A LAST 1A [Dropped]	FALL 05
Raquel	Ciudad de Mexico	Bachelor of International Relations	N/A	7th	POLI 3B POLI 3D POLI 3E COMM 4A 02 LAST 1A [Dropped]	FALL 05

Secondary Participants' Certificates and Courses

Participant	MCMU campus	MCMU degree sought	Certificate of Specialty	Semester (out of 9)	WCU courses	Period/length of stay at WCU
Marco	Federal District, Mexico	Bachelor of Financial Administration	Financial Economics	6th	COMM 3B COMM 3C COMM 3D 01 COMM 4B 01 ECON 3A	WINTER 04-05
				7th	COMM 3A 02 COMM 4D COMM 4I COMM 4K ECON 3C	FALL 05
Nancy	Guadalajara	Bachelor of Industrial & Systems Engineering	Logistics	6th	COMM 3A 01 COMM 3E	SUMMER 05
				7th	COMM 3G COMM 4E COMM 4F COMM 4H COMM 4L 01	FALL 05
Soledad	Guadalajara	Bachelor of Industrial Engineering	Logistics	8th	COMM 3A 01 COMM 3E	SUMMER 05
				9th	COMM 3H COMM 4E COMM 4F COMM 4H COMM 4L 01	FALL 05
Alejandra	Cuernavaca	Bachelor of Industrial & Systems Engineering	Logistics	6th	COMM 3A 01 COMM 3E	SUMMER 05
				7th	COMM 4E COMM 4F COMM 4H COMM 4L 01 PHIL 4A	FALL 05
Abel	Monterrey	Bachelor of Economics	International Economics	8th	COMM 3D 02 COMM 4C 02 ECON 3D ECON 4B POLI 3C	FALL 05
Salvador	Monterrey	Bachelor of Industrial & Systems Engineering	International Business	9th	COMM 4L 02 COMM 4C 02 ECON 3C ITAL 1 A PHIL 4A	FALL 05
Santiago	Monterrey	Bachelor of Marketing	N/A	7th	COMM 3A 02 COMM 3F COMM 4F COMM 4J COMM 4A 02	FALL 05
Mercedes	Chihuahua	Bachelor of Financial Administration	N/A	5th	COMM 2B COMM 4B 03 ECON 3A 02 ECON 3C PHIL 4A	FALL 05
Diego	Monterrey	Bachelor of Economics	N/A	8th	COMM 3D 02 ECON 3D ECON 4B POLI 1A 02 POLI 3A	FALL 05
Isidora	Monterrey	Bachelor of Law	N/A	7th	ECON 3B ECON 4A	SUMMER 05
Ignacio	Federal	Bachelor of	N/A	7th	COMM 4A 01	SUMMER 05

Participant	MCMU campus	MCMU degree sought	Certificate of Specialty	Semester (out of 9)	WCU courses	Period/length of stay at WCU
	District, Mexico	Financial Administration			COMM 4C 01	
Sofia	Saltillo	Bachelor of Internacional Commerce	N/A	5th	ECON 3B ECON 4A	SUMMER 05
Adriana	Federal District, Mexico	Bachelor of Financial Administration	N/A	5th	COMM 4A 01 COMM 4C 01	SUMMER 05
Felix	Federal District, Mexico	Bachelor of Financial Administration	N/A	5th	COMM 4A 01 COMM 4C 01	SUMMER 05
Jose	Monterrey	Bachelor of Chemical Engineering	N/A	7th	COMM 3A 01 COMM 3E	SUMMER 05
Magdalena	Monterrey	Bachelor of Psychology	N/A	5th	COMM 4A 01 COMM 4C 01	SUMMER 05

Appendix C

Transcription Conventions

.	*A period indicates* terminal falling intonation
−	*A dash* indicates a brief pause or cut-off utterance
!	*An exclamation mark* indicates an enthusiastic tone
,	*A comma* indicates a rising, continuing intonation
?	*A question mark* indicates a rising intonation
((comments))	*Double parentheses* include researcher's comments
[clarification]	*Brackets* include information to clarify meaning
"reported speech"	Words between *double quotation marks* are attempt made by the speaker to report speech
bold	*Bold typeface* is used to highlight part of an utterance for analytical purposes
<u>underlining</u>	*Underlined words* indicates utterances spoken with emphasis
['	*A single left bracket,* indicates the starting point of overlap

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Sample Student Interview Questions

1. What do you expect to be some of the most challenging aspects of your academic experience at WCU? Do you anticipate any special difficulties or advantages in relation to your academic literacy experiences as you complete written assignments in English at WCU?

2. Before you came to Canada, what was your experience reading and writing academic texts in English? What kind of opportunities did you have to speak, listen to, read, or write in English in Mexico? Have you taken any specific academic writing courses before your came to Canada? And in Canada? If so, could you describe them and also indicate any ways in which they may have helped you?

3. Are there any specific strategies that you employ when reading/writing texts in English? Are there any strategies that are useful in Spanish and that may or may not be useful in English? Could you give examples?

4. Could you tell me the kinds of reading and writing activities you usually engage in in addition to your course assignments? For instance, do you read any novels, newspapers, magazines, etc.? Do you write e-mails in English to friends? If so, do you think this helps in any way to improving your academic writing performance in the courses you are taking at WCU?

5. Do you choose to make English-speaking friends so that they can help you with your writing?

6. Do you prefer to work in teams with other Mexican students or with English-speaking classmates? Why? Does this have anything to do with the written assignments you may have to produce as a result of your team work?

7. What types of assignments are you required to complete in the courses your are taking? Are these assignments similar across courses? What kind of feedback do your receive? Is it useful?

8. In relation to your reading and writing abilities in English, what do you wish you were able to do in a different way, and why?

9. Do you seek any help or advice in order to complete your writing assignments? If so, from whom?

10. Do you enjoy the kinds of academic literacy tasks that your are asked to complete in the different courses? Could you tell me why/why not? How could you make them more enjoyable?

11. Do you think that the academic literacy activities your are asked to complete in WCU will be help to further develop your knowledge and thinking skills? How?

12. Do you think that your academic literacy performance in English has changed since you arrived in Canada? If so, in what ways? Do you think that any changes that might have taken place will have a positive impact on your academic literacy experiences once you return to the MCMU in Mexico? Will instructors in Mexico appreciate the same writing styles and approaches that WCU instructors do? Do you anticipate any advantages or any conflicts in this respect once you return to Mexico and are asked to complete written assignments there?

13. Did you ever feel discriminated against because you did not have the required academic literacy skills to complete a written task in English? If so, who discriminated against you? How did you react? How do you think this has impacted on your own ways of viewing your academic competences and performance?

14. Have you experienced at WCU any extraordinary situation in relation to your academic literacy experiences? For example, has anybody highlighted either your outstanding academic literacy skills or your problems with writing?

Sample focus group interviews questions (post-exchange)

1. When you think about WCU, what's the first thing that pops to your mind?

2. What do you consider the biggest impact of the exchange?

3. Has the exchange brought any benefits to you? [elicit examples]

4. Has the exchange brought any negative consequences to you? [elicit examples]

5. About the English language:

   • Was there any improvement in your English proficiency as a result of the exchange? [elicit examples]
   • If so, what do you think contributed most to this improvement?
   • Do you keep on speaking English? When? Where? Do you speak more or less than when you were in Canada? Do you keep in touch with friends you made in Canada? In what language do you communicate with them?
   • Do you read in English? If so, what kind of things? Have you noted any changes in your reading habits since your return? Is there anything you used to do (when

reading at WCU) that you didn't do before, and that you now do? [e.g., write summaries, focus on specific sections, etc...]
- How about your writing? [same questions as above – try to elicit examples]
- Are you taking English lessons, or are you participating in any activity or group where you practice your English? What motivated this?

6. Is there anything that differentiates the exchange in WCU from other exchange experiences? If so, what is it? How do you know this?

7. How do you view the MCMU education system now that you can compare it with WCU's? Do you compare them? What comments do you have? Is there any system that you prefer, or that you prefer in any specific aspect or context? Is there any system you consider more effective or successful, or fit for you? Why? [elicit detailed responses]

8. How did it feel to return to school in Mexico? Did you feel there was a transition moment? [describe]

9. What was the reaction of your classmates at MCMU after your return? Has it changed in any way? Do they ask you about WCU? Are they curious about your experience?

10. Did you feel that you had to make an effort in order to adapt at WCU? Who helped you then? Was it worth all the effort? Was it helpful then, when you were studying at WCU? Is it helpful now, that you're back at MCMU?

11. Did you have to make any efforts to re-adapt to the MCMU system? [elicit examples]

12. Could you describe the kinds of assignments and other types of writing that you need to do at MCMU? Would you say they are similar or different to the ones in WCU? In what ways?

13. Has your way of looking at assignments, and of approaching and solving them changed since your stay at WCU? [elicit detailed responses]

14. Is there anything you learned in WCU that you can apply to your current learning/studying activities at MCMU? What? Can you give me examples? [try to elicit as much detail as possible]

15. Is there anything you learned in WCU that you now transfer to the MCMU context? [in order to study, or read, or write, or handle situations, to look at things...] or else in your work context? [elicit examples]

16. Do you have any suggestions for the exchange program organizers? Have you visited them or have you been in contact with them since your return? Did you debrief your experience with anybody? Who? Would you enjoy doing it? How?

17. Did you experience any change/ transition period upon your return, in the following aspects/contexts: with your family, with your friends, with your routine, at school, in your feelings/the emotional aspect, etc.

18. Have you modified in any way your perception of what it means to be a good student? Is it the same to be a good student at WCU than at MCMU? [explain]

19. Have you met some of the friends you made at WCU since your return? If so, how frequently do you see them? Who are they? Where did you meet them at WCU? And here? If you knew them prior to going to WCU, has anything changed in your current relationship with them? [explain]

20. Is there anything you miss about WCU?

21. Looking back to your stay in WCU, is there anything you would have liked to be different? What would you change? What would you do again, or more, or different?

22. Is there anything that you see different compared to those that have not gone on an exchange? Or that have gone for an exchange to a different place? If so, what? When did you notice this?

Sample Instructor Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching at WCU? How much experience have you had teaching Mexican exchange students at WCU? How much experience have you had teaching students from other first language backgrounds?

2. Do you identify any specific difficulties or advantages pertinent to Mexican exchange students? If so, how do you address them?

3. Have you modified your teaching practices in any way since the first time you taught Mexican exchange students? Were you impressed or disappointed in them in any way? Why?

4. What are the kinds of reading/writing activities that you consider most challenging for Mexican exchange students? Can you think of any ways in which they might be helped?

5. What kind of feedback do you usually provide to your students? What do you think they expect?

6. Do you think that students' academic literacy difficulties are related more to linguistic proficiency problems or to lack of pragmatic and sociocultural knowledge? Or to both? How can you tell this?

Appendix E

Background Information Grid[85]

<u>Research Project:</u> The academic literacy experiences of [MCMU] exchange students at [WCU]
<u>Investigator:</u> Sandra Zappa-Hollman; <u>Supervisor:</u> Dr. Patsy Duff, LLED, UBC.

Please, complete the grid below with your information and e-mail it back to me. Fill in as much information as you can/want to share with me.

Your name			
Name of your MCMU campus			
Date you arrived in Canada and date you will return to Mexico			
MCMU program in which you're registered			
Semester in which you're enrolled			
Certificate of specialty you wish to complete at WCU			
Courses in which you're registered at WCU	Code/	Class dates	Schedule
Your TOEFL score			
How many years have you studied English?			
What's your average at MCMU?			
Is this your first study abroad experience?			
If this is not your first study abroad experience, where else did you go for an exchange? When? For how long?			
Which days would you prefer to be interviewed? What are you time preferences?			
Accommodation details (e.g., name of residence on campus or area of Vancouver where you live, etc.)			
Your E-mail and phone			

Thanks a lot!!! ☺ Sandra
sczappa@interchange.ubc.ca

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[85] This is a translation from the original document, which was in Spanish.

Writing Assignments Log[1]

Your name:_____

Date	Type of assignment (e.g., essay, multiple choice, report, etc.)	Class	Time spent (preparing, reading, writing, checking/editing, etc.)	Please explain step by step what you did to solve the assignment (did you ask anybody for guidance/help?, did you look for examples?, did you work alone/with somebody else? Etc.)	Please explain the kinds of difficulties you encounter, if any	Have you received any feedback on your assignment? What was is like? Did it you're your expectations? What was your grade?

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[1] This is a translation from the original document, which was in Spanish.

Appendix G

Questionnaires

Questionnaire A[87]

Your name:_____

I would appreciate if you could complete the information requested below in much detail as possible. You can use as much space as needed!

Cluster 1: Grades: Write down the courses you took and the grades you got.

Course	Grade	Comments (Did you obtain the grades you expected? Why/why not? Any other comments about the courses you took?)

Cluster 2: Courses in Mexico: What courses are you taking now at MCMU?

Course	Grade	Describe the topic and any other aspects you may wish to write about.

Cluster 3: Reading practices

Do you usually read before attending MCMU classes? Why?

If so, what kind of readings do you have to do?

Are readings longer or shorter than at WCU?

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[87] This is a translation from the original document, which was in Spanish.

How much time do you spend reading?

Before the exchange at WCU, did you use to read before going to class? Why?

Did you usually read before attending WCU classes? Why?

Cluster 4: Writing practices

Do you have written assignments for your MCMU courses?

If so, what are they like?

How much time do you spend doing your assignment? Please include general comments first and then tell me step by step how you completed one assignment of your choice.

Do you usually work individually or in pairs or teams?

Have you changed the way in which you approach assignments since you returned from Canada?

Do you think that you're applying any of the knowledge or strategies (for reading and writing) that you learned/practices at WCU? If so, which ones? Why?

Your name:_____

Retrospective questionnaire on your reading and writing strategy use and development[89]

	Strategies to improve my reading ability	I use this strategy and like it	I've tried this strategy and would use it again	I've never used this strategy but am interested in it	This strategy doesn't fit for me
1	Read as much as possible in the target language [English].				
2	Try to find things to read for pleasure in the target language.				
3	Find reading material that is at or near my level.				
4	Plan out in advance how I'm going to read the text, monitor to see how I'm doing, and then check to see how much I understand.				
5	Skim an academic text first to get the main idea and then go back and read it more carefully.				
6	Read a text several times until I understand it.				
7	Pay attention to the organization of the text, especially headings and subheadings.				
8	Make ongoing summaries of the reading either in my mind or in the margins of the text.				
9	Make predictions as to what will happen next.				
	Strategies for when words and grammatical structures are not understood				
10	Guess the appropriate meaning by using clues from the context of the reading material.				
11	Use a dictionary to get a detailed sense of what individual words mean.				
12	Ask somebody for help.				

1. Which other reading strategies have you used besides those included in the table above? Do you think your strategy use varied depending on the kind of materials you read?

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[88] This is a translation from the original document, which was in Spanish.

[89] Based on the "Language Strategy Use Inventory", by Cohen, A., Oxford, R., and Chi, C. In "Maximizing Study Abroad" (2005), CARLA, University of Minnesota. Duplicable Masters 13, 14, and 15.

2. Have you noticed any change in how you have used reading strategies since you returned from Canada?

3. Did you learn any of the strategies at WCU, or did you already know all of them? Who did you learn them from?

4. Now that you're back in Mexico, do you use any of the strategies (old or new ones) to read materials in Spanish?

B1. Try to remember if you have used any of these strategies while you were at WCU. Mark with an "X" as applicable.

	Strategies for basic writing	I use this strategy and like it	I've tried this strategy and would use it again	I've never used this strategy but am interested in it	This strategy doesn't fit for me
13	Practice writing the alphabet and/or new words in the target language.				
14	Plan out in advance how to write academic papers, monitor how my writing is going, and check to see how well my writing reflects what I want to say.				
15	Try writing different kinds of text in the target language [e.g., personal notes, (msn) messages, letters, and course papers).				
16	Take class notes in the target language as much as I'm able.				
	Strategies for writing and essay or academia paper				
17	Find a different way to express the idea when I don't know the correct expression. (e.g., use a synonym or describe the idea).				
18	Review what I have already written before continuing to write more.				
19	Use reference materials such as a glossary, a dictionary, or a thesaurus to help find or verify words in the target language.				
20	Wait to edit my writing until all my ideas are down on paper.				
	Strategies to use after writing a draft of an essay or paper				
21	Revise my writing once or twice to improve the language and content.				
22	Try to get feedback from others, especially native speakers of the language.				

1. Which other reading strategies have you used besides those included in the table above? Try to think about each of the courses you took this term.

2. Please, comment on how often you use writing strategies, and which ones.

3. Do you need you need to edit or proofread your Spanish work more than before going abroad? Why/why not?

4. Do you feel you have learned anything at WCU in terms of your writing practices? If so, can you transfer that knowledge to your Spanish writing practices?

5. Do you think there's anything about you writing that you could have improved/learned more about at WCU?

6. Could you have received help from someone else? If so, from whom?

C1. Try to remember if you have used any of these strategies while you were at WCU. Mark with an "X" as applicable.

	Strategies for translation	I use this strategy and like it	I've tried this strategy and would use it again	I've never used this strategy but am interested in it	This strategy doesn't fit for me
23	Plan out what to say or write in my own language and then translate it into the target language.				
24	Translate in my head while I am reading to help me understand the text.				
25	Translate part of a conversation into my own language to help me remember the conversation.				
	Strategies for working directly in the target language use as much as possible				
26	Put my own language out of mind and think only in the target language as much as possible.				
27	Try to understand what has been heard or read without translating word-for-word into my own language.				
28	Use caution when directly transferring words and ideas from my own language into the target language.				

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C2. Please answer the following questions in detail.

1. Do you usually translate your work (e.g., when you need to write in English, do you write in Spanish first?)

2. Do you think you have changed your translation practices as a result of your study abroad experience? Why?/How?

Thank you very much for your help!!!
Sandra

Appendix H

Consent Forms

<u>Background Information for Students</u>

Title of Study: The academic literacy transformations of sojourners in a global world: Mexican student returnees after a semester abroad in a Canadian university

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Patricia Duff
Associate Professor·
Department of Language and Literacy Education, UBC, Faculty of Education

Co-Investigator:
Sandra Zappa-Hollman
PhD. Candidate
Department of Language and Literacy Education, UBC, Faculty of Education

Purpose:
The aim of this project is to investigate the academic literacy experiences of Mexican exchange students who are taking courses at [WCU] as part of the [MCMU] [MCMU]-[WCU] Joint Academic Program. Since academic reading/writing usually involve challenging activities, especially when performed in a foreign language and in a new sociocultural context, this study seeks to investigate the kinds of literacy activities that exchange students find most demanding, and what aspects of their study abroad experience may have an impact on their academic literacy practices while they are at [WCU]. Also, this project aims to provide insights regarding the impact that any changes in their English academic literacy practices may have on their Spanish academic literacy practices once they return to Mexico to continue their degree at [MCMU]. Another focal aspect of this investigation is placed on the response/reaction of the [WCU] community to the presence of Mexican exchange students in this institution. This study is not an evaluation of the participants' or their instructors' performance, the [MCMU]-[WCU] Joint Academic Program or its Director, or [WCU].

Study Procedures:
Participation in this project is voluntary, and if you decide to withdraw from this investigation you can do so at any time without suffering any <u>negative consequences.</u> <u>This study requires you to participate for about 32 hours over a period of eight months.</u> Your participation will involve being interviewed several times by Sandra Zappa-Hollman, a doctoral student in the Department of LLED at UBC. These face-to-face interviews <u>(which will be audiotaped with your permission)</u> are expected to take up to one hour each time, and they will be conducted at any time of your convenience every two weeks during your stay abroad experience in [WCU] (i.e., for approximately a four-month period). Once you return to Mexico, three to four 1 to 2-hour interviews will be conducted either by phone or in person (in case Sandra is able to travel to Mexico). In addition, e-mail communication between you and Sandra will be maintained during the research process in order to make arrangements for interviews or for any other project-related issues you may wish to share/discuss with her. Also, you will be invited to share with

Sandra writing samples, course outlines, feedback received from instructors, and other aspects of your experience in [WCU] courses for analysis.
For your knowledge, some of your instructors will also participate in interviews with Sandra, where they will be asked to share their perceptions on the academic writing experiences of Mexican exchange students.

Publication:
This research project will be conducted as part of a doctoral degree, and will thus be accessible to the general public in the form of a doctoral dissertation. In addition, conference presentations as well as journal articles will be published based on the findings of this investigation. Pseudonyms will be employed for all participants.

Confidentiality:
Your identity will be confidential at all times. All documents (e.g., writing samples, course outlines, feedback from instructors, etc.) will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Sandra's office. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Also, all the computer files generated for this study will be kept in Sandra's personal computer hard disk, which is password protected. The only people that will have access to your raw data, besides you if so you wish, are Dr. Patricia Duff and Sandra Zappa-Hollman.

Compensation and benefits for participants:
You will not receive any payment as a result of your participation in this project. However, we believe you might find it beneficial to have an opportunity to discuss and reflect on issues related to your academic exchange experience at [WCU] and to the impact it may have on your literacy practices while at [WCU] and once you return to Mexico. As a gesture of appreciation for the time and effort you will devote for this study, you will be offered a $20 gift certificate after your final interview for this project.

Contact for information about the study:
If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Patricia Duff by phone   or Sandra Zappa-Hollman, by phone   or e-mail:

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:
If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Consent Form [Student Copy]

Your participation in the study "**The academic literacy transformations of sojourners in a global world: Mexican student returnees after a semester abroad in a Canadian university**" is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to you.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Subject Signature   Date

Printed Name of the Subject

*Please **keep this copy** for your own records.*

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Consent Form [Researcher Copy]

Your participation in the study "**The academic literacy transformations of sojourners in a global world: Mexican student returnees after a semester abroad in a Canadian university**" is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to you.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

_____   _____

Subject Signature   Date

_____

Printed Name of the Subject

*Please **return this page** to the researcher.*

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Background Information for Instructors

Title of Study: The academic literacy transformations of sojourners in a global world: Mexican student returnees after a semester abroad in a Canadian university

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Patricia Duff
Associate Professor
Department of Language and Literacy Education, UBC, Faculty of Education

Co-Investigator:
Sandra Zappa-Hollman
PhD. Candidate
Department of Language and Literacy Education, UBC, Faculty of Education

Purpose:
The aim of this project is to investigate the academic literacy experiences of Mexican exchange students who are taking courses at [WCU] as part of the [MCMU] [MCMU]-[WCU] Joint Academic Program. Since academic reading/writing usually involve challenging activities, especially when performed in a foreign language and in a new sociocultural context, this study seeks to investigate the kinds of literacy activities that exchange students find most demanding, and what aspects of their study abroad experience may have an impact on their academic literacy practices while they are at [WCU]. Also, this project aims to provide insights regarding the impact that any changes in their English academic literacy practices may have on their Spanish academic literacy practices once they return to Mexico to continue their degree at [MCMU]. Another focal aspect of this investigation is placed on the response/reaction of the [WCU] community to the presence of Mexican exchange students in this institution. I would like to interview instructors about their experiences teaching [MCMU]-[WCU] exchange students, and their perceptions of the students' abilities and success completing writing course requirements in English.

This study is not an evaluation of the students' or their instructors' performance, the [MCMU]-[WCU] Joint Academic Program, its Director, or [WCU].

Study Procedures:
As an instructor, your participation will involve being interviewed (most likely just once) by Sandra Zappa-Hollman, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at UBC, who is pursuing this study as part of her doctoral dissertation research. For those who agree, you will be asked to share course outlines and examples of specific challenges faced by Mexican students in your courses. The interview (which is expected to be o longer than one hour) will take place at the end of the academic term in which the Mexican students that participate in this study take your course(s).

Publication:
This research project will be conducted as part of a doctoral degree, and will thus be accessible to the general public in the form of a doctoral dissertation. In addition, conference presentations as well as journal articles will be published based on the findings of this investigation. Pseudonyms will be employed for all participants.

Confidentiality:
Your identity will be confidential at all times. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Also, all the computer files generated for this study will be kept in Sandra's personal computer hard disk, which is password protected. The only people that will have access to your raw data, besides you if so you wish, are Dr. Patricia Duff and Sandra Zappa-Hollman.

Compensation and benefits for participants:
The opportunity to reflect on your pedagogical practices teaching Mexican students might be useful for your future teaching practices. As a gesture of our appreciation for the time and effort you will devote for this study, you will be offered a $15 gift certificate once the interview is completed.

Contact for information about the study:
If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Patricia Duff by phone   or Sandra Zappa-Hollman, by phone
                or e-mail:

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:
If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Consent Form [Instructor Copy]

Your participation in the study "**The academic literacy transformations of sojourners in a global world: Mexican student returnees after a semester abroad in a Canadian university**" is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to you.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

_____   _____

Subject Signature   Date

_____   _____

Printed Name of the Subject

*Please **keep this copy** for your own records.*

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

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Consent Form [Researcher Copy]

Your participation in the study "**The academic literacy transformations of sojourners in a global world: Mexican student returnees after a semester abroad in a Canadian university**" is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to you.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Subject Signature   Date

_____
Printed Name of the Subject

*Please **return this page** to the researcher.*

Thank you very much for your cooperation!