

**EXPLORING IDENTITY FORMATION AND  
ACADEMIC WRITING OF MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS:  
SKIPPING THROUGH THE ACADEMY**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research project investigates multilingual students' engagement and investment in their undergraduate studies as they transition from foundational academic writing coursework (which may be seen by some as a stigmatized, "remedial" context) to Writing Intensive credit coursework. Through interviews and narrative writing samples, I investigate students' various communities and positions in the university context to examine academic writing as social practice and identity negotiation (both interpersonal and intrapersonal). I find that while some students do report increased proficiency and confidence in their academic writing, their investment in the university community as a whole is more fractured than cohesive.

**Keywords: multilingualism, undergraduate students, identity, academic writing, Community of Practice, transformation**

*Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man.*

*Sir Francis Bacon*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Students embark on university study for a variety of reasons, not least of which is the opportunity to learn and grow. Where and how that happens varies from student to student, but has the potential to be transformative. This thesis research project recounts how my own surprise challenge with academic writing lead me to explore other students', in particular multilingual students', experiences and identification with the university through the frame of academic writing.

In my first semester of graduate studies, the course requirements were to discuss our course readings in class time and on an online platform, and to write a final research paper. I enjoyed the course readings, discussions and research, and had few qualms about writing up my ideas in a final paper. Because this was my first foray into academic work in many years since my undergraduate degree, I sought feedback from my professor on my final research paper; I expected there to be much more writing ahead of me, and I wanted to take all I could get from one course to another. What I had not expected was feedback that shook my self confidence to the point I second-guessed trying to articulate any of my thoughts in subsequent assignments. While commenting positively on my research and ideas, the professor essentially questioned why someone who can speak, not to mention teach English, cannot write it properly. He stated I should know better, and did not understand why I had problems with academic

English. Nor did I. I love language, and have enjoyed writing, albeit non-academic genres, over the years. I am quite fluent in English and have been able to explain finer points of grammar to many students over the years. I delight in words and have suffused my interactions with others with a breadth and depth of English; to illustrate, I am comfortable using the subjunctive, and once overheard one of my 3 year olds correcting his twin brother on the use of 'whom.'

I identify myself as keen, engaged and already a (albeit peripheral) member of the academy; if writing 'properly' was difficult for me, what is it like for students without the same linguistic resources?

I found writing difficult as a writer, but I also need to consider my relationship to writing as an instructor. How can I assist my own students in their writing? How can I enable them to express what they need and want to in 'acceptable' forms? How can I help them come to terms with writing as a communicative tool, and to engage with it on their own terms? How can I empower them to use writing in English as a vehicle for their own thoughts and contributions to their personal, professional or academic fields?

For almost 15 years I have been a teacher of English as an Additional Language (EAL). Regardless of whether I have been teaching visitors to Canada, students, immigrants, refugees or pre-university students, writing in English seems universally feared and loathed. Students seem wary of seeing their emerging English language skills in written form, giving evidence of both their repertoire and 'gaps,' without non-verbal modes of communication for support. Written samples can be read, reread, analysed, and in the university preparation

course in which I currently teach, students' writing serves as a primary form of assessment. I teach in a non-credit, EAP (English for Academic Purposes) programme at SFU, where my students begin with a low intermediate proficiency in English and work towards increased proficiency and entrance into a sheltered academic cohort with continued language support. As my students move into credit coursework and the mainstream campus, the stakes get higher; SFU's Writing Intensive curriculum requires students to produce academic writing on their own.

Studying at university can be transformative; the personal history and goals of the student meet the influences of ideas in the disciplines and interactions with members of the university community as a whole in an alchemy that can shape individuals' sense of self and their trajectory through adult life. Harvey's (2000) discussion of the "New Realities" of post secondary education highlights "the primary role of higher education is increasingly to transform students by *enhancing* their knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities while simultaneously *empowering* them as lifelong critical, reflective learners" (p. 3, emphasis in the original). Beyond the conflict between "discipline apprenticeship" of traditional academic life, and "employability" of graduating students (p. 9), is the realization that post secondary education has the opportunity, if not responsibility, to nurture "a well-educated and trained population as necessary for future economic prosperity, promotion of innovation, productivity and economic growth, cultivation of community life, social and political cohesion and the achievement of genuinely democratic societies with full

participation” (p. 10). Similarly, SFU’s rationale for undergraduate curriculum reform (2003) aimed to produce students who “will be better prepared to live productive lives and to make significant contributions to society” (p. 3). Those curricular reforms lead to the implementation of Writing Intensive courses and Foundational writing courses at SFU, on which I focus in this project. In my research, I explore the effects of taking the Foundations of Academic Literacy course on student engagement with their university careers. I was curious about the use of narrative as a tool to facilitate both students’ academic writing and the university’s recognition of what multiliterate students bring to the academy. Can the transformations expected of students extend to SFU as a whole so it is better positioned to not only satisfy its motto of “thinking of the world”, but participate in it?

### **Purpose: My “Burning question”: How are students doing?**

The prime motivation for this research project was to explore how multilingual students are doing at the university. This was my “burning question” (Harter, 2006) and I came back to it time and time again through my coursework and inquiry. The scope of such a question is too large for any one research project (let alone one’s first foray into research in an MA thesis) as there is so much going on for university students in both their academic and personal lives. Add multiple literacy practices into the mix and it can seem unwieldy. But not if the complexity of variables in students’ lives fall under the umbrella of identity. Identity is portrayed by theorists variously as being incomplete, emerging, essentialized, non-essentialized, hybrid, core and unstable (Bhabha, 1994;

Block, 2001; Casanave, 2002; Hall, 1996; Norton, 2000; Phan, 2008). Despite discrepancies in defining the term, there is consensus that identity plays a significant role in individuals' engagement with social groups. Norton (2000) specifically ties identity to multilingual people's "investment" in learning and using an additional language, and their "complex social history[s] and multiple desires" (p. 10). I see this sometimes conflicted relationship between the self and social situation, specifically the university context, an opportunity to study, learn, and grow. Acknowledging identity as both important and nebulous gives space for students to define it as they understand it, and articulate its role in how they are doing. Asking them how they are doing with academic writing keeps the focus of the research on academic language production and the manner in which they will be assessed for some of their required courses at the university. This research project explores the transitions multilingual students make as they move from the additive credit Foundations in Academic Literacy (FAL) course to credit Writing Intensive (W courses) in various faculties. It aims to explore students' interactions with the university to gain a holistic understanding of their experience, and uses the following research questions to stimulate that discussion:

**Research Questions:**

- How do multilingual students making the transition from foundational academic literacy to writing intensive learning perceive and perform identities?

- To what extent do these processes of identity construction reflect, challenge, and reproduce institutional discourses around the following: multilingualism, linguistic competence, and academic literacy?

## **CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND MORAL PURPOSE**

### **History & implementation of W courses**

This section establishes SFU's rationale for its writing curriculum (W courses), the university's response to both its institutional context and demographics, and the disconnect between ideals and realities. None of these factors are in clear, causal relation to one another, nor are the reactions to one another without challenges.

As of September 2006, all undergraduate students admitted to Simon Fraser University (SFU) are required to take 6 credits of Writing-intensive designated coursework prior to graduation. This is the direct result of work done by SFU's Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee which was a determination of "...the intellectual and educational values SFU should foster, of the intellectual qualities that all SFU undergraduates should share, and of the skills and experiences that will best prepare our undergraduate students for successful and fulfilling futures." (SFU 2002, p.2). This "fulfilling future" can be considered parallel to what Fullan (2003) calls "Moral Purpose," a "critical motivator for addressing the sustained task of complex reform" and movement towards "greater social cohesion, developmental health and economic performance." (p. 18). Moral purpose is prime motivation for fundamental changes in university curriculum, giving the university purpose to its education and the engagement of its extended community. The Writing Intensive initiative brought about by the curriculum

committee's directive has had implications for members of the administrative and academic community at SFU, through the teaching faculty and TAs, to undergraduate students, current and prospective. Please see Appendix A for the W course criteria. and Appendix B for assessment in the FAL course.

### **The pace of change**

SFU's progressive history has labeled it "Radical campus," a moniker in which it has taken pride. It prides itself on being a teaching university, but is currently facing challenges from external competition. Mainly due to competition from other universities and the expanding local college system, SFU needs to stay competitive to attract students. On one hand, in 2008, SFU eased its admission requirements in direct response to the streamlined application and admission processes at competing institutions (SFU PAMR, 2008), reducing its requirement of four provincial grade 12 exams to one. On the other hand, it has added requirements to criteria for students graduating from SFU; the implementation of not only Writing but Breadth and Quantitative requirements to its own curriculum and graduation requirements came after the VP Academic's proposal to make sure the SFU curricula maintain "commitments to a broadly based liberal education and are attractive when compared to curricula at other universities" (Waterhouse in Strachan p. 18). These changes in SFU's entrance and graduating criteria are significant changes for the university, and demonstrate that the university has the willingness to make changes, adapting to the changing context of modern tertiary education. This willingness to adapt

parallels what Fullan (2003) states, that institutions must “give up the idea that the pace of change will slow down” (p. 24).

## **The face of change**

### **Language Demographics**

Another reality of the modern university is the diversity of its student body. SFU not only admits students with high school leaving qualifications, but also transfer students, international students, and students with diverse qualifications. The university’s admission website characterizes those with diverse qualifications as students who may not have the academic standing to be admitted to SFU, but have “demonstrated commitment or excellence in other endeavours, or who have succeeded in their studies in spite of difficult circumstances.” (SFU, n.d.) The student demographics of SFU are more varied than ever, and the demands that those students, and society as a whole make on the university will challenge not only the curriculum, but the identity of the university itself. As SFU is located in Metro Vancouver, its student body reflects a metropolitan region with an increasing number of its population born outside of Canada; in the 2006 census, 40% of the population of the area was born internationally (compared with 20% for the national average). The newcomers come from all around the world, the largest communities being Chinese (17% of newcomers) Indian (11%) Hong Kong (9%), Northern European (9%) and Filipino (8%) (Census Canada in Metro Vancouver, 2008).

This breadth of student background is both an asset to the university's diversity and a challenge to building coherence in its curricula. The broadening of admission criteria not only reduces the elitism of academia, but shifts the expectations of what education and pedagogy the university will employ in ensuring students' success. This is what Bricker and Greenspon in Fullan (2003) suggest, stating "...the real public opinion story in education is more about changed expectations than decay..." (p. 17). Harvey (2000) claims "graduate attributes' are more important ...than the graduates' degree subject" (p. 7), challenging a more traditional view of university education as a solely intellectual pursuit. The broadening of both admission and curricular criteria diversifies both who attends the university and what is taught. As students from diverse backgrounds create a presence on campus, old cultural hegemonies are threatened. The curricular initiative for writing intensive learning may also come from a nostalgic, reactionary standpoint, that students cannot write as well as they used to. Trimbur (1991) posits that "literacy crises are strategic" (p. 286) as reactions to the shifting demographics of students admitted into the academy. This decline in standards may be nostalgic by those who have previously enjoyed power, and efforts to raise and remediate those standards are "strategic pretexts for educational and cultural change" (p. 281).

While the purpose, limitations and responsibilities of university education have been and can be debated indefinitely by authors such as Harvey (2000), the realities of the demographics of current and prospective students enrolling in SFU must be considered as well. In 2003, 7.3% of undergraduate students at

SFU were international students on student visas. By 2007 the percentage had risen to 9.5, nearing its international student enrolment target of 10% (SFU IRP, 2009, SFU Senate, 2007). For the 2010-2011 academic year, international student enrolment surpassed its new target of 13% to reach 16.7% (SFU IRP, SFU Senate, 2011). These statistics alone do not fully exemplify the variety of students studying at SFU, as within the domestic student population, of the 22,816 undergraduate students enrolled at SFU in Fall, 2008, 2148 were permanent residents of Canada, indicating they were born outside of Canada and have immigrated here. While all of these students may have English language skills sufficient to gain admission to the university, it cannot be assumed that any of these students, international or domestic, have all the necessary linguistic competencies to succeed in academic writing in English.

### **Linguistic competence and educational experience**

We cannot assume that simply because someone sounds fluent or has skill in a particular aspect of language, he or she will be able to perform in all areas of language production. Cummins (2001) describes the social fluency as “basic interpersonal communicative skills” or “BICS,” distinct from the “cognitive academic language proficiency” or “CALP” required for academic achievement. My own example of expertise in English grammar and vocabulary, yet inadequacy of appropriate discourse in the genre of academic writing should illustrate this inconsistency. The gap is in what Hymes (1985) terms “communicative competence,” situating linguistics, and therefore language knowledge and use, beyond the confines of structure, syntax and history or

cognitive psychology. Instead, Hymes argues linguists must site their work upon "...foundations that include the social sciences and social life. From this third point of view, the expansion of scope would not be a reaching out, as it were, but a reaching down. What one reaches is not a periphery or an implementation but a deeper grounding." (p. 11). He further supports this stating, "...any actual language's semantic system stands in the relation of 'metalanguage' to the way of life of which it is part." (p. 18). Communication, and by extension, effective writing, draws on not only technical knowledge of structure, but a facility in *applying* this repertoire appropriately to various contexts. Some of us may have the 'what' but not enough practice with the 'how.' Our educational histories and previous writing experience shoulder some of the responsibility in shaping our writing proficiencies.

Regardless whether students are admitted to SFU directly from grade 12 in British Columbia, through international academic credentials, or transfer from a local college, the rigour of writing instruction and the integration of writing into curriculum can vary widely, even for domestic students. It is naïve and culturally biased to assume domestic students have necessarily had superior or even sufficient preparation for writing at university than those coming to SFU through other pathways. Even if students matriculate from a 'local' BC high school, they may have had differing exposure, experience, expertise, instruction and attitudes towards writing. To satisfy the Dogwood high school completion requirements, students may graduate with either English 12, or Communications 12. English 12 teachers may assign more or less writing than others. Some may encourage

the process of writing, requiring several drafts with formative assessment. Other high school teachers may use writing infrequently, or for summative assessment purposes only. The autonomy public secondary classroom teachers have with curriculum and assessment allows for great variability in the writing skills students may develop in their secondary education.

Unfortunately, the reality of the undergraduate student body at SFU varies too much for the Writing Intensive curriculum initiative to fulfil its mandate on its own. While it may have moral purpose, it does not have, in my view, sufficient means to help marginalized students at the university.

Fullan argues that moral purpose, epitomized in the view that SFU's undergraduates are "best prepare[d] for successful and fulfilling futures" (SFU 2002, p.2) "...must go beyond the individual; must be larger and more collective in nature. ...the only measure that counts at the end of the day is whether the *gap* between high and low performers is explicitly reduced" (Fullan, 2003, p.12). Teaching to the ideal student is not enough; from my experience too many students at SFU lack the skills to succeed in the Writing intensive curriculum. They need support to close the gap in writing skills expected to graduate from SFU.

### **The 'Remedial' need for FAL**

In order to address the requirements of students whose English writing skills were not proficient for W courses, the Undergraduate Curriculum Implementation Task Force (UCITF) recommended a remedial, pre-W course "in

order to meet the needs of newly admitted students with limited academic writing skills, as assessed by standard language proficiency tests.” (Fettes et al., 2004, p. 3) Essentially, SFU had admitted students, and now needed to prepare them for the university’s curriculum. As a response to this shortcoming, Foundations of Academic Literacy (FAL) was proposed in 2004 with input from the Centre for Writing Intensive Learning (CWIL), the Faculty of Education and the English Bridge Program. Its proposed learning outcomes can be demonstrated in the following statement from the proposal: “Students are expected to...become confident and competent at addressing a range of tasks in academic reading and writing, from short in-class assignments to extended essays to unseen exam questions” (p. 12). FAL was expected to help 10% of the undergraduate enrolment, from both domestic and international backgrounds (Fettes et al. 2004).

Where CWIL had failed to appreciate the importance of students’ backgrounds, the initial proposal for FAL streamed its students along cultural and linguistic lines to ease delivery. The FAL proposal divided students into streams of students based on their perceived linguistic and cultural competency; Native Speakers, Acculturated ESL and International ESL, with the rationale that, “the different sets of knowledge and beliefs present in each group will certainly lead to differences in class dynamics, in the time spent practicing particular kinds of skills, and in the type of feedback that will be most helpful.” (p. 14). The streaming of students along cultural and linguistic criteria could be problematic both logistically and ethically. These concerns manifest in the means to

determine student groupings; if students were to be separated based on how long they had been in Canada, where would students who had lived in other English-speaking countries or communities to be placed? What about students who had lived in Canada for many years, but in monolingual communities with little extracurricular exposure to English? Would students be separated on the basis of scores on English language structure and usage tests? It is conceivable that students who have studied English as an additional language have more familiarity with the rules of English grammar than native speaking students who have been educated in a whole language educational approach. The streaming of students along cultural and linguistic lines would also risk ghettoizing the groups of students, undermining their full participation in the academic community and hindering their academic apprenticeship. Waterstone's (2008) case study of an EAL student refers to the "multiple and contradictory identifications that affect the learning of academic literacy" (p. 53). Streaming students would add another factor in students' 'identity' in addition to not being ready for W-courses. Students do not need to be further separated from one another and the academic community as they take foundational coursework. As FAL is taken concurrent with credit coursework, streaming students would add another variable in student timetabling, another disincentive. However, in a departure from its original proposal, FAL students are currently not streamed along linguistic, cultural or discipline lines. They are, however, held back in their accumulation of necessary credits to graduate with the *additive* credit designation of FAL; while the course grade is calculated towards students' GPAs, they do not

receive any academic credit. Thus, FAL may be seen as a course that some students must take, but that hinders their progress, ultimately undermining their investment in the course and university context in which it is mandated. As investment is both a key force for learning and a factor in negotiating identity, (Norton, 2000), the role of students' personal identity and *identification with* (Hall, 1996) their surroundings needs closer examination to better understand their engagement and success at university.

When young adult, multilingual learners study at university, both their identities and academic skills undergo tremendous growth and development. The process, however, is not a simple, linear acquisition of skills and maturity. It is a complicated push and pull between the student and the academy, dominated by themes of identity, stigma, and negotiation.

The dynamic diversity of the student body at Simon Fraser University today represents both depth and breadth of multiculturalism, language expertise and lived experience. Enrolling students from various backgrounds seemingly satisfies the university's new motto of "Thinking of the World," but how well are multilingual, multicultural students engaged with the university? How does the university see them, how do they see themselves, and what role do these perspectives play in the progress of students' academic literacy? A review of some of the relevant literature on these topics establishes frames of reference for developing questions for this research project.

## **CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The focus on negotiated identities in relation to others exemplifies the transition students face as they participate in the construction of their academic literacy skills and their personal identities in the social context of the university. Academic literacy traditionally focuses on writing as a socially constructed practice (Lee & Stierer, 2000; Street, 2004; as cited in Marshall, 2010), and investigating students' ways of understanding, or epistemologies, can illustrate their engagement and role in the discourses around them. This relative positioning is seen as integral to identity formation, as will be explored next.

### **Constructions of Identity**

I begin with a discussion of identity simply because 'knowing' who we are talking about seems a logical place to start. As should become immediately clear, however, learner identity is not a simple representation of demographics and labels, but a much more complicated interaction of cultural, historical and psychological factors.

In his chapter "Who needs Identity?" Hall (1996) presents a multidisciplinary deconstruction of the idea of identity as a stable, unified or "essentialized" set of characteristics an individual possesses. Short of dismissing identity altogether, in its place Hall emphasizes it is the decentred relationship between individuals and discourses that exposes a gap across which

*identification* occurs. Where identity may have been thought to reside within an individual and be the result of unalterable, defined inheritances, identification is a process of bridging the self with groups outside the self. The emphasis is on the bridging, or *becoming*, rather than simply being. The external group with which an individual identifies may be idealized, and is typically regulative or normative in its practices, “summoning” individuals to align their behaviours and values to participate fully. However, Hall argues the identification can never be full or complete, as identities are “fragmented and fractured” due to the various roles, responsibilities, and environments we inhabit in our daily lives. In Hall’s view, it is the contrast and ongoing negotiation between these positions that constructs the identity of an individual, as much through ambition and allegiances as personal capacity and position.

Norton’s (2000) research focuses on second language learners’ identity, problematizing how others have “...assumed that learners can be defined unproblematically as motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited, without considering that such affective factors are frequently socially constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in a single individual” (p. 5). Instead of simplistic binary categories, she portrays identity as “...how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p.5).

Similarly, Block (2007) presents a post-structuralist, non-essentialized view of identity, made up of the various factors of complex, modern lives. Block does use the term “identity,” but also rejects deterministic categories in favour of a more “fluid and unstable” (p. 3) constructivist approach, “nuanced, multileveled” (p. 13) and representative of the complex histories and influences on individuals in postmodern times.

Further expanding on the postmodern theory of non-essentialized identity, Block draws upon past research and case studies to demonstrate some factors that influence not only an individual’s identity, but transformations that may occur over time, and specific to second language learners. Block claims that as individuals need to make difficult choices to resolve underlying conflicts, they create a more coherent personal narrative (p. 22). While he does list several seemingly codified categories of identity (ethnic, national, gender, language, etc., p. 43), he points out how these have overlapping impact on one another and are co-constructed through discourses in communities. Block positions the individual looking inwards to address the “ambivalence” of “simultaneous affirmation and negation” (p. 21-22) of these influences, drawing on a constellation of factors to create an individual identity.

Casanave (2002), while acknowledging this postmodern view of an overlapping, ambivalent, emerging, contradictory, co-constructed, (and what I see as a) *messy* process, claims that “[w]e do not need an essentialist view of self in order to accept a view of self that is motivated by a *longing* for an essence or a core as a way to reduce the anxiety that we all face in a world that is full of

more complexities and options than we can ever control” (p. 265 emphasis in the original). This “longing” for a clearer sense of self can be seen in studies of both teachers and students, and, dangerously, in how institutions also assume ‘clearer’ categories of who students are.

Looking at English Language teachers rather than students, Phan (2008) both seeks and maintains a clearer sense of self from a core national identity to which citizens “fasten” themselves. She acknowledges the often contradictory “Western” and Vietnamese influences on her personal, linguistic, pedagogical and professional self, and in doing so essentializes “Western” culture herself, conflating US, Australian, UK and other English-speaking cultures into one monolithic idea. On the other hand, Phan, in her work with Vietnamese EAL teachers, juxtaposes the hybridity of Western culture with the unifying “national umbrella” of Vietnamese culture (p. 31), exemplifying a national sense of “longing for an essence or a core” to which Casanave (2002, p. 165) referred. Phan rationalizes distancing herself from the postmodern, non-essentialist views of identity by claiming they are “insufficient,” and that “overall identity is needed to give people a sense of belonging,” “...highlight[ing] the importance of the sense of belonging, connectedness, continuity and a coherent growth in identity formation” (p. 13). However, in doing so, Phan risks simplifying inevitable tensions in the social fabric around political, gender, educational, economic and social issues: critical issues that postsecondary education provides an opportunity to explore. Glossing over individual difference also subsumes any aspects of individuals’ identity that might not fit a nationalistic, idealized sense of

who a particular group of people are. The following case study of an individual international student highlights how even a 'clear sense' of self and nationality are not immune to identity influence from normative contexts.

As part of her case study of one of her multilingual, undergraduate students, Waterstone (2008) examines what she calls the "multiple and contradictory identifications that affect the learning of academic literacy" (p. 53). Similarly to Block's (2007) "simultaneous affirmation and negation" (p. 21-22), Waterstone portrays students' identities developed through "...both identifying and not identifying with the positions offered to them" (p. 54). Waterstone characterizes her multilingual student's identification as a confident, high-achieving student who, at the same time, resists the label 'ESL' "because it does not relate to her own sense of identity" (p. 61). This particular international student's first degree is in English literature, and at the time of the study, was succeeding in academic, credit courses in the second year of her second undergraduate degree, this time at an English-speaking university. Still, Waterstone makes her the subject of an examination of the "received category" (p. 63) of ESL and her positioning as such at the university. It should be noted that it is not clear how or even if she is, in fact, identified by other members of the university itself as an "ESL" student or learner. However, Waterstone refers to her as a "second-language learner" (p. 57), not user, whereas the student identifies herself as someone "who [knows] English language and grammar." (p. 58). In reviewing the content of their interviews, the student describes how Waterstone's use of the term ESL is a hurtful "cliché," and how the pejorative

term doesn't acknowledge all the other influences that shape her identity (p. 59). This prescriptive positioning of the student as "ESL" perpetuates students' subaltern position to "native speaker" proficiency, and does not examine more critically her demonstrated language proficiency and intellectual ability to engage in academic discourse. In essence, use of the term ESL conflates all the identity-forming facets of her expertise, education, and experience into one, limiting, reified category.

Leung, Harris & Rampton (1997) explain how categorizing multilingual students as simply 'ESL' (or more appropriately, ESOL, English for Speakers of Other Languages, in their article) not only limits consideration of the various factors involved in shaping individual identities, it juxtaposes second language users in a deficit position to "native speakers" of English. They caution against relying on "presumed language use, ethnicity and culture of the bilingual learner" (p. 546) as it oversimplifies and fails to take into account the real expertise and identities of individuals. Instead, they emphasize the importance of individuals' "linguistic *affiliation*", "expertise" and "inheritance" as more fluid factors, determined more by the individuals than by their positioning (p. 555).

The major implication of essentializing or categorizing identities is that too much is left out. Tidy, firm identities, whether attributed or assumed, do not leave much room for change or growth. The risk in education is that both the individual student and the university miss out on co-constructing new knowledge and pushing the limits of their own identities beyond their existing, safe horizons. The loss to students may be obvious: lack of engagement may lead to lack of

completion of studies and consequently retarded socio-economic potential (Harklau & Siegal, 2009; Louie, 2009). The loss to universities when they fail to engage with the multicultural students they enrol may not be so easily apparent. However, cultural anthropology professor Tim Sieber (2004) recounts how “in classroom discussion, ESOL students frequently become information resources - teachers, really - for the whole class” (p. 132) and expand the context and understanding of their fellow classmates. If universities perpetuate their multilingual students’ identities as ‘ESL’ by employing labels and positioning multilingual learners in remedial ESL spaces, they risk essentializing their own institutional identities to what Sieber refers to as “older, fairly rigid notion of erudite, academic culture that is ruthlessly monocultural and monolingual” (p. 131). Such rigidity also excludes the varied perspectives multicultural students bring, and their potential “to question ‘accepted dogma’ in their disciplines and become able to propose original studies that will lead to new understandings in their fields” and to “add important dimensions to their professional fields and contribute seminal knowledge to the larger community” (Sternglass, 2004, p. 58).

Both the poststructuralist, non-essentialized theories of identity and Casanave’s “longing” for personal coherence draw on the context in which individuals find themselves. For multicultural undergraduate students developing as writers, when the university streams them into a group in need of remediation, essentializing them as ‘ESL,’ they impose a stigmatized label that can limit the students’ potential. There can be little of Hall’s (1996) “closure of solidarity and allegiance” (p. 2) with an academy that marginalizes students, which may in turn

undermine students' "investment" (Norton, 2000) in the university, and their education, overall.

## **Stigmatized Contexts**

To understand the stigma of ESL at university, the context of ESL at high school serves as an example of how multilingual learners can be underserved and frustrated by a ghettoized environment. In his argument for critical discourse analysis, Steven Talmy (2009) situates his research in a Hawaiian high school ESL class where multicultural students are viewed and treated as "an undifferentiated group of cultural and linguistic newcomers" (p. 200), regardless of their linguistic affiliations or expertise. They are taught by a teacher with no particular training or affinity for L2 English users, assigned texts far below their maturity and intellectual level, and given tedious grammar translation activities to do in disorganized class time (p. 186-7). Similarly, in the province of Alberta, L2 English high school students designated as 'ESL' demonstrate significantly lower graduation rates than the provincial average, and refer to being stigmatized by not only the student body but teachers as well, challenging their success in education (Derwing, DeCorby, Ichikawa & Jamieson, 1999). It is no wonder these students "resist[ed] membership to the category of "ESL student" (Talmy, 2009, p. 183). Students who do graduate out of such a high school environment into university may think they can escape the ESL stigma, only to find themselves "re-becoming ESL" (Marshall, 2010) at the start of their post-secondary careers. The labeling of 'ESL' at university typically happens through high school matriculation English exam scores or language assessment tests at

admission. Benesch (2009) argues these policies and procedures rely on outdated, “modernist assumptions about languages and identities” where language proficiency is divorced from usage, and “ignore the linguistic complexity of the global diaspora” (p. 65). Zamel & Spack (2004) cite instructors who cannot seem to reconcile students’ varied linguistic proficiency and their potential to participate and learn in the academy, again falling back on “...an essentialized view of language in which language is understood to be a decontextualized skill that can be taught in isolation from the production of meaning and that must be in place in order to undertake intellectual work” (p. 7).

Both students and the university community as a whole carry a remedial, “gate keeping” stigma associated with the ‘ESL’ label that undermines their engagement with one another. English language proficiency is separated from the academic context in which it might be used to construct knowledge and identities for all members of the university. Instead of moving forward to engaging intellectual work, students are held back by their stigmatized labeling by the university.

### **Fixing English skills**

This focus on discrete English language proficiency comes from designing curricula around what Leung, Harris & Rampton (1997) refer to as “the idealised native speaker” (p. 544) and is a function of historically “overtly assimilationist approaches” (p. 545) to post-secondary education. It is seen in Waterstone’s (2008) student’s statement that “to become a native speaker” (p. 60) would be the solution to improving her academic writing. It is also explored in Marshall’s

(2010) mixed method analysis of multilingual learners struggling with the assumptive 'ESL' stigma an academic literacy course carries. Where any undergraduate student, regardless of cultural or linguistic background, may enroll in FAL, the course was originally envisioned as a resource to 'fix' the English language deficit of L2 English users. Simon Fraser University's Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee's Final Report (2002) stated: "Those who are not able to express themselves well will not be able to communicate ideas to others, nor will they be able to define, develop and understand ideas themselves. Thus, they will be at a disadvantage in university classrooms and in the world beyond them. At SFU, students must be able to communicate effectively in English" (p. 2). The academic literacy course Foundations of Academic Literacy was originally conceived to fill this 'gap' in L2 English users' ability "to understand ideas" and reflects a "service orientation" of ESOL and EAP classes to 'prepare' students for academic study, away from the academy itself (Spack, 2004, p. 36).

Instead of 'fixing' language, Zamel & Spack (2004) emphasize the role of time and engagement in developing academic literacy. They are clear that we need to separate academic literacy from linguistic proficiency, arguing that "...even when second language features persist, students can express ideas in thoughtful and sophisticated ways. Thus it is crucial to resist making easy predictions about students' potential and to be wary of conflating linguistic proficiency with intellectual ability" (p. xi).

Spack's longitudinal case study of a multilingual student with 'adequate' English language proficiency scores highlights how much strategic learning and

confidence have to do with academic literacy as quantifiable English language test scores. However, stigmas persists. The remedial linguistic-deficit ideology overrides the multi-linguistic assets of academic literacy students; an example of this can be seen in SFU's Foundations of Academic Literacy website which states that students need to demonstrate "English competency" rather than academic literacy or writing skills in order to succeed at university. In terms of constructing identity, the danger here is that the inferior positioning of the 'linguistically inadequate' student in academic contexts is internalized to become a part of the "multidimensionality" (Block, 2007, p. 40) of students' sense of self. As Marshall (2010) states, "ESL is not only a linguistic state, a course, an abbreviation, appreciated by many, disliked by others; it is also as an institutional and learner identity that some students associate with nonacceptance, deficit, and even nonrecognition of their multilingual and multicultural knowledge and competence" (p. 51).

Such statements exemplify how the label 'ESL' can stigmatize students to whom it is attributed. Next is to explore how members of that stigmatized group negotiate their participation in the larger university community.

## **Negotiation and Participation**

One lens through which to examine how multilingual students participate in academic communities is Lave and Wenger's (1991) seminal work on Communities of Practice. Lave and Wenger "locate learning squarely in the processes of coparticipation, not in the heads of individuals" (p. 13), situating "meaning production ... in the fields of social interaction" (p. 13). This theory fits

the university context, which counts interactions such as lectures, peer reviewed journals, seminars, conferences and collaborative research as primary features of academic discourse. Lave and Wenger claim that “legitimate peripheral participation” (p. 35) is the key to participating in a social environment where learning is both a component and product of ongoing interaction, acknowledging it is a “complex notion, implicated in social structures involving relations of power” (p. 36). The power relations that exist at university can be seen in the hierarchical teacher-student relationship, but marginalizing students undermines their roles in those relationships and erases much of their legitimacy to participate in the discourse at all. A Community of Practice depends on participants’ membership, where individuals contribute their biographies, relationships and practices; in short, where they co-construct their identities within the larger context of a community. Hall (1996) emphasizes the “suturing” of the self to a group as part of identifying with it, taking a “strategic and positional” (p. 3) approach. But the deficit position of ‘ESL’ or writing remediation is not closely aligned with universities’ own view of themselves and their own academic goals. How then are multilingual, L2 English students to negotiate not only their academic literacy, but their simple *entry* into such a community? Casanave (2002) claims that “academic writing does not happen in isolation, but within multicultural, social and political networks of relationships for purposes that suit particular locally situated practices in college and university settings” (p. 257). This reflection upon her series of case studies and research opens the door to a broader understanding of academic literacy that relies on varied

networks. It expands the academic community for students well beyond the hierarchical professor-student/expert-novice positions to multiliteracies that better reflect the knowledge and skills students bring to the academy. Casanave uses the “organizing metaphor” of “writing games” to analogize gaining academic literacy, specifically academic writing. This analogy alludes to the subtlety of ‘plays’ and (often unspoken) rules of the academic environment, and also the recognition that it takes time, practice, motivation and support to become a participant. Similarly to Hall’s (1996) emphasis on the *process* of identification Casanave (2002) claims it is the *transitions* made during the acquisition of academic skills that shape who we become (p. 7). In expanding the scope of her work to the community of academic writers as a whole, she states, “I see change all around me, as well as great resistance to change, in the academic literacy practices of students, teachers, and professional academic writers. People seek stability, yet must change in order to learn and grow – an uncomfortable and paradoxical inevitability” (p. 9). Lave and Wenger’s (1991) Community of Practice parallels this inclusion of both newcomers and experts, as well as the importance of change, a force of renewal and innovation referred to as the “continuity-displacement contradiction” (p. 115). However, Casanave (2002) problematizes using the Communities of Practice model with academic literacy, as she contrasts how students in university are not really joining the communities of practicing academics, but being explicitly taught by those academics (p. 77). As Lave and Wenger (1991) point out, apprenticeships in Communities of Practice are not schooling, because schooling is too tied to

theories and research, or “didactic structuring” (p. 61-62). However, if one considers the community of students moving from first year newcomers/novices to becoming full participants in their final years of study, the theory implies that professors in the university are products of the academic system itself and the epitome of experts in a Community of Practice.

More critically, however, Jewson (2007) contends that Lave and Wenger’s initial theorizing of Communities of Practice (1991) did not satisfactorily determine the construction and constraints of the communities they proposed. While he suggests likening communities of practice to networks, of particular relevance to this university study is the idea that Communities of Practice are not the default route, existing as amorphous, consuming entities, but one of several opportunities individuals have for social engagement and hence, learning. He states:

There is far less material, psychological and social investment in any one Community of Practice. Rather than becoming more and more embedded within a single community of practice across a lifetime, identity may well lie in successfully traversing many Communities of Practice without becoming immured by any one. Indeed members of Communities of Practice may define their participation as that of a consumer, participating by choice, on a temporary basis, as long as their interests are served. (p. 79)

Perhaps then the Community of Practice does describe the university as a whole, but insufficiently. While the university requires the invigoration of newcomers to propel research and innovation, the necessary legitimate peripheral participation and situated learning are fostered in smaller, less formal communities of practice throughout the university. These communities may be

simply peers, informal study groups, or cultural clubs that embrace multilingual students' varied histories, languages and experiences. Nevertheless, they all provide the opportunity for multilingual students to engage or identify with fellow students and ideally, extend that relationship to the university itself. These smaller communities are important to a successful university experience, as Lave & Wenger (1991) claim "learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: They are aspects of the same phenomenon" (p. 115).

Further to the examination of identity of the individual in Communities of Practice, Billet (2007) emphasizes the relational role of the individual person and the community. While not dismissing the relevance of a Community of Practice, he contends individuals' histories, knowledge, and engagement are critical to learning, rather than the primacy of the social interaction (p. 56). He cautions not allowing the community "to eclipse the person" (Lave & Wenger, quoted in Billet, p. 60) and to acknowledge "it is perhaps through individuals seeking to make sense of what they know and what they want to achieve that comprises the inter-psychological negotiation. Beyond the pressure of immediate social circumstances are the agency, intentionality and subjectivity of the learner." (p. 64).

Pavlenko & Blackledge (2003) apply a similar post-structuralist framework to multilingual contexts, to "capture the complexity of identities in postmodern societies, where languages may not only be 'markers of identity' but also sites of resistance, empowerment, solidarity, or discrimination" (p. 3-4). Multilingual students at the university embody this negotiation of self and context, stepping

forward into various new spheres while bringing along the multiplicity of their existing linguistic, cultural and community allegiances. Power, hegemonic language use, and temporal aspects of context all serve to shape the emergence of new identities for students who need to negotiate their new roles at the university. Echoing Billet's (2007) assertion of individuals' agency within larger communities, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2003) insist that the negotiation of identity in multilingual contexts recognize that "individuals are agentive beings who are constantly in search of new social and linguistic resources which allow them to resist identities that position them in undesirable ways, produce new identities, and assign alternative meanings to the links between identities and linguistic varieties" (p. 27). Therefore, gaining legitimacy for L2 English users to participate, and in turn, negotiate their university position, is all the more relevant. In fact, Lave & Wenger claim that "conferring legitimacy is more important than the issue of providing teaching" (p. 92).

But how is that legitimacy gained or fostered? Shifting the focus of academic literacy coursework to academic content rather than remedial 'ESL' language proficiency is one approach. In their review of writing courses that are "situated within the college curriculum" (p. 155). Murie & Fitzpatrick (2009) describe students who find themselves "at the intersection of ESL and basic writing" (p. 154) making significant progress with their academic literacy when their still remedial coursework is highly contextualized to real academic tasks. The course includes "embedded content-based language support" (p. 157) as opposed to a traditional 'ESL' model, and the research and narrative writing

assignments acknowledge students' multilingualism as expertise and abilities rather than viewing them as deficiencies. Kutz (2004) is careful not to oversimplify "language-learning problems as discourse-learning problems" and describes how a course designed to address "meta-level understandings, and the discourse strategies that go with them" (p. 77) facilitates students' participation in the university community. SFU's Foundations of Academic Literacy Course Outline demonstrates a similar, contextualized, discursal approach. These are all examples of supporting students to "participate skilfully and flexibly in academic writing games" (Casanave, 2002, p. 7) and to "draw on multiple resources...[to] gradually develop[ed] strategies to succeed as a reader and writer in a university setting" (Spack, 2004, p. 20). This success is key to ongoing legitimizing L2 English users' participation. As "legitimate peripheral participants," L2 English users "learn not just from talk but to talk" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 108). Murie & Fitzpatrick (2009) summarize the philosophy best with, "[T]he more we can connect coursework to the real work of college, the more we will be able of reduce the stigma of ESL, and to build the genuine academic literacy needed for success" (p. 166).

Another factor for multilingual students' success is the determination of sufficient linguistic proficiency required for students to gain a toehold in these integrated course opportunities. Determining the necessary language proficiency requirements for both entry into the university and successful engagement in it is not part of the scope of this project, but seemingly in need of comment nonetheless; to ignore the English skills EAL users do have risks either idealizing

proficiencies or ignoring discrepancies between the university's requirements and students' existing capacity to meet them.

Feast (2002) examined the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores (a language proficiency measure also used by SFU Admissions) and grade point averages (GPAs) of international students enrolled in Australian universities in multiple regression analyses to determine if there was an ideal minimum threshold of language proficiency at admission to the university. While echoing IELTS' recommendation that each institution determine the language proficiency levels required of its programs (p. 71, IELTS, 2011, p. 13), Feast found that a global (average) IELTS band score of 6.0 (with minimum Reading and Writing scores of 6.0 (p. 84)) was sufficient for EAL users' academic engagement and success. She also stated that in lieu of raising test score requirements above IELTS 6.0, "a better choice may be to raise support levels for those students who gain entry at present test score levels [IELTS 6.0]" (p. 84). This is less restrictive than IELTS' own description of a band 6.0 proficiency as "English study needed" for both "linguistically demanding academic courses" and "linguistically less demanding academic courses" (IELTS 2011, p. 13). As SFU has set its own IELTS admission levels between 6.0 and 6.5 ("English study needed" for "linguistically demanding academic coursework", and "probably acceptable" for "less linguistically demanding coursework"), the relevance here is to consider the disparity between the linguistic demands of SFU's W curriculum and the minimum English proficiency requirements of students enrolled in the university. Does SFU not consider its W courses "linguistically demanding

academic coursework”? Does the university value multilingual students enough to extend the support required, and does it do so on an ongoing basis? As Lave & Wenger (1991) situate learning in the co-construction of knowledge, and identity theorists (Block, 2001; Hall, 1996; Norton, 2000) emphasize reciprocity and relationships in the process of identification and growth, supports provided by SFU can be seen as evidence of the university's investment in multilingual students. Is there enough support available to students throughout their undergraduate careers that they can fully participate in their varied courses, or is FAL alone expected to satisfy that need for the students registered in the course? In the current iteration, students streamed into FAL are blocked from registering in W courses until successful completion of FAL, placing the support in a consecutive rather than concomitant position, just outside the general curriculum. Feast (2002) is vague in not specifying the timing of the support levels she suggests (p. 84), but advocates for contextualized support and, like Murie & Fitzpatrick (2009) and Spack (2004), might argue for ongoing support or at least an opportunity to return for support rather than a one stop remediation.

The discussion of the proficiency and timing of support is of consequence to the idea of Communities of Practice because it can alleviate or exacerbate students' (lack of) engagement in the academy. If remediation is situated divorced from the “real work” of the university, participants risk being ghettoized or limited to a subaltern Community of Practice, impacting their legitimacy to participate in the larger academic context.

Following Jewson's (2007) suggestion of a multiplicity of Communities of Practice, it is plausible that multilingual students negotiate their identities in a series of Communities of Practice in any of the following academic contexts: general ESL classes at any institution, FAL at SFU, and W courses in their disciplines. What this research project seeks to illuminate is if and how multilingual students' "identity may well lie in successfully traversing many Communities of Practice" (Jewson, 2007, p. 79), and how they perceive and perform those identities as they traverse and transform into 'genuine literacy' and fully legitimate participation in their credit W courses.

And what of the change that legitimate participants bring about? Once gaining legitimacy at university, L2 English users can enhance their classmates' understanding of topics (Sieber, 2004), can critically examine culture-bound assumptions within their disciplines (Sternglass, 2004), and demand transparency and assistance from faculty that enhance overall teaching (Smoke, 2004, Sieber, 2004). Working alongside L2 English users, either as a classmate or a researcher, can have profound impact on expectations, power, and pedagogy.

In terms of Communities of Practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) maintain that "the development of identity is central to the careers of newcomers in communities of practice, and thus fundamental to the concept of legitimate peripheral participation" (p. 115). At the 'periphery' of legitimate university participation are first year undergraduate students who are in the throes of trying to determine not only who they are, but what they want to study, how they are

going to manage their time and attention, and who is beside them in this process. Marshall's (2010) study of students in his academic literacy class highlights a student's negatively stereotyped expectations of his multilingual classmates, only reversed after meaningful collaboration with one another. Waterstone's (2008) power as researcher is challenged by the subject of her case study resisting the label of 'ESL' and beginning "to take control, disrupting to a certain extent the usual power relations of the interview" (p. 59). This causes the discomfort of change and renewal that newcomers bring (Casanave, 2002; Lave & Wenger 1991). But the discomfort of change can eventually transition to renewal of the larger community, including a shift in teaching practices. Smoke (2004) recounts some of the pedagogical improvements made by faculty, such as anticipating student questions and comprehension problems, breaking assignments into more manageable chunks, and providing samples of assignments for new students to use as models (p. 72). The benefits are obvious: as Sieber (2004) points out, "[T]eaching practices that are good for ESOL students are equally good for all students" (p. 142). Change also comes about through the influence of students' writing itself. Ivanič's (1998) work examining the construction of identity through academic writing claims that influence is bilateral, with not only the academic context imposing normative practices on writing assignments, but also student work influencing those who read and study it. While influence from the periphery may take a long time, "[e]very time a writer constructs a discorsal self which draws on less privileged possibilities for self-hood they are...redefining the possibilities...available to future writers" (p. 28). Spack (2004) extends the

context of change students can bring about, stating “[I]t is important to develop strategies to facilitate students’ acquisition of academic literacy because it can give them access to power in the larger society” (p. 38). This acquisition of academic literacy and legitimate participation can gradually change both the environments in which individuals find themselves, and their own sense of identity through those transformed contexts. The phenomenon of acquiring academic literacy has been portrayed as a transformative process, drawing upon individuals’ skills, strategies, and engagement (Casanave, 2002; Ivanič, 1998). It is not a decontextualized, stable skill. Nor is identity simple and essentialized. Both are complex, multifaceted processes that inform one another and warrant continued investigation and research. Using a critical Community of Practice lens to investigate students’ transformations and perception of selves in the university institution should provide evidence of the roles students accept, create or reject for themselves while engaged in the academic discourse. There are similar patterns of challenge and development in the processes of academic writing, identity formation, and social participation that investigating them concomitantly should illuminate their complex interrelationship.

In this study, I challenge the idea that simply gaining admission into the university results in or even necessitates gaining admission into a coherent Community of Practice. Further to the critiques of Community of Practice above (Billet, 2007, Jewson, 2007) the university community as a whole cannot be seen as a monolithic entity that gradually folds newcomers (undergraduate students) into its realm, conferring legitimacy as they near its academic heart (larger

academic engagement and degree confirmation). I explore the role of academic writing, a fundamental medium of the university, as a negotiated form of engagement between multilingual students and the university.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

As the purpose for this research project was exploratory in nature, a qualitative, rather than quantitative, approach was chosen. Casanave (2002) writes of her interviews with burgeoning writers leading to “self-discovery...from in-depth open interviews- the learning that happens as people listen to themselves put feelings and experiences into words- contribut[ing] both to the clarity and complexity with which people...view key issues in their lives.” (p. 33) In discussing identity, I needed to provide the space for my research participants to articulate their identities and transformations. I wanted to give participants an opportunity to speak openly and not limit their responses to quantifiable, yet restricted options. I wanted an opportunity to sit with students and hear what they had to say and to speak and listen to them more than once, as well as analyse their written work. Thus, qualitative research interviews and text analysis seemed the most conducive method for this quest.

With similar features of being situated, contextualized and strategic, qualitative research methodology can be seen as a subset or a particular branch of academic literacy. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) present qualitative research as “the process of knowing through conversations is intersubjective and social, involving interviewer and interviewee as co-constructors of knowledge” (p. 18). This social, discursive practice parallels the production of genre-specific academic writing. Graue (2006) describes both the process and importance of

writing educational research as "...an elaborate performance of identity that connects an author and his or her work to a community....If we think of how writing is part of the process of affiliation within scholarly communities, then rather than being merely researchers or social scientists, researchers who write are also authors who work through language." (p. 516). Both qualitative research and academic writing are practiced within communities with their own discursive and normative processes . Researchers' major concerns, however, involve not only the practical elements of completing the work, but ethical implications of whom they engage and how they represent their subjects in the new knowledge. Both issues can be largely addressed through establishing guiding principles that enable both planning and flexibility. The flexibility is required to pursue worthwhile lines of inquiry that come up during the interview process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Mason, 1996; Waterstone, 2008); essentially, to appropriately respond to the context. The planning is being "strategic" (Mason, 1996, p.1) so that the research not only avoids exhausting resources, but adheres to the question being investigated. Where L2 English users may revert to superficial linguistic issues when struggling with intimidating texts (Kutz, 2004, p. 77), Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) warn beginning researchers that "content and purpose precede method" (p. 191). They encourage researchers to be attentive to statements and nuances in interviews with participants that may lead to fruitful discoveries, instead of being beholden to prescriptive methodology that might limit engagement and co-construction of knowledge with participants. The sidelining of method in favour of content and purpose is a function of "knowledge

constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee” (p. 2) where there may need to be back and forth in the questions and comments during an interview, and between initial plans and reactions to contexts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Mason, 1996). Shifts in lines of inquiry, however, cannot stray from ethics. Representing participants’ revelations involves being mindful of the implications of power relations, bias and the impact of participation on subjects themselves. In this study, I emphasised my role as student with participants, at times sharing learning resources and institutional supports with students.

In her candid account of self-transformation , Waterstone (2008) describes how her initial research plan shifted significantly based on the surprising and challenging responses given to her preliminary questions. Waterstone not only acquiesced to the “power shift” (p. 59) in the process of conducting the research, but grants it in her published portrayal. The researcher’s power may not be so humbly shared if researchers confine themselves to narrow, culture-bound conventions of communication (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) or ignore their own biases. Mason (1996) argues that “a researcher cannot be neutral, or objective, or detached, from the knowledge and evidence they are generating. Instead, they should seek to understand their role in that process” (p. 6). Pressing the point of inherent bias when dealing with people and language, with reference to critical and feminist researchers, Talmy (2009) supports the argument, stating, “no analysis can be free of the analyst’s interests, however explicitly political or implicitly ‘neutral’ they may be” (p. 182). Mason (1996) also argues researchers “should think about the sources of [their] criteria for judging what is moral or

ethical, and recognize that these sources are unlikely to be neutral and apolitical” (p. 30).

Both analysis and representation are issues in how to transcribe research interviews appropriately. In general terms, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) claim that a transcription is only a shadow of the interview; the full meaning is/was in the interview, in the interpersonal “lived situation” (p. 191-3). Specific to L2 English users, moreover, researchers have to carefully weigh how best to transcribe interviews. Marshall’s (2010) decision to present his first year academic literacy course (ALC) students’ statements in “original form without correction” (p. 43) aptly demonstrates both the authenticity and sophistication of his multicultural, multiliterate students. On the other hand, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) warn that verbatim transcription may stigmatize participants’ language use, which some may parallel with lowered intellect (see also Spack, 2004).

I felt the best way to mitigate against these ethical dilemmas was to ensure a discursive approach to interview research, with the principle of knowledge co-construction at the forefront. When initial interview transcriptions go back to the interviewee for checking, they can be a catalyst for deeper discussion and analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Waterstone, 2008). Engaging research subjects as fellow learners employs Lave and Wenger’s model of a Community of Practice (1991), illustrated in Spack’s (2004) case study subject indicating how much she learned from participating in the longitudinal research.

## **Procedure: What I did and why**

This qualitative research project employed a series of interviews to explore the transition from foundational, additive credit coursework to writing-intensive, credit coursework. The rationale for exploring the relatively short term experience of undergraduate study is that “consistent positioning over time...establishes more enduring identities for individuals and groups.” (Worthman in DeCosta, 2010, p. 776). I interviewed 9 undergraduate students at SFU over two semesters to explore the transition from foundational to discipline-specific work, and to mine students’ narratives of that transition for themes of personal identity, identification with the academy, and growth.

This research project began with opening interviews with participants while they were enrolled in SFU’s Foundations of Academic Literacy (FAL) course, and concluded with follow up interviews once some of those same students were enrolled in a writing intensive course (W-course). In the initial interview, participants were asked about their own academic and linguistic history, their experience of the FAL course, cohort and status at the university, and how they identified themselves with any of these aspects. These interviews occurred individually so participants’ responses were free of peer influence. Participants were invited to return for follow up interviews to further explore these themes upon enrolment in their W-course. The participants were also asked to provide me with samples of their written work for secondary analysis. I wanted to see if students’ written work exemplified issues raised in the interviews, consolidating their thoughts and adding validity and depth to the research.

The interviews with students were recorded for transcription and review (debrief) with the participants. Transcription enabled coding of themes of responses and facilitated further discussion, including confirmation or refutation of the issues raised with the participants. Reviewing the content of the first interview at the start of the second interview also served as a springboard for deeper analysis and discussion of students' identities and academic writing.

## **Participants**

The participants in this project were all recruited from FAL classes. This cohort of students was chosen to locate students who were already in a particular community of practice within the larger university context, and who were well represented by multilingual students with whom I wanted to engage. I made arrangements with FAL instructors to attend and present to their students at a convenient time in the semester. In all, I attended 13 FAL classes between the Summer 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters. When presenting to the classes, I introduced myself as a graduate student and sessional instructor at SFU, the purpose and scope of my research project, and distributed a written summary of my research, and a 'permission to contact' sheet. (Please see Appendix C for the documents used in recruiting research participants). In several classes, I received one or two completed volunteer participant contact sheets. In others, I received none at all. I did, however, include my own contact information on the sheet, and received emails from interested participants well after my presentation to their class.

While recruiting participants for this study, I was struck by how little student engagement there was. My study did request two interviews of approximately 45 minutes in length, and I made a point of acknowledging that everyone was busy and I would do my best to accommodate participants' schedules. But I would recruit in two or three FAL classes before receiving any participant interest. In one class, a Caucasian female dismissively returned the introductory letter and form back to me, stating she would not participate as she was "from here." In another class, a student asked, "What's in it for me?" Another asked if she could get some of her required Psychology research participant credit through volunteering for my research. I repeated that I was obliged to honour the confidentiality of my participants, but could confirm her participation in research with her permission if she wished. She seemed to feel it was not worth her time without a guarantee of credit for her participation. These students, as well as all those who did not respond in any way, demonstrated a distinct lack of engagement with the community of research around them.

I also traveled to the other campuses of SFU: SFU Surrey and Harbour Centre. In each presentation I promised to return to those campuses if it made an interview there more convenient for participants, and I was peppered with many questions about the purpose, scope and procedure of my research. A few students seemed quite interested in my work, but those who did provide me with completed permission to contact forms never replied to my voice or email messages and those who promised to contact me never did.

It seems to me the lack of willingness to volunteer can be blamed on more than the time constraints of modern life. I wonder if students really identify with the university's research (in addition to its teaching) role, and their own place in it. Is academic research really a part of these students' "imagined community" to which they aspire (Kanno & Norton 2003)? The following comment from an instructor perhaps best sums up my suspicion: "Sorry to hear about your lack of student response. I know this is probably of little consolation, but I don't find students identifying with MUCH at the university today...sigh..." (E. Lee, personal correspondence, Oct. 13, 2010). If not seeing themselves as researchers one day, it is the keenest, most altruistic students who volunteer, limiting the representation of student voices in this study to some of the strongest and most engaged participants.

The students who did follow through with their willingness were a varied group, with 3 male and 7 female students ultimately participating in interviews. A few students spoke 3 or more languages, but the mother tongues identified by the students were Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish and Farsi. Please see Appendix D for further details.

In this research project, the participants' statements gave me so much to think about and invigorated both my research and practice; just as important was how discussing my synthesis of their initial statements was to demonstrate how integral their participation was to the success of my own academic endeavours. This was therefore my attempt at showing them how my work was contingent upon their statements, hopefully giving the students' participation in the larger

university community a broader scope and legitimacy. These “methodological implications” (Mason, 1996, p. 19) of conducting and participating in research can therefore be opportunities for learning and growth, opportunities to extend academic literacy practices, and opportunities to narrate a more cohesive sense of self.

### **Ethical concerns**

As per ethical standards established by the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University, my research project guaranteed the confidentiality of my participants (both in identifying personal information with their FAL instructors and/or as to whether they participated or not). As well, students were told at both recruitment presentations and when they came for their interviews they were free to withdraw at any time. (Please see Appendix C for the Informed consent forms for research participants). While there was no risk to students for participating, there was some benefit to them, as sometimes the discussion around being a student and writing engendered increased engagement and identification with university coursework. I also took the opportunity to remind the participants who indicated they were struggling that there were supports available to them at SFU, namely the Student Learning Commons and instructors' office hours. One of my research participants also sent me a draft essay to read and review in each semester (FAL and W courses), separate from the 'free' narrative writing samples I requested.

## **CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS**

### **General findings**

I collected data from students under 3 major themes: their language use, their identity, and their writing to address my research questions:

Research Questions:

- How do multilingual students making the transition from foundational academic literacy to writing intensive learning perceive and perform identities?
- To what extent do these processes of identity construction reflect, challenge, and reproduce institutional discourses around the following: multilingualism, linguistic competence, and academic literacy?

I introduced these themes both in my recruitment presentations to the FAL classes, and at the start of my individual interviews. I wanted to reinforce the major themes of my research so we could keep them front of mind in our conversations and let them guide us if the interview threatened to veer too far off topic. In attempting to establish an atmosphere of co-construction of knowledge, I wanted my research participants to be empowered as the expert contributors, and to have them confident in both their role and the purpose of my research. I reminded students that they were the experts of their experience, and to use my

research themes as ideas to start discussion, not limit it. I hoped that establishing clear themes would give them freedom to explore the topics with me. Please see Appendix E for the Interview Questions I used.

In the first interview, I asked about the students' use of languages, including their history of learning and using English. Students had varied educational histories, but generally saw performing in English as a means to success in their future lives. To characterize their identities, however, my participants did not look so much to the future as their past and present. As discussed previously, defining "identity" is messy and unstable for the theorists, and it was no easier explaining what I wanted to know in my research when I really did not want to put words in my participants' mouths or project any assumptive identities on to them.

The following is an excerpt from my interview with Miriam to illustrate the discussion around identity, after having discussed language use and affiliation.

- Jennifer: ...I want to tie it into talking about language use, and now your personal identity. Okay, and, um, can you tell me about your identity-who is Miriam?
- Miriam: Oh, that's a difficult question! Umm, I'm Miriam!  
[laughs]
- Jennifer: Uh-hum.
- Miriam: I'm a Persian girl, that's, um, has been grown up with a very, very rich literature, culture, music, and, um, I also believe in God, and I also- I'm also a Muslim, and- and I am happy girl. I love to learn many things about other cultures, or other people around me. And, yeah.
- Jennifer: Okay, that is a lot. That's good. Fantastic! And so, in all those things, which one of those is strongest for you as to how you identify yourself?

Miriam: Being Persian.

After working to establish the scope of what identity could encompass in the first interview, having a subsequent interview to explore transitions facilitated a more natural, yet reflective exploration. Lastly, we discussed writing. Few liked writing in any language, and there was universal discomfort with academic writing in English.

In the second interview with my participants, I checked my understanding of their statements from the first interview, asked what may have changed since then, and explored how they were doing in their Writing Intensive courses. Students also spent a few minutes at the end of the second interview writing freely about any of the topics touched on in our conversations in free narrative writing.

The biggest finding of my interviews is that the multilingual students who volunteered to participate in my research are undergraduate students like any others; they are navigating their first years of university, meeting new people, juggling assignments, coming to terms with the expectations of post-secondary education, rethinking their majors, and figuring out who they are and who they want to be. Their academic literacy and identity are undergoing transition.

Evidence of transition was seen from one interview to the next, and from FAL to W courses. Students spoke of not only who they felt they were, but of how they did or did not fit in to the various contexts of campus life. Some accepted and internalized particular roles, and others worked hard to break

moulds. The work of negotiating their academic and social selves wasn't tidy, easy or even easily recognizable as transformational all the time.

### **Private and Public Identity**

At the first interview, conducted while the students were taking FAL, most students identified themselves by their country of origin and first language.

(Please see Appendix D for a reference table of research participants). With one notable exception, the students' sense of selves seemed as much in relation to other groups as anything; they had the most to say when I asked how they thought others thought of or identified them. They felt they were seen variously as "good students", "diligent", "undergraduate", "business orientated", "Chinese-Canadian", "Hong Kong person", "Vancouverite", "quiet in class", "chatty, pretty outgoing, sometimes funny." There were no constants, except that like in Waterstone's (2008) case study, none of them identified themselves as "ESL." Nor did they typically self-identify as international students, hinting at an underlying stigma to which I will return later.

At the second interview, occurring in a subsequent semester once these same students were enrolled in a W course, most of my participants indicated their sense of self remained stable, and there had been little change. They obviously still had the same mother tongue and cultural background with which they had quickly initially identified themselves, and still relied on these factors to determine their core identity. They confirmed that the notes I had taken on their individual senses of identity and their senses of others' identification of them remained the same from the first interview to the second. Students expressed

little change in themselves: Jeremy insisted “I will never change,” and Scott claimed “I’ve stayed the same.”

I realize a limitation of this study was in its duration; I wonder if there had really been enough time between the first and second interviews to observe much growth. Simply due to the pragmatic design of this research study, I collected data from one semester to the next. I didn’t extend data collection through to students’ final year of study, at which point there would have been more time to have confronted various challenges (Block, 2007) and more opportunity to “construct[s] a discorsal self” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 28), at least as participants in the university.

The exception to the reliance on mother tongue and country of origin to identify oneself came from Miriam, a slightly older student who identified herself not only by her country, but its rich cultural history, her religion and her interest in other cultures and people. I expect that the broader scope of factors she included in her identity came from her maturity, her marriage, and her involvement in campus activities to engage young women in her male dominated faculty.

To further delve into the idea of identity, I asked my research participants if there were groups with which they identified. FAL and W courses rely on discorsal practices for students to develop a sense of belonging to their particular academic community, and this line of questioning sought to explore where students saw themselves in relation to other students or student groups at the university. As mentioned above, it was not the role of international student to

which these students attached or “sutured” themselves (Hall, 1996, p. 3). Laurie, who seemed more comfortable with ambiguity and critical self analysis, referred to herself as a “skipper”, having the ability to move from group to group with relative ease. She is fluent in Cantonese and English, but felt her repeated relocation throughout her public schooling interrupted her learning. While she confirmed she felt this moving was a hindrance, she acknowledged that it gave her the ability to observe, analyse, and adapt to various social situations. Laurie claimed she could readily recognize “people who are really new” and listed what she termed “boundaries” such as (oral) fluency, physical separation, and “disrespectful” first language use that students could cross over time. In her interview, Laurie repeatedly referred to newcomers in the third person, demonstrating what Kubota (1999), calls “othering” and her desire to distinguish herself from this maladjusted state. This is illustrative of Billet’s (2007) contention of the “uniquely shaped nature of the person and personal. This arises through ongoing negotiation between the individual and the social throughout individuals’ life histories or ontogenies and serves to mediate subsequent immediate experiences” (p. 59). Laurie drew on her own experience of being new repeatedly through her public schooling to recognize characteristics of not belonging, and compartmentalized that old aspect of her identity. When I asked if she identified with any particular group of students on campus, she replied, “not unless I *have* to.” She felt she had left the “community of newcomers” behind and had negotiated her way into a more legitimate position.

Michelle, an immigrant to Canada, also described distinctions between groups, indicating a hierarchy of interaction and movement from 'international student' to 'immigrant' to 'mainstream'. She claimed that,

the values are slightly different...that's why international students, like, prefer staying with their groups...They stay in the circle...cause their views are different and then the, the group, the mainland group, with the international and the immigrants, there's some other difference[s].

She articulated her claim that the group designation was permanent, but adaptation to context possible with the following explanation: "...It's not like change my group; it's that I can fit in there, like, so ... I can change my, change my situation." Adaptation may be recognized, but these students recognize a deeper, negative association with being outside the mainstream.

Other students' statements articulated how much they, too, internalized the idea of "other" and international student, and wished to disassociate themselves from these subaltern states. Jeremy referred to himself as "...very typical Asian kid who studied abroad in Canada..." yet made a point of saying how he managed this opportunity is atypical, contrasting who he may *be* from what he *does*. He portrayed himself as "...not a normal Asian kid who does not open up to everyone else and just stay in the room and study all day." He spoke of working hard to overcome this stereotype, his rationale being, "Canadian friends don't really like to make friends with international students." He worked to learn about and adapt to his new surroundings, and became proficient enough in cultural expectations here that he has to "squeeze" his Canadian self when he

visits China. Where Laurie identified and “skipped” between groups of students at SFU, Jeremy worked to fit in to the prevailing surroundings in various contexts.

Scott further acknowledged the impact of identification with or being identified with particular groups, as illustrated by his comments, where he complained about Mandarin speakers being loud and others staring at them.

Jennifer: It sounds to me that you don't want to be identified with them. You're trying to distance yourself from speaking Mandarin and being considered a Mandarin speaker.

Scott: Yes, actually. It's kind of racist, actually. But then, yeah, I don't like being them. I don't like being a group, a part of them. I don't know why!

These various personal recounts exemplify the messy process that identity and identification can be. Some students are clearly clinging or “longing” to maintain coherence in their sense of self (Casanave, 2002, Phan 2008) while others are “embracing ambiguity” (Ilieva, 2001) and letting their sense of self be “fluid” (Block, 2007, p. 3) and responsive to their various contexts. Where Block positions the individual looking inwards to resolve the “ambivalence” of “simultaneous affirmation and negation” (p. 21-22) of these influences, Hall (1996) claims it is negotiating with external factors where identification occurs. It would seem that both internal identity and external identification shape these multilingual students, but my interviews with them also revealed the importance of the larger context in shaping who they are *not*.

The use of formative feedback and revision of writing assignments in FAL and W courses may well satisfy the goal of learning through writing, but the issue

of belonging, or rather not belonging, is more complex. Identifying with the academic discourse and community requires more than course-specific assessment and both reflects and challenges the assumptive labels members of the university project onto multilingual students.

### **Larger contexts**

While none of the participants identified themselves as international students, I do not believe this was an oversight of an obvious category; students brought up the term and topic in most interviews, and some took care to distinguish themselves from groups of students who use languages other than English on campus. Miriam expressed exasperation with her FAL classmates who did not participate actively in class and passed up opportunities to practise English with an attentive instructor. Jeremy uses English as a default language on campus, even with his Chinese friends, only acquiescing when challenged for “showing off” or being “strange”. Scott described how he feels use of languages other than English on campus was “disrespectful”, and how he makes a point of using English “...just to make everyone understands that I’m not saying something bad.” But he relishes being considered “special” or “different” socially, and is pushing himself to stand out academically as well. Both reflect the view of English as the default language of the academy, requiring these students to abandon what could be a parallel discourse of legitimate intellectual engagement in their first language(s). It may also be an example of these students acquiescing to English as “the language of hegemonic institutions because both

the dominant and the subordinated group misrecognize it as a superior language.” (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2003, p.10-11)

While these students contrast themselves against the first language use of some of their peers, they do not necessarily identify with whom they call “locals.” Jeremy expressed frustration with people who haven’t traveled, claiming they “shut down” when in unfamiliar or challenging intercultural situations. He claims they don’t need to understand, but he feels “... sometimes I still think you should experience something else than your own culture.” There seems to be a sense of superiority that the multicultural, multilingual students’ repertoire of experience and expertise exceeds not only the “international student” category, but the “local” student group as well.

### **Situating the self in the larger context: Identification with the institution of the university**

#### **The “local” label at university**

While some students demonstrated ambition to surpass limiting labels at the university, Kailey expressed a decidedly different perspective. Having spent some elementary school years in Canada and other years in an English private school in China, she was educated in both countries and both languages. She (and the university) does not consider her an international student, as she has a Canadian passport. However, she wished the university *did not* consider her a local student, as the label assumes she has local knowledge. The following excerpt illustrates her point:

Well, I actually want other people to see me as an international student. It's ' cause there's only two categories to choose from: local and international. So I would want other people to see me as an international student, cause, ... you know, international students always get more information. People expect me to know a lot, when I don't!

...I totally think they [the university] should do something for, you know, people like me. Like, I'm stuck in the middle. I'm Canadian, but I study my, uh, like, high school, middle school in China...[we're] Canadian; [we] want to come back for University. So you can't put us really in the local student category and you can't really put us in the international either. Like, I think they should, umm, I don't know, think of something for us.

This shows how inadequate the university's tidy, binary categories are at reflecting the complexity of the modern student body.

Kailey expressed how she was happy when TAs and instructors assumed she was an international student, as she felt this was a handicap that lowered the bar of expectations in her academic work, particularly her writing. She was enrolled concomitantly in a FAL and W course, and expressed a bias toward what Leung, Harris & Rampton (1997) call the "idealized native speaker." In our interview, she contrasted "this difference between our writing and what could be your writing, or maybe, like, a Canadian student writing...a native speaker...We just want to feel like that." It seemed that until she could achieve that particular, idealized standard, she did not want to be held to it by the university.

### **English as a weapon or resource?**

The lucrative power of native or strong speakers of English manifests itself not only in standards of written assignments, but in group projects as well.

Miriam described an experience where she was the project manager of a group project assignment, and she had to follow up with a classmate who had excellent English, but poor time management skills. She recounts:

When I wanted to contact her and talk about why you do not do your job, on time, on the schedule and she used some complicated words that I understand she knows that I do not understand them. *And the English was a weapon against me.* And it was really hard for me in that sense...I little bit lose my confidence in my courses. (my emphasis)

While she succeeded in attaining an A- for the course, she seemed haunted by her sense of powerlessness compared to a student with stronger English. She articulated this sense of inadequacy with "...when you know maybe you just think in the moment, wow, if you have better, if you were better in your English, you would be much, much better in your academic studies." Miriam, despite consistently strong academic results, seems to fall prey to Zamel & Spack's (2004) warning against "conflating of linguistic proficiency with intellectual ability" (p. xi).

While the original purpose of FAL came from a remedial approach to fill the gap in students' language proficiency, the current iteration of the course focuses more on academic literacy. The distinction is important not only in terms of the course's philosophical underpinnings, but the students' perception of the course. Kailey expressed frustration that her FAL instructor assumed too high a level of English language proficiency; she had voluntarily enrolled in the course to improve her academic writing, but felt that her instructor misjudged the gaps in students' abilities. She expressed it thus:

But [the] teacher hasn't thought about one problem is that why are we taking this class? It's cause our English is not good, right? And while we're learning things like, you know, summary, paraphrasing, things we don't know! That's why we learn it, right?...But when we get to into the main points...the main point you see is actually different from the main point we see, 'cause our English level is different...Like we all know that the teacher's is better, but like, *how* did you get your main point? *Why* is this the main point?...I don't need the conclusion! I want the process, cause if you just give me the conclusion, I will know, but what about the pattern? (emphasis in the original)

Kailey seemed to reject the opportunity within FAL to “connect coursework to the real work of college” (Murie & Fitzpatrick 2009, p. 166) falling back on old models of language ‘training’ distinct from usage (Benesch, 2009; Spack, 2004).

However, Marshall (2010) explored students' experience with the phenomenon of ACL students “re-becoming ESL,” where instead of looking for additional academic literacy support at university, they felt sidelined into remedial language coursework they thought they had left behind in high school. Jeremy felt the stigma with his Chinese friends, explaining that while he does not feel the stigma with his ‘Canadian’ friends, “...when I'm with a group of Chinese friends, I'm probably a little too shy that I took FAL...I'm not stupid enough to say I took FAL last semester to them!”

FAL's additive course credit designation had drawbacks felt in subsequent semesters for other students; Laurie, while happy with how her high mark in FAL improved her overall GPA, explained how she was prevented from enrolling in certain courses towards her major with her cohort of classmates and friends because she didn't have the required number of credits. She felt left behind in

her academic progress, and worried about being unsupported when she did enrol in the required courses without her peers to form study groups.

In addition to “provid[ing] learners with a variety of opportunities to practice, develop, and apply in context, their academic literacy skills” the FAL course’s stated goals are “for learners to feel safe in the university classroom and to increase confidence to take on further studies.” (SFU FAL website). Several students in this study gained confidence through recognition of content, and the opportunity to revise their work.

Scott claimed FAL was easier than grade 12 English, as his FAL instructor was not as particular about punctuation as his high school teacher had been. However, he found FAL helpful to learn how to cite properly, and that he “got a lot of feedback and then [I know] how to improve now. Another part is we have to redo the essay after we do revising. I think that part actually helped me!” Enrolled in 6 pre-engineering courses at the time of our second interview, Scott also credited his FAL experience with enabling him to express himself more easily and quickly in his W course. Miriam echoed the importance of revision, stating that, “when we become aware of your mistakes, next time it is easier to fix them.”

Dominic, a Spanish-speaking student who completed grades 10 to 12 at a local international high school, felt that FAL did most for his confidence and clarity. He did well on his provincial English 12 exam, but still claimed “...maybe if I would have gone without doing the FAL class, I would be lost.”

## **Change and growth: Two steps forward, one step back**

Despite successful completion of FAL, some students still feel lost in their university coursework. Cindy, enrolled in a Philosophy W course after receiving a final grade of A- in her FAL class, floundered in her writing assignments. She recounted seeing improvement from first to final draft, but expressed her “...difficulty is with type of argument required. But my grammar isn’t so good...In Philosophy course we need to really think, deeply think about something. I’m not good at creation. Creation [of] argument.” She expressed frustration at how her TA can’t find her thesis statement, and doesn’t feel there’s enough time to revise between drafts of her writing assignments.

Yvonne simply stated “writing scares me” and her success in FAL was “not good enough for writing courses.” She factors supplementary help into her plans to manage: “I have to pay for a tutor in order to help me so it’s kinda like a university fee.”

Laurie, who had stated that she felt she engaged with the topics in her FAL class more passionately than most, still did not see the extension of her FAL writing practice to the dialogues of her Philosophy W course. She complained how little guidance she got from her TA, her sense of disengagement illustrated in her statement, “That’s why I don’t like it when they don’t tell you what they really want. So, like my philosophy group; it’s a joke. I have no idea what I’m writing.”

Lastly, one student in my study did not pass FAL. Michelle went to another post secondary institution to take a financial planning certificate, but

plans on returning to SFU upon its completion. Despite her setback, she still identifies enough with the university to keep in touch with me through my research project and return to SFU for another try.

Despite these challenges, or more likely due to them, students expressed growth and development of not only their academic literacy and engagement, but ultimately their senses of selves. When I asked about their sense of identity near the beginning of both interviews, students expressed little change in themselves. Jeremy insisted he'd "never change," yet later described how he was proud of taking his first W course in the English department, where most of his friends were too intimidated to do so.

Acknowledging her low marks in her first semester were fair, Yvonne was therefore reading ahead and preparing for midterms in her second term.

Scott, buried in his 6 courses, realized he needed to engage with the world around him a little more, "Cause if I just keep using Cantonese, I'm not gonna learn any English at all."

Cindy acknowledged that writing forced her to create new ideas, and while she struggled to articulate her argument in essays, she was able to clearly voice her goals of becoming more independent and self-reliant in our conversations.

Laurie, who was frustrated with the TA who did not answer her question directly, recognized how

nothing is ever laid out for you. It's not like your whole life is going to be...laid out...They tell you, they kinda lead you to this path, but, to take the path, and to acknowledge what you're experiencing, that's all on your own. I

kinda want someone to guide me. Maybe you'll get there, maybe you won't. If you want to take a detour, take it yourself...you're on your own, man.

While these students had originally said they had not changed, their anecdotes above illustrate the gradual transformations they were making as they negotiated their way through challenges. Block (2007) claims that making choices to resolve underlying conflicts is what creates a coherent personal narrative; negotiating demanding courses, resolving to improve unsatisfying results, and reconciling the desire for self determination over guidance are prime examples of opportunities for transformation. While these typical undergraduate tensions may not have *changed* their identities, facing the challenges facilitated growth. In discussing and reflecting on these experiences, perhaps their senses of self and identity will catch up and be reinforced.

However, the challenges, both academic and to personal coherence, continue. Academic success and confidence create their own tension for some of these students. For example, despite her A-, Miriam experienced a tremendous loss of confidence dealing with a more (linguistically) 'powerful' classmate. Cindy relied on her letter grade to determine her success, regardless of how much she herself felt she understood of the coursework.

In the narrative writing sample she produced after our second interview, Yvonne wrote the following discouraged statements:

Throughout the conversation, we talked alot about studies and lives. For me, it was like a reflection of who I really am in the university. I wish I am a 'white' girl in Canada, so there won't be too much difficulties that I find in lives. If I can be one of those kids who born in Canada, it would take less time for me to read

the textbooks and do the assignments. In my future, I don't think I will neither own a business nor have a job in Canada as English is not my first language and it makes me not strong enough to compete with the others.

It seemed that students did not necessarily trust themselves with determining their academic and intellectual selves, to themselves or to others. These particular examples may show a more passive, accepting or attributed identity rather than a negotiated, constructed one (Block, 2007). I would hope that they are still in transition, and the reconciliation simply incomplete rather than aborted.

## **Writing**

### **Academic Writing**

Academic writing was used as a frame through which emerging identity could be explored because it is a common way in which university students are assessed, and because it is an intimidating prospect to so many students, especially EAL users. Situating my research in a group transitioning from a foundational course to a Writing Intensive course focused the parameters of my research, giving us a topic to explore in our conversations. Where identity can be nebulous and abstract, academic writing, while at times still abstract, did not need to be defined before discussing. It was much easier to ask "What do you write?" and "Do you feel readers are able to understand what you really want to say in your writing?" than to ask "How do you identify yourself?" More important, it was easier to *answer* the former questions than the latter.

A history to this approach can be found in Casanave's (2002) research, exploring how EAL writers', "writing practices interact with and contribute to their evolving identities" (p. xiii). Locating identity formation within academic writing makes it "situated and local" and serves as a platform to discuss my underlying question of how multilingual students are doing at university. This is where students could, theoretically at least, see their challenges and growth over a series of writing assignments, articulating not only their ideas, but themselves in the process.

The stated purpose of W courses also supports the idea of formative feedback leading to growth; please see Appendix A for the complete list of standard W course criteria. These criteria rely on formative dialogue between instructor and students, informing one another of the learning process. While perhaps still developing its academic tone, that dialogue in turn relies on communication that is confident and coherent. W courses, and their implementation, made a point of distinguishing themselves from remedial, foundational work, necessitating FAL. With FAL successfully completed, were the multilingual students in this project able to engage with and benefit from the discursive design of W courses? Were they enabled to participate as legitimate peripheral participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the university context?

I would be remiss in moving ahead with analyzing my findings if I did not better contextualize students' interaction with W coursework and their instructors. Practising academics today speak of learning to write through "osmosis," further characterized by Strachan (2008) in her research and eventual implementation of

W courses at SFU, that, "For all the faculty interviewed, it seemed that the process of the acquisition of their particular disciplinary discourse was so embedded in their apprenticeship in the discipline that it was invisible to them." (p. 142). This conjures images of real engagement with not only the discipline, but the experts in the field. I anticipate a sense of personal, reciprocal engagement as portrayed in Lave & Wenger's (1991) *Community of Practice*; newcomers gradually moving from (legitimate) periphery to "participating roles in expert performances." (p. 17). However, where Leung, Rampton and Harris (1997) warn against idealising native speakers, we must also be wary of idealizing the educational opportunities of the university. We cannot overlook the very real demands on universities and professors, nor the role of Teaching Assistants as frontline providers of not only instruction, but of formative feedback in writing.

In addition to disclosing their experiences as undergraduate students in our interviews, some participants also shared their W course assignments and feedback with me. Cindy, who acknowledged struggling with argument, showed me a draft of a short philosophy paper with feedback from a TA. There was a grading rubric at the end of the assignment that allowed the marker to place the student's performance of certain criteria along a spectrum of proficiency; this TA circled the lowest standard of proficiency, "needs a lot of work" for the criteria of thesis statement, being on topic, argument, clarity, grammar and overall quality. There were also comments on the draft itself, focusing on the incorrect use of definite articles for proper nouns, verb choice and collocating prepositions;

“grammar” was underlined several times and followed with many exclamation points. But feedback ended a page and a half into the 4- page assignment, with the remainder blank and seemingly unread. Cindy couldn’t understand why the TA couldn’t follow her argument or find her thesis statement, and was too discouraged and frustrated to go back to the Teaching Assistant for help. She stated she felt, “this feedback is too abstract, not concrete.” There seemed to be a sense of mutual frustration in the relationship between Cindy and the TA, perhaps characterizing a lack of engagement from each of them in their contribution, or even participation in the discipline. The result for Cindy was a lack of confidence and legitimacy.

Laurie, too, expressed frustration with one of her TAs, whose “thick accent” and poor grammar made her difficult to understand. She highlighted part of the irony, that is, “The funny thing is, I understand the prof way better than her...even though the tutorial is trying to make sense of the prof is saying. I understand him [the professor] way better than her.” While acknowledging the TA as an EAL user herself, Laurie did not identify with her or even extend legitimacy to the TA’s position at the university. She, too, seemed to want that “idealized native speaker” (Leung, Rampton & Harris, 1997) to guide her/interact with, and pegged her TA’s academic legitimacy to her linguistic (in)sufficiency. (Benesch, 2009; Zamel & Spack, 2004).

Some students did acknowledge improvement in their writing through W courses; Miriam reported that not only was her vocabulary range wider, writing was easier in general. She wrote:

I've found SFU very useful and helpful in my academic studies and my desires from university. SFU will give you so many options and opportunities to build your skills and it totally depends on the person whether or not using these options....Being in an English environment is so different from learning it through classes and practices out of an English environment.

Scott and Jeremy, too, felt so much practice had made their writing easier. Instead of being dreaded, writing assignments were becoming part of their repertoires of competencies.

Kailey, taking a Communications W course at the same time as her FAL course, was surprised by her success in her writing assignments. She scored much higher than her classmates, even the "Canadian" ones (her designation) but had no idea why. When I asked her if perhaps her ideas had been clear, she insisted that she was a "low level" writer who did not have the sophisticated, "difficult words" she felt necessary to be a good academic writer. She made a distinction between clarity of ideas and the language skills required to convey them, and did not identify herself as a competent academic writer.

Without prompting, Laurie alluded to Casanave's (2002) "organizing metaphor" of academic writing, and by extension, academic success, as a game. She recounted how a TA for one of her courses was poorly organized and with weak English language skills, so she did not feel much pressure in preparing her

written assignments. She contrasted this with another TA, for whom she would do more careful work, stating, “he seems, kinda like, top notch, needs everything perfect.” She characterizes this relationship to her TAs, the intermediary between her work and the academy, as,

So in a way, I guess it’s about who’s marking it. That’s actually how I write most of my things. That’s the trick you gotta learn. Knowing...I mean, it’s important that you have your own ideas, but it’s also important to make sure you know what your TA or prof likes. That could be why I got a good mark in FAL. I kinda followed what he [the instructor] wanted, not what I wanted.

Some might characterize this portrayal of academic success as pragmatic or even cynical. Casanave (2002) calls it “situated survival” (p. 52); developing “strategic social and interpretive skills” (p. 53) is necessary to adapt to the various demands of assignments, professors, disciplines and goals. Instead of relying on a stable set of formulae, successful students are able to respond to shifting contexts. They can identify with a variety of positions and grow into them. Instead of a singular Community of Practice at the university, this relative positioning suggests that individual students “skip” in and out of engagement with the academy, depending on the course, instructor, criteria, and ultimately, investment. I would also suggest that the university itself reserves complete legitimization of participation for the few students who engage with a much more limited community of practitioners who research and publish within a more tightly bound Community of Practice.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS**

The idea or analogy of writing and identity formation as parallel processes has been hinted at in both this study and the literature, but it is too rigid a structure to reflect the complexities of students' experiences. Instead of tidy threads of themes woven together, I find they are tangled and intertwined, pulling at one another and reflecting the vibrant 'mess' that learning and life can be.

### **Unparalleled Progress**

My general interest throughout this project was to explore how multilingual students were doing at university. Were they just getting by or getting something out of their studies? Did their experiences of writing through FAL and W courses transform their writing enough to ultimately legitimize their participation at the university? Did the process of gaining academic literacy facilitate their identification with the community of the university? What impact did their relation to the university have on their sense of identity?

As discussed in the data analysis, participants expressed much stability in their sense of identity. From one semester to the next, their language use, cultural frames of reference and academic aspirations did not exhibit a complete overhaul in their interviews with me.

The limitation of this research project spanning 2 to 3 semesters of students' study (instead of their entire undergraduate career) does not alone

explain why there was not more variety or complication in participants' expression of their personal identity. While Hall (1996) and Block (2007) portray identity formation as ongoing and multifaceted, the more stable philosophies of Phan (2008) and Casanave (2002) are personified by these students. Perhaps they were clinging or "longing" to create or maintain coherence in their sense of self. Alternatively, they may not have yet encountered a fuller range of experiences to shake this stability.

Not only was there not enough time to undergo a complete transformation, there was not necessarily the need. I was not looking for change for the sake of it, and growth cannot be exponential, let alone measured. I wanted to explore how the challenges of developing academic writing impacted identity formation, and have to acknowledge that they are unparallel, iterative processes.

### **Resisting stigmas and moving on**

A clearer understanding of the resilience of existing identities may be found in the earlier examples of participants' determination to remain distinct from groups stigmatized at the university. Clearly, data revealed that being multilingual or international students held no cachet at this university, and was not part of these participants' "imagined communities" (Kanno & Norton, 2003) or aspirations.

Nor did participants articulate any aspiration to become members of the academy as anything other than undergraduate students for a limited period of time. Their ultimate imagined community was not as academics; they were at

the university temporarily, on their way to lives outside academic life with various other communities. But while at SFU, was their experience and participation legitimized?

Some students in this study complained of lack of guidance, cryptic or incomplete feedback and inadequate support. Yvonne bemoaned how much /less English she was encountering at SFU than she had in high school. Cindy and Laurie portrayed their TAs as ineffectual. Some may question whose responsibility it is to satisfy these inadequacies; does the university identify itself as a teaching institution or a support structure? Should the students be examining their own responsibilities rather than projecting inadequacies onto the university? Those questions, while valid, interesting and probably controversial, extend beyond the scope of this project; however, within the frame of a Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), there is the aspect of legitimate peripheral participation to explore. Lave and Wenger maintain that, "conferring legitimacy is more important than the issue of providing teaching." (p. 92) They warn, however, that, "gaining legitimacy may be so difficult that some fail to learn until considerable time has passed...Gaining legitimacy is also a problem when masters prevent learning by acting in effect as pedagogical authoritarians, viewing novices who 'should be instructed' rather than as peripheral participants in a community engaged in its own reproduction." (p. 76). A community of practice depends on participants' membership; members contribute biography, relationships and practices. If the legitimacy of their writing and therefore participation is questioned, students have the opportunity to contribute very little.

The further risk is the adoption of a deficit or subaltern facet to their identity (Marshall, 2010; Waterstone, 2008) that continues beyond the academy. Examining the discourses between students and the academy serves to reflect, and hopefully challenge, the limitations they place on one another as they co-construct identities and knowledge.

### **From Community of Practice to the community at large**

Identities are not abandoned at graduation; the university experience is carried forward into personal and professional lives in the larger community. In fact, Lave and Wenger (1991) state, “we have...situated learning in the trajectories of participation in which it takes on meaning. These trajectories must themselves be situated in the social world.” (p. 121). The university cannot be expected to be entirely responsible for students’ engagement and success with the world at large. However, consider SFU’s Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee’s “moral purpose” (Fullan, 2003) in implementing curricular change and, ultimately, the Writing Intensive Curriculum; they sought to address, “the intellectual and educational values SFU should foster, of the intellectual qualities that all SFU undergraduates should share, and [of] the skills and experiences that will best prepare our undergraduate students for successful and fulfilling futures.” (SFU 2002, p.2).

Two pieces of student writing articulate these issues perhaps better than I can. In my ongoing attempt to develop and share legitimacy together with the participants in this study, allow me to give them space here to speak for themselves:

Do I belong here?...I'm not sure whether university is right for me, although my parents will say it's the best for me if I have a degree and start my career. Hopefully I will have an answer that won't change, but I will never know until later in life. (Laurie, narrative writing, 2011)

...university- the place where, I believe, one stops being a kid and becomes an adult....The fact of becoming an independent person actually thrills me...University sure is different from high school but I feel like everyday I adapt more and more....Nevertheless, there are a lot of times where I wish I could just quit school and go back to relaxing and resting, but I know that this won't get me half the opportunities as University does. (Dominic, narrative writing 2011)

## **CHAPTER 7: IMPLICATIONS**

This study aimed to explore issues of identity formation, academic writing, and their relationships to one another. But what to do with this exercise? There are implications for my personal practice as an instructor, and, hopefully, for the university in both its research and teaching practice.

### **Instructor, teach thyself**

There are countless things one learns in embarking on a graduate research degree. I chose this program to broaden my educational and professional horizons, but was still surprised at how writing became central to this effort. Already discussed was my own struggle with writing in the academic genre 'properly.' That was/is a humbling, formative, and ongoing process that began on a personal level. The exploration of narrative writing, however, was one that was undertaken with a mixture of detached intellectual curiosity and skepticism. In my undergraduate linguistics degree, as well as teaching experience since then, narrative writing had not held much attention or even legitimacy. Some readings on narrative writing were, frankly, a stretch for me, as I had very little appreciation, as a student or instructor, for the role or even relevance of narrative writing in the academic context. As my studies and readings continued, it was the identifiable voices of authors in texts that invited me to think deepest, and those writers often made personal references. I identified with the author and ideas and used them to construct my own

understanding. Ultimately, courses in which I learned the most and felt the most passion were those where I tossed aside the restrictive constraints of what I thought academic writing was to be and wrote what *I thought*. My engagement, learning and legitimacy all deepened.

I have come to believe that narrative writing has its place in the academy. Perhaps as a toehold or step that does not need to be left behind. Perhaps instead of being simply practice exercise, it is simply a position, or a safe place from which to launch deeper thought, and return when needed for another push. In the way that both FAL and many W courses include free writing and multiple revisions, students need to be encouraged to write to learn for themselves, not just for assessment. Perhaps I can infuse my classroom teaching and student counseling with Casanave's (2002) analogy of writing as a game; there are generic 'rules' and subtleties of play that require practicing and playing for the sake of playing. It might also help students identify with other writers if they realized we're all *practising* writers, students, instructors and researchers alike. Or if they realized that so many writers struggle, especially when the context shifts.

### **The older we get, the better we were**

De Costa (2010) claims that "...interactions are not simply reflections of macro-level ideologies, but the location where ideologies are created and reinforced" (p. 774). In this research project, my interactions with the participants reminded me of what it is like to navigate undergraduate life. It is easy to be dismissive and say the whole world is open to them; they are young, they do not

have much burden of responsibility. Talking with these students, I was reminded of how that wide open future can seem so vast it is overwhelming. We do not anticipate our missteps, and are not always sure how to move on after stumbling. If we see the university as a community of learning and achievement, we need to support all members, from the outside in.

No one should forget what it is like to be on the outside; of the academy or anywhere else. We all want to know what we are supposed to do. We crave guidance and shelter, and students are no different. It is important we talk *with* our students; in Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice model, they are the newcomers who can reinvigorate our practice. We can be the catalysts for one another's challenge and growth, although part of the challenge may be to acknowledge the very need for it. In her research of writers at various positions in the academy, Casanave (2002) described, "...change all around me, as well as great resistance to change, in the academic practices of students, teachers, and professional academic writers. People seek stability, yet must change in order to learn and grow – an uncomfortable and paradoxical inevitability." (p. 9)

In my graduate studies, my uncomfortable writing experiences propelled my research, and my difficulties prompted me to investigate others' experiences. Mason (1996) argues that "a researcher cannot be neutral, or objective, or detached, from the knowledge and evidence they are generating. Instead, they should seek to understand their role in that process" (p. 6). I would hope that my role was respectful and empathetic towards my research participants, and transformative to my own practice.

The role writing has played in my student and professional life has been transformative; my challenge in “learning to write” has not only helped me “write to learn” (Strachan, 2008), but engage my own students in the writing and learning process as well. In my classes, I seek to establish a safe place for my students to try out new ideas, language and structures. Most of my assignments are opportunities for process writing, with clear stages and rubrics for assessment established at the outset. I am sympathetic to the (sometimes overwhelming) impact of comments or other feedback on student work, and I begin with a focus on formative feedback on metalanguage issues of meaning and organization instead of typical EAL error correction. I also readily admit to the challenges I face as a writer, and celebrate the successes students have in articulating their ideas in the burgeoning community of readers and writers of our classroom.

### **Maintaining Change**

My greatest opportunity for improvement and growth as a writer was in a graduate course that was structured similarly to a W course (please see Appendix A). This is where I got formative feedback and the opportunity to *apply* new writing strategies to subsequent assignments. Where I had been interested in the W initiative previously, my personal experience convinced me of its merit and became woven into my own narrative as an academic writer. The context for this development included an engaged learner, a conscientious instructor, and a small, supportive student cohort. While this may have been an ideal situation, Hackman (2002, in Fullan, 2003, p. 96) claims success in sustaining educational

change, such as SFU's Writing Intensive initiative, requires "a *supportive organizational context...and... ample expert coaching* in teamwork" (emphasis in the original).

### **Threats to the context**

The biggest threat to a "supportive organizational context" may be how the W curriculum is no longer new, and does not garner much excitement as 'innovation' at the university. Benefactors' names are being attached to new schools, research initiatives and buildings, all of which offer some sort of physical or measureable evidence of the contribution; guided writing practice pales in comparison. It is not sexy or exciting. The research participants in this study did not suggest it was popular, either. It is difficult to quantify the results of the writing initiative, and when they manifest. In this era of 'accountability,' iterative and emerging voices may take too long to develop to be counted and valued.

### **The right to teach and the right to write**

There is always room for more research. It is probably time for SFU to assess its Writing Intensive curriculum initiative, 5 years after implementation. This project has explored multilingual students' engagement with the curriculum, but this being an academic community, the voices of faculties, faculty members, teaching assistants and perhaps the community at large also need to be heard. We need to research who is actually teaching (& providing feedback) for W courses, and offer legitimate participation to all instructors, whether they are tenured or "peripheral" to the academy; for example, many W courses are taught

by sessional instructors who are rarely secure in their position at a university, accepting the 'temporary' and, frankly, 'expendable' labels as part of the position offered them. Finally, if we get bogged down in arguing over who should 'teach' students to write, we annul students' right to write at all.

The tensions between these stakeholders of the university community strain the coherence of the university's purpose and curriculum. But just as in developing skills and identities, these challenges provide the opportunity for progress and growth and reflect the complexity of not just thinking of the world, but engaging in it.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: SFU W course Criteria:**

1) Students have frequent opportunities to use writing as a way of learning the content of a course and are taught to write in the range of forms and for the range of purposes that are typical of the discipline in ways that are clearly distinguished from remedial and foundational skills courses.

2) Examples of writing within the disciplines are used as a means of instruction about typical structures, modes of reasoning, styles of address, and the use of technical language and of evidence.

3) Students receive appropriate feedback and response to their writing that is based on explicit criteria and is directed at improving the quality of their writing.

4) Revision is built into the process of writing for “formal” assignments, usually in terms of revisions of the same paper, or alternatively, in revisions accomplished through successive similar assignments.

5) At least half the course grade is based on written work for which students receive feedback (see Criterion 3)

(Strachan 2008, pgs 49-50, SFU UGCI 2006)

## **Appendix B: FAL course assessment**

In order to obtain a FAL credit and to go on to take a W (writing intensive) course, students are required to pass the course overall with a minimum C grade and to pass each of the assessed components (detailed as follows) with a minimum C grade.

- Summary (10%)
- Critique (20%)
- Research Essay (30%)
- Active Learning (10%)

Consisting of the following:

- Narrative writing
  - Reflective writing
  - Diagnostic writing task improvement
  - Attendance/Homework/Punctuality
  - Engagement/Peer Review
- In-class Examination (30%)

(SFU FAL 2011)

## **Appendix C: Request for Informed Consent**

### **Request for Informed Consent from Participants: Introduction**

#### **Exploring the Interrelationship of Identity Formation and Academic Writing of Multilingual Students, Ethics Application # [2010s0403]**

Dear Student,

As part of my Master's Degree in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University (SFU), I am conducting a study that will collect information about multilingual students' sense of identity and their academic writing skills.

I hope you will agree to participate in this research. Agreeing or declining to participate (or discontinuing your participation at any time) will have no impact on your grades on FAL or on any other course at SFU. There is no payment or other reward for participating; however, you may find the attention on your writing helpful.

These are the parts to my research; you may agree to participate in some, all, or none.

I will begin with some individual interviews with students about their participation in FAL, their language use, sense of identity, and feelings about writing.

I will ask some participants if I may look at some samples of their writing. I will analyze this writing to see how it relates to the answers about writing given in the interviews.

In the next semester(s), I will contact students who are registered in a Writing- Intensive course, and interview those students about their writing assignments in the W-course, their sense of identity, as well as their feelings about writing. I may also ask participating students to do some short writing for my research.

The interviews will be recorded, and participants will have the opportunity to review my notes and comments about the interviews to ensure they are comfortable with my understanding and representation of participants' statements. Participants can also contact me at any time about the results of my research.

This research carries minimal risk to participants. Participants may find discussion about their writing helpful. Participants will be given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym, and the participants' participation, names, statements, and any other identifying information will remain confidential. Interview notes, samples of student writing, and all related documents will be stored on a memory stick in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office on campus. These documents will be destroyed 2 years after the completion of my research.

If you want to participate, please complete the attached form and give it back to me today or bring it to my office (RCB 8203).

Thank you!

Jennifer Walsh Marr

MA candidate, Faculty of Education

Sessional Instructor, PAS program, SFU

### **Request for Informed Consent from Participants**

Jennifer Walsh Marr is asking you to participate in educational research. This research will help university instructors and administrators understand the relationship between the formation of personal identity and academic writing ability for multilingual students.

If you want to participate in this study, you need to sign this form to give your consent.

Some important information about the study:

Participation is voluntary. Participation is not required for FAL or any other course. If you do participate, you may stop participating at any time during the study and there will be no impact on any of your grades or status at SFU.

The study may ask participants to take part in 2-3 one-on-one interviews (one hour each) with the researcher. Total time commitment is 2-4 hours over this and next semester.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact any of the following people:

Researcher: Ms. Jennifer Walsh Marr [jwalshma@sfu.ca](mailto:jwalshma@sfu.ca) 604-831-9145

Senior Supervisor: Dr. Steve Marshall [stevem@sfu.ca](mailto:stevem@sfu.ca) 778-782-7666

For any concerns or complaints about this study, you may contact Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director, SFU Office of Research Ethics at hal\_weinberg@sfu.ca or 778-782-6593.

If you agree to participate, please sign your name and write your contact information below:

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (your legal name), having read the attached letter of introduction, consent to give the researcher, Jennifer Walsh Marr, the use of the following in the course of this research project: names and personal information (to be kept confidential), audio recordings and transcriptions, researcher notes, samples of participant writing and email messages.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I also give the researcher consent to contact me for further interviews in the following semesters (2010 and 2011 only) to continue with the research project.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Details: Please give me a little more information about yourself.

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you planning on taking a Writing Intensive course at SFU soon? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, which W-course are you planning on enrolling in? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Research participant profiles

Name	Gender	First language	Other languages	Country of Origin	(intended) major
Cindy	Female	Mandarin	English	China	Accounting
Dominic	Male	Spanish	English, French, Italian	Mexico	Psychology
Jeremy	Male	Mandarin	English, "local language" (dialect), Japanese	China	n/a
Kailey	Female	Mandarin & Cantonese - (code-switched with bilingual parents)	English	China	Business
Laurie	Female	Cantonese	English, Mandarin, French	China	Business
Michelle	Female	Mandarin	English	China	Business
Miriam	Female	Farsi	English, Turkish, Arabic	Iran	Computing Science
Scott	Male	Cantonese	English Mandarin, Japanese	Hong Kong	Engineering
Yvonne	Female	Cantonese	English, Mandarin	China	Previously: Economics, International Studies, now: Sociology

## **Appendix E: Interview Questions**

### **Initial Interview with FAL students:**

#### **Establishing scope of research into multilingualism at the university**

- Can you please tell me about your own language use?
  - Which language(s) do you use at home?
  - Which language(s) do you use at SFU?
  - In which language(s) are you most comfortable?
  - Does your comfort depend on the context?
  - Which language would you identify as your “mother tongue”?

#### **Linking multilingualism to research into identity**

- Can you tell me about your identity(s)?
  - How would you identify yourself?
  - How do you think classmates identify you?
  - How do you think instructors identify you?
  - With which group(s) do you identify?
  - Why?

#### **Investigating Writing Practices**

- What do you write in each language?
  - Do you feel different writing in different languages?
    - If so, how?
  - Do you feel readers are able to understand what you really want to say in your writing?
  - Can you show me some writing that describes or demonstrates how you feel about writing?

**Follow up Interview topics (in W-courses):**

**Reviewing the researcher's (written) synthesis and interpretation of FAL**

**interview:**

- Please comment on my understanding of your identity and feelings about writing.
  - Do you wish to change or correct anything?
  - Do you feel you have changed since then?

**Exploring development**

- What's different for you now in the Writing Intensive Course?
  - What kind of assignments do you have?
  - What is your sense of self or identity now?

**Performing feelings of Identity**

- In your FAL course you did some "free" or "exploratory" writing to express your feelings; can you please spend 15 minutes writing now?

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