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THE ACQUISITION OF ACADEMIC LITERACIES DURING AN HONOURS
RESEARCH PREPARATION MODULE

by

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SUPERVISOR: Prof B Leibowitz

January 2018
DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation, entitled “The acquisition of academic literacies during an honours research preparation module” is my own work. I declare that, to the best of my knowledge, all sources have been properly acknowledged and referenced, and that the dissertation does not use sources in a way that constitutes academic plagiarism.

Laura Arnold

January 2018
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First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor who provided me with excellent feedback during some very challenging times. When I look back as all the ways in which my ability to express myself in writing has developed I have you to thank.

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Thank you to the nGAP programme for providing me with support to complete this Master’s, and to the University of Sol Plaatje who paid for a writing retreat where I wrote most of an article based on this research.

DEDICATION

For my grandmother, without her I would not be where I am today.

1936-2017
Jane Calder
ABSTRACT

Present research into how postgraduate students should be supported to acquire discipline-specific literacies is lacking. This research adds to the conversation by illustrating the ways in which a research preparation module, informed by a writing in the disciplines (WID) approach, prepared a group of Human Resource Management Honours students to submit their research reports. The module required groups of students to submit a series of developmental assignments, and then to use feedback from supervisors and Academic Literacy Practitioners to re-write these assignments as sections of the final research report. Since literacies are acquired in particular contexts, a case-study approach, which focuses on exploring phenomenon in context, was chosen. Multiple methods of data collection and analysis were used to obtain a rich understanding of how the module supported students’ acquisition of academic literacies. The students’ developmental assignments and final research reports were compared against a marking rubric to demonstrate how drafting sections of the research report multiple times helped the students to write in their discipline. Students shared their experiences of the support offered in the module during focus group discussions held towards the end of each semester. Staff members discussed the challenges they faced while supervising the students during open-ended interviews. Both the transcripts of the focus group discussions and the interviews were analysed via content analysis. The findings from this research suggest that a research preparation module can help students acquire the academic literacies necessary to complete their research report. By writing the developmental assignments and participating in the Academic Literacies tutorials students were supported to submit the final research report. However, one possible weakness of the intervention was that part-time students had difficulties accessing support services that would have supported them to develop their academic literacies further. This research also found that support staff need to ensure that feedback and guidance provided to the students is more aligned to the Human Resource Management discipline. Since this research mainly examined students’ perspectives of the module, this study recommends that additional research could examine how a WID approach affects supervisor autonomy and workload.
ACRONYMS

AL- Academic Literacies
ALPs- Academic Literacy Practitioners
B.Com - Batchelor of Commerce
DSs - Disciplinary Specialists
EAL- English as an Additional Language
HEIs - Higher Education Institutions
PGWFs- Postgraduate Writing Fellows
HR- Human Resources
HRM- Human Resource Management
SA - South Africa
WAC - Writing Across the Curriculum
WID - Writing in the Disciplines
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The transition high school students make when they become first-year university students has been extensively researched (Hoffman & Julie, 2012; Fergie, Beeke, McKenna & Creme, 2011). Thus far, the transition undergraduate students make when they become postgraduate students, particularly coursework postgraduate students, remains under-researched (Bangeni, 2009; Hoffman & Julie, 2012; Tobbell, O’Donnell & Zammit, 2010; Symons, 2001). Most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Europe and America offer students either two-year diplomas or four-year degrees. In South Africa, and many of the former British colonies, university students who complete a three-year degree choose to enrol in a separate year of study, known as an Honours degree (Paxton, 2011). In South Africa the Honours degree is often considered to be the first year of postgraduate study, because during an Honours degree, students deepen their knowledge of their subject area while conducting independent research.

Honours students are required to engage with their discipline in more depth, and in a completely different manner to undergraduate students. Instead of offering insights into pre-packaged knowledge like undergraduate students, Honours students must become true producers of academic knowledge for the first time (Cooper, 2011; Lander, 2002). For many students, this requires an epistemological shift where they start to understand that knowledge is not made up of objective facts and is instead constructed by researchers, and is thus a set of contestable propositions (Hyland, 2005; Wingate, 2006).

Unfortunately, many institutions fail to understand that this new role requires Honours students to engage with disciplinary knowledge in new ways (Butler, 2007). While students entering an Honours programme are often able to complete their assignments, they are often unsure as to how they should conduct their research and write their research reports. Thus, many South African undergraduate students have become expert consumers of knowledge, but lack the necessary academic literacies
In order to understand what kinds of literacies former students bring to an Honours degree, it is necessary to examine how they have been taught to research previously. At present there is very little research regarding the teaching of research to undergraduate students in South Africa (Lombard & Kloppers, 2015). One study that examined the curriculum of undergraduate science students at a South African university found that students often learned through textbooks and were assessed through multiple choice questions (Jackson et al., 2006). Based on this study it is reasonable to assume that numerous undergraduate students in similarly structured courses, particularly in large cohorts, have never undertaken independent research prior to entry into an Honours course. Students who have never undertaken a research project do not possess sufficient knowledge about the research process and research methodology, including terminology related to research, before they begin an Honours degree. Even when students have completed a small research assignment at undergraduate level, a study suggests that the way that they have been taught to research does not sufficiently develop their ability to think critically and problem solve (Lombard & Kloppers, 2015). Employers have also said that graduates are not able to research problems within the workplace context adequately (Griesel & Parker, 2009). Thus, both students who have completed a research project at undergraduate level, and those without this experience, need to develop their current academic literacies in order to conduct research independently.

Honours students do need additional support in order to be able to research problems independently, but they also require guidance on how to write research texts, such as the research report. The struggles that postgraduate students at all levels experience when writing academic texts has been well documented. Some students are unsure how to structure the final document. This confusion stems from an inability to structure sections, paragraphs and sentences so that each piece of the text relates to the preceding and proceeding sections while remaining focused on the research topic (Hyland, 2005). Others are unsure of how to paraphrase texts, because they have not understood the terminology, concepts, or findings presented in the original texts, which
is unsurprising as Honours students with limited exposure to lexically-dense research articles may struggle to deconstruct these articles (Hathaway, 2015). Students are also reluctant to paraphrase when they do not yet feel confident enough to re-write a text that seems to be written so well (Angélil-Carter, 2000; Hutchings, 1998). Understanding what the current debates in the field are and how to marshal often-conflicting views of various authors in a succinct manner in order to create one’s own arguments presents an even greater challenge (Woodward, 2000). Even fewer students feel ready to disagree with acknowledged experts in the field and display their own ‘voice’ in their writing.

Although writing is central to knowledge production, which is especially crucial for postgraduate students, teaching students how to write is often a marginalised activity at higher education institutions (Tuck, 2016). The dominant discourse at many institutions, including South African universities, is that writing is a technical process that is separate from the meaning-making practices used in the discipline (Thesen & van Pletzen, 2006; Tuck, 2016). This understanding of writing as a technical process means that most students in South African Higher Education institutions receive generic, often remedial support, rather than discipline-based writing support integrated into the curriculum (Boughey, 2002). This means that many lecturers do not fully understand how students negotiate meanings through texts, and the writing support that they provide to students may be primarily focused on helping students improve their written English (Tuck, 2016). Helping students understand surface features of a text, such as grammar and punctuation, will not enable students to master higher order concerns, such as argumentation in particular disciplines (Boughey, 2000; Leibowitz, 2000).

Many of the writing support programmes that help students understand the surface features of texts are only offered to a select group of students, most commonly English as an Additional Language speakers (Boughey, 2000; Hathaway, 2015). However, much of the information in these programmes, such as an introduction to academic discourse, could be useful for a broader range of students (Leibowitz, 2010; Hathaway, 2015). Boughey (2000) claims that a lack of familiarity with argument and other features of academic writing are greater challenges for South African university
students writing academic texts than their English proficiency. Acquiring the necessary academic literacies is even more challenging for students from working class backgrounds or rural areas who have less exposure to academic discourse than middle-class students (Boughey, 2000; Leibowitz, 2009).

Universities cannot expect students with little knowledge of academic literacies to acquire academic literacies unconsciously as many middle-class students did in the past (Leibowitz, 2009). As the university becomes more diverse it needs to respond to the needs of a diverse group of students, including mature students, students who are changing disciplines, students from working class backgrounds, or from the rural areas (Bangeni, 2009; Leibowitz, 2009). This argument has merit in the South African context where many students have little exposure to English and academic discourse at home and at school (Leibowitz, 2010). It is therefore not sufficient to expect students to have overcome these by the time they begin an Honours degree. Sheer willpower on the part of students is not sufficient for the acquisition of academic literacies, particularly when students have experienced unequal access to academic discourse over decades (Layton, 2015; Leibowitz, 2010; Thesen & van Pletzen, 2006). Thus, struggling postgraduate students are not lacking in willpower, instead they may be unaware that disciplines have particular histories that are linked to particular ways of writing (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). Thus, postgraduate students need to understand different disciplines make different assumptions about the world, including, which knowledge, methods of enquiry, and means to explain the findings from research are the most valuable (Booth, 2004).

If academic writing is not seen as tied to and embedded in disciplines then it is possible for academics to ‘outsource’ the teaching of academic writing to support staff (Tuck, 2016). Therefore, many generic writing support programmes are facilitated by disciplinary outsiders instead of disciplinary experts, even though insiders have a better understanding of how meaning is negotiated in disciplines (Tuck, 2016). As reading and writing academic texts is the main mechanism by which disciplinary knowledge is acquired, disciplinary experts should also be involved in the teaching of writing (Tuck, 2016). If experts in the discipline help students understand the ‘ways of knowing that are valued’ in their disciplines then students will be better supported to
write for their disciplines (Layton, 2015: 203). Since access to the ‘ways of knowing’ valued by certain disciplines is access to powerful knowledge, helping students acquire the academic literacies required to write in their discipline could be one way of providing students with epistemological access (Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Layton, 2015: 203).

Many South African postgraduate programmes operate under the assumption that students have already mastered the ability to write in the discipline during their undergraduate degrees (Butler, 2007; Symons, 2001). Whereas, postgraduate students, especially those who have had less access to academic discourse, still struggle to research and write in the discipline (Butler, 2007; Greenbank, 2007; Leibowitz, 2000). Part of this struggle stems from the fact that Honours students need to create new knowledge in an academic context for the first time (Cooper, 2011; Lander, 2002). This means that postgraduate students need to learn how to write texts that acknowledge the ways in which knowledge claims have changed over time in a discipline (Booth, 2004). One way to provide greater epistemic access to the theories, methods and assumptions in disciplines is to provide postgraduate with discipline-specific rather than generic writing support. Thus, discipline-based writing programmes are more likely than generic writing programmes to help students acquire the academic literacies needed to produce texts in specific disciplines.

1.2 RESEARCH GAP

The current body of knowledge focuses more on both generic and specific, or discipline-based academic writing interventions at the undergraduate level (Fergie et al., 2011; Wingate, 2015). This means that the types of academic literacies required for success at an undergraduate level, and the identity shifts that students make when they transition into a university context are well documented. However, much less is known about how students experience the transition from an undergraduate degree into a postgraduate degree. While there has been some research on how postgraduate students write, the bulk of this research focuses on the writing of Master’s by research dissertations or PhD theses (Bangeni, 2009; Poole, 2015; Symons, 2002; Wellington, 2012). This means that there is a dearth of literature on the
acquisition of academic literacies by coursework postgraduate degree students, including Honours students (Bangeni, 2009; Fergie et al., 2011; Symons, 2001; Tobbell et al., 2010).

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to understand how a research preparation module supported B. Com Honours students to acquire the necessary academic literacies to conduct research, and produce a research report in the discipline of Human Resource Management (HRM). At the site of study, this research will be especially useful for academics within the Human Resource Management department as the research preparation module was adapted from another institution, and staff do not yet know how successful this module has been in supporting the B. Com HR (Human Resources) Honours students. The findings from this research will also guide the support and academic staff responsible for developing postgraduate students’ academic literacies. More broadly, the recommendations from this research could be of use to academics who want to develop or adapt research modules offered to Honours students, particularly Honours students from similar disciplines.

1.3 BACKGROUND

In 2007 the Higher Education Qualification Framework stipulated that all Honours degrees at National Qualification Level (NQF) 8 should include a 30-credit research component (CHE, 2011). According to NQF Level Descriptor for level 8, Honours students should be able to understand and apply ‘theories, research methodologies, methods and techniques in the discipline’ to relevant problems and issues (SAQA, 2012: 10). In order to provide students with an Honours degree that met these requirements the redesigned Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com) Human Resources (HR) Honours degree was first offered at the university in 2015. The redesigned Honours degree is offered on a part-time basis over two years, and includes a year-long research preparation module in the students’ first year of study. The research preparation module is compulsory for all students and is worth the same amount of credits as the other modules in the degree.
The design of the module was based on a similar research preparation module offered at another university for Honours students in a different discipline, Construction Management. Lecturers in the course explained that part of the rationale behind this module was that entrants into the course had different degree backgrounds, with both Bachelors (BA) and B. Com HR students registering for this course. Another reason why lecturers felt that this module would be useful was that students attended different universities that may have emphasised research less in the programme. In South Africa many undergraduate students start working straight after completion of the degree due to financial constraints, and often begin an Honours degree many years after their first degree. This means that the preparation module could also help re-acclimatise mature postgraduate students to the ways of researching in the discipline. Supervisors hoped that students who completed the module would be better able to understand the research process, and more motivated to pursue an HR Master’s degree at the university.

Students completed the module in groups where two to five students researched a particular topic and co-wrote the research report in order to reduce supervisor workload, and enable more students to have access to an Honours degree in the field. Towards the beginning of the module each student is asked to select a topic, which interests them, and is related to the broader field of Human Resource Management. A summary of the topics offered by lecturers in 2015 and 2016 can be found in the table on the next page:
Table 1: HR topics offered in 2015 and 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HR topics offered in 2015 and 2016</th>
<th>New HR topics offered in 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015 name: Employment Relations</td>
<td>Globalisation, Human Resources and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 name: Employee Relations</td>
<td>Talent Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Diversity</td>
<td>Human Capital Metrics And Analytics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource Development</td>
<td>Organisational and Professional Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Management</td>
<td>Leadership Excellence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological Contract</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work and Wellness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the module coordinator tried to ensure that students were able to research a problem within the topic that they had expressed interest in, due to supervisor capacity this was not always possible. Each supervisor in the department had work or research experience in one or more of the topics. Thus, it was assumed that supervisors would have sufficient knowledge of the topic to provide their students with the necessary support and guidance. One of the topics, Organisational Design, was only offered in 2015 because the part-time supervisor who had expertise in the area was unable to supervise the next cohort of students in 2016.

The lecturers expected the students, former BA or a B. Com graduates who had studied HR as a major or minor subject, to have a basic understanding of the HRM field, and less knowledge about each of the specific research topics. Although all postgraduate students learn more about a particular topic, the type of knowledge valued in the discipline has an effect on what is researched, and how the research is conveyed in the final research text. HRM, like many disciplines in the social sciences, values knowledge found in multiple disciplines, and uses multi-disciplinary knowledge to constructs its premises, theories, concepts, and ideas. If we consider the topics listed in Table one, it is easy to see that these topics are informed by knowledge found in other disciplines, including: Business Management, Education, Feminism, and Economics. It could be argued that there is no way that HR as the study of systems, processes, practices, relationships, and other factors that influence the behaviour and performance of employees at work, can be understood without drawing upon multi-disciplinary knowledge. However, engaging with multi-disciplinary knowledge can be
challenging as it requires students to engage with potentially contradictory theories and concepts found in different disciplines. An even greater challenge for students may be the need to reconcile discourses that have competing ‘ways of knowing’ and viewing the world (Davidson & Crateau, 1998; Layton, 2015: 203). Thus, the students in this degree may need to marshal seemingly conflicting viewpoints found in texts in different disciplines to present their research problem within a particular context.

Students in the field of HRM, and other management related disciplines, are also expected to generate knowledge that can be applied in industry (Goodier & Parkinson, 2005). Thus, the research projects of the B. Com HR Honours students have to contribute to HRM theory, and address a particular challenge facing HRM practitioners. Since the research problem has to be relevant to practitioners in the field, it is expected that students might also refer to a few non-academic sources in the research report. For instance, students may use legal documents, newspapers, websites, and company reports as well as scholarly books and journal articles. Since each type of text was written for a different purpose and for a different audience, melding these texts together in a coherent way is challenging. However, through combining academic and legal or popular sources, the students are more likely to produce a research report that addresses the needs of HRM practitioners. Thus, one type of knowledge valued within the HRM discipline, is, and this influences the type of research that the Honours students undertake.

Since developing a HRM research report is challenging, prior to the submission of the final research report each group completed a series of developmental assignments that form the basis of their research report, which was also written as a group. Students received feedback from an internal panel of supervisors on two of the developmental assignments, the proposal presentation and the final presentation of the research. Panel feedback allows students to learn from multiple supervisors who hold different perspectives about research. The feedback was also given by a panel so that less experienced supervisors could learn about supervision pedagogy from colleagues who had more supervision experience. This was an important focus for the department as many of the supervisors are still busy studying towards their PhDs.
The assignments were assessed by the students’ supervisor who was supposed to award members of a group their own mark based on their individual contributions. Supervisors evaluated each students’ contribution informally throughout the module and by reading through their individual and group portfolios. In the individual portfolio, a student described his or her contribution to the assignment, and in the group portfolio the group sent in a consolidated report outlining how much each member of the group had contributed to a particular assignment. In cases where the portfolios showed that one or more group members had contributed more or less to an assignment, the supervisor had the option to award these students higher or lower marks based on their reported contributions.

During the first semester of this module students participated in Academic Literacies (AL) tutorials, and Truth Knowledge and Creating Knowledge lectures. The aim of the Truth Knowledge and Creating Knowledge lectures is to expose students to research paradigms and theoretical concepts, such as ontology, and epistemology. During these tutorials the tutor also provided guidance to the students regarding the format and assessment of the developmental assignments. During both 2015 and 2016, the tutor of the subject also supervised one or more of the groups.

Other supervisors involved in the module were the qualification leader and module coordinator. The qualification leader gives his or her feedback on the curriculum of the module to the module coordinator. He or she is also responsible for formally reviewing all aspects of each module, including the research preparation module, that form part of the qualification. The module coordinator is responsible for designing the learning guide, which acts as a roadmap of the module for the students, and for ensuring that the teaching and learning (including supervision) offered by all the lectures, tutors, and supervisors in the module is of a high quality.

I designed the Academic Literacies tutorials in 2015 and 2016 while I was a staff member working at the university’s Postgraduate Centre. A consultant from the Writing Centre and I facilitated the tutorials. I taught half of the students in 2015, and all of the students in 2016, because staff from the department combined the two groups, and consultant from the Writing Centre was no longer available to assist with the tutorials.
I became a tutor when the previous Truth Knowledge and Creating Knowledge lecturer who worked part time as a consultant to the Postgraduate Centre asked me to consider facilitating the Academic Literacies tutorials. I decided to tutor the students as I had a degree in Human Resource Management, and was interested in researching how postgraduate students could be supported to acquire the necessary academic literacies as a Master’s topic. I hoped that by having some knowledge of the discipline, and a background in research capacity development for postgraduate students, I would be able to facilitate the tutorials, and research students’ developing academic literacies in context.

I tried to design the tutorials so that they would provide a space where students could develop ways of thinking, reading and writing that were suitable for their discipline. As the tutorials were designed with a WID approach in mind, each tutorial guided students through a series of reading and writing exercises designed to help them successfully complete a particular developmental assignment. Each developmental assignment prepared students to submit their research reports because each assignment asked students to complete a component of the research report. In order to ensure that the material used was relevant, all the texts, both research articles and past research reports from former students, used were provided by the qualification leader or module coordinator, and were related to the students’ research topics.

After each tutorial, the students were asked to complete a series of questions on a Blackboard (the students’ learning management system) forum asking them to reflect back on their experiences of participating in the tutorials. Students also received additional academic literacies support during two-full day writing workshops. These workshops were facilitated by Writing Centre staff who were Postgraduate Writing Fellows (PGWFs), or PhD candidates at the university contracted by the Writing Centre to support postgraduate students with their writing. The PGWFs abided by the general Writing Centre philosophy where a consultant’s role is to help students reflect on their own writing practices so that each student can decide how to improve his or her writing (Leibowitz, 2013; Leibowitz, 2016).
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the introduction (see 1.1) section, I argued that there is a lack of research into how postgraduate students should be supported to acquire the academic literacies required for knowledge production. In the following section of the dissertation (see 1.2), I explained that while research into PhD candidates' acquisition of academic literacies has increased much less is known about how Honours students acquire the necessary academic literacies. Since Honours are potential Master's students and PhD candidates, the main research question of this study considers how a group of Honours students were supported to acquire the academic literacies necessary for success.

1.4.1 Main research question

How does a research preparation module enable B. Com HR Honours students to develop their academic literacies?

This question will be addressed through a series of sub questions that tackle one of the facets of the main research question.

1.4.2 Sub questions

1. How do the many formalised written assignments help students to acquire the academic writing conventions needed in their larger research report?

2. How do students experience the academic literacies support offered through the research preparation module?

3. What challenges do the supervisors who were involved in this module face?

These sub questions either focus on the perspectives of the students or the supervisors as the two main role players, or on a particular aspect of the module, in this case the formalised assignments completed prior to the research report.
1.5 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Based on the research questions, I have drafted four broad aims that the research will achieve, and six smaller more concrete objectives.

1.5.1 Aims

- Investigate how students experience the academic literacies support offered through the research preparation module
- Understand the role of the smaller assignments in preparing students to submit their larger research report
- Investigate the challenges which supervisors involved in the module face
- Provide feedback to the staff members, i.e. the module coordinator, lecturers and supervisors to enable them to redesign and ultimately improve the Academic Literacies tutorials

1.5.2 Objectives

- Analyse the students' responses to the discussion questions posted on a Blackboard forum, which relate to specific reading and writing support provided during the tutorials
- Prepare a number of open-ended questions for the focus group discussions based on the analysis of the posts on the Blackboard forum
- Conduct focus group discussions with members of the class to probe issues that were raised during the tutorials or on the Blackboard forum
- Analyse students' written assignments in order to see if their writing has improved over time with regard to acquisition of the expected genre and discourse
- Draft open-ended interview questions for the staff members based on potential issues raised by students during the online forum and focus group discussions
- Share the findings of this research with the staff members involved in this module through informal discussions, and contributions to the module review
Fulfilling the aims and objectives of the study ensures that multiple methods and sources of data will be used to generate rich findings, which can be shared with staff from the department. These findings could also inform the support for the acquisition of academic literacies that university management, support staff, and supervisors provide to Honours students.

1.6 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

Chapter two begins by arguing that literacy is a social practice located in particular contexts. It then explores how contextual factors can influence postgraduate students’ acquisition of academic literacies. Chapter three provides a justification for, and an explanation of, the case study research design. The chapter also describes the data sources, and the methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter four presents the findings from the study in relation the three research sub-questions. Chapter five discusses the contribution of the findings to the current writing in the disciplines literature, and considers what difficulties practitioners may face when using this approach to teach postgraduate students how to write in their discipline. Chapter six summarises the contributions of the study and its limitations, before presenting several recommendations for future research.
As this study explores how students acquire literacy in social contexts, the first section of this chapter discusses how students acquire academic literacies in particular contexts. The next section of the chapter explains how reading and writing, rather than speaking and listening, are particularly useful modes for acquiring academic literacies. The five sections of the chapter that follow explore how students’ social relationships with members of their community, including their peers, supervisors, and members of the support staff, influence how they acquire the required academic literacies. The next section explores how a writing in the disciplines approach, which includes scaffolding and explicit instruction on genre, can help students to acquire the academic literacies required to write in their disciplines. The final section considers how support and academic staff can best work together to support students to write in their disciplines.

2.1 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

While both ‘academic literacies’ and ‘academic discourse’ refer to ways of valuing and producing knowledge in a discipline, the term academic literacies is particularly relevant for this research (Gee, 1990; Russell, Lea, Parker, Street & Donahue, 2009). The primary reason for using the term ‘academic literacies’ rather than ‘academic discourse’ is that academic literacies is a term that was coined to argue that literacy is not a unitary concept related to reading and writing; instead literacy is engagement in multiple social practices or literacies (Gee; 1996; Lillis & Scott, 2007). Thus, for the purposes of this research, the term academic literacies is more appropriate than the term academic discourse as university students need to acquire multiple literacies in practice in order to succeed in a postgraduate degree. Another reason for using the term academic literacies is that unlike other theories of literacy acquisition, academic literacies theorists pay particular attention to how the power relations between those with more power, influence the acquisition of academic literacies (Russell et al., 2009). In this study, the amount of power bestowed upon the supervisors is much greater than the amount of power held by the Honours students.
I have also chosen to use the term ‘acquisition’ rather than ‘learning’ when I refer to academic literacies in this study. The term acquisition is more appropriate because literacy is learnt in a social context often unconsciously and cannot be developed through conscious self-study alone. Another reason why the term acquisition is more suitable than the term learning is that it acknowledges that disciplines evolve over time and so to so the literacy practices in a discipline (Booth, 2004; Gee, 1996).

2.2 LITERACY AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE

Children acquire social practices, including literacy practices, over time in the home, at school from trained teachers, and in other contexts. (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1990; Emig, 1977; Horner, 1987). These practices serve particular purposes depending on the context in which they are performed (Barton, 1994). Since literacy is a social practice, some literacy practices which are valued in one context may not be valued in other contexts. This means that when students enter into a new context they have to adapt their literacy practices, or acquire new literacy practices that are valued within the new context. For example, when students enter into an undergraduate, or a postgraduate degree, they have to acquire new literacy practices, which can be understood as particular ways of ‘thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting’ (Gee, 1990: 143). If students are to function within higher education context they must be able to show that they have acquired certain discourses (Gee, 1996). One of the main ways in which university students display their mastery of these discourses is by writing texts, such as essays or reports, situated within a specific discipline where particular ways of knowing are privileged (Bangeni, 2009; Layton, 2015).

Since literacy practices are acquired in certain contexts, multiple contextual factors, for instance, peer support, collaborative writing, and supervisor-student relationships influence how postgraduate students acquire the necessary academic literacies (Arend, 2014; Buissink-Smith, Hart & van der Meer,., 2013; Cooper, 2011; Clark and Ivanić, 1997; Menzies et al., 2015; Murray, 2015; Stracke & Kumar, 2014). Another factor that affects how students acquire the necessary academic literacies is the mode by which students are assessed. Since the B. Com HR Honours students are mainly assessed on their written texts, the next section of this literature review considers what
makes writing and reading, as opposed to speaking and listening, particularly potent modes of learning.

2.3 WRITING AS A CONDUIT FOR LEARNING

Learning generally takes place through interaction with written or spoken texts. The reason why both instances of writing and speaking are texts, is that a text can be understood as ‘any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language’ (Halliday, 2004: 3). While learning can be mediated by spoken texts, written texts are particularly suited to the mediation of learning. In order to understand why writing is a particularly good mode of learning, it is useful to compare the differences between written and spoken texts.

The most obvious difference between written and spoken texts is the way that these texts are produced. Writing is a much slower and more deliberate act, which requires more planning, than speech (Barnett & Leibowitz, 2014; Emig, 1977). Since deliberate acts require more thinking, more thought is generally given to the structure of ideas in written rather than spoken texts. Cognitive psychologists and educationalists have argued that the intentional structuring of ideas while writing can help students to grasp ideas and ultimately to learn (Emig, 1977). This means that writing something down makes it easier to refer to previous ideas, and to continually restructure one’s own thinking on and learning about a topic (Clark and Ivanić, 1997; Emig, 1977).

The nature of written texts also means that they are easier to interact with and therefore to learn from than spoken texts. While spoken texts have to be listened to at the same speed at which they were spoken, readers can choose to move more quickly or slowly through certain sections of the text (Barnett & Leibowitz, 2014). This means that instead of devoting most of one’s attention to a spoken text, readers of written texts can read through a text, while posing questions about the text and relating the text to other texts that they have read (Barnett & Leibowitz, 2014; Emig, 1977). Therefore, written texts are generally easier to learn from, because readers can read through written texts at their own pace and better interact with the text while they are reading it. Written texts are also easier for students to refer back to, and this can help
students understand how their thinking has developed and changed over time, and promote further learning (Emig, 1977).

Another feature of written texts, which makes them easier to learn from than speech, is that it is easier to give feedback on written rather than spoken texts. Spoken texts are harder to give feedback on as the feedback must be given while the speech is being given, interrupting the listener, or in a condensed manner where much may be lost, after the speech has been given (Emig, 1977). Written texts create an end product that allows lecturers and tutors to respond to each section of the text separately through written or spoken comments. However, this does not mean that feedback on written texts is always easy for students to understand. Multiple studies have shown that students struggle to understand feedback that they have received on their assignments (Chanock, 2010; Lillis, 1999). For instance, tutors and students have different understanding of comments, which can be interpreted differently, such as ‘be explicit’, and ‘too much description-not enough analysis’ (Lillis, 1999; Chanock, 2010). Only when students understand the feedback that they have been given will they be able to use this feedback when writing their future texts. This means that supplementing written feedback with an oral explanation can help each student to obtain a more complete understanding of the feedback on their writing (Lillis & Swann, 2003).

In general, written texts are more permanent and deliberately structured than oral texts, which allows for students and supervisors to engage with the ideas in written rather than oral texts more easily. This is why most postgraduate students, including this group of Honours students, usually provide a written account of their research. The permanence of written texts also means that they are easier to analyse than oral texts. In this study, I will analyse the students’ written assignments, including their final research report. The way in which writing mediates learning has been considered, but the question of how students can be supported to write research texts remains. The next section of the literature review considers how postgraduate students can learn to write with and from others.
2.4 SOCIAL WRITING

Since most postgraduate students spend long periods writing alone, many find that academic writing is a lonely experience (Fergie et al., 2011). Murray (2015) proposes that this isolation stems from a situation where the writer has difficulty focusing on the task due to time constraints and becomes frustrated when the way that they should best express their ideas in writing is unclear. Murray (2015) suggests that the key to alleviating this loneliness and helping novice writers to be productive is to create an environment that promotes social writing. Social writing occurs when a group of people dedicating time to write in each other’s presence under the guidance of a facilitator instead of writing alone (Murray, 2015). The reason why people write in groups with a facilitator at set times is so that writing becomes a habit. Social writing is a model of writing that views writing as a behaviour that can be initiated, sustained, and improved through fostering opportunities where people write and discuss their writing as a group (Murray, 2015).

Many postgraduate students and academics have said that writing as a group creates a different atmosphere than writing alone, because a facilitator ensures that participants disengage from other tasks and make writing their primary task (Murray, 2015). This creates an atmosphere where participants can write academic texts by disengaging from other tasks and engaging with writing (Murray, 2015). This can also help writers to develop healthy writing behaviours where they learn how to set aside time to write where they consciously start and stop writing (Murray, 2015). Being able to control when one writes, instead of waiting for inspiration to flow, or writing just before a deadline, has helped writers to feel more in control of the act of writing, and more motivated to write (Murray, 2015). Other benefits of social writing are that it allows academics to receive feedback on their texts, and to share knowledge and resources related to research with each other (Murray, 2015). Although some postgraduate students and academics still prefer to write by themselves, social writing can support students with their academic literacies acquisition by developing a culture of academic writing within particular departments or institutions (Murray, 2015).
2.5 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

A community of practice can be seen as any group of people who sustain an interaction over a period of time. All Honours students enter into a new community of practice when they begin their degree. Gee (1996) describes how social practices allow members of a community to recognise other community members as people with similar beliefs, values, and goals. While he does not specifically use the term community of practice (COP), communities of practice theory outlines how social practices are acquired through interaction with other members of a community (COPT). Therefore, COPT can be used to explain how postgraduate students acquire academic literacies through participation in a COP (Wenger, 2002; Wingate, 2012).

New Honours students are generally taught certain practices by established members of the community, for instance academic and support staff (Wenger, 2002). However, the literacy practices which Honours students will learn from their supervisors differ according to the institution and the discipline. This means that communities of practice are not value neutral and can be seen as sites where certain practices are accepted, nurtured or sustained, and by contrast other practices are discredited, side-lined, and rejected.

Before a person becomes a member of a community of practice, he or she may need to meet some preconditions to prove that he or she has enough knowledge and ability to become a member of this community. For example, most Honours students need to have passed certain degrees with a specific pass mark in order to be admitted to the degree. Even once Honours students are admitted into the degree they may be seen as newcomers or apprentices who performs small, low-risk tasks that help them to acquire some of the practices valued by the community (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson & McKee, 1978; Wenger, 2002). Community of practice theory regards this kind of participation in communities of practice as legitimate peripheral participation (Roberts, 2006; Wenger, 2002). If we consider the B. Com HR Honours students as a community of practice, the students completed smaller, lower risk assignments to acquire some of the practice valued by the community. Once the newcomers master certain practices they can be admitted more fully into the community (Wenger, 2002).
In this instance B. Com HR Honours students who demonstrated that they could perform practices related to the research proposal and research ethics could then continue their research. In completing these smaller tasks students learned practices related to conducting research and writing research texts in the discipline of Human Resource Management. Thus, for new members of the community, participation in communities of practice involves acquiring the practices that are valued in the community from a more senior member of the community over time (Wenger, 2002). In most cases, supervisors would be the more senior members of the community who induct postgraduate students into the community.

While it may be tempting to view part-time postgraduate students who are studying in the field in which they work as members of a large community that is made up of members from industry and academia, communities of practice are highly localised entities (Wenger, 2002). Therefore, while each student enrolled in the B. Com HR Honours degree may be seen as a member of the same academic community, they may each belong to a separate community of practice at work. When communities of practices have similar forms or functions they may be organised as networked communities of practice (Wenger, 2002). Work-based communities of practice for HR professionals may have very different social practices to community of practices which consider HRM issues within academic communities. For example, the social practices related to academic literacy, including research and academic writing may not be found to the same depth and for the same purposes in industry.

While postgraduate students may belong to different communities of practice at work and at university there are some advantages of degrees where links between these communities are made. One advantage of connecting communities of practice in industry and academia could be that students are more able fully participate in workplace communities (Russell, 1997). One of the ways that formal education can prepare students to participate in future workplace communities is by preparing them to write in ways that are useful for the world of work (Russell, 1997). Formal education best imparts literacy practices needed in the workplace by drawing together the similarities between workplace and academic communities of practices. During the B. Com HR module Honours students were asked to create linkages between these
communities by stating how their research had applications for HR professionals working in industry, and would address gaps in the literature for academics in the field.

By requiring the B. Com HR Honours students to create connections between industry and academic in this module may enable students to apply their own knowledge and experiences while conducting their research (Hutchings, 1998). Reducing the perceived gap between the subject matter and the students’ experiences can help students feel that as they know something about the subject they have the ‘right’ to speak on it. Research has shown that when students feel that the texts are too far removed from their experiences they are more likely to unintentionally plagiarise the material as they feel that they are not ‘qualified’ to voice their own opinions on the material (Angélil-Carter, 2000; Hutchings, 1998). Therefore, allowing students to research topics that are connected to other parts of their lives may in fact reduce the amount of plagiarism present in students’ writing.

Creating linkages between the field of HR as a discipline and the current practice of HR in industry can be advantageous for university students as it can help them to apply the knowledge gained through study, including through social practices, to the world of work. One of the most central social practices that Honours students need to acquire are academic literacies. Postgraduate students’ supervisors can have a profound impact on their students’ acquisition of academic literacies and the formulation of their written texts. The next section will consider how postgraduate students in communities of practice always have less power than their supervisors, and how this can affect students who want to write in unconventional ways.

2.6 POWER RELATIONS AND WRITING

It may seem that full membership for incoming newcomers who need to enter a community of practice for work or study is assured, but knowledge within a community of practice is relational (Wenger, 2002). Thus, Honours students need to acquire the practices, which rely on the knowledge of a shared repertoires or the ‘language, routines, artefacts, and stories’ of the community from their supervisors (Roberts, 2006: 624; Wenger, 2002). Students in the B. Com HR Honours programme also met
with support staff, but their primary relationship was with their supervisors. Thus, academic literacies are acquired through the social relationships that postgraduate students have with more experienced others, most notably their supervisors, located in particular communities of practice (Clark and Ivanić, 1997).

Community of practice theory (COPT) describes how new members of the community learn from more established members. A weakness of the COPT is that it does not pay sufficient attention to how those with the most power in a community may seek to impose their own ideas around what practices are acceptable on less powerful members of the community (Roberts, 2006). If we consider the research module as a small community, the B. Com HR Honours students generally have less power than academic staff and support staff (Clark and Ivanić, 1997). This is because a supervisor’s role is to ensure that his or her postgraduate students have attained enough knowledge of the content related to their topic and the conventions of the discipline in order to succeed. Success in this instance is obtained when students have enough knowledge of the content and the disciplinary conventions to read and write specific texts (Almargot & Chanquoy, 2001).

While supervisors as the relative experts in the discipline are placed in a position of power over their students, many of the judgements that supervisors make are partly subjective (McConlogue, 2012). This is because the supervisor’s viewpoints, prior experiences, and expectation of their students, all influence the act of assessment (Canagarajah & Lee, 2015; Thesen, 2015). Since supervisor judgements are subjective, it is possible for supervisors in the same department to assess students’ work very differently (Backhouse, 2007). Usually even when students believe that their work had not been assessed fairly, it is the supervisor, who holds more power than the student, whose view will prevail (Thesen, 2015).

However, power is not a fixed entity and some students may have more agency, depending on their relationships with their supervisor and support staff, and their perceived competence, than others (Clark and Ivanić, 1997; Fox, 2000). Even though postgraduate students have less power than their supervisors, they do not simply have to accept staff members’ views of how their academic writing should look. Instances
where mature postgraduate students have argued that they should be able to write a piece of work that explores the research topic in relation to their own experiences within their workplace and community have been documented (Arend, 2014; Canagarajah & Lee, 2015; Paxton, 2015). However, the likelihood of a supervisor being willing to negotiate how the student should write, and how their writing should be assessed depends on the supervisor’s views, the disciplinary conventions, and the institution’s position on what counts as scientific knowledge (Canagarajah & Lee, 2015; Thesen, 2015). In most institutions, postgraduate students across a wide variety of disciplines are expected to submit a research report, dissertation or thesis, structured according to the IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion) format, and to use an ‘objective tone’ (Canagarajah & Lee, 2015: 90).

The IMRAD format and the need to use an objective or impersonal tone means that the inclusion of a students’ experience in a research text is unconventional, and may be viewed by the supervisor as too risky (Canagarajah & Lee, 2015). If supervisors and examiners, who hold more power than the student, do not support unorthodox writing, then postgraduate students may find that they cannot discuss their own experiences in their research report (Cooper, 2011). Students who cannot find ways of bringing their personal experiences into the research report may become too demotivated to continue with the degree, or produce a research report that meets the disciplinary conventions, but which lacks the students’ voice and perspective (Bangeni & Kapp, 2006). Students who are unsupported to write in new ways may complete a research topic, but fail to truly explore the topic in a manner that is meaningful to them (Arend, 2014).

Supervisors are more experienced members of the disciplinary community and therefore have more power to influence how the research report is written. Many mature postgraduate students may want to bring their own experiences into their texts. Since writing in this way may contravene accepted academic discourses, supervisors should help students acquire enough of the disciplinary conventions so that students can choose when and where to use their authorial voice in their texts (Bangeni & Kapp, 2006). The ways in which the student-supervisor relationship can affect students’ writing have been considered, but in instances where students write texts in groups,
the social relationships between group members also influence how texts are written. The next section considers how the social relationship between group members assists or hinders the production of join texts.

2.7 COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Since the Honour's students in the B. Com HR module write their assignments and the final research report as a group, it is also important to consider how group or collaborative writing affects students’ acquisition of academic literacies. Audio recordings have shown that students who write collaboratively: discuss the task, brainstorm ways to successfully meet the task’s aims, and co-edit the final document (Storch, 2005). This interaction means that students who write collaboratively produce better texts than students who write individually (Storch, 2005). When English as an Additional Language students write collaboratively they produce texts with more complex and accurate sentences that exclude extraneous details (Storch, 2005). Students in the Honours research module write assignments collaboratively, which may help them to produce better texts.

Collaborative writing can help students produce better texts, but not all texts produced collaboratively are better than texts produced by individuals. Collaborative writing may fail because synthesising the different writing styles of the group members into one coherent text is complex (Ede & Lunsford, 1990). Some writers may feel that group members are too distracted with surface features of a text, such as grammar, while other writers may feel that too much attention is being paid to the overall text structure and not enough to the sentence construction (Ede & Lunsford, 1990). Learning how to accommodate different points of view from different writers into one text is also a challenge (Ede & Lunsford, 1990). If writers cannot find productive ways of writing together, and come to some conclusions about the ideas in the text and the structure of the text, it is possible that the text or texts produced will be disjointed.

The evidence that collaborative writing improves the final texts, is not the main reason why lecturers want students to work in groups. In disciplines related to business, such as Human Resource Management, lecturers feel that working in groups prepares
students to work with people, which is an essential skill in the workplace (Macfarlane, 2016; Rich, Owens, Johnson, Mines & Capote, 2014). This is why students in groups may be required to handle any problems that arise within the group by themselves. However, this is difficult for students to do as they all have the same level of authority in the classroom. One reason why it is harder to underperform in work groups is that employees in groups generally have managers inside or outside of the group, and all managers are expected to deal with underperforming employees (Macfarlane, 2016).

One of the main problems with working in groups is that individuals in groups are more likely to engage in a behaviour called social loafing, which can be defined as a situation where one or more group members displays a ‘propensity to withhold effort’ (Chidambaram & Tun, 2005; Kidwell & Bennett, 1993: 1; Piezon & Ferree, 2008). Social loafing increases when individual contributions to a project are difficult to measure and reward (Chidambaram & Tun, 2005; Piezon & Ferree, 2008). As large group sizes make it harder to discern each individual’s contribution, ensuring that groups remain small is one way in which lecturers can reduce social loafing (Chidambaram & Tun, 2005; Piezon & Ferree, 2008). Asking students, who have a good idea of how much each student has contributed to the group, to assess their peers may be a good way to measure an individual’s contributions. Peer assessment is also a good way of measuring each student’s contributions, because when individuals are accountable to a group they are more likely to contribute to group projects (Erez, Lepine & Elms, 2002; Rich et al., 2014). Since disengaged individuals are more likely to reduce their contribution to the group, designing tasks that are complex and meaningful will also reduce social loafing (Rich et al., 2014). Another way of ensuring that individuals in a group remain engaged is formally rotating leadership roles so that each individual has a chance to lead the group (Erez et al., 2002).

While students may acknowledge that writing collaboratively gives them access to multiple perspectives that can help them to produce better texts, many students still prefer to work individually since people working in groups tend to reduce their output. Lecturers who want to reduce the likelihood of social loafing when their students work in groups can 1) design complex and meaningful assessments, 2) use peer assessment to reward each individual’s contribution to the finalised research product,
and 3) encourage group members to rotate leadership roles (Chidambaram & Tun, 2005; Erez et al., 2002; Rich, et al., 2014). The next section considers how students working in formal and informal groups may form a peer support network where members exchange advice and information related to postgraduate studies.

2.8 PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

Collaborative writing may help students produce better texts than they would have produced individually, but this might not be the only benefit of writing as a group. Members of a writing group, such as the groups of Honours students in the research module, may find that their bond with each other resembles that of a peer support group. Peer support groups may be sustained by students, or may be supported in some way by the institution (Murray, 2015). All peer support groups can be seen as communities of practice where more experienced members of the community help new members of the community become fully-fledged members of the community (Wenger, 2002). In peer support groups, more experienced postgraduate students mentor their peers by sharing knowledge and resources (Menzies, Baron & Zutshi, 2015).

Although supervisors are the acknowledged experts in the field, postgraduate students may prefer to receive feedback on their writing from peers. Asking a peer for feedback is preferable because postgraduate students are less afraid to test out their initial ideas and to ask seemingly inane questions (Menzies et al., 2015). Although the Honours students entering into the research module are all relatively inexperienced, they still bring different experiences with them, which means that they may be able to mentor others in certain aspects related to their research. By gaining access to knowledge and resources, for instance knowledge of the ethics protocol to follow, and ethical clearance application forms, students acquire the social practices, including practices related to literacy, which they require to function as a member of the community. Research has found that peer support groups are especially beneficial for students transitioning into new communities, in this instance universities and disciplines, because they help students clarify social practices related to academic success (Menzies et al., 2015).
Peer support groups also form their own practices, which often include spaces for students to share their own academic struggles, and opportunities to celebrate academic and personal achievements of members. (Buissink-Smith et al., 2013; Murray, 2015; Menzies et al., 2015). Regular meetings, sharing of struggles related to research, and participating in social functions, are some of the ways that peer support groups help students to connect socially with their peers and feel less lonely during the often solitary research process. Thus, for postgraduate students belonging to a peer support network helps alleviate loneliness by providing students with the opportunity to interact with their peers (Buissink-Smith et al., 2013).

Research has shown that postgraduate students working in peer support groups are also more likely to achieve cross-curricula outcomes (Buissink-Smith et al., 2013; Stracke & Kumar, 2014). The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has ten cross-curricula learning outcomes that Honours students should be able to achieve by the end of the degree. One of the ten learning achievements states that Honours students should be able to create and share information, which is an essential ability for knowledge producers. Research has shown that students in peer support groups in Malaysia and New Zealand, who had the opportunity to present their research to other students, felt that they were now better able to share their research with others (Stracke & Kumar, 2014). Thus, requiring Honours to work in groups may help them develop the ability to create and share information.

Another two of the learning outcomes stated in the framework are the ability to manage one’s own learning and take responsibility to address any learning needs, both of which need to be met in order for students to conduct independent research (SAQA, 2012). Research has found that students who are part of a peer support group feel better able to manage their learning, because being part of the group helped them to acquire essential organisational and time management practices (Stracke & Kumar, 2014). The acquisition of these practices by students in peer support groups may be why postgraduate students who are members of a peer support group are more likely to finish their degree, and more likely to finish the degree in the required time period (Buissink-Smith et al., 2013).
Thus, the South National Qualifications Framework states that Honours students across all South African Higher Education Institutions should be able to share their research, and manage the research process (SAQA, 2012). However, according to a survey conducted in 2008 by Higher Education South African, and the South African Qualifications Authority, employers were dissatisfied with Honours graduates' written and oral communication, and ability to conduct research independently (Griesel & Parker, 2009; Leibowitz, 2011). Students may perform poorly on these outcomes because they are taught across the curriculum, which means that these outcomes are only partly covered by academics who teach core content in largely separate Honours modules. Since it is difficult to ensure that students meet these learning achievements during their Honours degrees, it may be better for students to master cross-curricular outcomes through participation in peer support groups.

Discipline-specific literacies must be learnt through concerted effort on the part of the student (Leibowitz, 2010). Students who are part of a peer support group make sustaining this effort easier by sharing information and advice on academic writing with each other, and motivating one another. Thus, South African universities that want their postgraduate students to achieve the South National Qualifications Framework Level Descriptors should create enabling environments where postgraduate students can form peer support groups. While peer support groups can help students achieve general cross-curricula outcomes, students need additional support in order to write research reports in their disciplines. A discussion of which theories and approaches are best suited to preparing students to write in their discipline follows.

2.9 WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES AND GENRE PEDAGOGY

The writing in the disciplines (WID) approach is approximately 47 years old (Russell, 1997). This approach recognises that one of the best ways for students to learn is by structuring their thoughts in writing (Emig, 1997; Russell, 1997). However, the end goal of the WID approach is not only to teach students how to produce texts in an academic discipline. This approach also empowers students to be able to produce and understand written texts in different worlds, or communities of practice. The WID
approach can be used to help students communicate with others in the workplace and within different disciplines (Russell, 1997). Thus, WID is used to empower students to be able to shape the different communities that they enter (Russell, 1997).

As the WID approach advocates teaching students how to write by helping them write in their disciplines, this approach rejects the proposition that literacy is a set of skills that can be learnt in one context and easily transferred to different contexts (Downs & Wardle, 2007; Lillis & Tuck, 2016; Wingate, 2006). In fact, teaching reading and writing as a set of neutral skills is highly problematic when we consider that practices, such as referencing, vary across disciplines, partly because generating and sustaining arguments is discipline specific (Wingate, 2006). Students who have been taught the technical aspects of referencing may be able to produce an acceptable reference list, but do not understand which parts of the text require references, and which sources they should reference (Wingate, 2006). The study skills approach may help students produce writing that meets certain technical requirements, but it will not help students understand how to debate and contest knowledge within their discipline (Wingate, 2006). Framing referencing as a technical process instead of an aspect of disciplinary knowledge only helps students learn to produce acceptable in-text references and reference lists and does not help them to understand how to reference for their discipline.

Evidence suggests that framing referencing as a technical skill does not help students write in their discipline (Fister, 1993). In addition, framing other discipline-specific meaning-making practices as technical skills may hinder students from learning how to construct meaning in their disciplines (Fister, 1993). Research has shown that students who received more sessions with library staff on information retrieval techniques performed more poorly on research problem formulation than students who had fewer sessions with the library (Fister, 1993). This is because librarians typically focus on how students can narrow down their searches for information according to a simplified framework, for instance asking students to apply the: who, what, when, and where questions to their research topic. Unfortunately, these types of simplistic information processing frameworks do not help students to locate their own research within a body of knowledge (Fister, 1992; Rinto, Bowles-Terry & Santos, 2016). In
order to construct meaningful and well-defined research problems students must firstly be aware of the current debates and controversies in the discipline, and then be able to locate their research problem in relation to these debates (Davidson & Crateau, 1998). Since this is a complex process, students struggle to locate their research problem within a particular theoretical and practical context (Davidson & Crateau, 1998; Rinto et al., 2016).

Further support for the view that writing is framed within a disciplinary context can be found if we consider the demands that different disciplines place upon their students. For instance, some hard science disciplines believe that scientific truths speak for themselves and are largely value neutral (Hyland, 2005; Hyland, 2010). In contrast, many disciplines in the social sciences and humanities view all knowledge as a set of contestable propositions (Hyland, 2005; Hyland, 2010). The way in which certain disciplines view the nature of reality affects how the texts that students write (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). In some disciplines postgraduate students should strive to write texts that are as objective as possible while in other disciplines students are expected to acknowledge that all knowledge is partially, or completely, socially constructed. Thus, instead of teaching students writing as a series of technical skills, such as referencing and information retrieval WID socialises students into the ‘ways of knowing’ that each discipline values.

Though there are some differences in how students from the social or hard sciences view knowledge, researchers in different disciplines also have particular views about which kinds of knowledge are the most valuable. Since this research explores the acquisition of academic literacies by Human Resource Management students, it is necessary to understand the particular texts that students in disciplines related to management are expected to read and produce. Research has found that students studying towards degrees in management related fields, such as HRM, are expected to read and produce reports and case studies (Goodier & Parkinson, 2005). These text types show that disciplines related to management, such as Human Resource Management, are communities where knowledge that can be applied to a specific business-based scenario is valued (Goodier & Parkinson, 2005). Students in these disciplines must learn to recognise that a case study is a type of narrative that
highlights a problem within an organisation, and a report is constructed to appear as a factual display information of information about a company’s current productivity. Students must also learn to read and respond to these texts appropriately. After reading through case studies and reports students are generally required to answer some questions about the text. Students answer these questions by: identifying and outlining the problem within the text correctly, seeking possible solutions to the problem, which are drawn from theories covered during the course, selecting what they believe is the best possible solution, and justifying their reasons for choosing this solution to the problem. Business simulations in case studies and reports therefore demand that students combine analytical problem-solving abilities with knowledge related to business systems, processes, and theories (Goodier & Parkinson, 2005).

The WID approach helps students to learn how to write for their disciplines, and due to the specific demands that each discipline places on students, the WID approach argues that writing should take place across the entire curriculum (Russell et al., 2009). Several well-known South African authors have argued that the best way to support students to develop their academic literacies is to offer writing support programmes across both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees (Boughhey, 2002; Jacobs, 2013; Leibowitz, 2000). When WID programmes exist at Honours level they need to build upon the mostly generic writing support was offered at the undergraduate level. If the writing support provided at the undergraduate level did not focus on writing in the disciplines, it will be difficult for WID at programmes at Honours level to build upon students’ prior knowledge of how to write in the discipline. However, the aim of WID programmes at Honours level would still be to familiarise students with conversations taking place in their discourse communities (McLeod & Soven, 2000: Hall, 2006). A discourse community, like any community of practice, relies on its members’ shared understandings of repertoires and practices for meaning making (Wenger, 2002). Honours students entering into or deepening their participation in a discourse community must learn how shared repertoires and practices are used in order to make meaning in texts. As an example, consider how certain vocabulary is a shared repertoire in discourse communities, and how Honours students must learn how terms and phrases are used in particular ways in a discipline (Hyland, 2016). Honours students entering into or deepening their participation in a discourse
community, must also understand how social practices, such as accepted modes of inquiry, also shape texts (Hyland, 2016).

One of the best means to help students learn how meaning is negotiated through text in disciplinary discourse communities is to include the teaching of genre within a WID curriculum. Since there are many different definitions of genre, as an Academic Literacies tutor I turned to the definition which seemed the clearest to me: genre is ‘socially recognised ways of using language for particular purposes, within particular contexts’ (Parkinson, Jackson, Kirkwood & Padayachee, 2007: 445). Thus, genre can be seen as language choices which create particular text types that fulfil a particular purpose in certain social contexts.

Genre Pedagogy, or the teaching of genre, focuses on teaching students how to use language to create particular kinds of text, such as a research report, for the readers located in particular contexts (Clark and Ivanić, 1997; Hyland, 2005). Assisting students to acquire academic literacies through Genre Pedagogy ultimately makes the process of reading and producing academic texts in the discipline less mysterious (Hyland, 2003; Clark, 2014). One of the advantages of incorporating Genre Pedagogy into a curriculum designed according to WID is that teaching students to recognise features of genre in text is a way making disciplinary conventions, which are often invisible to students, visible (Lillis, 1999). This may be particularly useful for mature students and students who are changing disciplines, who may be less aware of how the ‘ways of knowing’ valued by their disciplines should inform the written texts that they are expected to produce (Clarence, 2012; Bangeni, 2009; Hathaway, 2015; Layton, 2015: 203; Leibowitz, 2009). Genre Pedagogy, where students are shown how texts are structured according to certain disciplinary conventions, is one way to accommodate mature students or students who change disciplines.

There are a few possible ways of teaching students how genre operates in their disciplines (Wingate, 2012). One of the older methods of teaching genre focuses on showing students how grammar, or the rules that make up the structure of a language in texts, is used for certain communicative purposes (Merriam-Webster, 2017; Oxford English Dictionary, 2017; Wingate, 2012). The philosophy behind this approach is that
once students know how grammar can be used to create meanings in certain text types, such as a research report, they would be better able to use grammar as a resource to construct certain meanings in their own reports.

Since this approach could be taught in a prescriptive way, researchers sought other ways in which to teach students how to master genres (Wingate, 2012). One method, move analysis, which was popularised by Swales in 2004 shows writers how they can mimic typical transitions, or ‘moves’, that exist in certain texts (Cotos, Huffman & Link, 2015; 1). These transitions can be thought of as expected steps within particular genres that a writer should follow to communicate with the reader, and to strengthen their arguments (Doró, 2013). Another way to teach genres is to show students how to use particular rhetorical devices to persuade readers to adopt particular readings of their texts. Most genre pedagogy focuses on teaching students how to use a rhetorical device known as metadiscourse. Any parts of a text where the writer engages the reader directly, for example, by discussing the structure of the text or their own position within the text, rather the subject matter, are examples of metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005). The advantage of teaching students how to use metadiscourse is that they would be better able to create arguments and respond to previous research in a manner that their intended audience, their supervisors and examiners, find familiar (Hyland & Tse, 2004).

Despite the relevance of genre pedagogy for WID programmes, this approach is not without its critics. Genre pedagogy has been criticised for presenting students with static model texts that reduce the variety of representations used within a discourse and thereby limit students’ ability to produce meaningful texts. Clark (2014) and Hyland (2003) do not believe that knowledge of genre places undue limitations on the students’ ability to express themselves. In fact, Hyland (2003) argues that only by understanding how academic texts are produced can learners hope to engage with and ultimately question and take a critical standpoint with regards to these texts. Clark (2014) argues that genre-based pedagogies are not inherently harmful to students, and similar to all pedagogies, it is the way that the subject matter is taught which empowers or disempowers students. Thus, genre pedagogy is not an inherently restrictive way to teach students how to write, and its focus on conventions in texts
can help students understand how they can use language to create meaning in particular genres for specific audiences. Even though genre was first taught to students in the 1960s as a set of very restrictive textual features, over time genre pedagogy has emphasised the social and relational nature of acquiring academic literacies (Wingate, 2012). The way in which the study considered the social context in which the literacies were acquired is described in more detail in the research design and methodology section of this dissertation. One could also argue that the very nature of literacy as a social praxis means that all pedagogies, including genre pedagogy, which its focus on uncovering meaning making practices in text, do seek to induct students into a particular way of thinking.

One way of supporting students to produce texts that meet certain genre conventions is to provide students with scaffolding prior to the submission of these texts (Parkinson et al., 2007). Scaffolding is any additional support provided to students so that they can successfully complete a task independently (Grossman, 2009; Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). In practice, this might mean that students co-write developmental assignments, and use the feedback that they receive on these assignments to write increasingly complex texts (Ferris, 2003; Parkinson et al., 2007; Thomas, 2016). This feedback is most effective if it focuses on how both the structural and the rhetorical devices used meet the conventions of the genre (Ferris, 2003; Thomas, 2016). Research also suggests that students are better able to improve their texts if they receive feedback from multiple sources, including, peers, writing tutors, and academics (Parkinson et al., 2007; Leibowitz, 2016). Thus, additional support prior to the submission of a complex text can help students produce a text that meets more of the requirements of a particular genre. The next section considers how partnerships between academic and support staff should support students to write in the discipline.

Different disciplines require students to produce different types of texts that will be read by particular audiences. Unless students can understand how language is used in texts to create meaning they will not be able to harness these patterns within their own writing. Demystifying the discipline using genre pedagogy involves articulating implicit rules of the discourse found in the texts that students are expected to read and produce (Clark, 2014; Hyland, 2003). This uncovering of features of academic writing
that are often not explicit makes Genre-Pedagogy a particularly powerful way of helping students write for a discipline-based audience.

2.10 THE ROLE OF THIRD SPACE PRACTITIONERS

Other members of the disciplinary COP, who like students, are on the edge of the community and have considerably less power, are academic support staff (Latour, 1999). In this study, academic support staff members from the Writing Centre and Postgraduate Centre assisted the students as Academic Literacies tutors, which meant that they had considerably less power compared to the lecturers from the department. These staff members played a specific support role as Academic Literacy Practitioners (ALPs), or support staff whose role is to help develop students’ academic literacies (Jacobs, 2005; Moore, Praxton, Scott & Thesen, 1998). While teaching and learning was seen in the past as the preserve of academics, ALPs, such as myself, often specialise in the field of academic literacies (Whitchurch, 2013). Unlike pure academic or administrative personnel, we ALPs straddle academic and administrative roles (Whitchurch, 2013).

Although all ALPs assist students with their writing, ALPs in Writing Centres can play a crucial mediating role between students and lecturers (Harris, 1995). For instance, Writing Centre consultants can help students understand their lecturers or tutors’ feedback by explaining seemingly opaque terms like ‘coherence’ and ‘argument’ (Clarence, 2012). Writing Centres play a crucial role in developing students writing as they provide opportunities for students to reflect on their writing and to clarify lecturers’ comments on their writing. Writing Centres, like ALPs, resist the notion that their function is to fix the language errors of underprepared students (Clarence, 2012). Instead, Writing Centres are spaces within institutions where discussions around writing are centred (Clarence, 2012). Discussion can occur between a writing consultant and a student who reflects on his or her own writing practices, or when a lecturer and a more senior consultant consider how students can be empowered to harness the meaning-making practices within a discipline. Research indicates that postgraduate students appreciate the opportunity to develop writing practices related to self-reflection (Leibowitz, 2013; Leibowitz, 2016).
Though the support that ALPs and other support staff provide may be valued by postgraduate students, supervisors frequently feel that this support is an ‘intrusion’ into what they perceive as a private relationship with their student (Manathunga, 2005). Supervisors are particularly threatened if they perceive ALPs or other support staff as being critical of the guidance that they provide to their postgraduate student (Vosloo & Motala, 2016). When postgraduate students receive advice on their research from ALPs, this advice is rarely thought to contribute to student success (Vosloo & Motala, 2016). This disregard for the input of ALPs is heightened by most institutional cultures, which regard Academic Literacies and other Scholarship of Teaching and Learning fields, as less prestigious than discipline-based research (Tuck, 2016).

By operating on the edge of the ‘private’ student-supervisor relationship and in the space between academic and administrative functions, ALPs and other support staff who support postgraduate students are thought to operate in ‘third’ or separate spaces (Vosloo & Motala, 2016; Whitchurch, 2013). By operating outside the traditional institutional boundaries ALPs perform roles that are less clearly defined than typical academic staff members and administrators (Whitchurch, 2013). While some third space practitioners find freedom in operating in spaces that are not well defined, others find working in an in-between space isolating (Thesen & van Pletzen, 2006; Whitchurch, 2013).

Unfortunately, when the roles of ALPs and DSs are unclear the students will not benefit as much from the expertise of both parties. The role that both the ALP and the DS play in this partnership is of equal importance. The role of the DSs is to help ALPs gain a deeper understanding of the discipline, because ALPs cannot induct students into disciplines that they are not familiar with (Jacobs, 2005; Jacobs, 2007). In addition, DSs are generally responsible for assessing students’ work and can help students understand how their written work will be assessed. If DSs do not recognise that they need to teach ALPs more about the discipline operates then ALPs who are not experts in the discipline may assign students writing tasks that bear little relation to texts that have specific functions within the discipline (Jacobs, 2013). For example, an ALP with
a background in English literature may ask Honours students to produce a narrative piece of writing rather than to write texts that prepare students to write in the form of a research report.

The role of the ALP in these partnerships is to help the DSs articulate from themselves, and later for their students, how language is used to convey meaning in their disciplines (Jacobs, 2007; McKay & Simpson, 2013). The ALPs’ role is important because the DSs have often unknowingly internalised knowledge related to WID and can no longer clearly see why students struggle to articulate their thought in their writing (Jacobs, 2005; Jacobs, 2007). Thus the ALPs’ role is to help the DSs to see that rhetorical processes that disciplines use to convey meaning, which they have absorbed through years of study, need to be explicitly taught to students. When the ALPs are not acknowledged as academic literacies specialists by DSs, they may act as editors of students’ work, or language teachers who facilitate workshops focused on language development skills, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling (Jacobs, 2005; Clarence, 2012). This approach will not enable the Academic Literacy Practitioners to induct students into the meaning-making practices of the discipline (Jacobs, 2005; Moore et al., 1998).

While ALPs may not fully understand the ‘ways of knowing’ prized by the DSs, there is an expectation that supervisors from the same department share a common understanding of what constitutes good writing in a discipline (Backhouse, 2007; Layton, 2015: 203). However, this is not the case. Research indicates that supervisors from the same disciplines have very different views on how their postgraduate students should write (Backhouse, 2007). Thus, in order to ensure that the discussions on how to support students with their academic literacies are productive both ALPs and DSs need to research and interrogate how they impart literacy practices to students.

Though partnerships between ALPs and DSs can help students acquire necessary academic literacies as these partnerships are usually informal, only the students of academic staff who want to work with ALPs benefit from the expertise of both parties (McKay & Simpson, 2013). In order to ensure that more students benefit from
collaborations where ALPs and DSs exchange content and tacit knowledge these partnerships need to be initiated, supported, and sustained by HEIs (Leibowitz, 2011). Unless the institution clarifies the role of ALPs and academic staff in these partnerships, ALPs may feel unsupported or unable to negotiate ways of working with more powerful others, including academic Heads of Department or faculties.

Research suggests that it is the responsibility of both faculty and support staff to show students how certain rules shape texts used in disciplines (Jacobs, 2007; Leibowitz, 2010). For partnerships between ALPs and DSs to enable students to write within their disciplines, the role of each party needs to be acknowledged so that the expertise of both ALPs and DSs is utilised. Ideally if both parties understand their roles, the instruction and feedback provided to the students should be focused on helping them to write in their discipline. Thus, only when the roles of each party are clearly understood can ALPs and DSs co-design and co-teach WID programmes successfully (Leibowitz, 2013; Moore et al., 1998).

2.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter has contested the idea that literacy is merely a set of generic and transferable skills, and has instead shown how students acquire literacy in particular social contexts. Since literacy is a social practice, students need to be provided with opportunities to acquire the academic literacies that are appropriate to their disciplines (Gee, 2015). One way of helping students to acquire these practices is to let them re-write draft texts. Research suggests that students benefit from the opportunity to write and re-write these texts while receiving input from peers, supervisors, and academic staff, and literacy practitioners (Parkinson et al., 2007; Leibowitz, 2016).

However, like any communicative act, this feedback is influenced by the social relationships between the role players. While students writing in groups can provide each other with academic and emotional support, students working in groups are more likely to contribute less to collaborative assignments (Buissink-Smith et al., 2013; Chidambaram & Tun, 2005; Erez et al., 2002; Menzies et al., 2015; Murray, 2015; Rich, et al., 2014; Storch, 2005). By mediating the relationships between group
members, and ensuring that students do not dominate groups and that leadership roles are shared, social loafing behaviour can be reduced.

The relationship between supervisors, who are Disciplinary Specialists (DSs), and support staff who are Academic Literacy Practitioners (ALPs), also has an impact on the type of support that students are likely to receive from each role player. When ALPs do not work closely with DSs they are less likely to be shown by the DSs how the discipline operates. Without an understanding of the discipline, ALPs are more likely to provide students with advice that is not aligned to their discipline (Jacobs, 2013; Moore et al., 1998). When DSs do not see ALPs as literacy experts, they are less likely to work with ALPs to rediscover how the academic literacies operate in their discipline, and how they can assist students to acquire these academic literacies (Jacobs, 2007; McKay & Simpson, 2013). Thus, students are more likely to benefit from the unique input that both DSs and ALPs can provide when these two parties acknowledge and utilise each other’s expertise.

Since literacy is a social practice, the chapter that follows will consider which research design and methods are best suited to studying the students’ acquisition of the academic literacies in context.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains how the chosen research design, and methods of data collection and analysis enabled a rigorous study of the phenomenon in context. The chapter begins by explaining how a flexible research design was leveraged to better understand the phenomenon in context. The chapter then describes how the methods used to collect the data ensured that the data gathered would be rich and relevant. A description of the methods used to analyse the data, and the measures that were taken to ensure that results of the study were trustworthy and credible follows. The final section in the chapter outlines how certain choices were made throughout the research process in order to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research was qualitative and interpretive as I used the participants’ accounts of their experiences, rather than numbers, to understand their experiences (Ponelis, 2015). As with all case study research, I wanted to gain a deeper, more situated understanding, of the phenomenon or 'unit of human activity' in a real life context (Gillham, 2000: 38; Knobel & Lankshear, 1999). Thus, I sought to understand how the research preparation module facilitated the B. Com HR Honours students’ acquisition of academic literacies, by researching the participants in their usual setting, the university (Ponelis, 2015). This was particularly important because the way that people write is influenced by their previous experiences, and ongoing interactions with other writers. Thus, writing is a social practice and social practices cannot be studied in a decontextualised manner. Since a student’s acquisition of academic literacies is influenced by their context, case study research was an appropriate design as it explores how human behaviour is influenced by context (Gillham, 2000; Knobel & Lankshear, 1999). Since case studies explore human behaviour in context, researchers using case studies seek to understand a phenomenon in greater depth, rather than to produce generalisable findings (O’Leary, 2014). This means that by using case study research I could explore how a particular group of Honours students enrolled in a particular programme in one institution were supported to develop their academic literacies.
All case studies seek to understand a phenomenon in the context in which it is located, but there are different kinds of case studies. As each type of case study suggests a different research purpose, the researcher has to determine what kind of case study will address the research questions in the best manner. As not much is known about how Honours students acquire academic literacies through a research preparation module, I chose to use an exploratory case study to research this problem. Exploratory case studies seek to find out more about a research problem where little published literature is available (Yin, 2014). As the name suggests exploratory case studies are open ended in nature and do not seek to definitively prove or disprove certain theories or premises (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Since exploratory case studies are fairly open ended, the researcher has the opportunity to decide how the research should be conducted. Generally, case studies, including this one, use multiple data sources and methods to understand multiple facets of the research problem (Baxter & Jack, 2008). By borrowing methods commonly used in various research designs, researchers are better able to seek knowledge in new territories (Yin, 2003; Yin, 2014). I had hoped that by crafting a unique design, the research might provide unique or new insights into an under-researched phenomenon, the acquisition of academic literacies at postgraduate level (O’Leary, 2014). I took advantage of the flexibility inherent in case study research by incorporating elements from two other research designs, namely: action research and ethnography, into this study.

This exploratory case study had some similarities to action research, because I identified a real world problem, i.e. how not enough was known about how to facilitate Honours students’ acquisition of academic literacies (O’Leary, 2014). In addition, I followed a short action research cycle of observation, reflection, planning, and action, as the data and my own reflections from 2015 informed the way in which I taught the tutorials in 2016 (O’Leary, 2014). Although this research borrowed some elements of action research, which I think enabled me to gather rich data, the design of this research was not a pure action research design. If the design of the study was action research I would improve the ability of the module to support students’ academic
literacies acquisition (O’Leary, 2014). While my reflections on the tutorials in the first year shaped the way I taught in the second year, as a tutor I had a limited amount of influence on the way that the research preparation module was taught. As a relative outsider to the discipline it was not my aim to try and control the way that the academic staff taught this module at the time of the study or in the future. The staff from the department will determine which, if any, findings are relevant, and how, if at all, these findings should be used to improve the module further. Thus, while my involvement as a tutor, or practitioner, did inform the study, this research was not an example of practitioner-led action research as the practitioners’ experience was not the primary focus of the study (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Instead, as with many qualitative case studies, I wanted to explore the supervisors’ and the students’ perceptions of the module.

While I was primarily interested in gathering self-reported data from interviews and focus groups, I also observed the participants during the tutorials that I taught, and the other tutorials and lectures that the students attended. I believe that these observations helped me to refine the interview and focus group questions and to locate the findings in a particular context. Observation is a method typically associated with ethnographic research (O’Leary, 2014). However, I do not believe that I was involved enough in the lives of the participants in order for this study to be classified as an ethnography. If this study had been a pure ethnography, I would have tried to understand the lived reality of the participants, by registering as a student in the module or by observing the students more often (O’Leary, 2014). I did not observe every lecture or tutorial that the students attended. In 2015 it was not possible to attend the lectures and tutorials as the group was split into two halves, and one half of the students attended the Academic Literacies tutorials while the other half attended the Truth Knowledge and Creating Knowledge lectures. However, as students attended the Academic Literacies tutorials and Truth Knowledge and Creating Knowledge lectures on alternate days as one group in 2016 I was able to observe some of these lectures and tutorials. I also observed any other events that students were required to attend. For instance, I observed the consultation days with the Writing Centre staff, the teaching and learning seminars, and the departmental poster evening, where students presented their final poster. These observations helped me to gather,
analyse, and report on the data, but they were not sustained enough to be a primary source of data.

I was able to observe the participants and to incorporate elements of action research into the study because I was a tutor and a support staff member who worked at the same university where the module was taught. This meant that I already knew the staff who taught the module, and could therefore be considered as an insider researcher rather than as an outsider who only visits the site to collect data. However, as I was not a full member of the department, I did not share the same values as members of the community, and this meant that my insider status was partial (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Greene, 2014). The ways in which this partial insider status allowed me to gather rich data and the measures that I took to reduce potential bias, which can be a hazard when conducting insider research (Greene; 2014), are discussed in more detail in section 3.6.1.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

3.2.1 Overview of the data sources

The participants in this study were two cohorts of students completing the research preparation module in 2015 and 2016 as part of the B. Com HR Honours degree offered at a comprehensive South African university, and their supervisors. Data from the students was gathered from three sources: the students’ responses to questions posed in an online forum, focus groups discussions with the students, and analysis of the students’ assignments. Data from the supervisors was gathered through interviews. Example questions from the discussion forum, the focus group discussions with students, and the interviews with supervisors can be found in Appendix A.

3.2.2 Sampling

Forty-two students registered for the degree in 2015 and in 2016 this number increased to 57 students. Only a handful of the students were white, the rest were black or coloured. Most of the students worked full-time and had previously studied
their undergraduate degree at the same university. I invited students to participate in focus group discussions during an Academic Literacies tutorial. Students received a letter of informed consent and an information form, which they could fill in and give back during the next tutorial. Unfortunately, volunteer sampling can be problematic as volunteers may have particularly strong views about the topic, which means that they may not represent the population well (O’Leary, 2014). I was concerned that the volunteers would either hold very positive or negative views about the research module, but I decided that offering all the students the chance to take part in the research was the most ethical way to conduct the study.

One of the questions on the information form asked participants how many tutorials they had participated in. Once I had received the forms from the interested participants, I invited students in 2015 and 2016 who had attended the first four academic literacies tutorials to a focus group discussion. The reason why I only invited the students who had attended the first four tutorials to the focus group discussion was that these students would have found it easier to discuss the impact of the tutorials on their writing during the focus groups. Thus, I handpicked students with more experience of the tutorials so that they could engage in discussions around the acquisition of academic literacies more fully (O’Leary, 2014).

Students generally chose to attend the same focus group discussion as the other members of their group. Students were assigned to groups at the start of the module, and completed all the required assignments, including the research report, in groups of three to five students. Once a focus group had taken place, I invited all of the supervisors of the groups that had participated in the focus group to an interview. Not all of the supervisors took part in the interview, and I decided that I would only analyse the students’ assignments if I had interviewed their supervisor. I made this decision because I wanted to relate the way in which the students wrote to what the students and their supervisors had told me during the focus groups and interviews.
3.2.3. Overview of the data collected

Students participated in focus group discussions held at the end of the first and second semester in 2015 and 2016. In total fifteen students from six different groups participated in five focus group discussions. Nine of the fifteen participants shared their experiences in both a mid-year and end-of-year focus group, and the other six participants chose to participate in either the mid-year or end-of-year focus group. I invited the five supervisors of the six groups, one supervisor supervised two groups, to an interview. Three of the supervisors from four of the groups were interviewed, and the assignments from these four groups were analysed. In total, I analysed 36 out of a possible 38 written assignments from these four groups, because students were unable to locate two of their assignments.

3.3. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

3.3.1 Students’ online discussion forum

Prior to the focus group discussions students were asked to respond to questions asking them to reflect on the Academic literacies tutorials via an online forum, which was available through the students’ Blackboard module. I created the forum because I thought that the opportunity to reflect on the tutorials using informal language could help the students clarify the research project for themselves. I also wanted to use an online forum to collect data as there would be no need to transcribe the data as I could copy it from the forum into a Microsoft Word document. I had hoped that the forum, which did not require students to respond immediately, would give students more time to reflect on the tutorials before answering the discussion questions (Tiene, 2000). I also thought that this medium would make it easier for students who are reluctant to participate in face-to-face discussions to engage in the discussion (Tiene, 2000).

After each tutorial, I posted three to five questions on the students’ Blackboard module. Each question asked students to reflect back on what they had learned during the tutorial, or to discuss their shifting perspectives on academic writing. In the first semester of 2015, almost all of the 42 students posted responses to the questions that
I had posted on the online forum. However, there were far fewer posts after the three second semester tutorials, and very few of the 57 students in 2016 posted responses on the online forum. I think that students did not participate in the discussion forum as much in 2015 because tutorial attendance dropped in the second semester as the pressure to submit the research report loomed. The students in 2016 may have responded to the posts less because of inherent differences between the two groups. However, it is also likely that the 2016 cohort learned from the 2015 cohort that neither tutorial attendance nor participation in the online forum, both tutorial requirements, were enforced, and therefore felt less pressure to participate in the forum.

Due to the decreased participation in the forum in the second semester of 2015 and from the 2016 cohort, I decided there would not be enough data for the forum to form one of the data sources. However, the forum data could still be used to develop the draft interview and focus groups questions.

3.3.2 Focus group discussions

During focus group discussions the researcher formulates questions which are likely to promote dialogue. My aim as the facilitator of the focus group discussions was to ask participants questions that would prompt them to begin conversations with each other. By questioning each other, elaborating or clarifying ideas, agreeing or disagreeing with previous statements, a richer picture of how the participants perceived the module emerged (Barbour & Kitzenger, 1999; Hesse-Biber, 2017). Thus, this method was chosen to as it enabled me as the researcher to unearth the multiple perspectives that participants had towards the module (Barbour, 2007).

I decided to hold the first focus group discussion at the end of the first semester after students had presented their research proposal to a panel of staff from the department, because this event happened about halfway through the academic year. Presenting the research proposal to the panel was a milestone for the students as it meant that they were now able to continue with their research project. The second focus group was held after the students presented their research report to the panel, because the students would be in a position to reflect on how they had experienced the module
over the entire academic year. In order to prevent students from traveling to campus just to participate in a focus group discussion, I arranged the focus groups on days where students had to come to campus to meet with their supervisor or submit an assignment.

In order to create the most conducive environment for the focus group discussions, I did not arrange for them to take place in their tutorial venue. The tutorial venue was not suitable as scheduling conflicts had occurred in the past and during the tutorial noise from surrounding venues could also be heard. I therefore booked a quiet venue on campus for all the focus group discussions. While this venue may have been available and quiet, the fact that it was less familiar to the students and located in the building where I worked may have emphasised the fact that I had more power in the university hierarchy than the students. Each of the five focus group discussions was audio recorded so that near verbatim transcriptions of the focus groups could be produced (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3.3. Interviews with staff members

Interviews are used when the researcher is interested in the lived experience of each participant (Hesse-Biber, 2017). I interviewed four supervisors, three of whom had additional roles as the Truth Knowledge and Creating Knowledge lecturer, the qualification leader, or the module coordinator, and would be able to view the module from a different perspective. I already knew from my conversations with academic staff in other departments that individual staff members have their own style of supervision, which influences the relationship that they have with their postgraduate students. In addition, within the same department supervisors’ very notion of what constitutes ‘good’ writing, and how writing should be taught and assessed, differs (Backhouse, 2007). These differences may be even greater if supervisors also perform different teaching, managerial, and administrative duties. Two of the interviews took place in 2015, and two took place in 2016.

I used semi-structured interviews, a flexible interview method that is often used by researchers conducting exploratory research (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The only structure was a list of possible open-ended questions which served as an interview
guide (Hesse-Biber, 2017; O’Leary, 2014). As the interview did not proceed in a set order, I could also ask participants relevant follow-up questions, or probe for more information (Hesse-Biber, 2017). This allowed participants to reflect back on their own experiences of the module, which generated rich accounts of their experiences in their own words (Hesse-Biber, 2017; O’Leary, 2014).

3.4 INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP PREPARATION

3.4.1 Interview and focus group preparation in 2015

The interview and focus group questions were informed by an iterative process of question generation, data collection, data analysis, and question review. Constructing draft questions for an open-ended interview is important, because the researcher needs to ask questions that enable him or her to obtain data that provide insights into the original research questions (Mason, 1995; O’Leary, 2014). For more information on how the data analysis informed the interview and focus group questions in 2015, see the figure on the below:

![Figure 1: The process of refining the interview/focus group questions in 2015](image)

Step 1: I analysed the data from the online discussion posts, which had asked students to reflect on their experiences during the tutorial, and how much they felt that the tutorials had helped them to write their assignments. Once I revised the data from the online discussion posts, I wrote down a few of the themes that had been raised multiple times, and which I wanted to ask students more about in the focus groups (Mason, 1996). Using the list of themes, I then brainstormed possible focus group questions with a colleague (Hesse-Biber, 2017). This helped me to draft questions that were less
directive, and more likely to prompt discussion among participants (Kidd & Parshall, 2000)

I constructed topics for the interviews with supervisors by reviewing: 1) The focus group discussion topics, 2) The advice that I had received on asking questions in a non-leading manner, and 3) Notes that I had made based on conversations with the staff members. Working at the same university also meant that on a few occasions I encountered the staff members at work where these discussions continued.

Step 2: I analysed the data from the mid-year focus group.

Step 3: I refined the end-of-year draft interview and focus group questions after reviewing data from the online discussions, the interviews, the informal discussions with staff members and students, and the analysis of the mid-year focus group transcript. Since I was an on-site practitioner, I had the opportunity to find out more about the students’ experiences before or after the tutorials I taught or the classes that I had observed. I found that as the students’ understanding of the aims of the module grew and they interacted with me more, they were keen to reflect on how the module had supported them with their academic literacies development. When I acted as a de facto writing consultant during two full-day writing sessions, I also made notes of particular observations or concerns raised by participants regarding the writing of the research report. I observed two of the six statistics tutorials and two of the six Truth Knowledge and Creating Knowledge lectures. During these tutorials, I made notes on how aspects of the tutorials and lectures related to academic literacies, I paid particular attention to aspects related to academic literacies that students seemed to enjoy or to find challenging. At the end of each tutorial, I wrote a summary of these notes, which I could then use to refine the list of possible questions to ask the students in the focus group discussions. I believe that all my interactions with the students helped me to add to and refine the list of suggested questions for the focus group discussions. If I had not been able to engage with the students over time I would not have been able to pose such pertinent questions during the focus group discussions.
3.4.2 Interview and focus groups preparation in 2016

Preliminary data analysis also helped me to revise the interview and focus group questions in 2016. The process of refining the interview and focus group questions was slightly different in 2016, because too few participants posted responses to the online discussions for this data to be used, and two mid-year focus groups were conducted. For more information on how an analysis of the data informed the interview and focus group questions in 2016, see the figure below:

Figure 2: The process of refining the interview/focus group questions in 2016

Step 1: I reviewed the data from the interviews, focus groups, informal conversations, and tutorial and lecture observations (in 2016 I observed the statistics tutorials, and the Truth Knowledge and Creating Knowledge lectures that students attended as part of the module). I then revised the list of questions developed in 2015 for the end-of-year focus groups in order to form a list of possible questions for the first 2016 mid-year focus group and interviews with supervisors.

Step 2: I analysed the data from the first mid-year focus group and reflected back on my observations of workshops, tutorials, and lectures, and the informal conversations that I had with the students. I then revised the original list of possible focus group questions to form a list of possible questions for the second mid-year focus group.

Step 3: After reviewing all the data collected, I revised the list of potential questions for the end-of-year focus group, and interview.
I used data from multiple sources to generate possible questions for the focus group discussions and interviews. This iterative process of data analysis and collection was negatively influenced by a period of time where I had a reduced level of access to participants involved in the research module, for more detail see the limitations section in the conclusion chapter and Appendix B. While each interview and focus group was a unique set of interactions or co-constructions, I believe that the pre-planning helped me to direct and shape the focus of the interactions (Mason, 1996).

Reviewing the initial interview and focus group transcripts, enabled me to determine which issues were raised by both parties, and which were raised only by supervisors, or only by students. Once I understood the concerns of students and of supervisors, I revised the subsequent interview and focus group draft questions accordingly. I believe that formulating specific questions for supervisors and for students meant that the data which was gathered gave a good account of the students’ and supervisors’ unique experiences.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

3.5.1 Analysis of the online discussion forum posts

Students responded to three to five questions, which were posted after each tutorial via their Blackboard Module. Since participation declined sharply in the second semester, only the posts from students in the first semester of 2015 were analysed. In 2016 participation in the online discussions was very low, and this meant that the 2015 and 2016 responses to the discussion questions could not be compared.

For a few days after the first tutorial in 2015, the fear that I would somehow unduly influence the students' responses and my previous work commitments prevented me from commenting on the students' posts. After a few days of reflecting on my dual role as tutor and researcher, I decided that it would be appropriate to praise students for posing reflective responses, or to ask students to clarify statements that were unclear to me.
In order to analyse the students’ posts from the first semester of 2015, I copied all the questions and the students’ responses, in the order in which the questions had been posed, into a Microsoft Word Document. After reading through the data many times, I started to categorise the students’ posts into colour coded categories, referred to in the literature as codes (Saldaña, 2016). The categories were reviewed and revised until categories could be collapsed into one another, or discarded. Once the list of codes was finalised the codes were arranged into larger categories, or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

While this data proved very useful for compiling interview and focus group questions, it was too superficial to be used as one of the sources of data. Instead of really engaging with the questions, most students responded to each question in one or two sentences, and only a handful of students responded to a fellow student or wrote a longer response. The lack of depth in the data meant that the data was used as the basis for the interview and focus group discussions rather than a separate set of data to be discussed in the findings chapter. As many of the issues raised in the online discussions were discussed in more depth in the focus group discussions, there was no need to discuss the data from the online discussion separately.

3.5.2 Analysis of the focus group discussions and interview transcripts

Once data has been transcribed it needs to be sorted into different categories or codes (Saldaña, 2016). The literature that I had read provided some idea of what codes I might find, but as this was an exploratory study, it meant that there was not enough literature on the phenomenon to develop a pre-determined coding framework. The advantage of not utilising a coding framework was that I did not try to fit all the codes into a list of pre-determined codes, instead I explored the multiple ways of grouping the data, and the messy boundaries between codes, sub-themes, and main themes (Yin, 2003; Yin, 2014). By exploring multiple ways to group the data, I was able to develop a rich comparison of the different participants’ perspectives.

In order to analyse the data, I first reviewed the data many times in order to get a sense of which codes could be used to describe quotes, or pieces of participants’ speech. I then assigned codes to the data using the ATLAS.ti software programme,
which Richards (2009) and Saldaña (2016) suggest is a more effective and efficient than coding the data by hand. Richards (2009) states that assigning codes via a software programme enables the researcher to access relevant data from a saved file instantly. I found that using ATLAS.ti did help me to find relevant data more quickly, because when I selected a particular code or quote, the relevant section of a transcript was highlighted. I found that this helped me keep track of the common codes which appeared across multiple transcripts.

Once codes had been assigned to all the transcripts, I had to reduce the number of initial codes (Richards, 2009). I exported the code list with related quotes as a Microsoft Word document, and then decided which codes were semantically similar and could be collapsed into one code. For example, I decided that the codes ‘Conducting independent research for the first time’, ‘More work’, and ‘Greater depth required at Honours level’ could be merged into one code. Based on the students’ remark that there was a ‘huge gap’ between undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, I renamed the code, ‘Huge gap between undergraduate and Honours degrees’. I reduced the code list further by removing redundant code from the code list. Generally, codes were removed if not enough of the participants’ quotes were attached to a code, or if the quotes which were attached to the code were not useful for making sense of the participants’ experiences of the module. For example, I the ‘Working in a large group is challenging’ code from the code list because the challenges of working in groups had already been captured by a code called ‘coordinating assignments is a challenge’.

Once I had a list of codes, I wanted to compare the different ways in which supervisors and Honours students viewed this module. To do this, I created a table where the codes and their related quotes from the supervisors and students were listed side by side, a strategy recommended by Saldaña (2016). An example table, without the quotes, which are too numerous to include, can be found on the next page.
Table 2: Example table comparing student and supervisor views on the module

| Main theme: Supervisor and student reflections on students’ academic literacy development |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Sub themes                                 | Supervisors’ reflections                     | Students’ reflections                        |
| Academic dishonesty                        | Students fabricate their literature          | Plagiarism a problem                         |
| Academic literacies                        | Students present their research in multiple modes | Presenting research as a poster is fun       |
| Academic Literacies tutorials & input from tutor useful | Fight to get AL tutorials included in course | AL tutorials too draining Tutors advice might differ from supervisor’s advice |
| Referencing                                | Students must reference correctly            | Referencing is a pain                        |
| Feedback from the Postgraduate Writing Fellows (PGWFs) | PGWFs’ advice was useful PGWFs’ advice conflicted with supervisor’s advice | PGWFs’ advice was useful PGWFs’ advice conflicted with supervisor’s advice PGWFs must be available for part-time students |

By reviewing the table, it was possible to ascertain which codes were shared by both groups, and which codes were particular to students or supervisors.

Once I had a final list of all the codes, I needed to group the codes into themes and sub-themes (Saldaña, 2016). I began to determine some draft themes by sorting codes that seemed to speak to similar issues into groups. By examining these groups of codes, I could then determine some draft names for these different groupings. I then used Salanda’s (2016) strategy of creating different visual maps to determine which groups would become the main themes, and which groups would become the sub-themes under those themes. In order to create the visual maps, I chose a colour to represent related themes, which I placed on the left hand side of the page; I then typed the main theme that would encapsulate the sub-themes on the right hand side of the page after a bracket. I then devised clear names for the themes and sub-themes, i.e. names that I could use to remind myself what the essence of each theme is (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For an example visual map, see the figure below:

1. Thrown in the deep end
2. Gaining direction
3. Adjusting to a new university or campus

Figure 3: Example of how main and sub themes were represented visually
3.5.3. Analysis of the students’ written assignments

The students’ written assignments were analysed once the analysis of the data from the focus group discussions and interviews was complete. I was interested to see if students and staff members’ experiences of the programme corresponded with the improvements in the students’ writing. However, as I did not want to examine the data with too many preconceived ideas about what I would find, I decided to analyse the written assignments without referring back to the focus groups and interview transcripts.

I assessed whether students’ writing had improved over time by assessing whether the students’ assignments had met the criteria outlined in the rubric. Some of the assignments, such as the literature survey were only completed once. Other assignments, such as the literature review assignment, required students to review and refine the first draft in order to re-write a second and third draft in the proposal and the research report. Since students had been given the rubrics before each assignment and had used the criteria to re-write previous versions of the assignments, this was a fair assessment of their written work. In order to assess whether the re-written assignments had adopted several typical academic conventions, I analysed the assignments against adopted Butler’s (2007) seven criteria for academic writing (formality, conciseness and exactness, impersonality and objectivity, nominalization, grammatical correctness, coherent and cohesive (logical) structure and argument, appropriate use of evidence) in their subsequent assignments.

In order to capture the extent to which students had mastered the criteria outlined in the rubric, an Excel spreadsheet was compiled. An example of this spreadsheet with an explanation of how it was compiled can be found in Appendix C. I used the information in the spreadsheet to compile some notes outlining to what extent each group had met the criteria in the initial assignment. If students re-wrote this assignment in the proposal, and research report, I also made notes on how subsequent versions of the assignment met more of the criteria outlined in the rubric. I used the spreadsheet and these notes to write a summary of the progress that each group had made towards meeting the criteria in the rubric for each assignment. I then used this summary to
compare the progress that each group had made against the progress made by the other three groups. When I wrote the findings chapter, I checked it against this summary to ensure that the chapter had captured all the salient points.

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY

3.6.1. Trustworthiness and credibility in insider research

Since I was an insider working within the institution, I found it easier to access the research participants than an outsider would have (Greene, 2014). I met the staff from the department after the lectures I observed, during staff development workshops, and in the corridors of the campus. On these occasions, we sometimes discussed the module. I also had a chance to talk to the students before and after the tutorials I taught. This prolonged engagement with the participants allowed me to build a rapport with them before the interviews and focus groups took place (Unluer, 2012).

The advantage of having a rapport with one’s research participants is that it is easier for them to speak candidly enough about their experiences, and this can help produce credible data (O’Leary, 2014). Knowing more about one’s research participants before the data is collected also means that the researcher has an understanding of his or her participants’ worldviews and particular concerns (Unluer, 2012). This knowledge can help researchers pose better research questions and understand the subtext of the participants’ responses more fully.

I found that knowing which students had more dominant personalities, or had been assigned to leadership roles, allowed me to pose questions to the to quieter participants during the focus group discussions. Providing the quieter participants with the opportunity to address key questions first, meant that I heard their perspectives. Another benefit of being familiar with the participants was that it was easier for me to recognise who was speaking while I transcribed the focus group discussions. I also found it easier to reflect on how power imbalances, interruptions, personality clashes, and other sensitive topics could have affected the interviews and focus groups.
Despite being able to build rapport with the participants before the focus groups, I was concerned that participating in a focus group was an unfamiliar experience for them, and that they might find it unnerving. In order to put the students at ease, before the focus group began, I chatted to participants about other matters as we helped ourselves to refreshments. I also began the focus group with a friendly opening question as recommended by Hesse-Biber (2017). At the start of the mid-year focus group, I asked students to reflect back on the recent panel assessment of their proposal, and at the end-of-year focus group I asked students how they felt now that they had submitted their research reports. Both of these questions helped students relax as they did not require deep reflection and allowed them to express their own opinions. Hesse-Biber (2017) recommends that researchers pose closing questions in order to provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on issues that have been raised. I closed each focus group by reflecting on the key issues that had been raised, and asking the students if there were any additional ways in which the module could be improved.

Though insider research is advantageous because it allows the researcher to better understand his or her participants’ perspectives, this approach is not without its pitfalls. One of the pitfalls is that the researcher often plays a dual role. In this instance, I was a tutor and a researcher. If a role provides a researcher with too much power over his or her research participants, the participants may feel too wary to share their opinions with him or her. I was aware that the students might feel inhibited to share their ideas with a person in a position of relative authority—their tutor (Greene, 2014). I used a learner-centred approach during the tutorials, and I think that this approach reduced the amount of power I had during the tutorials. The fact that I did not assess the students’ work also made it easier for me to build a rapport with them.

While insider research may help build rapport with participants, being an insider researcher may also lead to interview bias. Bias can occur when a researcher overestimates how much he or she understands and shares the participants’ views (Greene, 2014). This type of bias can cause a researcher to ask shallow or leading questions that do not address the research questions. In order to reduce any subconscious bias, I asked a colleague to review the draft interview questions that I
had composed (Hesse-Biber, 2017). She felt that some of the questions could lead participants in a particular direction, and so I revised the questions, and we agreed that these revised questions seemed less leading (Kidd & Parshall, 2000).

Assuming that the participants’ perspectives are already well understood can also cause a researcher to pass over statements that need further clarification, or could be explored more fully (Greene, 2014). In order to avoid missing important cues from participants I paid attention to what the participants said during the interviews and focus groups. I feel that listening actively enabled me to ask the follow-up questions and probes necessary to gather more information on new and surprising ideas raised by the participants (Gillham, 2000; Yin, 2011).

An insider researcher who asks non-leading questions may also bias the participants’ responses in other ways. For instance, insider researchers might be tempted to discuss their own views during interviews and focus groups. I tried to focus on what the participants said and respond accordingly. As discussions around particular viewpoints can be productive, I tried to voice my opinions in ways which would not unduly influence the interview or focus group discussion. For example, I waited for participants to express their own views before offering my opinions, and I also offered my opinions towards the end of the focus group discussion or interview so that participants would be less influenced by my opinions.

One reason why insider research can be biased is that participants sometimes feel that insiders understand their perspective so completely that they do not need to explain it in detail or can explain it using sub-text (Unluer, 2012). The danger here is that researchers may not understand the participants’ experiences to this degree and the data produced will therefore be opaque even to the researcher. Since my interaction with participants mainly happened during the tutorials, I did not find that participants expected me to share their worldviews. This meant that participants explained their own experiences in full, and that I could understand the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups.
Being an insider researcher also meant that I had to approach analysing the students’ written assignments cautiously. I had already read some of the groups’ work beforehand and both the students and their supervisors had discussed the students’ writing. Since I knew that my prior knowledge of a group’s writing might influence how I evaluated their assignments, I tried to examine each assignment as though I had no idea how well each group could express themselves in writing. I think that evaluating the students’ writing against their assignment criteria instead of my making my own judgements helped me to be more objective. While completing the grid I did not refer to any of the focus group discussions or interviews so that this data would not unduly influence my findings. Only once I had completed the grid and my summary of each group’s progress did I refer to the other data and try to make connections between the different data sets.

3.6.2 Ensuring trustworthy and credible content analysis

I took three steps to ensure that the audio files would be audible, because inaudible audio files led to inaccurate transcripts, which compromises the quality of the content analysis, and casts doubt on the accuracy of the findings. Firstly, I tested the recording software and determined that it recorded sound well (Poland, 2003). Secondly, I booked a boardroom for the focus groups that had good acoustics and was located in a quiet part of the campus (Poland, 2003). Thirdly, I placed the audio file on a flat surface halfway between the participants and myself so that it would be able to record all our voices clearly (Poland, 2003). Finally, I tested the software to ensure that it was working immediately before each focus group and interview (Poland, 2003).

Once I obtained the audio files I transcribed the files in a way which maximised the accuracy of the final transcriptions. I transcribed the audio files according to a system of notations, which indicated how pauses, participants’ actions, unclear speech, and emphasis should be transcribed (Poland, 2003: 279). I also listened to small sections of each audio file before transcribing the data. When the audio file was not as clear, I replayed the unclear section of the file from the beginning multiple times before transcribing what the participants had said (Poland, 2003). When I had transcribed the entire file, I checked each complete transcription against the audio file to ensure that the words and the punctuation used in the transcript were as accurate as possible.
I then coded the data, grouped the data into themes, and organised the themes and sub-themes in a visual map. This process was not as linear as it sounds, but following a process for data analysis supported by Saldaña (2016) meant that the findings were more robust than if a haphazard approach had been followed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Having only one person analyse the data meant that there was no need to worry about how different researchers had assigned codes to the data.

Once I had finalised the themes and sub-themes, I had to think of ways to write the findings that would increase their credibility and trustworthiness. Instead of simplifying the data by creating one neat narrative, I wanted the findings to do justice to the multiple experiences of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

3.6.3 Ensuring trustworthy and credibility textual analysis

I followed Trowler’s (2016) three-step data analysis process where the researcher familiarises him or herself with the data, selects the most important information, and checks the final data set for accuracy. Firstly, I became familiar with the data when I evaluated the assignments according to a grid based on the marking rubric. Since students had been given the rubrics before each assignment and had used the criteria to redraft previous versions of the assignments, this was a credible assessment of their written work. I used the information in the grid in order to write summaries comparing how much progress each group had made on the various drafts of the assignments. Secondly, I selected the key information from the summaries and used this information along with quotes from the original assignments to structure a draft findings chapter. I then went through the grid and the summary notes to ensure that all the important information had been captured, and that the information was a good reflection of how the students’ writing had changed over time. By following a well-structured process where credibility and trustworthiness were considered I could be more certain that the findings adequately described the way in which the students’ writing had developed over time.
3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All the data were collected once ethical approval has been granted from the University of Johannesburg’s Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee. The usual ethical standards were upheld. For example, all of the students and supervisors who participated in this research signed a letter of informed consent. The letter contained all the relevant details about the study so that potential participants would be able to make an informed choice about whether or not they would like to take part in the research (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The letter outlined how participants’ privacy would be protected through the use of pseudonyms in the final dissertation and any other publications. Students and supervisors also gave their permission for the interviews and focus groups to be audio recorded.

However, as I was a partial insider researcher, additional measures to protect participants from harm were taken. Insider researchers have to consider whether or not all the interactions with the participants will form part of the final data (Humphrey, 2012). I decided that instead of using the potentially sensitive data gathered through informal conversations, I would use this data to draft potential questions for the interviews and focus groups. Thus, the informal conversations informed the data, but did not form part of the participants’ final quotes.

Insider researchers who are instructors also have to ensure that students understand that they are under no obligation to take part in the research (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Humphrey, 2012). I explained to the students that I was conducting research on the module during the first Academic Literacies tutorial in 2015 and 2016. In order to reduce the perceived pressure to take part in the research, I did not ask students to read my letter of informed consent as an in-class activity. Instead, I asked the students to read the letter at home and contact me after the next class if they wanted to participate in the research.

Insider researchers, unlike outsider researchers who only visit the site to collect data, are more likely to be involved in institutional politics (Trowler, 2016). During the study I had an disagreement with one of the members of staff. I believe that this reduced my engagement with the participants, and have described how this was a possible
limitation of the study in the conclusion chapter. I also suspected that her students who had previously agreed to take part in the end-of-year focus group might have declined the invitation because of the wishes of the supervisor. In order to discuss this situation in a sensitive manner as recommended by Humphrey (2012) I removed any identifying data, even data that might have been relevant, from this account.

3.8 CONCLUSION

The research design was an exploratory case study as it allowed a little understood phenomenon to be studied in context. Once ethical clearance had been granted by the university, the participants were invited to participate in the study. Interviews with four supervisors, and focus group discussions with 15 Honours students from six groups, in either the 2015 or 2016 cohort, were held. I analysed the assignments from four of the six groups. Measures to obtain clear audio recordings were taken, and the interview and focus group discussion transcripts were analysed according to proven content analysis methods. The students’ assignments were analysed against the criteria in their rubrics and a method suggested by Trowler (2016) was used to ensure these texts were analysed in a credible and trustworthy manner. The chapter that follows presents the main findings of the study.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The chapter is structured according to the three main research sub-questions. Question one is addressed by considering how writing the developmental assignments helped students to acquire the writing conventions required in the research report. In order to answer this question, the results from the analysis of the students’ assignments, which were assessed against the students’ marking rubrics, are presented in the order in which students submitted these assignments. Questions two and three, which consider the students’ and supervisors’ experiences of the module, are then answered by referring to the data gathered from interviews with supervisors and focus groups with students. The data from these questions is presented thematically and related themes are discussed one after the other. Since each section has its own conclusion section, no overall conclusion is provided at the end of the chapter.

4.1 QUESTION ONE

1. How do the many formalised written assignments help students acquire the academic writing conventions needed in their larger research report?

Though six groups participated in the focus groups, I decided to analyse the assignment from the four groups whose entire group had participated in the focus groups and whose supervisors I had interviewed. I made this decision so that it would be possible for me to relate the findings from the analysis of the assignments to the experiences of the students and their supervisor.

4.1.1 Conceptualising the research problem

Research suggests that students struggle to understand the discipline and the research topic in enough depth to conceptualise a research problem (Davidson & Crateau, 1998; Rinto et al., 2016). Students in 2016 completed the literature survey before the problem statement assignment while students in 2015 completed the problem statement before reviewing the literature. Each group reviewed the literature
by completing a literature survey assignment. The assignment required students to paraphrase and summarise key information from 20-30 articles in a table.

I was interested to see if reviewing the literature helped students to write better quality problem statements. I found that Group C and D, who completed the module in 2016, did write more focused initial problem statements than Group A and B, who completed the module in 2015. This result suggests that it was easier for students to complete a problem statement after reading through the literature. However, before Group C submitted their initial problem statement assignment they also received substantive feedback from their supervisor. Group C explained that their supervisor had pointed out that their draft problem statement was broad as it included “too many variables”, and that they needed to “narrow it down”.

While the 2016 cohort, which completed the literature survey before the problem statement, may have had an initial advantage over the 2015 cohort, all four groups were able to write clear final problem statements, which met the stated criteria. All four groups improved their ability to: explain the context of the research, provide evidence that research on the topic was lacking, and explain how this research would contribute to the ‘knowledge gap’. In addition, the final problem statements portrayed the ideas more clearly through the use of shorter sentences. One group, Group D, which had initially used non-academic register, removed business jargon, such as, “the bottom line” from the final text. Thus, all four groups improved the grammar and language used in the problem statement, and the structure of the final problem statement.

Groups may have been able to improve their substantiated problem statements because they submitted them three times: firstly, as an assignment, secondly as part of the research proposal, and thirdly as part of the final research report. By submitting the same assignment multiple times students were able to use supervisor feedback, which included a completed rubric showing the students where they had met and had not yet met the rubric’s criteria, to revise the problem statement further. The process of revision enabled students who were unfamiliar with how to produce new knowledge at the start of the module to situate their own problem within the body of knowledge by the end of the module. This meant that the module was able to acculturate students
into the ‘ways of knowing’ required to write a contextualised problem statement, which is generally thought of as the first stage of the knowledge production process (Layton, 2015: 203).

Though submitting and receiving feedback on multiple drafts of the problem statement did help students to write better problem statements, students found that conceptualising the research problem was challenging. One student said that while the work “kept piling up and piling up and piling up”, the group still “didn’t understand what is our problem” (C1), and another said that it took the group months “to even actually understand what is our problem statement” (C4).

Asking groups in 2016 to write their literature survey before the problem statement improved the students’ problem statements. However, it also meant that the groups in 2016, Group C and D, said that it was a struggle to complete the literature survey, because they had not yet properly defined the research problem,

    You cannot start with the first assignment and say look for this assignment I’m giving you a topic, but you look for, look for sorry, um, journal articles, this is the topic you don’t even know your problem so you’ll just stumble (C1).

Though writing the literature survey before the problem statement seemed to help the groups in 2016 to write clearer problem statements, these groups said that because they had not written a problem statement they were unable to select which literature to review. Thus, separating the problem statement and literature survey assignments may be problematic as these two tasks are inter-related. Postgraduate students generally complete a review of the literature while refining their problem statement, because their revised problem statements guide their literature search and their reading of the literature helps them revise their problem further. Formulating the problem statement according to the expected conventions is very challenging (Davidson & Crateau, 1998; Rinto et al., 2016), and it may be beneficial to give students more time and more guidance on how to read the literature and revise their problem statement accordingly.
4.1.2 Locating the study in a theoretical context

Students wrote their literature reviews after their literature surveys. Students completed their literature survey assignments by reviewing articles and filling in the relevant information into rows in a grid. An example of the grid used to complete the assignment can be found below:

Table 3: Example Literature Survey Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Title of paper</th>
<th>Full reference</th>
<th>Problem *(Problem and list of key concepts investigated)</th>
<th>Context *(Definition of concepts &amp; theories and arguments)</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Findings *(Discussion, assumptions, and limitations)</th>
<th>Link to own research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

* Criteria shown in brackets was added in 2016

It is important to examine the quality of these literature surveys, as groups which wrote more comprehensive literature survey assignments would have had more data with which to write their literature reviews. None of the literature survey assignments of the four groups met all of the criteria outlined in the rubric. Each group failed to meet one or more criteria outlines in the rubric. Group A chose articles that were not directly related to their research problem. Group B did not explain the problem in context, and Group A and D did not tell the reader how the articles were related to their own research problem. Group A and C provided very vague descriptions of the research design and methodology sections of the articles. In many instances, students merely transferred whole sentences from the articles into the grid. Since these sentences had been written as part of an article, the verbatim copying produced a disjointed literature survey assignment that often failed to meet the outlined criteria.

Supervisor C had hoped that students would keep “updating” the literature survey table so that they would have a summary of all the information necessary to write their literature reviews, but she said that this had not happened. Students from all the groups admitted that they had not used many of the articles reviewed for their literature survey assignments to write their literature review. If the students had been supported to select more relevant literature, and encouraged to update the literature survey table, they may have been able to use the information in literature survey table to write their
literature review. However, the literature survey grid, like any schema, may only work well for some students, because individuals use different means to order and interpret different kinds of data.

Writing a literature review is a complex undertaking for postgraduate students because they must choose how to locate their study in relation to prior concepts and theories (Davidson & Crateau, 1998). Many of the initial literature review assignments failed to meet two of the criteria specified in the rubric. Firstly, students were unable to explain the context of the research, and secondly, they were unable to explore the theories and concepts, and show how they were relevant to their research.

All four initial literature review assignments explained prior theories and concepts in a fairly superficial way. For instance, Group B’s use of bullet points to explain key concepts meant that the literature review resembled a list instead of a discussion. In addition, Group A, B, and C’s use of numerous and/or repetitive sub-headings made the structure of the literature review unclear. Instead of viewing these attempts as failures, research suggests that these fragmented pieces of writing, in this instance literature reviews that resemble lists or re-stated information, help postgraduate students to create more coherent texts (Wisker & Savin-Baden, 2009). By giving students an opportunity to write an initial literature review, which supervisors assess and provide feedback on, this module provides students with an opportunity to use fragments when creating a more holistic literature review.

Providing students with an opportunity to revise their initial literature review benefited them, because the final literature reviews in the research report had been improved in four main ways:

1. By removing theories and concepts which were not relevant to the study,
2. By providing clear definitions for all/most of the key concepts,
3. By revising the sequence of ideas, and presenting general information before specific information, and
4. By renaming headings so that the names of the headings were less ambiguous.

The students’ initial literature reviews indicated that they were unfamiliar with the literature on the topic, and had limited knowledge of how to write literature reviews.
However, the final literature review chapter better integrated the ideas from multiple sources to introduce the reader to the current debates and controversies in the discipline (Davidson & Crateau, 1998). The quality of the final literature review chapter suggests that students do benefit from receiving structured feedback on multiple drafts of a chapter via a marking rubric. By re-drafting it multiple times, the groups were able to improve the structure and argument of the chapter. Group A, which produced a particularly fragmented literature survey, may also have been better able to write a coherent literature review after receiving an extension from their supervisor.

At the end of these problem statements students wrote research objectives. The formulation of the research objectives was unclear at times. Two groups (Group C and D) mentioned objectives, such as distributing questionnaires and conducting a literature review, which contribute to the study’s objectives, but are not the main objectives of the study. Thus, more guidance on writing objectives could help students to write objectives that clearly indicate what the research seeks to achieve.

**4.1.3 The research questions**

At the end of the literature review assignment students were required to write their research questions. After Group D’s main research question: “To what extent does the breach of the psychological contract influence psychological capital?” Two less clear sub-questions were posed:

1. “Does psychological capital measure reliably?
2. Does psychological contract measure reliably?”

The two questions above are not research questions, because they could have been addressed in the literature review or research design and methodology chapters of the research report. This mistake could easily be made by other postgraduate students, which means that postgraduate programmes need to ensure that students appreciate how research questions define and guide the purpose of the research.
4.1.4 The research design and methodology chapter

The rubric for the research design and methodology chapter required students to provide a justification for choosing a particular research design and set of methods. Only three of the four groups did this. It was significant that the three groups which provided a justification for their research design and methods had conducted qualitative research, or had been assigned to a supervisor who understood qualitative research. The group which did not (Group D) justify their chosen research design and methodology conducted a quantitative research project under the guidance of a supervisor who specialised in quantitative research. The students in this group may not have justified research design and methods because quantitative researchers justify their design choices less often than qualitative researchers. The supervisor of the group as a specialist in quantitative research may not have encouraged the students to justify design and methodology choices to the reader, even though this was part of the marking rubric.

Another group also failed to meet all the specified criteria in the marking rubric. The rubric said that the research paradigm and epistemological framework should be aligned, but while the students in Group B were conducting qualitative research they wrote in the research design and methodology chapter that “The research takes a positivist philosophy, although the data gathered will be qualitative data.” Whatever the reason for this lack of alignment, the problem was not pointed out to the supervisor during the group’s panel presentation (as mentioned previously each group presented their proposal and final research report as a PowerPoint presentation to a panel of supervisors from the department). Since the supervisor of the group found the panel “constrained” and said that supervisors were told “do not in any way imply that there are alternative ways, you confuse our students”, it may have not been an environment where supervisors could provide other groups with constructive criticism. Unfortunately, groups which have not corrected part of their research reports may now have misconceptions about research, which might need correcting if they pursue a Master’s degree in future. If supervisors feel more at ease sharing their own opinions on a group’s research report, students will be able to learn more than their single
supervisor is able to teach them. Emerging supervisors will also benefit from receiving constructive criticism from more experienced supervisors.

4.1.5 Effect of additional scaffolding in 2016

In 2016, students submitted two additional developmental assignments before the research report. These two additional assignments gave the groups in 2016 an opportunity to revise the last two chapters and the abstract of the research report. This opportunity may be why the groups which completed the module in 2016 (Group C and D) wrote results, discussion and conclusion chapters, and abstracts that were more clearly structured and that met more of the criteria in the rubric compared to the groups in 2015 (Group A and B).

The results chapters written by the two groups in 2016 were better structured than the results chapters written by the two groups in 2015. While the groups in 2016 structured the chapter so that they discussed the findings in relation to each research question, the two 2015 groups (Group A and B) did not relate the findings to the research questions as clearly. Group A began the chapter by discussing the three main themes, and then proceeded to answer the research question. The chosen structure felt inadequate, because the group did not discuss how the three main themes had addressed the research question. Group B included information in the results chapter that seemed misplaced as it belonged in the background of the study rather than in the findings. Group B discussed the recent legislation, and the findings from interviews separately, whereas integrating these finding would have made the main argument (i.e. that the legislation would change design of organisations in the industry) more convincing.

Groups which completed the module in 2016 also benefited from the opportunity to submit a draft discussion and conclusion chapter. The discussion and conclusion chapters of the groups which completed the module in 2016 were better structured than the same chapter of the groups which completed the module in 2015. Group C and D, which completed the module in 2016, structured the conclusion chapter as follows: summary of key findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future
research, implications for HR practitioners, and contributions to theory. The structure that was chosen for this chapter was logical and made the information easy to read.

On the other hand, the structure of the discussion and conclusion chapters of the groups which completed the study in 2015 could have been improved. Group A chose to summarise the key literature and the key findings separately before attempting to bring these two sections together. If the past literature and the findings of the study had been discussed simultaneously the main argument, and the contribution that the group made to the HR field and to the theoretical body of knowledge, would have been clearer. Group B hardly referred back to the literature in the discussion section, only vaguely stating how HR professionals could benefit from the study, and did not provide any limitations of the study, or recommendations for future research.

It seems as if the opportunity to submit a draft abstract that the groups in 2016 had enabled these groups to write structured abstracts that met more of the marking criteria in the rubric compared to the abstracts of the groups in 2015. The groups which completed the module in 2015, Group A and B, did not meet some of the criteria because their abstracts did not discuss the current state of knowledge on the topic and how their findings would add to this knowledge. The groups in 2016, Group C and D, met more of the criteria in the marking rubric because their abstracts explained how the research would add to the body of knowledge. The structure of the abstracts written by the groups in 2016, Group C and D, unlike the abstracts of the groups which completed the module in 2015, also followed the five typical moves described by Santos (1996): 1) introduce the topic, 2) describe the purpose of the study, 3) outline the research design and methods used, 4) present the main findings, and 5) provide a summary of the study’s recommendations and conclusions. Thus, the groups in 2016 seemed to have benefited from the opportunity to revise their initial abstract, because these groups wrote abstracts that met more of the criteria and more closely followed the prescribed abstract genre as described by Santos (1996).

The groups which completed the module in 2015, Group A and B, may not have met some of the criteria stated in the rubric, because they failed to understand the purpose of the two final chapters and abstract. The groups which completed the module in
2015, Group C and D, drafted two versions of the results, discussion, and conclusion chapters and the abstract. These groups (Group C and D) seemed to be able to improve their final research report because they had the opportunity to revise assignments, which were components of the research report, and this meant that the revised assignments met significantly more of the criteria in the rubric. Thus, Group A and B would have also benefited from the opportunity to submit draft versions of these two chapters and the abstract.

4.1.6 Language

Academic texts are meant to contain precise language (Butler, 2007). While each group tended to express their ideas more succinctly over time, some of the words in the final research report were used incorrectly. For instance, Group D said that they had to test the ‘portability’ of the questionnaires instead of their reliability and validity. All of the students in the module were English as an Additional Language speakers, and they admitted during several of the tutorials that they wanted their texts to sound impressive. The students may have confused using complex words with sounding academic. If this is the case, the module has not fully taught students that academic texts should be written in plain English (Cutts, 2013), which means that research texts must clearly explain the research to the reader and avoid using uncommon words in the wrong context.

4.1.7 Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse refers to all the parts of the text where the writer does not deal directly with the subject of the text and instead tries to shape the way in which the text is read (Crismore, 1983). Broadly speaking there are two types of metadiscourse, informational, or structural, and attitudinal (Crismore, 1983). Structural metadiscourse helps the reader to better follow the structure of the text, and attitudinal metadiscourse helps the writer to convey his or her perspective about the text to the reader.

One way in which students use metadiscourse to structure a text is to provide the reader with preview statements that introduce the reader to content that will follow,
and summary statements that restate the main points (Crismore, 1983). According to convention, postgraduate students begin each chapter by providing the reader with an outline of the chapter, and end the chapter with a summary of the main points and an introduction to the following chapter. While this is merely the most common way of writing a research report, dissertation, or thesis, it is a useful convention for novice postgraduate students who may not know the genre well enough to circumvent it.

Whether students choose to introduce and conclude each chapter, or choose not to follow this structure, I would have expected them to adhere to their chosen style. However, two of the four groups used chapter introductions and conclusions inconsistently. Group A concluded, but did not introduce each chapter, and Group D introduced, but did not conclude each chapter, and I found that this made their chapters seem incomplete and less coherent. Group C neither introduced nor concluded each chapter, and it may be that this omission was a choice on their part. The only group who introduced and concluded each chapter was Group B, who skilfully deployed phases, such as, “This chapter begins by”, “The following will be discussed in this chapter”, and “in conclusion”, to direct the reader’s attention to the structure of the text.

Attitudinal metadiscoursal features are also used to communicate a writer’s perspective on the text to the reader. Three metadiscoursal features used by the groups were self mentions, relational markers, hedges, and boosters. Self mentions, such as the pronoun ‘we’ explain how a piece of research was conducted (Akbras, 2012; Winterrowd, 1986). Relational markers are pronouns, such as the second person pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’, that are used to ensure that the reader is drawn to a particular reading of the text (Lamberti, 2013). Hedges, such as, ‘may’, ‘might’, and ‘could’ are used when researchers phrase something tentatively, and boosters or emphatics, such, as ‘significantly’, ‘obviously’ and ‘clearly’, are used to convey certainty (Lamberti, 2013).

In general, qualitative researchers are more likely to use self mentions to explain the research, and relational markers to persuade the reader to adopt particular readings of the text (Hyland, 2005; Lamberti, 2013; Winterrowd, 1986). One group, Group C,
which conducted qualitative research, used self mentions and relational markers very effectively in the final research report. Group C which initially wrote a research design and methodology chapter where the word ‘we’ was overused, wrote a second draft of the chapter which only used the word to describe the most important aspects of data collection and data analysis. This group also used the first personal plural pronoun ‘we’ as a relational marker to convince the reader of the strength of their findings in the final chapter, “In conclusion of the results we can confidently accept all the research questions.”

While Group C used self mentions and relational markers strategically, the other two groups which conducted qualitative research, Group A and B, did not use self mentions or relational markers to engage the reader. Group C may have used these metadiscoursal features more skilfully than the other groups because their supervisor was particularly focused on the students’ writing. As evidenced by the following comment from the group, “He sort of focused more on the language and yah not necessarily the content”. By comparison, the supervisor of Groups A and B explained that “I do not see it [the language]” and found it easier to provide feedback to the students on the content.

While Group A and B may not have been aware of how to use metadiscoursal features, the feedback from their supervisor helped Group C reflect on the use of self mentions in the text. Group C was aware that fewer self mentions were used in written rather than oral texts, “Like if we speaking now it’s in first person, but if we writing it has to be third person” (C2). The group also seemed to understand that qualitative researchers could sometimes use self mentions to serve a particular purpose within a text,

we don’t want to start every sentence with saying these are some people who do this and this and this, then next paragraph these are some people who do this and this. And you also don’t want to be too personal and saying ‘we’ every time, ‘I’ every time, ‘us’, so that I think that has also been a challenge (C2).

Group A and B moderated very few of their findings through the use of hedges. Since the groups had conducted qualitative research, hedges could have been used to highlight the tentative nature of some of the findings. Group C and D used significantly
more hedges than Group A and B to tone down the strength of their findings. However, Group D had conducted quantitative research and their use of the hedge ‘may’ seven times in the abstract made them seem too uncertain about the credibility of their findings. In contrast, the group used the booster ‘significantly’ before the word ‘negatively’ 10 times to show that the results from the quantitative tests performed could be trusted. Thus, it seems that the group did have confidence in their findings, but had not managed to properly convey this confidence in the abstract of the research report.

While Group D used boosters correctly when discussing their findings, the students’ use of two boosters in the conclusion and recommendations chapter made the text seem too forceful. The two boosters which the group used are shown in bold: “This is a stern warning to business that they should prevent psychological contract breach at all cost [SIC]”. Unfortunately, these boosters made the sentence take on an emotive tone rather than an ‘objective tone’ (Canagarajah & Lee, 2015: 90). Researchers are expected to state their findings by objectively by referring to the evidence rather than stating an opinion, which may more be appropriate in advocacy contexts, and for other text types.

4.1.8 The benefits of presenting the research in multiple forms

The ways in which writing the developmental assignments helped the students to complete their research report have been discussed. As part of the module students also presented their research to a supervisory panel as a PowerPoint presentation. As I was not present during these presentations I could not analyse these assignments, but during the focus groups I asked students how presenting their research had helped them to write their research report. Several of the students mentioned that preparing a presentation was more “fun” (C1) than writing a “long” (C2) and “boring” (C1) research report, and that presenting their research had also made them feel more confident about delivering presentations at work. More importantly, students found that these presentations had helped them to “understand our research better” (C2) because they had the “opportunity” (C4) to “pull out the important information that you can present to the panel” (C2). Thus, asking students to construct their research in
multiple forms can help them to better understand the content of the final research text that they need to submit.

4.1.9 The deadlines in the module are not conducive

According to the students, one of the reasons why their assignments did not meet the expectations of their supervisors was the amount of time allocated to complete each assignment. One of the students, C1, expressed the view that her group was unable to complete a comprehensive literature survey assignment in the allocated time,

No, ah! This needs to be recorded. No i-i-it cannot happen, you want quality work, you want us to read through journal articles which is not five pages it's more than 15 pages, you cannot analyse each and everything and still add on like f-for every assignment you give us like five days, period to go through everything and it must be compiled and finished by that day.

As the students only had two to three weeks to survey 20-30 articles, and they had only recently enrolled for an Honours degree, it is unsurprising that they found completing a preliminary survey of the literature in the allocated time challenging.

Other students also found that completing assignments within the specified time frame had a negative impact on the quality of the final text. According to C1, because the group was under so much pressure to submit something they sometimes knew they were “handing in work that is substandard”. The students claimed that the pressure to hand in assignments within a short amount of time resulted in poorer quality work for two reasons. The first reason was that the students did not have the time to “incorporate it [the changes] in our proposal” (C1). Thus, students felt that the amount of time between the assignments was not enough for them to fully utilise their supervisor’s feedback to improve their research proposal. Students also said that they did not have enough time to utilise the information that they had learned during the academic literacies tutorials to write their assignments. Students said that a lack of time meant that they “end up not following instructions” (C2) and this meant that they “forget the basics” (C1 & C2), which is why they said that they did not always write paragraphs with topic, supporting, and concluding sentences. The module was designed to help students use the information from the tutorials and their supervisor’s
feedback to improve subsequent drafts of texts, but it seems as if students did not have enough time to do so.

The students asserted that they did not have enough time to complete well-written assignments, particularly in the first semester when more assignments were due. Supervisor D explained that the module was “front loaded” because students completed more assignments in the first semester, and had more time to perfect their final research report in the second semester. However, students felt that the first semester was too pressurised. One of the students, (C1), felt that the academic staff should not “just squash everything” into the first semester and should instead “eliminate the unnecessary parts” of some of the assignments. Since each assignment served a particular purpose, but several of the assignments had some similar components, it may be possible to simplify the assignments. Reducing the complexity of some of the assignments might give students more time to incorporate supervisor feedback and advice from the tutorials into their assignments. In fact, providing students with an extra week to complete their literature survey and requiring them to review 20 instead of 30 articles, may have been the reason why the literature surveys which were completed in 2016 met more of the criteria in the rubric than the literature surveys which were completed in 2015.

The attendance at the Academic Literacies tutorials dropped in the second semester for the 2015 and 2016 cohorts, and this meant that many students failed to attend tutorials that unpacked the abstract, research design and methodology, results, and conclusion chapters. Supervisors confirmed that falling attendance was a trend in the second semester for all the lectures and tutorials in the module. Attendance in the second semester may have dropped because students had to submit draft versions of their research poster and research proposal, and their final research poster and research report, and write exams for the other modules. One student said that she chose not attend the tutorials and instead to use this time to submit her final assignments and to prepare for the exams.

_I think that because we all had so much work to get done that coming to class just felt like it’s taking away time from what you need to get done, because we were all under pressure to make sure that that draft is done, the poster is done, and, still at the same time to study for exams, you know it was like.. a lot of_
things needed to be submitted within a specific time, and you just felt you didn’t have enough time. But what I also found is, I was getting more done with my time by just focusing on what I needed to submit at the time, but if I had had the time I would’ve, attended, it was either I just go home focus on getting that done and submitting it, or come here and then, just not have enough time (B1).

Attendance may have also decreased because students felt that it was more important to attend the tutorials in the first semester. One student said that, “For first semester we’re still trying to find out for ourselves or trying to figure out the module I think that that’s where they’re important” (C1). Another student was of the opinion that the second semester tutorials, “Could be beneficial, maybe, for other students that still don’t understand” (C4). Offering tutorials to only the students who are struggling to write academic texts is problematic as it assumes that academic literacies only assists weaker students, when in fact all academics continually develop their writing. These students also said that a few tutorials in the second semester on areas of the research report, such as the discussion and results section, might be beneficial. In light of these comments and the falling attendance in the second semester, the staff in the department will have to decide how often the tutorials are offered in the first and second semester.

4.1.10. Conclusion

By comparing the 2015 and 2016 cohorts, this study suggests that when students write sections of the main text beforehand they structure these sections better in the final research text. Students struggled to survey the literature within the required time, which suggests that WID programmes may need to provide postgraduate students with more time, or more support, to assist them to engage with the relevant concepts, theories, and research. Since some groups used metadiscourse more skilfully than others, this could be another area that WID programmes for postgraduate students need to develop further.
4.2 QUESTION TWO

2. How do students experience the academic literacies support offered through the research preparation module?

4.2.1 Knowledge gained from the module

While the primary purpose of the research preparation module was to support students so that they could successfully complete a research report, students felt that the knowledge and academic literacies gained would also assist them in their careers. Students said that by researching a particular topic they had learnt more about the field of HR. The students said that the Honours degree had broadened their understanding of the field. According to one student, “Now we understand more of what..HR is all about, before if you had to be asked you’d be like it’s just managing people, but it’s more than that” (A1). Another student, C2, felt that her research topic had given her ‘specialist knowledge’, because “most people [in the industry] don’t know what a psychological contract is”. The student felt that this knowledge would be advantageous in the workplace.

Students also said that completing the module had helped them to acquire academic literacies that would be useful at work. Three students said that they now had a larger “vocabulary” (C2, C3, & C4), and thought more about the words that they used. Other students mentioned that writing the research report had improved their ability to write other types of texts. One student said that before the module she would type out a report and hand it in without reviewing it, but that now she knew to “look at the language” (C2), and to check whether the report made sense. Another student, (C4), said that she was now aware that reports had to be “structured in a certain way”. She explained that instead of “klapping the information together”, she would include an introduction and an abstract in the reports that she wrote for the HR director, or the CEO.
4.2.2 Reflections on the Academic Literacies tutorials

During the tutorials the students were shown how to read academic articles and complete short pieces of writing. Students said that they valued what they had learnt from participating in the tutorials. One group said that during the tutorials they had learned how to write in a way which supports or refutes knowledge claims, which they called “how we make arguments flow” (D2). The group valued this knowledge because they said that it had helped them to structure their literature review.

The reason why only one group discussed how they had learnt to write academic texts in the tutorials, was because most of the tutorials focused on strategies for reading articles, which I thought was an essential ability for any postgraduate student. These tutorials taught students strategies to help them read the academic articles more actively and with greater understanding. Students commented that being able to identify the topic sentences in paragraphs was helpful, but that the most valuable reading strategy they had learnt was to read an abstract first before deciding if the article was “linked to my research” (B4). One student said this was a new way of reading for her because unlike at undergraduate level she no longer felt that “you must read everything (laughs)” (B1). Students valued learning to read in this way because it saved them time as they chose not to read articles that were unrelated to their research topic.

Students also discussed how the way in which the tutorials had been facilitated had helped them to learn.

Another thing I think the tutorials were more helpful than the lectures, because it was more interactive and attention was paid to you because you’d come to each group and listen to what’s going on and answer and give them like, whereas where you get-when you get to the lecture it’s just the lecturer telling you what to do and what’s going on, and the tutorials actually supported you to understand the, the lectures (B2).

This comment indicates that students may have found learning through tutorials easier than learning through lectures because of their interactive nature where tutors interact with each group while they read or construct a text.
I feel that the students may have enjoyed the tutorials because they had built a rapport with me, their tutor. However, this rapport sometimes caused the students to ask me to provide them with information related to their topic instead of relying on their supervisor. When I showed students how problem statements were written in articles and previous research reports, they pleaded with me to “please tell us our problem because we don’t know our problem” (laughter) (C1). Since I am not an expert in the topic, I tried to help students clarify the problem for themselves, and then reminded them to speak to their supervisor about any changes that they had made to the problem statement. In order to prevent academic literacies practitioners from being placed in an awkward position where they have the potential to misinform students, WID tutorials where students may require disciplinary expertise could have been co-facilitated by supervisors.

While students clearly benefited from these tutorials, many students also found that engaging with or producing academic texts was a challenge after a full day of work,

D1: But I think it’s too much when you give us 30 pages and journal writing and now we must go through. I am one of those slow readers
D2: I remember I found it thinking one, and you give me that summary [of an article] and I look at the roof
D3: My attention span.

It makes sense that students would find these tutorials particularly taxing because they had to read academic articles and produce small pieces of writing, which requires a great deal of concentration and cognition. Bearing this in mind, academic staff should ensure that academic literacies tutorials take place when students have the energy to engage with texts and practice mastering the necessary academic literacies.

4.2.3 Reflections on the literacies not yet fully acquired

In order to complete the research report students had to further develop, or acquire, certain academic literacies, one of which was the ability to paraphrase. During the module students learned that plagiarism is a type of academic theft. The students also completed activities during the Academic Literacies tutorials where they practiced paraphrasing research articles. Despite this support, students admitted that paraphrasing was a challenge and that they still needed to practice it.
One reason why students found paraphrasing challenging is that it is not a simple ‘skill’ as some academics with years of experience claim, instead paraphrasing is challenging because writers have to convey the author’s meaning in their own words (Angélil-Carter, 2000). One student said that paraphrasing without changing the author’s intended meaning was difficult,

\begin{displayquote}
when it comes to rephrasing you need to be very careful, because you don’t wanna distort the meaning and you don’t wanna change what the author is trying to say but at the same time you can’t use his own words cause that’s plagiarism (C4).
\end{displayquote}

Students felt that their ability to paraphrase had improved, but that it was and would still be a challenge for them, as one student explained, “I think that’s always gonna be a challenge. I think even at a Master’s level” (C4). Students from this group also admitted that they sometimes plagiarised work unintentionally when under pressure to complete an assignment. Since students found that paraphrasing texts can be challenging, WID modules may need to devote more time to teaching students how to paraphrase. Particular attention could be paid to helping students paraphrase more quickly so that students do not feel the need to plagiarise when they have less time to complete an assignment. If more time is spent teaching students how to paraphrase they may feel more confident in their ability to do so without plagiarising at Master’s level.

In order to ensure that students referenced correctly, supervisors encouraged them to use a freely available software programme called Mendeley. The students who had used the programme agreed that it was useful, but two groups said that the software was flawed because it sometimes loaded the wrong references into a text. Students said that this problem was particularly likely to happen when they were uploading many references within a short span of time into a text. This finding suggests that all postgraduate students need adequate training so that they can effectively operate any software programmes designed to assist them with their studies.
4.2.4 Reflections on the statistics tutorials

While knowledge of statistics may not be viewed as an academic literacy, this knowledge does have an impact on the way in which students write academic texts. Students who conduct quantitative research need to be able to interpret the findings of previous researchers to write a review of the literature, and to be able to correctly conduct and interpret statistical tests in order to write their research findings. Thus, for students studying quantitative research, a lack of statistical knowledge may lead to a poorly written research text.

Since the way in which a subject is taught influences what the students learn, I wanted to know whether or not students felt that they had been well supported to learn basic concepts related to quantitative research design and methodology. Students who had not studied statistics previously said that because the pace of the tutorials was so quick it was difficult to understand the content covered in the tutorials. Two of the students (B1 & C2) felt that the pace of the tutorials was so quick because the tutor had mistakenly assumed that they already had some knowledge of statistics. As the students found the tutorials hard to understand both cohorts reported that self-study had helped them to pass the statistics test. Students used four study methods to pass the test, 1) watching YouTube videos, 2) referring to the textbook, 3) studying in their assigned groups, or 4) studying with friends who were not registered for the degree, but had studied statistics previously. Students in the 2015 cohort also said that the test was too challenging given their current level of knowledge of the subject.

Students from both the 2015 and 2016 cohorts thought that the tutorials could have been taught in a more practical manner. The students from the 2015 cohorts and Supervisor B agreed that the tutor focused too much on teaching the students how to work out “formulas” or “calculations”. Supervisor B said that the tutor should rather have taught the students when and how to apply certain statistical tests. Students from both cohorts felt that the tutor could have made it easier for them to relate the material covered in the tutorial to their research topics. They suggested that the tutor could have used examples from the field of HRM, and their own research projects, for example, by asking them to run statistical tests using the data that they had collected.
Students’ feelings about a subject also have an effect on how motivated they feel to study. During the focus groups, the groups which had conducted qualitative research projects, Group A and B, expressed the opinion that they should not have had to learn statistics, because it was not necessary for them to complete their research project. This indicates that students conducting qualitative research will be less motivated to learn about quantitative research design and methodology. One group, Group C, felt that the tutorials were unnecessary because their supervisor had been able to explain to the group how they should analyse their data.

Many students admitted that they did not learn a lot from the statistics tutorials. One student from the 2015 cohort explained that she felt that she had not learnt much from these tutorials, “I didn’t gain anything I didn’t learn anything, cause I don’t understand most of the things so” (B2). Some groups had relied on the university’s statistical consultation services unit to analyse the data for them, and two students (B1 and E1) said that they would not be able to conduct “statistical analysis” in future. Students learning may have been impeded by the quick pace of the tutorials, the perceived lack of connection between the tutorials and the students’ research topics, and some students’ lack of interest in the subject. Where students, especially students with very little previous knowledge of the subject, must learn about quantitative research design and methodology as part of their course, the pace at which the material is covered should support learning. If tutors help students to see the relevance of the subject in relation to their own field, and in particular to their own research, they may also be more motivated to learn.

4.2.5 Students’ reflection on the developmental assignments

The Truth, Knowledge and Creating Knowledge lecturer gave the students information about research paradigms, designs, and methods and how the assignments in the module should be completed. The students from Group C said that the lecturer’s advice about the assignments sometimes conflicted with their supervisor’s advice, and that because the lecturer was also a supervisor in the department that it was hard not to listen to her advice. The students also felt that they did not receive enough guidance
from the lecturer on how to complete the individual and group portfolios, where they described their individual and group contributions to an assignment. According to the students, the only instruction the tutor gave to them about the portfolios was, “Just combine everything into one file and submit” (C2). Students had to read the rubric to find out that they had to submit certain documents and a reflection with the portfolios. Although the portfolios are not marked, supervisors used the information in the portfolios as evidence when they had to make a decision to give students higher or lower marks based on their contributions. Since the portfolios may influence the grade that a student receives, it is important that students understand which documents should be included in the individual and group portfolios.

Students from Group D would have liked the guidelines, which were given before the assignment rubric, to be better aligned to the rubric. Several students complained that because they had followed the guidelines, and not the rubric, that they sometimes lost marks. Although it may be possible to better align the instructions and rubrics given before an assignment, it is not possible to perfectly align these two different text types because they serve different purposes. Thus, students should be given more guidance so that they are able to understand that instructions are general guidelines for completing an assignment while an assignment rubric outlines the criteria against which an assignment will be assessed.

Students from the two groups also said that they lost marks because they did not always understand the rubrics. Students from these groups suggested that the rubrics would have been clearer if the rubrics for the different assignments were more distinctive. Students from Group D said that the “repetitive” (D4) rubric for the Concept Research Design assignment, and the Data Collection assignment, made it hard for them to understand how these two assignments differed. While students from Group C said that the terminology used in the rubrics was confusing, they explained that the term design had been used to refer to both the data collection process in the Method assignment, and the research design in the proposal.

Students received feedback on their writing from their supervisors, their group members, their academic literacy tutors, and the Postgraduate Writing Fellows
(PGWFs), who were PhD candidates working as postgraduate writing consultants. As the supervisor graded all of the students’ assignments and was the acknowledged expert in the discipline, he or she provided the students with more feedback than the other role players. Though all the students said that they had learned a lot from their supervisor, students from one of the groups said that their supervisor could have provided them with more detailed feedback. Group D felt that their supervisor, who was also the Truth, Knowledge and Creating Knowledge lecturer, provided them with less feedback than other supervisors. The group said that while other supervisors would re-explain the assignments to their students, when they asked their supervisor for more explanation about the assignments she would say “I did discuss it in class” (D2). Two students from the group, D1 and D2, suggested that it would be best if staff who lecture this module do not supervise students. Where capacity limitations mean that staff have to lecture the module and supervise, supervisors performing both roles should consider re-explaining any material covered in the lectures.

Students from this group also mentioned that their supervisor provided less guidance on their assignments than the supervisors of the other groups. The supervisor did not provide students with previous proposals, possibly because one of her other groups had copied part of another group’s literature review, and she wanted to prevent another instance of intentional plagiarism. The group felt that the other groups which had received previous proposals could understand the genre of the research report more, and were therefore at an advantage. Thus, it may not be sufficient for supervisors to tell students how to write particular texts, students may need to see model texts in order to fully understand how to write in accordance with the conventions of the genre.

This group was also very unhappy with the low marks that they received for their assignments. The students felt that it was unfair that other groups received higher marks, and one student, D1, complained that the group felt demotivated by their low marks. Though the students did persuade the supervisor to remark some of the assignments, which slightly raised their grades, D1 said the group was still disappointed with their marks, “Because now other groups who are sitting on distinctions and we not”. When the students asked the supervisor to remark their work,
the supervisor as the expert had the power to decide that the students only deserved a slightly higher mark (Thesen, 2015). While I cannot say whether or not this supervisor actually marked her students’ assignments more strictly or not, supervisors, even when based in the same discipline, do assess students’ work differently (Backhouse, 2007; Canagarajah & Lee, 2015; McConlogue, 2012). In order to acknowledge supervisor variability, especially when multiple supervisors mark the same assignments in a degree programme, supervisors should attempt to standardise assessment practices so that marks are awarded or deducted fairly.

Another group, Group C, felt that it was unfair that one group received more feedback on their poster before the posters were displayed at a departmental poster evening. This group were upset when the supervisor of the winning group said that she had provided the students with feedback eleven times, because their supervisor had only given them feedback on their poster three times. The group had wanted to win the prize for the best poster, and proposed that the competition would be fairer if all groups received feedback from their supervisors a standard amount of times.

Students from three groups (Group B, C, and D) commented that high supervisor workload had a detrimental impact on supervisor feedback. One of these groups said that their supervisor gave them less detailed feedback due to her high workload, “Yes so I think they really also get overwhelmed so they also end up giving you generic information almost, you know because they can only get through so much” (B1). Another group speculated that the feedback from the supervisor was delayed, because supervisors were traveling to conferences, or more derisively in the words of a student “roaming around, roaming around” (C1). The delayed feedback made the students feel “neglected” (C1), and that their supervisor was not fulfilling the “commitment” (C1) that she had made to them. Though the students understood that their supervisor had to travel for work, they argued that if they had checked their email they would have been able to notice the things in their research report that needed to be changed “awhile ago” (D1).

While the students’ other criticisms of their supervisors may have stemmed from the multiple roles that supervisors play as tutors and researchers, one group developed
expectations of the supervisors that were not in line with the design of the module. As part of the requirements of the module, each group presented their proposal and research report as a PowerPoint presentation to a panel of supervisors from the department. According to Supervisor D, students were told that their proposal and research report would not be read beforehand, and that they would have to develop succinct PowerPoint presentations that could be understood without reference to the research report. However, some students still expected the panel to read through their texts beforehand, and one student was frustrated because the panel had not done so, “they didn’t even seem like they read the report.. before, they watched your presentation” (F1). Students may have been less disappointed if they had been reminded that only the presentations would be assessed and that lecturers would not read the texts, which the presentations summarised, beforehand. To prevent postgraduate students from becoming disappointed when their expectations are not met, academic staff need to communicate the purpose of each text and how lecturers will assess the text more clearly.

Another group criticised their supervisor in the first focus group after their proposal presentation for being too critical and expecting too much from them. However, the group seemed to have changed their opinion about the supervisor by the end of the module,

*Well Supervisor B has always been a perfectionist, I mean that’s not...something new (laughter), but uh...mmm I think it wasn’t harsh, he just wanted us to do the correct thing and not put in, you know, information that’s unnecessary you know. So I don’t think, I wouldn’t see it as being harsh, he was just assisting us to make sure that we were doing the proper, correct thing (C4).*

It seems that the group no longer considered their supervisor’s feedback to be too critical, because they had internalised their supervisor’s standards. The students admitted that in the first semester there had been a time, “where we just submit” (C1) (laughter), but in the second semester, “wanted to give him work that is good, like of quality” (C1). The group admitted that they wanted to submit high-quality work because “we wanted to impress him” (C4). This comment indicates that the group was motivated to work hard, because they understood that only high quality research would satisfy their supervisor whose opinion mattered to them.
Though it was positive that the students of Supervisor B had internalised his standards, it was concerning that the students in the group seemed to be overly reliant on him. The students from Group C listened when their supervisor said, “*don’t say it like this, you know, maybe this is not too much important but rather say this*” (C2), but said that they could not judge for themselves if any of the information was irrelevant. Though it may not be necessary to discern when information is relevant, and when it is irrelevant at Honours level, Honours students who are able to do so may be better prepared to write a larger Master’s dissertation. Supervisors could help their students judge how relevant a piece of information is by asking students to place potentially irrelevant information in a separate document and to send this document and the draft text to them. This method would develop students’ ability to separate relevant from irrelevant information, and make sure that students do not accidently remove important information.

Since the supervisor was the acknowledged expert in the area, students trusted their supervisor’s feedback much more than the feedback from other sources, a finding which is consistent with previous research (Leibowitz, 2013). One group prioritised their supervisor’s feedback over feedback from support staff so much that when the feedback from the support staff did not align with their supervisor’s feedback they decided that “*we just gonna stick to what Supervisor D says*” (B1). When students respond to conflicting advice by deciding only to follow what their supervisor says they will not benefit from the unique perspectives offered by academic literacies practitioners. Unlike supervisors, writing consultants have been trained to help students develop as writers by asking them to reflect on their current writing practices, a technique that postgraduate students said had helped them to improve their writing (Leibowitz, 2013; Leibowitz, 2016). Since previous research has shown that students appreciate feedback from different sources, when academic and support staff provide students with feedback these role players need to find ways to align the feedback that they provide to the students about their writing (Leibowitz, 2013; Leibowitz, 2016).

If these role players work together more closely students might not feel that these role players have a “*different view of how the research should be*” (B4), and that “*every single person was like making us go back to the beginning*” (B1). Supervisors and
support staff also need to ensure that students are aware of how to utilise the feedback that they receive from other role-players. If students have strategies for incorporating feedback from multiple sources they might find that it is not as “challenging” (B4) and “confusing” (B1) to receive feedback from multiple sources. Staff should also recognise that students might require instruction on how to use reflection, discussion, and other forms of metacognition in order to use feedback from different role players to create a coherent text.

Despite how challenging it was for students to receive feedback from multiple role players, some of whom work from a particular philosophy about writing, students did gain valuable feedback during consultations with PGWFs,

\[I \text{ think we already realised what our problem was when we went to the Writing Centre. That’s where they actually unpacked it and then it actually made sense you know everything just made sense (C4).}\]

This was a very valuable contribution, because postgraduate students who do not understand their problem statement will find it challenging to present a rationale for their research, and to describe how their findings have made a contribution to the field.

While PGWFs’ feedback did assist this group of students, two of the groups, Group B and C, said that the PGWFs had given them incorrect advice regarding the writing of their research reports. One student felt that a PGWF had given her group incorrect advice because he or she was,

\[\text{just looking at this piece of paper, looking at so there’s supposed to be…uh a hypothesis here there’s supposed to be objectives, there’s supposed to be that, but you not even you haven’t even read the content to understand that this is this particular research doesn’t need that (B1).}\]

In this instance, the PGWF had asked the group to include a hypothesis even though this did not fit well with the students’ qualitative research project. I knew that the PGWF who had given the students this advice was fairly new to the role, and more familiar with quantitative research, which underpinned a lot of research in the PGWF’s discipline. Group C, which had also conducted qualitative research, mentioned that a PGWF told them to describe how they had selected their sample randomly even though random sampling is a sampling technique associated with quantitative research. One group, Group D, also felt that the PGWFs expected too much from them.
as Honours students, because their supervisor had indicated that some of the changes implemented based on PGWFs suggestions were unnecessary.

Students did not mention that I, one of their Academic Literacies tutors, had provided them with incorrect feedback on their writing. It is possible that they did not feel comfortable enough during the focus group to point out that some of the feedback that I had given them had been incorrect. However, disregarding my degree in the field, I believe that my feedback was less likely to be incorrect for three reasons. Firstly, I understood the differences between qualitative and quantitative research more than the PGWFs, because I had attended capacity development workshops on research design, and methodology, and conducted research using both paradigms. Secondly, unlike some of the PGWFs who dispensed advice on research, design and methodology, I tried not to offer feedback on an area where their supervisors had greater expertise. Even when the students and I felt that their research topic could have been more focused, we deferred to the supervisor’s view that the chosen problem statement was not too broad. I tried not to offer feedback on areas where the supervisor was the expert, such as, research, design, and methodology, and in cases where my feedback differed from the supervisor’s feedback, I would defer to the supervisor’s opinion. Thus, in order to prevent giving students misleading advice academic literacies practitioners should understand how qualitative and quantitative paradigms differ. Where possible academic literacy practitioners should also defer to supervisors’ opinions on matters related to research design and methodology.

The third reason why my feedback on the students’ writing may have been less confusing was that when I read the students texts I tried to align my feedback with the expectations outlined in the assignment rubrics. I also had a better understanding of what was expected from the students because I spent more time with them and knew their research projects better than the PGWFs. Most of the PGWFs only interacted with the students during two one-day writing workshops. My approach may have been why one of the students, (B1), said that compared to the PGWFs, “At least you were actually reading the content and seeing it’s not making sense”. Based on this comment, the student values feedback from ALPs on how to clarify the meaning of a text. ALPs will not know which parts of a text are unclear unless they understand what
the purpose of the text is. One way in which ALPs can clarify an assignment’s purpose is to familiarise themselves with the assignment rubric. If the assignment is a developmental assignment that prepares students to submit a research report, then ALPs must also understand how the final research project will be assessed.

4.2.6 Students’ views on collaborative writing

Students in this module completed the research and the assignments as a group. During the focus group discussions, the students discussed the ways in which their group members had helped or hindered them during the module. Students whose group members had all made substantial contributions to the assignments mainly discussed the benefits of completing the assignments as a group. On the other hand, when students felt that they had completed most of the work by themselves they mainly mentioned the challenges associated with completing the assignments as a group.

The students said that being part of a group was beneficial for the five reasons shown below:

1. They had access to the viewpoints of other students
2. They benefited from the different experiences and strengths of the other students
3. They received emotional support from the other students
4. They felt more accountable to the team
5. They learned how to work with difficult team members

Students found that working in a group gave them access to different viewpoints, or as one student said, “I feel that sometimes when you are working on something alone it seems right at that time, whereas you get different opinions when you in a group” (B2). When group members had different experiences they could also make unique contributions to the text, for instance C4 as a manager “would bring implications for managers” into the text. Thus, working in a group allowed students to access opinions other than their own, and may have allowed the groups to produce research reports that spoke more fully to the HRM industry.

The students said that another benefit of working as a group is that their team members had different strengths. In Group C, one student, C2, made sure the text
made sense, and another student, C3, edited the students’ language. One student, C1, said that the advantage of working in a group was that “all our strengths will be combined”. A student from another group said that one of the students, D2, had helped the entire group to paraphrase and reference more accurately.

Working in a group also provided the students with additional emotional support. As one student explained, “we were able to motivate each other” (B4). One student valued this support so much that she expressed the view that, “I think..we couldn’t do it alone I very much doubt” (D1). Students said that because they were working in a group they felt accountable to their team members because they did not want to “to let the team down” (D3) by submitting work late. Previous research has also found that postgraduate students working in peer support groups are more likely to submit their work on time than postgraduate students completing their research by themselves (Stracke, and Kumar, 2014).

While the students above discussed the benefits of working collaboratively, other students found it more challenging to work with their assigned group members. These students mentioned six ways that collaborative writing could be challenging:

1. Some group members contributed much less to the assignments
2. Some group members tried to control the behaviour of others
3. Students need to explain things to the group members who have not attended the academic literacies tutorials
4. Supervisors did not ensure that all students contributed to the assignments
5. Group members deregistered and took their knowledge of the topic with them
6. It is challenging to consolidate different pieces of work into a coherent assignment

Three students (A1, E1, and F1) from three of the six groups said that they did most of the work. These students said that they had helped their group members to prepare for their assigned sections of the presentation by making them cue cards or notes under the PowerPoint slides. Though all three students helped their other group members to prepare for the presentation, the reported amount and type of social loafing between groups differed. One student, E1, said that one of her group members would produce better quality work “in his own time” and another would submit work quickly, sometimes by the next day, but that the work did not belong or “fit” with the
topic well. Since the student did not “want to make her feel stupid” by telling her the work was irrelevant, she spent extra time trying to incorporate this student’s work into the assignment. The reported amount of social loafing was even more extreme in another group, and made the one student, A1, feel “like it was a one man group”. The students said that writing the bulk of the work by themselves had caused them to experience strong negative emotions. One student, F1, she that she felt “just anger the whole … [research project]” towards her group members, and another, E1, said that having to complete the work by herself made her “feel alone”, and wonder if her group had “other priorities”.

Social loafing has been shown to be greater in groups with domineering group members (Erez et al., 2002). One of the students reported that she was unable to address the social loafing in her group because the other group members, who were older and had more life and work experience, would try and blame her when they had not sufficiently contributed to an assignment,

and I just tried to sort it out in the group and then, you know, because my group members were older than me they tried to intimidate me, so it turned into this like big fight, and then, on the WhatsApp chat, she’ll say something and then in the WhatsApp chat she completely, completely turns it around and says it’s my fault. Like so if she wasn’t contributing work she’d write in the WhatsApp group chat that I’m blocking her contribution, and that, that’s how the story used to get like twisted (F1).

As the student wanted to avoid confrontations with her other group members, she admitted to signing that their statements in the group portfolio were accurate, even when she believed that they had overstated their contributions. She felt that compiling an accurate portfolio was not that important because the supervisor knew the truth of the situation. Her actions indicate that she may not have realised the extent to which the portfolios were used as evidence to determine students’ marks, and how an inaccurate portfolio would make it harder for her supervisor to award lower marks to the non-contributing students.

Since the student experienced a lot of conflict within the group, she was relieved when the research project ended, because she would no longer have to interact with her group members,
For me I was like-the day we finish I’m exiting off that group on WhatsApp (laughs). Honestly I was waiting so I could leave the group on WhatsApp. I didn’t want to deal with the people anymore, didn’t wanna, talk to them on WhatsApp, I was glad I never had to phone anyone on weekends. I was just doing my own thing. Didn’t have to worry about anyone else.

It is understandable that the three students who felt that the other group members had not contributed enough to the assignments did not develop close relationships with their other group members. These students may be less able to turn to their group members for emotional and intellectual support in the following and final year of the degree than other students who have bonded with their group members.

Students in Group D also had one dominant group member. According to the members of the group, though the leadership role was supposed to be rotated, one group member had assumed the main leadership role for the entire year in which the module ran. The group explained that this student, D1, had threatened to dock ten percent off an assignment each time a student “didn’t do good work” (D4) or submitted work that the students said was “boring” (D2) and had “no meat” (D4). I presumed that the last comment meant that the work lacked substance, or did not contribute to the body of knowledge. She also threatened to deduct ten percent from a student’s final grade for not attending the Academic Literacies tutorials. Students resented this behaviour, and one student, (D2), referred to the de facto group leader as “group punisher”. Threatening to deduct ten percent for poor tutorial attendance ensured that in the following tutorial “everyone was there” (D2). However, the self-appointed group leader, D1, said that the other group members were still not contributing equally to the group. Ironically, domineering behaviour increases the risk of social loafing within groups (Erez et al., 2002). Therefore, D1’s decision to reduce the social loafing by trying to control the group may have actually made the other students contribute less to the assignments.

Supervisors knew that they should use students’ individual and group portfolios, which contained statements about their contributions to the assignments, to award marks to the students that were a good reflection of their contribution to an assignment. However, supervisors did not receive any guidance on how to manage the groups so that they would be more cohesive and less likely to engage in less social loafing. One supervisor, Supervisor A, did try to ensure that all the members of the group had an
equal stake in the group’s activities by ensuring that the group leadership role was rotated each month. This is a sound strategy as previous research has shown that social loafing occurs less frequently in groups where leadership is shared (Erez et al., 2002). Group leaders had to arrange meetings between the group and the supervisor, compile group portfolios where students outlined how much each group member had contributed to an assignment, and submit the final assignments. The supervisor also asked each group leader, “To make certain decisions and then email me or contact me with the actual decision”.

Two of the other supervisors reported that they took steps to reduce social loafing amongst the students. When Supervisor B noticed that a “scatter-brained” student was not "pulling her weight" he suggested ways in which the students could raise the issue with the student. He said that learning how to deal with this situation would equip students to deal with underperforming employees in the future. Supervisor C also reduced the amount of social loafing by telling an underperforming student that if her contribution to the assignments did not increase that she would receive lower marks than her other group members. While these supervisors took steps to reduce social loafing, two students from two different groups said that their supervisor did not address the high levels of social loafing within their groups. One student (E1) felt that her supervisor,

*Knew I was the, one person in the team because she-she she just used to speak to me and only me and she obviously only saw me and she even forgot about my group members like she forgot their names. She just knew that she was dealing with me.*

Several of the supervisors in the department expressed the opinion that they should not have to encourage students to contribute to an assignment because the students are adults who should be able to ensure that all the group members contribute equally. These supervisors also remarked that they did not have time to help the students manage their affairs.

One student said that because the under-performing student worked for her part-time, her supervisor felt sorry for him and was too understanding when he did not contribute
enough to the assignments. When the student complained about the group member’s lack of contribution the supervisor told her that he had, “Just gone off the radar and he’ll be back again” (E1). While the supervisor did eventually agree that the student had not contributed enough to one of the assignments, the student still felt that “she was taking his part”, or favouring the under-performing student. In this instance, it seems as if the supervisor’s prior relationship with the under-performing student meant that she failed to address his lack of contribution to the group for most of the module. In cases where it is not possible to assign students who know a supervisor fairly well to another supervisor, supervisors should reflect on whether or not their decisions unduly favour a student whose personal situations they have some sympathy for. This may prevent supervisors from providing undue support to students because of the prior relationship that they have with them.

Generally, social loafing is defined quite narrowly, and is only thought to occur at university when students contribute less to an assignment. However, two students in this course also felt that the other group members who chose not to attend the Academic Literacies tutorials were also engaging in social loafing. One student, D1, said that it was unfair that she was the only student who had attended the tutorials, because she had to “listen for all of you”. Another student, A1, said that attending the tutorials meant that she now knew “all those things [which they had learned in the tutorials]”. In her view, when the group members did not attend the tutorials then they missed out on the “input that that it [the tutorials] might have on the whole group”. She said that because her group members did not attend the tutorials she had to spend extra time explaining the tutorials to them and editing their work.

Another disadvantage of being part of a group is that if students chose to deregister they took all the knowledge that they had gained on the research topic with them. One group member, A1, explained that when one of her group members left, 

*otherwise I could have just been an individual thing, because now each one has sections of what they did, so now coming together, I, I can’t explain more on what the other person did. So I can only explain what I did, which is not that much, and which is cause the other guy had started on the most important part of the, of the, of the research question which is-the organisational design and the other guy did the mechanisation so if we’re all together it would give me clarity on what this one means and you know? So yeeahh.*


In this instance, the person who had deregistered due to work commitments had written important parts of the problem statement and literature review, and when the student deregistered the group lost a large portion of their intellectual capital. As the student was a valued member of the team, the group’s supervisor (Supervisor C) said that the group felt that they should have made a greater effort to encourage him to stay.

The students from four of the six groups commented that consolidating the assignments was a challenge. The students who consolidated the assignments said that receiving late work from group members made consolidating the assignments more difficult, but that the most challenging part about consolidating the assignments was to “make it [the final text] make sense” (B1). Though I initially thought that the students who consolidated the work also edited the work, the student who consolidated the work, B1, clarified that she would ask their group members to fix the “referencing”, “grammar” and parts that did not “make sense” and send it back to them. Despite asking the students to improve their own sections of the text, the students who consolidated the assignments, B1, found that integrating the different sections into one text that “has a flow” was “not a small task”. She even expressed the view that “the person that’s consolidating really does have more work than anyone else” because, the coordinator needs to “bring all of those thoughts together”. Consolidating the work would have been a challenge because the coordinator would have had to work productively with pieces of work written by students whose ability to write for the discipline varies.

Two of the groups, Group C and D, said that they had to develop strategies in order to consolidate sections of work written by different group members into coherent assignments. Instead of relying on one person to organise the different pieces of work into coherent assignments, the groups decided that more than one person should ensure that the final text was coherent. One group had made it a rule that, “like if you write something everyone has to re, review it or at least one person to fix it no person can just submit their own work” (D2). The students from these groups said that relying on more than one group member to consolidate the work had improved the quality of the assignments. Since writers are often unable to see how the content and rhetoric
in their texts could be improved, it would make sense that asking multiple group members to review a text would improve the overall quality of the text (Beard, Myhill, Riley & Nystrand, 2009).

4.2.7 Impact of contextual factors

Since literacy is acquired in context, multiple contextual factors affected how the students experienced the academic support. A discussion of how three factors, transitioning from an undergraduate degree to a postgraduate degree, studying at a different institution, and studying as a part-time student affected the students’ perceptions of the support offered can be found below.

4.2.7.1 Transitioning to a postgraduate degree

Students who thought a part-time module would be less intensive struggled to adjust to the amount of work that they needed to complete. They also battled to adjust from an undergraduate degree where the research had been well structured or “straightforward, straight to the point” (C1) to the less well defined, and more complex and exploratory research at Honours level. One student, B3, had reported that at one point he felt so confused by the research project that he had considered deregistering from the degree.

Um, Okay, when I started I did..I felt energetic, I wanted to work hard and stuff like that and as much as aghh, when the research started I started getting confused with what was actually required of us. And by April I was ready to to quit, I asked myself why do I want an Honours degree? I started feeling really directionless doing an Honours degree.

The student said that he only felt more eager to complete the research project when he had “painted the picture, or the corner of the picture that we’re using”, and now knew “what was expected of us”. Thus, this research seems to support previous research that shows that undergraduate degrees, including those in South Africa do not sufficiently prepare students for Honours level research (Butler, 2007; Jackson et al., 2006; Lander, 2002; Lombard & Kloppers, 2015).
Although Murray (2015) proposes that collaborative writing can help writers to clarify their writing, and that this will motivate them to write further, even completing the assignments in groups did not always help students to clarify the purpose of the research report genre. A significant difference between the social writing model proposed by Murray (2015), where academics with differing levels of experience learn and write together, was that all the students in the degree were novice researchers. Students may have also found the purpose of research project unclear, because the benefits of research, or how it develops researchers and contributes to society, were not initially explained to them. Instead of explaining the benefits of research, one group said that a supervisor said that they needed to complete research, because Honours degrees had to include a research component to meet the “legislation” (C1). The students were disappointed by the supervisor’s explanation of how the research fulfilled met the Higher Education Qualification Framework criteria, because they wanted to know why they were conducting research. Only later did students understand that producing a record of the research in a research report would enable them to make a contribution to what is currently known about a particular topic. Since Clark and Ivanić (1997) have argued that students who write to fulfil particular purposes are more motivated to write, lecturers should explain how writing a research text benefits the students and society instead of focusing on how research fulfils the macro purpose of an institution.

The students had not completed a postgraduate degree prior to the Honours degrees and were unable to comment if the structured WID programme made the research process easier for them. However, it was clear from the students’ comments that they did not initially understand the purpose of conducting research, and when faced with uncertainty while conducting the research that they had considered deregistering from the degree. Postgraduate students are more likely to be motivated to pursue research even when uncertain as to how to address the research problem if staff explain to them how conducting conducting research benefits both society and themselves. Students, particularly those who prefer to avoid uncertainty, may also need to be reassured and told that it is normal for researchers to experience confusion and uncertainty at times.
4.2.7.2 Changing universities

Students who had studied at other universities may need additional support in order to adjust to studying at a new university, because they are unfamiliar with the university policies, and campus, or are used to studying at a distance university. One of the students who had previously studied at a distance-learning institution said that working in a group was challenging because she was “so used to do things myself at my own pace” (B1). Another student struggled to adjust to the examination regulations at the current university. Since the student had assumed that like her prior university the supplementary examination marks were uncapped, when work commitments prevented her from studying she decided to leave an examination early and write the supplementary exam. The student described herself as a higher achiever, and was so distraught when she found out her marks would be capped at 50% that she told the group that “I just want to go deregister” (D2).

Universities or departments seeking to minimise the disruption of studying at an unfamiliar institution, could provide more orientation to new students, particularly those who have studied exclusively online before and now need to work in groups. The university could offer students a tour of the campus, but clarifying the university’s assessment and examination procedures would be even more crucial. If universities clarified different assessment and examination practices, students would be empowered to make better choices regarding examination preparation and writing, which might make them feel less like deregistering from an academic degree.

Currently the only orientation the department offers is a short Teaching and Learning Seminar where support staff introduce the services offered and supervisors give presentations on topics, such as avoiding plagiarism and remaining motivated. The qualification leader, or the supervisor with the overall responsibility for the degree, organised this seminar to show students that there “was no stigma attached” to utilising the support services. She felt that the seminar had been a success because the staff at the seminar had created a very “supportive environment”. However, most of the students said that the seminar was not useful for them because they had heard most of the presentations, especially the one on avoiding plagiarism, before. Since
this seminar took place in the second semester many students were also already aware of the services offered by the Postgraduate School and the Writing Centre.

4.2.7.3 Being a part-time student

During the focus group discussions students agreed that studying part-time is very challenging, and many expressed the opinion that the module was not designed to accommodate part-time students who are full-time employees. Though the administration of the module is not directly related to the acquisition of academic literacies it may have affected the students’ ability to acquire and display the necessary literacies in their written assignments. This is because requiring students to a) submit assignments in person, and b) log into the Learning Management system to receive notifications may have meant students had less time and energy to acquire the necessary literacies. Furthermore, as many students did not log in to the system often, they found some of the due dates had been changed a few days before the assignment was due. This meant that that student had less time to display the literacies acquired when writing these assignments. Where learning management systems are used to communicate with part-time postgraduate students perhaps notifications should also be delivered to the students’ work email addresses, which they check regularly. Part-time students would also find it more convenient to submit assignments online.

The students who were working found that accessing the additional support workshops during the day was difficult. Most of these workshops were opportunities to consult with PGWFs, and therefore opportunities to acquire the necessary literacies. Students were particularly frustrated when their institution has promised them the flexibility to attend these workshops, and then denied then tried to deny them this opportunity. Most of the students who reported that their workplace had found reasons to deny them access to these opportunities were intern or employees in junior positions. This situation is concerning since research indicates that academics who report that their workplace does not sufficiently support them with their writing feel less motivated to write (Murray, 2015). It was even more problematic that the students could only consult with PGWFs at the writing centres during office hours. Since students who consult with writing consultants achieve better grades than those who
do not (Yeats, Reddy, Wheeler, Senior & Murray, 2010), universities should ensure that writing centres are equally accessible to both part-time and full-time students.

4.2.8 Conclusion

Students felt that the Academic Literacies tutorials had helped them to acquire academic literacies related to academic reading, which could have helped them to complete their research reports. Through writing the developmental assignments and the research report students also acquired academic literacies that will assist them in the workplace. Students also commented that the teaching in the module, namely the teaching of the statistics, and the feedback given to them by the Postgraduate Writing Fellows could have been improved. Both parties could offer the students more relevant advice by learning more about how Human Resource Management texts should be written. Students felt that the high supervisor workload caused their supervisors to provide them with feedback that was generic or substantially delayed. Other factors, which were not part of the research preparation module, such as students’ transition to postgraduate studies or a new university, and their studying part time, that were not directly also affected the students’ experience of the module.

4.3 QUESTION THREE

3. What challenges do the supervisors who were involved in this module face?

4.3.1 Supervisor reflections on module load

Since the research preparation module is a 30 credit module, and each credit represents ten notional hours, it should take approximately 300 hours to complete (SA Department of Education, 2007). However, Supervisor D felt that the module took too much of the students’ time because it “conveniently” assumed the entire responsibility for “developing skills that are not necessarily research skills”. She felt that the lecturers in the module had a higher workload because they taught students multiple academic literacies, for instance, critical thinking, and academic reading, that were also necessary for success in the other Honours modules. In order to prevent one module,
and the staff who teach in the module, from becoming overloaded, the Honours degree could be designed so that the students acquire the necessary academic literacies throughout the degree, an approach known as Writing Across the Curriculum (McLeod & Soven, 2000). If postgraduate degree programmes are based on WAC no single module will be responsible for teaching students the academic literacies that they need to complete all the modules. Instead each module should include content related to writing for the discipline so that students can acquire the necessary academic literacies throughout their degrees. Where modules require students to acquire particular academic literacies these can be taught to students during the module. For instance, in the HRM Honours degree before students are asked to respond to business problems posed by companies they could be assisted to acquire the practices needed to respond to case studies.

4.3.2 Supervisor perspectives on working collaboratively

The module coordinator, module designer, administrator, and supervisors had to collaborate in order to develop and deliver the module. At times this collaboration was harmonious, and at times different viewpoints about how the module should be offered was a source of tension between the collaborators. The module coordinator was responsible for ensuring that the module met its stated aims, including the main aim of helping students submit the research report. The coordinator and other supervisors continually reflected on how successfully the module met its main aim. The coordinator relied on Supervisor B’s input when making some of the decisions regarding the module design. Since she aimed to respond to the students’ needs, she often found it necessary to make changes to the module while the module was running. Some of these changes included: arranging extra workshops with the Writing Centre to support students with their writing, extending deadlines so that students had more time to complete the work, and bringing the deadline forward so that supervisors had more time to provide feedback. As the module coordinator was responsive to what she perceived as the students’ needs, many of these changed took place at short notice, and the module coordinator relied on a competent administrator to handle most of the logistics. Since implementing a new module, particularly one with a different design is
challenging, the academic head of the module can use competent administrative support and keen academic insight to improve upon the delivery of a new module.

The module coordinator and Supervisor B had worked well together, but did not find their collaboration with the supervisor who had designed the module as fruitful. Supervisor D was asked to design this module because she had previously supervised Honours students who had completed a similar research preparation module in a different field at another university. While the module coordinator found the input from the coordinator and Supervisor B enjoyable, she thought that the module designer only helped her design the learning guide instead of providing enough information on the structure of the module. Supervisor B was dissatisfied with the design of the module, because he had wanted the different components of the module, the academic literacies, statistics, research design and methodology to be better aligned to the students’ assignments.

Supervisor D also found that it was sometimes a challenge to work with the module coordinator, because the changes she made to the curriculum showed that she did not understand the “philosophy” behind the design of the module. While the module designer though the academic literacies component was an essential part of the module, she said that Supervisor B had to persuade the coordinator to focus less on statistics so that some time would be allocated to academic literacies support. While the module coordinator’s views on academic literacy seemed to change as did comment on how beneficial the tutorials and writing workshops were, her initial reaction shows that the importance of academic literacies is not recognised by all academics. The module coordinator may not have seen how necessary it is to teach students how to write in their discipline, because historically academic literacies is not accorded the same prestige as other fields (Tuck, 2016). Academic literacy practitioners can help supervisors recognise what contribution these literacies make by researching how specific academic literacies support improves postgraduate students’ ability to write in their discipline. This kind of research will also provide academic and support staff with more information on how current academic literacies support can be modified so that students are better supported to write for their discipline in future.
The module designer also thought that the module coordinator should have conducted the two panel presentations differently. The module designer thought the coordinator should force supervisors to accept input from their colleagues, which had been the practice at the university where the module originated from. Instead the module coordinator allowed supervisors to decide whether or not their students could be exposed to alternative viewpoints. Some supervisors may be genuinely concerned that students, particularly novice postgraduate students at Honours level, may be confused by alternative viewpoints. However, previous research has found that supervisors who perceive the relationship between the supervisor-student relationship as strictly private are unwilling to receive any input from other staff members (Manathunga, 2005). In this instance, even the once-off feedback offered at a panel presentation could have been perceived by supervisors as threatening the sacrosanct relationship between the supervisor and his or her students. The danger of not being able to provide the students with honest feedback is that any misconceptions on the part of the supervisors are less likely to be corrected. A panel which operates in this way also denies students the opportunity to learn from other supervisors’ experiences and viewpoints.

The module designer also mentioned that she was unhappy about the way in which the portfolios were assessed. While the curriculum of the original allocated marks to students the written portfolios where students documented their contributions to the assignments, when the module was redesigned no marks were allocated to the portfolios. The module designer felt that students would not be motivated to properly document their contribution to the assignments, if the portfolios were not worth any marks. Her concern was that if contributions were not clearly stated then supervisors would find it difficult to correctly award higher or lower marks individual students. She also worried that submitting the portfolios at the end of the semester, rather than after each assignment, would mean that the supervisors would not have enough evidence to give students higher or lower marks based on their stated contributions. The module coordinator did decide that students would submit individual and group portfolios after each assignment in 2016, but did not assign these portfolios marks as she said they were not a piece of academic writing. From the sample it is not possible to say whether
this decision reduced the amount of social loafing by group members in 2016. However, it is interesting to note that the groups in 2016 reported less social loafing behaviour from individuals in the group than the groups in 2015.

As the original module was offered at another university, it had to be adapted to fit the context of the current institution. However, by allowing the supervisors to dictate that other supervisors should not offer suggestions to their students during their presentations, students did not learn as much from the other supervisors. In addition, choosing not to allocate marks to the portfolios may have meant that students did not take the time to properly complete these portfolios, which supervisors use to decide which students deserve higher or lower marks. Thus, it seems that some of these adaptations may not have benefited the students. In order to ensure that all adaptations to a module will benefit students, closer collaboration between the staff where a module is originally offered and the staff where the module will be offered is needed. Staff who intend to adapt a module must fully understand the relevance of each aspect of a module so that a module can be adapted to the local context while key aspects of a module, which enhance teaching and learning, are retained.

4.3.3 Supervisors’ reported supervision challenges

None of the supervisors whom I interviewed had previously supervised postgraduate students who were required to complete developmental assignments before submitting the final research text. One supervisor expressed the opinion that students did not always use the feedback that he had given to them to write better research reports and proposals. Supervisor B believed that students did not use his feedback on the developmental assignments to improve their larger assignments because they still had the “mind set” of undergraduate students where they feel that, “when I get a mark with something it’s the end of that because I don’t need to take that feedback further”. As the students had only submitted summative assignments at undergraduate level, they may not have understood why or how to use the feedback from the developmental assignments to write their proposal and research report.
Supervisor B also expected the students to learn from the mistakes in “one paragraph or one sentence” and to correct “similar repetitive mistakes”. While this supervisor seemed to believe that students will learn quickly to correct mistakes related to spelling, grammar, and punctuation, this is not the case. Research has shown that it takes English as an Additional Language students a long time to learn to write grammatically correct English sentences (Archer, 2011). In this instance, the entire group has to improve their ability to express themselves in English, and the supervisor admitted that “some members learn and some members don’t”. The supervisor seemed to be acknowledging that students have different motivations to learn and that this affects how much they incorporate their supervisor’s feedback. This view is supported by research which has found that student motivation plays a large role in their academic literacies acquisition. Students who feel positive about their studies and the English language are usually better able to express themselves in English than students who have a negative attitude towards their studies or the English language (Leibowitz, 2009; Leibowitz, 2010). However, motivation and attitude are only two of the many factors which influence students’ ability to write texts. Leibowitz (2010) has also found that students who had more 1) prior access to the English language, 2) exposure to academic discourse, and 3) past participation in academic literacy events also found it easier to write academic texts. Thus, multiple factors besides motivation and attitude determine each student’s ability to write academic texts and how likely the student will be able to use the supervisors’ feedback to write texts with fewer errors. Students with less access to the English language and knowledge of the discipline may need more support in order to be able to utilise their supervisor’s feedback effectively.

4.3.4 Conclusion

The module was redesigned by the module coordinator, but several curriculum changes may have hindered students’ acquisition of academic literacies. This indicates that staff should ensure that the goals of a WID programme and its curriculum are aligned. Some supervisors felt that students did not sufficiently implement some of the feedback that they had provided to the students on their developmental assignments. Students may have needed more time to acquire the necessary academic literacies to address some of this feedback. Since acquiring academic
literacies is complex, it may be easier for students to acquire the literacies throughout the degree rather than in one module. One way to decrease supervisor workload, and ensure that students have multiple opportunities to develop the academic literacies required to respond to supervisor feedback, is to redesign the Honours degree so that each module supports students to acquire literacy practices.

This chapter has considered how the main findings of the study relate to each research question and to previous research. The chapter that follows considers how these findings contribute to the WID literature, and what the implications of these findings are for WID practitioners.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first section of the chapter discusses how the findings of this study support and add to the WID literature. The second section reviews what the possible implications of these findings are for academic and support staff. The third section of the chapter discusses one of the main contributions of this study, the finding that the marginalisation of part-time students by institutions negatively affects their ability to acquire the necessary academic literacies. The final section of the discussion is a reflection on why a WID approach may be particularly challenging to implement at postgraduate level. Since each section has its own summary, a summary will not be provided at the end of the chapter.

5.1 CONTRIBUTION OF THE FINDINGS TO THE WID LITERATURE

The WID literature argues that universities should teach literacy practices that assist students to write texts that are appropriate for both university and workplace contexts (Clark & Ivanić, 1997; Leibowitz, 2011; Russell, 1997; Russell et al., 2009). Russell (1997) suggests that universities should achieve this aim by ensuring that students have an opportunity to practice writing academic and work-based texts throughout their degree. During the module, students presented their research in the form of a research poster, a research presentation, and a research report. Students felt that presenting their research in these three forms had taught them how to correctly structure reports, deliver oral presentations with confidence, and correctly address senior staff. While the students thought of these as skills which they had acquired, I feel that these are not separate skills, but are instead practices located in social contexts, or academic literacies. In fact, these academic literacies can be viewed as graduate attributes, because through acquiring these literacies students are able to make a larger contribution to their workplaces (Leibowitz, 2011). Most of these practices relate to graduates’ ability to express themselves orally and in writing, which is an aim of the SAQA cross-curricula framework, and an area that South African companies feel that graduates could substantially improve upon (Griesel & Parker, 2009; SAQA, 2012). Since these literacy practices are so valuable, students felt that by having acquired these practices that they would be better able to advance their
careers. Thus, this research suggests that it is possible to teach postgraduate students how to produce research texts in their discipline in ways which also support them to acquire graduate attributes.

Although the assignments in the module did help students acquire academic literacies that are valued within the workplace, the main purpose of the developmental assignments was to prepare students to submit their research reports. Turning to the preparatory purpose of the developmental assignments, the findings suggest that these assignments did help students to improve their research reports. In this study, each time the students redrafted a component of the research report, it met more of the criteria stated in the rubric. The redrafted text also better approximated the features of academic discourse, such as coherence and cohesion (Butler, 2007). This finding is supported by research which shows that students who receive feedback on an assignment and re-write it manage to improve the original text (Ferris, 2003; Thomas, 2016). Research also shows that students need sufficient scaffolding to complete complex assignments (Parkinson, et. al., 2007). In this module only students from the 2016 cohort, who had the chance to write drafts of the abstract and final chapters, had re-written these parts of the research report according to the expected social sciences conventions. Thus, the 2016 cohort was more prepared to write the research report because they had practised more of the core sub-genres found within the main research text. This suggests that students are more likely to be able to produce research texts that meet the requirements of the discipline if they have an opportunity to practise drafting and receiving feedback on sub-genres within the text.

While writing and receiving feedback on draft texts helped students to improve their final research report, students said that they did not have enough time to write some of these assignments. Students felt that only having a few weeks to submit several assignments was a challenge, because they did not have enough time to incorporate several academic literacies that would have improved their assignments. When the students in Group A, who had struggled to produce a comprehensive literature survey, were given an extension, they wrote a literature review that discussed the key literature in relation to their topic. This finding is supported by research, which shows that if students who struggle to complete assignments on time are given an extension then
they are more likely to succeed (Patton, 2000). Previous research, and the students’ own comments, suggests that students writing assignments in groups may need additional time to consolidate different pieces of work into one coherent text (Ede & Lunsford, 1990).

While research has shown that when students write texts in groups they engage in discussions around form and content that ultimately help them to produce better texts, there is very little research on how the functioning of a group affects the end product (Ede and Lunsford, 1990; Storch, 2005). Since literacy is a social practice, students acquire academic literacies through engaging with others (Clark and Ivanić, 1997). This is particularly true when students write assignments collaboratively, which means that WID literature should pay greater attention to how working in groups affects students’ acquisition of academic literacies. More literature on how writing assignments collaboratively affects how students acquire the necessary academic literacies would help to inform the structure and nature of degrees and support programmes for postgraduate students wiring in groups.

This research found that the amount of social loafing, which is the well-documented tendency to contribute less when people work in groups, affected the support students received from their group members (Chidambaram & Tun, 2005; Kidwell & Bennett, 1993; Piezon & Ferree, 2008). In this study, students who reported high levels of social loafing did not report receiving any emotional and academic support from their group members. In comparison, the students who felt that all group members contributed equally to the research reported receiving emotional and academic support from their group members. This could have enabled students to acquire certain kinds of practices valued in the discipline. For instance, by sharing viewpoints students could develop a better understanding of their discourse, and receiving emotional support may help students sustain the motivation required to acquire complex academic literacies. Previous research has shown that students feel less lonely, and are more likely to submit their research by the deadline when they belong to peer support groups (Buissink-Smith et al., 2013; Stracke & Kumar, 2014). On the other hand, students who said that they completed most of the work alone, said that completing the work on their own often made them feeling isolated, angry, and
frustrated, which may affect their ability to sustain the motivation necessary to acquire complex academic literacies. Thus, lower levels of social loafing create an environment where students are more likely to help each acquire the practices required to succeed at university.

Since high levels of social loafing may create unfavourable conditions for the acquisition of academic literacies, it is important that when students produce assignments collaboratively, measures to prevent social loafing are put in place. In this module, students completed individual and group portfolios, where they outlined their contributions to the assignments, supervisors were then supposed to use the information written in the portfolios to allocate marks fairly to individual students. While rewarding students for their individual contributions to group assignments does reduce social loafing, there was a basic flaw with the way in which the group portfolios were designed (Chidambaram & Tun, 2005; Piezon & Ferree, 2008). Students described their individual contributions to the assignments in the group portfolio, and then all the group members signed the portfolio to say that these statements were accurate. This system was flawed as students admitted signing off on inaccurate statements, because they wanted to avoid intra-group conflict. Since confronting students about their contribution to the assignments creates conflict, this may indicate some defensiveness on the part of the students who seemed to contribute less to the assignments. Since anonymous peer evaluations are usually more honest (Lu & Bol, 2007), when WID programmes require students to work in groups, students should rate the contributions of their peers anonymously.

While systems that are put in place at the level of curriculum can help prevent social loafing, the study indicated that the way in which a supervisor interacts with his or her students can also mediate the amount of social loafing in groups. This study suggests that some supervisor behaviours can also reduce the levels of social loafing within groups. One supervisor chose to rotate the leadership role amongst the students; rotating leadership among members of a group has been shown to reduce social loafing by motivating students to engage with task at hand (Erez et al., 2002). Another supervisor chose to coach the students so that they would be able to have a discussion with another group member about her lack of contribution to the group. Since students
may be defensive about contributing less to the assignments, students do need to be taught how to raise this issue with their group members. Thus, when students work in teams, coaching is a useful supervision strategy, which can be used to prevent social loafing. Supervisors coach students by helping them to resolve specific problems that negatively impact their productivity (Wisker, Exley, Antoniou & Ridely, 2008).

Students acquired literacy practices through interacting with their group members, and academic staff. Though group members provided a lot of support to each other, students did not mention receiving feedback on their writing from their peers. By contrast, students discussed receiving feedback on their writing from two sources, the ALPs and their supervisors. Many students found that both ALP and supervisor feedback was helpful, previous research has also found that postgraduate students appreciate receiving feedback from multiple sources (Leibowitz, 2013; Leibowitz, 2016). However, some students said that receiving feedback on their writing from multiple sources was challenging, because feedback from the ALPs was not aligned to their supervisor’s expectations for their writing. Some students said that a PGWF had advised them to adopt quantitative methods for qualitative research projects, or to implement changes that were beyond the scope of an Honours research report. Hence, PGWFs gave feedback that did not fully address the needs of the primary reader of the students’ work, their supervisor, because this advice was based on their own meta-discipline, the hard sciences, and level of study. The group became frustrated with this misalignment and decided to only incorporate suggested changes from their supervisor, had less chance to use reflection as a tool to develop their writing. In order to help students acquire academic literacies in practice, ALPs have to understand the way in which disciplines create meaning in particular communities so that they can help students to acquire the literacy practices valued in their disciplines (Jacobs, 2005; Jacobs, 2007; Moore et al., 1998).

Although students did not receive feedback on their writing from the statistics tutors, I believe that knowledge of statistics also informed students’ ability to write sections of the research report, such as the findings chapter. Many students felt that they would have learned more from the tutorials if the tutors had referred to examples from their field, and allowed them to analyse their own data in class. As students need to
understand how knowledge is generated in their disciplines, writing support programmes for postgraduate students should use data from their disciplines. The students also said that because the tutor had assumed too much prior knowledge of the subject on their part, the pace of her lectures was too quick, and that this made it hard to understand the material covered in the tutorials. Unsurprisingly, several students admitted that they learned very little from the tutorials, which may have negatively impacted their ability to write their research reports, and that they did not feel confident about pursuing quantitative research in future. These findings provide support for the idea that subject knowledge and the ability to write in the discipline are entwined (Ackerman, 1991; Almargot & Chanquoy, 2001). Thus, students’ ability to write in the discipline cannot be separated from their knowledge of the research process, and the more embedded knowledge about research is in their discipline, the easier it will be for them to write in the discipline.

The most important vehicles for the transmission of disciplinary knowledge in this study was the supervisor-student relationship. As found in previous studies, as supervisors were the experts in the discipline, students regarded their feedback as the most significant for their study (Leibowitz, 2013; Leibowitz, 2016). Though the supervisors as disciplinary experts presumably understood the social practices valued by their disciplinary community, their ability to provide students with feedback on their writing differed. Present research indicates that when DSs no longer ‘see’ the practices at work in their disciplines, ALPs can help them to uncover how the meaning-making practices in the discipline operate (Jacobs, 2005; Jacobs, 2007; McKay & Simpson, 2013). In this module, one area in which ALPs could have helped DSs provide more guidance to students on is the use of metadiscourse. Especially since research indicates that English as an Additional Language (EAL) students may be less familiar with aspects of metadiscourse, such as boosters and speakers, than native speakers (Figueiredo-Silva, 2001; Serholt, 2012). Universities that provide their postgraduate students with explicit instruction regarding metadiscourse would also be supporting non-traditional students. For example, students who have gained entry to the course through recognition or prior learning or who have taken a substantial break between their undergraduate and postgraduate degree. Thus, this research provides further evidence that students are best supported to acquire the necessary academic
literacies when ALPs help supervisors to re-discuss and impart the meaning making practices in their disciplines.

One reason why these students were not explicitly taught how to use metadiscourse may have been because the involvement of the ALPs in this module was fairly superficial and peripheral. Instead of ALPs acting as a resource for supervisors, they were relegated to the lesser and more peripheral roles of writing tutors, or writing consultants. The ALPs in this module may have played a superficial role for two reasons. Firstly, supervisors tend to resent interference ‘outside interference’ into what they perceive to be a completely private relationship with their students (Manathunga, 2005). Secondly, ALPs may play peripheral teaching and learning roles, because of their traditionally subordinate position within the university hierarchy. Due to the lack of prestige conferred by institutions on ALPs and their straddling of support and administrative work, they tend to operate outside of traditional institutional boundaries, such as faculties and departments (Tuck, 2016; Vosloo & Motala, 2016; Whitchurch, 2013). This means that ALPs have less power and status than supervisors who operate from within more traditional university structures (Fox, 2000; Latour, 1999). To complicate matters further, most partnerships between ALPs and DSs are informal (McKay & Simpson, 2013), meaning that often the roles of both parties are not clearly defined (Leibowitz, 2013). If ALPs and DSs define their roles more clearly they will be better able to align the support that they provide to the students (Leibowitz, 2013; Leibowitz, 2016).

While previous research has shown that support and academic staff need to find more productive ways of working together (Leibowitz, 2013), this research has also found that this is also true for supervisors who are co-teaching. Several supervisors in the department wanted the supervisor who designed the module to pay more attention to constructive alignment so that the support tutorials aligned more with the students’ assignments. On the other hand, the supervisor who designed the module felt that some of the changes made to the module, such as choosing not to allocate marks to the portfolios, when it was redesigned, did not support the students’ acquisition of the necessary academic practices. It is possible that these supervisors found it particularly hard to clarify their roles, because the module designer taught on the course part time.
and was based at another institution with its own communities of practices. Thus, it is possible that the module designer and the supervisors in the department had different assumptions regarding ‘best’ practices that were not fully interrogated (Roberts, 2006; Wenger, 2002). This research suggests that supervisors from different communities of practice who co-deliver a WID programme may find it particularly challenging to define their roles, because they might have different assumptions about how students in a particular discipline should be supervised.

Different viewpoints around supervisory practices in this module extended to supervisors’ beliefs about what kind of feedback students should be exposed to. Some supervisors in the module believed that feedback from colleagues that contradicted the advice that they had provided to their students would only confuse them. These supervisors resisted attempts to create spaces where other supervisors could express opinions that differed from their own. However, another supervisor felt that providing students with multiple, and possibly contradictory feedback would help them to better understand their research and prepare them undertake Master’s level research. The supervisors who wanted to ensure that students did not receive contradictory feedback were members of the department at the university. On the other hand, a supervisor, who was a contract lecturer, said that supervisors should be forced to provide the students with alternative views and that this was the established practice at her university. It seems that in the study the supervisors’ views on what kind of feedback practices are effective were influenced by which community of practice they belonged to. Thus, when staff from different communities of practice work on a WID programme they bring different, and sometimes contradictory views regarding the kinds of teaching that empowers students to acquire the necessary academic literacies.

5.2 THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE FINDINGS FOR PRACTICE

This research suggests that the research preparation module did help students to acquire the necessary academic literacies to write their research reports. Thus, other universities may consider offering research support modules where students receive academic literacies, statistics, and research design and methodology support in order to enable them to conduct postgraduate research. Since students required less supervision due to peer and tutor support, this model could also be one way in which
South African universities with finite numbers of supervisors increase the numbers of postgraduate students. This model could be especially effective in South Africa and other countries, where governments expect universities to dramatically increase the number of enrolled postgraduate students within a short space of time (National Planning Commission, 2012).

One of the most important features of this module was the developmental assignments that students wrote to prepare them to submit their research reports. Writing these developmental assignments helped the students to align sections of their research reports to their marking rubrics, and adopt features of academic writing. This finding suggests that WID modules for postgraduate students could include developmental assignments, which are marked by supervisors according to rubrics, and form part of the students’ main research text. However, any developmental assignments in a WID programme need to sufficiently scaffold all the components of the main research text, and provide the students with enough time to incorporate their developing academic literacies into the assignments. Thus, staff teaching on WID programmes should ensure that the design of the assignments allows students to develop the academic literacies required to write the main research text.

Students wrote all these assignments in groups, and students who did not report high levels of social loafing said that they received both academic and emotional support from their group. Since this support may have helped the students to acquire the necessary academic literacies, a WID approach for postgraduate students could consider requiring students to complete assignments in groups. However, any WID programme where students work in groups would have to ensure that peer evaluations are anonymous and that students are rewarded for their individual contributions to assignments. WID programmes could also reduce social loafing by ensuring that supervisors understand the importance of, and the means to reduce social loafing in groups, and by providing students with assertiveness training.

Students’ acquisition of academic literacies could also have been negatively affected by ALP feedback that was not aligned to supervisor feedback. This means that ALPs in WID modules need to develop a better understanding of the students’ discipline so
that students have the opportunity to develop their writing through reflecting on a draft text. This suggests that ALPS, like students, also need to be inducted into the disciplinary community, though presumably ALPs would be more able to critique this process and the meaning-making practices within the discipline. The statistics tutors could also needed a better understanding of the discipline, as the use of examples from the discipline, and a slower pace would have helped some students acquire practices necessary to write quantitative research reports.

Creating formally recognised partnerships between ALPs and DSs is another way in which the academic literacies support in the module could have been strengthened. If the roles of both parties were clarified and ALP input into the design of the module was assured then ALPs could have worked more closely with DSs. If ALPs acted as advisors as well as tutors and consultants there would have been more opportunities for ALPs to assist supervisors to recognise and share the social practices at work in the discipline with their students. Universities should support the vital work of ALPs, and by extension postgraduate students’ ability to harness disciplinary norms when sharing new knowledge in texts, by ensuring that spaces where ALPs and DSs can work together on more equal terms are created.

As an ALP, I would have liked the opportunity to share my insights with all the supervisors in the module. My main concern would be that the separation of the four different aspects (academic literacies, truth, knowledge, and creating knowledge, statistics) felt very artificial. Since writing was a central part of the knowledge production in this degree, at times the tutors and lecturers touched on aspects of writing. For example, students were taught how to write numerical symbols in the statistics tutorials, and to explain, i.e. write down, their ontological and epistemological assumptions in the research, design, and methodology section of the research report. I also explained aspects of research design and methodology, and statistics while unpacking genre conventions present in texts during the Academic Literacies tutorials. Instead of organising research support modules into different knowledge or skill aspects, I recommend that lecturers and tutors teach in ways that demonstrate how the social practices are used in the discipline. Where possible synergies between what
were once viewed as separate knowledge areas should reinforce the acquisition of literacies as social practices for students.

Supervisors from different institutions who co-designed and taught the module also failed to fully understand how their understanding of ‘best’ supervisory practices informed the design of the module. This suggests that when supervisors from different institutions co-design and teach WID programmes they need to spend time understanding how the module can be designed to fulfil specific aims. This research found that supervisors were unwilling to allow their colleagues to fully contribute to their students’ academic literacies development during panel presentations. Since it may be threatening for supervisors to receive feedback from others in a public space, designers of WID modules could ask supervisors to develop ways of working together that they feel more comfortable with.

Though the study mainly explored the support offered as part of this module, several factors that were external to the module itself also affected the students’ academic literacies acquisition. For example, students who had not studied at the university previously, said that it was difficult to adjust to the institutional norms in their new community of practice. In addition, as the institution values full-time students more, the part-time students in this study had difficulty accessing important support services. Thus, WID modules may need to orientate postgraduate students from other universities to the current institutional practices, and ensure that part-time students are able to access all the support that they require to develop their academic literacies.

In conclusion, all aspects of a WID module, including any assignments, tutorials and lectures, teaching, and feedback need to be aligned with each other and the discipline so that student are supported to acquire literacies valued in their discipline. This means that all role players involved in a WID programme need to understand the aims of the programme, and how they will develop the students’ writing in collaboration with the other role players. In addition, staff who teach on WID programmes need to lobby university management to provide easily accessible support services.
5.3 THE ROLE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Most research on academic literacies focuses on how factors related to teaching, learning, and assessment helps students acquire the necessary academic literacies. Several studies pay attention to how factors in the work, or family context, influence students’ acquisition of academic literacies (Heath; 1983; Russell, 1997). Other studies consider how the unequal power relationships between the students and their supervisors or tutors, negatively impacts the way in which students learn to write, or prevents students from writing in personally meaningful ways (Arend, 2014; Canagarajah & Lee, 2015; Layton & McKenna, 2015; Paxton, 2015). However, these studies do not consider how other contextual factors affect students’ acquisition of academic literacies. This section of the discussion chapter will consider how students found transitioning into a postgraduate degree, and in some instances to a new institution challenging. The majority of the section will consider a little explored issue, how the marginalisation of part-time students negatively affects their ability to acquire the academic literacies required for success.

Several of the students in this study struggled to adjust to a postgraduate degree, because they felt that previous undergraduate research projects had not prepared them to undertake more challenging and complex Honours level research. This is not surprising as research shows that undergraduate degrees do not sufficiently prepare students for Honours level research (Butler, 2007; Jackson et al., 2006; Lander, 2002; Lombard & Kloppers, 2015). The supervisors in the module acknowledged the need to provide students with additional support by including this research preparation module in the degree. Students from other universities also reported that adapting to a new institution with a different mode of learning, contact rather than distance education, and different assessment practices was challenging. While it is fairly easy to provide students from different institutions with an orientation session, it was more troubling that many of the students felt that the institution did not offer enough support to part-time students.

Though many postgraduate students in South Africa work full time, since the university wants to attract younger, full-time postgraduate students, who can dedicate more time
to their studies, more support was available for full-time students. Research shows that universities do not offer enough support to part-time students, many of whom have not studied for many years and need additional support in order to successfully complete a postgraduate qualification (Walters, 2006). Part-time students who occupied lower-level administrative roles, which are still performed by many employees in the HR field (Steyn, 2008; Wood & Mellahi, 2001), found it particularly difficult to access any support that was offered during working hours. The lack of access to some important support services at this university may have prevented these students from acquiring additional academic literacies. In addition, some administrative arrangements that were cumbersome and time-consuming for part-time students may have meant that these students had less time to acquire and display the academic literacies required to write their research reports.

While it important to consider how the power relations between supervisors and students may impact the students’ writing, researchers should also consider how marginalisation by the institution affects the students’ acquisition of academic literacies. In this study, the students did not report feeling that their supervisor had limited their freedom to write the research report. It is difficult to say what the exact reason for this is, but I suspected that as the students were completing the degree to improve their career prospects and not become an expert in a particular field, they were keen to follow their supervisor’s advice. The students were novice researchers who may not have known how to, or had the desire to, break with certain academic conventions. While the students did not report being hindered from taking risks in their writing, their ability to acquire the necessary academic literacies was negatively affected by the institutional structures. The marginal position of part-time students within the university hierarchy meant that these students had less access to support services that could have helped them to develop their academic literacies further. It also meant that students spent unnecessary time on administrative matters unrelated to the acquisition of academic literacies. Current research has not focused enough on how part-time students’ marginal positions on campus affect their academic progress; this research has found that simply being a part-time rather than a full-time student makes accessing support designed to help students develop their academic literacies more difficult. Since the institutional context plays a key role in students’ learning,
university management should consider whether the current structures provide postgraduate students with enough access to the support that they may require to succeed.

5.4 USEFULNESS OF WID FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

As an Academic Literacies tutor with a degree in HR, I had a unique perspective on the module. I feel that my understanding of some HR fundamentals meant that I was more familiar with aspects of the students’ discipline. This knowledge, my prior observations of the students’ lectures and tutorials, and my review of the students’ marking rubrics, may have made it possible for me to partially align the feedback that I gave to the students with conventions of the discipline. However, even with an understanding of some of the fundamental HRM theories and concepts, and my effort to understand the students’ context, providing the students with relevant guidance and feedback on their writing was challenging. This challenge stemmed from the fact that each group not only focused on a sub-field within HRM, but also conducted research into a particular topic within this sub-field. Since each sub-field drew upon literature from particular fields, such as management, gender studies, and education, each sub-field can also be regarded as a sub-genre within HRM. Whenever I used a model example to unpack some of the disciplinary conventions I had to focus on one of the HRM sub-fields, which meant that the article was more relevant for a small set of the students in the class. Students discussed their own research during several of the tutorials and it was challenging for me as a tutor to move between multiple sub-genres of HRM. The implication here for the teaching of WID at postgraduate level is that it may be best for ALPs to unpack the conventions used in the main discipline, and to work with supervisors so that they can teach students how to produce research texts that are relevant within any sub-disciplines.

The final chapter concludes the study by providing a summary of the key findings, some limitations of the study, and some recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarises the findings from the study in six main sections. The first three sections address the three research sub-questions. The fourth section is an overview of how the research findings answer the main research question. The last two sections of the chapter consider some limitations of the study and possible directions for future research.

6.1 THE ROLE OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENTS

Research question 1: How do the many formalised written assignments help students to acquire the academic writing conventions needed in their larger research report?

The formalised assignments prepared students to submit the research report, because each time students re-wrote an assignment that formed part of the research report it met more of the criteria specified in the marking rubric. Each assignment that was re-written as a component of the research report was also more coherent and cohesive than the original version. Since the rubrics made several social sciences conventions explicit, the final research reports were also more aligned to the social sciences genre. However, students in the 2016 cohort who had an opportunity to complete draft abstracts and final chapters wrote abstracts and final chapters that met more of the criteria in the marking rubric than the same sections of the 2015 students’ reports. Thus, completing additional assignments in 2016 gave the students an opportunity to improve upon several important components of the research reports, an opportunity that the 2015 cohort did not experience.

Though the developmental assignments helped the students write their research reports, if the students been given more time to write the preparatory assignments they may have been better prepared to submit the final research report. A lack of time may be one of the reasons why students were unable to write literature survey assignments that met many of the specified criteria within the timeframe. During the focus groups students confirmed that it was challenging to write and consolidate high-level assignments within the short period of time provided to them.
Students also admitted that it was a challenge to complete assignments when they did not fully understand the purpose of the assignments. Since research shows that conceptualising a problem statement is particularly complex (Davidson & Crateau, 1998; Rinto, Bowles-Terry & Santos, 2016), it is not surprising that students said that they spent long periods of time struggling to understand their research problem. Some students found dealing with this uncertainty so difficult that they considered deregistering from the course. WID programmes should take into account that students conducting research for the first time need much support in order to conceptualise their research problems.

WID literature has found that undergraduate and postgraduate students can use feedback on the structural and rhetorical devices used within draft texts to improve their final texts (Ferris, 2003; Thomas, 2016). This research has shown that writing several shorter developmental assignments that are marked according to a rubric by supervisors can assist postgraduate students to write a larger research text. Preparatory assignments seem to be even more effective when they prepare postgraduate students to submit all the different components of the main research text. This research has also confirmed that students need enough time to write each assignment, and that the purpose of the assignments must be understood by the students.

6.2 STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF THE MODULE

Research question 2: How do students experience the academic literacies support offered through the research preparation module?

Students appreciated and benefited from some of academic literacies support offered during the research preparation module. Students particularly enjoyed the opportunity to interact with their tutor while completing academic reading and writing tasks during the Academic Literacies tutorials. The students said that these tutorials had helped them to learn strategies for reading academic articles. However, students’ experiences of the other academic literacies support offered during the module varied.
Some students benefited from the scheduled consultations with the Postgraduate Writing Fellows (PGWFs), and said that they had managed to clarify their research problem. However, other students found that receiving feedback on their writing from other role players was confusing, because the feedback from the PGWFs did not always align with their supervisor's expectations. This lack of alignment may have occurred because the PGWFs only had two days with the students and did not fully understand their context. Current research shows that ALPs need to understand the meaning-making practices within a discipline before they can socialise students into the literacy practices that are valued in their disciplines (Jacobs, 2005; Jacobs, 2007; Moore et al., 1998). Formalising partnerships between ALPs and supervisors could mean that ALPs are more likely to learn from supervisors how the discipline operates and what the supervisors’ expectations are before they provide students with feedback on their writing (Jacobs, 2005; Jacobs, 2007).

Students’ experiences of working in groups also differed. Students in groups where all the members contributed discussed the benefits of completing the research project as a group. These students appreciated the encouragement and alternative viewpoints that they received from their groups members. Some students said that because they were accountable to their group members, they were more motivated to complete tasks on time. Other students felt that working in a group had helped them to write better texts because group members with different strengths played particular roles, for instance as editors. Thus, working in groups gave students access to the opinions and academic literacies of other students, and may have helped the students develop literacies associated with success, such as time management, and emotional regulation.

However, other students felt that working in groups had not benefited them. Students who said that they had completed all or most of the assignments by themselves did not report receiving any academic or emotional support from group members. In addition, these students experienced a significant amount of frustration and anger towards the group members who they believed had made minimal contributions towards the assignments. Some students, who reported intra-group conflict, admitted
that they had signed off on untruthful statements regarding member contributions made in the portfolios in order to avoid further conflict. Anonymising these peer evaluations may help students to rate their contributions of their peers more honestly (Lu & Bol, 2007).

The students who reported high-levels of social loafing felt that their supervisors could have done more to try and reduce the social loafing within their groups. One student was frustrated by her supervisor’s unwillingness to award fewer marks to a non-contributing group member. This suggests that it is very important for students working in groups to feel that their supervisors allocate marks according to students’ contributions. In addition, students who dislike conflict may need to be coached by their supervisors so that they have the ability to confront group members who contribute less to the assignments.

Despite the involvement of ALPs in the module, and the additional support that some students received from their group members, the students said that the transition from undergraduate research to Honours level research was challenging. Students may have found this a trial, because research suggest that undergraduate degrees do not prepare students to undertake Honours level research (Butler, 2007; Jackson et al., 2006; Lander, 2002; Lombard & Kloppers, 2015). Though all students found the transition to a postgraduate degree difficult, students who were transitioning into a new university found completing this research even more challenging. Students who had previously completed an undergraduate degree at another university found it challenging to navigate unfamiliar practices at their new university. Thus, students who complete undergraduate degrees as part of a different community of practice tied to another university may need more support to adapt to unfamiliar practices valued by their new community at the current university.

Another transition that many students faced was the transition from full-time employee to employee and part-time student. While students struggled to balance their work and studies, the main challenge reported by the part-time students was that they could not access many of the support services, which were only available during working hours. Better access to these services would have meant that these students were better
supported to acquire the necessary academic literacies. Supervisors in certain fields, such as HRM, where many part-time students perform administrative functions and have little flexibility, need to design degrees that do not require students to attend workshops or submit assignments during the day (Steyn, 2008; Wood & Mellahi, 2001). Universities need to realise that older part-time postgraduate students may need additional support offered at convenient times in order to complete their degrees (Walters, 2006).

Students enjoyed the interaction during the Academic Literacies tutorials, and said that the tutorials had taught them strategies for reading academic articles. Not all students benefited from ALPs’ feedback, because they felt that this feedback was not always aligned to their supervisor’s expectations. Students who reported low levels of social loafing received academic and emotional support from their groups members, but students who reported high levels of social loafing did not receive this support from their group members. Instead, these students felt anger towards these groups members, and frustration at their supervisor’s inability to ensure that students who contributed less to the assignments received lower marks. Students who had not studied at the university previously had difficulty acquiring new practices, which they may need to navigate in order to succeed (Canagarajah & Lee, 2015; McConlogue, 2012; Thesen, 2015). Students who were studying part time had difficulty accessing support services, a finding supported by previous research (Walters, 2006).

6.3 CHALLENGES FACED BY THE SUPERVISORS

Research question 3: What challenges do the supervisors who were involved in this module face?

The main reason why supervisors found that being involved in the module had been a challenge was because this was the first time that a research preparation module had been offered during the HR Honours degree. Since the supervisors from the university had not taught an Honours research preparation module before, they asked a supervisor from another university to design the module. The module was then adapted to suit the local context, but the designer of the module felt that some of these
changes meant that the module offered less support to students. For instance, by choosing not to assign marks to the portfolios she felt that students would not be as motivated to give a true reflection of their own contributions to the assignments. She also felt that asking supervisors not to provide the students with alternative views during panel presentations limited their opportunity to learn from the other supervisors in the department. This indicates that supervisors are unwilling to allow others into the ‘private’ student-supervisor space (Manathunga, 2005). Where supervisors are required to give feedback to each other, peer-feedback mechanisms that are perceived as less intrusive to the student-supervisor relationship, are more likely to be well received.

Another reason why supervisors may have found it challenging to supervise the students was that the students were required to develop their writing over the course of the one module rather than throughout the entire degree. Since this was the only writing-intensive module in the degree, supervisors involved in this module spent a lot of time developing the students’ literacies. High supervisor workload meant that supervisors had little time to devote to partnerships with ALPs, and their workload may have also have resulted in some delayed and generic feedback. Since the other Honours modules were not as focused on supporting students to acquire the necessary academic literacies, the students may have been unable to address some of their supervisor’s feedback. Current research suggests that it is more effective to teach students how to write in their disciplines across an entire degree programme, rather than in a specific module (Boughey, 2002; Jacobs, 2013; Leibowitz, 2000).

If students are taught how to write for their discipline across undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, this could ensure that no staff in a particular module bear sole responsibility for supporting students to acquire the necessary academic literacies. If this approach reduces supervisor workload this may mean that supervisors will have more time to work with ALPs in less superficial ways, and to provide better feedback to students. Another advantage of a WAC approach is that each WAC module can help students to acquire specific literacies that are required mainly or solely in the module. Thus, this degree might be more effective if students are given the opportunity
to acquire specific academic practices in each and every undergraduate and postgraduate module.

6.4 CONCLUSION

Main research question: How does a research preparation module enable B. Com HR Honours students to develop their academic literacies?

There is not enough research on how a WID approach can support postgraduate students to acquire the required academic literacies. This research adds to the WID literature by showing that the scaffolding provided as part of a research preparation module supports students to acquire the academic literacies necessary to submit their research report. The module provided support to the students, prior to the submission of their main assignments, in the form of preparatory assignments, academic literacies tutorials, and writing workshops. The students’ re-written assignments, which were sections of the research report, conformed more to the research report genre, and included more features associated with academic writing than their initial assignments. Therefore, by re-writing the developmental assignments, after receiving feedback from their supervisor, students were supported to acquire the academic literacies required to complete their research reports. Students said that participating in the Academic Literacies tutorials had assisted them to acquire several academic literacies required to read research articles, and other academic texts. Students also said that scheduled workshops where they had consultations with Writing Centre staff helped them to clarify the purpose of their research. Though the module required support staff to develop new material, and supervisors to mark many developmental assignments, this research indicates that the time invested was worthwhile as the module did prepare students to submit their research reports.

Aside from the assignments, tutorials, and workshops offered as part of the module, two additional factors, the implementation of the module, and the institutional context, also affected the students’ academic literacies acquisition. The supervisors in the module brought in support staff who had very little understanding of the discipline to assist the students. A lack of knowledge about the discipline may be why the students
indicated that the support staff did not align their teaching and feedback with either the disciplinary conventions or the content. The students who chose not to implement any ALPs’ suggestions regarding their writing may have chosen to forgo valuable input that could have assisted them to further develop their academic literacies.

The original module was offered at another university, and then adapted to fit the university context. Since the supervisors at the current university did not understand the context in which the module had been designed, several of these adaptations seemed to decrease the sharing of supervisory practices, and the reporting of social loafing by the students. Most of the students in the study were studying part time, and found that many of the support services and opportunities offered as part of the module were difficult to access. Since this support could have assisted students to acquire the necessary academic literacies, the lack of support may have had a detrimental effect on quality of the final research reports.

6.5 LIMITATIONS

There were three main limitations of the study. Firstly, since the supervisors had considerably more power than I did, when a supervisor felt that I had been criticising her I had to stop the research for a short time. While negotiating how to continue this research, I had fewer interactions with participants, and this meant that the end-of-year focus group in 2016 was not as informed by the participants' perspectives as the end-of-year focus group in 2015 had been. I suggest that before ALPs conduct research that they negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding with any partners that clarifies the roles, responsibilities, and procedures for dealing with disputes. For a more detailed account of how this disagreement with one of the supervisors may have negatively affected the study see Appendix B. The second limitation was that most of the interviews with supervisors took place in their offices. Holding the interview in their offices meant that two of the interviews were frequently interrupted by students or staff. If the interviews were scheduled off-campus they would have been less likely to be interrupted.
The third limitation was that the students were completing their first postgraduate degree and had nothing to compare the degree against. This meant that the students could not comment on whether acquiring the academic literacies would have been more difficult without the inbuilt support offered through the module. Thus, students were not able to discuss whether the developmental assignments with their specially constructed rubrics, and the support tutorials and workshops had provided them with more support than other Honours students typically receive. Although students could not say whether it would have been more challenging to write their research reports without the support provided during the module, their perceptions of the course were not the only data gathered, as part of the study as I also analysed the students’ assignments against their marking rubrics. It seems that the module did prepare students to submit their research reports, because the re-written assignments, which were sections of the report, met more of the criteria in the marking rubric, and were more coherent and cohesive.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It would be beneficial to repeat a similar study with students completing a Master’s degree designed according to WID principles who have previously completed a traditional non-WID supported Honours degree. These students would be better able to tell the researcher whether a WID approach offers them more support than degrees where this support is not a formal part of the curriculum. Since this research focused more on the students’ experiences of the module, the supervisors’ experiences were explored in as much depth. Additional research could explore how a WID curriculum, particularly one where supervisors are required to allow others into the supervisory space, affects supervisor workload and autonomy.

Since this research focused on a group of Honours students, the findings may be more applicable to Honours students and limited-scope Master’s students. These Honours students also completed a degree in one particular field, HRM, a field in the social sciences, which like many fields related to management, expects students to produce research with implications for practitioners in industry (Goodier & Parkinson, 2005). More research may be needed in order to ascertain how a WID-based research
support module can support students completing larger, more complex, research projects, for instance Master's dissertations and PhD theses, in different fields.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Discussion questions posted on blackboard

Tutorial 1

- What does the term ‘academic literacy’ mean to you?
- Do you feel that you need help with any aspect of academic literacy? Explain why or why not.
- What are you hoping to gain from the academic literacies tutorials and truth, knowledge and creating knowledge tutorials?
- Do you think that learning about reading for the main claim/s in a journal article will help you with your research report? Explain why or why not.

Tutorial 2

- How do you currently feel about conducting a research project?
- Has learning to locate research gaps in articles helped you to think about what your potential research gap could be?
- Do you think that writing your draft problem-purpose statement has helped you to focus your research? Explain why or why not.
- Reflect on the reading from the tutorial. What made this reading hard or easy to understand?

Tutorial 3

- In tutorial three we looked at two articles which disagree with each other by dividing the tutorial into two groups which each supported the views of found in one of these articles. Was this way of approaching the articles helpful? Why or why not?
- Which article do you personally agree most with and why?
• If you had to choose would you say that your research intends to makes more of a theoretical or a practical contribution?

Tutorial 4

• Read the paragraph below and explain why you feel the same way or differently to the author:

’When I first was trying to write a literature review I thought I had to list all the different research I had read. When I was told that a literature review was a dinner party, and I was the host, I felt confused. But I was told that I had to choose the most important author to sit at the head of the table and then decide who would sit next to him, and talk to him at the dinner party it started to make sense. The metaphor really helped me understand how to write my literature review’.

• In your opinion should there have been more or fewer academic literacies tutorials, and truth, knowledge and creating knowledge tutorials?

• Reflect on the academic literacies tutorials, and truth, knowledge and creating knowledge tutorials. Have these tutorials helped prepare you to complete the research project, why or why not?

• Has your idea of research and your feelings towards research changed from tutorial one to now?

• What aspects of research do you still need help with that were not covered in the tutorials?
Focus group discussion questions

First focus group discussion questions

1. Overall experience of course

   I start the focus group by giving each student a timeline of the course and asking them to plot their journey through a line diagram (representing the highs and lows of the course, then I ask them to describe their overall experiences of the course to me)

2. Role of supervisor and input into project

   - What was the most difficult part of the RR for you to write and why?
   - How did your supervisor assist you with this part of the RR?

3. Knowledge and skills gained

   - Now that you are half way through the module, do you think you have learned any knowledge or skills that you did not have when you started the module?
   - Do you think that you will use any of these skills at work in future?

4. Interest in research

   - Do you find research interesting? Why or why not?
   - Do you think that research is more or less interesting to you now than when you began the module?

5. Honours versus undergraduate degrees

   - What would you say the main difference between an undergraduate degree and an Honours degree is?
6. Feeling that UG prepares you for Honours (and specifically to write a research report)

- How much do you think that your undergraduate degree prepared you for the Honours degree?

7. Feelings about research writing

- When you think about research writing, how do you feel?

8. Identity as Honours students and writers

- What things have you learned about research writing and how to express yourself more generally?

9. Procrastination and the emotional process of writing

- Have any of you ever struggled to finish a piece of writing?
- Why do you think this is?
- Do you think that writing requires one to manage ones emotions?

10. Research as a new language/writing for the discipline

- Would you agree that you learn a lot of new terminology that is new phrases and words and new rules when you learn to write in an academic way?
- How do you think that you have to write within the HR field?

11. Ability to choose a theme and topic within a theme

- At the start of the course, you all chose themes. Did you get assigned to your first choice?
• After the themes you came up with a topic, tell me how you chose this research topic?

12. Cohort supervision

• After the group was formed did you have any new students joining or students deregistering from the module?
• Who acted as the group leader in your group?
• What role did you play as group leader?
• Did you have to mediate any intra group conflict?

13. Deadlines

• Do you think that the deadlines in this module and your other module were well spaced out?
• Some mini assignments were more difficult than others, do you think that you were provided enough time to complete each assignment?

14. Knowledge of library resources & other sources

• Did you have any trouble searching for suitable sources that related to your topic?
• Did you use RefWorks or Mendeley to cite your references in your assignments?

15. Awareness of Saunders textbook

• Have you used the prescribed Saunders textbook, and if you have what do you think of it?

16. Reflection on the 4 streams
• This module had four main parts, ALs, statistics, RD&M and guidance on tutorials and assignments. Which part of the module was the most useful for you and why?
• Do you think that any other parts need to be added to this module?
• I feel that the separation between the four streams is a bit artificial, e.g… and that we could combine these streams into one tutorial in future, what do you think?

17. Feedback

• How useful did you find the feedback from your supervisor generally?
• The module required you to complete a number of mini assignments that relate to your RR, did your supervisor's feedback on these mini assignments help you to improve these sections of your RR?
• I heard some students say advice between the lecturers and the writing tutors was different. Can you tell me more about this?

18. Learning guide and Blackboard

• How useful was the learning guide for you?
• Do you think the assignment rubrics (marking guidelines) were easy to understand?
• How clear was the communication on Blackboard?

19. Experience of proposal presentation and final presentation

• How did your proposal presentation go?
• Were you nervous speaking in front of a panel?
• Did the panel give you any suggestions that you can use to improve your work?

20. Impact of tutorials and mini assignments
• How many AL tutorials did you attend?
• Did you experience any benefits from attending the AL tutorials?
• Do you think that the tutorials helped you to write your assignments?

21. Reading versus support on writing

• How useful was the writing day where you received input from writing consultants for you?
• Most of the tutorials focused on reading, do you think more guidance on academic writing is needed?

22. Full time versus part time students

• How many of you are working full-time?
• Do you think studying on a part-time basis is harder?
• How do you manage your time?
• Do you think it is difficulty for part-time students to find their way around campus and to participate in activities, e.g… on campus?

23. UJ experience

• Which of you are UJ students?
• Which universities did the rest of you study at before?
• How is UJ different to your other universities?

24. Impact of prior degree

Which degrees did you study before and what affect did you think that your first degree had on your performance in the module?

25. Willingness to study further

Are any of you keen to do a Master’s in the future?
26. Any other ideas?

Do you have any other suggestions on how to improve this module?

Second focus group discussion questions

1. You have all just completed the panel presentation of your research. Do you think that this is a valuable part of the course, and why or why not?

2. How useful do you think the knowledge or skills that you have acquired by completing this research project?

3. What were some of the benefits and challenges of completing this project as a group?

4. What do you think are the best and worst things about this course?

5. How would you suggest that the lecturers improve this course in the future?

6. Would you like to complete a Master’s in the future?

7. Do you think that this course is set up for part-time students? If not how could this course be redesigned for part-time students?

8. You mentioned in the last focus group that you received conflicting advice from different people about your research, was this also a problem in the second semester?

9. You also said that some of the feedback you received was too critical and that you felt that too much was expected from you as Honours students, did you continue to feel this way in the second semester?
10. You mentioned in the last focus group that you sometimes felt unmotivated, were you more or less motivated in the second semester?

11. Do you think that you managed your time more or less efficiently in the second semester?

12. You also said that rephrasing articles in your own words was challenging, do you think your ability to rephrase improved over time?

13. Did your work provide you with any support to complete your studies?

14. You said that your supervisor was absent and unable to give you feedback on your first two assignments in the first semester, did you have a similar experience in the second semester?

15. You mentioned that you were not always sure what to include or exclude in your assignments, as the year went on were you able to judge more accurately what needed to be included or excluded?

16. I know that you were hoping to win a prize at the poster session and that you didn’t, how did you handle this disappointment? Were you aware how the judges were marking your poster? And what score did you receive for the poster?

17. How were your overall marks for the assignments in the second semester?
APPENDIX B

During the Second Semester of 2016 a supervisor who had co-taught several of the Academic Literacies tutorials with me wanted to spend an entire tutorial teaching students research, design, and methodology. I refused because I felt that the students would benefit more from the tutorial that I had planned on summarising, paraphrasing, and referencing. The supervisor then informed me that they were an expert in the area of academic literacies, and would cover both the content related to the assignments and teach the students about academic reading and writing during the Academic Literacy tutorials. Despite repeated email and voicemail messages the supervisor was unwilling to commit to a meeting to discuss this matter.

When I raised this matter with the module coordinator, the supervisor said that I had criticised her supervision in front of her students, and she suggested that I should change the focus of my Master’s dissertation. During informal conversations and in the focus groups the students in some of the groups had expressed dissatisfaction regarding supervisor response time and clarity of feedback. However, I remember providing a sympathetic ear and not making judgements regarding the supervision they had received. I consciously tried to avoid making negative remarks because I was aware that I was hearing second hand information.

These objections to the study were raised after I had gained ethical approval to conduct the research and approached all the gatekeepers (the main gatekeepers being the qualification leader and module coordinator) involved in the module. When I received ethical clearance from Faculty of Education’s Research Ethics Committee, I sent it to both the qualification leader and module coordinator. Unfortunately, for qualitative researchers, following the correct channels in order to obtain permission is not a guarantee that access to the participants will remain constant and will not have to be renegotiated in the future (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

I now faced the possibility of no longer being able to conduct the end-of-year focus group discussions with the participants. I decided to try reobtain permission from the department in order to conduct the second focus group so that I would not need to reframe the research. In the email that I sent to the supervisor and the module
coordinator I asked them to consider that my entire Master’s explored how this research preparation module had supported the students. The supervisor conceded that I had followed the correct procedures in order to be able to conduct this research. She also informed me that the entire ‘HR team’ would now need to meet and decide whether I could still conduct this research. Fortunately, the staff from the department decided that I could still invite students to the end-of-year focus group.

Despite this positive outcome, the trust that the department has placed in me was much reduced. In 2015 I had given students advice on their writing during two sessions facilitated by staff from the Writing Centre. In 2016 I was told to merely observe these sessions and not to offer feedback in case it differed from the advice given by the Writing Consultants. In 2015 I had been invited to an evening where students displayed their posters and received prizes for the best poster, but in 2016 I had to ask to attend this evening. Whereas once correspondence between myself and the students had been a private matter, I was asked by members of staff to remind students that the focus group was voluntary, and to send them a copy of any of my correspondence to students. Since the research was confidential, I did not copy them in the email; instead, I removed the students’ email addresses and sent them the body of the email message. In 2015, an administrator had sent me the students’ assignment (the 2015 letter of informed consent had asked students to give me permission to obtain the assignments through the administrator), but in 2016 I was told to ask the students to send me their assignments directly instead.

The situation described above meant that there were fewer Academic Literacies tutorials, and observations of lectures and classes in the Second Semester of 2016. This meant that I had much less contact with the students and role players over this period. I had less engagements with the participants and fewer chances to converse with them and to gain their perspectives on the module. It is impossible to say for sure what impact this situation had on the study. I do know that the end-of-year focus group discussion questions in 2016 were not as informed by the perspectives of the role-players compared to the end-of-year focus group questions in 2015. I also felt too wary to share my insights into the module with the supervisors directly, which I had previously planned to do.
APPENDIX C

Overleaf is an example of the table that I used to determine which criteria in the rubric the students’ assignments met. The criteria for both the 2015 and 2016 groups, as written in the students’ study guide, are displayed in rows after the name of the assignment. The first column shows that the group wrote this assignment three times. Whenever students met a criterion I placed a yes in the cell below the criterion, a no indicates that students did not meet the criteria. I used this table and some summary notes to evaluate how successfully these assignments had prepared students to write their research reports.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substantiated Problem Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2016 Criterion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper introduction to the subject under investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2015 Criterion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce the subject under investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group A - Assignment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group A - Proposal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group A - Research Report</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No changes to proposal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>