WHAT LIES BENEATH TUTORS' FEEDBACK? EXAMINING THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK IN DEVELOPING 'KNOWERS' IN ENGLISH STUDIES

Martina van Heerden

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, the Department of English, University of the Western Cape

Supervisors: Dr Sherran Clarence and Dr Sharita Bharuthram

Date: 10 November 2017

KEY WORDS

academic literacies

cultivated gaze

English Studies

feedback

higher education

knower code

Legitimation Code Theory

rhizomatic code

knower

ABSTRACT

Feedback plays an important role in student learning and development in higher education. However, for various reasons, it is often not as effective as it should be. Many studies have attempted to 'solve' the feedback situation by finding new ways to give feedback, or by exploring the various perceptions around feedback to see where the problem lies. In many of these studies, however, the purpose of feedback within disciplines are taken for granted or not actively made visible. This study therefore explores how (or whether) the practice of feedback aligns with the often hidden, taken for granted purpose of feedback in a discipline.

The study focused specifically on English Studies, an undergraduate first year literature course at the University of the Western Cape. As the nature of the discipline is often invisible, even to those who are familiar with the course, the study drew on Legitimation Code Theory, and specifically the dimensions of Specialisation and Semantics, to make the invisible purpose of the discipline more visible. In so doing, it sought to enable a clearer understanding of what the purpose of feedback should be; namely, consistent with the underlying purpose of the discipline. English Studies was classified as a rhizomatic knower code, which means that what is valued in the discipline is not possessing knowledge as a study-able concept, but rather possessing the required aptitudes, attitudes, and dispositions. Feedback plays an important role in developing these knower attributes.

The study took a qualitative case study approach to obtain a full, detailed account of tutors' feedback-giving practices. Data was collected from a small group of participant tutors, via questionnaires, focus group meetings, individualised interviews, and written feedback on sample essays provided by the tutors. 962 comments, spread over 65 essays, were analysed.

The study found that, in terms of Specialisation, there was a misalignment between the purpose and the practice of feedback: feedback did not predominantly and/or progressively focus more on making the knower code more visible. Instead, the feedback was largely focused on a relativist code and a knowledge code. This indicates that students may be being misled about what is valued in the discipline. Additionally, in terms of Semantics, it was found that the feedback, given on single-draft submissions, would be more useful in a drafting cycle and that learning from the feedback was made difficult by the context-dependent comments that were either too complex to be enacted, or would be more appropriate in a drafting cycle.

Ultimately, it was found that if there is not a careful consideration of what feedback should focus on, students may be misled about what is valued in the discipline. This could have effects beyond merely passing or failing the course.

DECLARATION

I declare that *What lies beneath tutors' feedback? Examining the role of feedback in developing 'knowers' in English Studies* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Name: Martina van Heerden

Date: 10 November 2017

Signature:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people:

- My supervisors, Dr. Sherran Clarence and Dr. Sharita Bharuthram, whose patience, guidance, and support made this a lovely and rewarding experience. I am grateful that I could draw from their knowledge and expertise.

- The National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) for generously providing me with a bursary, which enabled me to lessen my teaching load and focus more on my study.

- My participants, without whom there would be no data.

- Ms. Shirley Sampson, Dr. Fiona Moolla, Dr. Jacolien Volschenk, Ms. Elsa Winckler, and Associate Prof. Shaun Viljoen, for their encouragement throughout various stages of this project.

- John Williams, Hans Zimmer and Michael Giacchino for composing the perfect thesis-writing soundtracks.

- My parents, Carel and Ronel Muller, and my sisters, Andrea and Keren; my in-laws, Gideon and Marcelle van Heerden; my aunt and uncle, Murray and Maritha Pellissier; who supported me, encouraged me, and understood my absences.

- Floyd, who was there at the start; Rupert, who was there at the end; they reminded me to take breaks 🐾

- My wonderful husband, Deon, who made me endless cups of tea, gave all the hugs, and listened to me ramble when I tested new ideas. He kept me sane, focused, and motivated. Without him there would have been no thesis to begin with.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following papers have been presented or published from this study:

Papers presented:

Van Heerden, M. 2015. What lies beneath: Gauging students' access to, understanding of and interaction with the discourses underpinning feedback in English Studies, paper presented at the English Department's annual conference, Bellville, 16-17 July. Unpublished.

Van Heerden, M. 2015. What lies beneath: Exploring perceptions and purpose of feedback on student writing, seminar presented at the English Department, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, 7 October. Unpublished.

Van Heerden, M. 2016. The role of feedback in developing knowers in English Studies: What are we saying to students and why?, paper presented at the English Department's MA/PhD Conference, Bellville, 22 September. Unpublished.

Van Heerden, M. 2016. What lies beneath: Examining why we give feedback in English Studies, paper presented at the NIHSS National Doctoral Conference, Johannesburg, 2-3 November. Unpublished.

Van Heerden, M. 2017. Et tu, feedback? The unintended betrayal of undergraduate student writers, paper presented at the Second International Legitimation Code Theory Conference, Sydney, 2-7 July 2017. Unpublished.

Van Heerden, M. 2017. 'I am trying to tell students to think further': Exploring why we give feedback in English Studies, paper presented at the NIHSS National Doctoral Conference, Johannesburg, 1-2 November. Unpublished.

Paper published:

Van Heerden, M., Clarence, S. & Bharuthram, S. 2017. What lies beneath: exploring the deeper purposes of feedback on student writing through considering disciplinary knowledge and knowers. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 42 (6): 967-977. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02602938.2016.1212985

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF IMAGES

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ER: epistemic relations

LCT: Legitimation Code Theory

SD: semantic density

SG: semantic gravity

SR: social relations

UWC: University of the Western Cape

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of written feedback in higher education, and specifically within the context of English Studies, is the focus of this PhD study. In this Chapter, I introduce the study fully by providing the background to the research. I also provide a broad contextual background to the study, by presenting an overview of the research context (South African higher education) and the discipline being studied (English Studies). Thereafter, I introduce the research problem and research question that drive this study. Finally, end the Chapter by providing an outline of the organisation of the thesis as a whole.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

This thesis is greatly inspired by my own experiences as a tutor. As such, I will first provide a personal background before providing a more contextually situated background to the study.

1.1.1 PERSONAL BACKGROUND

This PhD study is grounded in my own experiences and frustrations as a tutor. I have been tutoring English Studies since 2008, having started just after I completed my undergraduate Bachelor of Arts degree. I first tutored at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, and then at the University of the Western Cape, where I am currently tutoring. Over the years, I have become increasingly preoccupied with questions around the purpose of both English Studies as a discipline, and the nature of feedback on essays in English Studies.

I finished my MA (English Studies) in 2011 and could still not really say *what* I had 'learned' (aside from an annoying habit of being able to see how twists in films were being foreshadowed throughout). At the same time, students would constantly ask me: what do we need to study for the exam? At first, I would tell them to make sure they had read the story and that they knew what the themes were. However, this was not enough, as a student who could recall all the facts of the story would still not necessarily do well. Thus, a relatively straightforward question became increasingly difficult to answer. I came to realise that English is not a 'study' subject, but something much more tacit (see Chapter 3). This tacit something that

students had to have had to be manifested in their essays; yet, I often found myself focusing on technical aspects of essay writing in my written feedback to students, side-lining (unconsciously) the 'something' that their essays needed to be considered worthy of high marks.

The more I looked into what we do with English Studies, the more I considered what the purpose of my feedback to my students should be, and the more uncertain I became about whether I was doing the 'right' thing with my feedback. This uncertainty was greatly heightened by working as a writing consultant at Stellenbosch University's Writing Centre where the consultants had clear 'objectives' for different subjects. Was I trying to create grammatically proficient essays, or structurally sound essays, or was I meant to do something else? Why was it that students did not seem to respond to feedback in the desired way? What were students doing (or not doing) with the feedback? What should I be doing with my feedback? Increasingly, I became aware that although what I focused on in my written feedback was not necessarily wrong, it was not quite right either; as much as I thought I was giving helpful feedback, I was not quite sure with what I was helping my students.

The more I researched the topic and the more I talked with other tutors, the more I realised that these problems with feedback were not mine alone. This was reassuring – the problem was not me! – but not heartening. It became clear that there seems to be a problem with the way that feedback is often given by tutors and the way it is received by students, which is quite troubling, as it plays such an important role in higher education. Feedback takes up a lot of our time, both as tutors giving it, and as students receiving it. I think the problem of feedback lies in the way that we do not always consciously consider why we give feedback. If students ask us what we give feedback on, then we might say that we are giving feedback on structure, language, or referencing; all of these are aspects of the essay that students could improve on for next time. However, even a structurally sound, grammatically correct essay is not necessarily going to be a high-achieving English Studies essay. It is also difficult to communicate to students why one essay is better than another one; saying 'it just is' is not helpful. Clearly, then, the point is not giving feedback to merely make students better essay writers; there is something that lies beneath tutors' feedback, there is a message that tutors are trying to convey to their students without necessarily being aware of what it may be.

(Re)considering the *why* of feedback is inescapably linked to what English Studies means as a discipline. It is a subject that seemingly has no clear purpose (see Section 1.1.2.2 below). Psychology, for instance, seems to have a clear purpose in that students need to know what psychological disorders and theories exist in order to apply them to real world cases and to become psychologists one day; History is all about *history*, and so on – but what does English

Studies do? Moreover, why should students do English Studies? The more I grappled with this, the more I realised that if we cannot answer what we are seeking to do in our discipline and how this should translate into feedback, then we cannot give students effective feedback: we will always be giving feedback with the purpose of doing something subconsciously and we will remain unhappy if students do not magically pick up on the subconscious messages we are trying to deliver to them. In trying to uncover the link between what lies beneath the discipline and what lies beneath the feedback, my study emerged. This study, then, was inspired by my own attempts to find out what we are doing in our subject and how this should translate into feedback practice.

1.1.2 RESEARCH CONTEXT

My experience as a tutor is greatly affected by two specific contexts: South African higher education in general, and English Studies as a discipline in particular. Therefore, in order to understand my study and where it is situated, I will provide relevant clarity on these contexts.

1.1.2.1 SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

In 1994, South Africa became a democratic country after nearly 50 years under the apartheid regime, which sought to separate people of different 'races' in various spheres of life, including higher education. The segregated nature of the apartheid state led to various inequalities, amongst others, regarding job opportunities, distribution of resources, and education. In higher education, specifically, there were divisions in terms of access (people of different 'races' had to go to different, race-specific higher education institutions), areas of study (different programmes of study were available to people of different 'races' at these institutions that were meant to reinforce the racial division of labour), and resources (the allocation of funding and resources differed along racial lines) (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012). Since 1994, the South African higher education context has been marked by efforts to redress these educational inequalities imposed by the apartheid administration. Attempts at redressing these inequalities have focused on widening access and participation to all students, regardless of 'race'. Although 'race' is the biggest focus in terms of redress, other categories include gender, age and disability (Webbstock, 2016).

Currently, South Africa has 26 public universities (Webbstock, 2016), which can be divided into three types: traditional universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities (Boughey, 2012). Universities of technology offer "vocationally focused

qualifications", while comprehensive universities offer a "mix of traditional and vocational programmes" (Boughey, 2012:133-134). Traditional universities are more research-orientated, offer degree programmes (rather than diplomas), and have an emphasis on high postgraduate enrolments (Boughey, 2011, 2012); the University of the Western Cape (UWC), where this study was situated, is a traditional university.

Moreover, at UWC, as at other South African universities, enrolment numbers have increased almost exponentially in the last decade or so (Webbstock, 2016). Consequently, South African universities, like many universities globally, have experienced a 'massification' of the university (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007), where increasing student numbers have meant the expansion of the university into larger classes, more crowded campuses, repeated lectures, strain on resources (both human and material), and so on (Hornsby & Osman, 2014). The result of this is that the student body is now not only larger, but also more diverse than before; however, the ratio of students to staff is skewed (Gourlay, 2009; Webbstock, 2016). As a result of the larger classroom sizes, there are fewer opportunities for individual attention or assistance (Hornsby & Osman, 2014). Consequently, the opportunity for staff to give individual, face-to-face attention to all their students has become difficult, with written feedback on assignments often having to fulfil this role.

Although attempts have been made to redress the inequalities in education, there are nevertheless problems that remain in the South African higher education sector. Firstly, although enrolment numbers have increased, success rates remain influenced by 'race'. A report by the Council on Higher Education (2013:15), for instance, found that "access, success and completion rates continue to be racially skewed, with white completion rates being on average 50% higher than African rates". The fact that access, success and completion rates continue to be influenced by 'race' is in large part because of how the differences in education quality in primary school and high school also affect students' success in higher education (Van der Berg, 2007). This is because at school level, as at higher education, there remains a divide between historically advantaged educational institutions (schools and universities designated for 'white' students during apartheid) and historically disadvantaged educational institutions (schools and universities designated for non-white students during apartheid). Historically advantaged institutions are often better resourced, have higher prestige in the public eye, and may have higher fees, thereby potentially excluding students from poorer backgrounds and limiting social mobility. UWC, for instance, is still designated as a historically disadvantaged university (Nkosi, 2015; Pather, 2015) (See Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1).

Secondly, the divide between historically advantaged and disadvantaged schools may affect students' preparedness for university. Webbstock (2016), for instance, argues that "there

exists an articulation gap between school and university" and consequently students often come to university 'underprepared' for the demands of higher education. As I will posit in Chapter 2, this under-preparedness can better be encapsulated as a lack of congruence between the various levels of schooling (McKenna, 2004b; Boughey, 2012). Nevertheless, educational inequalities prevail in various levels of education in South Africa, not just in higher education, with students from poorer schools often doing worse in their matric exams than those in more affluent schools (Van der Berg, 2007). These educational inequalities are linked to differing literacy practices and support structures at home; many students currently in higher education in South Africa are first generation learners, whose parents could not go to university, and who come from home literacy practices that are not aligned with higher education literacy practices (Kapp & Bangeni, 2005; Kapp & Bangeni, 2011; Boughey, 2012). Attempts at addressing these inequalities include having academic development courses, writing workshops, etc. and in so doing encourage a deficit approach towards teaching in higher education (see Chapter 2).

Thirdly, in spite of efforts at equitising universities, there remains a marked difference in terms of student body population and resources at various institutions, with the consequence that some universities are still classified as being historically disadvantaged, such as the University of the Western Cape (See Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1). This is because the financial background and available resources of these universities have not made it easier for them to become on 'equal footing' with historically white universities, thereby re-enforcing the divide between historically advantaged and disadvantaged universities (Nkosi, 2015; Pather, 2015).

Against this backdrop of the massification of higher education, especially in terms of the skewed student to staff ratio and the diverse background of students entering higher education, particularly in relation to student-preparedness, feedback plays an increasingly important role. Regardless of their preparedness levels, all students require feedback, though the type and extent of the feedback may differ because of students' different backgrounds. Feedback not only has to communicate to students what they need for success in a discipline, especially in a discipline like English Studies, but it is also often the only individualised communication that students receive from their tutors and lecturers. At the same time, however, giving feedback is also under pressure because of the massification of higher education, as larger student numbers also mean heavier marking loads. Lecturers and tutors consequently have to rely more on feedback, while simultaneously having less time and fewer opportunities (if there are no drafting cycles) to give feedback. It is, as this thesis will posit, important to know *why* we give feedback, if feedback is to have its desired outcome.

1.1.2.2 ENGLISH STUDIES

English at university is a unique subject in that its parameters are not clearly delineated (Rosslyn, 2004; Prescott, Hewings & Seargant, 2016). Carter (2016:11), for instance, points out that the "academic subject of English is and always has been permeable and elusive in definition". Consequently, for a long time, its status as a discipline was contested, because it "had no body of knowledge to be mastered, [no] laws and protocols governing the organisation and use of that mastery" (Gooder, 2005:297). Moreover, as a discipline, it is nourished by various other disciplines, such as classics, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, history, and language (Gooder, 2005; Waugh, 2016); yet, what English *does* remains unclear to many, as there is "no clear or consistent sense of what the object of study is" (Carter, 2016:11). Macken-Horarik (2011:201) for instance points out that English has "always been an unstable epistemological mix … it has been construed variously as an induction into basic literacy skills, an engagement with great works of literature, an opportunity for personal growth and for cultural and critical analysis". In fact, English Studies is often seen as consisting of three different aspects, namely, literary studies, language studies, and creative studies (Prescott, Hewings & Seargant, 2016). At the University of the Western Cape (where this study is situated), however, English Studies is primarily concerned with literary studies[1,2]; that is, the study and analysis of texts, within certain theoretical frameworks and contexts (Chick, 2009; Cromwell, 2005). As such, English Studies in this thesis will primarily refer to the literature aspect.

The study of English literature has been a staple at the university since the late nineteenth century (Chace, 2009; Prescott, Hewings & Seargant, 2016). Currently, although it may be one of the largest disciplines in the Arts and Humanities (Gooder, 2005), it is a divided discipline. Some feel that English "has lost its sense of mission and purpose" (De Sousa, 1997:450), while others feel that it is "one of the great fields of human knowledge, one of the incontrovertible sources of learning and pleasure" (Perloff, 2011:156). As such, there is not only uncertainty about what English does, but also why one should take English Studies. It is perhaps this uncertainty about what English Studies entails that has lessened its popularity among undergraduate students of late (Chace, 2009).

In large part, the uncertainty surrounding English, and specifically the literature aspect thereof, may be due to the way it is taught to students at university. The focus is often on presenting an analysis or interpretation of a text to students without showing how the

---

[1] Creative writing degrees are offered at postgraduate level, specifically MA and PhD. Creative writing, however, is not taught at undergraduate level.

[2] The specific undergraduate course will be discussed further in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2

particular analysis was reached. Consequently, it may seem to students as though literary scholars are "performing some sort of hocus-pocus, conjuring up meaning through mysterious spells, pulling an interpretation out of a hat" (Chick, 2009:44-45). The result of this teaching style may be that the nature of the discipline remains elusive (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007), and that "literary understanding is a mysterious skill known only to the initiated" (Cromwell, 2005:79). From the outset, then, the discipline seems not only indefinable, but also inaccessible.

In spite of its seemingly indefinable nature, the literary aspect of English Studies is seen as presenting students with the opportunity to learn more about themselves and the world, through the process of analysing texts. Cromwell (2005:77), for instance, highlights that "the study of literature is a major way in which we come to understand the human experience; ... literature gives us a sense of the world around us, of human nature, of events, that even experience itself cannot give". Similarly, Rosslyn (2004:8) argues that what makes English so valuable is that it aims to develop students' voices, to know "what a student thinks". As such, English may be the only discipline in the Arts and Humanities in which emotional responses to texts, events and experiences are actively encouraged (Gooder, 2005).

The above paragraphs provide a broad understanding of English Studies as a difficult-to-define subject that nonetheless plays an important role in student development in higher education. In Chapter 4, I will provide a more detailed explanation of the specific, though fairly typical undergraduate English Studies course that will be examined in this study.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

It is against this backdrop of both continuous educational and economic inequalities in South Africa (though these are not limited to the South African context) and a discipline that is difficult to define (even for those who are part of the discipline), that my study takes place. The specific problem that is being addressed is the issue of written feedback and its effectiveness in higher education, and specifically in English Studies. As Chapter 2 will elaborate on, feedback in higher education has been problematic for the last couple of decades in that it does not seem to be as effective as it should be as a tool for learning and development.

This study will therefore explore written feedback in higher education from the point of view that the problem of feedback may lie in the fact that *why* feedback is given in a discipline is often left unexplored. So, for instance, in English Studies, what should the main focus of feedback be? If there is not a careful consideration of why feedback is given, then feedback may

remain ineffective. For example, if feedback focuses more on technical aspects, such as identifying and correcting language errors or on the conventions of essay writing, it may compromise the development of students' voices (Wilder & Wolfe, 2009); however, if feedback focuses too soon in the course on developing voice and creativity, it may compromise students' ability to write grammatically and structurally sound essays. There needs to be a balance as both aspects (technical and voice development) are necessary for students' success in the discipline, but if feedback errs on the side of working with what is tangible and overt, such as correcting language errors, paragraph structure, referencing errors, etc. at the expense of voice development, then feedback may remain ineffective. Thus, research needs to connect *what* tutors give feedback on with *why* feedback is given in a clear, analytical way that could enable changed practice.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The central research question guiding this study is framed by both the contextual (Chapter 2) and theoretical (Chapter 3) frameworks:

(How) are tutors using feedback to develop knowers in English Studies?

The research question's aim is to explore how the often-invisible underlying purpose of the discipline (and thus of feedback) links up with the practice of feedback, specifically in English Studies, a first-year course at the University of the Western Cape.

1.4 OUTLINE OF THESIS

This thesis is organised into seven Chapters, including the current Chapter in which I provide background to this study, including my motivation for doing this study, the broad contexts that frame this study, as well as an introduction to the research problem and research question that drives the study. Both of the latter will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 4, respectively.

Chapter 2 provides the contextual framework for this study. The aim of the Chapter is to provide an overview of the relevant literature on feedback to answer three central questions:

1. What is feedback?
2. What role does feedback play in higher education, specifically in relation to issues surrounding student writing and epistemological access?
3. What are the most relevant feedback-related research trends for this study?

Addressing these three questions will enable me to provide an in-depth contextual background to the study and in so doing indicate how my study addresses the perceived gaps in current research into feedback practices.

Chapter 3 will outline the theoretical framework for the study. The aim of this Chapter is to make the underlying invisible nature of English Studies progressively more visible. The Chapter will start by briefly outlining the relevant concepts from Critical Realism and Basil Bernstein's work on the sociology of education. Thereafter, I will use Legitimation Code Theory, and specifically the dimensions of Specialisation and Semantics, to conceptualise English Studies as a rhizomatic knower code. This conceptualisation of English Studies will form the basis of my analysis, as it will enable me to conceptualise the purpose of the discipline, which in turn informs the purpose of feedback in the discipline.

Chapter 4 explains the methodological framework of this study. The aim of this Chapter is to give a clear account of the various steps taken in the research process. The Chapter will start by explaining the rationale for the research design (a qualitative case study approach); thereafter, it will give a detailed outline of the specific context of the study. The Chapter will also outline how data was collected and analysed, as well as the relevant ethical processes and decisions that had to be taken into account.

Chapter 5 analyses the data using the LCT dimension of Specialisation to understand *what* tutors are saying to their students through their feedback, and whether this aligns with the purpose of the discipline. Chapter 6 will then analyse the same data from a different LCT dimension, Semantics, in order to understand *how* feedback is being given to students and whether this could enable them to engage in progressively more complex meaning-making practices.

Lastly, Chapter 7 concludes the thesis, by summarising the study thus far, and then pulling together the analyses from Chapters 5 and 6 to consider the pedagogical implications of the study's findings, as well as the implications for student learning and tutor development in this and other disciplines. The limitations of the present study, and recommendations for future research and practice, are also considered.

Throughout the thesis the central argument is that feedback practices should not be separated from the often-hidden purpose[3] of feedback. On a practical level, this would mean that feedback itself may need to be re-conceptualised as a literacy that needs to be developed,

---

[3] Although I am using 'purpose' in the singular, it should be noted that feedback may have various purposes. For readability and focus, however, the singular form of purpose will be used throughout this thesis.

not only in how tutors give feedback, but also in how students may use feedback. As it is only in doing so, that feedback may become more effective.

CHAPTER 2
CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the previous Chapter, I highlighted how this study has been largely inspired by my own experiences and frustrations as a tutor giving feedback. It also stems from my own uncertainty about what role feedback is supposed to play in my discipline to (better) enable student learning.

In this Chapter, I turn to the literature on feedback to outline the current context of research into the "puzzling phenomenon" (Boud & Molloy, 2013:699) of feedback in order to outline the contextual framework for this study. In so doing, this Chapter will elaborate on the role that feedback plays in higher education and why it is so crucial. It should be noted, though, that feedback is one aspect of the pedagogic practices of a course; it is thus only one aspect of what students experience and tutors do at university. This, however, does not diminish the importance of feedback, as this Chapter will highlight.

This Chapter has been organised around three central questions:

1. What is feedback? (Section 2.1)
2. What role does feedback play in higher education, specifically in relation to issues surrounding student writing and epistemological access? (Section 2.2)
3. What are the most relevant feedback-related research trends for this study? (Section 2.3)

Addressing these topics will enable this Chapter to fully contextualise the present study within the broader debate about feedback in higher education.

2.1 WHAT IS FEEDBACK?

In recent years, feedback has been shown to play an increasingly important role in higher education. This is largely due to the effect of massification on higher education as a result of increased student numbers and increased student diversity which have led to changes in the system (Mills & Mathews, 2009; Gourlay, 2009). Consequently, feedback is often the only personalised communication students receive from their tutors or lecturers about their work.

Feedback, in essence, has to fulfil the same role as individual, face-to-face consultations (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2001).

As the concept of 'feedback' is central to this study, a broad understanding of what feedback is, as well as how it will be used in the thesis, is necessary. Consequently, the section starts with providing an outline of what feedback is, before examining the function of feedback. Beginning with what feedback is enables this Chapter to lay the foundation for considering what the purpose of feedback is and how this compares to the practice of feedback.

2.1.1 DEFINITION OF FEEDBACK

Feedback is often viewed as "a unique process of communication" (Higgins, 2000:1) between tutor (or lecturer) and student, which typically contains information about, but is not limited to, students' level of engagement with a task, usually an essay. On a practical level, feedback usually consists of detailed annotations throughout the student's assignment, with a summative comment at the end (Tomas, 2014). It is thus possible to distinguish between feedback-giving, as a process that takes place, and feedback comments, which are produced.

McCann and Saunders (2009:1) indicate that feedback may take various forms (such as electronic, individual, or group feedback) and may be given in writing and/or orally. Feedback comments are usually in response to either a completed assignment with the goal of indicating to students how successfully they have completed it in order for students to complete a similar task more successfully in future, or a draft, to indicate to students what needs to be worked on for the next draft (McCann & Saunders, 2009).

Although feedback, as a process and a product, therefore appears relatively straightforward, it is often more complex than it seems, as it takes place "in particular cultural, institutional and interpersonal contexts, between people enacting and negotiating particular social identities and relationships" (Hyland & Hyland, 2006:10). This complex nature of feedback will be elaborated on further in the rest of the Chapter.

In this study, when referring to 'feedback', I will refer specifically to written feedback, as this is the main form of feedback that students in English Studies, the discipline being examined[4], receive. Should other feedback types be referred to, they will be identified accordingly. Similarly, where applicable, a distinction will be made between feedback-giving as a process and feedback comments.

---

[4] See Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, especially, for a more detailed discussion on what English Studies is.

2.1.2 FUNCTIONS OF FEEDBACK

Although various functions have been identified for feedback, these may be condensed into two main functions: evaluative feedback and developmental feedback (these are also often known as summative and formative feedback, respectively). These two functions have been condensed from Lizzio and Wilson (2008), who identified the two functions as evaluative and educative; Burke and Pieterick (2010), who identified the two functions as evaluative and advisory; and Sadler (2010), who, although not providing specific names, also divided feedback into two broad functions (see Table 2.1). To avoid confusion, I have grouped educative and advisory feedback together under the term 'developmental'.

TABLE 2.1. COMPARISON BETWEEN LIZZIO & WILSON (2008), BURKE & PIETERICK (2010), AND SADLER (2010)

Authors	Function	
	Evaluative	Advisory/educative
Lizzio & Wilson (2008)	- "provides student with information on his/her performance attempt at an assessment task" (263)	- "facilitates students' development and task improvement" (263)
Burke & Pieterick (2010)	- backwards-looking - provides information on what student did (incorrectly)	- forward looking - provides information on what student should do (better)
Sadler (2010)	- provides a statement on performance - is retrospective	- provides advice/suggestions for improvement -prospective

2.1.2.1 EVALUATIVE FEEDBACK

Evaluative feedback looks back on a completed task and indicates how successfully a student has completed it. Evaluative feedback thus has to do with identifying students' academic strengths and weaknesses (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2002; Weaver, 2006). Once these have been identified, students may obtain a clearer idea of which areas need improvement, though the feedback itself may not advise students on how to go about realising this improvement.

Evaluative feedback may, for instance, tell a student that her[5] conclusion is weak or that her introduction is incomplete, but does not necessarily explain further or provide advice on how to improve these parts. The evaluative nature of feedback is acknowledged in most lists detailing the various (sub) functions of feedback. Evaluative feedback may largely manifest itself in the form of corrections (Ivanič, Clark & Rimmershaw, 2000; Price et al., 2010).

2.1.2.2 DEVELOPMENTAL FEEDBACK

As a tool for development, feedback has two main sub-functions: developing students' ability to complete future tasks (more) successfully and, in so doing, assisting with student development and learning. Ideally, feedback should look to the future; that is, feedback should feed into future assignments (Orsmond et al., 2013). As Crisp (2007:579) points out "feedback should not only aim to assist students to complete a similar task successfully at some stage in the future, but ideally should also be transferable to other tasks that they might be expected to undertake". Feedback should therefore ideally assist students in developing academically, instead of just correcting errors and/or listing what students have done wrong in a specific assignment. Feedback should instead feed*forward* (Duncan, 2007).

In order to assist with this, Hattie and Timperley (2007:88-89) identified three main questions that developmental feedback should be able to answer:

1. "Where am I going?" Feedback should ideally help "close the gap" between where a student is and where the student wants to be (a student's academic goal).
2. "How am I going?" Feedback should assist students in determining how they can go about closing the gap; thus, how to achieve their goals.
3. "What to next?" Feedback can help students move onto a "higher plane of learning" and not just onto subsequent assignments.

Moreover, the feeding forward, developmental aspect of feedback is not just limited to assignment completion but may also apply to students' metacognitive development (Murtagh & Baker, 2009; Orrell, 2006), knowledge acquisition (Poulos & Mahoney, 2008), as well as potentially leading to behavioural changes in students (Adcroft, 2011). Developmental feedback is central not only to students' cognitive development, but also to practices of lifelong learning. Parkin et al., (2012:963) point out that feedback "can be one of the most powerful ways in

---

[5] I will be using the feminine pronoun throughout when referring to tutors and students so as to avoid the jarring effect of using 'he/she' or 'him/her'.

which to enhance and strengthen student learning". Similarly, Duncan (2007:272) indicates that feedback "is inseparable to the learning process".

However, due to various reasons, the developmental aspect of feedback is often not fully realised. For example, evaluative feedback is often easier to provide than developmental feedback; it is far easier and less time-consuming to identify and correct errors than it is to give advice on how to avoid them in the future. Another reason may be that the developmental aspect of feedback might not be recognised by students, so that even when developmental feedback is intended, students perceive it as being evaluative and may respond accordingly. Students' inability to fully recognise the developmental function of feedback is often because of differences in feedback practices between school and higher education (Beaumont, O'Doherty & Shannon, 2011; Robinson, Pope & Holyoak, 2013). If students are used to getting evaluative feedback, they may respond to developmental feedback in a similar way.

2.2 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

Underpinning both the developmental and evaluative functions of feedback in higher education, is an epistemic function of feedback. Feedback may enable epistemic access (Luckett & Hunma, 2014; Luckett, 2016); that is, access to the inner workings of a discipline, the discourse, in order for a student to become a successful participant in the discipline. Feedback on essay writing is therefore not just about developing competent essay writers, but serves a deeper, more tacit function of enabling access to the discipline's discourse. In order to fully explore how feedback could enable epistemic access, I will firstly explore student writing in higher education, including the essay, as the prototypical form of academic writing, and problems with, and approaches to, student writing, before linking this explicitly to feedback.

Thereafter, the discussion moves on to epistemological access and how feedback could assist students with not just becoming better essay writers, but also more successful participants in higher education.

2.2.1 STUDENT WRITING

As the previous section indicated, feedback's main developmental functions are to assist with student development and learning. On a practical level, this manifests in the way that feedback could assist students in becoming more proficient writers in higher education, specifically in relation to the essay.

2.2.1.1 THE ESSAY

The essay is the dominant form of student writing and assessment at university (Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Scot, 2007). As such, although there are various types of general literacy that students may need, such as reading literacy and computer literacy, written literacy is often considered to be most important (Lillis & Scott, 2007). Students' ability to write an essay according to the conventions of the institution and/or the discipline will play a big role in determining their academic success. However, the essay is not an unproblematic, autonomous form of assessment, but is inscribed with various ideological meanings. Lillis (2001:17), for instance, points out that "'essay' is really institutionalised short-hand for a particular way of constructing knowledge which has come to be privileged within the academy". This indicates not only the complex nature of essay writing in higher education, but also to the interconnectedness between the essay and knowledge-making (Burke, 2008).

Students' success is largely measured by their ability to write essays in discipline-specific recognized ways; students therefore have to develop an "essayist literacy" (Lillis, 2001:17). This means then that students have to become 'fluent' in the particular way of constructing meaning, using the relevant and interrelated conventions of a discipline, within a particular socio-discursive academic context (Burke, 2008). However, this is made potentially difficult by the fact that essays may be dependent on subject, discipline, or institutional context - that is, each subject may have different ways of using the essay to construct what counts as recognised knowledge. Students thus have to constantly navigate different discipline-specific essayist literacies.

The essay, then, is not solely a way to construct a response to an essay question using a universally accepted structure but is rather a way to construct knowledge within a particular academic context. This means that in encouraging students to produce knowledge, but within the framework of the essay, academics are both limiting and expanding students' horizons, as students are simultaneously being asked to expound (new) knowledges, while being confined to a discipline-specific essay format. This results in the essay becoming the "privileged way" (Lillis, 1999:131) of meaning making and means that students are consequently expected to master its construction. Knowledge constructed in any other way may not be recognised as legitimate by those in the discipline. The emphasis is thus not only on understanding the domain content, but also the rhetorical processes that underlie and create this content. In English Studies, for instance, it is not enough to have a grammatically and structurally sound essay; the student also has to be able to construct an analysis of the text at hand through the lens of a particular theoretical, contextual, or analytical framework in order for it to be recognised as an English Studies essay.

Moreover, in privileging a particular way of meaning making, higher education is also privileging a particular kind of student. Lillis (1999:131) points out that where essayist literacy practices are similar across different contexts (e.g. home and school), it "ensures continuity" for some students (in the United Kingdom context, largely white, middle class students), "whilst significantly contributing to discontinuity for others" (working class, minority students). This is especially the case in South Africa[6], where, in spite of efforts to redress the inequalities of apartheid, "education levels of incoming school-leavers are highly uneven" in higher education (Luckett & Hunma, 2014:184). This is often because the home and school literacy practices of middle-class, English-speaking students are more congruent with higher education practices, which may make it easier for those students to be successful at university, while students from schools with less congruent home and school literacy practices may struggle more (Geisler, 1994; McKenna, 2004b).

2.2.1.2 DIFFICULTIES IN STUDENT WRITING

The essay is thus an important part of students' experiences at university. Due to their importance, the essay, specifically, and student writing in general, have been the focus of a great deal of research. In particular, much has been written on discontent in higher education about the perceived lack of quality of student writing and indeed, much research into feedback does not focus on feedback per se, but on feedback in relation to improving the quality of student writing. Lea and Street (1998) pointed out that lecturers often view student writing as being 'deficient' somehow if it does not meet lecturers' often tacit expectations. Lillis and Turner (2001:57), additionally, point out that there are complaints about student writing that focus on "students' inability to write in the ways the academy requires". These views on student writing tend to place the blame with students: because students lack the necessary basic skills to write an essay 'correctly' or because they come to university underprepared, the problem must lie with them. Consequently, as Ballard and Clanchy (1988:13) highlight, lecturers may often label students (unfairly) as being "'lazy' or 'incompetent'".

The 'problem' of student writing is often due to students' unfamiliarity with the conventions and practices of higher education and the specific disciplines or subjects in which they are enrolled. This causes further problems, as students may know that there are specific conventions according to which they should write, but they may not know what these conventions are (Lea & Street, 1998). This may be exacerbated by the fact that these conventions are often seen by academics within the discipline as natural and obvious

---

[6] This study is situated in the South African higher education context (see Chapter 1 and 4)

(Bharuthram & McKenna, 2006). Moreover, attempts at making these conventions more accessible may also not be successful because of the unfamiliar discipline-specific terminology used to make these implicit conventions more explicit (Lea & Street, 1998). Furthermore, as Elton (2010) points out, academic writing conventions are largely tacit, which means that language on its own may not be enough to make these conventions explicit. The tacit nature of these conventions exacerbates the 'taken-for-granted' and obvious nature of academic writing.

The consequence of this is that the conventions of the discipline become "difficult to learn because they remain implicit in pedagogic practices rather than being explicitly taught" (Lillis, 2001). Moreover, as Lea (2004) and Curry and Lillis (2003) point out, teaching writing practices and conventions remains peripheral to the structure of courses, as course coordinators may be more focused on conveying the necessary content than on making writing practices explicit. The result is that academic writing is often relegated to an extra subject on its own, where it becomes the job of writing specialists outside of the disciplines to teach the conventions. However, as Elton (2010:151) argues, the "[g]enre of academic writing is discipline specific", which means that the teaching of the genre's conventions should not be done separately from the course or subject itself. Teaching writing conventions outside of the disciplines in which they are situated and enacted assumes a skills approach to writing and does not adequately acknowledge the contextually situated conventions and practices of a particular discipline (Gourlay, 2009). Moreover, there is the possibility that if academic writing is separated from its disciplinary context, we might create competent essay writers at the expense of enabling access to the discipline's discourse. This is a valid concern if the emphasis is placed on the essay-as-an-essay rather than as a tool for disciplinary meaning-making and knowledge building.

This links problems with student writing to the epistemic function of feedback, as feedback may be used to 'induct' students into what Lillis (2001:76) calls "institutional practices of mystery". Academic practices, and specifically writing conventions, are often presented as natural and 'obvious' to students by those for whom they are natural and obvious. Although there is not a single, definitive academic writing convention, various disciplines' and subjects' writing conventions do overlap. According to Bloxham and Campbell (2010:291),

> [a]chieving success as a higher education (HE) student, measured essentially through the capacity to write satisfactory assignments and examinations, is perceived as a complex task and not open to simple tutor instruction or written work. It involves the learning of tacit knowledge, new social practices and forms of expression, and negotiating the meaning and demands of individual assignments with tutors and peers.

For students, then, one of the most important and difficult tasks is navigating the various hows and whats they need for specific subjects' writing conventions. Feedback is perhaps best suited

to facilitate this navigation, especially since "face-to-face student-tutor contact time is diminishing, leading to a greater reliance on written correspondence" (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2002:54). Feedback thus has the potential to help students overcome their difficulties in writing in the discipline.

Yet, the pedagogic and developmental potential of feedback may be limited if tutors and lecturers do not fully conceptualise how the 'problem' of student writing may manifest itself. It is for this reason that I turn to Lea and Street's (1998) three theoretical approaches to researching student writing, as these not only highlight the ways in which student writing may be conceptualised, but it also gives an idea of what feedback should, or should not, do.

2.2.1.3 THREE APPROACHES TO RESEARCHING STUDENT WRITING

Student writing, and the problems associated with it, is thus central not only to practices at university, but also to various research studies. In order to gain a better overview of problems with student writing, Lea and Street (1998) introduced three interconnected approaches to understanding and teaching student writing: a study skills approach, an academic socialisation approach, and an academic literacies approach. The study skills perspective, views literacy as "a set of atomised skills" and assumes that problems in student-writing can be solved through teaching students the skills they lack (Lea & Street, 1998:158). The skill that seems to be most needed for success in higher education is language proficiency (Jacobs, 2015); if students are able to use English correctly and understand it better, their writing will improve. This particular way of looking at student writing is prominent in higher education thinking about student writing, and specifically in South Africa (Jacobs, 2013). In a context like English Studies, which is inherently a language-based subject, it is easy to fall into the trap of wanting to fix the problem of student writing through merely adapting or improving students' language proficiency. Although improving language proficiency may have its own merits, it is not the only or even primary solution for students' difficulties with writing, which are more complex than language proficiency.

The second approach, academic socialisation, which subsumes and extends, or challenges the study skills approach, acknowledges the more complex nature of student writing by viewing literacy practices as something into which students need to be inducted – that is, students need to be inducted into the university's (largely homogeneous) culture. Academic socialisation therefore looks beyond the immediate skills-based nature of essay writing to an acknowledgement that writing is not without a context. In this particular case, the context is higher education, which has its own specific writing requirements. This particular approach

assumes that the norms and practices of the university simply have to be learned, through immersion and interaction between tutor or lecturer and student, in order for students to gain access to the institution (Lea & Street, 1998). This particular view assumes that once a general set of academic conventions and practices is acquired, it can be transferred to all contexts in higher education.

The third approach, the academic literacies approach, subsumes but moves beyond and challenges the study skills and academic socialisation approaches. This approach sees "literacies as social practices ... at the level of epistemology and identities" and views academia as "constituted in, and as sites of, discourse or power" (Lea & Street, 1998:159). The academic literacies approach acknowledges that the university does not consist of a homogeneous culture, but rather that it consists of various (sub)cultures. Each discipline, for instance, represents a specific culture. Each of these discipline-cultures has its own 'normal' literacy practices. This particular approach does not assume that students are "merely acculturated unproblematically into the academic culture through engaging with the discourses and practices of established practitioners" (Lea, 2004), as academic socialisation might, but rather acknowledges that students have to constantly switch between various discipline-specific practices. These practices – the norms, conventions, and requirements – are often implicit and tacit; yet, it is assumed by tutors and lecturers that students will know what to do. At the same time, however, academics in a discipline may find it difficult to express what it is students have to do (Lea & Street, 1998).

The academic literacies approach acknowledges that each subject may function as an academic culture of its own, and although this culture makes use of various tangible skills (reading, writing and thinking), employing these skills will differ slightly across cultures. Similarly, on a writing level, even though most essays contain the same structural elements (introduction, development of the thesis, and conclusion), each discipline will have a slightly different way in which these need to be employed for a student to be considered successful in a particular discipline. Writing an essay in English Studies, for instance, although it employs many of the same structural elements as essays in other subjects, will be different from writing an anthropology or history essay.

Supporting the academic literacies approach, however, does not mean disregarding study skills and academic socialisation, as they should not be viewed as "a simple linear time dimension, whereby one model supersedes or replaces the insights provided by the other" (Lea & Street, 1998:158). Rather each of these models "successively encapsulates" (Lea & Street, 1998:158) the other. This means that the study skills approach is subsumed within, but improved upon, in academic socialisation, and in turn this approach is subsumed and extended

upon in academic literacies. The academic literacies approach instead shows how skills may be embedded in certain contexts, which enables us to consider how the enactment of those skills is context-dependent; it also therefore enables practitioners to consider how context may influence teaching and assessment. It thus enables a more complex understanding of problems students may experience in higher education.

a) *The implications of academic literacies for student writing*

The academic literacies approach allows for a broader view of student writing, so that it is not just about acquiring a generic set of skills to be applied to any context, but also about being able to switch between the various specifications of each disciplinary discourse. Lea and Street (1998:161) refer to this as a kind of "course switching". Switching between the specifications of disciplines can become complicated for students, as they may not only have to switch between the expectations of different disciplines, but also between the expectations of different tutors and modules. Consequently, what counts as a proficient piece of writing in one subject may not be acknowledged as such in another subject – although a student may have mastered a particular discipline's way of writing, this does not mean that the skills and conventions may automatically (and identically) be transferable to another discipline (Lea & Street, 1998; Elton, 2010). Academic writing is thus not only discipline-specific, but discipline-dependent (Elton, 2010).

The academic literacies approach also allows for a greater awareness of the implicit and tacit nature of academic practices. For instance, lecturers and tutors, having internalised the specific academic culture of their subject, may lose perspective of how 'unnatural' certain aspects of their discipline, which they may take for granted, are. Jacobs (2007:75), for instance, points out that this tacit knowledge "becomes internalised, operates at an unconscious level and is difficult to articulate and make explicit". This is why lecturers and tutors can often identify successful writing in the discipline but may find it difficult to articulate what makes it successful (Lea & Street, 1998). Successful writing in the discipline thus requires more than fulfilling a checklist of requirements.

The academic literacies approach also points to the importance of academic literacies not being marginal to or separate from a discipline, but that it should be inherently part of the discipline. Jacobs (2007) and Elton (2010) point to the inseparableness of academic literacies teaching and discipline-specific teaching, though in many global contexts, including South Africa, the development of academic literacies is seen as, and kept, separate from disciplinary learning and teaching. In a study on collaborative pedagogic partnerships between academic

literacies specialists and disciplinary specialists, Jacobs (2007, 2005) found that it was only by positioning themselves as outsiders to the discipline that academics within the discipline could view how their discipline might be viewed as "ambiguous and impeding students' access to the disciplinary content" (Jacobs, 2007:66). Similarly, academic literacies specialists should remain on the outside, as it is only by remaining on the outside that they can make discipline specialists aware of what may be the taken-for-granted practices and conventions of the discipline and simultaneously encourage them to make these more explicit (Jacobs, 2013). Writing should thus be situated within a discipline in order to make the invisible disciplinary writing conventions more visible (Mitchell, 2010).

b) *The implications of academic literacies for feedback*

The academic literacies approach interacts with feedback in two distinct ways: it firstly enables us to consider feedback as a kind of literacy in itself, and perhaps more importantly, allows for a deeper understanding of the complex nature of feedback-giving processes, especially since a more social practice-orientated perspective on feedback has been backgrounded, with some loss of recognition of the complexity of feedback-giving as a meaning-making practice.

As with other academic conventions, and, specifically, writing conventions, feedback itself is saturated in taken-for-granted terminologies (Glover & Brown, 2006; Tapp, 2015). Research has shown that students often do not understand the language of feedback (McCann & Saunders, 2009; Chanock, 2000; Weaver, 2006). This may be because students are unfamiliar with the often tacit and contextual meaning of terms used. For instance, students may be told that their 'analysis lacks depth', which points to at least two potentially problematic points – how do tutors and students define analysis and what does it mean for an analysis to have depth? If a student has only a vague idea of what it means to perform an analysis of a text, then a comment like this might not lead to a clearer idea of what 'analysis' means. For the tutor, however, the comment may simply mean that in attempting to analyse a piece of text the student has merely scratched the surface, they have not expounded on their ideas adequately. Moreover, certain terms are tacit in nature. Lea and Street (1998) for instance found that although tutors knew what the term 'analysis' meant and could identify good and bad examples thereof, they struggled to explain it to students. This is because the dictionary definition may not fully convey the contextual meaning of a word. Furthermore, a term may have different meanings in different contexts; so, for instance, what counts as analysis in one subject may not be the same in another subject. There is thus a tacit dimension to many commonly used

academic terms, especially in the social sciences and humanities, which can only really be accessed by students' becoming part of the discipline.

Using these kinds of obvious, taken-for-granted terminologies may, ironically, alienate students from the disciplinary discourses they are trying to access, especially since these terms are also situated within particular academic discourses. Carless (2006), Higgins (2000), and Higgins, Hartley and Skelton (2002) have indicated that there is a specific discourse that underpins not only the discipline itself, but also the accompanying feedback. Moreover, as Higgins et al. (2002) point out, students are increasingly unable to understand this discourse, which in turn means that they do not necessarily understand feedback comments, which may further render feedback unusable or ineffective. Similarly, Lillis and Turner (2001) indicate that feedback works from a discourse of transparency, which essentially means that tutors, having become inducted into a particular disciplinary discourse, may perceive their feedback to be more transparent and easy-to-understand than it actually is. Lillis and Turner (2001:58) argue that this discourse of transparency "both underplays the importance of language and potentially excludes from successful participation in academic discourse those participants who do not already take the norms of this discourse for granted". Students may thus experience a sense of "estrangement from the language of feedback" (Bailey & Garner, 2010:193), which may lead to a sense of estrangement from the discipline.

It is thus important for the language of feedback to be clear and understandable (Deyi, 2011). However, this is potentially difficult to achieve as tutors tend to work from within a discipline that they have already accessed. Bharuthram and McKenna (2009:8) indicated that "lecturers may battle to give feedback aimed at making the literacy practices overt, because these norms are unconscious and normalized for them". Similarly, Värlander (2008:152) points out that tutors, having become inducted into the subject, may easily "become alienated from the difficulties students may experience". Tutors may forget how alienating feedback language can be to students, which can be seen in their frustration in having to write continuously the same comments. The repetition of problem areas does not necessarily mean that students are too lazy to implement feedback, or that they do not read feedback, but rather, that they do not know what to do with the feedback (McCann & Saunders, 2009). The opposite of this may be that students may interpret feedback comments differently from how tutors intended them (Weaver, 2006). To avoid confusion, tutors could discuss feedback conventions with students in order for them to not only understand the comments on their work, but for them to also respond to and learn from them. Weaver (2006), for instance, suggests that students need to be guided in using feedback to their advantage. By acknowledging the need to explain feedback terms and practices, as well as providing guidance on how to implement feedback, it enables

tutors and lecturers to gain a deeper understanding of feedback and to consider it as a kind of literacy in itself that needs to be developed.

Furthermore, the deeper understanding of feedback allows us to see feedback as more than just a textual product but to see it as a social practice in itself (Tuck, 2012). As student writing does not exist in a vacuum, similarly feedback is not isolated from aspects of identity, power and emotion (Higgins, 2001). Feedback itself is constructed as a kind of social interaction between marker and student that is context dependent and determined; this context may be subject specific, assignment specific, or even tutor specific. Feedback then is not merely meant to be an evaluation of a student's piece of writing, but also a site of development and interaction[7].

The academic literacies model thus provides us with a useful way of viewing not only the 'problems' in student writing, but at the same time also enables us to reconsider what the purpose of feedback are. However, the academic literacies model is not without its limitations and critiques.

c) Critique against the academic literacies approach

Although the academic literacies approach is considered a useful framework for viewing student writing, there are critiques of it that need to be acknowledged and considered. One of the earliest critiques against it was that it lacks clear pedagogical implementation. Lillis (2003), for instance, points out that although the academic literacies approach has been very useful as a framework for critique, it has yet to be developed in a practical way. As such, it has not focused on how this approach, "might inform the theory and practice of student writing pedagogy" (Lillis, 2003:195). Similarly, Lea (2004) acknowledges this critique by affirming that it has not paid much attention to pedagogy. Both Lillis (2003) and Lea (2004) suggest ways in which academic literacies could be made a pedagogic reality; Lillis (2003), for instance, suggests that a more dialogic approach to teaching, learning, and feedback could assist with the development of an academic literacies pedagogy. However, as of yet, a clear pedagogical approach to making the academic literacies model a reality does not fully exist, though there have been attempts to clarify the role of academic literacies in pedagogy (see, for instance, Lillis et al., 2015).

It might be because of its pedagogically unclear status that there exists confusion as to what specifically constitutes academic literacies. Lillis and Scott (2007), for instance, have shown that there is both confusion about, and fluidity in, using the phrase 'academic literacies',

---

[7] See Section 2.3.1 of this Chapter for a detailed discussion on feedback as a dialogue between tutor and student.

as it can simultaneously be used to refer to the theoretical framework model and also to ''academic development' classes which might strictly be more aligned with the academic socialisation model. In South Africa, especially, there is great confusion about the use of 'academic literacies'. Boughey (2013:12), in an overview of academic literacy development in South Africa, points out that what we think of as academic literacies is "far removed"" from its theoretical inception. Jacobs (2013), for instance, points out that there are two (mis)understandings about academic literacies in South Africa. Firstly, that it refers to a list of skills that students need, and secondly that it refers to an "autonomous module/subject/course" (Jacobs, 2013:128) through which these necessary skills may be transmitted. In this way, then, 'academic literacies' teaching may combine aspects of the study skills and academic socialisation models but does not fully transform it into an approach that enables students to navigate the different disciplinary literacy practices. Instead, academic literacy remains a homogeneous concept that can be transferred to any academic context. Lillis and Scott (2007:17) suggest that the fluidity of the phrase "reflects its position at the juncture of theory/research and strategic application"; the lack of clarity on what academic literacies is may mean that it remains pedagogically unclear.

Another potential problem with the academic literacies approach is that it has tended to focus more on the problems experienced by non-traditional students upon entering higher education (Lea, 2004)[8]. In doing so, it may have inadvertently created a (further) divide between traditional and non-traditional students. By identifying students as 'non-traditional' and characterising them as lacking the necessary skills and thus being 'deficient' somehow, it may further alienate them from the practices of higher education as they are always, and almost by default, situated as academic others. Instead, what an academic literacies approach should ideally do is move away from seeing students as being deficient, but as being unfamiliar with the disciplinary conventions (Tapp, 2015).

Moreover, by focusing on the 'problems' that non-traditional students face, it means that the problems that so-called traditional students themselves may have with accessing the discourse of higher education may be ignored. Hathaway (2015:506), for instance, argues that all students would benefit from "an explicit and structured introduction to academic writing". Not doing so could perpetuate the divide between traditional and non-traditional (or, as in the South African context, between what is seen as 'prepared' and 'underprepared' students), which in turn not only "contribute[s] to the reproduction of 'normal' students" but may also perpetuate and create "new forms of inequality and social exclusion" (Mavelli, 2014:866). In

---

[8] Though there have been recent exceptions to this focus on non-traditional students (see, for instance, Lillis et al., 2015)

South Africa, the idea of academic literacies is "underpinned by issues of social justice" (Jacobs, 2013:132), as it has become a way to correct not only the wrongs perpetuated by the apartheid government, but also to overcome the gap created by students coming from schools whose literacy practices are less congruent with university practices (McKenna, 2004b). These students are often seen as 'underprepared', when it is rather a case of their previous schooling or home literacy practices not being aligned with those of the university. The focus of academic literacies then becomes making sure that students from less congruent backgrounds are aligned with the hegemonic practices of university. Doing so, however, perpetuates the myth of the 'underprepared' student (Webbstock, 2016), which allows for blame to remain with either the student or the secondary schooling system. Whatever its motives, however, by focusing on a particular group of students, the academic literacies model could inadvertently perpetuate educational inequality; as such, the academic literacies approach could be made more inclusive by focusing on the needs of all students, regardless of their socio-economic or educational status or background.

These debates about how academic literacies should be implemented and who it should focus on, has meant that the idea of disciplinary knowledge has been largely left out in discussion about academic literacy. This can be seen in the various academic literacies development courses, which tend to focus on developing the necessary writing skills and ignore how these skills are linked to, and constructed by, disciplinary knowledge. Tapp (2015:713), for instance, points out that "in learning to write in an acceptable way, students are also learning the ways of thinking associated with that academic context, which ultimately gives them access to the powerful knowledge of the academic community". Writing, then, is not inseparable from the knowledge practices of disciplines in specific, or higher education in general. As such, it is important to consider what constitutes knowledge in academia and how it is reflected (or not) in curriculum design, assessment practices and discussions about teaching and learning in higher education.

2.2.2 EPISTEMOLOGICAL ACCESS

Research into assessment largely focuses on the design, and effects of, assessment practices, and concomitantly, the role of feedback in these practices. Overall, though, the research tends to overlook what assessment should be focused on, that is, the knowledge-making that is being assessed through assessment practices. Woolf (2004), for instance, found that although two disciplines (namely, Business and History) had different knowledge-bases and subject-specific skills, assessment criteria were the same for the two disciplines. Woolf's

research suggests that assessment follows a kind of formula and does not consider the hidden disciplinary purposes more deeply. Consequently, the link between feedback and disciplinary knowledge(s) is often overlooked, as feedback tends instead to be seen as either a tool for correction or a way to develop essay writers; its potential role in helping students produce disciplinary knowledge is left behind. In order to further explore how feedback and disciplinary knowledges are intertwined, this section examines firstly the knowledge question of higher education, by discussing the link between knowledge and learning, and then explores the concept of epistemological access, in order to link it to feedback. This section therefore paves the way for the theoretical framework in Chapter 3.

2.2.2.1 LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Learning and knowledge are central to higher education, and the two are intricately linked to one another. Learning may be seen as the process of knowledge construction by students (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Murtagh & Baker, 2009), as learning requires students to adapt to "new ways of knowing, new ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge" (Lea, 1998:159). Maton (2009) postulates that two forms of learning take place at university: cumulative and segmented learning. Cumulative learning takes place when "new knowledge builds on and integrates past knowledge" (Maton, 2009:43); this creates the idea of not only building on what has already been learned, but also, in the process of doing so, constructing new knowledge. On the other hand, segmented learning refers to when "students learn a series of ideas or skills that are strongly tied to their contexts of acquisition" (Maton, 2009:43); this, in effect, ties knowledge to a specific context and at the same time does not fully allow for the possibility of new knowledge being constructed. Both of these forms of learning indicate the interconnectedness between learning and knowledge.

Although learning (and thus knowledge) is central to the purpose of university, this is not always reflected in students' daily experiences. Ramsey et al. (2002), for instance, point out that the academic culture emphasises performance as measured through grades, over actual learning or knowledge construction. This indicates how assessment practices, which are essentially geared towards finding out whether students have learned how to *produce* knowledge, may instead become vehicles for seeing whether students can *re*produce knowledge. This also speaks to the often-cited divide in assessment practice between assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning (Butler & Winne, 1995; Maclellan, 2001; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Wootton, 2002; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Weurlander et al., 2012). For students, in turn, their performance in assessment – that is, the actual grade that

they receive – may become more important than learning. The importance of grades is understandable, as students are constantly having to prove their 'betterness' in the highly competitive market for bursaries and careers through the marks they have obtained, but it may mean that students lose sight of what is important at university. This supports Ramsey et al.'s (2002) notion that grades may not be good for sustainable learning, as well as Dalziel's (1998) postulation that using marks to indicate how well students have performed in an assessment task does not adequately reflect whether learning has taken place[9].

Students, then, have to cope not only with their daily experiences not reflecting the importance of knowledge and learning, but at the same time they are not necessarily aware of this due to the way that courses are designed. Boud and Molloy (2012) assert that courses are not always designed with the idea of knowledge construction in mind, as these might be more focused on transmitting the necessary knowledge and/or skills to students. This not only potentially gives students incorrect information about what kinds of knowledge are important in the discipline, but also makes them less active in their own learning and knowledge construction. Currently, however, there is an awareness that there should be a move towards giving students access to what is important epistemologically in higher education; that is, students need to learn what kinds of knowledge are considered legitimate within the various disciplines specifically, but also at university in general (Shay, 2008; Mavelli, 2014; Jacobs, 2013; Maton, 2014a). If students' day-to-day practices are not aligned with the epistemological purpose of a discipline, then students may remain excluded from the discourse of the discipline.

Knowledge, therefore, although it is central to higher education practices and purposes, often remains on the periphery of both curriculum design and, consequently, assessment practices (Shay, 2008). It is also often overlooked in research that focuses largely on how assessment should work, or what we can do to improve assessment practice, but in which the 'why' of the assessment often remains tacit and unexplored. For instance, assessment research focuses on the theory of formative assessment (Black & William, 2009), the importance of making criteria explicit to students (Rust, O'Donovan & Price, 2005), how assessment can be used to support learning (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004), and how formative assessment is viewed by students (Weurlander et al., 2012). It rarely considers what the underlying purpose of the assessment is and how this is linked to disciplinary knowledge (Woolf, 2004). As such, knowledge has become "increasingly absent of late in debate over higher education" (Barnett, 2009:430). The danger of this lies in not communicating to students what legitimate

---

[9] I am not suggesting, though, that we should not use marks in assessment, but rather that there should be a more careful evaluation of what the focus of assessment tasks should be, which in turn may influence how feedback is given and utilised.

disciplinary knowledge is, which may, in turn, potentially cause students to remain alienated from the disciplinary discourse.

2.2.2.2 KNOWLEDGE AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL ACCESS

An understanding of 'knowledge' is central to this thesis. To this end, I use a social realist approach which places "knowledge as an object" at the centre of all educational research (Maton & Moore, 2010:2). Contrary to other approaches to knowledge, social realism sees knowledge as both a rational, objective fact and a social phenomenon (Maton & Moore, 2010). Social realism therefore contends that we construct knowledge about an ontologically real world, that is, a world that exists independently of the knowledge we construct about it. Simultaneously, knowledge emerges from specific contexts; however, it cannot be reduced to those contexts (Maton & Moore, 2010). Viewing knowledge as simultaneously objective and socially constructed enables us to avoid epistemic fallacies – conflating one experience of an object with a generalised representation of it, such as mistaking a student's account of her essay feedback for the actual feedback act itself. Although students' voices and experiences are important, these should not be conflated with teaching, learning, or assessment practices, which can be examined and analysed separately. A social realist approach therefore enables us to consider the dual nature of knowledge as both an independent object and a socially situated object, and to move beyond the idea of a single knowledge, and towards the idea of 'knowledges'. Jacobs (2013:136) for instance indicates that students are "confronted by different kinds of knowledge ... and that these different knowledge forms have different 'rules of the game' as it were". This indicates the complexity that is encapsulated by the word 'knowledge' at university. This will be examined further in Chapter 3.

As mentioned earlier, knowledge is closely linked to learning, and by proxy to assessment. Yet, research on assessment is characterised by a "knowledge-blindness" (Maton, 2013:9) whereby knowledge as an object is almost overwhelmingly obscured. Research on assessment typically focuses on two streams: how learning takes place, that is, "processes of learning" (Maton, 2013:9) and the power relations inherent in learning, that is "whose knowledge is being learned" (Maton, 2013:9). Knowledge, as the 'what" of learning, and how it may affect the processes and the power relations thereof is largely side-lined (Maton, 2013:9). Barnett (2009) suggests that this is due to "a diminution of the place of knowledge as an educational interest", which in turn also reflects a separate diminution of the "public understanding of knowledge itself" (Barnett, 2009:430). Knowledge has become something that is "obscure and strange and its possession difficult, and thereby somehow elitist" (Barnett,

2009:431). This creates the impression that knowledge is somehow not for everyone: people not at university may feel that it is only for those who are at university, those at university may feel that it is only for those who continue onto postgraduate level, and so on.

This brings us to the issue of epistemological access. Epistemological access needs to be distinguished from 'formal access': students may have formal access to university in the sense that they meet the requirements for physical access, but epistemological access is "learning how to become a participant in an academic practice" (Morrow, 1994:40). Epistemological access functions at an institutional level, while epistemic access functions on a more disciplinary level. It thus becomes important to consider what type(s) of) knowledge are important in different disciplines. In Psychology, for instance, what is valued "is knowledge of the course content" (Luckett & Hunma, 2014:189); this might be the various theories about human behaviour or the various psychological disorders that exist. Knowledge in Psychology may thus be considered as a study-able concept, where the necessary knowledge should also be applied "correctly to real world cases" (Luckett & Hunma, 2014:189). English Studies, on the other hand, does not have an 'actual knowledge' (as a study-able concept) but there is knowledge that is needed and recognised as being legitimate. This might be theoretical knowledge (that is, students do need to know what feminism is, what post-colonialism is, etc.), but it is students' reactions to, and interactions with, texts, as well as their ability to apply the theoretical knowledge they have to their readings of texts that is legitimated or valued[10]. It is thus important to consider what is considered to be legitimate knowledge in a discipline in order for students to gain epistemic, as well epistemological, access.

Theoretically, any academically qualifying student can have formal access to university. However, having access to university does not automatically mean that students have access to the practices, epistemologies and discourses that characterise university study. That is, formal access does not, by default, lead to epistemological access. In the South African context, the focus is often more on formal access, than on epistemic access, as there seems to be a greater focus on enrolment numbers and increasing throughput rates. However, the push towards high throughput rates does not fully consider what kinds of learning opportunities need to be created to enable less racially skewed throughput rates and success in South African higher education. For instance, the number of students enrolling at public higher education institutions increased from 837 776 new students in 2009 to 985 212 students in 2015 (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2015; Centre for Higher Education Trust, n.d). The graduation rate, on the other hand, although showing a steady overall increase, still remains relatively low compared to enrolment numbers, with only 15% of students graduating with

---

[10] The knowledge structures of English Studies will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 3.

undergraduate degrees in 2013 (DHET, 2015:17). Moreover, a report by the Council on Higher Education (2013) found that only 35% of students will graduate within 5 years. The lack of congruence between high school and university practices are often seen as the reason for this, as unpreparedness is seen as the "dominant learning-related cause of the poor performance patterns in higher education" (Council on Higher Education, 2013:16-17). This means then that students may gain formal access to university through enrolment, but that they are not always guaranteed epistemological access.

Students who struggle at university may come from school and home practices (discourses) that are not congruent with university practices (Geisler, 1994; McKenna, 2004b; Boughey, 2005; Boughey, 2012). These students are then identified as having a 'deficit' of some kind, which can be corrected through academic development programmes. As Jacobs (2013:128) points out, in South African higher education, one of the more prevailing (mis)perceptions sees academic literacies "as a description of the lists of atomised things (skills) that students need to be able to do in academia". Often, the skill that seems most necessary is English language proficiency – there is the assumption, then, that all students need for success, and to gain access to the discourse, is a proficiency in English (McKenna, 2004a). This also assumes that students do actually know what counts as knowledge in a discipline, but that they simply lack the necessary tools to convey this (McKenna, 2004a). This then both perpetuates the myth that all students need to achieve epistemological access is to obtain the necessary skills (as per the study skills model) and denies the complexity of the various disciplinary epistemologies that make up tertiary education practices.

2.2.2.3 ACADEMIC LITERACIES, KNOWLEDGE AND FEEDBACK

Knowledge, and specifically the idea of epistemological access, can now be linked back to the academic literacies model, as it shows us how important, and at the same time, overlooked, the link between academic literacy practices and disciplinary knowledges is. Clarence and McKenna (2017:37) suggest that "academic literacies work tends to conflate literacy practices with disciplinary knowledge structures, thus obscuring the structures from which these practices emanate" and this may lead to segmented knowledge building instead of cumulative knowledge building. It is thus also important to consider how academic literacies are viewed, because often the theoretical idea of the academic literacies model becomes conflated with the study skills approach. Jacobs (2013) points out that in South Africa the skills approach is dominant in approaching access to higher education. Attempts at developing the necessary skills may be called academic literacies development, which although not technically incorrect,

does conflate the idea of academic literacies as a heuristic framework with a more generic, skills-focused approach. If students are told to focus on a set of skills that they need to master in order gain epistemological access, that may mean that they do not learn how to construct knowledge of their own. Consequently, although students may be superficially included to the disciplinary discourse, they may be excluded from having a more meaningful and empowering mastery of the disciplinary discourse.

Feedback, in this context, thus has an important epistemological role to play (Lea & Street, 1998), as it can be used not only to help students navigate their construction of knowledge, but also to indicate to them what is considered legitimate disciplinary knowledge. Feedback can thus convey to students what is epistemologically, and epistemically, important. At the same time, though, feedback can also convey incorrect information about what is important in the discipline. If, for instance, teaching and feedback in English Studies is largely focused on grammatical correctness, that may convey the message that what is necessary for success in the discipline is good grammar. However, a student may write an essay that is grammatically correct but may still not be considered successful. This is because the student is not fully aware of what counts as legitimate knowledge in the discipline. In English Studies what is valued is the ability to analyse and think critically about a text and its relation to contexts of time and place (Department of English Student Handbook, n.d.; Christie, 2016)[11]. What counts as knowledge is thus not a study-able concept, but more about possessing certain attributes and dispositions, applying them in a recognised way, and which should ideally be reflected in how students write their essays. Grammatical proficiency is but a peripheral facet to assignments; yet, it may become the central focus for students. This would mean that students become alienated from the epistemology that underlies the discipline. Therefore, feedback is closely linked to disciplinary knowledge, because if any confusion about the disciplinary knowledge exists (for instance, what it entails or how to build it effectively over time), that could mean that the feedback practices may become misaligned with the pedagogic purpose of the discipline, which could cause students to be excluded epistemologically from a discipline.

This points to an interesting dilemma that students may face: students have to learn how to construct knowledge within a discipline; however, for them to construct legitimate knowledge in the discipline, they need access to the tacit knowledge structures that are implicitly part of the discipline. Because of the tacit nature of this knowledge, and the varied congruence between prior learning and university learning, many students are denied, almost by default, epistemological, and epistemic, access. Elton (2010:152) states that "tacit knowledge is embedded in taken-for-granted activities, perceptions and norms". Often to help overcome

---

[11]See Chapter 3.

the incongruence between school and university literacy practices, students are required to take academic development or writing skills courses. In doing so, it places the 'blame' with students, as they are seen as simply needing to acquire the necessary, universally transferable skills in order to be successful (as per the study skills approach). This approach, in effect, denies the way that literacy and knowledge are discipline specific.

Instead of assuming a homogenous knowledge structure, Jacobs (2013:132) suggests that "academic literacies teaching should be about making explicit to students the ways in which different disciplines structure their knowledge bases and produce knowledge". This should ideally be done through collaboration between discipline academics (those who have insider knowledge) and academic writing experts (Elton, 2010; Jacobs, 2013), as those within a discipline may not actively consider what counts as knowledge in their discipline and by working with an outsider, it allows them to (re)conceptualise it from a novice perspective. However, this collaboration may also cause students to remain isolated from accessing the disciplinary knowledge structures. Clarence and McKenna (2017:40) suggest that the academic literacy 'outsider' may be unfamiliar with the disciplinary knowledge-making practices. This means that their questioning the norms and conventions of the discipline may lead to students accessing the knowledge structure but could also cause them to focus on generically-based writing approaches which means that the "fine-grained disciplinary knowledge issues" are left to the disciplinary lecturers. Academic literacies needs to be able to conceptualise the knowledge structures of disciplines and how these knowledge structures may influence the literacy practices of a discipline; otherwise, academic literacies may remain generic. Similarly, feedback practices need to conceptualise the disciplinary knowledge structure, as otherwise it too may remain generic and not give students the information they need to become successful.

2.3 RELEVANT FEEDBACK-RELATED STUDIES

Feedback, then, clearly plays an important role in student learning and development, and in enabling epistemic and epistemological access. Yet, feedback in a higher education context, especially outside the United Kingdom, is still considered to be relatively under-researched (Weaver, 2006; Walker, 2009), especially in comparison with school-context feedback (Dowden et al., 2013). According to Ferguson (2011) research into higher education level feedback is still relatively new, because, historically, summative assessment has been emphasised at university level. The growing awareness, however, of students' dissatisfaction and discontent with feedback has led to an increase in research into feedback, especially in contexts such as South Africa.

This section explores the four main feedback-related research trends that are applicable to this study, namely: feedback as dialogue, students' perceptions of and engagement with feedback, tutors' role in the feedback process, and attempts at finding a solution to the feedback problem.

2.3.1 FEEDBACK AS DIALOGUE

One of the most relevant feedback-related research areas is an examination of the shift in how feedback is viewed, that is, as a dialogue, which prompts a consideration of feedback as a process of communication between two invested parties. A great deal of research focuses on what it means to have a feedback dialogue, the theory behind it, the factors that hinder effective dialogue, as well as how to make the feedback dialogue more visible.

Traditionally, communication and, by extension, the feedback process, is viewed in an over-simplified manner as "the linear transfer of information from the sender of a message (the tutor) to a recipient (the student) via a medium (usually written comments)" (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2001:271). Viewing communication, and feedback, in this manner, suggests that "there is nothing 'wrong' with the communication process itself" and that hindrances are externally situated (Higgins et al., 2001:271). However, Higgins et al. (2001) propose that the feedback-communication is influenced by internal aspects, such as emotion, perceived power relations between feedback-giver and feedback-receiver, and identity; feedback thus "involves a unique process of communication situated within a particular social context" (Higgins, 2000:1). Feedback should therefore be recognised as a faulty, unequal process of communication.

Consequently, there may be a communication breakdown during the feedback process, which could lead to students' misunderstanding of, and an inability to access, understand, and engage with, the discipline. Chanock (2000:95), for instance, showed that students often do not understand the comments that tutors have made on their work. If students do not understand the comments, then they cannot act on them; this would greatly diminish the effectiveness of feedback as a tool for learning and development. Moreover, even if students understand a tutor's feedback, they may not necessarily be able to act on it (Mutch, 2003). Burke's (2009:49) study, for instance, showed that "the majority of students entering higher education do not possess strategies to act on written tutor feedback on their work", which is similar to Weaver's (2006:385) study which found that approximately 50% of the students surveyed had not received guidance on how to understand or use feedback, which would mean that students may not know what to do with it. If students do not understand feedback, then they cannot act on it, or at least, not in the way that the tutor has intended. As this research study will posit, the

tutor's perception of the ideal English Studies student or 'knower' – one that possesses the necessary attributes and dispositions as reflected in their essays – is central to the feedback practices and the student's success in the discipline (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1). If there is a miscommunication and/or an inability to act upon feedback, then it limits students' ability to become successful in their discipline.

As was shown in Section 2.2.1.3(b), feedback is often rooted in taken-for-granted terminologies and practices, which may underpin miscommunications in feedback. For instance, what tutors might perceive as an easy-to-understand and easy-to-act-upon comment might not be perceived as such by students; even evaluative feedback – such as indicating a spelling error by using the abbreviation 'sp' – might not be obvious for students to act upon. Weaver (2006:389), for instance, found that "quite a number of students are unsure of the common [and therefore taken-for-granted] terms used by tutors". Similarly, *how* tutors convey messages to students about their work might not be clear to them; for instance, a question mark, which is frequently used by tutors, does not necessarily indicate a genuine question, but is instead used "as a kind of expletive, or as a categorical assertion that the point is not 'correct'" (Lea & Street, 1998:169). Many of these types of miscommunication practices can be overcome by explaining the feedback-giving process to students clearly; that is, to think of feedback as a kind of literacy in itself that needs to be learned and developed by students in order for them to best make use of feedback. If not seen in this way, then the dialogue of feedback might remain one-sided.

Moreover, within the South African context, what further problematizes feedback is that there is a distinction between the focus of high school feedback-giving practices, which tend to be corrective, and higher education feedback-giving practices, which tend to be developmental. Kapp and Bangeni (2005:121), for instance, have shown how "[t]he concept of dialogic feedback on writing is unfamiliar to most of our students". For higher education in a South African context, the shift in feedback focus and purpose between varying contexts may also lead to miscommunication. If a tutor, for instance, asks a student to consider what the significance of a particular image in a text is, then the student might not interpret this as a developmental question, transferable to another text and assignment-context, but merely as a corrective question stating what the student did wrong. And, indeed, many of our developmental questions in English Studies are perhaps corrective in nature, rather than serving a deeper, more tacit developmental purpose. This furthers the miscommunication and confusion for students.

Another possible reason for miscommunication lies beneath the surface of feedback practices, rooted in the discursive, epistemic motivation for giving feedback. Higgins, Hartley and Skelton (2001:272), for instance, show that "feedback comments convey a message based on an implicit understanding of particular academic terms, which in turn reflect a much more

35

complex academic discourse, which in turn may be only partially understood by students". The language barrier of feedback is thus rooted in discourse, for "feedback is predominantly underpinned by a dominant, subject specific discourse" (Higgins, 2000:3): tutors thus give feedback from within a particular discourse to students for students to gain access to that discourse, and in so doing, become successful in the discipline. Ironically, however, in doing so, tutors may inadvertently alienate students from the very discourse to which they have to gain access. The question then becomes how, and whether, students do access and understand the discourse that underpins feedback, or whether they merely mimic doing so. This is an especially important question in contexts where drafting is not a formal requirement and where students are evaluated on single-draft submissions. A lack of drafts is an especially interesting dilemma, as research has shown that the drafting process is more effective as a developmental tool than single-submission assignments (Bharuthram & McKenna, 2006; Carless, 2006).

What is perhaps most valuable about viewing feedback as a dialogue is that the 'blame' for the feedback problem cannot solely be placed on students for not incorporating feedback or seemingly being unwilling to learn from feedback. Nor can the 'blame' solely be placed on tutors who are often burdened by time-constraints and who, as insiders in the discipline, might find it difficult to convey the tacit expectations of the discipline through their feedback. This study, in focusing on only the tutors' perspectives, is only examining one side of the feedback dialogue; at all times, it should therefore be considered that the students' perceptions of feedback may be different from tutors' perceptions.

2.3.2 STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF AND ENGAGEMENT WITH FEEDBACK

Although this study focuses on tutors' perceptions of feedback, it is pertinent to briefly consider research into students' perceptions of, and engagement with, feedback, especially since feedback is a dialogue and the student voice cannot be left out entirely. A large body of research focuses on students' perspective on, and experiences of, receiving feedback, with an emphasis on student perceptions of feedback (Carless, 2006; Hounsell et al., 2008; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008: Poulos & Mahony, 2008; McCann & Saunders, 2009; Pokorny & Pickford, 2010; Adcroft, 2011; Ferguson, 2011; Blair & McGinty, 2013; Robinson, Pope & Holyoak, 2013). Research also focuses on students' engagement with feedback, which may be divided into how, or whether, students use feedback (Orsmond, Merry & Reiling, 2005; Duncan, 2007; Burke, 2009; Murtagh & Baker, 2009; Walker, 2009; Harran, 2011; Price, Handley & Millar, 2011) and how, or whether, they understand it (Chanock, 2000; Orsmond & Merry, 2011).

Great emphasis has been placed on investigating student perceptions of feedback. The prevailing myth seems to be that students do not find feedback to be particularly useful. Duncan (2007), for instance, found that students do not view feedback as being useful for future assignments, a finding shared by Ferguson (2011). Yet, there has also been much research to show that students do in fact find feedback to be useful. Orsmond, Merry and Reiling (2005:374), for instance, found that students use feedback for six specific functions: to motivate themselves, to enhance their learning, to enhance reflection, to get clarification on criteria, standards and/or errors, to enrich their learning environment, and in a mechanistic way (the actual practice of feedback, the how it is given). Similarly, Burke (2009:45) also identified that students use feedback to revise or correct work, for personal development, and to implement feedback in future work. There thus seem to be some misconceptions by tutors as to how students perceive feedback, and this may negatively impact the effectiveness of their feedback.

It is not only that there is a potential misconception on tutors' side about how students use feedback, but also that there is an active difference between students' and tutors' perceptions of feedback. Many studies on feedback (see, for instance, Higgins, 2000; Carless, 2006; Adcroft, 2011) have investigated these differing perceptions. Adcroft (2011:414), for instance, compared what he termed the "mythologies of feedback" that students and tutors have about feedback and found that "there is a gap in understanding and expectations of feedback between academics and students", which creates a "dissonance" (Adcroft, 2011:408,414). This suggests that often students and tutors do not perceive feedback, and especially its purpose, in the same manner, which greatly reduces the intended effect of feedback. If students, for instance, do not see feedback as a developmental tool, but as a corrective tool, the value of feedback becomes diminished.

The observation that there is a difference between students' and academics' perceptions of feedback was highlighted by Carless (2006), who compared students' and tutors' perceptions of feedback and found that there were many differences, especially with regards to the level of detail, usefulness, and fairness of feedback, as well as whether students want feedback. These differences, which incorporated student perceptions of feedback in a more visible manner, are also shown in studies by Ferguson (2011:52), who showed that what students want from feedback is not always what we give them; Deyi (2011:48), who found that there is a gap between what lecturers intend with feedback and how students understand and interpret feedback; and Crisp (2007:574), who stated that "assessors should not assume that students will respond to written feedback consistent with what the assessor had intended", amongst others. In general, though, tutors seem to view feedback as being more useful than students do (Carless, 2006). These differences in how feedback is perceived by both students and tutors

determine how it is acted upon by students, and how successfully feedback may be utilized in order for students to become successful in the discipline.

These differing perceptions point to a larger problem that is not just about how students view feedback, but also whether students are able to engage with feedback, to use it in a practical way. Burke (2009:41), for instance, stated that one of the biggest problems with feedback is that students do not use it and this sentiment is shared throughout many other studies (Chanock, 2000; Price et al., 2010; Carless et al., 2011; Dowden et al., 2013). Commonly-held beliefs as to why students do not engage with feedback include that students may be more interested in their grade and/or that they see feedback as a means of explaining their grade and thus not as a tool for learning (Duncan, 2007). However, these reasons place the blame, so to speak, solely on students: they suggest that feedback is not being implemented because students are not interested in it.

Instead, it is useful to consider more complex, dialogic reasons for students' engagement (or lack thereof) with feedback. Firstly, students may be too inexperienced to interpret feedback adequately (Robinson, Pope & Holyoak, 2013:261). At first year level, students may simply not have had enough experience with the feedback method and/or practices, and especially the more dialogic nature of feedback, to ensure that they can use it effectively as a forward feeding learning tool. Secondly, students are often not given guidance on how to use feedback (Burke & Pieterick, 2010; Weaver, 2006). Teaching staff may assume that students know how to use feedback (Burke, 2009:48), when in fact students have no way of meaningfully engaging with feedback. Thirdly, students' engagement with, and enjoyment of, a module or subject may also determine their level of engagement with the feedback provided (Wingate, 2010). If, for instance, students are not particularly invested in a subject, they might not be inclined to invest too much time in deciphering and engaging with the feedback; their focus may be on obtaining the necessary marks to pass the subject or module, rather than on accessing and understanding the inner workings of the discipline's discourse. Students may thus view feedback as a perfunctory explanatory tool, rather than as a tool for deeper learning (Rust, 2002). Lastly, students may simply be unfamiliar with the terms used when giving feedback and may thus simply not know how to *read* feedback (Weaver, 2006: 384). These reasons are all obstacles that may limit students' ability to engage with feedback, but they also show how students' engagement with feedback is part of an unequal feedback dialogue.

At the same time, there also needs to be a consideration of what exactly 'engaging with feedback' may mean – engagement may not necessarily only be visible; that is, changes being made to students' work are not the only reflection of engaging with feedback. Price, Handley

and Millar (2011), for instance, postulate that there are various stages of engagement with feedback, and not all of them are necessarily reflected in students' writing. These stages are:

- Collection: in contexts where assignments have to be collected, the first step in engagement with feedback would be to collect. Price, Handley and Millar (2011:889) point out that "'[c]ollection is the most visible indicator of student intention to engage". Not wanting to collect a marked assignment may indicate not wanting to engage with feedback.

- Immediate attention: This refers to an immediate (albeit) brief engagement with feedback. Price, Handley and Millar (2011:890) found that students will "read or listen to feedback at least once", but they might not refer to it again. Similarly, in spite of tutors' beliefs otherwise, various studies have shown that students do read feedback given (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2002; Harran, 2011) though this does not mean that students necessarily engage with it in an in-depth and meaningful manner.

- Cognitive response: This refers to the extent to which students will carry feedback forward in their learning. Engagement at this level may be hampered by their level of understanding of feedback – if a student does not understand feedback, then the student might not be able to engage with it.

- Taking immediate or latent action: This is often the most visible stage of engagement with feedback, though as Price, Handley and Millar (2011:891) point out, even if students have not visibly engaged with feedback, they still "may have been engaged at each stage of the feedback process". 'Taking action' may involve applying feedback to the next assignment, developmental changes, or, conversely, may result in rejecting and/or (mis)understanding feedback.

These stages may be influenced by various external factors, such as the "temporal dimension" (Price et al., 2010:279), referring to the time between submitting an assignment and receiving feedback; the "relational dimension" (Price et al., 2010:279), referring to the 'relationship' between tutor and student, which may influence student's willingness to respond to feedback; as well as the socio-cultural context "which creates the conditions for interactions and relationships, which together influence the nature of the student experience" (Price, Handley & Millar, 2011:883).

The perceived usefulness of feedback and level of engagement therewith may lead to an interesting dilemma, as students may find feedback useful, even if it is not reflected in their (re)writing; yet, because it is not reflected in their writing, tutors may feel that feedback is not being engaged with, thus potentially lessening their own engagement with giving feedback.

Similarly, if students cannot engage with feedback, because they do not understand it or do not know how to engage with it, then they might perceive it as not being useful, which will potentially lessen their (attempts at) engaging with it.

2.3.3 TUTORS' ROLE IN THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

The conceptualisation of feedback as a dialogue, as well as research dispelling various anecdotally-held myths about students' views on feedback, has created increased interest in examining the tutor side of the feedback dialogue (see, for example, Bailey & Garner, 2010; Tang & Harrison, 2011; Tuck, 2012). Tutors play an important role in the feedback-giving process, as they convey messages about what counts as legitimate knowledge in a discipline, and it is through tutors' feedback that the tacit expectations of the discipline may become explicit. Yet, tutors may not be aware of the underlying pedagogical purpose of their feedback, or tutors may be aware of what feedback should be doing, but do not necessarily provide feedback in such a manner that the practice and pedagogical purpose(s of feedback align. Orsmond and Merry (2011), for instance, found that tutors have two conceptualisations of feedback. Tutors, firstly, use feedback to "explain misunderstandings, [and] identify and correct errors" (Orsmond & Merry, 2011:129). This view was held by almost all the tutors in their study. Secondly, feedback was also viewed as something that can enhance learning, though this was not fully realised in practice. These differing conceptualisations of feedback show that although tutors may be aware of the fact that feedback serves a deeper purpose, this is often not reflected in their feedback practices. Moreover, tutors in Orsmond and Merry's (2011) study gave feedback that focused largely on a specific assignment; the feedback was not necessarily useful in other assignment contexts. This would limit not only the feedforward aspect of feedback, but also its usefulness as a tool for learning.

On an individual, interpersonal level, tutors also play a role in determining how in-depth students engage with feedback. Although Crisp (2007) postulated that students may feel that it is irrelevant who marked their work, Dowden et al. (2013) found that students prefer their work to be marked by their tutor, someone they know and are familiar with. Orsmond, Merry and Reiling (2005), similarly, found that tutors play an important role in the feedback process, as students' level and type of engagement with feedback depended largely on who their tutors were. Tutors may influence how students respond to the feedback given, their willingness to discuss their feedback, as well as whether they learn from feedback. This also points to the power that tutors have in the feedback process. This power may express itself "inadvertently"

(Blair & McGinty, 2013:467), especially since tutors assume the position of expert, by being placed in the position of being able to give feedback to students.

Although tutors' perceptions of feedback have been explored in relation to students' perceptions of feedback (Carless, 2006; Adcroft, 2011), very little research has been done to explore tutors' own perceptions of feedback. Tang and Harrison (2011), for instance, explored tutors' beliefs on feedback and identified three types. The first is "traditional autonomous global" feedback-giving tutors (Tang & Harrison, 2011:583). Tutors of this type feel that students do not care about feedback and doubt the usefulness of feedback. These tutors also believe that there is no need for guidance. The second is "student-centred" (Ibid., 583) tutors. Such tutors believe that feedback is necessary for improvement, for both strong and weak students, and are more positive about students' use of feedback. The third type of tutor is the "traditional local" (Ibid., 583), who believe that there is little relationship between feedback and students' achievements, and that they do not need help with tutoring. This type of tutor does, however, provide detailed feedback (Ibid., 589). According to Tang and Harrison (2011:601), "these dispositions and beliefs might affect tutor feedback approaches, the amount of detail of their feedback, and effort expended on feedback provision". This shows the intrinsic relationship not only between tutors' beliefs about feedback and how these feed into their feedback practices, but also between tutors and students, as students' perceived investment with feedback may determine how tutors view feedback and, consequently, how much tutors invest in giving feedback.

Similarly, Tuck (2012) explored how teachers perceive feedback and identified three perceptions. The first is that feedback is an institutional requirement (Tuck, 2012:213). This perception sees feedback as "bound by rules and regulations, subject to institutional processes of evaluation in a similar way to students' own assessed work" (Ibid., 214). This may lead to a sense of pedagogic disconnection between tutor and student, as marking and feedback become focused on accountability (justifying a mark to an (often imagined) body of overseers) rather than on being tools for learning, development and improvement. The second perception sees feedback giving as work (Ibid., 215). This belief relegates feedback to "a marginalised aspect of academics' work" (Ibid., 215), especially in relation to time, space and recognition. For instance, tutors may feel that giving feedback may take up an (unnecessarily) large amount of time; especially, because many tutors may feel that feedback-giving is often an unrecognised, taken-for-granted, and almost unglamorous aspect of academic life, which may negatively affect how they engage with the process. The third perception sees feedback giving as seeking dialogue (Ibid., 216). Tutors may see feedback as a way to engage in a dialogue with students, but often it merely becomes a way to explain marks to students and to be heard. These three beliefs may

interact with one another, and in relation to the perceptions identified by Tang and Harrison (2011) where tutors may be classified as belonging to a 'type', may be felt simultaneously.

The role, then, that tutors play in the feedback-giving process is complex, and relatively under-researched. For the most part, tutors are told how to give feedback, but not necessarily why they should give feedback. Similarly, in exploring tutors' perceptions of feedback, this is largely done in relation to students' perceptions and is also largely influenced by what tutors perceive as students' views on feedback (that is, if tutors feel that students view feedback as not being useful, due to students' perceived lack of engagement, then tutors might view it as not being useful). Exploring what tutors may feel is the true, implicit pedagogic practice of feedback is thus necessary, especially in a subject such as English Studies, where it is easy to get side-tracked by surface errors and where the purpose of feedback may not necessarily be considered beyond identifying errors.

2.3.4 SOLUTIONS TO THE FEEDBACK PROBLEM

As the previous sections have indicated, there are various challenges inherent in the feedback process. A relatively large body of research has focused on finding solutions to the 'feedback problem'. For instance, Bloxham and Campbell (2010:293) introduced interactive cover sheets to "prompt dialogue on the issues of importance to [students]". The idea with the interactive cover sheets was to make students more active in the feedback dialogue, by requiring students to pre-emptively ask for feedback on areas they were worried about; tutors would then respond to these and provide additional feedback if necessary. This had limited success, as students were often not able to "frame meaningful questions" and instead focused on "superficial or concrete features" (Bloxham & Campbell, 2010:297) suggesting that students lack the necessary understanding of the criteria and specifications of academic writing in order to ask the right questions about their work.

Other solutions to the feedback problem include providing model answers, using exemplars and using an Essay Feedback Checklist. Huxham (2007) tested the efficacy of using model answers in the feedback process. The results show that, even though, theoretically, model answers would make for a very useful feedback method, students prefer having both personal feedback and the model answer (Huxham, 2007:606). Similarly, Hendry, Bromberger and Armstrong (2011) tested the use of exemplars. These were marked by students and discussed in class with tutors; it was found that, especially compared to marking sheets, the exemplars were useful in providing guidance to students for completing a similar task in the future (though, this does not indicate whether students have learned from the process). Wakefield et al. (2014), on

the other hand, tested the usefulness of the Essay Feedback Checklist, the purpose of which was for students to compare their essay to the checklist criteria, and indicate their confidence in successfully addressing the criteria; the tutor would do the same. Where major discrepancies were found between tutor's and student's opinions of essays, feedback would be provided (Wakefield et al., 2014:55). This particular method did not have an immediate effect but did help students to complete future assignments (Wakefield et al., 2014:260), as it allowed them to engage on a more meta-cognitive level with the criteria, and, by extension, feedback.

Solutions, such as those listed here, present relatively surface-level interventions to what is a much deeper problem. For instance, feedback research largely focuses on the 'what' and 'how' of feedback, by examining questions like 'what is feedback? What are the best feedback practices? How do students use it? How do students understand it?' Yet, the 'why' of feedback is still relatively under-researched. Although there may be various answers as to why we give feedback (to assist, correct, develop, facilitate, etc.), the problem with not actively exploring the 'why' of feedback in a specific disciplinary context is that we may lose sight of what it is we are trying to achieve with feedback. In English Studies, for instance, we may become so distracted with getting students to write a grammatically-correct or structurally sound essay that we might not consider what is important for students to master, such as the ability to analyse a text critically within a particular theoretical framework. Seemingly superficial solutions to the feedback problem may thus not be of much use in the long term, as it does not matter *what* feedback is focusing on, or *how* it is given, if tutors do not know *why* they are giving feedback in the first place.

2.4 SUMMARY

In summation, to answer the three main questions posed in the opening to this contextual framework:

1. Feedback is an integral part of students' higher education. On an every-day level, it refers to the comments (written or otherwise) that students receive on their completed assignments. These comments may either 'feed*back*', thereby telling students what the strengths and weaknesses of the current assignment are, or they may 'feed*forward*', by encouraging student development and learning, by giving students advice about future assignments.

2. Feedback, due to its increased prominence in light of the increase in student numbers, and the concomitant high ratio of students to staff members, is also ideally situated to enable epistemic and epistemological access. Epistemic access refers to enabling access

to the inner workings and knowledge practices of a specific discipline, and epistemological access refers to enabling access to the higher education practices in general. Both of these may be seen largely through students' writing, as writing, thinking and, consequently, knowledge practices are intricately linked with one another. Feedback, therefore, has an increased importance in the higher education context.

3. In spite of its importance, there are various challenges inherent in the feedback process. Consequently, various avenues into feedback research have opened up. Of special relevance is the conceptualisation of feedback as a dialogue (instead of a one-way transmission) between tutor and student about the work; the increasing realisation that students' perceptions of feedback, and consequent usage thereof, are influenced by a myriad of internal and external influences; the increased focus on the tutor side of feedback-giving practices; and attempts at finding solutions to feedback problems.

Ultimately, as this Chapter has shown, feedback is often not as effective as it should be, because the 'why' of feedback is overlooked, and specifically how it ties in with the (often implicit) underlying purpose of a discipline; in other words, the 'why' of feedback determines 'what' feedback should focus on and 'how'. Not considering what the pedagogic purpose of feedback should be (the 'why') could mean that feedback may remain partially effective, no matter 'what' feedback focuses on or 'how'. It is therefore necessary to conceptualise what the epistemic, discursive nature of a discipline is, to enable the more consistent alignment between feedback purposes and practices.

This conflict between what feedback should do ideally and what it does in practice forms the central focus of this study. As this study will posit, if there is a misalignment between the practice and purposes of feedback in a discipline, it may have serious implications beyond feedback being an ineffective tool for student learning and development. Chapter 3 turns now to Legitimation Code Theory, to make the underlying purpose of English Studies more visible (Maton, 2016a). This will enable a greater understanding of what the pedagogical purpose of feedback should be in the discipline under study.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 2 indicated that feedback, as both an evaluative and developmental tool, is intrinsically connected with pedagogy and curriculum, and specifically with knowledge – whether it is building knowledge (through an evaluative approach) or developing knowers (through a more developmental approach). Often, however, the interplay between pedagogy, curriculum and knowledge is unclear, or hidden, from students and even tutors. This might have the unintentional effect of rendering feedback less effective than it should be, as there is no clear focus on what needs to be accomplished through feedback. It is therefore necessary to unpack the structures, and, specifically, the knowledge structures, that underlie both pedagogy and curriculum, which in turn inform pedagogic practices, such as feedback.

In this Chapter, I attempt to make the knowledge structures that underlie English Studies more visible. In order to conceptualise these underlying structures, I first turn to Critical Realism to provide a broad understanding of how we may view the world and the various events that take place within it. Thereafter, I will draw on concepts from the sociology of education as developed by Basil Bernstein and furthered by Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). Bernstein provides us with a useful way of heuristically representing knowledge. LCT draws on the foundations of Bernstein's work to provide us with a more in-depth conceptualisation of knowledge in a discipline. As LCT extends and subsumes the work of Basil Bernstein (Jackson, 2016), I will start by briefly unpacking Bernstein's notion of knowledge discourses. Thereafter, I will discuss LCT, focusing specifically on the dimensions of Specialisation and Semantics. This Chapter thus constructs a theoretical framework that enables this study to conceptualise the pedagogic purpose of English Studies visibly, which in turn allows it to consider clearly what the pedagogic purpose of feedback should be in the discipline.

3.1 CRITICAL REALISM

Currently, the dominant approach to education in most countries is underlined by constructivism (Maton, 2016a; Kotzee, 2010). Constructivism is an epistemological theory – in that it attempts to describe what knowledge is (Kotzee, 2010) – which views knowledge as being constructed individually or socially within specific historical or cultural contexts (Maton & Moore, 2010). This means there is no 'real' knowledge that exists outside of what a person or society may construct within a particular socio-historical context. This has various implications

for pedagogy and especially assessment. Kotzee (2010) for instance points out that if students construct their own knowledge, their own truth, then it becomes difficult for a teacher to evaluate assessments based on 'right' or 'wrong' answers, for the student will in essence always be right. Similarly, if students are told that all opinions are valued, then it becomes difficult to distinguish between a 'valid' opinion and one that may have, for instance, a discriminatory basis (Kotzee, 2010). This is why Kotzee (2010:185) argues against constructivism as a theory of learning, for "[t]he idea that every person constructs her own knowledge does not necessarily translate into a pedagogy that provides students with opportunities and incentives to build up their own knowledge".

Constructivism is often presented as an alternative to positivism. Where constructivism focuses on knowledge being socially and individually constructed, positivism posits that knowledge is "decontextualized, value-free, detached and 'objective'" (Maton & Moore, 2010:1). A false dichotomy is created whereby these two are presented as the only available theories for pedagogic purposes. Critical realism presents an alternative to this dichotomy.

Critical realism is a philosophical framework developed by Roy Bhaskar and it addresses the "epistemic fallacy" (Bhaskar, 2008:5), in which ontology is conflated with epistemology, that is created through constructivism and positivism. Critical realism makes three commitments when considering reality, namely ontological realism, judgmental rationality, and epistemic relativism.

Ontological realism suggests that reality exists independently of us. What we know of the world is not the same as what the world is. This suggests that what we consider to be 'reality' is but a part of it; there is a reality that exists beyond our knowing of it. We may only have partial knowledge of the world, but just because we do not know about something does not mean that it does not exist (Bhaskar, 2008; Clarence, 2014). This also suggests that as individuals "we can believe anything, but we cannot in the same way just know anything" (Maton & Moore, 2010:4). For the purpose of this study, this suggests that there is a 'reality' of English that exists whether students (and even tutors) are aware of it; this might refer to the 'reality' of the English scholar, or even the reality of the hidden pedagogy that underlies English Studies as a discipline. The ontological realism of feedback, then, would be the implicit pedagogical purpose of feedback in the discipline – what lies beneath feedback – that may, or may not, be fully conveyed or realised by students and tutors alike.

Judgmental rationality indicates that it is possible to make rational judgment claims about differing knowledge claims (Maton & Moore, 2010). It is possible for us to consider that some judgment claims are 'better' than others; that all opinions are not the equal in worth (Bhaskar, 2008; Clarence, 2014). For feedback in English Studies, this implies that we can differentiate

between those analyses that are 'better' than others; this might be why, although tutors do encourage students to come up with their own interpretations of texts, there are some interpretations that are more widely accepted and why other interpretations, while not necessarily wrong, are not necessarily 'right'. Feedback is a form of judgmental rationality as in English Studies tutors use it as a way to guide students to the 'right' (or at least 'better') interpretation of the text. Feedback, in itself, is a judgment made about students' knowledge claims.

Epistemic relativism, lastly, indicates that judgements are situated within particular socio-historical contexts. This then suggests that knowledge is not a "universal, invariant, essential Truth" (Maton & Moore, 2010:4) but changes over time, and adapts as knowledge progresses and changes across different socio-historical contexts. For English Studies, this might point to how interpretations of texts may differ with time, as new theoretical frameworks are developed. Feedback itself is situated in particular contexts and is in itself not necessarily an objective truth, as what tutors focus on through feedback may differ from tutor to tutor, within tutor cohorts, or even between specific university contexts.

Critical realism proposes an "ontological stratification" (Gorski, 2013:659) of reality; that is, reality consists of three domains: the real, the actual and the empirical (Bhaskar, 2008) (see Figure 3.1). These domains build on one another, with the domain of the real being the deepest layer.

Empirical
- students' (and tutors') experience of feedback

Actual
- feedback given / received

Real
- disciplinary knowledge/ pedagogy
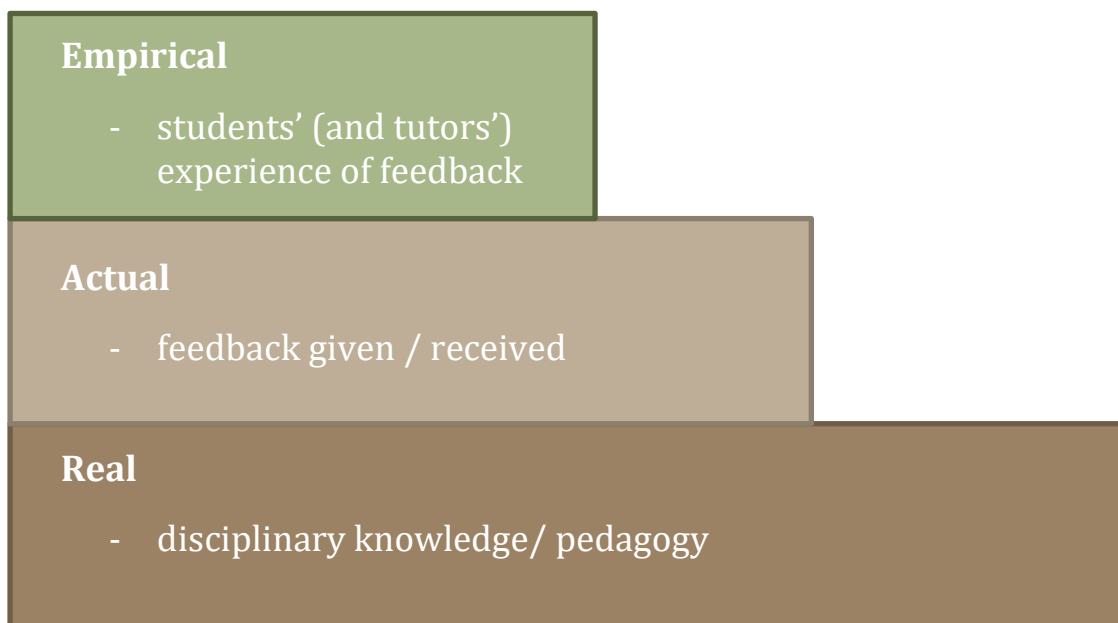
Figure 3.1. The ontological stratification of reality (in relation to feedback)

At the domain of the real, generative mechanisms function. These mechanisms "combine to generate the flux of phenomena that constitute the actual states and happenings of the world" (Bhaskar, 2008:38). These mechanisms may be present but not necessarily actualised, and even when they are actualised, they may not necessarily be observed. In the context of this study, pedagogy/curriculum/disciplinary knowledge can all be seen as various mechanisms that give rise to certain events and experiences in the actual and empirical and is often what lies beneath teaching practices, such as feedback, without tutors or lecturers necessarily being aware of it.

At the domain of the actual, mechanisms are actualised (but not necessarily observed) as events (Bhaskar, 2008; Gorski, 2013). In this domain, the events that take place have been generated by the mechanisms that underlie them. For instance, in an educational context, this would refer to the events that take place (lectures, tutorials, assignments, feedback, etc.) as a result of the underlying mechanism(s).

At the domain of the empirical, mechanisms are actualised and observed as experiences (Bhaskar, 2008; Gorski, 2013). These experiences differ based on individuals' past knowledge and experiences. In the context of this study, how students and tutors experience feedback would be considered an experience, as this will be different for each party involved: students as the recipients of feedback comments will perhaps have a more emotional feedback experience, while tutors as the providers of feedback may experience giving feedback as a task that merely needs to be completed in order to meet their contractual obligations (Tuck, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the domain of the real in order to understand what kinds of mechanisms give rise to present feedback events and experiences, and what might need to change at that level to give rise to different, more just or overt feedback events and experiences. Focusing on the domain of the real is thus a way to see 'what lies beneath' pedagogic practices such as feedback, and how they emerge from the level of the real, which is often hidden. Although the study in effect focuses on the events and experiences of feedback between tutors and students, it is necessary to find the tools to look beyond these to conceptualise the kinds of generative mechanisms that are shaping the events and experiences that are seen in everyday feedback practices. In doing so, it becomes possible to see what lies beneath not only what we tell our students through feedback, but also what causes current issues in teaching and learning, which, in turn, has implications for students' access to and success in the discipline. In order to start uncovering what lies beneath dominant feedback practices in particular, I first turn to Basil Bernstein's conceptualisation of knowledge.

3.2 BASIL BERNSTEIN, KNOWLEDGE DISCOURSES AND THE PEDAGOGIC DEVICE

Basil Bernstein was a British sociologist who, for over forty years, contributed to the development of a theoretical framework for the sociology of education (Sadovnik, 2001). Although Bernstein did not explicitly identify as a critical realist, there are similarities between his work and the depth ontology of critical realism, especially in its attempt to understand 'what lies beneath' practices (Clarence, 2014). A key aspect of this is how Bernstein foregrounded knowledge as an object of study (Maton, 2009), which has important implications for the social sciences especially. This section begins by looking at Bernstein's conceptualisation of knowledge as two distinct discourses and thereafter will discuss the pedagogic device, which considers how curriculum and pedagogic practices are developed. This helps to conceptualise English Studies more clearly, which in turn enables a clearer conceptualisation of the implicit function of feedback in English Studies.

3.2.1 KNOWLEDGE DISCOURSES

Basil Bernstein proposed two forms of knowledge discourse: horizontal discourse and vertical discourse. Horizontal discourse refers to common sense, everyday knowledge; this type of knowledge is segmented (where the various segments are not equal as some are more important than others, not necessarily related to one another, and context-specific) and is transmitted and acquired locally within specific contexts (Bernstein, 1999:160). For instance, learning how to tie one's shoelaces or how to ride a bike are both examples of segmented, everyday knowledge. These are segmented in the sense that learning how to ride a bike is not dependent on learning how to tie one's shoelaces, and these two knowledges are not necessarily equal in importance.

Vertical discourses, on the other hand, refer to official, school knowledge (Bernstein, 1999:158). This kind of knowledge can be divided into two forms, namely hierarchical knowledge structures and horizontal knowledge structures.

Hierarchical knowledge structures are "[c]oherent, explicit, hierarchically organized structures" (Bernstein, 1999:159), such as the natural sciences and physics, and can be imagined as a triangle, where knowledge is constantly working towards a defined point, but is dependent on the base (See Figure 3.2).
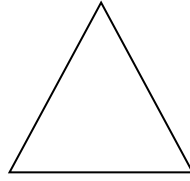
Figure 3.2. *Hierarchical knowledge structure (Bernstein,1999:162)*

Horizontal knowledge structures, on the other hand, are "[a] series of specialised languages with specialised modes of questioning and specialised criteria of production and circulation of texts" (Bernstein, 1999:162), such as English, Philosophy or Sociology. The languages that make up horizontal knowledge structures can be transmitted *explicitly* through "a pedagogy which makes explicit (or attempts to make explicit) the principles, procedures and texts to be acquired" (Bernstein, 1999:168), usually the natural and physical sciences, or *tacitly* where "showing or modelling precedes 'doing'" (Bernstein, 1999:168), typified by the social sciences and the humanities. Horizontal knowledge structures can be represented heuristically as follows:

$$L^1 \quad L^2 \quad L^3 \quad L^4 \quad L^5... \quad L^n$$
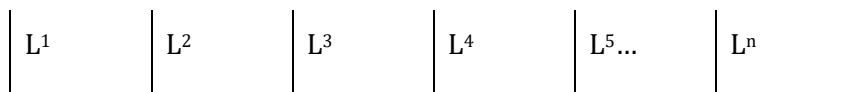
Figure 3.3. *Horizontal knowledge structure (Bernstein, 1999:162)*

Horizontal knowledge structures can be subdivided into *strong and weak grammars*. In this context, 'grammar' refers to "their capacity to generate unambiguous empirical referents" (Maton, 2010:155); these grammars may be 'strong' or 'weak' relative to one another within horizontal knowledge structures (Bernstein, 1999:164). Stronger grammars therefore mean that the languages that make up the horizontal knowledge structure "have an explicit conceptual syntax capable of relatively precise empirical descriptions and/or of generating formal modelling of empirical relations" (Bernstein, 1999:164). Horizontal knowledge structures with stronger grammars can thus "provide relatively unambiguous definitions of empirical phenomena and empirical relations under study" (Liu, 2011:116), such as economics and linguistics. Weaker grammars, on the other hand, lack the relative empirical preciseness of stronger grammars and are less capable of providing certain definitions of empirical phenomena. Examples of horizontal knowledge structures with weak grammars include sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. With strong grammars when one moves from one

theory to the next, it is merely an extension of that language; this means that the acquirer does not have the problem of knowing whether she is speaking the language of the knoweldge structure, "only the problem of correct usage" (Bernstein, 1999:164). With weak grammars, on the other hand, when one moves from one theory to another, one is moving from one language to another and the acquirer may become anxious as to whether she is speaking the language of the discipline.

Based on this view of knowledge, we can perceive English Studies[12] as a horizontal knowledge structure, with a weaker grammar (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007:157). This means that what counts as knowledge in English is not necessarily expliticly transmitted or acquired. According to Christie and Macken-Horarik (2007:157) "[a] powerful invisible pedagogy often applies [in English] such that what is evaluated as [a] success is tacitly understood, rather than clearly articulated". For students, this would mean that English Studies is not a study-subject, as there is nothing tangible to study. Assessments (such as essays, tests and examinations), for instance, generally do not require students to merely repeat facts about a text, such as characters' names and relations to one another or events in the story. Instead, assessments require students to interpret the underlying themes and metaphors in the text, to consider how meaning is created, and to build literary critiques and arguments. Therefore, instead of being a study-able subject, learning in English Studies is about cultivating the necessary skills to think about and engage with texts. These skills are often both tacitly conveyed to students and tacitly acquired by students through class activities aimed at developing their close analysis and (to a greater, more personalized extent) the repeated essay writing process of which feedback is an integral part.

Moreover, as a discipline, English Studies exemplifies Bernstein's idea of a horizontal knowledge structure, as it entails various segmented languages. Chick (2009:39), for instance, points out that literary studies consists of various areas of specialisation; these may be categorised according to nationality or geography (such as British Literature, American Literature, or South African Literature), chronology (such as Renaissance Literature, Victorian Studies, or Romanticism), politics (such as Post-colonial Literature, or anti-apartheid Literature) or perspective or theory (such as feminist or Marxist literature). Each of these subcategories are "the specialized languages of criticism" (Bernstein, 1999:162) that make up knowledge in English Studies. These languages do not extend or subsume one another; instead, knowledge is built by creating new languages. For instance, an English scholar may become proficient in one

---

[12]English Studies is a literature course which focuses on how texts are situated contextually (both historically and spatially) and, at undergraduate level, aims to introduce students "to the full spectrum of literature written in English … and [to] a wide range of different genres, such as poetry, novels, theatre, film and various media texts" (Department of English Student Handbook, n.d.: 4) (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2 for a more detailed overview of English Studies).

particular language of critical analysis – Victorian studies – without having to become proficient in any other language. Simultaneously, the scholar could create an additional language of analysis, such as feminist Victorian studies or speculative feminist Victorian studies, which is introduced as a new language of its own, with its own, new set of conventions and rules, even as there is some overlapping between the various languages. This is because English Studies, as a horizontal knowledge structure, segmented into specialised languages, does not build itself by subsuming and extending existing languages, but rather by adding new speakers and new languages. What it thus needs is new speakers, thinkers and writers of a language in order to build knowledge in the discipline.

However, it is not enough to merely learn (one of) the language(s) of English Studies. This is because underpinning these various languages is the discourse of English. This discourse refers to students inhabiting a specific ontological space in becoming successful participants in the discipline. Cromwell (2005:78, 80), for instance, points out that "students who study literature [have to] learn to think and feel in unique ways"; they have to develop a "literature mind-set". One of the ways of being that characterises English Studies is an open-minded critical curiosity - students have to constantly look beyond the text to see what lies below the surface, to look at how meaning is created and how that meaning is connected to other texts and the broader social, political or cultural context the text is situated in. Cromwell (2005:79) indicates that

> [s]tudents who study literature can learn to think in ways that allow them to enjoy the imaginative qualities of literature, write and speak about the work from a variety of critical perspectives, and feel confident that their responses are based on the relationship between their unique reading experience and the more systematic world of critical reading.

A student who has managed to access the discourse will thus not merely repeat the plot in their essay, but will present a critical engagement with the text that explores how the various parts of the text, and the social, cultural and/or political issues that the text addresses, are linked. We can therefore heuristically represent knowledge in English in the following manner:

Languages of English

L^1 $\quad$ L^2 $\quad$ L^3 $\quad$ L^4 $\quad$ L^5 $\quad$ L^n

discourse of English
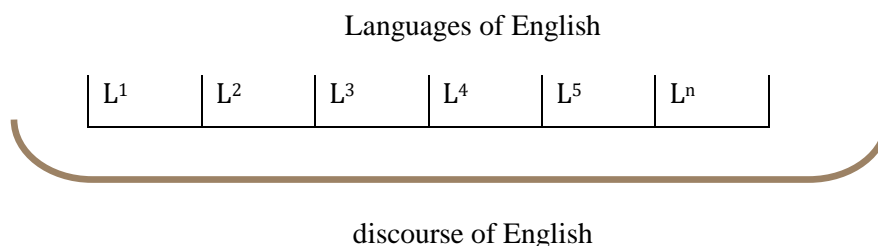
Figure 3.4. Visual representation of knowledge in English Studies

Success in English Studies thus means not only 'learning the languages', such as feminism, post-colonialism, and Romanticism, but also accessing the discourse of English, a process that feedback, particularly, needs to facilitate. This process is especially complex in the South African educational context where there is dissonance between high school subject English and higher education English Studies. At high school level, students are required to reproduce knowledge – information about the text – whereas at tertiary level, students are required to produce knowledge – synthesizing ideas about and interpreting the text. As Kapp (2006:48) points out, students have to move from "rote-learning mode" in high school to "engaging in close analysis of texts and in analysing and synthesising multiple points of view" in university. The feedback given has to facilitate this mental shift in students' relation to knowledge about a text in order for them to become successful readers, thinkers and writers in the discipline.

3.2.2 PEDAGOGIC DEVICE

Feedback, of course, is not an isolated practice but is largely informed by the pedagogical practices undertaken by the department and the various course coordinators. As mentioned above, the difference between knowledge reproduction pedagogies in high school and knowledge production pedagogies in higher education means that the feedback practices will be determined accordingly; consequently, high school feedback tends to be more corrective whereas higher education feedback aims to be more developmental. It is thus important to consider how disciplinary pedagogies, in general, are constructed, as these will determine the pedagogic purpose of feedback.

To do so, Bernstein proposes a pedagogic discourse that consists of instructional and regulative discourses. Instructional discourses refer to the "selection, sequence, pacing and criteria of the knowledge" (Bernstein, 2000:13); for English Studies, this may mean determining how much time should be spent on discussing the context of a text, before moving on to examining how context and content link up. Regulative discourses, on the other hand, relate to the "moral discourse which creates [social] order, relations and identity" (Bernstein, 2000:32). The instructional discourse, which is embedded in and regulated by the regulative discourse, can be seen as the field of reproduction, where what is produced in the regulative discourse is reproduced in pedagogic terms (Bernstein, 2000:32). For English Studies, this would mean that the academic research field of literary analysis – where new knowledge about literature is created through adopting and applying various languages to texts – is filtered through to a seemingly accessible level for students in order for them, in turn, to become academic

producers of knowledge; to become new speakers, thinkers and writers of a segmented language of the discipline.

The pedagogic discourse shapes the pedagogic practices of a particular subject, field and discipline. Yet, it is important to remember that pedagogy is not ideologically free. To explain the creation of pedagogic practices, Bernstein developed the pedagogic device, which consists of three sets of rules: distributive, recontextualising and evaluative rules (see Figure 3.5 below). In-between these rules are what Bernstein calls discursive gaps; it is in these discursive gaps, as I shall explain further on, that power and ideology come into play in terms of who is setting up what counts as legitimate knowledge or ways of knowing.

Field of Production	Discursive gap	Field of Recontextualisation	Discursive gap	Field of Reproduction
• Has to do with creation		• Has to do with transmission		• Has to do with acquisition
• Where new knowledge is produced		• Where knowledge is refocused, relocated, recontextualised		• Where teaching and learning happens
• Governed by Distributive Rules		• Governed by Recontextualising rules		• Governed by Evaluative Rules
• Is found in research papers, conferences, laboratories		• Is found in curriculum policy, textbooks, learning aids		• Is found in class rooms, examinations, assignments

(Compiled from Bernstein (2000) and Maton and Muller (2007))

Figure 3.5. *The Pedagogic Device*

The first set of rules is distributive. The function of distributive rules "is to regulate the relationships between power, social groups, forms of consciousness and practice" (Bernstein, 2000:28). The distributive rules thus determine who may transmit knowledge to whom and what the conditions of this transmission are (Bernstein, 2000:31). The distributive rules govern the Field of Production, where new knowledge is produced.

The next set of rules is recontextualising rules, which "regulate the formation of specific pedagogic discourse" (Bernstein, 2000:28). That is, this is where a 'real' discourse, for example carpentry, is transformed into an 'imaginary' discourse, for example, Woodwork, for pedagogic

purposes. The recontextualising rules govern the Field of Recontextualisation, where knowledge is adapted into curriculum.

Finally, there are evaluative rules, which "constitute any pedagogic practice" (Bernstein, 2000:28). Feedback, as part of the pedagogic practice, is located here, as a natural and necessary part of assessment, development, and teaching and learning. The evaluative rules govern the Field of Reproduction, where teaching and learning take place. The present study is situated in the Field of Reproduction, as it takes the curriculum as is, and examines how this translates into pedagogic practices, and specifically feedback practices as a form of pedagogy.

Moving between the different fields within the pedagogic device requires moving across or through what Bernstein (2000:30) calls the "discursive gap" (see Figure 3.5), where ideology and power are at play. According to Bernstein (2000:30)

> this gap or space can become (not always) a site for alternative possibilities, for alternative realisations of the relation between the material and the immaterial ... [and] can change the relation between the material and the immaterial ... This gap will always be regulated ... Any distribution of power will regulate the potential for this gap in its own interest, because the gap itself has the possibility of an alternative order, an alternative society, and an alternative power relation.

This means that the discursive gap is determined or mediated by ideologies, which determine what moves from distributive (real) to recontextualised to evaluative (taught), leading to a transformation of knowledge (Bernstein, 2000:32). This is ultimately why Bernstein shows that pedagogic practices do not exist in isolation; they are contextually and ideologically determined.

Feedback, as a pedagogically situated practice, often conveys ideologies to students, as it is a way for tutors to communicate their own ideologies, as situated within and formed by other pedagogic ideologies that they have internalised themselves about what they find acceptable or not. These ideologies may range from relatively pedantic to epistemological. As an example of a pedagogic ideology, a tutor may insist that students not start a sentence with the word 'however'. Although there is no need for this grammatically, it does show how the tutor has invoked her own internalised notion of correct English. The fact that this is being presented to the student as a fact, instead of a stylistic preference, is problematic, as students have to follow this seemingly arbitrary rule without being given room for disagreement. Epistemological ideologies, on the other hand, might focus on using feedback to guide students into interpreting a text in particular, recognised ways (Chick, 2009).

Using the pedagogic device to consider how pedagogies and curricula are ideologically constructed allows us to visualise, in critical realist terms, the interplay between the real, the actual and the empirical in academic contexts. As my study is in essence interested in what

emerges from the real and how that manifests in events and experiences, I now turn to Legitimation Code Theory, as it provides a useful framework for not only visualizing and conceptualising knowledge in a discipline, but also analytical tools for deciphering disciplinary practices and pedagogies.

3.3 LEGITIMATION CODE THEORY (LCT)

Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) is a social realist framework that integrates and extends much of Bernstein's work (Maton, 2011; Maton, 2016a). Social realism draws on the philosophical approach of critical realism and uses it as a framework to understand knowledge (Maton & Moore, 2010; Clarence, 2014). Social realism sees knowledge as both a rational objective fact; that is "we do actually have knowledge" (Maton & Moore, 2010:2), and as a social phenomenon; that is "it is something that people do in socio-historical contexts" (Maton & Moore, 2010:2). Social realism thus sees knowledge as something that emerges from a particular context but is not reducible to that context (Maton & Moore, 2010). As with critical realism, broadly speaking, and Bernstein, specifically, social realism focuses on knowledge as 'real'; that is, something that simultaneously shapes the world and is shaped by the world.

LCT, as an explanatory framework that is situated within social realism, conceptualises the organising principles of disciplines to indicate what counts as legitimate knowledge, who count as legitimate knowers, and how knowledge is built. LCT provides a multi-dimensional 'toolkit' of concepts that enables us to visualise how the underlying mechanisms of the real organise or determine events and experiences; it allows us thus to delve into what lies beneath, for instance, curricula and to consider how these manifest in pedagogical practices (Maton, 2014a). This then provides a useful framework for situating feedback within pedagogic practices.

The LCT toolkit – the Legitimation Device – comprises 5 dimensions, namely Autonomy, Density, Specialisation, Semantics, and Temporality (see Figure 3.6). Each dimension consists of two legitimation codes, which are brought about by the interaction between, and relative strengths of, the code modalities (Maton, 2016a). For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the dimensions of Specialisation and Semantics. Specialisation is concerned with accessing the social/symbolic order, that is, to consider what is legitimated or privileged in a discipline and why. Semantics is focused on meaning, that is, if one knows what is legitimated/privileged in a discipline (via Specialisation) then Semantics focuses on how one conveys that meaning to students (Maton, 2014a). Specialisation and Semantics are thus useful to look at what is

privileged in English Studies (via Specialisation) and how (or whether) that is being conveyed through pedagogic practices such as feedback (via Semantics). Using these two dimensions together enables one to look at the problem being studied – feedback – through two complementary lenses.

Dimension	Legitimation Codes	Code modalities
Autonomy	Positional autonomy, relational autonomy	PA+/-, RA+/-
Density	Material density, moral density	MaD +/-, MoD +/-
Specialisation	Epistemic relations, social relations	ER +/-, SR +/-
Semantics	Semantic gravity, semantic density	SG +/-, SD +/-
Temporality	Temporal position, temporal orientation	TP+/-, TO+/-

Figure 3.6. *Basic summary of the Legitimation Device (Maton, 2016a)*

3.3.1 SPECIALISATION

The LCT dimension of Specialisation focuses on "what makes someone or something different, special and worthy of distinction" (Maton, 2010:44). Specialisation therefore focuses on conceptualising the underlying organising principles of a discipline and, in doing so, reveals one dimension of legitimacy – the social/symbolic – that is, what counts as legitimate knowledge and who is valued as a legitimate knower in a particular discipline. Three parts of Specialisation have been included in my thesis, namely Specialisation codes, knowledge-knower structures, and gazes. These three 'tools' assist with conceptualising English Studies in order to make the hidden nature of English Studies (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007:157) more visible which, in turn, can guide the pedagogic purpose and practice of feedback.

3.3.1.1 SPECIALISATION CODES

Specialisation codes are underlined by the "simple premise that practices and beliefs are about or oriented towards something and by someone. They thus involve relations to objects and to subjects" (Maton, 2014a:29). We can therefore distinguish between epistemic relations and social relations respectively. Epistemic relations (ER) refer to what can be studied in a discipline and therefore focus on "*what* can be legitimately described as knowledge" in a

discipline (Maton, 2014a:29; emphasis in the original). Social relations (SR), on the other hand, focus on "*who* can claim to be a legitimate knower" in the discipline (Maton, 2014a:29; emphasis in the original). The emphasis is not so much on what can be studied, but on who is doing the studying. Social relations therefore refer to the required and valued aptitudes, attitudes, and dispositions that students should possess.

The relative strengths and weaknesses of ER and SR are indicated by using + or - signs. For example, ER- means that the discipline is characterised by weaker epistemic relations, while SR+ denotes stronger social relations. It is, however, important to remember that disciplines always have epistemic relations and social relations, although it is rare for both to be given equal priority in a discipline. One is usually weaker or stronger in relation to the other.

Social relations and epistemic relations can be traced together (or separately) in varying combinations along a continuum of strengths and weaknesses. These continua can be visualised as the axes of a Cartesian plane, with ER denoting the y-axis and SR the x-axis. Combining the strengths and weaknesses of ER and SR along these axes enables us to create four principle modalities, namely the specialisation codes (Maton, 2014a) (see Figure 3.7).
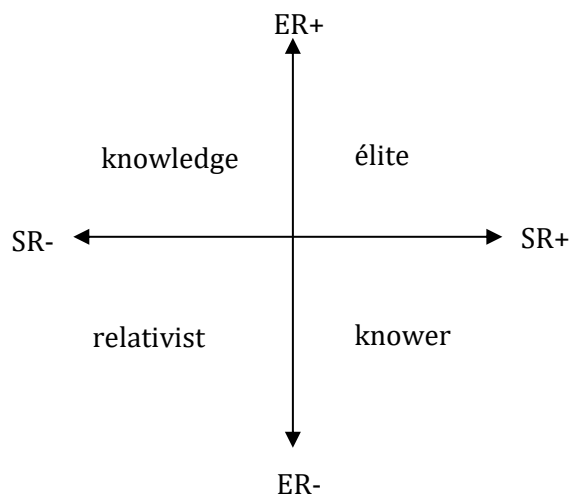
Figure 3.7. *Specialisation codes (Maton, 2016a: 12)*

There are four specialisation codes that emerge from the varying relationships between epistemic and social relations, namely: knowledge codes, knower codes, élite codes and relativist codes.

Knowledge codes (ER+, SR-) for instance emphasise the importance of acquiring specialised knowledge. A discipline with a knowledge code will thus privilege knowledge (as an

object) over dispositions or attributes. An example of a knowledge code is the natural sciences, where the emphasis is on obtaining knowledge about the physical world (Maton, 2014a:30).

Knower codes (ER-, SR+), on the other hand, place emphasis on the necessary attributes or dispositions that students need to acquire. It is thus less about obtaining factual knowledge, and more about developing a kind of knower. An example of a knower code is English Studies, as the emphasis is on developing the necessary critical curiosity about texts within specific contexts, rather than on having knowledge about particular text characteristics or 'forms' (Maton, 2014a:30-31).

Élite codes (ER+, SR+) privilege both "possessing specialist knowledge and being the right kind of knower" (Maton, 2014a:31). An example of an élite code is Music, as the emphasis is not only on having technical knowledge about making music itself, but also on having the necessary temperament and talent to excel at it (Maton, 2014a:31).

Lastly, there are *relativist codes* (ER-, SR-). These privilege neither "specialist knowledge nor knower attributes" (Maton, 2014a:31). An example of a relativist code could be an academic literacy skills course that focuses on teaching students generic writing and literacy skills that are applicable in most contexts; it thus would not focus on orienting students towards specific knowledge or specific knowerness within a particular disciplinary context.

English Studies may be seen as a knower code, as the epistemic relations are weaker relative to the social relations (Maton, 2007; Jackson, 2016; Christie, 2016). Knower codes base "claims on a legitimate kind of knower. This knower may claim unique knowledge of more than a delimited object of study" (Maton, 2014a:32) and "the procedures of enquiry and criteria of validation prevalent within the field are thereby not deemed appropriate/inappropriate according to a defined object of study … and are thus relatively tacit" (Maton, 2014a:32). In English Studies, although there might be an objective knowledge that students need, this is not what is privileged in the discipline. Cromwell (2005), for instance, points out that although it is important for students to have knowledge of the English Literary canon, this knowledge is not in itself what is important. It is far more important for students to adopt the "literature mind-set" (Cromwell, 2005:80) than to merely have all the facts of the text. Knowing, for example, that *Macbeth* was written by William Shakespeare and is about the tragic downfall of its central character, is less important than having the ability to consider, through close reading, what lead to Macbeth's downfall, to look beyond the factual information of the text and to engage with the moral and existential questions the play poses about human agency and free will. It is thus more about the aptitudes, attitudes and dispositions that students need to possess than about a set body of knowledge that has to be studied. This 'literature mind-set' needs to be mediated and developed, in significant part, through feedback, as it is through feedback that students may be

59

mediated into the Discourse. In English Studies, the aim therefore is to create knowers in the discipline. It is thus not about transmitting knowledge as a study-able concept, but about cultivating knower-ness in order to enable the creation of new speakers, new ideas and new approaches to the field. This may have to be facilitated largely through feedback.

The central role of feedback in creating knowers in English Studies is linked to its role in essay writing. In English Studies, as in many other disciplines in higher education, the dominant mode of assessment is essays (see Chapter 2), and it is through their essays that students may show their developing knowerness. As determined by "practice wisdom[13]" (Bamber & Stefani, 2016:248), there are three essential parts to the English Studies essay: content knowledge, knowledge about the conventions of essay structuring, and the analysis (see Figure 3.8 below).
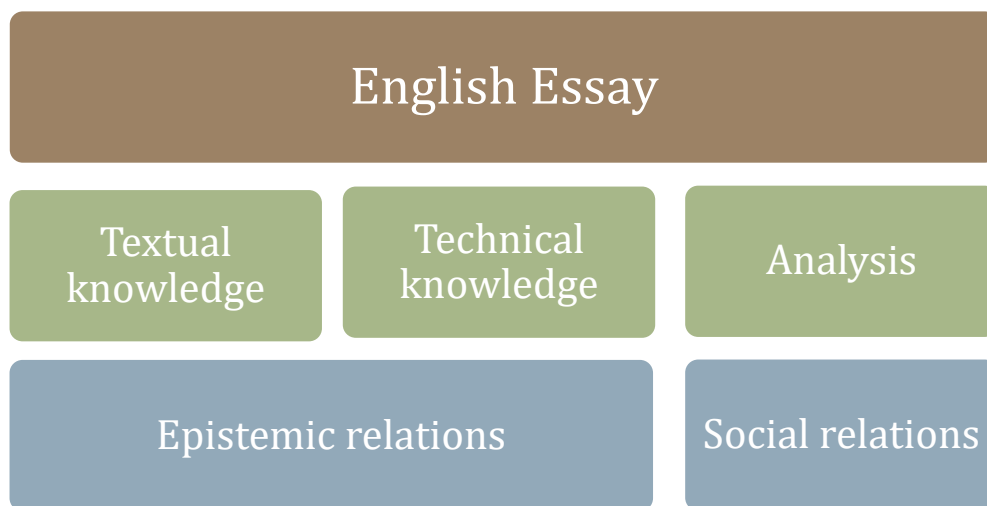
Figure 3.8. *Components of an English Studies essay*

In Specialisation terms, content knowledge (or textual knowledge) and the conventions of essay structuring (or technical knowledge) comprise epistemic relations as they refer to the specific 'knowledges' that a student must possess. The analysis aspect of the essay refers to the social relations, as the analysis aspect reflects those attributes that are at the core of the discipline, namely critical curiosity and independent thinking, a 'literature mindset'. Although Figure 3.8 may make it seem like the epistemic relations is more important, the analytical aspect of the essay, and what it represents, is far more important than the textual knowledge or the technical knowledge. A student may have a technically proficient essay or may reproduce an

[13] According to Bamber and Stefani (2016:248) practice wisdom is "the knowledge, often tacit, which we draw on when we make professional decisions, often developed in the workplace". Practice wisdom is acquired "through practice and interaction with others in our field, through experience and non-formal learning".

abundance of facts about the text, but what is valued is the student's ability to think creatively, independently and analytically about the text.

The knowledge-knower structures of Specialisation enable a deeper understanding of the kinds of knowers necessary for success in horizontal knowledge structure, and for that reason, I turn to 'knowledge and knower structures'.

3.3.1.2 KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWER STRUCTURES

Maton (2014a:91) developed Bernstein's concept of knowledge structures further by including 'knower structures', because "social fields comprise more than formation of knowledge; they also comprise formations of knowers". Using knower structures along with specialisation codes to reveal the organizing principles of English Studies, brings together "analyses of intellectual and educational practices, and they contribute towards a fuller and more integrated approach to education" (Maton, 2014a:67).

As with Bernstein's knowledge structures, knower structures may also be divided into two sub-structures, namely horizontal knower structures and hierarchical knower structures.

Horizontal knower structures consist of a segmented "series of strongly bounded knowers, each with specialized modes of being and acting with non-comparable dispositions based on different trajectories and experiences" (Maton, 2014a:91), and can be heuristically represented as follows:

$$K^1 \quad K^2 \quad K^3 \quad K^4 \quad K^5... \quad K^n$$
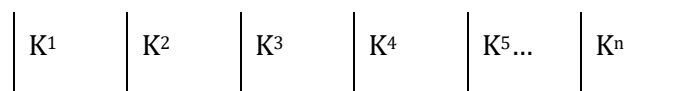
Figure 3.9. *Horizontal knower structure (Maton, 2014a:92)*

Hierarchical knower structures, on the other hand, have a "hierarchical organization of knowers based on an ideal knower and which develops through the integration of new knowers at lower levels and across and expanding range of different dispositions" (Maton, 2014a: 92) and may be visualised thus:
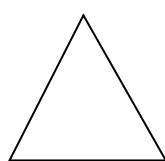
Figure 3.10. *Hierarchical knower structure (Maton, 2014a:92)*

The humanities and social sciences subjects are considered to have hierarchical knower structures, as these tend to place "less emphasis on principles or procedures and more on aptitudes, attitudes and dispositions" (Maton, 2014a:92). Knowers are integrated through developing a particular, socialised way of seeing the world and acting within it; by adopting a 'gaze' (Bernstein, 1999). English Studies, as a humanities subject, has traditionally had a very tacit, but rather powerful 'ideal knower' as its goal – namely the "English Scholar" (Cromwell, 2005:95) – in terms of the aptitude, disposition and character that a student should possess. Christie (1999:173), for instance, points out that English Studies "seek to develop pedagogic subjects who take up particular values and adopt particular perspectives upon human activity". This ideal knower tends to be constructed by tutors based on their own internalised understanding of what this knower entails. Tutors' perceptions of the aptitudes, attitudes and dispositions that the 'ideal knower' has to possess may then be filtered through the feedback that students are given in order to create new knowers.

3.3.1.2 *GAZES*

Part of becoming a recognised knower in an academic field means adopting a particular gaze. According to Bernstein (1999:165), in a horizontal knowledge structure, the acquirer needs to acquire a 'gaze'. This gaze is "a particular mode of recognising and realising what counts as an 'authentic' sociological reality" (Bernstein, 1999:165). In order for a student to 'know' a student needs to 'gaze'. However, this gaze is tacitly transmitted and acquired and is dependent on being "inside the specialised language" and experiencing "a social interactional relationship with those who possess the 'gaze'" (Bernstein, 1999:165). Maton (2014a:95) develops the idea of the gaze further and distinguishes between four gazes: born, social, cultivated, and trained. They can be viewed on a continuum from stronger social relations to weaker social relations as follows:
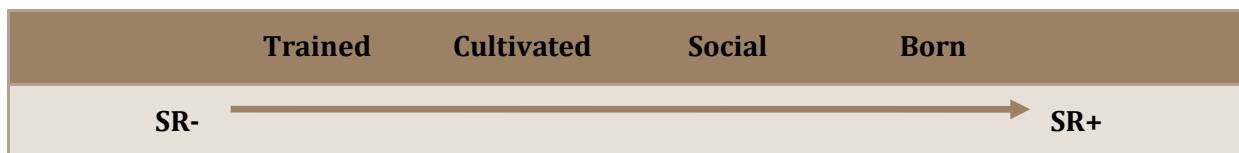
Figure 3.11. *Continuum of gazes (Maton, 2014a: 95)*

The stronger the social relations the more highly restricted membership is. The born gaze, as the gaze with the strongest social relations, is perhaps the most difficult to attain. If, for

instance, you are not born with a natural talent for music or art, then it is difficult to obtain (Maton, 2014a:95). Allowing for slightly less restricted membership, the social gaze restricts legitimacy to pre-existing social categories that may be difficult to join, for example black lesbian writers and white middle-class male writers (Maton, 2014a:95). The cultivated gaze, on the other hand, offers the possibility of attaining legitimacy through prolonged immersion in a way of being, seeing or acting, for example the humanities and social sciences (Maton, 2014a:95). Lastly, Maton identifies the trained gaze. This gaze proclaims openness to anyone willing to be trained in specialized principles or procedures, for example, physics (Maton, 2014a:95).

In order for students to become successful knowers in English Studies, they need to develop a cultivated gaze – it is thus not impossible for students to attain knower-ship of the subject, but it does, as Maton's postulation suggests, take time. Luckett and Hunma (2014:195), for instance, point out that the English Studies gaze is cultivated through "prolonged apprenticeship and immersion in the discipline". As cultivating the necessary gaze may take time, there are two aspects that need to be considered, especially at first year level (which is the year of study that this study focuses on; see Chapter 4). Firstly, it needs to be considered that there is the possibility that cultivating the gaze may be easier for those students who have already partially cultivated the gaze through their previous schooling or home contexts. Maton (2014c:192), for instance, points out that "the ability to move between concrete, simpler meanings and abstract, generalized and complex meanings is associated more with socialisation practices in cultural middle-class families than those of working class families". This is especially problematic in the South African higher education context, where the apartheid legacy of education inequality still prevails. If cultivating the gaze is easier for those students who have already been partially exposed to it, then it might re-enforce educational inequities, thereby problematising epistemological access at undergraduate level, and especially first year.

Secondly, it must be considered what the lengthy cultivation of the gaze would mean for pedagogic practices and approaches at first-year level. This would mean considering whether students can in fact cultivate the necessary gaze within a year's time or whether the more realistic expectation would be to lay a solid foundation for cultivating the gaze by the end of the year. This may suggest a (re)consideration of what students need to have achieved at the end of their first year in relation to accessing the discourse of the discipline. If part of tutors' frustration stems from the fact that students do not seem to learn from feedback (or at least, not in the way the tutors intended), it might be necessary to keep in mind that students will not cultivate the gaze after the first essay, or even the sixth, even if they do come from schools that are more aligned with higher education practices. Jacobs (2013:132) points out that "the

development of academic literacies is not something that should be confined to the first year"; the same can be said for developing a gaze. As with most academic practices that become naturalised over time, tutors gradually cultivated the gaze; it might therefore be difficult for them to remember that this is a lengthy process, which might unfairly influence their view of student writing. They might thus further the educational inequity gap through their written feedback as they might inadvertently advantage those students who are predisposed to or have partially acquired the gaze already by rewarding their writing with higher marks, while being hard on students who are unable to fully realise the discourse or gaze in their writing.

Developing the necessary gaze in English Studies can thus be quite challenging. Macken-Horarik (2011:21), for instance, argues that if English Studies is a knower code, that might mean that "the possibilities for making knowledge more visible are limited". This is especially the case in English Studies, in which mastering the subject is seemingly limited to a select few students, as "the nature of English is increasingly elusive, its mastery not available to many students" (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007: 157). Students might thus start perceiving English Studies as needing a born gaze, which means that they might feel excluded from the discipline by virtue of their not having the necessary 'talent' because the discipline is only accessible to those students who already partially possess the necessary gaze or to those students who are predisposed to acquiring it with less difficulty.

Moreover, if students are getting written feedback that predominantly focuses on correcting language and grammar errors – which might mean that students are told to focus on developing more of a knowledge-y code – then there might be a code mismatch between the message that written feedback conveys about what is necessary for success (knowledge code), and what they actually need for success (knower code). For instance, tutors may often pose questions to students through feedback ('What is the significance of [x]?', 'Why does a character do [something]?'). These questions are meant to help students think more critically about what they have written in order for them to develop the necessary metacognitive and critical awareness to ask the same types of questions next time; this may enable them to develop the necessary critical curiosity to look beneath the surface of what they have read and written. Students, however, may interpret these questions not as knower-based, but knowledge-based; that is, they might not necessarily see these questions as a tool to develop a necessary skill or disposition, but as a way for the tutor to tell them that they have not included all the facts. The knower-based feedback then appears almost knowledge-based, which would give students the wrong information about what is important for success in the discipline. This then would create another type of code mismatch between what the tutor intends to achieve with the feedback and how the student receives the feedback.

This points to an important distinction between the *focus* and *basis* of practices: the *focus* refers to "what practices concern" (Maton, 2016b:239), and the *basis*, refers to the underpinning legitimacy of practices (Maton, 2016b). In relation to feedback, the *focus* refers to what the comment says, while the *basis* refers to what the comment is trying to achieve. A perceived mismatch between the *focus* and the *basis* of feedback comments may mislead students about what is valued in the discipline. In English Studies, the knower code forms the *basis* of the discipline. Ideally, the feedback given should predominantly and/or progressively be underlined by the knower code *basis*. It is therefore important to consider not only what kind of knowledge is privileged in the discipline, but also how that knowledge is built, transmitted and acquired. To conceptualise this process of knowledge building as meaning making, I turn to Semantics.

3.3.2 SEMANTICS

While the LCT dimension of Specialisation focuses on conceptualising what counts in a discipline, the dimension of Semantics focuses on how to make that code more visible, and thus accessible, to students. If the code is not made visible, students may never fully access the discourse and code or acquire the necessary gaze. They may therefore be excluded from equitable epistemological access in higher education, which, in turn, has broader socio-economic implications.

Semantics conceptualises how learning takes place in a discipline. Maton distinguishes between cumulative learning "where new knowledge builds on and integrates past knowledge" (Maton, 2009:43) and segmented learning, where "students learn a series of ideas or skills that are strongly tied to their contexts of acquisition" which makes "transfer and knowledge building" difficult (Maton, 2009:43). Cumulative learning is the preferred form, as it is "central to the aim of lifelong learning in higher education" (Maton, 2014a:166); however, segmented learning appears to be the more dominant form of learning. Segmentalism is "when knowledge is so strongly tied to its context that it is only meaningful within that context" (Maton, 2014a:106); in other words, it means that new ideas and skills cannot integrate with existing knowledge. This might mean that although students do learn, they might not be learning in the desired or relevant ways; students might be more focused on learning for a specific goal, such as a test, than on life-long, cumulative learning.

One of the reasons for this is due to a possible code mismatch that takes place between what students need to acquire and what is made visible to them. In other words, cumulative learning is hampered by, for instance, using knowledge code means to achieve knower code

outcomes (Maton, 2009:54). In English Studies, for instance, this might mean giving students knowledge code information about what is important (such as focusing on essay structure or content knowledge) instead of giving them knower code information (facilitating the development of critical curiosity) that they need to cultivate the necessary gaze and access the disciplinary code. In order to trace how (and whether) learning takes place, to consider how (or whether) the applicable code is being made visible to students, we can use LCT's dimension of Semantics as this provides a toolkit for examining how knowledge is built and in what ways.

The dimension of Semantics consists of two legitimation codes, namely semantic gravity (SG) and semantic density (SD). Semantic gravity, on the one hand, refers to the context dependence or independence of meanings (Maton, 2013). Stronger semantic gravity (SG+) for instance indicates that meaning is strongly bound to its context whereas weaker semantic gravity (SG-) indicates meanings that are less bound to their context. It is thus possible to trace meaning along "a continuum of strengths with infinite capacity for gradation" (Szenes, Tilakaratna & Maton, 2015:577). This is why we can also distinguish between strengthening semantic gravity (SG↑) , "such as moving from abstract or generalized ideas toward concrete and delimited cases" and weakening semantic gravity (SG↓), which moves "from the concrete particulars of a specific case towards generalizations and abstraction" (Szenes, Tilakaratna & Maton, 2015:577). In relation to feedback, semantic gravity refers to whether feedback is only useful in the context of the particular essay or prescribed text, or whether it feeds forward into future assignments. Feedback should therefore not be too context-dependent (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Lillis, 2003; Duncan, 2007), as this may make it difficult for students to learn from the comment and apply it to future assignments.

Semantic density (SD), on the other hand, refers to "the degree of condensation of meaning within socio-cultural practices, whether these comprise symbols, terms, concepts, phrases, expressions, gestures, clothing, etc." (Maton, 2013:11). As with semantic gravity, it is possible to trace semantic density along a continuum, so that we have weaker semantic density (SD-) – where meanings are less condensed – and stronger semantic density (SD+) – where meanings are more condensed within practices (Maton, 2013). As with semantic gravity, it is also possible to distinguish between strengthening semantic density (SD↑) and weakening semantic density (SD↓). Semantic density is strengthened when "moving from a practice or symbol that denotes a small number of meanings towards one that implicates a greater range" (Maton, 2014a:130), while semantic density is weakened when "moving from a highly condensed practice or symbol to one that involves fewer meanings" (Maton, 2014a:130).

In feedback, semantic density refers to how many actions are implied in a comment. For instance, a comment that only requires replacing an incorrect word with the corrected word

would be weaker in semantic density (SD-), as there are few actions implied in the comment. A comment that is more complex and requires students to first unpack the comment before she can implement or act on it, would be stronger in semantic density (SD+). The relative strength or weakness in semantic density of comments could influence students' willingness, and ability, to engage with comments. For instance, comments that are too vague or difficult to act on may "discourage interaction" (Deyi, 2011:51). Using Semantics therefore enables us to understand whether feedback merely feeds back or whether it feeds forward into future assignments, so as to make knower development through cultivating the English Studies knower gaze more accessible.

3.3.2.1 SEMANTIC CODES

As with Specialisation, the Semantics dimension can also be visualized as semantic codes. These codes comprise differing combinations of stronger and weaker semantic density and semantic gravity. These can be mapped onto a Cartesian plane to generate four principle modalities, or semantic codes (Maton, 2014a; Maton, 2016a), namely rhizomatic codes, worldly codes, prosaic codes and rarefied codes. (see Figure 3.12 below).
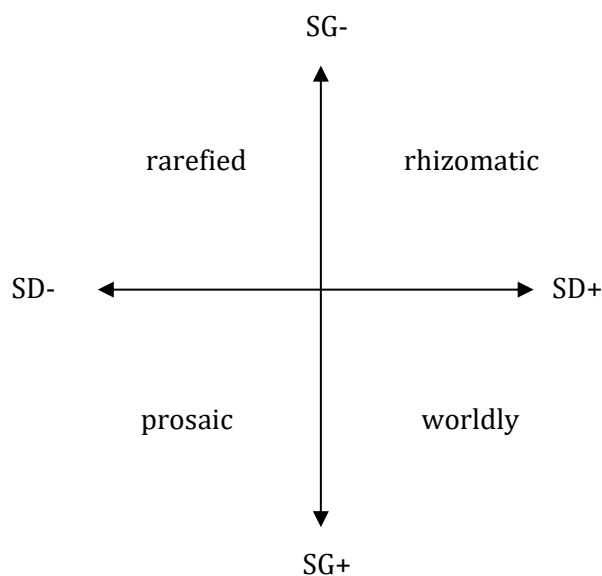
Figure 3.12. Semantic codes (Maton, 2016a: 16)

Rhizomatic codes (SG-, SD+) comprise "relatively context-independent and complex stances" (Maton, 2016a:16). This would mean that the basis of achievement would entail dealing with relatively complex, semantically dense concepts in any context.

Prosaic codes (SG+, SD-) are characterised by "relatively context-dependent and simpler stances" (Maton, 2016a:16). This would for instance entail working with relatively simple concepts in a specific context.

Rarefied codes (SG-, SD-) are characterised by "relatively context-independent stances that condense fewer meanings" (Maton, 2016a:16).

Lastly, *worldly codes* (SG+, SD+) require "relatively context-dependent stances that condense manifold meanings" (Maton, 2016a: 16).

Ultimately, English Studies leans towards a rhizomatic code as students need to be able to lift meaning from specific contexts to more figurative levels (Christie, 2016). Students need to be able to use and engage with a variety of fairly dense concepts, regardless of the context. However, this is not necessarily something that students are expected to do from the get-go, as it may overwhelm and confuse them. Consequently, throughout first year, students need to be guided gradually towards the rhizomatic code. It is through accessing the rhizomatic code that students may indicate their mastery of the knower code. Maton (2014b:117), for instance, points out that students in English Studies need to be able to move from reproducing information from the text to being able to "embrace principles of literary understanding applicable to a wide range of potential texts". If students remain rooted in the context of one prescribed text to the next, without being able to extract the underlying, linked literary principles in order to see the link between various texts, then they may be excluded from the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline. Students' knower development, in terms of Semantics, therefore has to constantly be moving across different semantic codes in order for them to cultivate the necessary gaze.

In the same way that students need to be gradually inducted into a rhizomatic code, feedback should also follow this gradual progression (see Figure 3.13). For instance, initially students may need feedback that is relatively context-dependent (SG+) and relatively easy to implement (SD), suggesting a prosaic code. As students become more familiar with the knower code, feedback should become less context dependent (SG-), but still relatively easy to implement (SD-) to further facilitate students' development of the necessary gaze, suggesting a rarefied code. As students become more confident knowers, feedback should become less context-dependent (SG-), as well as more challenging to implement (SD+) (suggesting a rhizomatic code), as it is through engaging with challenging feedback comments that are not

bound to the particular context of the essay that students may be able to bring more complex meanings into their textual analyses.
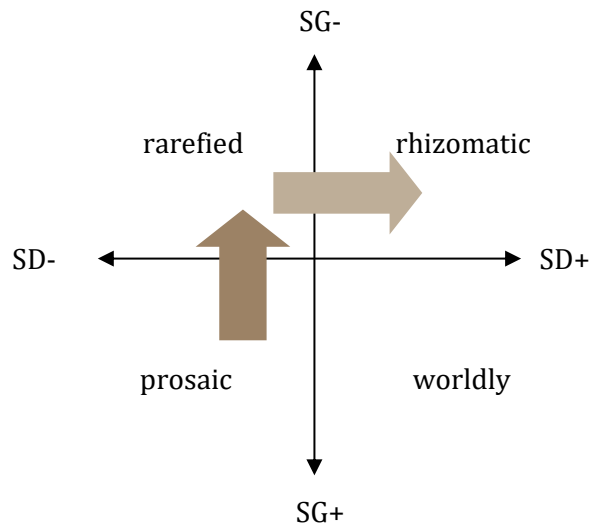
Figure 3.13. *Ideal movement of feedback across the semantic plane*

Feedback, in terms of Semantics, should therefore not remain static – that is feedback that falls into a rhizomatic code is not going to make the rhizomatic code more accessible; feedback has to mirror the gradual building towards a rhizomatic knower code. Feedback that remains, for instance, in a prosaic code may stand the danger of not only being too context-specific (thereby limiting the possibility for feedback to feed*foward* to assist with learning and development). Simultaneously, if feedback remains easily implementable it may also limit students' ability to learn from comments, especially in contexts like English Studies where there are, for the most part[14], no re-drafting opportunities, possibly resulting in an understanding that feedback is only implementable in a particular essay.

3.3.2.2 CODE SHIFTS AND DRIFTS

As the ideal feedback semantic plane indicates, semantic codes (and specialisation codes) are not static and unchanging. Students may for instance experience a code shift where the dominant code of a subject may change, such as between high school and university. These code shifts may "change the 'rules of the game'" (Maton, 2016a:13), which may negatively impact

---

[14] The only essay that requires a draft is the Macbeth essay. This draft, however, is peer reviewed during the tutorial. For the other essays, students have the option of consulting with their tutor ahead of time, but an 'official' draft is not required (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2.1(c)).

students. Maton (2016a:13) for instance points out that code shifts may cause "previously successful actors [to be] unable to continue to achieve the same results". Additionally, students may also have to contend with code drifts, whereby there may be changes within a code, for example, from a stronger knower code to a weaker knower code (Maton, 2016a:13). For the purpose of this study, the knower code *basis* of English Studies at first year level will be seen as relatively stable, while the various code shifts in terms of Semantics have already been acknowledged (see the previous section).

3.4 SUMMARY

In conceptualising English Studies, this Chapter first turned to Bernstein, who provided a useful way of visualising English Studies not as a subject that requires a specific kind of knowledge, but rather a specific kind of knower. LCT enabled the theoretical framework to build on this initial understanding of English Studies. Using the dimension of Specialisation, English Studies may be classified as a knower code. Developing knowers is therefore the implicit goal not only of the discipline, but concurrently of feedback in the discipline. Ideally, feedback should be geared towards enabling knower development through cultivating the necessary gaze. Using the dimension of Semantics, English Studies may further be classified as a rhizomatic code, which indicates how a student may indicate her mastery of the knower code. Feedback should enable students to construct meaning in a rhizomatic code manner by gradually introducing students to the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline.

In Chapter 5, the feedback in the data set (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2.2(c)) will be explored through the lens of Specialisation to understand what the *focus* of feedback in the study is and what the underlying *basis* of the comments are. In so doing, I hope to show whether there is an alignment between the practice of feedback and the hidden purpose of feedback in English Studies. Chapter 6 will build on Chapter 5's analysis, by examining the same data through the lens of Semantics, to understand how feedback in the data set is being given and whether the feedback would enable students to implement the feedback in order for students to cumulatively cultivate the necessary rhizomatic knower code gaze.

However, before moving onto the analytical aspects of the data, the methodological framework will be discussed in Chapter 4, to show how data was collected and analysed. The methodological framework will also indicate how the theoretical framework, as outlined in this chapter, was translated into an analytical framework.

CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 2 provided a contextual framework for this study to indicate how it is situated in relation to other research into feedback and identified the gap that needs to be addressed. Chapter 3 provided the theoretical framework, the lens through which the research problem has been addressed.

This Chapter provides the methodological framework. It starts by restating the research question to reiterate the aim of the study. Thereafter, it discusses the research design and provides a rationale for the qualitative case study approach. Thereafter, the research context is addressed, as well as the research process (including the participant group and the materials used to generate data). Thereafter, ethical considerations and researcher positionality are discussed.

The aim of this Chapter is to provide a detailed description of how the study was conducted, as well as why various decisions were made during this process.

4.1 RESTATING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Drawing on Legitimation Code Theory, specifically, as framed within Critical Realism, this study was concerned with delving beneath the surface of current feedback-giving practices to see how, and whether, these align with the often taken-for-granted pedagogic purpose of the discipline. This study focused specifically on the role that feedback, as a pedagogic practice, plays in creating 'knowers' within a discipline. The research question for this study, which is guided by the contextual (Chapter 2) and theoretical (Chapter 3) frameworks, was as follows:

(How) are tutors using feedback to develop knowers in English Studies?

Framing the question in this way enabled this study to determine whether we are, in fact, cultivating authentic knowers in the discipline and, if so, how this is being done.

To do this, the research was guided by the following sub-questions:

- What are the ideal characteristics that a first year English Studies student should possess?
- What do tutors perceive as the purpose of feedback within the discipline?
- What are tutors saying to students through their written feedback?

- How is feedback being conveyed to students in order to enable cumulative knower building?

The main aim of this study was thus to discover whether current feedback practices in English Studies at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) align with the implicit disciplinary purpose of creating knowers within the discipline; it was therefore about looking at *why* feedback is given in the discipline with the aim of informing necessary changes to, and enhancement of, feedback-giving practices. The aim of the study largely informed the research design.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

As this study was small in scale and intimate in nature, a qualitative case study approach was adopted. Below, I provide a detailed rationale for both the qualitative research and case study approach.

4.2.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

As indicated in Chapter 2, little has been written about the 'why' of feedback, as most studies tend to focus on the 'what' and 'how' of giving (or receiving) written feedback. As such, this study was exploratory in nature. For this reason, a qualitative approach was best suited to the study. Creswell (2014:20), for instance, points out that "if a concept or phenomenon needs to be explored and understood because little research has been done on it, then it merits a qualitative approach". The relatively unexplored nature of why feedback is given in a discipline, as well as a more detailed examination of tutors' role in this process, therefore justified a qualitative approach.

Moreover, as this study examined tutors' thoughts and perceptions on, as well as their motivations for, giving feedback – which are not (easily) quantifiable – a qualitative approach was best suited. Qualitative research tends to focus more on providing depth, detail and illumination to particular phenomena under study (Golafshani, 2003; Clarence, 2014). Qualitative research thus considers phenomena in their natural setting, to provide "rich descriptions of the social world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:11) as it is, and attempts to understand, or interpret, these phenomena based on how people have experienced them. As such, the greatest advantage of qualitative research is that it enables us to examine the opinions, beliefs and emotions of people in a particular setting. Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011:16)

point out that one of the most important objectives of qualitative research is to "gain a detailed understanding of underlying reasons, beliefs and motivations". It is this aspect of qualitative research that enabled this study not only to explore how tutors' hidden (and perhaps unconscious) perceptions on feedback manifest in their feedback-giving practices, but also to bring these perceptions to the surface in order to gain a deeper understanding of how they shape these practices.

However, qualitative research is often considered to be "inferior and weak" (Cibangu, 2012:92), to be less scientifically viable, because it does not strictly adhere to the scientific principles of reliability and validity which are more readily associated with quantitative research. In quantitative research, reliability is seen in the repeatability of the research – how well the results of a particular experiment can be repeated under similar circumstances – and validity refers to the accuracy of results, as well as how effectively an experiment has measured what it set out to measure (Golafshani, 2003). Qualitative research does not, and perhaps need not, adhere to these principles. Especially since quantitative research focuses more on the "causal determination, predication and generalization of results" (Golafshani, 2003:600), whereas qualitative research focuses more on providing "illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar situations" (Golafshani, 2003:600). Qualitative research is thus focused more on experiencing and understanding phenomena in their natural settings than about making predictions about these phenomena and should therefore be evaluated on different principles.

This does not mean that qualitative research is not 'scientific' or not 'scientifically viable'. As quantitative and qualitative research have different underlying goals, they cannot be judged to be valid on the same criteria. Instead, validity and reliability should be reworked as "trustworthiness, rigor and quality" (Golafshani, 2003:604). To best facilitate this, multiple sources of data are needed, which is why this study obtained data from various sources[15] to create a fuller and more detailed description of the case under study.

Thus far I have discussed qualitative and quantitative research as though they are binary opposites and although they are often seen as such, they are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, Flyvbjerg (2006:241) refers to any distinction between qualitative and quantitative research methods as "spurious". For instance, a qualitative study may have quantitative aspects to it, and vice versa; taking a qualitative approach does not mean excluding quantitative methods during data analysis. Discussing them as opposites merely provides a useful platform for illuminating why a qualitative research approach was best suited for this particular study. However, although this study used 'quantitative measures' to represent the data, such as percentages (see

[15]See Section 4.4 for a detailed discussion on the research process.

Chapters 5 and 6), it does not mean the study employed a mixed methods approach. Instead, these percentages were used to "qualitis[e] quantitative data" (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2003) – these percentages helped to enrich the qualitative findings by enabling a greater understanding of "the frequency of an observed phenomenon" (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2003:6).

Another potential disadvantage of qualitative research is that although it provides rich, descriptive data, it is difficult in most cases to make generalizations based on the findings as qualitative research studies are usually small scale in nature. Although this may be valid, the theory used in this study – Critical Realism and Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) – enabled the study to contribute to the field the study is situated in, as there were conceptual connections between this and other similar studies.

Qualitative research is thus more about learning (about) something than about proving something; it is more about understanding phenomena than about predicting them (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 224). It is this ability of qualitative research to look at a phenomenon in its natural setting and to provide illumination on it, to look beneath the surface that made it valuable for this study. The study further used a case study approach.

4.2.2 CASE STUDY APPROACH

The case study is qualitative research's "implicit companion" (Yin, 1981:58), though it can also be used in quantitative research. A case study is the investigation of a particular 'case' – this could be "a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals" (Creswell, 2014:14). The goal with the case study is to conduct an in-depth investigatory analysis of a particular contemporary phenomenon in its natural context (Yin, 1981). In case study research, the boundary between the context and the phenomenon is not clear (Yin, 1981), which means that it has to be investigated (and understood) in that particular context. In this study, the 'case' under investigation was tutors' written feedback comments within a particular university and subject context, and how these comments are tied to their experiences and perceptions of feedback-giving. The participant tutors' experiences, although tied to a specific spatial (UWC's English Department) and temporal (the academic year of 2016) context, were nevertheless a way to explore, and in so doing obtain a greater understanding of tutors' experiences and perceptions of giving feedback outside of, or beyond, the spatial and temporal limitations of this study. This, in turn, may provide a conceptual understanding of feedback-giving practices in similar situations.

An additional advantage of case study research is that it provides "a nuanced view of reality" (Flyvbjerg, 2006:223). This allows the researcher to dig beneath the surface of a

particular phenomenon in order to provide a fuller, more detailed description of this phenomenon to aid in understanding it. This study thus had the opportunity to build a detailed description of how tutors experience giving written feedback in a discipline like English Studies. By building this description, it may allow similar disciplines in the humanities and social sciences to (re)consider how the practice of giving written feedback intersects with tutors' own experiences as knowers, with their training (or lack thereof), and to the tacit pedagogic purpose of a discipline.

On the other hand, one of the biggest criticisms against case study research is that it is not considered to be scientifically valuable, as it is difficult to generalize based on a single case (Flyvbjerg 2006; Punch, 2009; Merriam, 2009). However, Flyvbjerg points out that it is possible to make generalisations based on a single case and that a "purely descriptive" case need not attempt to provide a generalisation in order for it to be valuable (Flyvbjerg, 2006:235). Moreover, the case study allows for the development of something more nuanced than generalisable knowledge, what Thomas (2011:31) calls "exemplary knowledge". Exemplary knowledge refers to "particular representation given in context and understood in that context" (Thomas, 2011:31). Trowler (2011) indicates that the exemplary knowledge "draws its legitimacy from the fact that it is corrigible and interpretable in the context of experience rather than theory". At its core, case study research is not about providing generalisations, but about providing understanding (Thomas, 2011). For this study, it means that the conclusions that was reached might not be applicable to all disciplines. However, the study will add conceptually to discussions on feedback and its importance in enabling epistemological and epistemic access in higher education institutions, which in turn may affect how similar disciplines approach feedback.

The case study approach has been shown to be especially suited to research with an LCT framework (see Chen, 2010; Clarence, 2014; Conana, 2015; Glenn, 2016). This is largely due to LCT's ability to examine any case in depth – from Physics (Conana, 2015) to Jazz (Martin, 2016) and even Ballet (Lambrinos, 2017) – no matter the sample size. As the sample size of this study was quite small, the in-depth conceptualisation made possible by LCT (and specifically the dimensions of Specialisation and Semantics) enabled the study to obtain a nuanced, detailed understanding of the case under study (Tomas, 2014).

Moreover, the case study research method works well within a Critical Realist framework. Critical Realism "justifies the study of any situation, regardless of the number of research units involved, but only if the process involves thoughtful in-depth research with the objective of understanding why things are as they are" (Easton, 2010:119). As such, the case study method employed within this study not only made sense within the Critical Realist framework –

exploring what lies beneath the events and experiences of tutors – but Critical Realism also provided a specific validation for using the case study.

4.3 RESEARCH CONTEXT

Aside from being set in the broader context of higher education, and particularly higher education in South Africa (see Chapter 1), this study was also bound spatially to the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and, within that, to English Studies at UWC. In the following sections, I provide a detailed account of the specific contexts in which the study is situated.

4.3.1 UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

The study was situated in the English Department of the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Trowler (2011) points out that when doing endogenous research – researching your own institution – the issue of institutional anonymity becomes a slight dilemma, especially since guaranteeing institutional anonymity is not possible (Trowler, 2011). In this case trying to keep the institution anonymous would have been to deny the vital impact that the institutional context had on the case under study.

UWC was chosen largely because of its availability and familiarity. I have been tutoring and lecturing at UWC since 2011, and I am currently studying there; as such, I did insider research as I was researching that which I am closely familiar with and the research topic and question were largely determined by my own experiences of tutoring English literature at two universities. Being an insider does pose various ethical concerns; these will be discussed later in the Chapter (see Section 4.5).

Moreover, aside from its availability and familiarity, UWC also provided an interesting socio-economic context that linked to the study's broader concerns about institutional versus epistemological access. UWC

> has a history of creative struggle against oppression, discrimination and disadvantage. Among academic institutions it has been in the vanguard of South Africa's historic change, playing a distinctive academic role in helping to build an equitable and dynamic nation. UWC's key concerns with access, equity and quality in higher education arise from extensive practical engagement in helping the historically marginalised participate fully in the life of the nation. (UWC History, 2013)

Although the university has achieved academic success, it is still considered a historically disadvantaged university, as it lacks necessary resources (especially in comparison to other universities in the Western Cape) and has a high student-to-staff ratio (Nkosi, 2015; Pather, 2015).

UWC has traditionally attracted students from poorer home and school backgrounds, as it has the lowest fees of the three universities in the Western Cape (the others being Stellenbosch University and the University of Cape Town) (Pather, 2015). This means that the students who come to UWC may have less congruence between their home, high school, and university lives (McKenna, 2004b; Boughey, 2012). This may also mean that concerns about enabling epistemological and epistemic (disciplinary) access, participation and success to a larger body of students are different at UWC than at the other universities, where there are different contexts and where assumptions about students are also different. Consequently, the role that feedback plays in enabling this kind of access, and success, becomes important not only from a practical point of view (enabling students to pass a course, for instance), but also from a social justice point of view in enabling greater participation in higher education practices and beyond. If students are not told or shown what is legitimated, or valued, in a discipline, it may lock them into certain categories of achievement and/or exclude them from accessing or understanding the discipline and its knowledge practices, which in turn would lock them out of successful participation in higher education.

For many students at UWC (as in the broader South African context), higher education is seen as a way to escape their current socio-economic status. The Centre for Higher Education Transformation (2010), for instance, found that students in South Africa who have a degree are twice as likely to be employed than those who do not. Not enabling students to successfully participate in higher education may effectively mean locking them into a potentially disadvantageous socio-economic situation with little means of escape (Boughey, 2012). The context in which the study was situated was thus vital in emphasising the importance of considering the 'why' of feedback in a discipline and how this may link to broader social issues of inclusion and exclusion in higher education.

4.3.2 ENGLISH STUDIES

English Studies is a literature course that students may take from first year to PhD level at UWC. During their undergraduate years, English may be taken as part of various degree programmes (e.g. Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree, or Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree), while

at postgraduate level students can obtain a degree in English specifically (e.g. BA Honours (English Studies), MA (English Studies) or PhD (English Studies)).

The course focuses on literary analysis and, at an undergraduate level, and specifically first year, aims to introduce "students to the full spectrum of literature written in English" (Department of English Student Handbook, n.d.: 4). As such, it focuses on literature from various historical and geographical contexts over a range of textual genres (such as novels, plays, films, poetry, etc.). English 111/121[16], in particular, is a first year, introductory course "with a strong emphasis on developing reading and writing skills appropriate to the study of English" (Department of English Student Handbook, n.d.: 4).

4.3.2.1 COURSE OUTLINE

English Studies at first year level consists of two distinct modules, English 111 and English 121, which are presented in the same year, one per semester. A student may, for instance, pass English 111 but not English 121 (though, a student would need to pass both in order to continue onto English Studies at second year). These modules are not compulsory to all first-year students, though in some degree programmes they are (for example, students studying B.Ed have to complete English 111/121). Consequently, there may be many students who do not continue with English beyond the initial first-year modules.

The course consists of three contact sessions a week: two lectures and one tutorial, as well as an occasional workshop period. For the most part, the outline and the content of the course have stayed the same since I started tutoring at UWC in 2011.

(a) Lectures

Lectures provide discussions on the set works. Attendance of lectures is compulsory, and students are expected to have read the set works in advance of the lectures in order to gain value from the period.

Additionally, a weekly workshop period is scheduled for students, which is used occasionally. These workshop periods may be used for training on information technology (for

---

[16] There are three other first year courses offered in the Department: Humanities ("a highly successful interdisciplinary course that introduces students to English, History and Philosophy"), English 105/106 ("An intensive semester-long language course that helps students improve their competency in English") and English for Educational Development (an academic development course that focuses on developing students in other faculties such as Community and Health Sciences, Law, and Science) (Department of English Student Handbook, n.d.: 4). These courses were not considered as they are not as 'disciplinary' as English Studies.

instance, workshops on how Turnitin[17] (plagiarism-detection software) works), for screening movie adaptations of prescribed texts, or for skills development training (for example, optional referencing or grammar workshops).

(b) Tutorials

Tutorials take place once a week and consist of classes that usually have between 15 and 20 students per group. They provide a "small group forum" in which students can "participate in debate and discussion" with peers and tutors (English 111/121 Course Reader, 2016:4). The aim of the tutorial programme is to gradually build knowledge and skills (English 111/121 Course Reader, 2016:4) and attendance is compulsory and closely monitored. Students stay in the same tutorial group for the entire year, unless a timetable clash develops in the second semester. In spite of students only having one contact session per week with their tutors, their tutor is often the person they see most on a one-on-one basis, as students may also consult with tutors outside of the tutorial time during tutors' consultation hours.

Tutorials are facilitated by tutors. At UWC, there are three kinds of tutors:

- postgraduate students (these tutors are currently studying towards a degree),
- professional tutors (these tutors may have completed a degree, but are not currently studying towards a particular degree), and
- lecturers (these are lecturers who tutor first year English and who are also usually involved in the lecturing aspect of the course).

In English Studies at UWC, the minimum qualification required to tutor in the programme is an Honours degree in English Studies. This suggests that some level of 'knowerness' has to have been achieved by the tutor before she can facilitate a class.

(c) Assignments

Assessment for each course consists of four assignments: two essays and two tests (See Appendix A for an overview of the assignments). Students also have to complete four multiple choice reading tests (MCQ tests) throughout the year. The purpose of these MCQ tests is to test whether students have read the prescribed texts for a specific term (English 111/121 Course Reader, 2016:7). Although they count towards the students' Continuous Assessment (CA) Mark,

---

[17] Turnitin is a website that is used to detect plagiarism in students' essays by comparing an essay to other students' essays, as well as to online sources. At UWC it is largely used as a plagiarism-deterrent and to encourage originality in students' work.

they make up only 5% of the CA mark. As these tests are not available to tutors nor administered by them, they have not been included in the study. The tests and essays form the bulk of the students' CA mark and are arguably more demonstrative of students' capabilities in the course.

Tests are written in the tutorial venues and are usually open-book. The test question is provided in the students' course reader and tutors may spend some time discussing the test question with the students, so as to help them prepare[18].

Essays are usually more formal in nature; tutors discuss the essay topic with students, providing them with guidelines on how to answer it. Usually, a tutorial period is assigned to discussing the essay question to ensure that students feel confident enough about writing the essay. Students are then required to submit their typed essay to Turnitin, and to submit in a submission box. Once these essays have been sorted, tutors receive them. Although drafting is not an explicit part of this essay writing process, students are encouraged to bring drafts to their tutors during consultation or to send drafts electronically. The exception to this is Essay 3, the *Macbeth* essay, where students are required to bring a draft to class for peer review. This is a chance for students to learn from and with each other in the relatively safe space of the tutorial group. Often, however, due to various other demands on students' time, the peer review class is not as well-attended as other classes, or students may bring incomplete essays. Although I have not explicitly focused on the peer review class in my study, this is an important process in the essay writing structures of the course, as it is the only time that a draft is explicitly required. Yet, many students do not make the best use of the opportunity.

Throughout the year, students are expected to write 5-paragraph essays (consisting of an introduction, three body paragraphs and a conclusion). Paragraphs are expected to follow the PEE structure (point, evidence and explanation[19]). For some essays, students are given explicit guidelines as to what to place in a particular paragraph, and for others, they are given more freedom in organising their writing.

---

[18]The exception to this is Test 4, which would have consisted of an unseen poetry test; however, in 2016, the year of my study, it was cancelled as class had been suspended at that time due to protest action of the #FeesMustFall movement (Brandt, 2016) (see Section 4.2.2) and the logistics and 'legality' of trying to arrange an off-campus test were not favourable.

[19]The PEE structure is based on the idea that each paragraph needs to consist of a Point (the topic sentence, which has to ideally function as a kind of sub-argument to the overall argument), the Evidence (the quote(s) from the text that supports/proves the Point) and the Explanation (where students have to explain how the evidence proves the point of the paragraph, in order for them to support their overall argument about the text). The strength of an essay usually lies in how in-depth the interplay between the Evidence and Explanation part is – the more detailed this is, the better the close reading and the stronger the overall essay; the more Evidence is used and Explained, the more supported the Point is.

4.3.2.2 RATIONALE FOR FOCUSING ON ENGLISH STUDIES

I decided to focus on English 111/121 for two reasons: practically, because it is a discipline with which I am very familiar, as I have been tutoring in it since 2011, and conceptually, because it is also a relatively under-researched discipline, especially in the higher education context. Although extensive research has been done on high school English (see for instance Christie 1999; Kapp, 2004; Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007; Macken-Horarik, 2011; Maton, 2014a; Christie 2015; Jackson, 2016), the same cannot be said for research into English at university. When research is conducted into university English literature, it tends to focus more on the teaching aspect thereof (see, for instance, Cromwell 2005; Knapp, 2004; Chick 2009; Wilder & Wolfe, 2009); research into feedback-giving practices, specifically in university level English Studies literature courses, is rare.

Although similar to university English, high school English is slightly different in that it focuses on "language, literature, and literacy" (Macken-Horarik, 2011:198), while university English, and specifically at UWC, primarily focuses on the literature aspect. Language development is on the periphery of English Studies (Mgqwashu, 2012). This disjunction between high school and university English also makes the discipline somewhat more challenging for students, especially if they were expecting it to help them improve their English language abilities.

My study therefore provided an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the mechanics of feedback in the discipline, which could be applicable to other subjects in the Arts and Humanities.

4. 4 RESEARCH PROCESS

The research was piloted in 2015, which served as a precursor to the full study. The full study was conducted the following year, in 2016.

4.4.1 THE PILOT STUDY

In order to get a feel for the types of data that would need to be generated and how this data would best be generated, I conducted a pilot study in the fourth term of 2015 with a sample group of 6 participant tutors. During the pilot study, data was generated via a questionnaire, marked sample essays from tutors, and focus group discussion meetings. Data (questionnaire

and sample essays) from the pilot study was analysed thematically to look for patterns which were then discussed with the tutors in the focus group meetings.

The pilot study proved to be invaluable, as it enabled me to get a greater sense of potential pitfalls in the data collection stage. For instance, during the pilot study, I found myself often speaking alongside tutors about the feedback-related problems that we had experienced throughout the year(s). This, however, made me feel uncomfortable, as though I was blurring the lines between researcher and participant. This did have the advantage of making tutors feel less judged, but it was difficult to remain objective in these situations, especially since it was a topic so close to my own experiences and feelings. This helped me to be more 'objective' when undertaking the 'actual' research the next year.

The pilot study also helped me gain a sense of how to phrase questions in such a way that I both invited tutors' responses but also, simultaneously, did not force them into giving me a particular answer. For instance, not letting my own views of what being a knower entails influence how a question is phrased but focusing more on letting the participant tutors' unfettered views come through.

4.4.2 RESEARCH STUDY

Data was generated in 2016, which was an especially challenging year in South African higher education. As this context affected the study, it is necessary to briefly explain the context. During 2016, there were increasing protests from the #FeesMustFall movement regarding the lowering and/or elimination of university fees. These protests waxed and waned between March 2015 and November 2016 (thus spanning more or less the same period in which the study was conducted), and largely centred on students' asking for more affordable and more inclusive higher education in South Africa (Quintal, 2015). In both 2015 and 2016, the protests became so heated that it necessitated the suspension of classes, and eventually the closure of campuses, to ensure the safety of staff and students (Brandt, 2016). The disruption and suspension of classes had an impact on students' handing in of work, which in turn affected data collection (especially with regards to collecting scripts from tutors). Where necessary, I tried to work around these disruptions (see Section 4.4.2.2 (a) below).

Data was generated using four different methods in order to gain a fuller sense of whether and how knowers are being cultivated in the discipline through the feedback tutors are providing. These sources are:

- Written feedback on sample essays

- Questionnaires
- Focus group discussion meetings
- Individualised interviews

Of these four methods of data, the written feedback on the sample essays were the main data used in my analysis, as this enabled me to obtain a clearer understanding of what tutors were saying through their feedback to students. Data from the questionnaires, individualised interviews, and focus group meetings were used to supplement my analysis of the feedback comments.

Data was gathered from participant tutors. In the following section, I will firstly provide an outline of the participant tutor group (including a rationale for why I am focusing on tutors specifically) and then discuss the reasoning behind each method of data generation.

4.4.2.1 PARTICIPANT TUTORS

The decision to focus on tutors stemmed from my own experiences as a tutor, as I was often faced with the question about what to focus on with feedback. Providing written feedback in English Studies can be quite challenging, as it is easy to slip into 'editor-mode' and merely correct grammar and spelling errors. At the same time, we were seldom given guidelines regarding what to focus on when giving feedback. The student handbook, which is given to each student as part of their coursework pack for English 111/121, provides details on what each mark indicates about the quality of the student's work, as well as a guide to some of the more commonly used feedback-giving 'symbols' (sp. for spelling, for instance) (See Appendix B). Similarly, moderation meetings focused more on making sure that marks are standardised and consistent but did not do the same for feedback. This lack of explicit guidance into giving feedback seems to reflect a broader trend in higher education in South Africa (and globally) where tutors are often not given guidance on how to give feedback in their discipline (Bell & Mladenovic, 2015; Underhill & MacDonald, 2010; Underhill, Clarence-Fincham & Petersen, 2014). In English Studies, there was more of an implied understanding that tutors, as knowers who had cultivated the gaze, would know what to focus on. Yet, 'knowing' tacitly what to focus on and implementing this in practice are quite different. This problem of what to give feedback on in English Studies served as motivation for this study, as it is one that many tutors may struggle with, not only in English Studies in particular, but in higher education throughout South Africa.

Moreover, once I started doing research into feedback, I found that research into feedback has largely focused on students and their perspectives on, and understanding of, written feedback (see for instance Chanock, 2000; Weaver, 2006; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008; Burke, 2009; McCann & Saunders, 2009), while tutors are often quite underrepresented in research. For the most part research has focused on how tutors perceive written feedback *in relation to* students (Carless, 2006; Orsmond & Merry, 2011) or what motivates tutors to give feedback (Tang & Harrison, 2011; Tuck, 2012). Looking explicitly at the actual practices of tutors giving feedback, specifically in relation to the tacit pedagogic purpose of the discipline, is largely unexplored. This may be partially explained by the fact that earlier research into the feedback problem tended to place the 'blame' with students – that is, it was assumed that tutors were giving 'correct' feedback and that students were simply unable or unwilling to engage with it. However, with the development of the idea of feedback as a dialogue (Higgins, 2000; Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2001; Nicol, 2010) it has become clearer that the problem of feedback lies on both sides of the dialogue. It was therefore important to also consider what tutors are saying to students through written feedback.

Deciding to focus on tutors meant an invitation to all those who tutor English 111/121 – postgraduate students, professional tutors, and lecturers. However, none of the lecturers joined the participant group. The participant group thus consisted solely of tutors; this was not deemed problematic as, had lecturers also participated, there might have been a power imbalance in the focus group. Tutors might not have felt as comfortable as they did in voicing their thoughts and opinions about topics, which often included critiques of current practices.

Tutors were approached at the first English 111/121 meeting of 2016[20] and were asked to volunteer for the study. A total of 6 tutors volunteered initially, of which 4 tutors remained throughout the year (see Table 4.1 below for a comparative synopsis of the tutor participants' details). As Table 4.1 shows, the participant tutors had a range tutoring experience, from inexperienced (with almost no tutoring experience) to highly experienced (with more than 8 years of tutoring experience); this means there was a range of voices and opinions with regard to tutors' experiences of giving feedback. At the time of the study, all of the participant tutors had completed an Honours degree in English Studies and were either in the process of completing an MA degree or had already completed one. The participant tutors were a mix of postgraduate student tutors and professional tutors.

---

[20] There are usually about two meetings per term: one to keep tutors updated on what the lectures will be doing, and a moderation meeting, in which the term's essay is moderated.

TABLE 4.1. COMPARATIVE SYNOPSIS OF TUTOR PARTICIPANTS[21]

Tutor	Pseudonym	Highest qualification	Started tutoring	Started tutoring English 111/121	Number of tutorial groups in 2016	Years of Experience (English 111/121)
B*	Alex	BA (Honours)	2015	2015	3	1
C*	Jane	BA (Honours)	2016	2016	3	0
D#	Cindy	MA	2008	2011	3	5
E*	Jessica	BA (Honours)	2016	2016	1	0

* Postgraduate student tutor

Professional tutor

These participant tutors made up the focus group on which the research study largely focused. The tutors were each randomly assigned an alphabetical code (A, B, C, D, E, etc.); they also provided pseudonyms for themselves, as shown in Table 4.1. The alphabetical code was used to code their students' essays; for discussing the results of the study, their chosen pseudonyms have been used.

Although this was a relatively small participant group and although seemingly limited to a bounded context, the phenomenon under study is a relatively common one, especially in the social sciences and humanities. This may mean that even though the results of this study may not be directly carried over to other contexts through generalisations, they link conceptually with other studies through this study's use of Legitimation Code Theory. The study also practically showed the importance of considering the 'why' of feedback in disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities and how or whether feedback is aligned with the purpose of the discipline.

Working with the participant tutors posed an interesting challenge as they are my peers - people I had worked and studied with for a couple of years. The advantages of working with my peers are that we have a variety of relevant, shared characteristics and experiences. Platt (1981:76) indicates that one's peers...

> ... are in a diffuse sense one's social equals, they are one's equals in role-specific senses, they share the same background knowledge and subcultural understandings and they are members of the same groups or communities.

---

[21]For purpose of this study, I will be referring to the participant tutors by the feminine pronoun, so as to further protect their identities.

Working with my peers also posed various challenges which will be discussed in more detail in Section 4.5.

4.4.2.2 DATA COLLECTION

(a) Written feedback on sample essays

Sample essays were used to look at the actual feedback given. Tutors were asked to provide three essays from three different mark ranges (low, middle, and high) per assessment task, with six assessment tasks in total. This ultimately gave me a sample set of 962 comments spread over 65 essays. Once tutors identified student essays to use, they obtained consent from these students by asking their permission to hand in copies of their scripts and by getting the students to sign a consent form (see Appendix G). The sample essays were coded in order to ensure the anonymity of both student and tutor. The coding worked as follows: students were firstly identified by tutor (e.g. B, for students from Tutor B), then by their marks category (1 for high scoring students, 2 for middle, 3 for low) and then by assignment type (e.g. E1 is Essay 1, T1 is Test 1, and so on). Students' codes (for example, B1) stayed the same, regardless of whether their marks improved or not throughout the year. Essay coding thus looked as follows:

B1: E1 (Essay 1 for high-achieving student for Tutor B)

I asked tutors to provide me with the specific marks ranges to see if there was any correlation between the marks category and the type and amount of feedback given. The pilot study, for instance, showed a marked difference in the amount of feedback given for each category, with lower-achieving essays almost always receiving more feedback than higher-achieving essays.

Tutors were asked to use the same three students' essays throughout the year. However, in the second semester some of the students whose essays had been used did not continue with English 121. Where this happened, tutors tried to find replacements. However, the disruption and suspension of classes in October made this somewhat difficult, which meant that whereas the first semester provided a consistent source of data, the second semester was scattered, with only two tutors being able to provide me with all three students' sample essays, while the other two could not.

Because English Studies is divided into two modules, English 111 and English 121, and because of the unforeseen way that some of the 'participant' students did not continue with English 121, I decided to divide the sample essay analysis into two sections in order to try to trace the feedback over each module. Where possible, I also traced the feedback over the course of the year.

For the fourth essay of the year, which had to be marked electronically, tutors were encouraged by the coordinator to give 'test-like' feedback, which amounted to a summative comment at the end, with very little feedback throughout the rest of the essay. Some of the tutors gave a summative comment at the end, while others only gave a grade. This might have been because of their unfamiliarity with marking essays electronically, time constraints, or simply because they felt it was not necessary to give detailed feedback at the end of the academic year. For this reason, Essay 4 was not included in the data analysis.

(b) Questionnaire

The first questionnaire (Appendix C) was designed to provide biographical information and to record tutors' responses to open-ended questions about their views of feedback in general. The biographical information (e.g. years of experience, qualifications, number of tutorial groups and students) enabled me to build a profile of the tutor participants, while the open-ended questions allowed me to gain a broad sense of tutors' experiences with and motivations behind the feedback process. Open-ended questions allow for detailed and in-depth answers in participants' own voices and mean that tutors are not limited to simple 'yes' or 'no' answers (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006); open-ended questions are thus valuable for examining tutors' opinions and perceptions on, and motivations for, giving written feedback, as they are invited to give voice to their own experiences. The questionnaire was handed out to participant tutors in hard copy during the first meeting (see Section 4.4.2.2(b) below).

After the initial questionnaire had been completed by the participant tutors, and after I had received the first batch of sample essays, a second questionnaire was sent out to tutors (Appendix D). This questionnaire sought further clarity on some of the patterns observed in the first questionnaire and sample essays.

(c) Focus group discussion meetings

Focus group discussion meetings were used to gain a fuller, more detailed understanding of tutors' perceptions of their role in providing feedback. These meetings were also used to

discuss the questionnaire responses and sample essays in more detail during the semi-structured discussions, which were audio recorded and transcribed by me. Drawing on multiple methods of data collection enabled triangulation of the data to create "an accurate representation of reality" (Foss & Ellefsen, 2002).

A focus group has various advantages, such as it being "an economical, fast and efficient method for obtaining data from multiple participants" (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009:2). Rather than approaching tutors individually to ask them for their views on feedback, the focus group enabled me to elicit data from the participant tutors simultaneously. Another advantage is that the focus group emulates a 'social' environment which may create a relatively safe space in which to encourage spontaneous reactions to one another and which could make tutors feel comfortable enough to voice their opinions (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). As I wanted to create a comfortable environment at the meetings, I provided snacks, and started with a general conversation, so as to make the atmosphere more inviting, before going into the actual discussion. As much as I tried to create a safe, inviting space for all, I have to face the possibility that tutors may not have been entirely forthright in their discussions. It is entirely possible that tutors may have been hesitant to voice their opinions, especially if they differed from someone else's, or they may have held back comments and questions out of fear or embarrassment.

Three focus group meetings took place in the seminar room at the English Department in semester 1 of 2016; the meetings were usually about an hour long. The first meeting was an introductory one, in which the purpose of the study, and the responsibilities of the participant tutors, were discussed. During this meeting, tutors signed the consent forms (see Appendix E). The second meeting focused on tutors' general views on, and experiences of, giving feedback in the discipline. The eventual third meeting focused on the data I had obtained from an initial analysis of the sample essays the tutors provided. During the early stages of generating data, I was more concerned with a deeper analysis and discussion of the practice of feedback. This is why I planned to have meetings once tutors had provided me with both the completed questionnaire and marked sample essays. The pilot study (see Section 4.4.1) showed me that these meetings could be derailed quite quickly (tutors might take it as an opportunity to vent their frustrations, etc.); thus, I felt it was better to have semi-structured interviews with the tutors. This is why I preferred to have some questions in response to their views on and practices of giving feedback than to have continuous broad discussions about feedback in general (see Appendix F).

However, due to the disruptions, and the consequent suspension of classes, these discussion meetings could not take place in the second semester. This is partially due to how the assessments were scheduled in the second semester: both the third test and the third essay only

took place at the start of term 4, in October (see Appendix A for an outline of the assessment schedule). As the discussion group meetings worked best when I had content from the sample essays to work with – to guide the discussion – it meant that I had to wait for tutors to provide me with their essays for Essay 3 and Test 3. Obtaining sample scripts of Essay 3 and Test 3 was made considerably difficult by the fact that some of the students from English 111 did not continue with English 121. As tutors are not aware at the start of the year which students have been enrolled for both or only English 111/English 121, they would not have known that their selected students would not be continuing into the second semester. Moreover, some of the tutors had returned the marked scripts to students (for them to have feedback in a timeous manner) before providing me with a copy of the script. For a few of the tutors, getting these scripts back from students would have taken place in week 5 of term 4, which is the week that classes were disrupted. Where possible, tutors managed to obtain photos of their tests and essays from students, though this was not possible for all students, as they may have had limited availability to internet and email. As such, there are gaps in the data set, as not all scripts could be collected for analysis. Nevertheless, a total of 65 scripts were obtained from the tutors.

(d) Individualised interviews

Initially, I had intended to have informal, sit-down interviews with each participant tutor separately, after the focus group discussions, to obtain additional, individualised views to compliment the focus group data. During these interviews, we would have discussed patterns specific to the tutor's feedback and obtain clarity on specific comments (e.g. intentions with comments, etc.) the tutor made. The disruption of classes made this difficult. I therefore sent each tutor an individualised interview that they could complete electronically. These interviews were tailored to each tutor and were a way to obtain further, detailed data not only about their perceptions, but also about their practice of giving feedback.

4.4.2.3 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Using different methods of data collection enabled me to increase the trustworthiness of my study. Trustworthiness is especially important in qualitative research, which, as pointed out in Section 4.2.1, is often viewed as being less scientific than quantitative research. Using different methods of data collection enabled me to triangulate the data, as using different methods "in concert compensates for their individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits" (Shenton, 2004:65).

Moreover, at various stages of the study, my research was presented to colleagues and peers at conferences and seminars. This enabled my research to be scrutinised by others in the field, which in turn made my analysis more detailed. For instance, I presented a paper at the Second International Legitimation Code Theory conference where feedback from other LCT users helped me refine my analytical framework.

Additionally, I could member check, after the fact, via email, with the participants at all times about comments they had made on essays or during the focus group meetings and questionnaires. Checking with the tutors about what they said increased the accuracy and validity of my interpretations of their comments (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Harper & Cole, 2012).

4.5 ETHICS AND RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

As I was working with participant tutors, it was necessary to ensure that the study was conducted ethically, to ensure the safety and confidentiality of my participant tutors. Additionally, my position as an 'insider' to the research area presented me with various ethical considerations that also needed to be addressed. These will be discussed individually below.

4.5.1 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations were addressed in a number of ways. Firstly, I obtained ethical clearance (Registration no. 15/7/52) from the Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Western Cape. Secondly, both tutors and students signed a consent form. The tutor consent form (see Appendix B) outlines the purpose of the study, the process involved in participating and the tutor's responsibility. This was discussed with tutors in a meeting as well. The contact details for myself, my two supervisors, as well as the English Department's postgraduate coordinator were given to ensure full transparency. Tutors were made aware that their participation was completely voluntary and that should they wish to, they could withdraw at any time. The tutors handed out the student consent form once they had identified which essays they wanted to use for the study. The student consent form (see Appendix E) outlined the purpose of the study and explained to students that the emphasis was not on them or their writing, but rather on the feedback they had received. Thirdly, the anonymity of both tutors and students was kept by using coded pseudonyms.

Moreover, at all times, participant tutors were encouraged to feel comfortable in the research environment. I also strived to create an atmosphere where they did not feel 'judged' for their views or feedback-giving practices.

4.5.2 POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER

In terms of my positionality in the study, I am an insider to the discipline under study. I have shared the same experiences (broadly) as the participant tutors (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), and we are all tutoring colleagues. The participant tutors in the study are people with whom I have personal and professional relationships; some of them are even close friends and old classmates. This does have an advantage in that there is a greater level of acceptance and ease in the discussion groups; I did not first have to 'win their trust' as we already had a relationship (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Indeed, the focus group discussion meetings often became a supportive space where tutors could voice their concerns and ask questions about feedback (and tutoring) scenarios that they were not sure how to approach.

The disadvantage to working with my peers, however, is that the boundary between interviewer and participant is somewhat blurred (Platt, 1981). This is not necessarily a negative thing, but it did mean that the participant tutors often approached me outside of the research space to talk to me about feedback, to ask for advice or to tell me that they found the focus group useful for (re)thinking about their own feedback practices. This all lead to greater comfort and ease in the discussion groups, but also meant that I had to constantly be aware of my own position as the researcher, especially in the discussion meetings. It also complicated the issue of what counts as data (Platt, 1981; Pring, 2001) – was it only the information revealed to me during 'official' data collection or should I have included information tutors gave to me in casual conversations outside of the research space? I decided to only use the 'official' data, especially since the casual conversations with tutors were often related to their relaying interesting (and often feedback-related) anecdotal experiences, which would not be relevant to the study.

I thus had to grapple constantly with two of the research "aporias" that Williams (2009) identifies in this kind of research: namely "the aporia of the agency of the subjects' identity transgressions" (how does the researcher deal with participants (unintentionally) compromising the protection of their identities by revealing information that could lead to their identification?) and "the aporia of the confessional space" (how does the researcher deal with participants 'airing dirty laundry' in the research space?) (Williams, 2009:215, 217). Some of my participants, for instance, would reveal information that could lead to their identification, but

which is linked to useful data. In this case, it became a question of maintaining participant anonymity without compromising potentially elucidatory or useful data. Similarly, participant tutors were often vocal about certain aspects that they might not have been if, for instance, lecturers had been included in the group or if they felt that it might influence their future employment chances. At all times, I had to thus ensure the safety and anonymity of the participants.

Moreover, I constantly had to contend with whether my research should influence the participant tutors. As I wanted to understand their current feedback-giving practices and because this was not an intervention study, I did not want the participant tutors to change their feedback-giving styles. Nevertheless, I did not purposefully omit data from the participant tutors – I, for instance, presented a couple of papers on my thesis in the Department which they could have attended – and at the end of the year, I gave each tutor a break-down of the patterns I had observed in their feedback comments (this formed part of the Individualised interviews). However, each of the tutors indicated to me that merely by participating in the study, they were already thinking differently about their feedback practices. For instance, Jessica pointed out that she "found this feedback group very valuable in … the questions you ask me" (Meeting 3). Even though this was not the explicit intention, participating in the study may have influenced the tutors' feedback styles.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

4.6.1 PRELIMINARY DATA ANALYSIS

The preliminary data analysis focused largely on identifying common themes in tutors' responses to the questionnaires and in their sample essays. Identifying common themes from an analysis of questionnaires is a relatively standard practice. Carless (2006), for instance, when using questionnaires and interviews to gain an understanding of the differing perceptions that students and tutors have about feedback, analysed responses by identifying common themes that ran throughout them. Similar methods have been used by other researchers examining feedback (see, for instance, Cho, Schunn & Charney, 2006; Duncan, 2007; Poulos & Mahoney, 2008; Walker, 2009; Price, et al., 2010; Bloxham & Campbell, 2010; Beaumont, O'Doherty & Shannon, 2011; Wakefield et al., 2014). This type of analysis enabled me to look for "commonly occurring patterns of view, experiences and underpinning concepts" (Beaumont et al., 2011), which, once identified, I could discuss in greater detail with the participant tutors, either during the focus group meetings, the second questionnaire (through follow-up questions on the first

questionnaire), or the Individualised interviews. This data could then be used to supplement my analysis of the feedback comments.

In doing the preliminary analysis of the comments in the sample essays, I drew on research by Brown and Glover (2006), in which they identified 5 categories of feedback (content, skills development, further learning, motivational comments and demotivational comments), and by Hyatt (2005), who identified seven types of feedback (phatic, developmental, structural, stylistic, content, methodological, and administrative). These categories were a useful starting point but needed further development and refinement to be useful for the first phase of my analysis. As such, I decided to focus on what I know are aspects of student writing that I focus on from my own experiences of giving feedback, in relation to these categories.

This preliminary data analysis was done to provide a platform from which we could make the focus group discussions fuller and more focused on tutors' actual feedback-giving practices. The data analysis in this phase of the study was thus done without explicitly analysing it from within a Legitimation Code Theory framework. The data analysis was therefore an iterative process.

4.6.2 DEVELOPING THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical framework was developed by iteratively refining the various themes and codes that emerged from the preliminary analysis of, and engagement with, the data from feedback comments. Once broad themes emerged, sub-themes started to be explored. For instance, when I focused on feedback that focused specifically on content (the analysis, or lack thereof, of a particular essay), I found that the feedback that focuses on content specifically could be divided into six categories: comments that highlighted how well students have analysed a text (analysis), comments that prompted students to think deeper about what they have written (prompts), comments that attempted to develop students' close reading ability (evidence), comments that told students to focus more on the specific extract or to use more evidence to support their analytical-summaries (focus), comments that focused on clarifying specific claims that the student had made about the text (clarification), and comments that indicated (and often corrected) errors the student had made about the text (knowledge). These various sub-categories could then be coded in terms of epistemic relations and social relations, in light of the analytical framework using Legitimation Code Theory's domain of Specialisation, to examine whether and how the feedback aligns with the underlying code of the discipline. The same process was followed for the other categories of feedback (see Chapter 5).

4.6.3 EXTERNAL LANGUAGE OF DESCRIPTION

Working through the comments iteratively enabled me to create the study's translation device. A translation device involves "iterative moments between theory and data" (Maton & Chen, 2016:33). Pre-existing categories from the theory cannot be arbitrarily imposed onto data; these theoretical categories must emerge from the data. Bernstein (1999; 2000) refers to the theoretical language as the *internal language of description*. A translation device is therefore used to relate theoretical concepts to specific problem situations (Maton & Chen, 2016). According to Maton (2016b:243), a translation device may take one of three forms: firstly, an *external language of description*, which is used for "translating between theory and empirical data within a specific problem situation"; secondly, an *external language of enactment*, which is used to translate "between theory and practice"; and lastly, a *mediating language*, which is used for "translating between theory and all empirical forms of a phenomenon". In my study, the translation device took the form of an external language of description.

The external language of description enabled me to adjust the theory (LCT) to the data and, in turn, to read the data in relation to the theory. This meant that the abstract theoretical concepts were made more concrete in relation to the data. For instance, the theory says that epistemic relations (ER) refer to what knowledge has been privileged (Maton, 2014a; Maton, 2016a); however, this does not indicate what counts as knowledge in feedback on English Studies essays. I needed to turn to the data to establish that. Once I had established what constitutes ER in this specific study, the relative strengths and weaknesses could be identified. The basic theoretical concepts, therefore, remain the same, but how these concepts are used to interpret data is context-specific. For the purposes of this study, I had to devise an external language of description for both Specialisation and Semantics. These will be discussed individually below.

4.6.3.1 EXTERNAL LANGUAGE OF DESCRIPTION: SPECIALISATION

As Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1.1, indicated, broadly speaking, an English Studies essay consists of three parts:

- textual knowledge (referring to the students' knowledge and understanding of the specific text being studied)
- technical knowledge (referring to knowledge on how to structure an essay and how to reference sources both in-text and in the works cited list)

- analysis (referring to the student's interpretation of the text, as framed by the essay question)

In terms of Specialisation, then, textual and technical knowledge both refer to epistemic relations, while the analysis refers to social relations (as a student's analysis shows whether she has cultivated the necessary gaze). Once this broad coding had been established, I could then look at determining what constitutes stronger and weaker social relations and epistemic relations.

What I found was that some comments were even stronger in terms of epistemic relations and social relations than others. Consequently, some comments were coded as SR++ and SR+ or SR-- and SR- (the same applied to epistemic relations). This is to indicate that, relative to other comments, an SR++ comment is stronger in social relations than an SR+ comment. The differences are largely in relation to how visible a comment may make the SR or ER *basis* of the comment. A comment that is SR++ might therefore be stronger in social relations because it recognises potential knower attributes in a student's writing, but it does not necessarily make it more explicit to the student.

The external language of description that emerged, looks as follows:

TABLE 4.2. EXTERNAL LANGUAGE OF DESCRIPTION FOR SPECIALISATION

Epistemic relations	
ER++	Seemingly solely privileges possessing technical or textual knowledge
ER+	Privileges technical or textual knowledge
ER-	Downplays technical or textual knowledge
ER--	Seemingly 'ignores' possessing technical or textual knowledge
Social relations	
SR++	Knower attributes are recognised (but not necessarily made explicit)
SR+	Develops knower attributes
SR-	Downplays the development of knower attributes
SR--	Seemingly 'ignores' the development of knower attributes

The external language of description for Specialisation was used to distinguish between what the comment says on the surface (the *focus* of the comment) and the underlying purpose of the comment (the *basis*) (see Chapters 3 and 5).

4.6.3.2 *EXTERNAL LANGUAGE OF DESCRIPTION: SEMANTICS*

The same process took place for Semantics. Once it was established that semantic gravity referred to the context-dependence of a comment and semantic density referred to how many actions are implied in a comment (see Chapter 3), I could then differentiate between comments that are SG++ and SG+ or SG-- and SG-. For instance, some comments are strongly bounded to a particular context with little chance of being applied in other contexts, suggesting stronger semantic gravity, while others, though bound to a context, do have the *potential* to be lifted to other contexts, which also suggests stronger semantic gravity, but weaker in relation to the first example. To indicate these differences, comments could then be coded as SG++ and SG+. For semantic density, the same applied – the more actions implied by a comment, the stronger the semantic density. But, some comments may have *more* actions implied by a comment than others. Consequently, the difference between the two was indicated by making use of SD++ and SD+. The same applied to weaker semantic gravity and semantic density.

The external language of description that emerged looks as follows:

TABLE 4.3. *EXTERNAL LANGUAGE OF DESCRIPTION FOR SEMANTICS*

Semantic gravity	
SG++	Comments that are bound to the particular essay and/or the particular text with very little or no chance of being abstracted to other essay contexts
SG+	Comments that are bound to a context and have the potential to be abstracted to other contexts
SG-	Comments that are framed explicitly as advice for future essays
SG--	Comments that could refer to any essay/text
Semantic density	
SD++	Comments that need to be fully unpacked before a student can act on it
SD+	Comments that require understanding of what the problem is and the terms used before being acted upon
SD-	Comments that require understanding only of the terms used before being acted upon
SD--	Comments that can be acted upon immediately

The external language of description for semantics was used to establish whether feedback is enabling cumulative knower development by unpacking how feedback is given (see Chapters 3 and 6).

4.6 SUMMARY

In summation, then, this Chapter discussed the methodological framework for the study and focused on 5 aspects within that: the research design, the research context, the research process, ethics and researcher positionality, and the data analysis process.

In terms of the research design, this Chapter explained, in detail, the choices made in creating a suitable research design for the study, namely, a qualitative case study approach. Using a qualitative case study approach enabled the study to obtain a nuanced, detailed understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Furthermore, the methodological tools to enact this research design, using data generated from participant tutors through questionnaires, focus group discussion meetings, individualised interviews, and feedback on sample essays, was also explained.

Additionally, the Chapter outlined the research context – both broadly in terms of the university, namely the University of the Western Cape, and specifically, the course being examined at UWC, namely English 111/121. This study is bound to its particular context (though, not limited to it), and as such a detailed understanding of the context is necessary.

Thereafter, the research process – that is, how data was generated – was described. The aim was to give a clear account of how data was generated in order to create a transparent audit trail of how the research was conducted. Similarly, in explaining the ethical considerations and the research positionality, I aimed to show that although I am doing insider research, I have tried to behave in an ethical manner throughout the study.

Lastly, the Chapter outlined the iterative data analysis process. Crucially, the development of the external language of description for both Specialisation and Semantics was explained in detail; this will enable the study to link theory to data (and vice versa) in order to address the central research question that guides this thesis: (how) are we creating knowers through feedback? This will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

CHAPTER 5
UNCOVERING THE *BASIS* OF FEEDBACK

Chapter 4 provided the methodological framework for this study; particularly, the rationale for using a qualitative case study approach and for focusing on the feedback-giving perceptions and practices of tutors, specifically in English Studies. The Chapter also outlined how data was collected from participant tutors, who provided their written comments to students through their self-selected sample essays (962 comments, spread over 65 essays), completed questionnaires and individualised interviews, and participated in focus group discussions. Chapter 4 also described how data was analysed.

In this Chapter, I aim to unpack, in detail, one of the sub-research question: what are tutors saying to students through their feedback? To do so, the data from the sample essays will be analysed using the Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) dimension of Specialisation. Data from the focus group meetings, questionnaires, and individualised interviews will be used to substantiate, clarify, and elaborate on the findings.

The Chapter opens with a brief review of the most salient aspects of Specialisation and how these will be applied to the data set. Thereafter, it will briefly consider what tutors perceive as the purpose of feedback, before moving onto the categorisation and coding of the feedback in the sample essays using Specialisation. Ultimately, this Chapter aims to determine whether the feedback given could enable access to the knower code underpinning the discipline. Although I am not examining students' perceptions of feedback, but tutors' intentions with their comments, it is important to note that there might be a discrepancy between the intended message of tutors' feedback and how students perceive this, which may in turn affect the overall effectiveness of the feedback. However, this is not the explicit focus of my study.

5.1 BRIEF RECAPITULATION OF SPECIALISATION

Specialisation focuses on making the underlying, often 'invisible' organising principles of the discipline more visible in order for students to cultivate the necessary gaze and to become knowers in the discipline (Maton, 2016a). Specialisation consists of specialisation codes which comprise different combinations of stronger and weaker epistemic relations and social relations.

Epistemic relations (ER) refer to "*what* can be legitimately described as knowledge" (Maton, 2014a:29; emphasis in the original). In English Studies, students need two types of knowledge: textual and technical. Textual knowledge refers to the 'facts' of the prescribed text; for example, events that occur, who the characters are, or what their relationships with one another are. Technical knowledge, on the other hand, refers to knowledge of a more procedural nature about the construction of essays; for instance, what should be in the introduction or conclusion, how a topic sentence should be constructed, or how to reference correctly. Social relations (SR), on the other hand, refer to "*who* can claim to be a legitimate knower" (Maton, 2014a:29; emphasis in the original) and refer to the necessary attributes, attitudes and dispositions a student needs to possess in order to be recognised as a legitimate fellow knowledge producer. In English Studies, these attributes may be seen through the analysis aspect of the essay, as it is through the analysis that the student shows whether she possesses the necessary critical curiosity. Figure 5.1 summarises the three components of an English Studies essay and their corresponding broad classification in relation to Specialisation.
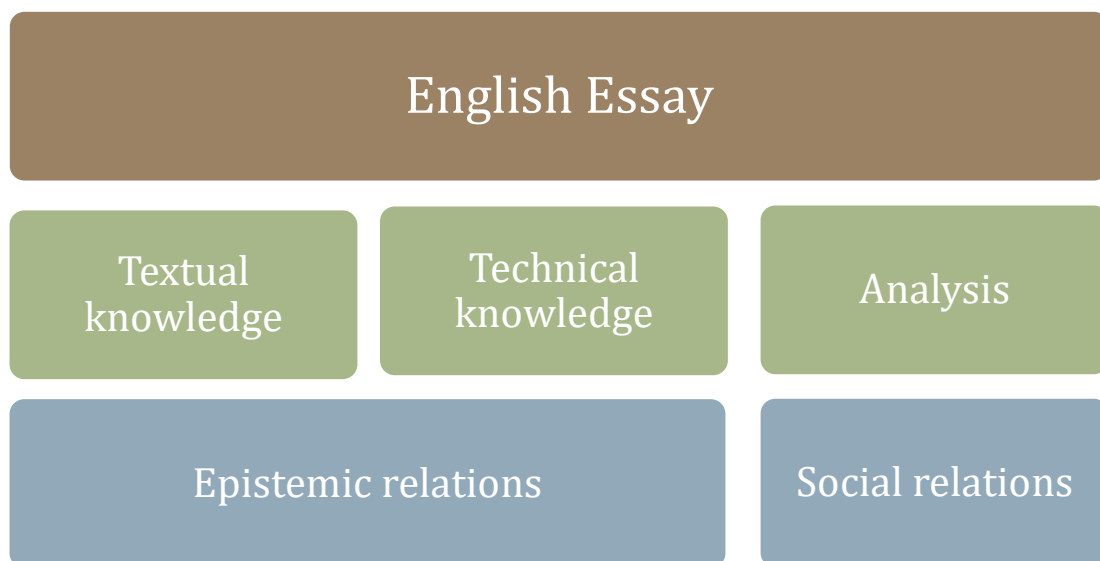

Figure 5.1. *Three components of an English Studies essay*

English Studies, as indicated in Chapter 3, may be classified as a knower code (Christie, 2016; Van Heerden, Clarence & Bharuthram, 2017). A knower code is characterised by weaker epistemic relations (ER-) and stronger social relations (SR+). Ideally, feedback should therefore enable students to access the knower code of the discipline by fostering the cultivation of the necessary knower attributes (the gaze). To assess whether feedback could be enabling this, it is important, in the analysis of feedback, to distinguish between the *focus*, i.e. "what practices

concern" (Maton, 2016b:239), and the *basis*, i.e. the underpinning legitimacy of practices (Maton, 2016b). In other words, the *focus* refers to what feedback says on the surface, and the *basis* refers to what the feedback comment is trying to achieve. In the context of this study, the *basis* of the discipline should be the knower code of English Studies (that is, the purpose of feedback). The different categories of feedback constitute the *focus* (that is, the practice of feedback). The aim of this Chapter is therefore to uncover what the *focus* of feedback is, and to determine whether the *focus* of the discipline enables access to the *basis* of the discipline. This will help me to determine if the practice and the purpose of feedback are aligned. In order to do so, I will be unpacking the five categories of feedback identified in the data set and coding these in terms of Specialisation.

5.2 FIVE CATEGORIES OF FEEDBACK

Before examining the five categories of feedback, as identified in the data set, it is important to briefly consider the characteristics of a strong analysis in an English Studies essay as these characteristics form the basis for determining the ideal English Studies knower, and the tutors' views of the role of feedback in English Studies, as this perceived role may determine what they choose to focus on in their feedback. The tutors' perceptions of what feedback should do tie in with Chapter 2's contextual framework, and as such it is necessary to briefly situate the participant tutors' understanding of feedback in relation to literature available on feedback.

Firstly, to understand what the characteristics of the ideal knower in English Studies are, the ideal characteristics for a strong analysis in an English Studies essay need to be unpacked, as the analytical aspect of the essay constitutes the 'social relations' of the discipline. The participant tutors mentioned that an analysis should show "original thought" (Alex, Individualised interview), should be presented in a "clear argument" (Cindy, Individualised interview[22]), should be "detailed" (Jane, Individualised interview), and should show a "critical engagement with the content" (Jessica, Individualised interview). These point to the various characteristics that an ideal English Studies student should possess. Table 5.1 (below) shows a breakdown of the ideal analytical characteristics of an essay, as well the underlying knower attribute that this analytical characteristic points to. As Table 5.1 indicates, the ideal knower in

---

[22] Individualised interviews refer to the interviews that were sent out to the participant tutors; Questionnaire 1 refers to the first questionnaire (see Appendix C); Questionnaire 2 refers to the second questionnaire (see Appendix D); Meeting 2 refers to the second focus group meeting; Meeting 3 refers to the third focus group meeting; Meeting 3, Written response refers to the written response by tutors, who could not attend the meeting, to the questions guiding the third focus group meetings (see Appendix F) (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2.2 for a detailed discussion of the various ways in which data was generated).

English Studies is one who can think independently, creatively, analytically and critically, not only about a prescribed text, but also about the world.

TABLE 5.1. *IDEAL KNOWER ATTRIBUTES OF ENGLISH STUDIES STUDENTS*

Characteristics	Description	Knower attribute(s)
Original thought	Refers to a student's ability to think independently and creatively about a text; to move beyond what has been discussed in class	Independent and Creative
Clear argument	Refers to a student's ability to formulate a clear argument about the text, in effect, forming a clear interpretation of the text and thereby allowing his/her voice to develop	Independent
Detailed	Points to the ability to engage with the text on a 'deeper' level, to not only find the 'hidden meaning' in a prescribed text, but to show how the various parts of the text link to one another	Analytical
Critical engagement	Points to the ability to engage critically with the text, (as well as secondary readings on the text) and to apply this to a wider context	Critical

Secondly, for the participant tutors, feedback plays two distinct roles: it is meant to develop and improve students' essay writing skills and their analytical ability. The term 'develop' suggests that feedback could assist students in becoming familiar with the required essay writing skills and analytical ability required in the discipline, while 'improve' suggests that students may already possess a rudimentary understanding of what is required in an English Studies essay, but that feedback could be used to refine this. For instance, Jane[23] points out that "the term 'improve' suggests bettering skills that are already in place, whereas 'develop' suggests both bettering current skills and fostering new skills" (Questionnaire 2). There is an equal divide between an understanding of the roles of feedback, as half of the participant tutors (Alex and Jane) feel that it should focus on development, while the other half (Cindy and Jessica) indicated that it should focus on improvement.

Although there is a divide between the participant tutors regarding whether feedback should improve or develop students' writing and analysis, both terms suggest a more skills-

---

[23] All names used are pseudonyms, chosen by the participant tutors (see Chapter 4).

based approach to English Studies (e.g. focusing on essay writing and analysis skills). Depending on how tutors communicate it to students, this skills-based approach to English Studies may mislead students as to what is important in the discipline. Simultaneously, this approach may suggest that the tutors were choosing to focus more on creating competent essay writers than on developing knowers. This split focus will be explored throughout the Chapter.

While the participant tutors are divided on what the role of feedback is – to improve or to develop – they are united in how they aim to give feedback. All of the participant tutors indicated that they try to balance giving constructive feedback (positive feedback) with critique (negative feedback). However, they admit that it is a struggle. Alex, for instance, said:

> Mostly, I fail to achieve the balance that I strive to. I find it much more challenging to give USEFUL positive feedback and much easier to give either a) less directive and therefore less useful positive feedback and 2) Negative feedback, or perhaps because it is quick and easy to point out where mistakes are (Questionnaire 2).

That participant tutors' struggle to balance constructive feedback and critique may result in their focusing more on easily identifiable problem areas in students' writing – for instance, language or referencing errors – than on trying to make the more implicit and underlying principles of the discipline visible, which in turn may mean that the *focus* of feedback is not clearly aligned with *basis* of the discipline. It is therefore important to consider what tutors are saying to students through their feedback and the implications this may have for successful participation in this discipline, and higher education in general.

In this study, the feedback in the sample essays was divided into 5 categories; namely content, structure, referencing, language, and encouragement (see Figure 5.2).
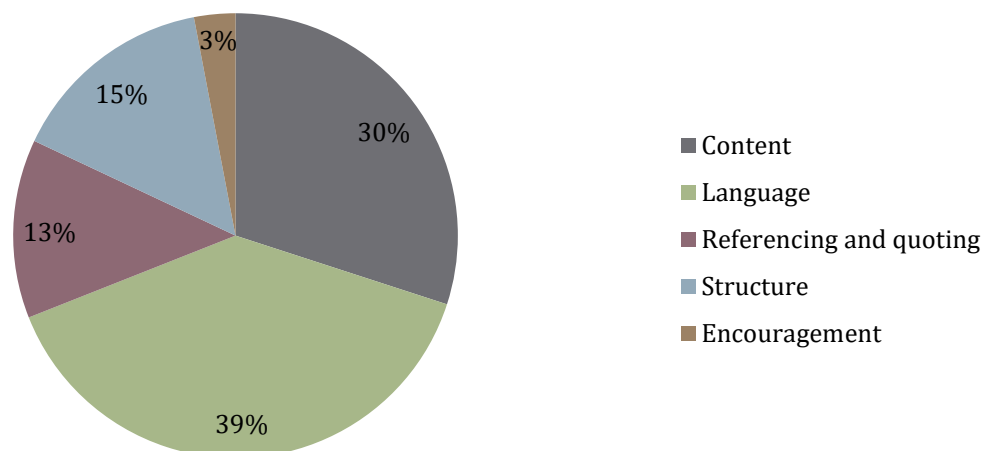

Figure 5.2. Overview of focus of feedback

Each of these categories refers to an aspect of essay writing. Although feedback is geared towards writing in general in the discipline, the unit of analysis in this study is written feedback received on essays. Each category will be discussed separately. Each discussion will start with an overview of the participant tutors' views on the particular category, by drawing on data gathered from the questionnaires, feedback discussion group meetings and Individualised interviews. Thereafter, the feedback is coded using epistemic relations and social relations in order to establish the underlying specialisation code of each category.

In coding the comments, the following translation device should be kept in mind:

TABLE 5.2. SPECIALISATION TRANSLATION DEVICE

Epistemic relations	
ER++	Seemingly solely privileges possessing technical or textual knowledge
ER+	Privileges technical or textual knowledge
ER-	Downplays technical or textual knowledge
ER--	Seemingly 'ignores' possessing technical or textual knowledge
Social relations	
SR++	Knower attributes are recognised (but not necessarily made explicit)
SR+	Develops knower attributes
SR-	Downplays the development of knower attributes
SR--	Seemingly 'ignores' the development of knower attributes

5.2.1 CONTENT COMMENTS

Content in an English Studies essay primarily relates to how well the student has engaged with the prescribed text as framed by the essay question. For the participant tutors, the content of the essay is a way to evaluate or determine a students' knowerness – as manifested in the strength and originality of her analysis – and knowledge of both the text and the ways of responding that may be considered acceptable. Consequently, for the participant tutors, content is a vital aspect of an English Studies essay. Jane, for instance, pointed out that "Content is the most important thing to focus on. Essay content should show that a student knows the work and

is trying to engage with it beyond paraphrasing the text" (Individualised interview). Similarly, Alex pointed out that content is one of the most important aspects of the essay as it "deal[s] with the art of interpretation, critical thinking, analysis of text ... which are integral cognitive processes for English Studies" (Individualised interview).

An important distinction needs to be made between the main components of content, namely analysis, and knowledge of the text. Analysis is central to the essay, as it is how the students indicate and justify their interpretation of the text, through close reading. Close reading refers to a detailed, in-depth engagement with the text (as opposed to merely paraphrasing or retelling the text). Tutors, for instance, value analyses that contain "original interpretation" (Cindy, Meeting 2). An original interpretation means that students have come up with "an idea that is like a new interpretation [that we] didn't do in class" (Jane, Meeting 2). An original analysis is thus indicative of a student's ability to think independently and creatively about the prescribed text. As was shown in Table 5.1, these ideal analytical characteristics also represent ideal characteristics of a first year English Studies knower. Analysis is therefore clearly linked to knowerness.

However, in order to undertake a successful analysis, students need to have sufficient knowledge about the text. In order to make an informed claim about the text, the student needs to draw on the relevant support provided by the text. Jane, for instance, pointed out that "A good essay should have no factual errors" (Individualised interview). At the same time, however, there was an awareness in tutors' comments that textual knowledge on its own is not the most important aspect of a student's essay. Cindy, for instance pointed out that "writing an essay isn't just regurgitating the plot or making superficial observation about something" and that "you [the student] need to really be not just giving me a lot of facts" (Meeting 2). Similarly, Jane pointed out: "For me, text knowledge means being able to draw some conclusions from the facts of the story. For example, rather than writing 'at first he liked her then he didn't, write 'at first he liked her then he didn't because ... happened'" (Individualised interview). Yet, as the participant tutors pointed out, students often over-rely on textual knowledge. For instance, Cindy remarked that students often seem to feel that "'the more information I include, the better I'm going to do, because there's more facts on the page'" (Meeting 2). Therefore, although textual knowledge – the facts of the story – is important as the basis for students' analysis, it is more important for the student to engage with the text on an analytical level as it is through their analysis that students come to be recognised as fellow knowers.

Although an independent and creative analysis is what tutors hope students will achieve, there is also a more 'realistic' expectation in terms of the essay. Participant tutors indicated that on an everyday level, they are often more concerned with the generic 'basics' of essay writing,

perhaps to lay the foundation for better essays in subsequent years of study. For example, Cindy pointed out that "aside from catastrophic language issues, [a well-structured essay] constitutes a pretty good essay … for now" (Meeting 2). While Jessica pointed to a distinction between first semester goals – "structure, … to answer the question, to use evidence" – and a second semester focus on "thinking, developing ideas and integrating other knowledge learned in other themes throughout the text" (Meeting 2). This suggests that there may be a (perhaps only initial) focus on improving or developing students' generic essay writing skills rather than an explicit focus on cultivating knowerness in students. This could suggest a disjunction between what tutors feel their feedback should focus on, ideally, and what it does focus on practically.

Ideally, content-related feedback should focus on developing students' analytical abilities for them to obtain the necessary critical curiosity to do in-depth analyses themselves. Feedback should be geared towards students developing a mindset of always thinking 'deeper' about what they have written, of moving away from a superficial recalling of information to a sophisticated analysis of the particular extract. Moreover, it should help students to develop the ability to think critically, independently, and creatively about the prescribed text, and to learn how to justify their interpretations with quotes from the text. Feedback should therefore be geared towards creating the necessary critical disposition of a knower, rather than solely focusing on correcting specific knowledge of the text or technical features of writing a competent essay.

Of the 962 comments analysed in the data set, 290 (30%) pertain to content. These content comments have been broadly organised into six sub-categories: analysis, prompts, evidence, focus, clarification, and knowledge. These 6 categories indicate the *focus* of feedback in terms of the essay's content. When looking at each of these categories, it is important to consider the *basis* of feedback, i.e. the knower code, and how (or whether) the *focus* of feedback enables students to see or achieve the *basis* through their writing. The content sub-categories have consequently been grouped together based on their underlying specialisation codes and will be discussed accordingly.

5.2.1.1 ANALYSIS, PROMPTS AND EVIDENCE COMMENTS

Analysis, prompts and evidence comments – sub-categories of the content category of feedback in this data set – are underpinned by differing relative weaknesses of epistemic relations and strengths of social relations.

Analysis comments focus on the strength of a student's analysis of the prescribed text. These analysis comments emphasise the importance of analysis, through acknowledging strong

analytical observations, but neither make explicit how to undertake a good analysis nor do they explain why a particular point is strong. For example, Alex wrote "Good insight!" (B1:E2[24]) on a student's essay (see below).
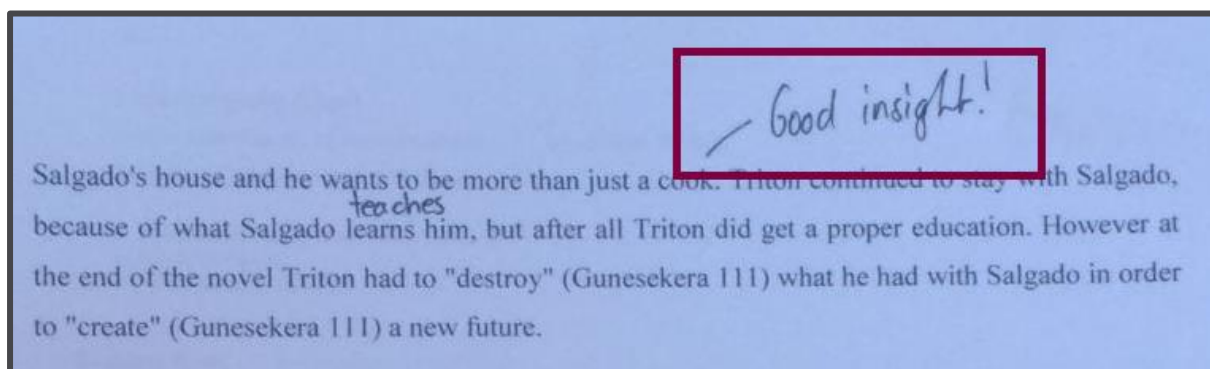

Image 5.1. *Specialisation example of an analysis comment*

In this instance, Alex had made the comment in relation to the student's claim that in Romesh Gunesekera's *Reef* Triton "realize[s] ... he wants to be more than just a cook" (B1:E2). Alex is therefore acknowledging that the student had made a good analytical claim but has not clarified what makes this claim 'insightful'. When asked what it means for a student to have insight in an essay, Alex pointed out that it "is the ability to recognise literary devices used by the author and to correctly (or persuasively) interpret their purpose or effect on the meaning of the text taking the context of the text into account" (Individualised interview). The comment then recognises the knower qualities in the student's writing but does not explicitly state what the term 'insight' means in this context.

On the surface, then, analysis comments are providing praise to the student (the *focus*); however, underpinning the comment (the *basis*) is a recognition of the knower attributes the student already possesses, though without necessarily making it clearer what these attributes entail. Analysis comments are therefore stronger in social relations (SR++). Additionally, analysis comments downplay textual and technical knowledge, as they focus on the analytical observation these students made. They can therefore be considered to be weaker in epistemic relations (ER--) (knower code) (see Figure 5.3).

---

[24]As indicated in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2.2 (c): The first half of the code identifies the student (B1 = Alex's high scoring student), while the second half of the essay code indicates the assignment's details. So, for instance, E2 is essay 2, which took place in the second term, etc.
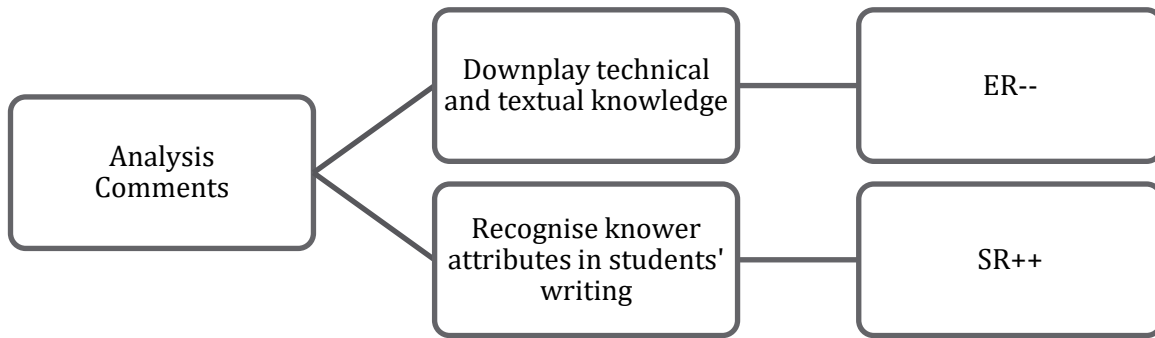
Figure 5.3. *Specialisation coding of an analysis comments*

Analysis comments are therefore grounded in the knower code *basis* of the discipline, although these types of comments do not necessarily make this basis more accessible. Prompt comments, however, tend to be more geared towards making the *basis* of the discipline more visible and potentially more accessible.

Prompt comments respond to what a student has analysed and written and are aimed at getting students to think beyond that. In so doing, prompts encourage students to think more deeply about what they have written in order to uncover potentially overlooked or under-analysed points. Prompt comments, then, are focused on developing students' analytical abilities further, whereas the analysis comments recognise the analytical abilities the student may already possess. Prompt comments downplay superficial content knowledge of the text in order to develop the necessary close reading and analytical skills that students need. For example, Jane made the comment "Do you think Triton's knowledge separates him from Salgado?" (C3:E2) on an essay (see below).
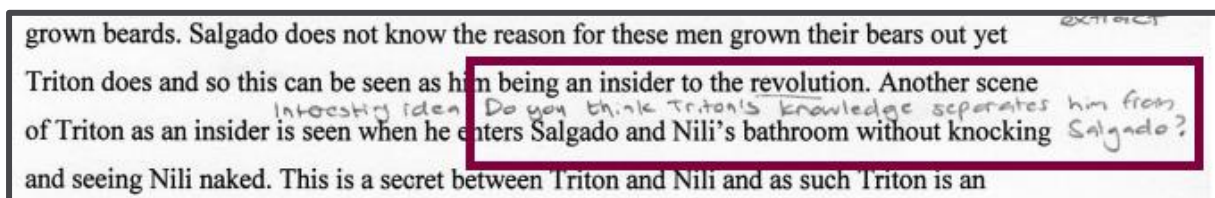

Image 5.2. *Specialisation example of a prompt comment*

This comment was made in response to the student's claim that "Salgado does not know the reason for these men growing their beards out yet Triton does [sic]" (C3:E2). This particular observation about the development of Triton, the protagonist in Romesh Gunesekera's *Reef*,

107

indicates that the student has made a particularly worthwhile observation about the difference in knowledge between servant (Triton) and master (Mr. Salgado). The question posed by the tutor prompts the student to consider what is being left unsaid at the moment – the fact that Triton knowing something which Salgado does not gives him (momentarily) the upper hand and shows Triton's growing awareness of his place in society and the role of the revolution, while Mr. Salgado's ignorance about the meaning of the beards suggests his own ignorance of society outside his immediate household. This is implied in the student's claim, but not stated explicitly; the tutor is thus trying to get the student to think beyond what she has written in order to provide more sophisticated depth to the analysis.

Prompt comments, as the example illustrates, may enable students to cultivate the necessary gaze to be recognised as knowers in the discipline, by encouraging them to move beyond a superficial analysis of the text to a more in-depth sophisticated analysis. Prompts are thus closely aligned with the *basis* of the discipline: tutors use these comments to enable students to see what is privileged in the discipline. Prompt comments may therefore be coded as stronger in social relations (SR++), as the purpose of these comments is more in line with the underlying purpose of the discipline – to develop knowers, by cultivating the necessary analytical attributes. Prompt comments do not explicitly call for textual knowledge, though they are based on students' knowledge of the text (and therefore does not discard textual knowledge completely) and as such may be considered as being weaker in epistemic relations (ER--) (see Figure 5.4 below).
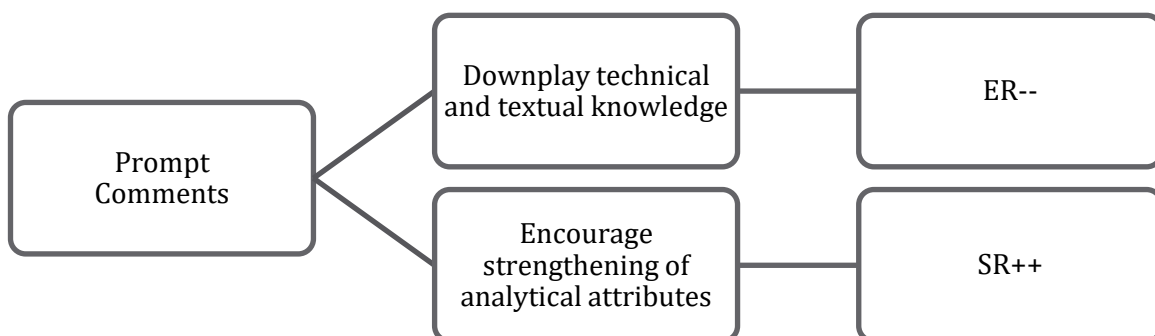

Figure 5.4. *Specialisation coding of prompt comments*

Prompt comments therefore have the potential for making the knower code *basis* of the discipline more visible (especially in relation to analysis comments) as they are strongly aligned with this *basis.* It is important to note that although analysis and prompt comments have been

coded the same, analysis comments tend to be a bit more vague about what specifically is required for successful analysis, even though the comment is meant to show that a student's potential knower-ness has been recognised. Prompt comments are less vague about what is required. Prompt and analysis comments have nevertheless been coded the same because they are both strongly aligned with the knower code *basis* of the discipline. Evidence comments, on the other hand, are slightly less aligned with the *basis* of the discipline.

Evidence comments are rooted in students' attempts to analyse and focus on their (in)ability to do so. They focus on conclusions that students have reached without providing the necessary substantiation for a point, or on pointing out the importance of actually analysing the text (without explicitly telling the student how to do so). As such, these comments are aimed at developing students' close reading abilities.

Close reading refers to students' ability to read texts attentively, by focusing on the details, and to provide evidence from their text for their interpretations (Cromwell, 2005). Students may either make claims about the text without showing how they arrived at that claim or they might use quotes without fully explaining or integrating them into their discussion. Evidence comments thus aim to improve students' use of quotes – to show the link between a quote and a statement, for instance, or to provide the necessary quote for a claim – to enable students' close reading ability. Prompt comments on the other hand are aimed at improving students' rudimentary close reading. Prompt comments thus aim to get students to do a better close reading, while evidence comments aim to enable students to do a rudimentary close reading on which they can then build. For example, Jane made the comment "What about the poem suggests that love is complicated?" (C2:E1) on an essay (see below).
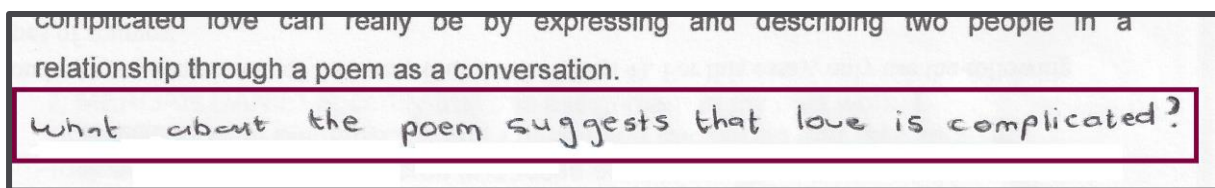

Image 5.3. *Specialisation example of an evidence comment*

This comment is in response to the student's claim that "Finally the dialogue actually gave more detail on the situation of how complicated love can really be by expressing and describing two people in a relationship through a poem as a conversation" (C2:E1). This claim is in reference to Jeremy Cronin's "A love poem". This sentence is taken from the student's

conclusion; it is the first time that she has mentioned this interpretation of the poem as showing the complicated nature of relationships. As with the above example, the interpretation is not necessarily wrong (there is indeed much to suggest that the poem highlights the complicated nature of a relationship), but the tutor is asking the student to provide more substantiation for a conclusion that she has reached without explaining clearly to the reader how it was reached.

In the analysis of all the evidence comments, exemplified above, the focus is on developing the student's analytical ability through engaging with the textual evidence. Consequently, evidence comments might appear to be stronger in epistemic relations, as they do call for evidence from the text (thereby suggesting that only knowledge of the text is important), but the ultimate *focus* of the comment is to encourage using this textual knowledge to reach analytical insights. Moreover, evidence comments are not focused on developing students' analytical abilities *further* as prompts do, which would suggest that students already possess the ability to do an analysis but that their analysis lacks depth. As the *focus* of the comments is to enable students' analytical and close reading abilities, thereby enabling access to the *basis* of the discipline, they can be seen as stronger in social relations, though relatively weaker than analysis and prompt comments; i.e. SR+. Further, they may be classified as weaker epistemic relations (ER-), because although the basis of the comments is on textual knowledge, ultimately this textual knowledge is more about supporting the analysis than about privileging the specific knowledge (see Figure 5.5).
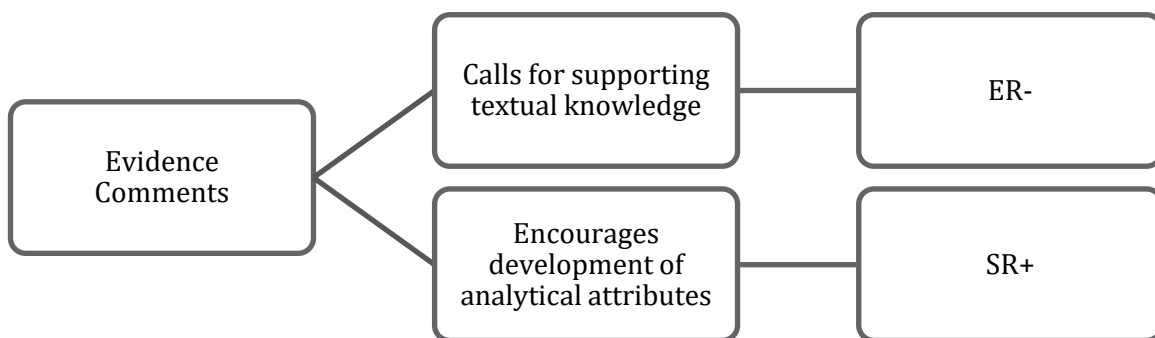

Figure 5.5. *Specialisation coding of evidence comments*

In summation, then, analysis, prompt and evidence comments are all aligned with the knower code *basis* of the discipline. In contrast, the next sub-category of content feedback to be discussed, namely focus comments, is not.

5.2.1.2 Focus comments

Focus comments point out that students are perhaps making valid claims about the text, but that these are not explicitly answering the essay question, so the analysis might be inaccurate or unfocused. For instance, the student may be recounting the events of the text without an attempt at analysis or not focusing on the given extract or not explicitly answering the essay question. For example, Cindy made the comment "Shows some understanding, but fails to adequately answer the question" (D3:E1) on an essay (see below).
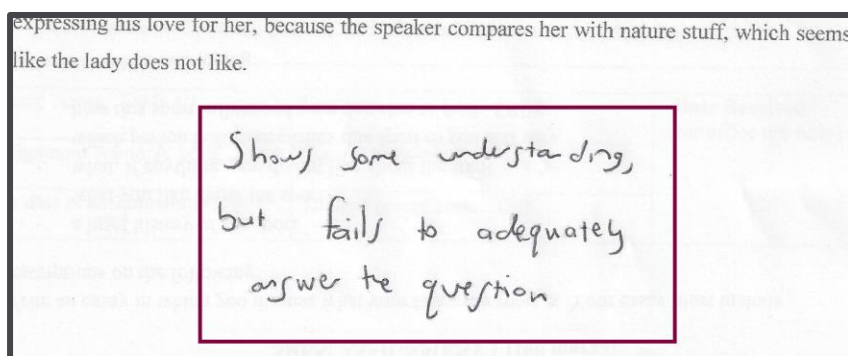

Image 5.4. *Specialisation example of a focus comment*

This summative comment was made at the end of the student's essay on Jeremy Cronin's "A love poem". In this instance, Cindy is referring to the essay quality at large. What is interesting to note is that she acknowledges that the student has 'some understanding' of the text, but that ultimately the student has failed to answer the essay question. The comment does not call for (more) knowledge of the text, nor does it seem to be aimed at developing the student's analytical abilities; instead, it is a statement about how well (or in this case, how poorly) the student has answered the essay question.

Focus comments, as the example illustrates, therefore seem to point towards answering the essay question well, which can come across as a generic ability. Answering the essay question is not specific to English Studies. Therefore, the *basis* of these kinds of comments is generic, rather than specific to the discipline's code. As such, the comments may be classified as being weaker in epistemic relations (ER-) and weaker in social relations (SR-) (see Figure 5.6 below).
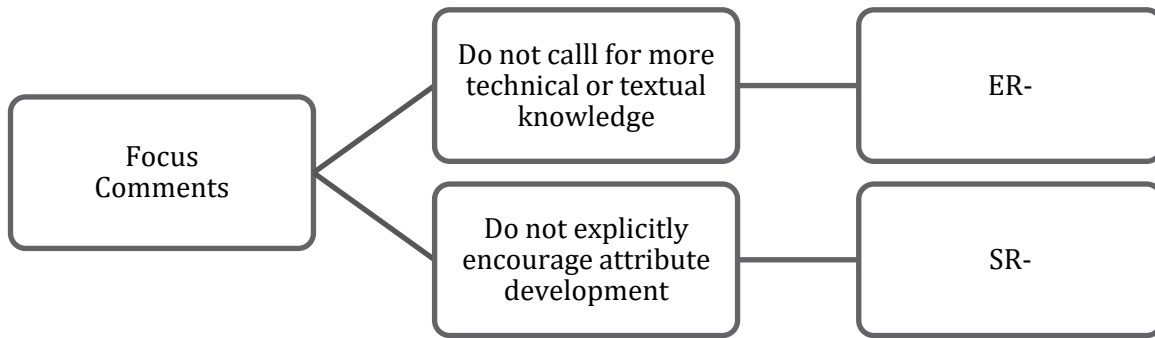
Figure 5.6. *Specialisation coding of focus comments*

Focus comments are therefore underpinned by a relativist code. The next subcategories of content-related comments, namely clarification and knowledge, are also not quite aligned with the *basis* of the discipline.

5.2.1.3 CLARIFICATION AND KNOWLEDGE COMMENTS

Knowledge and clarification comments are underpinned by varying degrees of stronger epistemic relations and weaker social relations. Clarification comments, for instance, are rooted in students' (mis)understanding and/or recalling of plot points from texts. These comments ask for clarification on certain plot points in order to provide necessary, additional detail. Often these might be crucial plot points that might have significance for the student's analysis, but because the student has left them out, the analysis is not as complete as it could be. For example, Alex made the comment "which? Be as specific as possible all the time in an academic essay" (B3:E2) on an essay (see below).
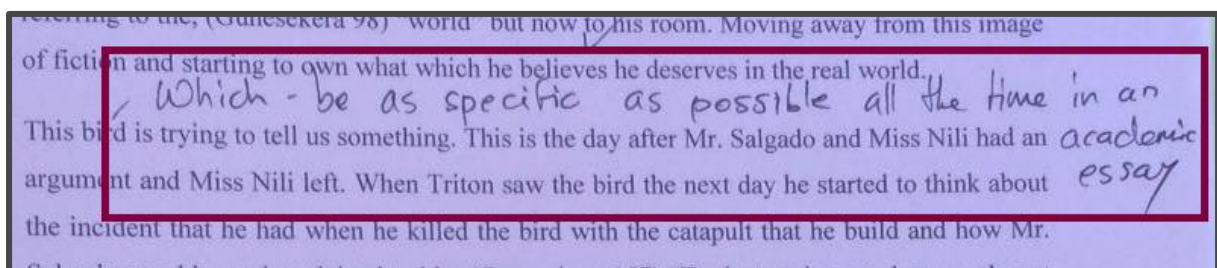

Image 5.5. *Specialisation example of a clarification comment*

112

In this instance, the student had written that "this bird is trying to tell us something" (B3:E2) in relation to the essay question about Romesh Gunesekera's *Reef.* The tutor's response – 'which [bird]' – seeks clarification on the type of bird mentioned in the novel. This is important for plot and analysis purpose, as the bird in question, an oriole bird, is symbolic of an earlier time. It is thus necessary to include the specific information about which bird the student is referring to, to give depth to the analysis. However, interestingly, the tutor qualifies this by saying 'be as specific as possible all the time in an academic essay', but does not explain why. Consequently, the point comes across as sounding like detailed and specific knowledge from the text is vital in and of itself, rather than because it actually deepens or sharpens analysis or focus. The student is therefore being encouraged to provide detail on all plot points, not just specifically those points that could have implications for the analysis. The *focus* of the comment is thus more on emphasising the importance of recalling correct and specific textual knowledge than on the implication the knowledge would have for analytical purposes.

From the examples in the data set, such as that above, it becomes clear that clarification comments seek further details on certain plot points. Clarification comments appear to privilege having more, and more detailed, knowledge of the text. As such, they can be classified as stronger in epistemic relations (ER+) and weaker in social relations (SR-) as the *focus* of these comments, as they are phrased, is on knowledge-telling rather than knower-building (see Figure 5.7 below).
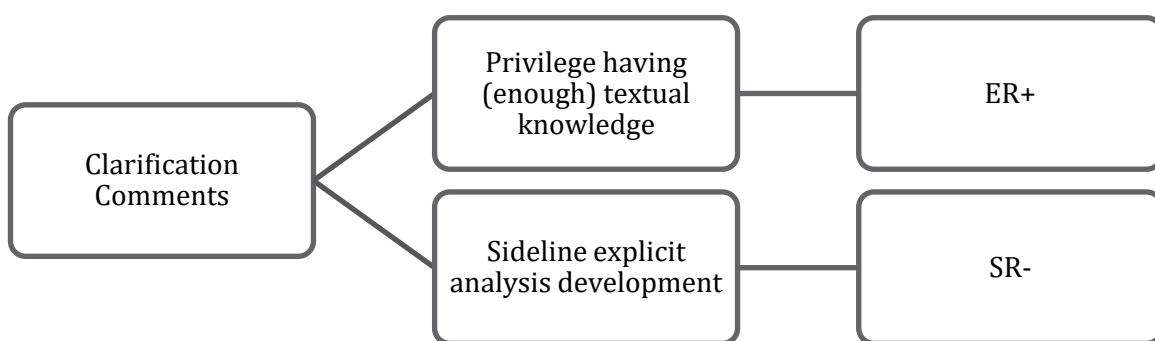

Figure 5.7. Specialisation coding of clarification comments

In the dataset, clarification comments are not alone in emphasising the importance of knowledge, as the next category of content-related feedback, knowledge comments, also emphasise it, though more strongly.

Knowledge comments are rooted in students having 'specialised' knowledge of the text. These types of comments may point out errors that students have made regarding plot and/or characters and may remind them of other plot points that they may have overlooked. It might also point out an 'error' in the analysis that arises due to a misunderstanding of certain plot points or erroneous recalling of information. For example, Jane wrote "He sees them fight before" (C3:E2) on an essay (see below).
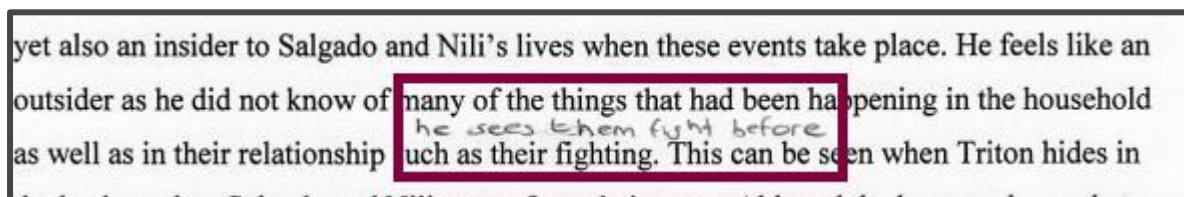

Image 5.6. *Specialisation example of a knowledge comment*

The student had written that this is the first time that Triton (the protagonist in Gunesekera's *Reef*) sees Miss Nili and Mr Salgado fight. However, the tutor points out that the fight in the given extract is in fact not the first one that Triton has witnessed. This gives the impression that the student somehow lacks sufficient knowledge about the text and implies that having the 'correct' knowledge of the text is important.

The knowledge comments indicate to students that a certain specialised knowledge is needed, that it is important for them to get all the facts about the text correct. Furthermore, the feedback also clearly indicates to students what specific knowledge is valued. So, for instance, one student included biographical information about Jeremy Cronin, the author of the poem "A love poem", upon which the first essay is based (see Appendix A). The tutor deleted this comment by placing a line through it; no explanation was given as to why. In doing so, the tutor is passively indicating to the student that certain information is not valued, while other information is.

As such, knowledge comments can be classified as being stronger in epistemic relations (ER++), especially in relation to clarification comments. At the same time, while this knowledge does not completely disregard the analytical aspect of the information – having incorrect textual knowledge may negatively impact the analysis of the text – it does downplay these analytical attributes in order to focus more on ensuring that students provide the correct content knowledge. Thus, knowledge comments may be classified as being weaker in social relations (SR--) (see Figure 5.8 below).
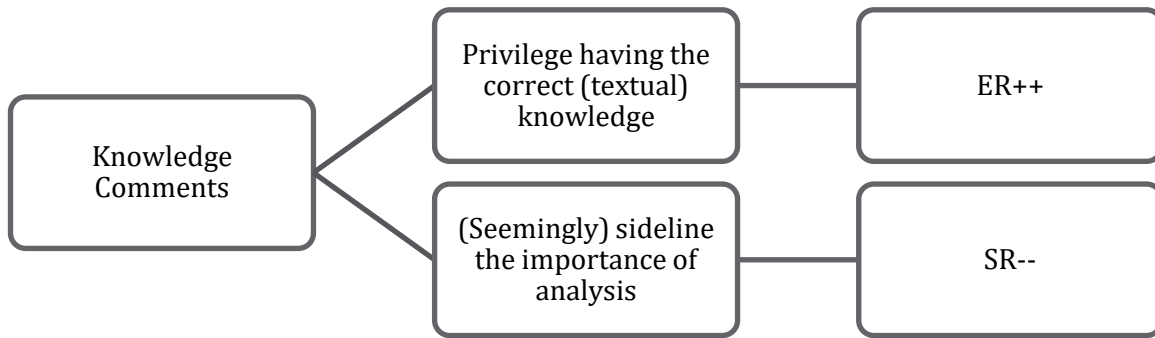
Figure 5.8*. Specialisation coding of knowledge comments*

Figure 5.9 provides a summary of the specialisation codes underpinning each content sub-category. In terms of content feedback, then, there is a clear divide between feedback that is underpinned by a knower code (analysis, prompts and evidence comments), a relativist code (focus comments) and a knowledge code (clarification and knowledge comments). Within the category of content feedback in the data set, alone, there is therefore a potential for miscommunication about what is valued in the discipline.
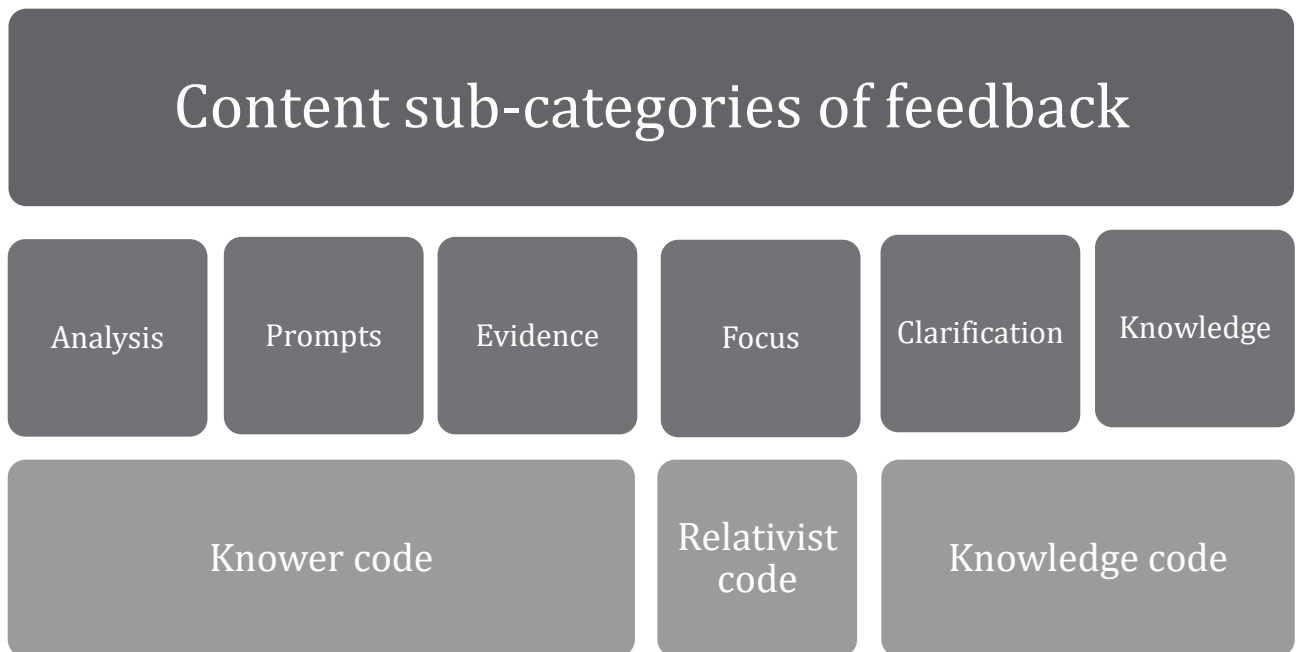

Figure 5.9*. Summary of Specialisation coding of content comments*

The next category of feedback, structure comments, is similarly underpinned by different specialisation codes.

5.2.2 STRUCTURE COMMENTS

Feedback also focuses on the structure of a student's essay. The structure refers to how the content has been organised – from a sentence[25] level to the argument.

Structure is important for tutors. For instance, Cindy, when asked to list the characteristics of a good essay, focused almost exclusively on the importance of structure:

> coherent, clear answer to the question, an introduction which suggests a planned structure and puts forth an argument, clear topic sentences, which condense each paragraph's argument, engagement with the text to support the argument, a logical structure and clear, precise language use (Individualised interview).

Similarly, Alex pointed out that one of the characteristics of a good essay is that "It has well-structured paragraphs that connect with one another. The introduction sets clear expectations of the ideas expanded on in the essay" (Individualised interview). Jessica also pointed to the importance of structure: "It [a high achieving essay] needs to follow some logical flow and have a point to the essay".

In spite of the importance of structure, the tutors do not always perceive it as something that feedback should focus on. Alex, for instance, pointed out that structure (along with referencing) is the least important aspect of the essay that feedback should focus on, and "should be self-taught" (Questionnaire 1). This is because structure is "Random conventions that are necessary in an institution and in an academic context, but do little to improve on students' self-empowerment" (Questionnaire 1).

Based on the analysis of the data, and the connection between the two, this study has organised structure into two sub-categories: Organisation and Argumentation.

5.2.2.1 ORGANISATION COMMENTS

This refers to feedback that focuses on a student's writing on a paragraph level and can refer to both how the paragraph as a whole and the individual sentences that make up the paragraph are organised and structured. In English Studies at UWC, students are told to write paragraphs using a PEE – Point, Evidence, Explanation – structure. Moreover, students are told rather explicitly what should be in the introduction, as well as how sentences, and specifically

---

[25]Sentence structure has purposefully been grouped with the more general structure comments instead of with grammar and spelling, because during discussions with the participant tutors sentence structure was frequently mentioned alongside other structural concerns such as paragraphing and argument.

topic sentences, should be written. For example, Alex asked a student "Does this introduction adequately summarize your 3 main ideas?" (B2:T1) on an essay (see below).
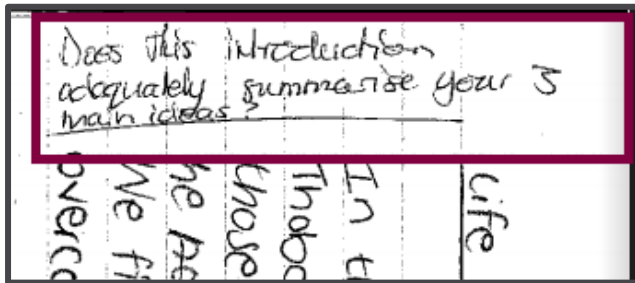

Image 5.7. *Specialisation example of an organisation comment 1*

In this instance, the student is being asked to consider whether her paragraph has included the necessary requirements in order for it to be recognised as an introduction. This suggests specific procedural expectations of what should be in the paragraph – the tutor is, for instance, specific about the introduction (and by extension, the essay) having three main ideas. This is largely because English 111/121 students are encouraged to write 5-paragraph essays (introduction paragraph, three 'body' paragraphs and a conclusion paragraph), which means that students are limited in terms of how much they *can* write, not only in terms of the word count (which is usually about 1000 words per essay at first year level), but also in terms of ideas, as, in essence, each essay can only have three main ideas to be discussed in the three body paragraphs.

Similarly, for example, Alex wrote "I repeated that you are NOT to put your topic sentences on separate lines and that they should be FULL sentences!!" (B3:T1) as a summative comment on a test (see below).
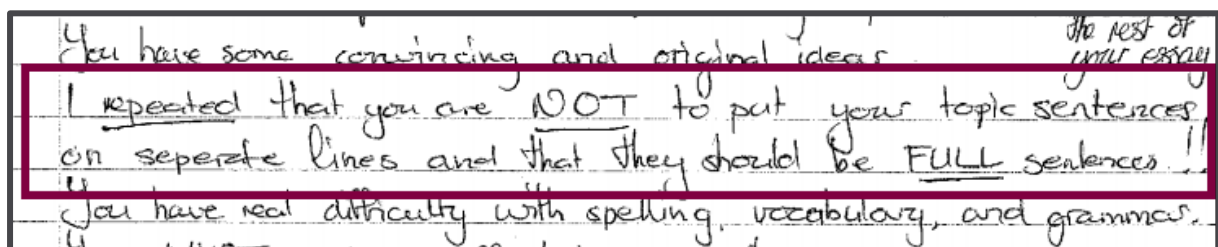

Image 5.8. *Specialisation example of an organisation comment 2*

The fact that the tutor underlined and capitalised certain words, as well as included the double exclamation marks, indicates not only the tutor's frustration at advice being disregarded, but it also breaks the topic sentence into a mechanistic 'thing'. The comment thus is less about what the topic sentence is saying – which would suggest a level of engagement with the text through the essay question and the corresponding argument – but rather about how the topic sentence should be constructed.

As these examples indicate, the requirements for organising a sentence, paragraph or essay are presented in a way that emphasises the construction of the topic sentence and paragraph on a technical level; that is, that students need the necessary technical knowledge of what should be included in the introduction paragraph or the topic sentence to get this aspect of the essay right. As such, organisation comments may be classified as having stronger epistemic relations (ER+), as this type of comments reduce the structure of the essay to various practical and procedural pieces of necessary knowledge that students need to enact in each paper they write.

However, as the tutors pointed out, the organisation of the essay is important for expressing coherent, well-evidenced arguments, which would be aligned with the knower code. Yet, the comments themselves are divorced from this knower-purpose of organisation comments; the comments focus more on the technical aspects of organisation, and thereby de-emphasise the underlying knower aspects of organisation. As such, they can be coded as weaker in social relations (SR-) (see Figure 5.10 below). Organisation comments are therefore more aligned with a knowledge code.
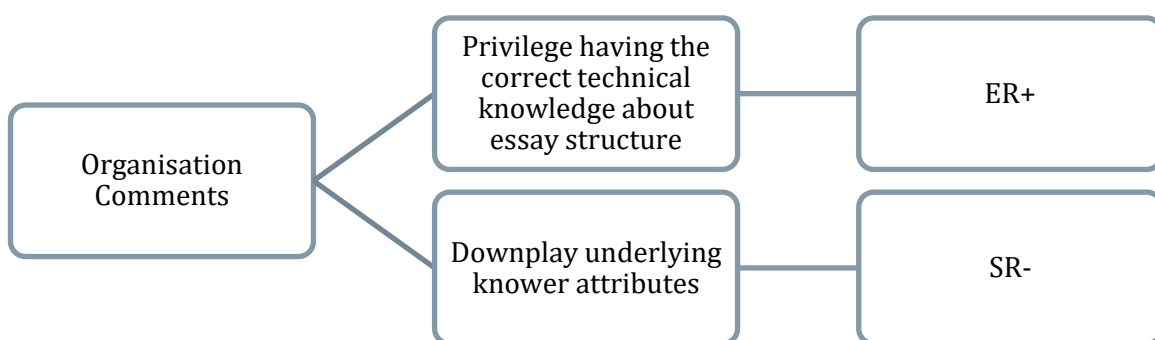

Figure 5.10. *Specialisation coding of organisation comments*

While organisation comments tend to be divorced from the knower code *basis* of the discipline, the argumentation comments are more aligned to the *basis* of the discipline.

5.2.2.2 ARGUMENT COMMENTS

The argument is central to a student's essay as it binds the essay together. The argument is the student's response to the essay question, which in turn should provide structure for the essay as a whole. For example, Cindy wrote "Outline full argument. Needs fleshing out" (D1:E1) on an essay (see below).
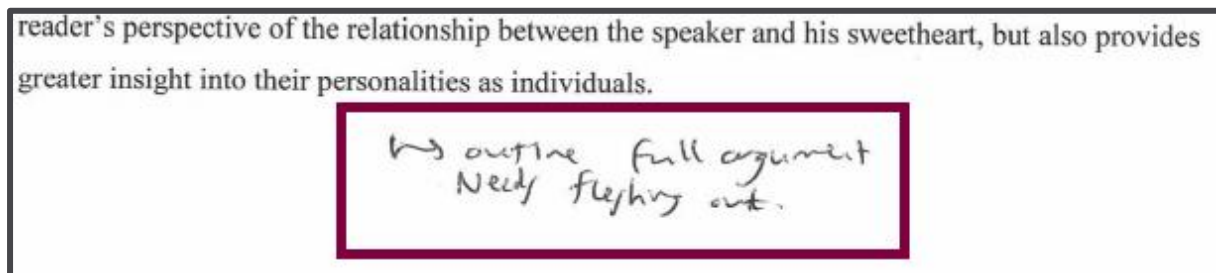
Image 5.9. *Specialisation example of an argument comment 1*

This comment, made after the conclusion, is suggesting to the student that the argument is something that needs to run throughout the essay, thereby emphasising its centrality in the essay. The comment, however, is not calling on a specialised knowledge of what a 'fleshed out' argument looks like; the tutor seems to be implying that the student will know what an argument is and why one is necessary. This suggests, perhaps, tacit knowledge about argumentation.

As another example, Jessica wrote "your introduction is vague. I am not sure what your essay will argue" (E1:T2) on a test (see below).

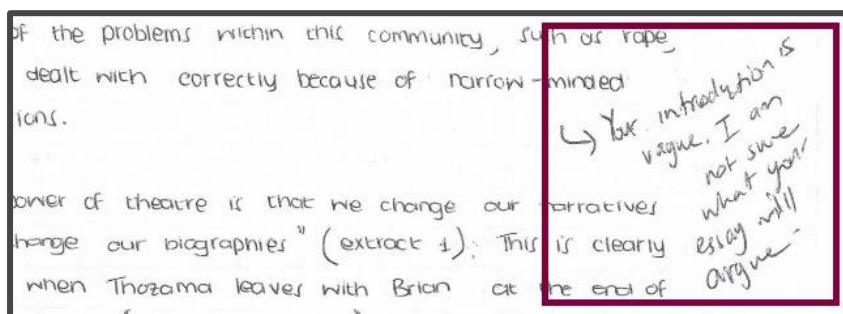**Image 5.10.** *Specialisation example of an argument comment 2*

119

In this instance, the tutor is indicating the importance of the argument to the student – without it, the introduction lacks clarity. By extension, this means that the rest of the essay may be lacking in structure and clarity as well. As with the previous example, the tutor does not explicitly say how the student should go about including an argument, but merely points out that one is needed.

Argument comments, as illustrated above, seem to suggest that students need tacit knowledge of what an argument is, as there is no explicit emphasis in these comments on how an argument should be constructed. As such, these comments are weaker in epistemic relations (ER-), as the tutors do not provide students with the necessary technical knowledge of how to construct an argument.

At the same time, the lack of explicit guidance on constructing an argument could suggest two things: firstly, that tutors have spoken about constructing arguments in the tutorials and may assume that students can enact this learning in their writing, and, secondly, that tutors may assume that students should already know how to construct an argument, especially since the argument is largely informed by the students' response to the essay question. This suggests a greater emphasis on developing specialised knower attributes, that is, to let the student's voice come through in their engagement with the essay question, as reflected in the construction of the argument. As such, these comments are stronger in social relations (SR+) (see Figure 5.11 below).
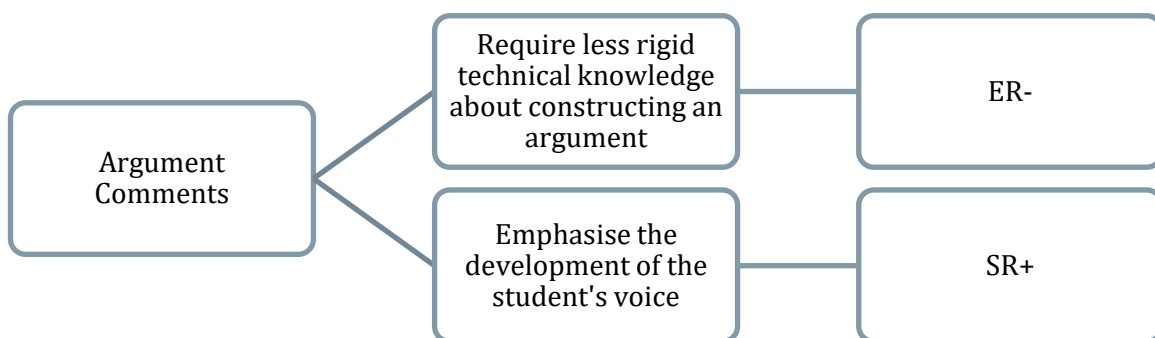

Figure 5.11. *Specialisation coding of argument comments*

Argument comments are therefore aligned with the knower code. Figure 5.12 provides a summary of the coding of structure comments in terms of Specialisation.
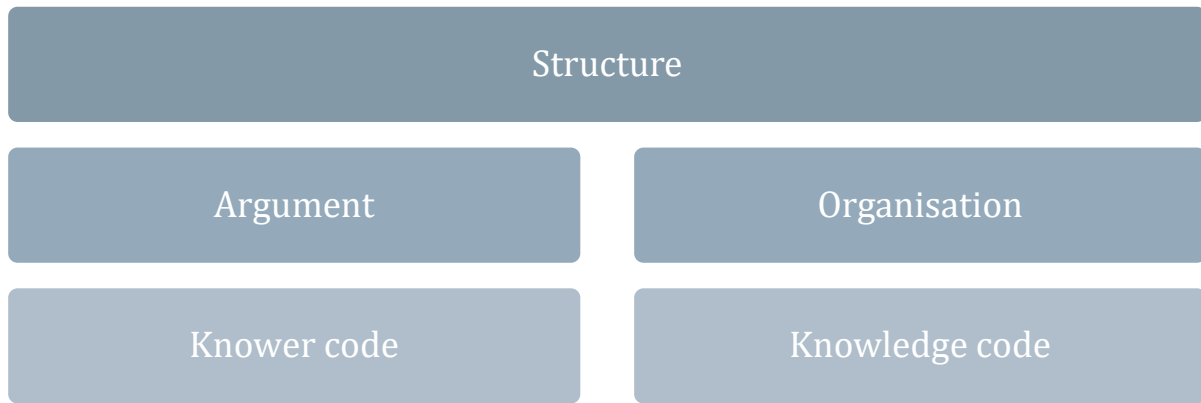
Figure 5.12. *Summary of Specialisation coding of structure comments*

In contrast to both content and structure comments, which are both underpinned by more than one Specialisation code, the next category of feedback, namely referencing and quoting, is underpinned by one Specialisation code only.

5.2.3 REFERENCING AND QUOTING COMMENTS

Referencing and quoting have been grouped together because, in the context of the feedback provided, the technical procedure for using quotes can be seen as an extension of referencing. In this instance, quoting does not refer to how a student has engaged with the quote (as with prompts or evidence comments) but rather how the quote has been integrated grammatically into the sentence.

Referencing (both in-text and in the reference list) is a necessary component of essay writing that students need to develop. In English Studies, students have to use the Modern Language Association (MLA) referencing style, which is specific to English Studies. Students are taught the basics of MLA referencing, and are then referred to the MLA guide in the course reader for further instructions. The MLA guide to referencing also has strict technical requirements for using quotes (e.g. using double quotation marks or using square brackets to indicate a change to a direct quote). Feedback on quotes, then, focuses more on the technical aspects of quoting, rather than the analytical usage of quotes. Therefore, because the technical aspect of quoting is closely aligned with the referencing system, quotes have been included with feedback comments related to referencing errors. For convenience, I shall refer to both referencing and quoting -related feedback as just referencing.

Although referencing is a necessary component of essay writing, participant tutors indicated that they do not feel that they should have to focus on developing students' ability to

reference. Alex, for instance, pointed out that referencing (and essay structure) "are random conventions that are necessary in an institution and in an academic context but do little to improve on students' self-empowerment. They can teach and master these for themselves/by themselves. It is a waste of my time and theirs to focus on" (Individualised interview). Similarly, Cindy felt that referencing is the least important aspect of student writing that feedback should focus on, for "though still important, it's more a formality and mechanistic element than skill to be developed" (Questionnaire 1). Jane was more specific and indicated that "bibliographic (Not in-text) referencing is less important in English one. The bibliography could perhaps be introduced later" (Questionnaire 1).

Tutors, therefore, may be focusing on the technical aspects of referencing and in the process overlooking the epistemological aspect of referencing as an integral part of knowledge construction (Hendricks and Quinn, 2000). At the same time, it may also suggest that tutors feel that what the discipline focuses on – developing the necessary knower attributes – transcends the more technical skills that students require for essay writing. For example, Jessica noted on the student's test script (Ndebele:**x** 15) -> **(Ndebele 15)** ->**No punctuation !!!** (E1:T1) [Words/letters in bold reflect the tutor's feedback] (see below).
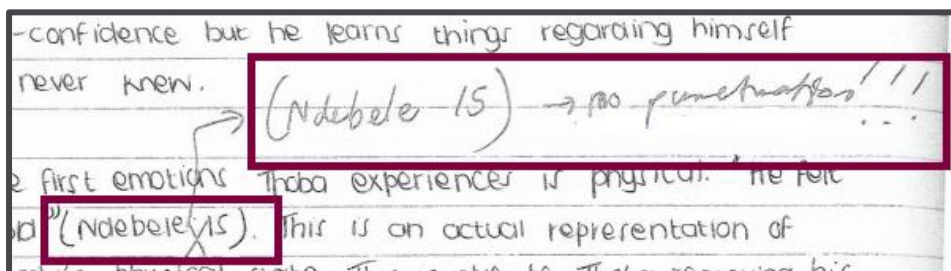
Image 5.11. *Specialisation example of a referencing comment 1*

In this instance, the tutor indicated that there was an error in the way the student had referenced with the use of a cross. The error was then corrected and explained. In this case, what the student did incorrectly was to include a colon inside the bracket (for MLA, 7th Edition, students only need to include the author's surname and the page number). The use of three exclamation marks suggests the tutor's frustration at the student not getting it right. What the tutor has indicated with this specific example is that there is a specific way of referencing in English Studies and that the student needs to have the requisite knowledge to do this correctly. It is important to note that this was the student's first test – not only in English Studies, but possibly at university. It is unclear whether the tutor had discussed how to reference with

students ahead of time (though, the use of multiple exclamation marks may suggest that the tutor's frustration stems from having already discussed this in class or the fact that the student did not consult the guide – since it's a 'technical' error which could easily be avoided had the student consulted the referencing guide in the Student Handbook).

Additionally, Alex wrote "When Thoba decides that his mother can "do whatever she [likes] with him" (…) it shows that he realises that he will be in trouble whether or not he makes the fire" (B3:T1) on a student's test (see below).
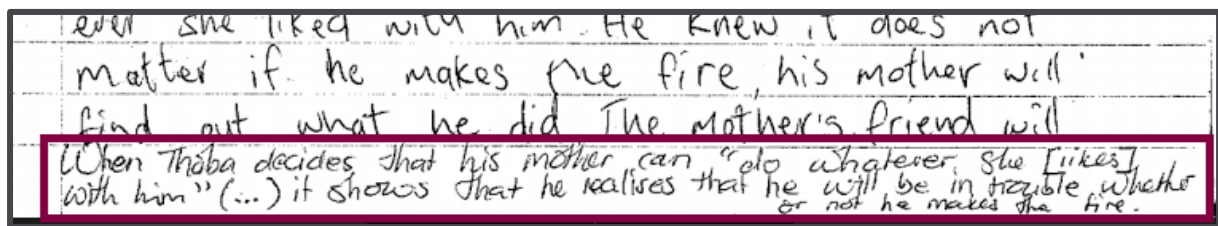
Image 5.12. *Specialisation example of a referencing comment 2*

In this instance, the tutor is providing an example to the student of how to integrate a quote. The tutor's comment foregrounds that the student needs to use square brackets ("[likes]") to indicate that the word 'liked' has been changed, while an ellipsis has been used to show that some words have been left out. The example therefore emphasises the technical aspects of integrating quotes. The example in itself may, however, not necessarily make it clearer what specifically the tutor is pointing out to the student as it implies technical knowledge that would constitute advanced referencing for the average first-year student.

Referencing and quoting comments, as exemplified above, place clear emphasis on having the right kind of procedural knowledge; the student needs to follow the referencing and quoting instructions correctly in order to 'get referencing right'. Comments that focus on referencing in this way may be coded as being stronger in epistemic relations (ER+) as there is a strong emphasis on applying the accurate technical knowledge of referencing. In doing so, the comment downplays the epistemological aspects inherent in referencing (Hendricks & Quinn, 2000) as the emphasis is thus less on using evidence to substantiate and build an argument, which may be more attuned to cultivating knowerness. As such, reference comments may be classified as being weaker in social relations (SR-) (see Figure 5.13 below).
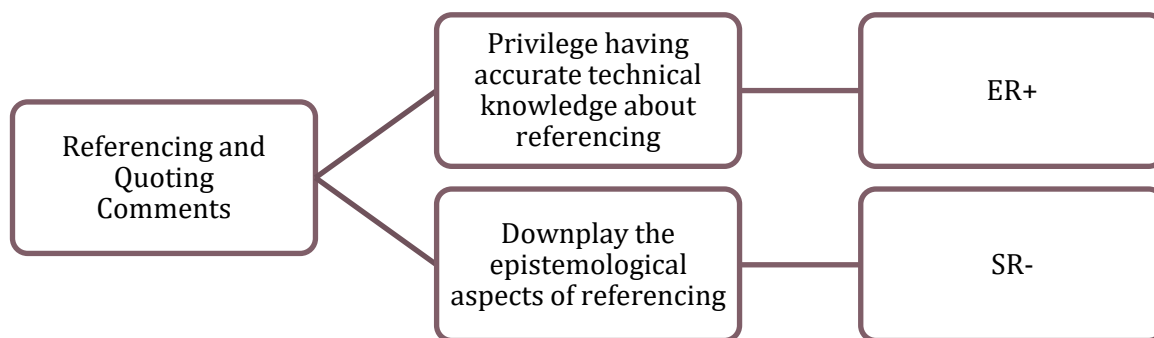
Figure 5.13. *Specialisation coding of referencing comments*

Referencing comments are therefore aligned with a knowledge code and may thus obscure the knower code *basis* of the discipline. The next category to be discussed, namely language comments, may also obscure the *basis* of the discipline.

5.2.4 LANGUAGE COMMENTS

Feedback on language-related problems (i.e. grammar and spelling errors) in the sample essays focused largely on identifying and correcting these language errors. The focus was largely on spelling (either spelling a word incorrectly or using a homophone), word form (using the noun form of a word instead of a verb, or vice versa), tense, concord, preposition errors, as well as identifying unclear sentences. Three examples are provided below (all words in bold indicate the tutor's feedback). For example, Alex corrected "Signify" to **"signifies"** (B1:E2) on an essay (see below).
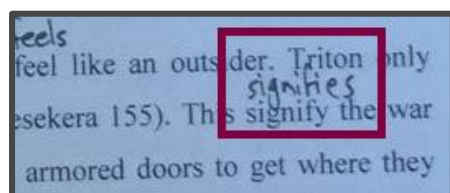
Image 5.13. *Specialisation example of a language error 1*

In this instance, Alex corrected a concord error. The subject in the student's sentence ('this') is singular, and as such, the verb should correspond in number. Instead of having 'signify' (the plural form of the verb) the student should have written the singular form of the verb,

namely 'signifies'. Although Alex corrected this error, she did not explain why this was an error. In doing so, Alex shows an assumption that the student will know why it was an error.

Similarly, Alex corrected "Triton's presents" to "**presence**" (B1:E2) on an essay (see below).
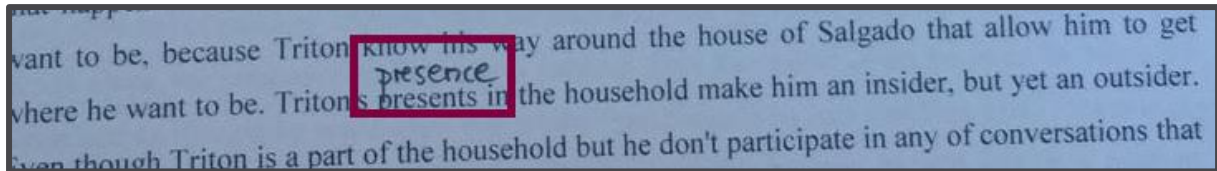
Image 5.14. Specialisation example of a language error 2

Here the tutor corrected the homophone error by writing the correct word above the 'incorrect' word. Although the incorrect word was spelled correctly, Alex did not explain why 'presence' is correct in this instance and 'presents' is not. Again, it shows an assumption by the tutor that the student will recognise why it was error.

Additionally, Cindy had underlined the student's phrase "An unpleasant attempt start of a dialogue love poem" and placed a question mark above it"**?**" (D3:E1) on an essay (see below).
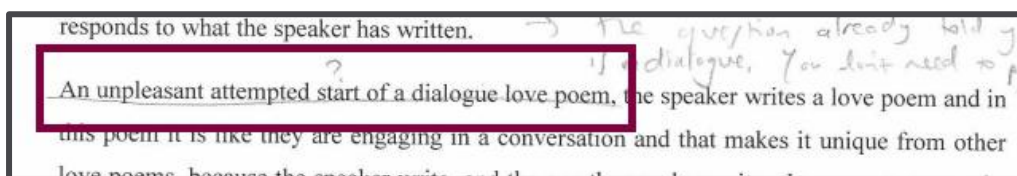
Image 5.15. Specialisation example of a language error 3

Here the tutor had identified the expression error by underlining it and used a question mark to indicate that she is unclear about what the student has tried to say. However, merely underlining the sentence and having a question mark above it is vague. While it may be relatively clear that the tutor is questioning the expression, it may not be something that the student would necessarily recognise as such; it could appear as though the tutor is questioning the statement itself and not the way it was constructed. The tutor, in this instance, could have made the error clearer to the student by writing 'meaning unclear', for example.

As these examples indicate, the *focus* of language-related comments does not seem to be explicitly on the rules and regulations of language. Although there are important grammar and spelling rules that determine how language should be used, the comments provided represent the knowledge neither as procedural, nor as socialised. The comments do not make the rules of grammar more explicit – even though it is the tutor's knowledge of these rules that governs the comments they give – nor do they emphasize how to communicate 'like a knower' through the comments. The phrasing of these comments presents language as neutral, devoid of a *basis* in knowledge or knower attributes, i.e., the term is correct, or not, but not in an English Studies context. Language feedback may therefore be categorised as weaker in both epistemic relations (ER-) and social relations (SR-) (see Figure 5.14 below).
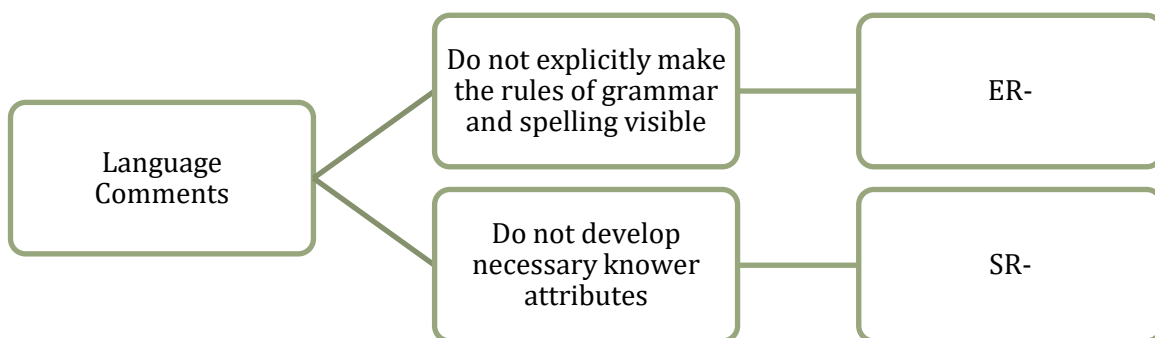
Figure 5.14. *Specialisation coding of language comments*

Language comments, as they are presented to students in this data set, are therefore aligned with a relativist code. The last category of feedback comments, namely encouragement comments, however, are more aligned with the knower code.

5.2.5 ENCOURAGEMENT COMMENTS

Encouragement comments refer to those comments that do not focus on specific aspects of essay writing or analysis but are merely there to encourage students by providing some form of praise or motivation. Research has shown that although these types of comments are important as they play a role in "enhancing self-efficacy" and self-esteem, they often contain very little information about what students can do to improve their writing (Hattie & Timperley, 2007:96).

Throughout the study, participant tutors indicated that these comments are meant to provide motivation, but that they also have a developmental purpose. For instance, Alex pointed out that

> … the students are often very discouraged by a lack of positive feedback and this is sometimes an attempt to boost their morale so to speak. Other times, it is an attempt to encourage them to continue with the specific thing that they have done well. It is also an attempt to comfort them that the teachings they have applied are recognised and have an impact on their marks. (Meeting 3, Written response)

For example, Alex wrote "Well done!" (B3:E3) on a student's essay (see below).
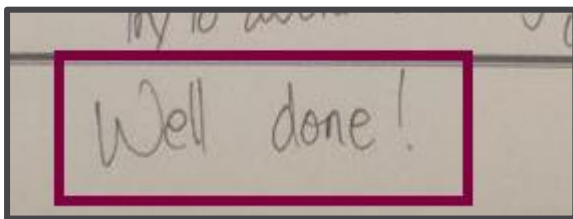
Image 5.16. *Specialisation example of an encouragement comment 1*

In this case, the comment is a summative comment at the end of the essay and does not explicitly refer to a particular point. The comment just presents a general statement of congratulations. The student received 55% so the comment is clearly meant as a motivational one but could also be misleading as it does not specify what the student has done right.

Similarly, Jessica wrote "Your essay has a lot of potential" (E2:E2) on a student's essay (see below[26]).
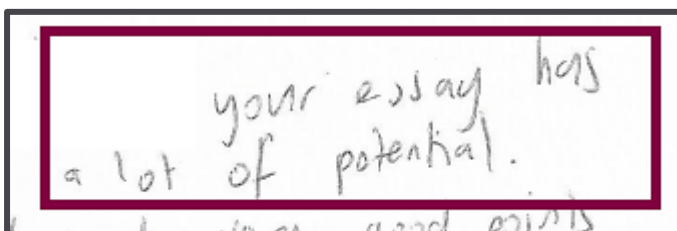
Image 5.17. *Specialisation example of an encouragement comment 2*

---

[26] Please note that the name of the student has been erased from the image.

In this instance, the comment is meant to motivate the student, as the student received 45%. By saying that the essay has potential, Jessica is trying to encourage the student to keep trying.

Encouragement comments therefore aim to motivate students, and in so doing, build confidence. Confidence, although not an attribute specific to English Studies, is nevertheless a knower attribute that may enable students to better navigate their way into university practices and the discipline. At the same time, the comment does not foreground possessing the right kind of, or more, knowledge; though because of the relative vagueness of the comment, knowledge cannot completely be disregarded as an underlying factor of the comment. As such, the comments may be seen as weaker in epistemic relations (ER-) and stronger social relations (SR+) (see Figure 5.15).
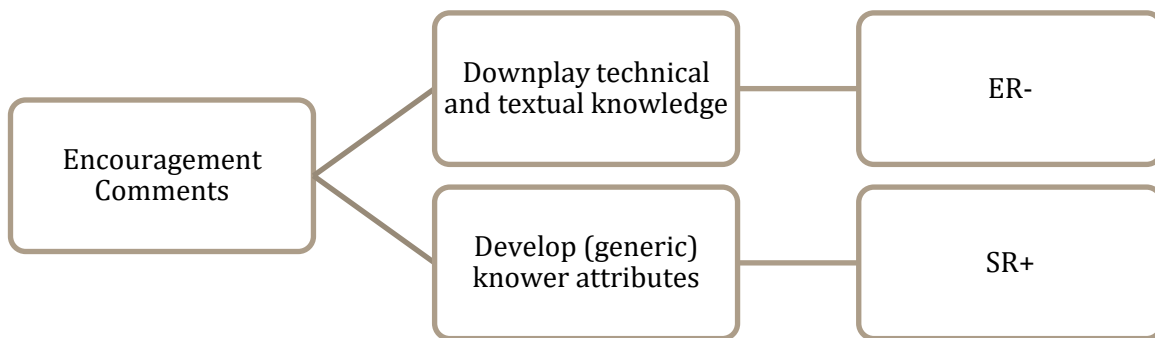
Figure 5.15. *Specialisation coding of encouragement comments*

Although the encouragement comments are not being used to develop English Studies specific knower attributes (such as independent thinking, creativity, critical thinking), they are being used to develop a more general knower attribute (i.e. confidence), which could in turn enable students to develop the other knower attributes. Encouragement comments are therefore aligned with the knower code of the discipline.

5.3 DISCUSSION: WHAT UNDERPINS FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS?

As the coding of the five feedback categories in terms of Specialisation has indicated, the feedback in the data set is underpinned by three distinct specialisation codes, namely a knower code (ER-, SR+), a knowledge code (ER+, SR-), and a relativist code (ER-, SR-) (see Figure 5.16).

Specialisation codes underpinning feedback categories		
Knowledge code	**Relativist code**	**Knower code**
Content (knowledge, clarification)	Content (focus)	Content (analysis, prompts, evidence)
Structure (organisation)	Language	Structure (argument)
Referencing		Encouragement

Figure 5.16. Specialisation codes underpinning feedback

As Figure 5.16 indicates, a knower code underpins most of the feedback comment categories. Mapping out the feedback categories on the specialisation plane to get a broad overview of where the comments fall in the quadrants, indicates that there are more categories of knower code feedback than of the other specialisation codes (see Figure 5.17)
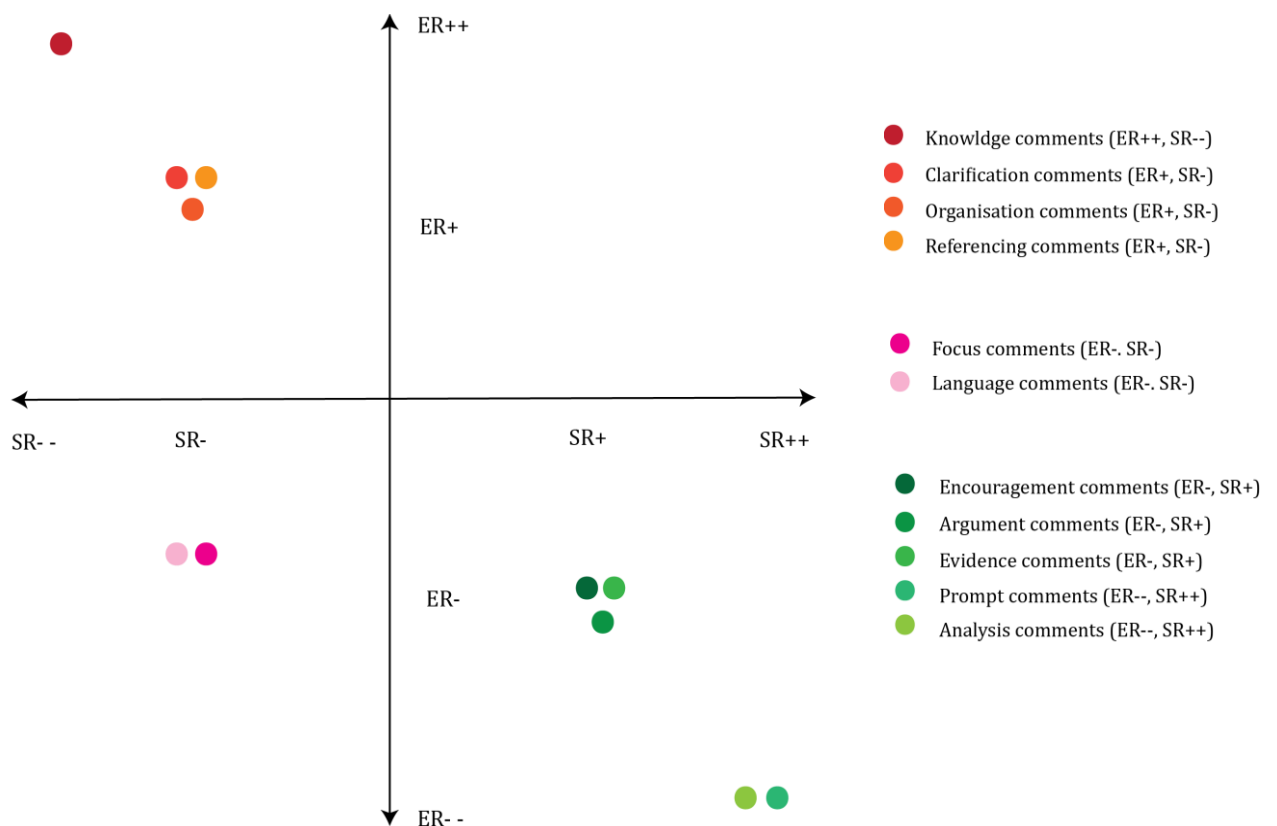
Figure 5.17. Specialisation plane

However, taking into consideration the percentage that each category is comprised of, it indicates that the emphasis – in terms of the percentage of comments – falls largely in the relativist code (See Figure 5.18).
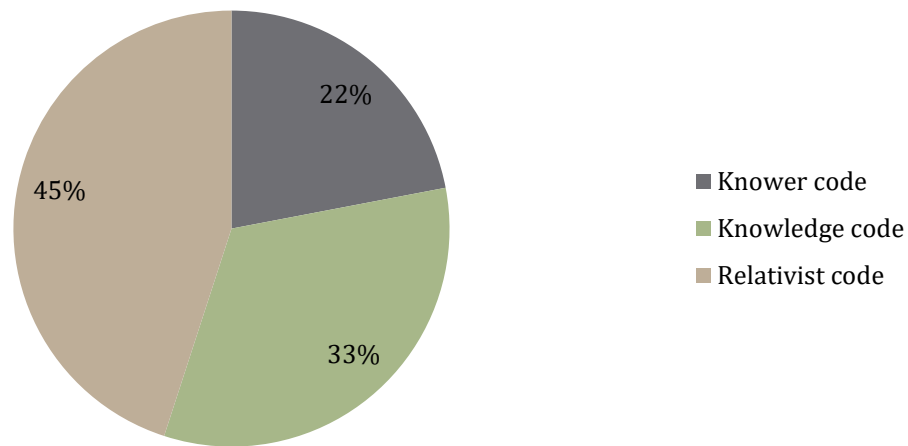
Figure 5.18. *Percentage distribution of codes underlying comments*

Comments that are aligned with the knower code *basis* of the discipline – that is, analysis, prompts, evidence, argument, and encouragement comments – account for 22% of the total comments (see Figure 5.18); these comments have been coded as being weaker in epistemic relations and stronger in social relations. Comments that are aligned with a knowledge code *basis* – that is, organisation, referencing, knowledge, and clarification comments – account for 33% of the comments; these comments have been coded as being stronger in epistemic relations and stronger in social relations. Comments that are aligned with a relativist code *basis* – that is focus and language comments – account for 49% of the comments; these comments have been coded as being weaker in both epistemic relations and social relations. In terms of Specialisation, then, there is a greater emphasis being placed on general essay writing skills (relativist code) than on cultivating the necessary knower gaze. Additionally, as the results reflect the feedback given over the course of the year, it indicates that there is no suggestion of a balance of knower code comments with the other code comments, which is problematic for enabling access to the discipline's underlying principles.

The clear split between the three kinds of specialisation codes represents a code clash, firstly, between the knower code underlying the discipline and the codes underlying feedback, and secondly, between the different feedback codes themselves. These clashes have various implications for student access to, and success in, the discipline. For instance, the fact that

comparatively fewer comments are aligned with the knower code suggests a possible overlooking of the knower code underlying the discipline, and it could be indicative of tutors either feeling that there are more generic essay writing matters that need to be attended to, or that they are perhaps not aware of what their feedback should be achieving. Additionally, as Chapter 6 will demonstrate further, even those comments that are aligned with the knower code *basis* do not guarantee access to the knower code. For instance, the effectiveness of both prompt and evidence comments – subcategories of content feedback that are underpinned by the knower code – greatly depends on whether, and how, students choose to engage with them. It is quite possible that students might be interpreting these comments as indicators of what they did not include (thereby suggesting that prompts or evidence comments may instead appear to call for more knowledge about the text rather than encouraging students to deepen their analytical curiosity about the text).

Moreover, the different codes underlying the feedback also clash with one another – students are, in effect, being told to focus on three things: having (enough) correct textual knowledge, having a technically proficient essay, and being able to construct an in-depth, original analysis of the text. Although all three of these are necessary components of the English Studies essay, it may confuse the student as to what is valued in the discipline, especially if the knowledge or relativist code aspects are seemingly privileged over the knower code aspect. For instance, as has been shown (Figure 5.2), the largest amount of feedback in the data set is on language comments, which are underpinned by a relativist code. Although English Studies is not explicitly a language-development course, language does play an important role in creating meaning in the discipline. Within the context of the discipline, to ignore language errors is seen as a way to encourage avoidable errors, while focusing on language at the expense of higher order concerns, such as close reading, critical analysis and critical thinking, could convey misleading information to students. Moreover, the way that language errors are corrected could also be problematic: focusing on correcting language errors merely for the sake of having a grammatically-correct essay, and not on how language is an important tool for meaning-making (which would be more closely aligned with a knower code *basis*), could further mislead students.

The issue of whether to correct language errors, and how to go about doing so is part of a larger debate about language studies and literature studies. These are essentially seen as two separate pedagogies (Mgqwashu, 2012). In my interactions with the tutors, the issue and importance of language appeared frequently. For instance, Cindy indicated that "poor language" is a characteristic of a low-achieving English Studies essay, while Jessica pointed out that grammar errors are "minor but important errors" (Individualised interview). At the end of the

semester, however, Jessica stated that "[l]anguage is the least important thing [that feedback should focus on] at this stage" (Individualised interview). In spite of these conflicting views on the importance of having grammatically correct essays, 39% of the total comments were devoted to identifying and correcting language errors.

Language errors, in this study, are problematic not necessarily because they are just errors, but rather because these errors have the possibility for inhibiting meaning – in other words, grammatically competent essays are important, not because *grammar and spelling* are important, but because meaning is important (Ivanič, 2004). However, the way the feedback on these errors has been conveyed focuses more on the 'correctness' of grammar and spelling for the sake of correctness in a neutral sense. The problem is thus not just with correcting language errors at the expense of other errors, but also *how* the errors have been identified, corrected, or explained – in terms of grammatical proficiency, and not in terms of meaning-making. Consequently, correctness gives rise to potential miscommunication about the role that grammatical competency plays in English Studies and may have negative implications for making the underlying knower code of the discipline more visible. By disconnecting comments about grammar, spelling and clear expression from the study of literature and the centrality of meaning, tutors may potentially obscure the role correct language use plays in meaning-making in English Studies. What is presented as neutral is therefore actually socialised within the specific context of English Studies, and students need to be aware of this for them to know how to improve their writing in future. An over-focus on language errors, in a specific manner, such as that used by the participant tutors, would then seem to privilege correct grammar over analysis; consequently, the knower code *basis* of the discipline remains inaccessible to students.

The split between the different *bases* of the comments is not necessarily a problem, *if* the comments showed a gradual shift in *focus* to align more with the 'true' *basis* of the discipline. For instance, if feedback had started out focusing on language-related errors, but had gradually increased its focus on more knower-building comments, such as prompts or arguments, then it would have indicated a gradual and progressive cultivation of the English Studies gaze. However, as Figure 5.19 shows, the distribution of feedback remained relatively static throughout the year.

With the exception of Test 2, language comments retained a large portion of the feedback given. Simultaneously, although tutors indicated that referencing is not something that they should actively be focusing on, there was a steady increase in the frequency of referencing comments, especially in the first three assignments of the year. Indeed, the focus on referencing remained high. Figure 5.19 shows that the overall emphasis of the feedback comments given in the data set remains relatively the same (with the exception of test 2) across the year.
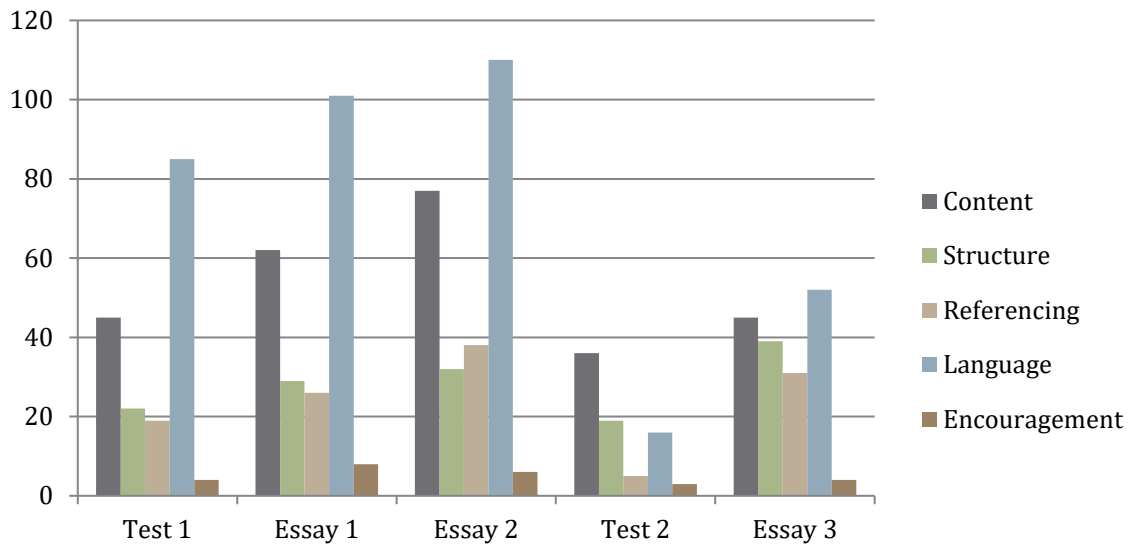
Figure 5.19. *Distribution of comment types over the course of the year*[27]

Additionally, students may also have to contend with a code drift between high school English and university English. A code drift refers to a "change *within* codes", for instance between different kinds of a knower code (Maton, 2016a:13). School English has been characterised as a knower code (Christie, 2016; Jackson, 2016), though it is a more restricted knower code than at university. Although students are encouraged to provide their own interpretations of texts, they are in fact "required to express judgements shared with the imagined examiner" (Christie, 2016:158). Students would then have to move from this restricted knower code to a more 'open' knower code at university, where students will be expected to produce their own interpretations; this suggests a code drift – from one type of knower code to another. Moreover, Kapp (2004) has shown that in some South African high schools, texts are not interpreted in a figurative manner. Consequently, these classes are characterised "by a relentless pursuit of denotative factual answers" (Kapp, 2004:254); this further emphasises the restricted nature of the knower code. If feedback does not make the knower code progressively more visible and consequently accessible, students may be locked out of successful participation in the discipline.

In summary, then, the feedback given to students tends to overlook the knower code *basis* of the discipline, by privileging both textual and technical knowledge. The consequence may be that at the end of first year in English Studies, written feedback may have enabled the

---

[27] Test 3 has been excluded from this graph, as there are quite a few scripts missing, so it would not be an accurate representation of the average comments given for that particular assignment.

development of competent essay writers, at the expense of laying a strong foundation from which students can become more successful participants in the discipline.

5.4 SUMMARY

This Chapter has discussed the five main categories of feedback in the data set, namely content, structure, referencing, language and encouragement. Each of these categories (and the sub-categories) was coded in terms of stronger or weaker epistemic relations and social relations. It was found that underpinning the feedback in the data set were three distinct specialisation codes: a knower code, a knowledge code, and a relativist code. Feedback largely fell into the relativist code. The implication of feedback being underpinned by three specialisation codes is that not only is there a clash between the knower code of the discipline and the three specialisation codes underpinning feedback, but that these codes also clash with one another. This may lead to potential confusion for students about what is valued in the discipline, thus inhibiting the realisation of what is valued in their writing over time.

Chapter 6 builds on this analysis by exploring the five categories of feedback in terms of Semantics in order to understand whether the feedback would enable students to learn from these comments in order to access the knower code (more) successfully, by focusing on *how* feedback is given.

CHAPTER 6
FEEDBACK OR FEED*FORWARD*?

In Chapter 5, the five main categories of feedback in English Studies were identified, namely, content, structure, referencing, language and encouragement; additionally, it was determined that an English Studies knower should be independent, critical, creative and analytical, not only in her engagement with a prescribed text, but also with the world. This enabled the characterisation of the particular knower code of English Studies in this case study and to conjecture that what feedback focuses on does not always clearly communicate this knower code to students effectively. In some instances, it may even obscure the knower code by over-focusing on comments that privilege more general essay writing skills or that privilege content knowledge over ways of working with such knowledge to develop critical and analytical thinking.

Chapter 6 builds on this Specialisation analysis by exploring *how* feedback is communicated to students in writing by tutors. The analysis here makes use of the second dimension of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) in this study's theoretical framework, namely Semantics, to track whether feedback is a meaningful tool for student development and learning. Semantics enables us to trace meaning in larger and smaller ways – across a whole set of essays, or one essay, for example – by determining the relative strengths and weaknesses of the semantic gravity and semantic density of the comments given, tracked in semantic planes or profiles. For English Studies, cumulative learning is the goal, as this is how students become recognised knowers, and being able to move beyond and between single assignment texts and contexts is key for building knowledge in this way. Using semantic planes to map out feedback practices is a way to trace how (or whether) feedback enables cumulative learning, particularly the kinds of learning that lead to students developing the requisite gaze. In terms of feedback, then, Semantics enables us to understand whether students could, in fact, act upon a comment and thereby learn from the comment in order to develop a deeper understanding of, and ability to enact, an English Studies gaze.

This Chapter will start by briefly reviewing the most salient aspects of Semantics. Thereafter, it will give an overview of the semantic gravity and semantic density of the various feedback categories (as indicated in Chapter 5). Lastly, semantic planes for feedback that four students received over the course of the academic year will be mapped out in order to trace how or whether the feedback enables access to the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline.

6.1 Brief recapitulation of Semantics

The LCT dimension of Semantics comprises relative strengths and weaknesses of semantic gravity and semantic density (Maton, 2014a; Maton 2016a). Semantic gravity (see Chapter 3) refers to how strongly meaning is bound to its specific context and can be envisaged on a continuum from stronger to weaker. For instance, a feedback comment with stronger semantic gravity (SG+) will be firmly bound to the context of the essay and/or the text under discussion, for example, a comment that asks a student to provide more detail on the text that the essay is based on. Feedback that is stronger in semantic gravity may be less useful for students if cumulative learning is the goal, as the student may find it difficult to abstract the comment from its context and apply it to other contexts. This may inhibit cultivating the necessary gaze if this is the dominant form of feedback that students receive. Weaker semantic gravity (SG-) denotes comments that are abstracted from the specific context of the essay and/or text at hand and could therefore be applied to other contexts as well. For example, a comment that gives students advice on how to structure an introduction could not only be applicable to a particular essay but could also be applied to writing other essays. Comments that are weaker in semantic gravity might be more useful to students, as they should be more generalisable within, but also beyond, the present context. Consequently, students may be better able to take the learning forward into future tasks.

Semantic density, on the other hand, refers to "the degree of condensation of meaning within practices" (Maton, 2016a:15). In the context of feedback, semantic density refers to how many possible actions are implied in a comment. For instance, a comment that is stronger in semantic density (SD+) will have more implied actions in that the student would have to first understand and unpack the comment, before she could act on it. An example would be when a poorly constructed sentence is underlined with no explanation given. The student would first have to unpack what, specifically, the problem is and then determine how to correct the problem. A comment that is weaker in semantic density (SD-) will have fewer actions implied; for example, when a word has been corrected for a student, the student merely has to replace the incorrect word with the correct word.

Traditionally, semantic profiles are used to trace how meaning is constructed over time (Maton, 2016a), for instance in essays (see Maton, 2014a; Christie, 2016) or classroom practices (Blackie, 2014; Jackson, 2016), through semantic waves. The semantic profile of an essay, for example, can be used to trace the development of the student writer's argument and ideas, which represent a single, focused entity. Feedback, however, is slightly different. Feedback, in essence, consists of a series of isolated moments that are not necessarily connected to one

another. For this reason, I will be mapping out feedback practices on the semantic plane. As with the Specialisation plane, the semantic plane consists of four modalities, or codes, represented on a Cartesian plane in combinations of stronger or weaker semantic gravity and semantic density (Maton, 2016a; Maton, 2010). English Studies may be classified as a rhizomatic code (SG-, SD+, see Chapter 3, Section 3.3.2.1). Ideally, and eventually, students need to be able to think critically, analytically, and creatively regardless of text or context (thereby suggesting weaker semantic gravity, SG-), while engaging with complex, multi-layered concepts (thereby suggesting stronger semantic density, SD+).

Feedback, then, should enable students to realise the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline in their writing and thinking by pushing them towards developing the ability to work across assignments, to see the developmental and cumulative links between various assignments. Working across assignments should take place alongside the ability to work with increasingly complex meanings, not only in terms of understanding the discipline's key terms and concepts, but also in terms of unpacking and acting upon feedback. Comments that are tied to the knower code of the discipline – prompts, analysis, evidence, argument, and encouragement (see Chapter 5) – are also tied to a rhizomatic code.

However, at first year level, students may be overwhelmed and confused if they have to be introduced to a rhizomatic code immediately. Consequently, throughout their first year, students need to be guided gradually, but purposefully, towards both the knower code (as the implicit goal of the discipline) and the rhizomatic code (as the way in which a student can indicate her mastery of the knower code). As this is a slow process, it means that feedback should ideally show a progression from one semantic code to the next. For instance, at first year level, stronger semantic gravity and weaker semantic density are needed initially (prosaic code); that is, students need written feedback that is relatively easy to implement (SD-) and tied to the specific text/essay (SG+). As students become more acquainted with the knower code, weaker semantic gravity and weaker semantic density is needed (rarefied code); that is, students need feedback that is still relatively easy to implement (SD-), but which can now be lifted from one context to the next (SG-). Thereafter, as students become more capable knowers, feedback should move towards weaker semantic gravity and stronger semantic density (rhizomatic code) as students need to be able to unpack more complex feedback, while also learning how to engage with more complex concepts of the discipline, through feedback that requires deeper engagement before being implemented (SD+) and which can be abstracted from one context to the next (SG-) (Figure 6.1 illustrates this ideal movement of feedback). Moving feedback between these semantic codes may enable students to end their first year in English Studies with a firmer foundation in place for moving into a stronger rhizomatic code in

second year. This possible movement between codes on the plane may depend on the assignment (whether it is a draft or a final; what the expectations of the task are), but ultimately the goal of the rhizomatic knower code should be kept in mind in feedback giving, as the place where present feedback is moving towards.
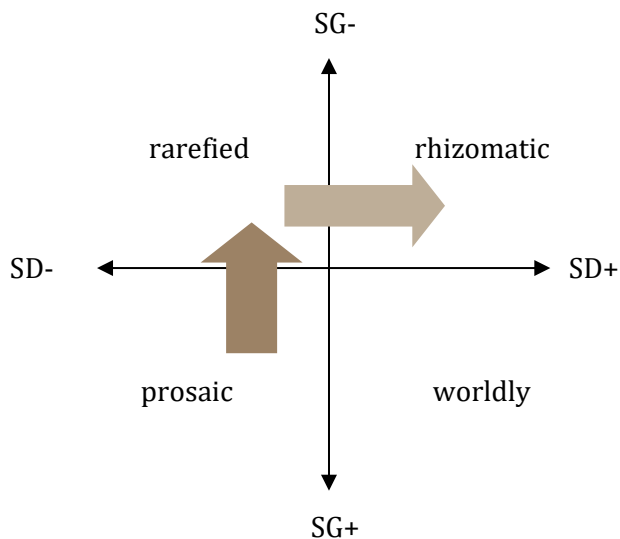
Figure 6.1. *Ideal movement of feedback across the semantic plane*

In order to trace how (or whether) feedback moves between the various codes, so as to strengthen students' ability to access the rhizomatic code, I will be mapping out the semantic plane of feedback given to four students. These four have been chosen as I have a complete set of assignments for 2016 (3 essays, 3 tests) for each student. I have given each student a pseudonym, with the first letter of their name corresponding to their tutor's code: Cynthia – tutor C (Jane); Diana and Dawn – tutor D (Cindy); Eden – tutor E (Jessica). I will start by explaining how the feedback categories were coded according to Semantics; thereafter, the four semantic feedback planes will be discussed.

6.2 SEMANTIC CODING OF FEEDBACK CATEGORIES

I will be working from the same categories that were identified in Chapter 5; namely, content, language, referencing, structure, and encouragement, to establish the semantic gravity and semantic density of each. Please note that this is a heuristic approach and by no means the only way to determine the semantic gravity and semantic density of each category.

In coding the relative strengths and weaknesses of semantic gravity and semantic density of the categories of feedback, the following translation device should be kept in mind:

TABLE 6.1. *SEMANTICS TRANSLATION DEVICE*

Semantic gravity	
SG++	Comments that are bound to the particular essay and/or the particular text with very little or no chance of being abstracted to other essay contexts
SG+	Comments that are bound to a context and have the potential to be abstracted to other contexts
SG-	Comments that are framed explicitly as advice for future essays
SG--	Comments that could refer to any essay/text
Semantic density	
SD++	Comments that need to be fully unpacked before a student can act on it
SD+	Comments that require understanding of what the problem is and the terms used before being acted upon
SD-	Comments that require understanding only of the terms used before being acted upon
SD--	Comments that can be acted upon immediately

6.2.1 CONTENT COMMENTS

The semantic gravity and semantic density of content comments depend largely on what type of comment is being given. For instance, analysis comments are often strongly bound to the particular essay and the particular point that has been identified as being a good analytical observation and are therefore stronger in semantic gravity (SG++). For instance, Jessica indicated "this is a good point" on an essay (E3:E1) (see below).
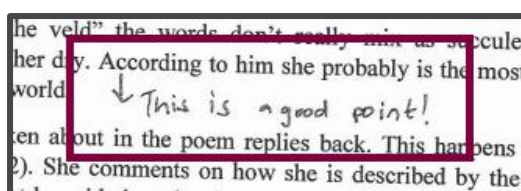
Image 6.1. Semantics example of an analysis comment

The comment, like the student's point to which Jessica refers, is strongly bound to the particular essay. Additionally, as the example indicates, analysis comments are also quite vague in terms of what specifically has been identified as 'a good point'; the comment does not explain, for instance, what makes the point good, and consequently the student may not get a clearer indication of what constitutes a good point in an English Studies essay. As such, analysis comments are difficult to act on in order to repeat them in future and are therefore stronger in semantic density (SD++) (see Figure 6.2 below).
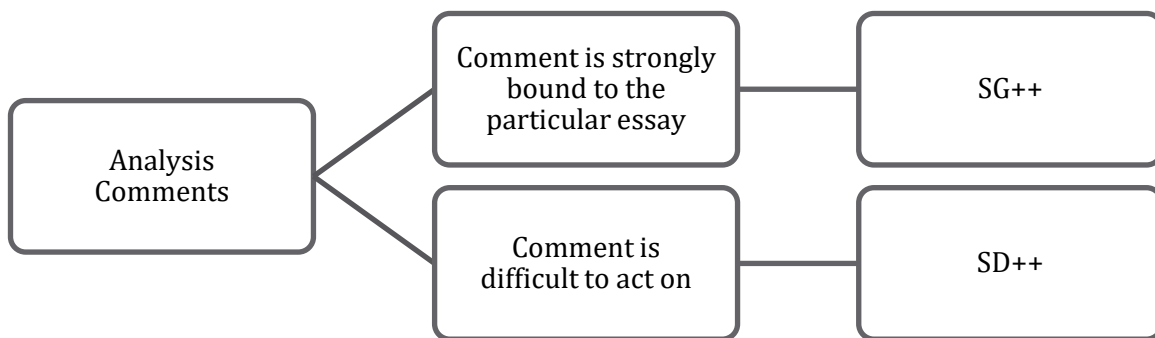
Figure 6.2. *Semantics coding of analysis comments*

While analysis comments are SG++, prompt comments are often relatively less strong in semantic gravity (SG+), for although they are bound to the particular essay and the particular text, it is what lies underneath this comment that is important – the ability to ask similar types of questions in different contexts. For example, Jane asked "he is more self-aware?" (C2:T1) on a test, with regards to a character's development.
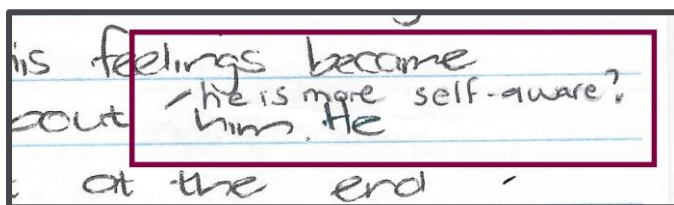
Image 6.2. *Semantics example of a prompt comment 1*

The majority of the prescribed texts in the course are *bildungsromans*, and deal with characters becoming more self-aware. The comment, then, prompts the student to take her interpretation to the next logical step; at the same time, this idea of characters becoming more

self-aware is a concept that could be applicable to other essays and texts. However, the effectiveness and usability of such a comment largely depends on whether the student is able to realise that the concept of characters becoming self-aware is what has to be gleaned from such a comment; therefore, the comment is SG+. At the same time, acting on the comment requires an understanding of the idea of being self-aware; the student has to first decipher if this is what she intended. As such, the semantic density is relatively stronger (SD+). On the other hand, if the prompt is too context-dependent, then it might be even stronger in semantic gravity (SG++). For instance, Jane asked "Are you suggesting that the play itself – how it is written – stresses the power of the imagination?" (C2:T2) on a test script (see below).
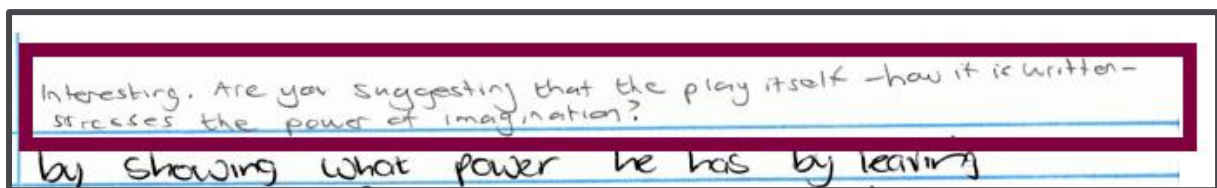
Image 6.3. *Semantics example of a prompt comment 2*

This particular prompt seems rooted not only in the context of the text, but also the actual essay. Moreover, the particular comment is quite difficult to act upon, and requires a lot of thought from the student before it can be acted upon. Therefore, the semantic density is relatively stronger for these kinds of comments (SD++). Prompt comments, therefore, may be either SD++ or SD+ or SG++ or SG+, depending on how context-dependent and complex the comment is (see Figure 6.3 below).
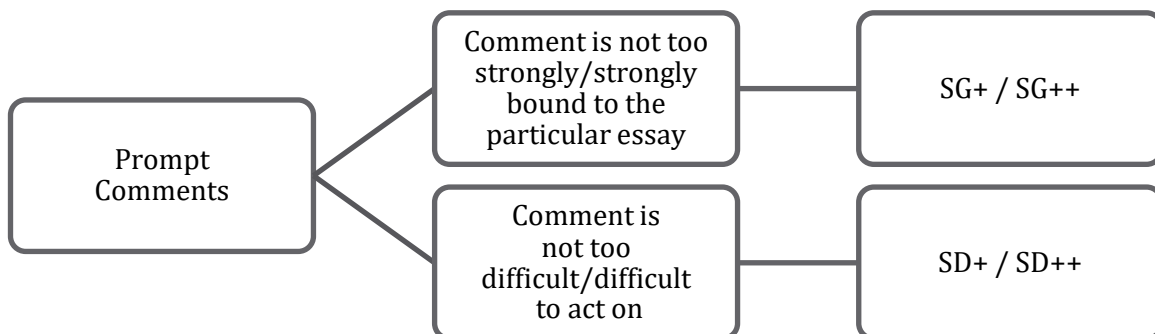
Figure 6.3. *Semantics coding of prompt comments*

Evidence comments are also relatively stronger in semantic gravity (SG+) as these comments are not as bound to the specific text or essay; they refer to something students should be able to do in any context, i.e., using evidence to support a claim. For instance, Jessica wrote that "The link between your point and evidence is unclear" (E3:T3) on a test (see below).
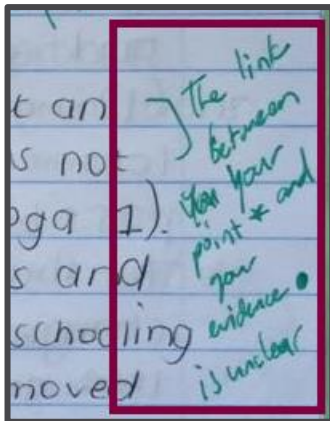
Image 6.4. *Semantics example of an evidence comment*

This particular comment is bound to the context of the essay, but has the potential to be applied to other contexts (therefore, SG+). However, they are stronger in semantic density (SD+) as students cannot simply act on these comments without a basic understanding of the terms used in the feedback comment. For instance, in the example, the student would first need to know what the tutor meant with 'link', 'point' and 'evidence'. The tutor assumes the student will be familiar with the terms used; yet, the student may not be familiar with them, which would hinder her ability to implement the comment (see Figure 6.4 below).
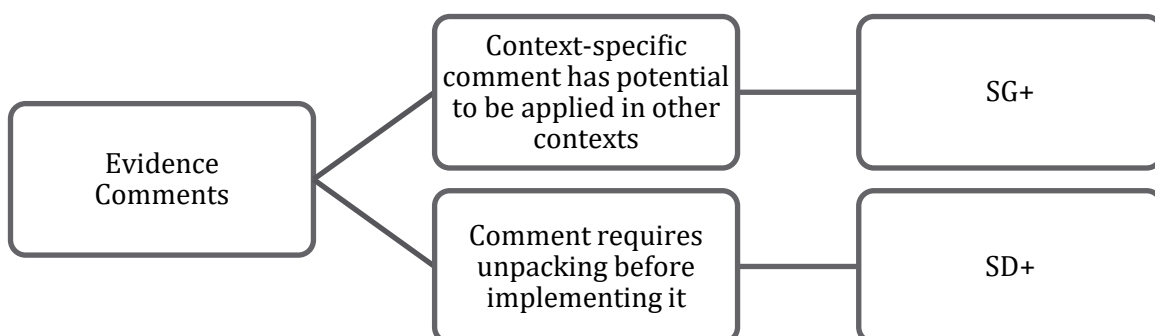
Figure 6.4. *Semantics coding of evidence comments*

Similar to evidence comments, focus comments are often framed within the context of the specific essay or text, but with the potential of being abstracted to other contexts, as such they are stronger in semantic gravity (SG+). For instance, Jane wrote "Remember to focus on the essay question rather than repeating the story" (C2:T3) on a test script (see below).
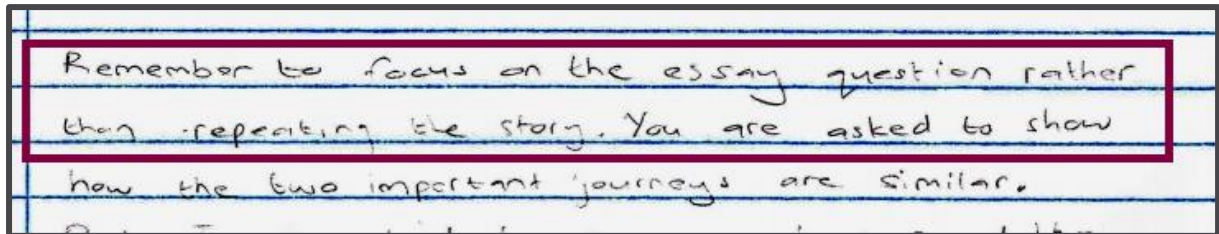
Image 6.5. *Semantics example of a focus comment*

This particular comment, though tied to the specific assignment and depending on the student's engagement with the comment, could be applied to other contexts. Additionally, focus comments are stronger in semantic density (SD+). For instance, as the example shows, the comment is not easy to act on, as the student would need to know what the difference between answering the question and repeating the story is (in essence, a balance between interpretation and reproducing the facts of the story) and would also need to know how to go about doing so (see Figure 6.5 below).
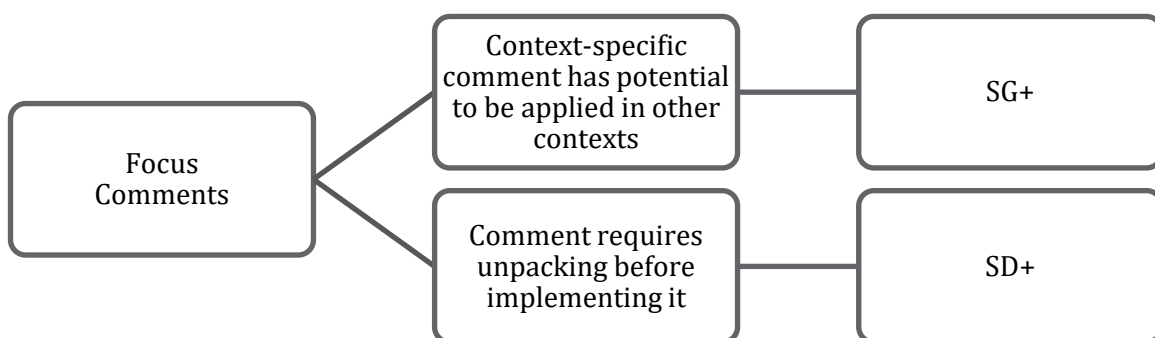
Figure 6.5. *Semantics coding of focus comments*

Similarly, clarification comments are often focused on the specific text at hand, but with the possibility that students could also ask similar questions with other texts (that is, what students can take from these comments is that they should provide more detail on the text), and

are therefore stronger in semantic gravity (SG+). Jane, for instance, asked "who stops him? What happens?" (C2:T1) on a test script (see below).
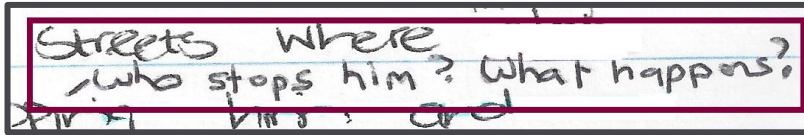
Image 6.6. *Semantics example of a clarification comment*

From this type of comment, the student could learn that at times it is necessary to provide more detail about the text. Acting on these types of comments could be relatively straightforward, though it does depend on how well the student knows the text, and may therefore be seen as weaker in semantic density (SD-) (see Figure 6.6 below).
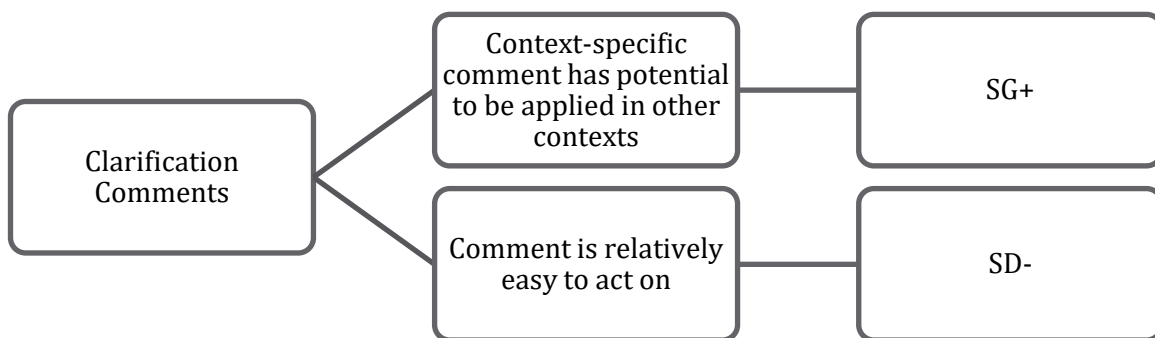
Figure 6.6. Semantics coding of clarification comments

Lastly, knowledge comments are strongly rooted in the specific text and related essay, and therefore are stronger in semantic gravity (SG++); for instance, Jane corrected her student who wrote "her cousin are ill" by reminding the student that "she is ill later" (C2:T3) on a test script (see below).
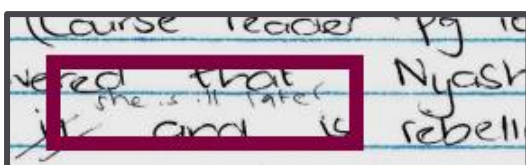
Image 6.7. *Semantics example of a knowledge comment*

This particular comment is strongly tied to the specific text (*Nervous conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga) and as such does not offer much in terms of being lifted to other contexts. Acting on this type of comment could be relatively straightforward, as students merely have to provide the required information (which, as in the example, has often already been provided for the student), and therefore may be coded as weaker in semantic density (SD--) (see Figure 6.7).
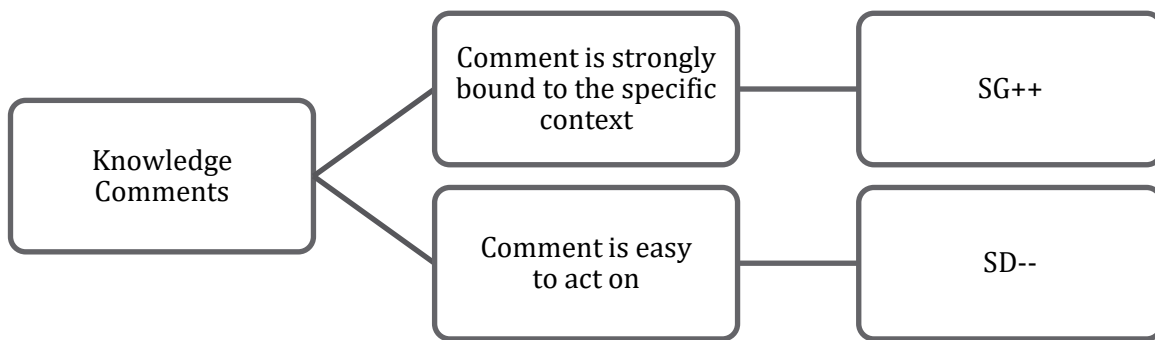
Figure 6.7. *Semantics coding of knowledge comments*

Figure 6.8 below provides a summary of the semantic coding of content comments. As can be seen, in general, the content comments tend to be overwhelmingly bound to the context, though the complexity of the comments may differ among the various content sub-categories.

Figure 6.8*. Summary of semantic coding of content comments*

Unlike content comments, structure comments are slightly more predictable in terms of their semantic gravity and semantic density.

6.2.2 STRUCTURE COMMENTS

Structure comments – regarding both argument and organisation – are often stronger in semantic gravity but with the potential for being used as advice for future assignments (SG+). For instance, Cindy wrote "start with a clear topic sentence" (D1:E2) regarding an organisational aspect of the essay (see below).
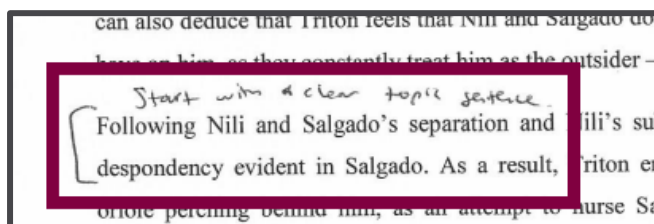
Image 6.8. *Semantics example of a structure comment (organisation)*

Although this pertains to a specific error in a specific essay, it has the potential to be taken as advice for future essays, depending on the student's engagement with the comment. At the same time, this type of comment is not necessarily easy to act on as it requires an understanding of the concepts being introduced or used in the comment and is therefore stronger in semantic density (SD+). In the example provided, for instance, the student would need to know what a topic sentence is, and how to construct one, before being able to implement the comment.

The same applies to argument comments. For instance, Cindy wrote "Outline full argument answering question" (D2:T3) on a test script (see below).
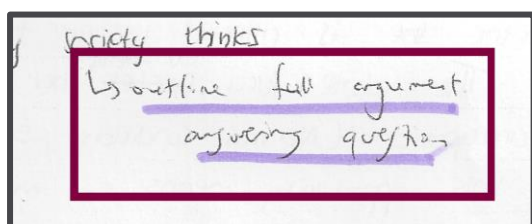
Image 6.9. *Semantics example of a structure comment (argument)*

Although this comment pertains to a specific essay and to a specific conclusion, it has the potential to be used as advice for future essays (that is, that the student should include her argument in the conclusion, as well), and is therefore stronger in semantic gravity (SG+). Yet, this comment is not necessarily straightforward, as the student would need to be familiar with

the various terms used in the comment, and is therefore stronger in semantic density (SD+) (See Figure 6.9).
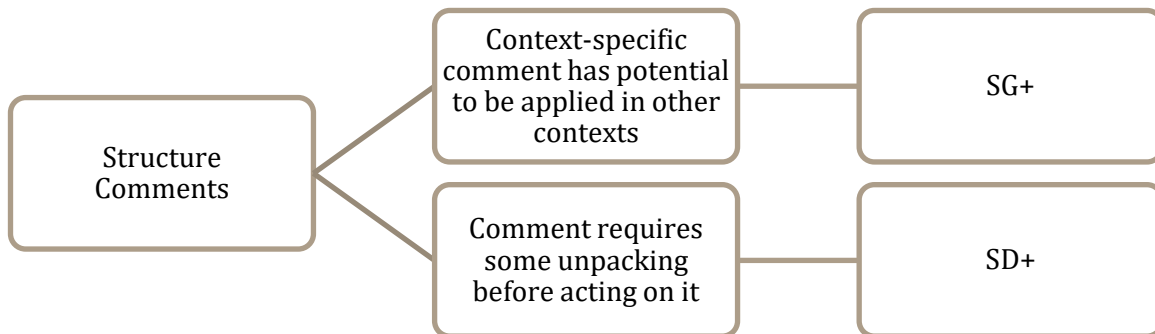
Figure 6.9. *Semantic coding of structure comments*

Structure comments therefore tend to be stronger in both semantic gravity and semantic density (SG+, SD+). Referencing comments, on the other hand, differ according to what specific referencing-related issue the comment is highlighting.

6.2.3 REFERENCING COMMENTS

The relative strength and weakness of referencing comments depends on what the comment focuses on. For instance, when the comment corrects a referencing error, then the comment tends to be weaker in semantic gravity (SG--) as they could be found in any essay context. For instance, Jane corrected a student's referencing error "(line 5, 6-7)" by indicating the correct way to do so "(lines 5-7)" (C2:E1) on an essay (see below).
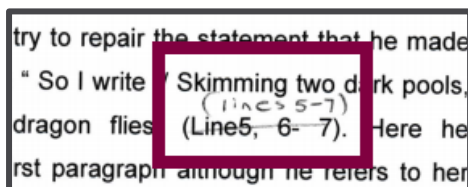
Image 6.10. *Semantics example of a referencing comment 1*

As this type of comment merely requires the student to replace the incorrect version with the corrected version, the comments are weaker in semantic density (SD--) (see Figure 6.10).
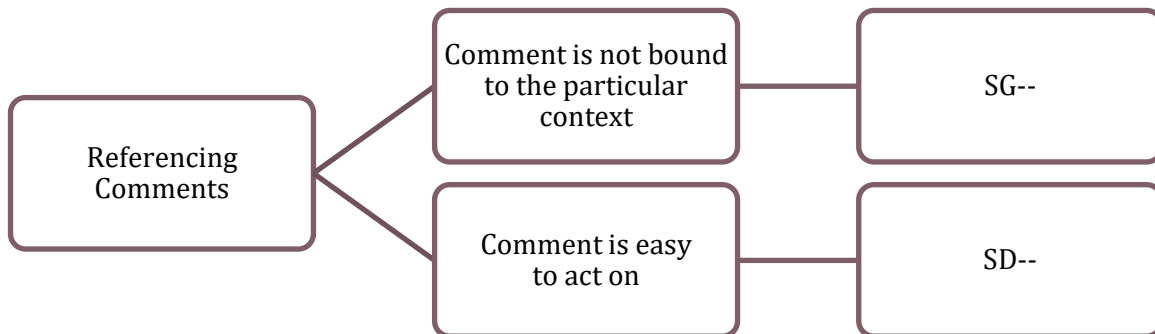
Figure 6.10. *Semantics coding of referencing comments*

Similarly, when referencing comments are about integrating quotes into a grammatically correct sentence, then they are also weaker in semantic gravity (SG-) as they could serve as advice for future assignments. For example, Cindy wrote "integrate quotes" (D1:E1), which is a relatively common comment, in the sense that it is repeated on various essays.
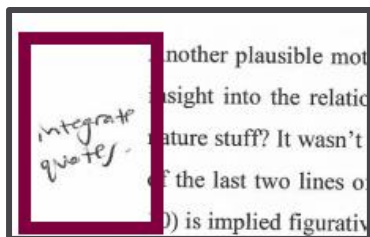
Image 6.11. *Semantics example of a referencing comment 2*

However, acting upon this comment is slightly more challenging, as the student would first need to know what 'integrating' a quote means. As such, these comments are stronger in semantic density (SD+) as they require the student to not only understand what needs to be done, but also how to go about implementing the comment (see Figure 6.11).
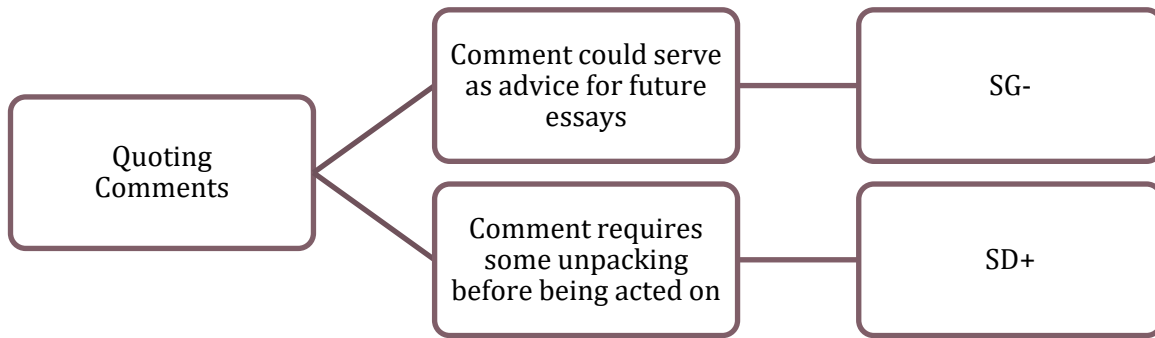
Figure 6.11. *Semantics coding of quoting comment*

Figure 6.12 summarises the semantic coding of referencing comments.
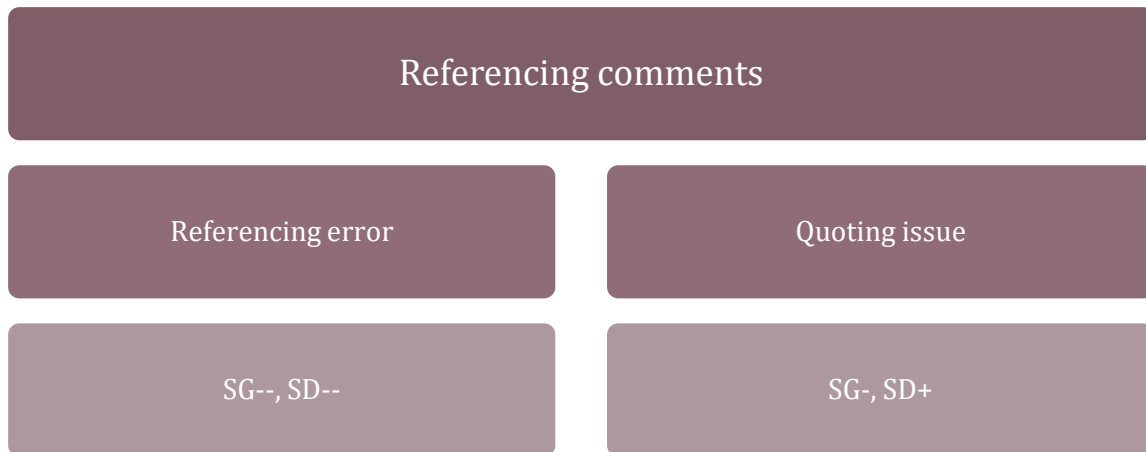
Figure 6.12. *Summary of semantic coding of types of referencing comments*

While the semantic gravity and semantic density of referencing comments are determined by what specific referencing-related issue the comment is highlighting, the semantic gravity and semantic density of language comments are determined by how the comment is phrased.

6.2.4 LANGUAGE COMMENTS

The semantic gravity and semantic density of language comments depend on how the comment is phrased. There are three main ways in which language feedback is given to students: these errors may be corrected for students, they may be identified, or advice on how to avoid these errors in future may be given. If a language error is corrected – Jane for instance,

replaced "learned" with "taught" (C2:E2) on an essay (see below) – there is very little chance of the comment being abstracted, as the tutor does not explain why the word ('learned' in this instance) was incorrect.
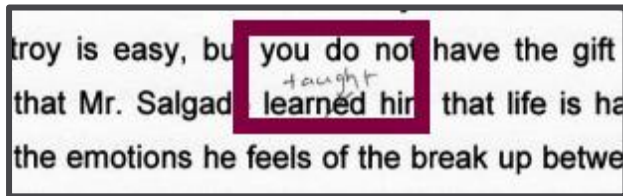
Image 6.12. *Semantics example of a language comment (correction)*

This might mean that the student may not effectively be able to learn something from this comment in order to avoid the error in future. The strong grounding of this kind of comment in the specific essay, focusing on the one specific error, means that these tend to be stronger in semantic gravity (SG++). At the same time, however, the comment is easy to act on, as the student merely has to replace the incorrect word with the correct one; this indicates weaker semantic density (SD--) (see Figure 6.13).
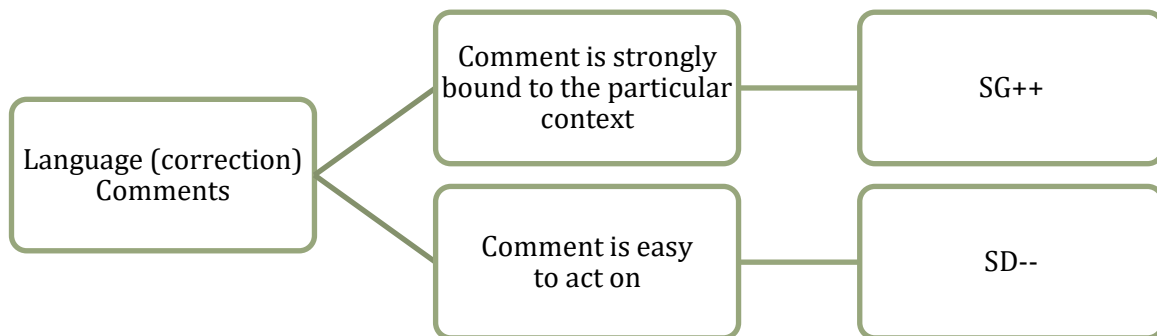
Figure 6.13. *Semantics coding of language (correction) comments*

On the other hand, a language comment that merely identifies an error, without correcting it, will also be stronger in semantic gravity (SG++) as the comment notes an error that is bound to the context of the specific essay. For example, Cindy underlined, with no explanation or explicit comment, the awkwardly phrased sentence "he never was as he never actually knew them" (D2:E2) in an essay (see below).
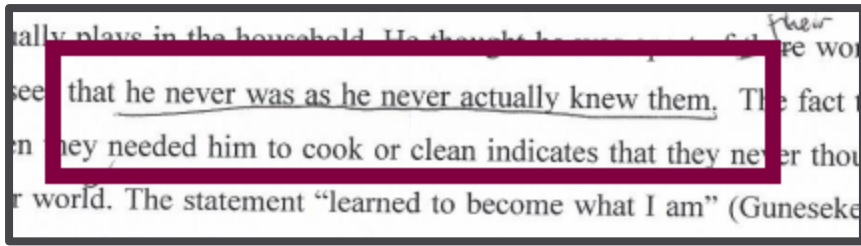
Image 6.13. *Semantics example of a language comment (identification)*

This specific error is therefore strongly grounded to the particular essay. Moreover, the lack of an explicit comment and merely underlining the error is relatively vague, as it is not clear what specifically is wrong when something is merely underlined with no explanatory note. The relative vagueness of the comment means that the student would have to first fully unpack the comment before being able to come up with a strategy to act on the comment. This suggests stronger semantic density (SD++) (see Figure 6.14).
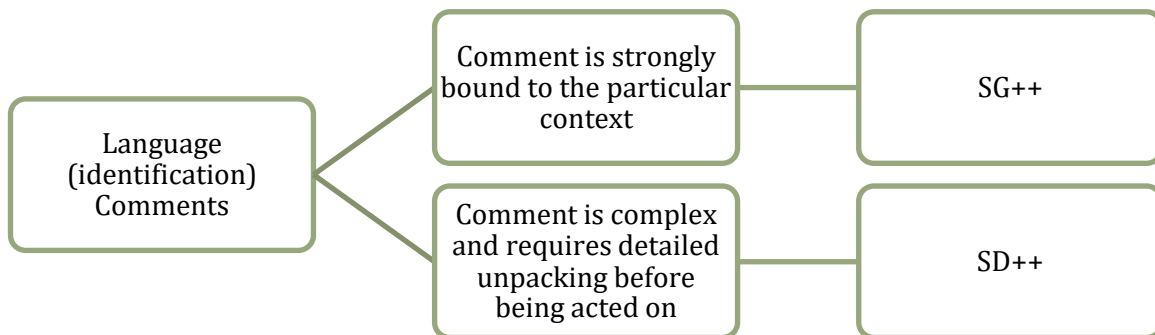
Figure 6.14. *Semantics coding of language (identification) comments*

Lastly, language comments that are framed as advice, rather than as explicit corrections, are stronger in semantic gravity, but also have the potential to be applied to other contexts, even though they are still based in the context of the particular essay (SG+). For instance, Jessica indicated to a student that she "should use the same tense" throughout the essay (E3:T1) on a test script (see below).
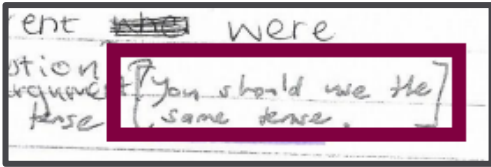
Image 6.14. *Semantics example of a language comment (advice)*

This comment, while grounded in the essay in question, could potentially be lifted from the context of this essay and applied to any other context (though, this does depend on the student). While it may be relatively easy to act on these types of advisory comments, it also largely depends on whether the student knows what the term means (e.g. 'tense' in this example), which suggests weaker semantic density (SD-) (see Figure 6.15).
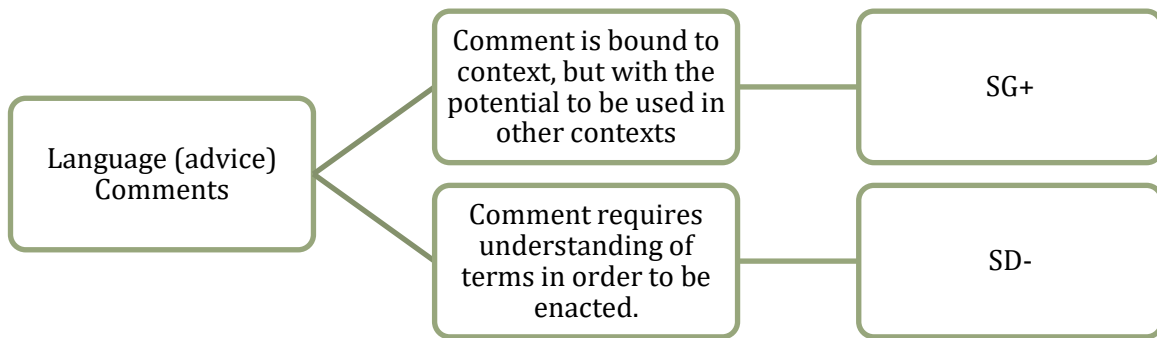
Figure 6.15. *Semantics coding of language (advice) comments*

Figure 6.16 below summarises the semantic coding of language comments.

Figure 6.16. *Semantic coding of language comments*

6.2.5 ENCOURAGEMENT COMMENTS

Encouragement comments tend to be stronger in semantic gravity as they are often rooted in a specific essay and are not really transferable to other contexts (SG++). For instance, Cindy wrote "Overall, a very good effort" (D1:E2) on an essay (see below).
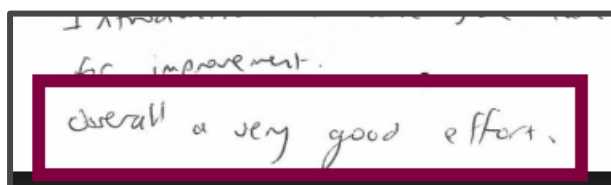
Image 6.15. Semantics example of an encouragement comment

This particular comment is tied to the specific essay – it is a way to indicate that in this essay, the student has made a good effort. However, these comments also tend to be stronger in semantic density (SD++) as they are quite vague and as such are quite difficult to act on. For instance, the example provided does not provide any clarity on what makes this essay a good effort, or how to improve the effort in future assignments (see Figure 6.17).
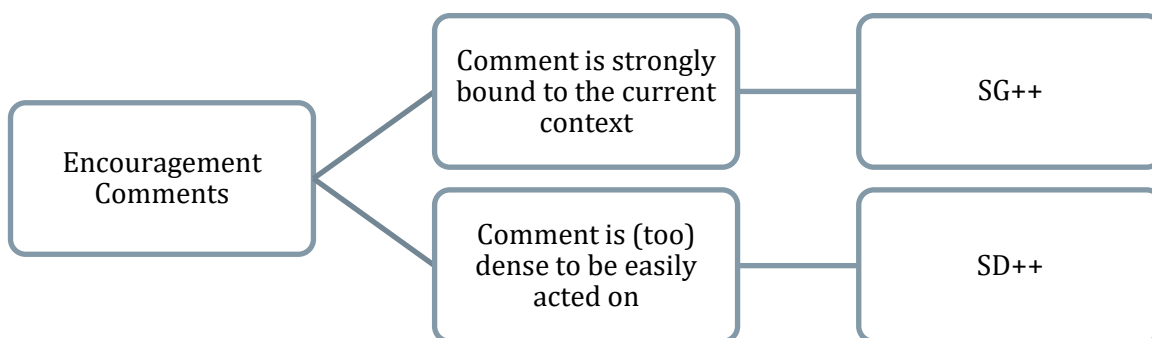
Figure 6.17. *Semantic coding of encouragement comments*

Encouragement comments therefore tend to be stronger in semantic gravity (SG++), and stronger in semantic density (SD++); the relative vagueness, and context-dependence of the comments make it difficult to lift advice for future assignments from the comment.

Table 6.2 provides a summative overview of the Semantics coding of all the feedback categories.

TABLE 6.2*. OVERVIEW OF SEMANTICS CODING OF FEEDBACK CATEGORIES*

Category	Semantic Gravity	Semantic Density
Language		
Correction	SG++	SD--
Identification	SG++	SD++
Advice	SG+	SD-
Content		
Analysis	SG++	SD++
Prompts	SG++/SG+	SD++/SD+
Evidence	SG+	SD+
Focus	SG+	SD+
Clarification	SG+	SD-
Knowledge	SG++	SD--
Referencing	SG--/SG-	SD--/SD+
Structure	SG+	SD+
Encouragement	SG++	SD++

Based on this initial view of the relative strengths and weaknesses of semantic gravity and semantic density applied to the dataset in this study, feedback appears to be context-specific, as well as relatively difficult to act on. As Figure 6.1 indicated, ideally there should be some movement in the feedback given so as to enable access to the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline. I will now look at how feedback manifests and the possible implications for student learning by examining the feedback received by four first year students over the course of one academic year.

6.3 FOUR FEEDBACK SEMANTIC PLANES

Before moving onto discussing each student's feedback semantic plane, it is necessary to go through the assignment schedule for English 111/121. Table 6.3 provides a summary of the different assignments, in chronological order, as well as what type of text each assignment is based on. Assignments are always essayist in nature, though the circumstances under which the essay is produced may differ. Class tests are written during the weekly tutorial. Students have access to the test question in advance and may bring the text, as well as notes, to the test. Although they are encouraged to practice writing the essay ahead of time, students are not allowed to bring a draft with on the day the test is written. For essays, tutors discuss the requirements and expectations with students in class, and students may consult with tutors about their essays. These have to be typed and submitted to Turnitin before tutors receive them.

TABLE 6.3. *OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH 111/121 ASSIGNMENTS*

Assignment no.	Assignment type	Text on which assignment is based	Text type
Test 1	Class test (essay)	"The test" by Njabulo Ndebele	Short story
Essay 1	Typed essay	"A love poem" by Jeremy Cronin	Poem
Essay 2	Typed essay	*Reef* by Romesh Gunesekera	Novel
Test 2	Class test (essay)	*Karoo moose* by Laura Beukes	Play
Essay 3	Typed essay	*Macbeth* by William Shakespeare	Play
Test 3	Class test (essay)	*Nervous conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga	Novel

As Table 6.3 shows, there is some repetition in text type (e.g. two essays on a novel, two on a play, and two on shorter texts) for the assignments. It is easy therefore to assume, for instance, that because test 2 and essay 3 are both plays that one will prepare students for the other. However, the *Karoo moose* test requires students to engage with two secondary views on the play, to select which one they feel is more valid, and then to justify that with an in-depth discussion of the ending of the text. The *Macbeth* essay question requires students to do a close reading of two extracts from the play (one of which has been provided for the students) in order to discuss the use of imagery in the play. The two assignments, though based on similar types of texts, have different requirements. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the assignments have been organised in such a way to gradually and cumulatively enable students to get used to the requirements of the discipline. Ideally, the feedback should be transferable from one context, regardless of assignment or text type, to the next in order for students to learn how to be knowers, to develop their essay writing and ability to reflect on, and analyse, texts.

This section will now examine the feedback the four students received over the course of their first year in English Studies; the feedback will be traced on the semantic plane in order to trace how, or whether, the feedback could enable access to the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline. The students have been organised in ascending order from lowest mark to highest mark average. The full mark profile of each student is given to provide additional context.

6.3.1 EDEN

Eden was Jessica's student in 2016. During 2016, Eden received a total of 77 comments spread across the six assignments for the year (an average of just under 13 comments per assignment). Her average mark for her assignments was 48%. Table 6.4 below provides the full details of the marks and number of comments Eden received for her assignments.

TABLE 6.4. *EDEN'S MARKS*

Assignment	Grade	Comments per assignment
Test 1	35%	13
Essay 1	47%	20
Essay 2	50%	16
Test 2	48%	6
Essay 3	50%	10
Test 3	58%	12
Average	48%	12.8 (total 77)

Figure 6.18 provides the semantic plane that maps out the comments she received.
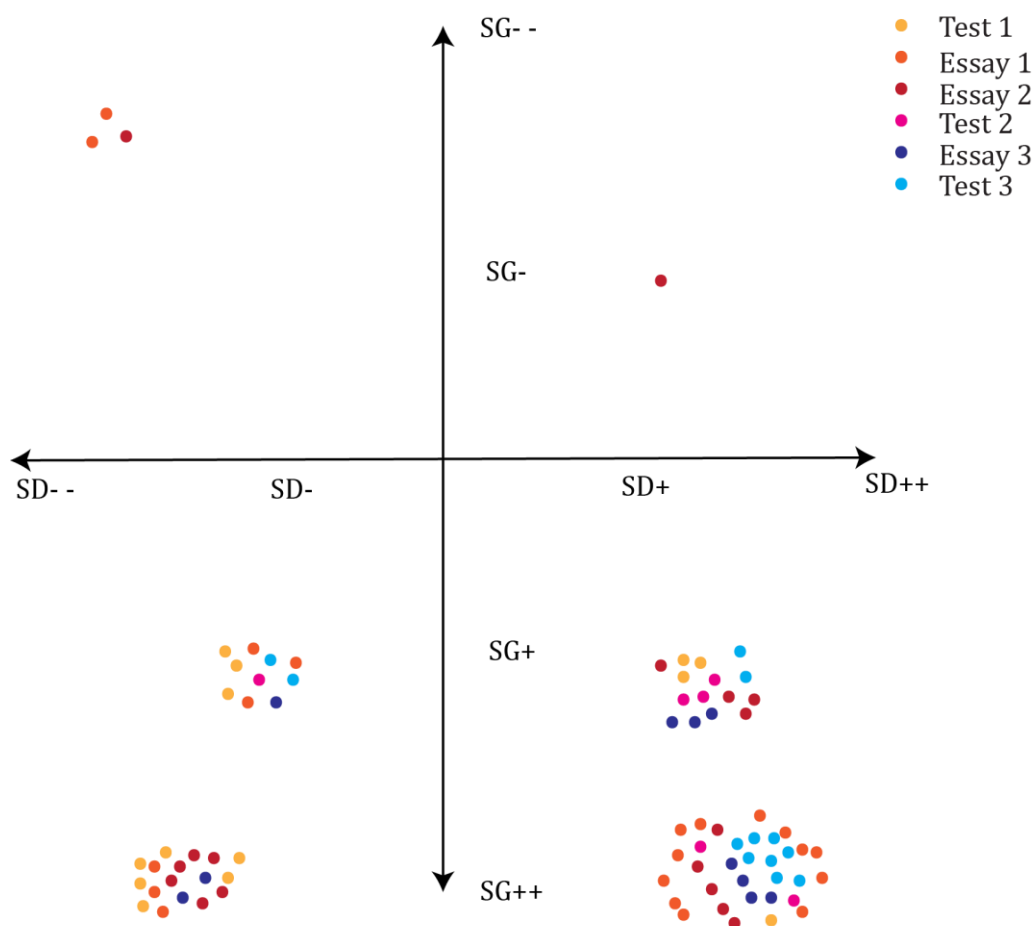
Figure 6.18. *Eden's feedback semantic plane*

Eden's feedback semantic plane indicates that her feedback remained static throughout the year – the feedback is consistently clustered in the worldly and prosaic codes, with a smattering of comments in the rarefied code. Consequently, her feedback is consistently stronger in semantic gravity. There are very few comments that are weaker in semantic gravity and those that are, pertain to referencing errors (e.g. "Please see MLA guidelines for spacing requirements and referencing" (E3:E1)). Most of Eden's feedback is related to language errors (therefore, SG++). However, most of the language errors have merely been identified (through question marks, or being underlined, or circled) which means that the semantic density of these comments is relatively strong (SD++) which makes acting on these comments quite challenging. Comments that are weaker in semantic density (SD-- or SD-) tend to be language-related (thus, easy to implement, but bound to the particular essay). A large portion of her comments that are stronger in semantic density (SD+ or SD++) are vague in nature. For instance, in spite of her fail mark for Essay 1, she received a couple of analysis comments ("This is a good point!" and "Good!" (E3:E1)), neither of which is clear on what makes the point good, nor were they enough to guarantee her a pass. The vagueness of the comments may have the interlinked effect of firstly inhibiting her willingness to engage with the feedback and secondly potentially confusing her as to what is required of her writing, as well as her responses to future tasks.

Consequently, Eden's feedback seems to be simultaneously stronger in semantic gravity – thereby suggesting that feedback cannot be lifted to other contexts – and stronger in semantic density – thereby suggesting relatively dense feedback that cannot readily be acted on. The combination of this may mean that her feedback may not effectively enable her to gradually access the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline.

6.3.2 CYNTHIA

Cynthia was Jane's student in 2016. Over the course of the year, Cynthia received a total of 129 comments, at an average of almost 22 comments per assignment (one of the highest average-comments-per assignment in the data set). For 2016, her marks averaged 56%. Table 6.5 below provides the full details of the marks and number of comments Cynthia received for her assignments. As the table indicates, Cynthia received more feedback on essays than she did on tests. Jane indicated that this is deliberate as she thinks that essays "are a better reflection of where a student is in terms of work" (Individualised interview).

TABLE 6.5. *CYNTHIA'S MARKS*

Assignment	Grade	Comments per assignment
Test 1	53%	25
Essay 1	56%	39
Essay 2	58%	27
Test 2	56%	13
Essay 3	58%	17
Test 3	53%	8
Average	56%	21.5 (total 129)

Figure 6.19 gives the semantic plane to indicate how her feedback was distributed in terms of semantic gravity and semantic density.
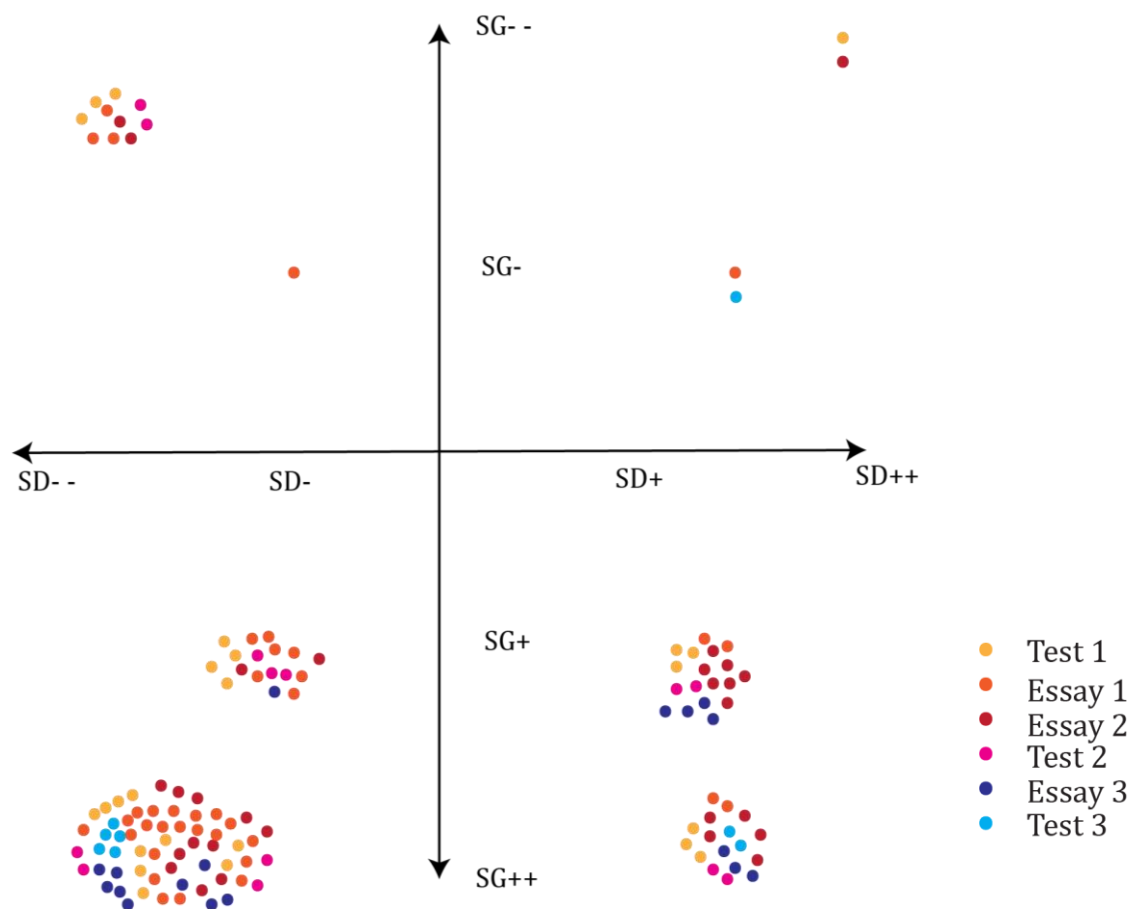
Figure 6.19. *Cynthia's feedback semantic plane*

158

The feedback plane indicates a relatively consistent grouping of feedback in the prosaic quadrant (SG+, SD-), suggesting feedback that is context-specific, and also relatively easy to act upon. Although feedback is grouped throughout each quadrant, this is not done in a progressive way; that is, the feedback Cynthia received did not move over time into other quadrants, so as to enable her to gradually access the rhizomatic code, but instead remained relatively statically and unevenly spread across the different codes.

As the plane indicates, the feedback Cynthia received is overwhelmingly stronger in semantic gravity. Those comments that are weaker in semantic gravity (as seen in the rarefied and rhizomatic quadrants) are mostly related to referencing errors. The fact that referencing errors make up most of the comments that are weaker in semantic gravity indicates that what could be learned from these comments is limited to technical knowledge about referencing; in terms of Specialisation, then, the *focus* of the comments that have more potential for enabling learning and development across assignments is not aligned with the *basis* of the discipline. However, even when the comments are potentially abstractable to other contexts, learning is not guaranteed. For instance, in Test 1, Cynthia made a referencing error: she included the abbreviation 'pg.' in the bracket. For MLA referencing, she only needed to have the page number in the bracket. Jane, her tutor, corrected this by crossing out the 'pg.' but did not provide an explanation for this. In Test 2, Cynthia repeated this error and Jane again crossed out the incorrect usage of 'pg.'. This time, however, Jane added a description ('No need to write 'pg' just use the number'). The latter comment is weaker in semantic gravity, and in semantic density, than merely crossing out the incorrect referencing usage, implying that it could be learned from and acted upon. Yet, in Test 3, Cynthia makes the same error again, as she still includes the 'pg' in the in-text reference. This indicates that even though the comments are not strictly bound to the context, there is no real guarantee that learning will take place from the comment.

While most of the feedback Cynthia received was stronger in semantic gravity, the feedback was weaker in semantic density, which suggests that most of the comments were relatively easy to act on. This, however, is nevertheless problematic for two, interlinked reasons; firstly, the lack of re-drafting opportunities that could enable the reinforcement and consolidation of learning and, secondly, the relative strength of the semantic gravity of these comments. There are no redrafting opportunities in English Studies (aside from voluntarily consulting with a tutor before an assignment is submitted), thus even though these comments are relatively easy to implement, they are not necessarily applicable in other contexts. Consequently, instead of enabling improvement and development, these comments become markers of what the student did incorrectly *in this assignment*. If the student is not in the habit

of going over feedback and making notes for herself for future assignments, it means that the feedback is merely doing that – feeding *back* on the assignment, instead of feeding *forward* into future assignments. For instance, the majority of the feedback Cynthia received was language related (47% of the comments). These comments are relatively easy to implement – Jane corrected most of the errors for Cynthia – but because there is no real opportunity to do so, the comments instead merely become a list of language errors made in a particular assignment rather than cultivating the necessary gaze.

Therefore, as with Eden, it seems unlikely that the feedback given would have enabled Cynthia access to the rhizomatic knower code. Instead, the focus of the comments seems to be geared towards creating a grammatically proficient, competent essay writer.

6.3.3 DAWN

Dawn was Cindy's student in 2016. She received a total of 66 comments across the six assignments for the year, at an average of 11 comments per assignment. As with Cynthia, there is a clear distinction between the amount of feedback given for tests and essays. Cindy, Dawn's tutor, indicated that this is deliberate as essays "are assumed to be polished, revised and edited pieces and are therefore better for developing writing ... Tests aren't as good an indicator [of a student's ability] as students may be affected by stress and other factors. My test feedback therefore tends to be far less detailed [than] my essay feedback" (Individualised interview). Dawn's average mark was 61% for the year.

Table 6.6 provides the full details of the marks and number of comments Dawn received for her assignments.

TABLE 6.6*. DAWN'S MARKS*

Assignment	Grade	Comments per assignment
Test 1	60%	4
Essay 1	57%	15
Essay 2	70%	24
Test 2	68%	4
Essay 3	54%	14
Test 3	53%	5
Average	61%	11 (total 66)

Dawn's feedback is mapped out on a semantic plane in Figure 6.20 below.
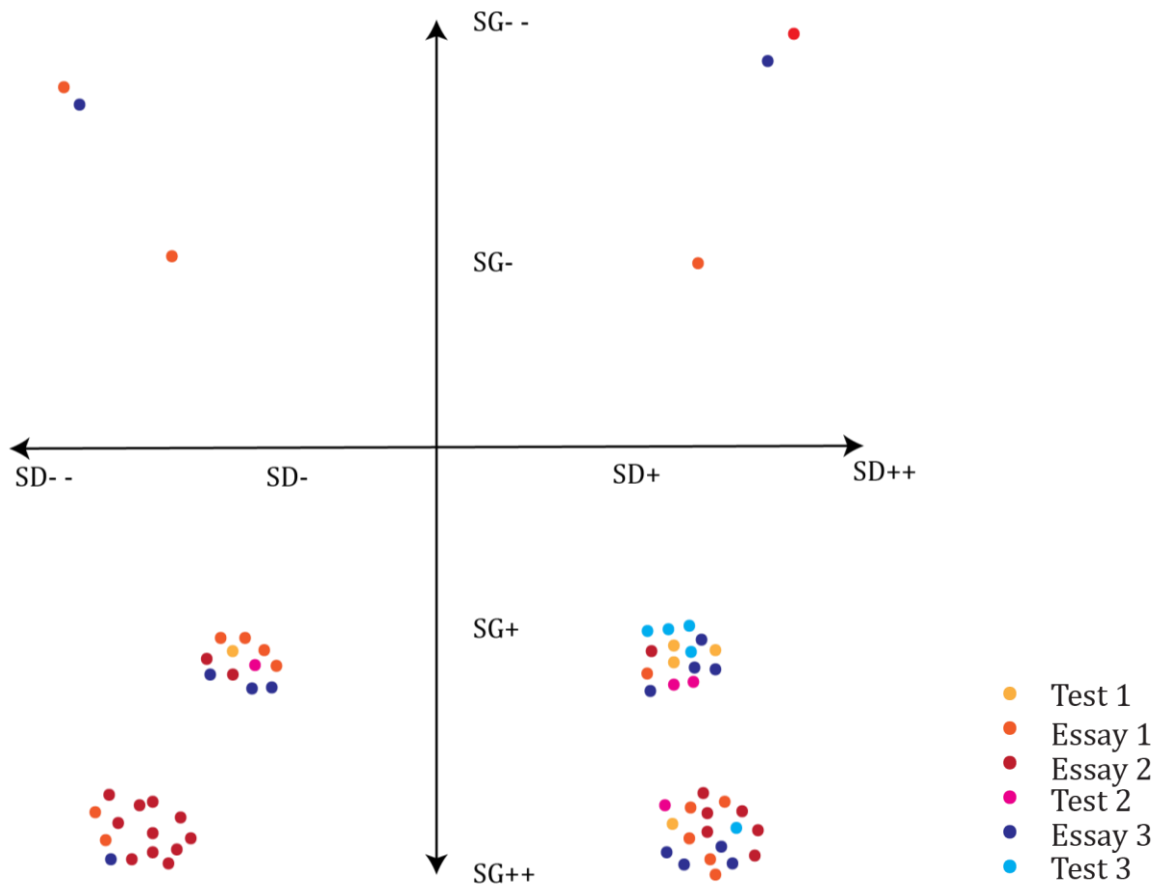
Figure 6.20. *Dawn's feedback semantic plane*

Figure 6.20 indicates that Dawn's feedback semantic plane shows the same kind of patterning as Cynthia's – though feedback is scattered across the plane, it is largely grouped in the bottom two quadrants where semantic gravity is stronger. As these comments are stronger in semantic gravity it reduces the applicability to other contexts. This can especially be seen in relation to feedback Dawn received in the focus category. In Test 1, for instance, Cindy noted that Dawn's essay should "Relate back to the final paragraph [of the short story "The test"]" (D2:T1), as the essay question mandates that this should be the main focus of her essay. Not focusing on the final paragraph of the short story in essence means not answering the essay question effectively. In Essay 1, Cindy noted that Dawn's essay was "somewhat scattered; not always focused on the question" (D2:E1). Similarly, in Test 3, Cindy wrote that Dawn "shows some understanding [of the text] but only briefly answers the question" (D2:T3).

Focus comments tend to be stronger in semantic gravity (SG+) as they refer to the specific context, but underlying this type of comment is the principle that needs to be applied to other contexts; that is, answering the question. Despite encouraging Dawn to do so in every assignment, and thereby emphasising the importance of having a focused answer to the essay question, Dawn still has not quite managed to do so by the end of the year. This could be because of the relative strength of semantic gravity of the comment, but it also might be because of the relative strength of semantic density of the comment (SD+). Telling the student that she should focus on answering the question or that she has not fully answered the question does not necessarily provide guidance on how to go about this. It suggests that Dawn has to fully understand what the comment is requiring from her before being able to act upon it.

At the same time, a large amount of Dawn's feedback is relatively weak in semantic density. However, the majority of those comments are in the language category. For instance, Dawn wrote "right" instead of "rite". Cindy corrected the word for her (D2:E2). This comment is relatively easy to implement, as Dawn would just have to replace the incorrect word with the correct word. However, correcting the word does not explain why the word was incorrect; thereby limiting the ability to learn from the comment about the connection between correct language usage and meaning-making.

Additionally, because most of the comments that are weaker in semantic density are language related, these comments would be more useful in a drafting cycle. Without a second opportunity to address these problems directly in the same assignment the comments merely highlight errors in a specific essay; moreover, even if Dawn engaged with these comments, most of the easy-to-implement comments pertain to generic aspects of essay writing – e.g. focus comments or language comments – which are both underpinned by a relativist code. The comments given, then, might hinder her access to the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline.

6.3.4 DIANA

Like Dawn, Diana was Cindy's student in 2016. Diana received considerably fewer comments than the other students; she only received 37 comments for the year, at an average of 6 comments per assignment. Despite this, she continuously received an A (75%+) for all her assignments. Similar to Dawn and Cynthia, she also received less feedback in tests than in essays.

Table 6.7 below provides the full details of the marks and number of comments Diana received for her assignments.

TABLE 6.7. DIANA'S MARKS

Assignment	Grade	Comments per assignment
Test 1	75%	2
Essay 1	76%	10
Essay 2	78%	18
Test 2	78%	2
Essay 3	82%	4
Test 3	80%	1
Average	78%	6.2 (total of 37 comments)

Diana's feedback is mapped onto the semantic plane in Figure 6.21.
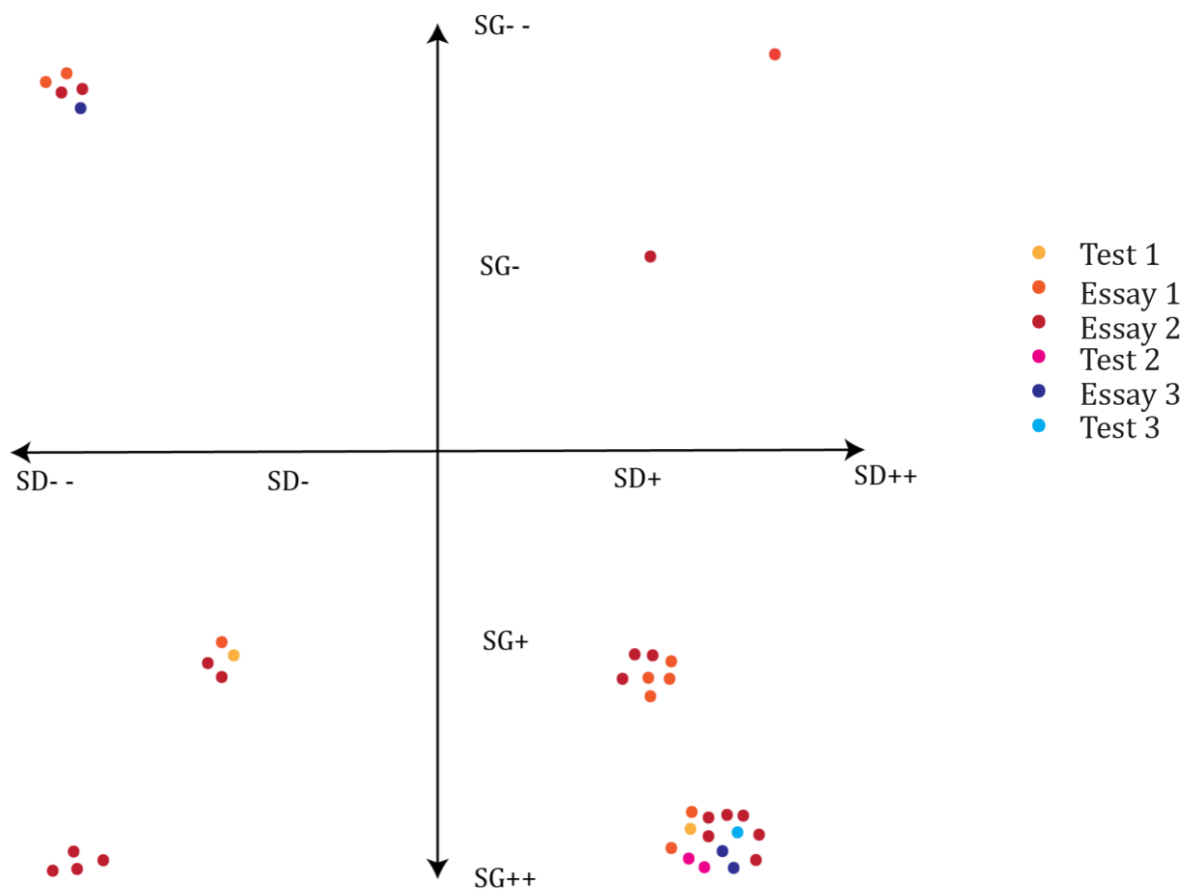
Figure 6.21. Diana's feedback semantic plane

As the plane indicates, Diana's feedback is also mostly stronger in semantic gravity. As with the other students' feedback, Diana's plane does not show a gradual progression from one code to the next, but instead shows a small smattering of comments that are initially spread across the plane; towards the end, however, feedback largely falls in the worldly quadrant (SD++, SG++). This is because most of Diana's feedback consists of encouragement comments and comments that indicate how well she has done something. For instance, Cindy wrote "A very good, sophisticated analysis" (D1:E1), "Great argument" (D:E2), "Largely sophisticated engagement" (D1:E2), "Great! [referring to the introduction]" (D1:E3), "Good. [Referring to an analytical observation]" (D1:T2) or "An excellent engagement! Well argued and intelligently written" (D1:E3). These comments are all stronger in semantic gravity (SG++) as they are strongly grounded in the particular essay.

At the same time, most of these comments are stronger in semantic density (SD++). This suggests that a large amount of the feedback she was given is essentially vague and difficult to use in consecutive essays as a basis for improvement. For instance, Diana frequently received encouragement comments, such as "An excellent engagement. Well done!" (D1:T1). These comments are difficult to do anything with, as it is not being made clear what specifically made her engagement with the essay question and text 'excellent', nor what has been done well. The consequence of this is that she might not be able to make visible for herself, or for others, what makes an essay 'good'. Therefore, because the feedback she received tended to be not only stronger in both semantic gravity and semantic density, it greatly limited her opportunities to cumulatively learn from her feedback, as well as become more conscious about her learning.

The feedback that is weaker in semantic gravity, that is, comments that could assist her with learning from her feedback, largely pertains to structure and referencing comments. For instance, Cindy wrote that Diana needs to "integrate quotes" (D1:E1), that she had not provided the "title/author" (D1:E2) of the text in the introduction or that she should "start with a clear topic sentence" (D1:E2). These comments all pertain to a lack of proficiency in certain technical areas. The comments that could be applied to other contexts but seem to focus more on generic essay writing aspects than on making the rhizomatic knower code more visible.

It could be postulated that Diana perhaps already partially possesses the necessary gaze for the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline due to her home and prior schooling experiences and that she might therefore not need as much guidance as other students. However, even if this were the case, it does not mean that the rhizomatic knower code should not be made more explicit to her through her feedback. As such, the feedback she received for 2016 may indicate to her that she is on the right track, but does not give her any guidance on how to further improve or become more conscious of the basis for success in this discipline.

Diana might therefore experience receiving feedback positively, but may not know why she is doing so well.

6.4 DISCUSSION: WHAT IS FEEDBACK ENABLING?

As the four examples have indicated, the feedback that the students in the data set received is relatively strongly bound to the context. This inhibits the students' ability to effectively learn from these comments and in so doing, access the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline. Interestingly, almost all of the tutors expressed disappointment at the level of engagement by students with their feedback. For instance, Cindy stated that "students fail to carry over the feedback from one assignment to the next" (Individualised interview), a sentiment shared by the other tutors. Additionally, tutors indicated that students seem disinterested in consulting with their tutors to obtain clarity on what to do with their feedback. Jane, for example, felt that "those [students] who don't understand their feedback just leave it" (Individualised interview). At the same time, however, the tutors are aware that implementing feedback is made challenging by the lack of drafting opportunities. Cindy, for instance, felt that some comments "would only help on the draft" (Meeting 2). Nevertheless, the tutors felt that although students do not have to physically implement feedback "they need to [at least] think about it" (Jessica, Meeting 2).

The tutors' sentiments about their students' perceived lack of engagement with the feedback mirror various other studies (see, for instance Burke, 2009; Price et al., 2010; Carless et al., 2011; Dowden et al., 2013). However, as this particular Chapter has shown, the problem does not necessarily lie with the student's willingness to engage with the feedback, but with the actual feedback given. Carless (2006), for instance, found that students want feedback that is not too specific to a particular assignment, but which is more general in nature. This present study has shown how feedback that is too context-specific may hinder not only students' learning from the comments, but also their accessing the underlying code of the discipline.

In terms then of the question posed in the sub-heading of this section – what is feedback enabling? – the answer would be that at best feedback is enabling the development of competent essay writers, but that this is in itself greatly dependent on whether students engage with the feedback provided in a meaningful way. As many studies have shown, though (see Hyatt, 2005; Duncan, 2007; Poulos & Mahony, 2008), students often find the comments too difficult to understand, which may hamper their willingness to engage with feedback. Moreover, even when students understand the comments, they may lack the necessary strategies to engage with feedback in a meaningful way (see Weaver, 2006; Burke, 2009).

6.5 SUMMARY

In summation, then, this Chapter has shown that the feedback in this dataset is largely strongly context-dependent and would potentially be more helpful in a draft-rewrite situation. Moreover, the comments given are either relatively vague and therefore difficult to implement, or easy to implement, but only if given the opportunity. Both of these situations regarding the semantic density of the comments inhibits learning from these comments. As a result, it seems highly unlikely that the comments alone would enable access to the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the role that feedback plays in developing 'knowers' in English Studies. Feedback, as research has shown (Chapter 2), plays an important role in student development and learning in higher education, as well as having an implicit epistemic function through which students may access disciplinary discourses. Feedback's importance in higher education is further increased by the fact that, due to increasing student numbers and the consequent high student to staff ratios, feedback has in effect taken the place of face-to-face consultations and may be the only personal communication many students receive about their essays. As essay writing is central to practices in higher education, feedback, then, becomes an important tool for gauging students' level of participation, as well as enabling successful student participation in higher education. However, feedback is not always as effective as it should be. Although there may be various reasons for this lack of effectiveness, this may largely be because the underlying purpose of feedback (and how it links with the underlying epistemic function of a discipline) is not explicitly considered. Consequently, feedback may mislead students about what is valued in a discipline; there might be a misalignment between the purpose and the practice of feedback, which could negatively affect students' access to, and participation in, higher education.

This study, therefore, examined how (and whether) the purpose of feedback is aligned with the practice thereof in English Studies, an undergraduate literature course at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in South Africa. In order to make the often-tacit epistemic purpose of the discipline (and, consequently, the feedback practices needed to enact this purpose) more visible, this study used the Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) dimensions of Specialisation and Semantics to classify English Studies as a rhizomatic knower code (Chapter 3). The purpose of the discipline is therefore to develop students who possess the necessary attributes, attitudes and dispositions needed for success in the discipline, and who can engage with fairly complex meanings in a variety of contexts. Ideally, then, feedback should enable students to develop these knower attributes, while simultaneously enabling students to engage with increasingly complex meaning -making practices in the discipline.

Using a qualitative case study research design, data was generated from a small group of participant tutors in the English Department at UWC who taught first-year English Studies in 2016. These participant tutors supplied sample essays (from which 962 feedback comments were obtained for analysis), completed questionnaires and individualised interviews, and

167

participated in focus group discussion meetings (Chapter 4). These various data sources were used to triangulate the findings to increase the validity and accuracy of the results. Using these sources, the feedback given was analysed in relation to the LCT dimensions of Specialisation (Chapter 5) and Semantics (Chapter 6) to understand whether feedback is enabling rhizomatic knower development at first year level, or at least laying the necessary foundations for this development.

I will now summarise my findings in order to address the central research question of this study:

(How) are tutors using feedback to develop knowers in English Studies?

Thereafter, I will discuss important considerations and implications from this study, as well as the significance of the study. I conclude by suggesting ways forward.

7.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In this section, I will summarise the findings of the thesis (see Chapters 5 and 6). In doing so, I will first address the various sub-research questions (see Chapters 1 and 4). Thereafter, I will attempt to answer the main research question. Underpinning these findings is the conceptualisation of *why* we should be giving feedback in English Studies: to enable students' access to the rhizomatic knower code of the discipline by cultivating the gaze. The *why* of a discipline should ultimately establish *what* feedback focuses on and *why*.

▪ **What are the characteristics of an ideal English Studies knower?**

As Chapter 5 indicated, an ideal English Studies knower should possess the following characteristics: she should be independent, creative, analytical and critical, not only in her engagement with a prescribed text, but also in the ways in which she approaches the world. It is through her engagement with a text that an English Studies knower may come to understand the world (Chace, 2009).

• **What do English Studies tutors perceive as the function of feedback?**

Chapter 5 indicated that, broadly speaking, the participant tutors indicated two main functions of feedback: improvement and development. Development, for the tutors, meant 'building' those skills that a student may not possess yet, while improvement meant refining the skills students already possess.

168

In both instances, these terms were in relation to critical thinking, as tutors felt that critical thinking, more than proficient essay writing, was the skill or ability that students needed most to succeed in English Studies.

- **What are tutors saying through feedback?**

The LCT dimension of Specialisation was used to analyse *what* feedback in English Studies focuses on, in order to look for a possible discrepancy between the *focus* and the *basis* of the comments. Ideally, the feedback given should have its *basis* in the knower code of the discipline. However, in the data set, the feedback was underpinned by three distinct *bases*: a knower code, a relativist code, and a knowledge code. Of these three, the relativist code was the most prominent (45% of the comments), while the least prominent was the knower code (22% of the comments). The greater focus on both relativist code and knowledge code feedback represents a code clash between what feedback should be focusing on and what it does focus on in practice. Moreover, the relativist code underpinning feedback shows a greater emphasis being placed on developing and improving students' generic essay writing skills, at the expense of developing knowers. The implications of this will be discussed in Section 7.3.1.

- **How is feedback given to students?**

The LCT dimension of Semantics was used to analyse *how* feedback was given, in order to trace whether it would enable students to engage in complex meaning making practices in the discipline. Using feedback from four students, given across the academic year of 2016, it was found that feedback in the data set tended to be relatively strongly bound to context, while simultaneously being easy to implement (in relation to language comments) yet too vague to implement (in relation to developing the more knower-like attributes). Moreover, the relatively static nature of feedback meant that feedback would not necessarily have been able to enable students to engage with, and produce, more complex ideas by the end of the year. Additionally, most of the comments in the data set would be more useful in a drafting situation, where students are given an active opportunity to implement the feedback in the same assignment (and consequently, being able to learn from these comments).

In summation, then, we see that there is distinction between the *why* of feedback and the *what* and *how* of feedback. Neither what the tutors say to the students, nor how they go about saying it, seem to be aligned with the underlying goals of feedback in the discipline. I now turn to the research question that guided the thesis and its various sub-questions, namely:

- **(How) are tutors using feedback to develop knowers in English Studies?**

Although this study focused specifically on feedback given in first year, "practice wisdom[28]" (Bamber & Stefani, 2016) and research (see for example Hyatt, 2005; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008; Pokorny & Pickford, 2010; Barker & Pinard, 2014) have suggested that the problems with current feedback practices are not confined to first year alone but are likely to be experienced by students in any year of study.

In the current study, based on the discrepancy between what feedback *should* be focusing on, and what it *is* focusing on, as well as how feedback has been given, it seems unlikely that the feedback in English Studies at first year level is developing knowers. At best, it seems that feedback is developing competent essay writers. For instance, the relativist code *basis* of what the written comments are telling students is rooted in essay writing conventions; similarly, the context-dependence of the comments, as well as the imbalance between easy-to-act on and too-complex feedback means that feedback would either be most useful in a drafting context, or not immediately useful. The likelihood of the feedback given enabling epistemic access to the knower code of the discipline therefore currently seems small.

There are various points to consider in relation to this conclusion, as well as several implications that the misalignment of feedback practice and feedback purpose has not only for pedagogy and tutor development, but also for student access to, and success in, higher education.

7.2 CONSIDERATIONS

In relation to the above conclusion that it seems unlikely that feedback in English Studies is currently effectively developing knowers, there are a couple of points that need to be taken into consideration, namely the time frame, the students' previous schooling, the nature of assignments in English 111/121, as well as the experience levels of the tutors. These internal and external factors may have affected the effectiveness of the feedback in the study (as well as being factors that could affect feedback in general). These will be discussed individually.

---

[28] According to Bamber and Stefani (2016:248) practice wisdom is "the knowledge, often tacit, which we draw on when we make professional decisions, often developed in the workplace". Practice wisdom is acquired "through practice and interaction with others in our field, through experience and non-formal learning".

7.2.1 EXPERIENCE LEVELS OF TUTORS

A big factor that may influence what tutors focus on and which may affect students' cultivating the necessary gaze is tutors' level of experience. It is possible that tutors who are relatively new to tutoring may want to focus on different aspects from those who have been tutoring for a while. For instance, when discussing the importance of argument over organisation of an essay in relation to structural issues (Chapter 5), there is an interesting divide between the level of tutoring experience and which structural aspect is focused on through feedback. Cindy, the more experienced tutor, focused almost exclusively on the argument-related aspects of essay structure, while Alex, Jane and Jessica, the relatively inexperienced tutors, focused more on the organisational aspects of structure. Cindy motivated this by pointing out that "structure is a vehicle for argument; without an argument, there is nothing to structure" (Individualised Interview). For Cindy, then, the argument is the driving force behind the essay; in effect, the argument determines the essay's structure. However, for the other participant tutors, the argument is seemingly not as important as the overall structure of the essay.

This difference in focus between the different levels of experience might suggest that for Cindy the emphasis is more on enabling students to develop their own voices through the argument, which in turn will have an effect on the overall structure of the essay, than on the mechanistic technical details of structuring a sentence or a paragraph. This might suggest, then, that Cindy, as the more experienced tutor, is more focused on higher order concerns, though perhaps tacitly so, while the less experienced tutors may not have made that realisation or might still be 'blinded' by more mechanical errors. It does suggest a slight, and possibly misleading, difference across tutors about what is important structurally in an essay. This may have implications for who is given potential access to the discipline, as it may indicate that the tutor, and perhaps the level of experience, may affect students' ability to see the *basis* of the discipline. Who a student gets as her tutor may thus affect how or whether she will be able to cultivate the necessary gaze and access the underlying knower code of the discipline. Additionally, the differing levels in tutoring experience and the effects these may have on students has pedagogical implications for tutor development and support within academic departments. I will return to this later in the Chapter.

Further, it may also suggest that Cindy is more immersed in the English Studies gaze than the less experienced tutors. This may suggest that the process of cultivating the necessary gaze is not one that reaches a specific conclusion upon completion of an undergraduate (or even postgraduate) degree; it suggests that the process of immersion into cultivating the necessary gaze is a lengthy one and that to assume that a postgraduate student has cultivated the English

Studies gaze and is therefore ready to tutor simply because she has completed the degree, may have broader implications for enabling first year students to cultivate the gaze. The difference in experience in tutoring may therefore have affected knower development in the discipline.

7.2.2 TIME FRAME

The level of tutoring experience and how it ties in with tutors' own cultivation of the gaze (and, consequently, their ability to cultivate the gaze in others) ties in with the issue of the time frame needed to cultivate a gaze. As the previous section highlighted, there were marked differences between tutors of varying levels of tutoring experiences. Yet, most of these tutors have the same qualifications - all of them have completed an Honours degree in English Studies, and most of them have completed, or are in the process of completing, an MA degree in English Studies (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2.1 for the tutor characteristics). Yet, there seems to be a distinction between their levels of awareness of what is valued in the discipline. The question then becomes: how much time is required to cultivate the gaze in order for students to become successful, recognised knowers?

This study focused specifically on first year students. The question then has to be: what is the goal of first year English Studies in terms of cultivating the gaze and knower development? Maton (2014a:122), for instance, points out that "[a] cultivated gaze results from the gradual re-shaping of dispositions, which requires prolonged and guided immersion in numerous and diverse context situations". The lengthy process involved in cultivating the gaze is emphasised by his using such phrases as "*extended* participation", "*sustained* exposure" and "*prolonged* apprenticeship" (Maton, 2014a:186; emphasis added). Cultivating the gaze is thus not something that is necessarily achievable by the end of the first year[29]. This prompts the question whether the goal should be to lay the foundations for knowerness (which could then be further developed and cultivated in subsequent years of study) at the end of their first year.

This study has shown that the first year of study is not enough time to cultivate the gaze fully, especially when tutors feel that they have to spend their time overcoming the incongruences between students' school experiences and university expectations. Cindy, for instance, points out that English Studies is "not an even playing field at all" (Meeting 2), and that most of the time is spent on 'lower order' concerns in order for students to have the rudimentary literacies needed to write an essay (regardless of analysis). For students who have to overcome certain educational incongruences, it might be even more challenging to cultivate

---

[29] And, as Section 7.2.3 will indicate, this might be affected even further by the previous schooling experiences of students entering higher education in general, and English Studies in particular.

the gaze during and beyond first year, especially if tutors' attempts at addressing the uneven playing field result in the knower code being obscured by a focus on more generic writing skills development, even within a specific disciplinary context. The issue of time is thus also linked to issues of *who* may become knowers, especially since most students will not continue with English in second and third year (and beyond). Tutors may feel that some students should rather be developed into competent essay writers who may be able to pass the course, but who should ideally not continue with it.

Even if it is realistic to not expect students to become authentic knowers by the end of their first year, the feedback given should nevertheless ideally still be aligned with the knower code of the discipline. This alignment between feedback purpose and feedback practice could make the foundation for knower development stronger, thereby enabling students to build cumulatively on what they have learned at the end of their first year in their subsequent years of study.

7.2.3 PREVIOUS SCHOOLING

Another issue that could affect the effectiveness of feedback, is the students' previous schooling. As has been pointed out (Chapters 1 and 2), in the South African secondary education system there are schools that are more, or less, congruent with university practices (McKenna, 2004b; Boughey, 2012). Consequently, some students may be more familiar with the tacit practices of higher education than others.

In Chapter 6, we saw the example of Diana who, although receiving fewer comments than the other three students used in the Chapter, on average performed better. It is possible that Diana came from a school or home literacy background that is more congruent with university practices than Eden, Dawn or Cynthia and that she would therefore have a clearer idea of what is expected of her. Maton (2014a:117), for instance, points out that students who "already possess an appropriately cultivated gaze, by virtue of their upbringing and/or previous education" may find it easier to cultivate the gaze in a higher education setting. However, this is not to say that she should not get feedback that is clearer about the knower code of the discipline, as she will still be required to refine her cultivated gaze in light of the expectations of English Studies. Especially since, "the cultivated gaze of a knower code is generally not explicitly taught" (Christie, 2016:161). Consequently, feedback should ideally assist students like Diana with refining their cultivated gaze.

Yet, as Mutch (2003:34) indicates, "markers are rather less likely to suggest developmental actions to those who they consider excellent". Diana, although doing well in

comparison to the other students in the data set, is nevertheless still disadvantaged by her feedback as the comments do not make the gaze of the knower code more visible. She might therefore do well, but not know why. This has negative implications for her becoming a self-regulated, independent learner.

On the other side of this dilemma is Eden, who consistently struggled throughout the year (her average being 48% for the year). Mutch (2003:34) points out that markers may "give poorer students advice that … they might be poorly equipped to deal with". The implication would then be that feedback is not assisting either good or poor students with improving. This will be discussed further in Section 7.3.1.

7.2.4 NATURE OF ASSIGNMENTS

Another factor that needs to be taken into account is the fact that there are no compulsory tutor-marked drafts in the course. Students only submit their assignment once. Although they may consult with their tutor ahead of time, this is not mandatory (and in fact the participant tutors indicated that students are often unlikely to consult with them, both before and after assignments have been submitted and returned). Similarly, Bloxham and Campbell (2010:294) found that students are often "too embarrassed or intimidated" by their tutor to ask for help.

Much research (see Bharuthram & McKenna, 2006; Vardi, 2012) has shown that feedback is more useful when given on drafts. Additionally, research has shown that students do not value feedback comments as much when they cannot apply them to their essays (Walker, 2009; Pokorny & Pickford, 2010; Barker & Pinard, 2014). If students are not required to engage with, or implement, feedback actively (as in a drafting cycle), then it limits the effectiveness of feedback (Rust, 2002; Orrell, 2006). Feedback in English Studies, which does not have a compulsory drafting system (at UWC at least), may therefore not be as effective as it could be, even when it is aligned with the knower code of the discipline, as there may be no 'incentive' for students to read through their feedback, other than as a way to understand their grade. The effects of massification and larger class sizes (Hornsby & Osman, 2014) may mean that this is not an isolated case, as various other disciplines may also have had to do without an official compulsory drafting cycle as time pressures on tutors and lecturers would make it unfeasible. Additionally, as we saw in Chapter 6, the feedback given by the participant tutors would often have been more appropriate in a drafting situation; yet, there is no real opportunity for students to engage with the comments. The participant tutors acknowledged that the lack of drafting was problematic, but they indicated that they hoped that students would at least "read and think" about their feedback (Jessica, Meeting 3).

However, the lack of compulsory drafts and the consequent effectiveness of feedback in itself points to the divide between feedback for improving an essay and feedback for enabling epistemic access. Thus, drafting may be useful for improving from one essay to the next, but it does not necessarily guarantee that students will learn from it effectively. But, what drafting does give students a clearer opportunity to do is to 'physically' engage with feedback. In a drafting situation, students 'have' to engage with feedback and they 'have'[30] to implement it. Nevertheless, if drafts are implemented it gives students an opportunity to engage with the feedback, to learn how to use feedback, and ideally how to 'lift' information from their feedback in order to learn from feedback. If there is no opportunity for re-drafting then feedback, as can be seen in Chapter 6, remains feed*back*. The comments on the assignment become a reflection of what a student did well, or not, in the current assignment, which limits their opportunity to learn from the comments and apply this knowledge going forward.

7.3 IMPLICATIONS

The previous section examined the various external and internal factors that need to be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of feedback. As this section will illustrate, there are various implications to feedback not being as effective as it should be, for tutors and students, as well as in higher education broadly. I will firstly discuss the effect of misaligned feedback practice and purpose on students, and then focus on the implications it has for tutors.

7.3.1 STUDENT ACCESS

As Chapters 5 and 6 have indicated, there is a misalignment between feedback practice and feedback purpose, whereby the feedback focuses more on developing generic essay writing skills than on knower development. Additionally, how feedback is given is either only appropriate in a developmental drafting cycle or too vague for students to act on. This misalignment of feedback practice and purpose has various implications for student development and learning.

Firstly, it indicates that tutors may be unaware of the tacit purpose of the discipline, and consequently, this may affect students' ability to access the knower code of the discipline. The feedback given would thus not fully enable students to be successful in the discipline. There is

---

[30] I'm using scare quotes here because there are always exceptions, e.g. students who may feel that it is not necessary for them to engage with feedback or who genuinely do not understand the feedback and are perhaps too shy to speak with their tutor.

therefore a need not only for surfacing the underlying organising principles of the discipline, but also for having tutors who are immersed in the discipline to the extent that they can act effectively on an increased awareness of these organising principles.

Secondly, through the misaligned feedback practices students may become 'locked' into certain grade categories. In Chapter 6, for instance, Eden remained locked into a fail grade, Cynthia a low 50s grade, Dawn a mid 60s grade, and even Diana got locked into an A grade (75%+). Although marks are subjective and problematic by nature (Dalziel, 1998), grades do play an important role in higher education. In each student's case, the feedback given did not enable them to necessarily do 'better' in terms of improving their grades. This has negative implications for students. For instance, in the highly competitive higher education environment, bursaries are awarded based on students' grades. By not enabling students to improve, we may inadvertently be locking them into certain grade categories which not only affects their marks, but also bursary opportunities and ability to go onto second year and beyond.

Moreover, in South Africa, higher education is often seen as key to success, as a way to redress the socio-economic inequalities that are currently dividing the country. Boughey (2012:126) for instance highlights that "a higher education qualification signifies an escape from the gruelling poverty which has plagued [many students'] families and communities for generations". If feedback does not enable students to improve, this may affect their chances of graduating, and eventually obtaining a job. Locking students into certain grade categories could in effect trap them in their present socio-economic position. If feedback therefore does not enable students to do 'better', especially when it is not aligned with the purpose of the discipline, it may result in dire consequences for student access, success and participation in higher education and beyond.

Thirdly, feedback could also be a way to break down barriers between students from diverse backgrounds by emphasising their belonging to university. Ivanič, Clark and Rimmershaw (2000:61) point out that "tutors' comments could help to build students' sense of membership of the academic community rather than emphasizing their role on the margins of it, or worse, seeming to exclude them from it". For many students in South Africa coming to university means a shift in their identity, especially if they are the first in their family to attend a higher education institution (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Luckett & Luckett, 2009; Kapp & Bangeni, 2011), as they have to constantly deal with the (at times contradictory) experiences of both home and university. Feedback could enable students to experience a greater sense of belonging in higher education, which would not only re-affirm their decision to attend university, but which could also serve as motivation to continue (Gourlay, 2009).

Therefore, if feedback is not as useful as it should be, it may produce consequences beyond not enabling students' access to the code – means of achievement – of a discipline. Related to this, then, there are various implications for feedback in relation to teaching and learning.

7.3.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

The findings in Chapters 5 and 6 also point to interesting implications for teaching and learning for both tutors and students. From the tutor's point of view, there is the importance of 'feedback-awareness' training. That is, that feedback-giving practices should become an integral part of tutor training, especially in those disciplines where feedback is not a component in tutor training. However, Underhill and McDonald (2010), for instance, have indicated that tutor training is often not made available. Moreover, even when tutor training is presented, guidance on how to offer students written and verbal feedback is not necessarily included. The participant tutors, for instance, all indicated that none of them had received training on how to give feedback specifically in English Studies. Although tutors have to attend regular moderation meetings, the participant tutors indicated that these are not necessarily useful for feedback purposes. Jessica, for instance, felt that although these meetings were useful in determining what constitutes a 60% or an 80%, these meetings did not provide clarity on how to provide constructive comments on essays (Meeting 3).

Additionally, providing feedback training could enable greater awareness in tutors of their own feedback-giving practices. Much research, for instance, has indicated how tutors are often not aware of how their own feedback-giving styles may affect students' ability to engage with feedback (see, for instance, Chanock, 2000; Hyatt, 2005; Weaver, 2006). If tutors are made more aware of *how* they give feedback and how this may inhibit understanding and action by students, it could lead to a clearer feedback dialogue between tutors and students. This is not, however, to suggest that feedback training should be prescriptive; that is, giving tutors a set of phrases that they should use when encountering a particular problem. Rather, feedback training could incorporate aspects such as looking at why we give feedback, creating awareness of how the different ways of phrasing comments could affect students, and (re)considering what tutors should focus on in their feedback. Crucially, feedback training needs to enable tutors to consider the knowledge being used and constructed in a discipline, and how students are required to build and consume knowledge.

Furthermore, the tutors pointed to the importance of creating a space to talk about feedback practices, as a way to develop their feedback-giving practices. Alex, for instance,

indicated that participating in the feedback discussion group helped her to consider and question her feedback-giving practices (Meeting 2), while Jessica indicated that she found it "nice to sit in a room with other tutors and hear how they approach tasks" (Meeting 3). This echoes Bell and Mladenovic (2015) who found that tutors often do not have the opportunity to discuss their teaching practices, including giving feedback, with one another, aside from chance encounters. Feedback, in itself, has a "marginal status" as a tool for learning (Orrell, 2006), especially in terms of helping tutors develop their feedback-giving practices. As much of feedback is steeped in taken-for-granted aspects, the assumption seems to be that giving feedback is something that should be easy and natural for tutors. However, this is not the case. Creating legitimised and visible spaces for talk about feedback could assist tutors in becoming better feedback-givers, as they could draw on the advice of other tutors (and even lecturers).

Understanding feedback-giving as a pedagogic practice, then, has various implications for tutor training which could influence tutors' feedback-giving practices. Similarly, there are implications for students in relation to receiving feedback. Firstly, the purpose of feedback in higher education needs to be made clearer to students. Holmes and Papegeorgiou (2009:88), for instance, highlight "the importance of managing students' expectations of feedback not least through making it very clear what constitutes feedback". As with the taken-for-granted nature of giving feedback, the purpose of feedback has a similar taken-for-granted nature; that is, that students will know what feedback is trying to achieve and how they should go about implementing comments to improve their writing. Cindy, for instance, pointed out that one of the biggest issues with feedback is that students do not understand the purpose of feedback (Meeting 2); that is, that students "tend to see feedback as validation or chastisement, rather than a learning tool" (Individualised interview). Jane pointed out that students need to be made aware that feedback "has a purpose beyond justifying a mark and that it is intended to help them move forward" (Individualised interview).

Students' lack of understanding of the purpose of feedback (both in general, but also specifically in relation to English Studies) may tie in with their lack of understanding about what the discipline entails, as students often come to the course with the expectation that it will be similar to high school English with its focus on language, literature and literacy. Cindy indicates that it is not "necessarily made clear to [students] what the course is" (Meeting 2). Jessica, additionally, indicates that it may be "unfair" to only tell students late in the course what it actually entails (Meeting 2). If students, for instance, look to English Studies as a language-development course then they may not perceive the developmental, epistemic function that underpins the feedback given to them. The inability to 'see' what a discipline entails is not limited to English Studies. Generally speaking, students often persist with school-based literacy

practices long after they have left school in the absence of guidance from lecturers and tutors on the underlying expectations and assumptions of the disciplinary work they are required to do at university (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005: Kapp & Bangeni, 2011). It would therefore be useful, in any disciplinary context, to guide students towards an understanding, firstly, of what the discipline entails and secondly, what the purpose of feedback in the discipline is, as this could assist with making feedback in the discipline more effective.

Secondly, the problem of the effectiveness of feedback could also be addressed by providing students with guidance, or training, on how to work with feedback. As research can attest (Weaver, 2006; Burke, 2009; Deyi, 2011), students might not understand feedback or might not be able to engage with it in a meaningful manner. However, Barker and Pinard (2014) and Dowden et al. (2013) have indicated that students can be taught how to apply and engage with feedback. When asked if students should receive training on how to use feedback, all four participants indicated yes. Jessica elaborated on this by stating that "most students do not seem [to] know how to work with the feedback" (Individualised interview). Helping students understand what to do with feedback could help them to "prioritize feedback" (Jane, Individualised interview), by enabling students to focus on "global textual issues" rather than on "spelling errors". It could also enable students to have a better understanding of what to do, on a literal level, with a comment. Showing students what they need to do with a comment could help students to learn more effectively from their feedback.

Therefore, from both the students' and tutors' respective points of view, feedback needs to be seen as a kind of literacy in itself. That is, it cannot be assumed that tutors will know why they give feedback, how to give feedback, or what to give feedback on, nor can it be assumed that students will be able to understand feedback as is, or how to use feedback effectively. Feedback, as an integral part of student learning and development at higher education, needs to be elevated from its status as a "*postscript* to teaching and learning" (Orrell, 2006:452; emphasis in the original) in order to improve the feedback dialogue on *both* sides of the feedback conversation.

7.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to research into higher education practices in three ways. Firstly, this study contributes to studies in the sociology of education that draw on the work of Basil Bernstein and LCT. On a practical level, the study has shown the usefulness of using LCT to conceptualise the underlying purpose of a discipline and to analyse the practice(s) of a discipline, especially in cases where disciplines are 'horizontal knowledge structures'

(Bernstein, 1999) and where there may be a less defined sense of what needs to be achieved in the discipline, or how to go about achieving it. The study therefore adds to the growing body of work using LCT in the Arts and Humanities (see, for instance, Luckett, 2009 (sociology); Shay, 2011 (history)). Additionally, although various studies have focused on using LCT in research on pedagogical practices, such as teaching (see, for instance Blackie, 2014; Christie, 2016; Jackson, 2016) or assessment (see, for instance, Shay, 2008; Wolff & Hoffman, 2014; Rootman-Le Grange & Blackie, 2017), this study has been the first in applying this kind of framework to written feedback. Additionally, within the LCT community, specifically, this study has shown the usefulness of semantic planes as a tool for unpacking pedagogic practices, such as feedback; traditionally, semantic waves have been used (see, for instance, Blackie, 2014; Clarence, 2016). The theoretical and analytical framework could therefore be adjusted for other disciplines in the Arts and Humanities using the LCT dimensions of Specialisation and Semantics to conceptualise, firstly, what the underlying principles of their disciplines are, and, secondly, how this could translate into pedagogical practices, such as feedback.

Secondly, the study contributes to studies in assessment and evaluation that consider new, and more effective ways of understanding and enacting feedback giving, especially in disciplines like English Studies, which to date, has mostly been researched at school level (see, for instance, Christie, 2009, 2016; Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007; Jackson, 2016). This study has shown the importance of considering the *why* of feedback and how it interplays with the *what* and *how* of feedback. I maintain that without fully considering 'why' we give feedback, as seemingly obvious and taken-for-granted as it may appear, we will continue to mislead students about what they need for success in higher education. That is not to say that knowing why we should be giving feedback will automatically fix the feedback problem, but it may assist with developing feedback training workshops on how to give effective feedback to students or how to get students to engage effectively with the feedback given. It, therefore, shows the importance of thinking of feedback as a kind of literacy in itself.

Thirdly, the study contributes to studies in social justice, access and success in higher education and the conditions necessary for teaching, learning and assessment to enable greater numbers of students to succeed in higher education. The study therefore shows the importance of considering the ontological implications (Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007) that pedagogic practices at university may have and to consider what we want our students to become at university; that is, students need to become more than just graduates with sets of skills, they need to become different kinds of knowers than can contribute to the betterment of society.

7.5 LIMITATIONS

There are a couple of limitations to this study and these need to be acknowledged. The biggest limitation of the study is that although having acknowledged the 'dialogic' nature of feedback in Chapter 2, this study focused on one side of the dialogue only. This was a deliberate choice, as I wanted to exclude the students' voices, in order to bring tutors' voices to the fore. I did not want the study to be another comparative study between tutors' and students' perceptions of feedback. However, this does mean that it is not possible to know how students would have responded to the feedback given.

Additionally, although I have highlighted that we should align the practice and purpose of the discipline, I have not (yet) provided guidelines on how to do so. However, the purpose of the study was not to find a practical solution to the feedback problem; the study is by design exploratory and not an intervention.

Moreover, written feedback is merely one aspect of pedagogic practices to which students are exposed, and only one aspect of feedback itself. Tutors may also have provided students with supplementary verbal feedback during the tutorial sessions, or during individual consultation sessions. Time constraints prohibited me from sitting in on such sessions. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the significance of the written comments analysed in the study, as these comments should in their own capacity provide students with sufficient information.

Furthermore, the study is limited to a specific discipline – English Studies – at a specific university – UWC – in a specific context – South African higher education. However, by having such a thorough exploration of this particular context it could enable others in similar contexts to unpack their practices as well.

Lastly, the study is relatively small in its scale. As critiques against small scale case studies have postulated, this limits the opportunity for generalizations. That may be so - not all English Studies courses at all universities may have the same kinds of problems. But, there may be other courses in the Arts and Humanities that may have similar problems, and this study could form a foundation for those courses to work from. Moreover, the purpose of this exploratory study was not to provide a generalisation to all other contexts in higher education, but to obtain a clearer understanding of the specific case under study. Additionally, as stated in Chapter 4, although this is a small-scale study, the LCT tools especially make it possible for research in other disciplines to subsume and extend my study, as the tools are applicable to all disciplines and fields, not just English Studies.

7.6 WHERE TO NEXT?

In order to build on the research done in this study, there are a few recommendations for follow-up studies:

- The focus of the study could be expanded to consider other disciplines in the Arts and Humanities in order to effectively gauge what feedback should be doing and what it is doing.
- Additionally, inter-university studies could be done to look at how/whether there are any discrepancies in the feedback patterning across universities.
- Students could be included in the study to look at how they would interpret the feedback given (especially using the lenses of LCT)
- An intervention-type feedback training workshop for both tutors (on how to give feedback) and students (on how to use feedback) could be developed and its effectiveness could be determined.

These are some of the potential areas for further research.

7.7 A FINAL NOTE

At the start of this thesis, I reflected on how my experiences as a tutor inspired this study. At the end of this thesis, I have now come to the realisation that feedback is infinitely more complex and problematic than I had ever imagined. It is a dialogue between two parties who often do not speak the same discourse, it is a potentially useful tool for learning and development that often is not useful at all, and it is a form of individualised, often impersonal, communication to students about their work.

Undertaking this study has shown me the importance of not taking feedback practices for granted; that is, as a tutor, to not assume that my feedback is easy to understand or easy to implement. I think I knew this, on some level, but I had not considered what this would mean for students. There are some things that we do as tutors when we give feedback, without realising it, that seem natural and obvious to *us*, but that does not mean that students will interpret it as such. I feel strongly that feedback needs to be re-considered as a literacy. Feedback is something that we, as tutors, need to learn how to give effectively and that students need to learn how to work with effectively. It should not be assumed that tutors will know what to give feedback on, how to give feedback, or why we are giving feedback or that students will know how to implement feedback.

Additionally, the study has made me realise the important role that feedback plays, beyond merely improving an essay (although improving essay writing is still a large part of it). I had not considered how my feedback could unintentionally lock students into certain spaces, such as specific marks categories which, in turn, could reinforce negative self-beliefs about their efficacy or intelligence as students. Too often, I think, we see feedback as a time-consuming task that needs to be completed, without fully considering the personal and educational implications that our feedback may have, beyond the essay.

Feedback is a dialogue, yes, but it will remain an overbearingly one-sided dialogue if spaces are not made in which to interrogate and understand what we are trying to achieve with our feedback and to assist students with getting the most out of their feedback, and consequently, more out of their time and engagement with higher education.

REFERENCE LIST

Adcroft, A. 2011. The mythology of feedback. *Higher education research and development,* 30 (4): 405-419.

Akoojee, S. & Nkomo, M. 2007. Access and quality in South African higher education: The twin challenges of transformation. *South African journal of higher education,* 21 (3): 385-399.

Bailey, R. & Garner, M. 2010. Is the feedback in higher education assessment worth the paper it is written on? Teachers' reflections on their practices. *Teaching in higher education,* 15 (2): 187-198.

Ballard, B. & Clanchy, J. 1988. Literacy in the university: An 'anthropological' approach." in, G. Taylor, B. Ballard, V. Beasley, H. Bock, J. Clanchy & P. Nightingale (Eds.). *Literacy by Degrees.* Milton Keynes: Society for research into higher education/Open University, pp. 7-23.

Bamber, V. & Stefani, L. 2016. Taking up the challenge of evidencing value in educational development: From theory to practice. *International journal for academic development,* 21(3): 242-254.

Bangeni, B. & Kapp, R. 2005. Identities in transition: Shifting conceptions of home among 'black' South African university students. *African studies association,* 48 (3): 1-19.

Barker, M. & Pinard, M. 2014. Closing the feedback loop? Iterative feedback between tutor and student in coursework assessments. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 39 (8): 899-915.

Barnett, R. 2009. Knowing and becoming in the curriculum. *Studies in higher education,* 34 (4): 249-440.

Beaumont, C., O'Doherty, M. & Shannon, L. 2011. Reconceptualising assessment feedback: A key to improving student learning? *Studies in higher education,* 36 (6): 671-687.

Bell, A. & Mladenovic, R. 2015. Situated learning, reflective practice and conceptual expansion: Effective peer observation for tutor development. *Teaching in higher education,* 20 (1). 24-36.

Bernstein, B. 1999. Vertical and horizontal discourse: An essay. *British journal of sociology of education,* 20 (2): 157-173.

Bernstein, B. 2000. *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique.* Revised Edition. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield publishers, 2000.

Bharuthram, S. & McKenna, S. 2006. A writer-respondent intervention as a means of developing academic literacy. *Teaching in higher education,* 11 (4): 495-507.

Bhaskar, R. 2008 [1975]. A realist theory of science. Oxford: Routledge.

Black, P. & William, D. 2009. Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational assessment, evaluation and accountability,* 21: 5-31.

Blackie, M. A. L. 2014. Creating semantic waves: Using Legitimation Code Theory as a tool to aid the teaching of chemistry. *Chemistry education, research and practice,* 15: 462-469.

Blair, A. & McGinty, S. 2013. Feedback-dialogues: Exploring the student perspective. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 38 (4): 466-476.

Bless, C., Higson-Smith, C. & Kagee, A. 2006. *Fundamentals of social research methods: An African perspective*. Fourth edition. Cape Town: Juta and company Ltd.

Bloxham, S. & Campbell, L. 2010. Generating dialogue in assessment feedback: Exploring the use of interactive cover sheets. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 35 (3): 291-300.

Boud, D. & Molloy, E. 2013. Rethinking models of feedback for learning: The challenge of design. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 38 (6): 698-712.

Boughey, C. 2005. 'Epistemological' access to the university: An alternative perspective. *South African journal of higher education,* 19 (3): 230-242.

Boughey, C. 2011. Institutional difference: A neglected consideration in the scholarship of teaching and learning. *International journal for the scholarship of teaching and learning,* 5 (2). [Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2011.050206 [Accessed: 23 February 2017].

Boughey, C. 2012. Social inclusion and exclusion in a changing higher education environment. *REMIE: Multidisciplinary journal of educational research,* 2 (2): 133-151.

Boughey, C. 2013. What are we thinking of? A critical overview of approaches to developing academic literacy in south African higher education. *Journal for language teaching,* 47 (2): 25-41.

Bozalek, V. & Boughey, C. 2012. (Mis)framing higher education in South Africa. *Social policy and administration,* 46 (6): 688-703.

Brandt, K. 2016. UWC management suspends classes until further notice. *Eye Witness News.* 18 October. [Online] Available at: http://ewn.co.za/2016/10/18/UWC-classes-remain-suspended [Accessed: 3 February 2017].

Brown, E. & Glover, C. 2006. Evaluating written feedback, in C. Bryan and K. Clegg (Eds.). *Innovative assessment in higher education.* London: Routledge, pp. 81-91.

Burke, J. B. 2008. Writing, power and voice: Access to and participation in higher education. *Changing English,* 15 (2): 199-210.

Burke, D. 2009. Strategies for using feedback students bring to higher education. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 34 (1): 41-50.

Burke, D. & Pieterick, J. 2010. *Giving students effective written feedback.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Butler, D. L. & Winne, P. H. 1995. Feedback and self-regulated learning: A theoretical synthesis. *Review of educational research,* 65 (3): 245-281.

Carless, D. 2006. Differing perceptions in the feedback process. *Studies in higher education,* 31(2): 219-233.

Carless, D., Salter, D., Yang, M. & Lam, J. 2011. Developing sustainable feedback practices. *Studies in higher education,* 36 (4): 395-407.

Carter, R. 2016. English pasts, English futures, in A. Hewings, L. Prescott & P. Seargant (Eds.). *Futures for English Studies: Teaching language, literature and creative writing in higher education.* London: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 11-18.

Centre for Higher Education Transformation. 2010. Institutional clusters in higher education in South Africa (presentation). [Online] Available at: http://chet.org.za/files/DifferentiationChet_Web10May10.pdf [Accessed: 2 September 2017].

Centre for Higher Education Trust. N.d. South African higher education open data. [Online] Available at: http://www.chet.org.za/data/sahe-open-data. [Accessed: 3 February 2015].

Chace, W. M. 2009. The decline of the English department. *The American scholar,* 70 (4): 32-42.

Chanock, K. 2000. Comments on essays: Do students understand what tutors write? *Teaching in higher education,* 5 (1): 95-105.

Chen, R. 2010. Knowledge and knowers in online learning: Investigating the effects of online flexible learning on student sojourners. Unpublished PhD thesis. Wollongong: University of Wollongong, Australia.

Chick, N. L. 2009. Unpacking a signature pedagogy in literary studies, in R. A. R. Gurung, N. L. Chick & A. Haynie (Eds.). *Exploring signature pedagogies: Approaches to teaching disciplinary habits of mind*. Virginia: Stylus, pp. 36-55.

Cho, K., Schunn, C. D. & Charney, D. 2006. Commenting on writing: typology and perceived helpfulness of comments from novice peer reviewers and subject matter experts. *Written communication,* 23 (3): 260-294.

Christie, F. 1999. The pedagogic device and the teaching in English, in F. Christie (Ed.). *Pedagogy and the shaping of consciousness: Linguistic and social processes.* London: Cassell, pp. 156-185.

Christie, F. & Macken-Horarik, M. 2007. Building verticality in subject English, in F. Christie & J. R. Martin (Eds.) *Language, knowledge and pedagogy: Functional linguistics and sociological perspectives.* London: Continuum, pp. 156-184.

Christie, F. 2016. Secondary school English literary studies: Cultivating a knower code, in K. Maton, S. Hood & S. Shay (Eds.). *Knowledge building: Education studies in Legitimation Code Theory*. New York: Routledge, pp. 158-175.

Cibangu, S. K. 2012. Qualitative research: The toolkit of theories in the social sciences, in López-Varela, A. (Ed.). *Theoretical and methodological approaches to social sciences and knowledge management.* InTech. Open Access. [Online] Available at: http://www.intechopen.com/books/how-to-link/theoretical-and-methodological-approaches-to-social-sciences-and-knowledge-management [Accessed: 6 August 2016].

Clarence, S. 2014. Enabling cumulative learning through teaching: A Legitimation Code Theory analysis of pedagogic practice in law and political science. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Grahamstown: Rhodes University, South Africa.

Clarence, S. 2016. Exploring the nature of disciplinary teaching and learning using Legitimation Code Theory Semantics. *Teaching in higher education,* 21 (2): 123-137.

Clarence, S. & McKenna, S. 2017. Developing students' academic literacies through understanding the nature of disciplinary knowledge. *London review of education,* 15 (1): 38-49.

Conana, H.C. 2015. Using Semantic profiling to characterize pedagogical practices and student learning: A case study in two introductory physics courses. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Bellville: University of the Western Cape, South Africa.

Council on Higher Education (CHE). 2013. A proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa: The case for a flexible curriculum structure. Report of the Task Team on

Undergraduate Curriculum Structure. [Online] Available at: http://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/publications/Full_Report.pdf [Accessed: 3 February 2015].

Creswell, J. W. & Miller, D. L. 2000. Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into practice,* 39 (3): 124-130.

Creswell, J. W. 2014. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Fourth Edition. Sage: Los Angeles.

Crisp, B. R. 2007. Is it worth it? How feedback influences students' subsequent submission of assessable work. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 32 (5): 571-581.

Cromwell, L. 2005. Reading and responding to literature: Developing critical perspectives, in T. Riordan & J. Roth (Eds.). *Disciplines as frameworks for learning: Teaching the practice of the disciplines.* Virginia: Stylus, pp.77-93.

Curry, M. J. & Lillis, T. M. 2003. Issues in academic writing in higher education, in C. Coffin, M. J. Curry, S. Goodman, A. Hewings, T. M. Lillis, & J. Swann (Eds.). *Teaching academic writing: A toolkit for higher education.* London: Routledge, pp. 1-18.

Dall'Alba, G. & Barnacle, R. 2007. An ontological turn for higher education. *Studies in higher education,* 32 (6): 279-691.

Dalziel, J. 1998. Using marks to assess student performance: Some problems and alternatives. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 32 (4): 351-366.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. 2000. Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research, in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage publications, pp. 1-28.

Department of English Student Handbook. n. d. Unpublished.

Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). 2015. Statistics on post-school education and training in South Africa 2013. [Online] Available at: http://www.dhet.gov.za/DHET%20Statistics%20Publication/Statistics%20on%20Post-School%20Education%20and%20Training%20in%20South%20Africa%202013.pdf [Accessed: 3 September 2017].

De Sousa, G. U. 1997. Paradigm lost? The fate of literature in the age of theory. *Shakespeare quarterly,* 48 (4): 449-451.

Deyi, S. 2011. Feedback or feed-forward? Implications of language used in giving feedback on students' writing, in A. Archer & R. Richards (Eds.). *Changing spaces: Writing centres and access to higher education*. Cape Town: SunPress, pp. 47-58.

Dowden, T., Pittaway, S., Yost, H. & McCarthy, R. 2013. Students' perceptions of written feedback in teacher education: Ideally feedback is a continuing two-way communication that encourages progress. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 38 (3): 349-362.

Duncan, N. 2007. 'Feed-forward': Improving students' use of tutors' comments. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 32(3): 271-283.

Dwyer, S. C. & Buckle, J. L. 2009. The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International journal of qualitative methods,* 8 (1): 54-63.

Easton, G. 2010. Critical realism in case study research. *Industrial marketing management,* 39 (1): 118-128.

English 111/121 Course Reader. 2016. Unpublished.

Elton, L. 2010. Academic writing and tacit knowledge. *Teaching in higher education,* 15 (2): 151-160.

Ferguson, P. 2011. Student perceptions of quality feedback in teacher education. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 36 (1): 51-62.

Flyvbjerg, B. 2006. Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative inquiry,* 12 (2): 219-245.

Foss, C. & Ellefsen, B. 2002. The value of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in nursing research by means of method triangulation. *Journal of advanced nursing,* 40 (2): 242-248.

Geisler, C. 1994. Literacy and expertise in the academy. *Language and learning across the discipline,* 1 (1): 35-57.

Gibbs, G. & Simpson, C. 2004. Does your assessment support your students' learning? *Learning and teaching in higher education,* 1(1): 3–31.

Glenn, E. 2016. From clashing to matching: Examining the legitimation codes that underpin shifting views about climate change. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Sydney: University of Technology Sydney, Australia.

Glover, C. & Brown, E. 2006. Written feedback for students: Too much, too detailed or too incomprehensible to be effective. *Bioscience education,* 17 (1): 1-16.

Golafshani, N. 2003. Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative report*, 8 (4): 597-607.

Gooder, R. D. 2005. What English was. *The Cambridge quarterly,* 34 (3): 287-311.

Gorski, P. S. 2013. What is Critical Realism? and why should you care? *Contemporary sociology,* 42(5): 658-670.

Gourlay, L. 2009. Threshold practices: Becoming a student through academic literacies. *London review of education,* 7 (2): 181-192.

Harper, M. & Cole, P. 2012. Member checking: Can benefits be gained similar to group therapy? *The qualitative report* 17 (2): 510-517.

Harran, M. 2011. What higher education students do with teacher feedback: Feedback-practice implications. *Southern African linguistics and applied language studies,* 29 (4): 419-434.

Hathaway, J. 2015. Developing that voice: Locating academic writing tuition in the mainstream of higher education. *Teaching in higher education,* 20 (5): 506-517.

Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. 2007. The power of feedback. *Review of educational research,* 77 (1): 81-112.

Hendricks, M. & Quinn, L. 2000. Teaching referencing as an introduction to epistemological empowerment. *Teaching in higher education,* 5 (4): 447-457.

Hendry, G. D., Bromberger, N. & Armstrong, S. 2011. Constructive guidance and feedback for learning: The usefulness of exemplars, marking sheets and different types of feedback in a first year law subject. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 36 (1): 1-11.

Hennink, M., Hutter, I. & Bailey, A. 2011. *Qualitative research methods*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Higgins, R. 2000. 'Be more critical': Rethinking assessment feedback. Paper presented at the *British Educational Research Association Conference.* Cardiff University, 2-10 September.

Higgins, R., Hartley, P. & Skelton, A. 2001. Getting the message across: The problem of communicating assessment feedback. *Teaching in higher education,* 6 (2): 269-274.

Higgins, R., Hartley, P. & Skelton, A. 2002. The conscientious consumer: Reconsidering the role of assessment feedback in student learning. *Studies in higher education,* 27 (1): 53-64.

Holmes, K. & Papageorgiou, G. 2009. 'Good, bad and insufficient': Students' expectations, perceptions and uses of feedback. *Journal of hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism education,* 8 (1): 85-96.

Hornsby, D. J. & Osman, R. 2014. Massification in higher education: Large classes and student learning. *Higher education,* 67: 711-719.

Hounsell, D., McCune, V., Hounsell, J. & Litjens, J. 2008. The quality of guidance and feedback to students. *Higher education research and development,* 27 (1): 55-67.

Huxham, M. 2007. Fast and effective feedback: Are model answers the answer? *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 32 (6): 601-611.

Hyatt, D. F. 2005. 'Yes, a very good point!': A critical genre analysis of a corpus of feedback commentaries on Master of Education assignments. *Teaching in higher education,* 10 (3): 339-353.

Hyland, K. & Hyland, F. 2006. Contexts and issues in feedback on L2 writing: An introduction, in K. Hyland & F. Hyland (Eds.). *Feedback in second language writing: Contexts and issues.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-19.

Ivanič, R., Clark, R. and Rimmershaw, R. 2000. What am I supposed to make of this? The messages conveyed to students by tutors' written comments, in M. R. Lea and B. Stierer (Eds.). *Student writing in higher education: New contexts.* Buckingham: Society for research into higher education / Open University Press, pp. 47-65.

Ivanič, R. 2004. Discourses of writing and learning to write. *Language and education,* 18 (3): 220-245.

Jackson, F. 2016. Unravelling high school English literature pedagogic practices: A Legitimation Code Theory analysis. *Language and education,* 30 (6): 536-553.

Jacobs, C. 2005. On being an insider on the outside: New spaces for integrating academic literacies. *Teaching in higher education*, 10 (4): 475-487.

Jacobs, C. 2007. Towards a critical understanding of the teaching of discipline-specific academic literacies: Making the tacit explicit. *Journal of education,* 41: 59-81.

Jacobs, C. 2013. Academic literacies and the question of knowledge. *Journal for language teaching,* 47 (2): 127-140.

Jacobs, C. 2015. Opening up the curriculum: Moving from the normative to the transformative in teachers' understanding of disciplinary literacy practices, in T. Lillis, K. Harington, M. R. Lea, & S. Mitchell (Eds.). *Working with academic literacies: case studies towards transformative practices.* Fort Collins, Colorado: The WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press, pp. 131-141.

Kapp, R. 2004. 'Reading on the line': An analysis of literacy practices in ESL classes in a South African township school. *Language and education,* 18 (3): 246-263.

Kapp, R. & Bangeni, B. 2005. 'I was just never exposed to this argument thing': Using a genre approach to teach academic writing to ESL students in the Humanities, in A. Herrington, & C. Moran (Eds.). *Genre Across the Curriculum.* Utah: Utah State University Press, pp. 109-125.

Kapp, R. 2006. Discourses of English and literacy in a Western Cape township school, in L. Thesen & E. van Pletzen (Eds.). *Academic Literacy and the Language of Change.* London: Continuum, pp. 30-52.

Kapp, R. and Bangeni, B. 2011. A longitudinal study of students' negotiation of language, literacy and identity. *Southern African linguistics and applied language studies,* 29 (2): 197-208.

Knapp, John V. 2004. Current conversations in the teaching of college-level literature. *Style,* 38 (1): 50-91.

Kotzee, B. 2010. Seven posers in the constructivist classroom. *London review of education,* 8 (2): 177-187.

Lambrinos, E. 2017. Building ballerinas: Semantics and embodied knowledge in ballet education. Unpublished paper delivered at the Second International Legitimation Code Theory Conference, 3-7 July, Sydney, Australia.

Lea, M. & Street, B. 1998. Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education,* 23 (2): 157-172.

Lea, M. 1998. Academic literacies and learning in higher education: Constructing knowledge through texts and experience. *Studies in the education of adults,* 30 (2): 156-171.

Lea, M. R. 2004. Academic literacies: A pedagogy for course design. *Studies in higher education,* 29 (6): 739-756.

Lillis, T. 1999. Whose 'commons sense'? Essayist literacy and the institutional practice of mystery, in C. Jones, J. Turner & B. Street (Eds.). *Students writing in the university: Cultural and epistemological issues.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 127-146.

Lillis, T. & Turner, J. 2001. Student writing in higher education: Contemporary confusion, traditional concerns. *Teaching in higher education,* 6 (1): 57-68.

Lillis, T. M. 2001. *Student writing: Access, regulation, desire.* London: Routledge.

Lillis, T. 2003. Student writing as 'academic literacies': Drawing on Bakhtin to move from critique to design. *Language and education,* 17 (3): 192-207.

Lillis, T. & Scott, M. 2007. Defining academic literacies research: Issues of epistemology, ideology and strategy. *Journal of Applied Linguistics,* 4 (1): 5-32.

Lillis, T., Harrington, K., Lea, M.R. & Mitchell, S. (Eds.). 2015. *Working with academic literacies: Case studies towards transformative practice*. Fort Collins, Colorado: The WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press.

Liu, Y. 2011. Bernsteinian perspectives on the Reading to Learn program. *Annual review of functional linguistics in China*, 3: 109-123.

Lizzio, A. & Wilson, K. 2008. Feedback on assessment: Students' perceptions of quality and effectiveness. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 33 (3): 263-275.

Luckett, K. 2009. The relationship between knowledge structure and curriculum: A case study in sociology. *Studies in higher education*, 34 (4): 441-453.

Luckett, K. & Luckett, T. 2009. The development of agency in first generation learners in higher education: A social realist analysis. *Teaching in higher education,* 14 (5): 469-481.

Luckett, K. & Hunma, A. 2014. Making gazes explicit: Facilitating epistemic access in the Humanities. *Higher education,* 62 (3): 183-198.

Luckett, K. 2016. Making the implicit explicit: The grammar of inferential reasoning in the humanities and social sciences. *Universal journal of educational research,* 4 (5): 1003-1015.

Macken-Horarik, M. 2011. Building a knowledge structure for English: Reflecting on the challenges of coherence, cumulative learning, portability and face validity. *Australian journal of education,* 55 (3): 197-213.

Maclellan, E. 2001. Assessment for learning: The differing perceptions of tutors and students. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 26 (4): 307-318.

Martin, J. 2016. Musicality and musicianship: Specialisation in jazz studies, in K. Maton, S. Hood & S. Shay (Eds.). *Knowledge building: Educational studies in Legitimation Code Theory*. London: Routledge, pp. 193-213.

Maton, K. & Muller, J. 2007. A sociology for the transmission of knowledge, in F. Christie & J. R. Martin (Eds.). *Language, knowledge and pedagogy: Functional linguistics and sociological perspectives.* London: Continuum, pp. 14-33.

Maton, K. 2007. Knowledge-knower structures in intellectual and educational fields, in F. Christie & J. R. Martin (Eds.). *Language, knowledge, and pedagogy: Functional linguistics and sociological perspectives*. London: Continuum, pp. 87-108.

Maton, K. 2009. Cumulative and segmented learning: Exploring the role of curriculum structures in knowledge-building. *British journal of sociology of education,* 30 (1): 43-57.

Maton, K. 2010. Analysing knowledge claims and practices: Languages of legitimation, in K. Maton & R. Moore (Eds.). *Social realism, knowledge and the sociology of education. Coalitions of the mind*. London: Continuum, pp.35-59.

Maton, K. & Moore, R. (Eds.). 2010. *Social realism, knowledge and the sociology of education. Coalitions of the mind*. London: Continuum.

Maton, K. 2011. Theories and things: The semantics of disciplinarity, in F. Christie & K. Maton (Eds.). *Disciplinarity: Functional linguistics and sociological perspectives*. London: Continuum, pp.62-84.

Maton, K. 2013. Making semantic waves: A key to cumulative knowledge building. *Linguistics and education,* 24 (1): 8-22.

Maton, K. 2014a. *Knowledge and knowers: Towards a realist sociology of education*. London: Routledge.

Maton, K. 2014b. A TALL order: Legitimation Code Theory for academic language and learning. *Journal of academic language and learning,* 8 (3): A34-A48.

Maton, K. 2014c. Building powerful knowledge: The significance of semantic waves, in E. Rata & B. Barrett (Eds.). *Knowledge and the Future of the Curriculum: International studies in social realism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 181-197.

Maton, K. 2016a. Legitimation Code Theory: Building knowledge about knowledge-building, in K. Maton, S. Hood & S. Shay (Eds.). *Knowledge building: Educational studies in Legitimation Code Theory*. London: Routledge, pp. 1-23.

Maton, K. 2016b. Starting points: Resources and architectural glossary, in K. Maton, S. Hood & S. Shay (Eds.). *Knowledge building: Educational studies in Legitimation Code Theory*. London: Routledge, pp. 233-243.

Maton, K. & Chen, R. T. 2016. LCT and qualitative research: Creating a language of description to study constructivist pedagogy, in K. Maton, S. Hood & S. Shay (Eds.). *Knowledge building: Educational studies in Legitimation Code Theory*. London: Routledge, pp. 27-48.

Mavelli, L. 2014. Widening participation, the instrumentalization of knowledge and the reproduction of inequality. *Teaching in higher education,* 19 (8): 860-869.

McCann, L, & Saunders, G. 2009. Exploring student perceptions of assessment feedback. *The higher education academy, social policy and social work (SWAP Report)*. [Online] Available

at: http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/1832/1/SWAP_Assessment_Feedback.pdf [Accessed: 9 November 2014]

McKenna, S. 2004a. Lecturers' discourses about the interplay between language and learning. *South African journal of higher education,* 18 (2): 278-297.

McKenna, S. 2004b. The intersection between academic literacies and student identities. *South African journal of higher education,* 18 (3): 269-280.

Merriam, S. B. 2009. *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

Mgqwashu, E. M. 2012. On creating conditions for the acquisition of discourse specific literacies in English Studies: The value of integrating language studies and literary studies in English departments. *South African journal of higher education,* 26 (5): 1045-1065.

Mills, C. & Matthews, N. 2009. Review of tutor feedback during undergraduate dissertations: A case study. *Journal of hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism education,* 8 (1): 108-116.

Mitchell, S. 2010. Now you don't see it; now you do: Writing made visible in the discipline. *Arts and humanities in higher education,* 9 (2): 133-148.

Morrow, W. 1994. Entitlement and achievement in education. *Studies in philosophy and education* 13 (1): 33-47.

Murtagh, L. & Baker, N. 2009. Feedback to feed forward: Student response to tutors' written comments on assignments. *Practitioner research in higher education,* 3 (1): 20-28.

Mutch, A. 2003. Exploring the practice of feedback to students. *Active learning in higher education,* 4 (1): 24-38.

Nicol, D. J. & Macfarlane-Dick, D. 2006. Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in higher education,* 31 (2): 199-218.

Nicol, D. 2010. From monologue to dialogue: Improving written feedback processes in mass higher education. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 35 (5): 501-517.

Nkosi, B. 2015. UWC's success counts against it. *Mail and guardian.* 22 May. [Online] Available at: https://mg.co.za/article/2015-05-22-uwcs-success-counts-against-it [Accessed: 3 September 2017].

Onwuegbuzie, A. J. & Daniel, L. G. 2003. Typology of analytical and interpretational errors in quantitative and qualitative educational research. *Current issues in education,* 6 (2): 1-33.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Dickinson, W. B., Leech, N. L. & Zoran, A. G. 2009. A qualitative framework for collecting and analysing data in focus group research. *International journal of qualitative method,* 8 (3): 1-21.

Orrell, J. 2006. Feedback on learning achievement: Rhetoric and reality. *Teaching in higher education,* 11 (4): 441-456.

Orsmond, P., Merry, S. & Reiling, K. 2005. Biology students' utilization of tutors' formative feedback: A qualitative interview study. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 30 (4): 369-386.

Orsmond, P. & Merry, S. 2011. Feedback alignment: Effective and ineffective links between tutors' and students' understanding of coursework feedback. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 36 (2): 125-136.

Orsmond, P., Maw, S. J., Park, J. R., Gomez, S. & Cook, A. C. 2013. Moving feedback forward: Theory to practice. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 38 (2): 240-252.

Parkin, H. J., Hepplestone, S., Holden, G., Irwin, B. & Thorpe, L. 2012. A role for technology in enhancing students' engagement with feedback. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 37 (8): 963-973.

Pather, R. 2015. UWC: free education at a historically black university. *Daily vox*. 3 November. [Online] Available at: https://www.thedailyvox.co.za/uwc-free-education-at-a-historically-black-university/ [Accessed: 3 September 2017]/

Perloff, M. 2011. The decay of a discipline: Reflections on the English department today. *Qui parle,* 20 (1): 153-167.

Platt, J. 1981. On interviewing one's peers. *The British journal of sociology,* 32 (1): 75-91.

Pokorny, H. & Pickford, P. 2010. Complexity, cues and relationships: Student perceptions of feedback. *Active learning in higher education,* 11 (1): 21-30.

Poulos, A. & Mahony, M. J. 2008. Effectiveness of feedback: The student's perspective. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 33 (2): 143-154.

Prescott, L., Hewings, A., & Seargant, P. 2016. Introduction: Futures for English Studies, in A. Hewings, L. Prescott & P. Seargant (Eds.). *Futures for English Studies: Teaching language, literature and creative writing in higher education*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 1-8.

Price, M., Handley, K., Millar, J. & O'Donovan, B. 2010. Feedback: All that effort, but what is the effect? *Assessment and evaluation in higher education*, 35 (3): 277-289.

Price, M., Handley, K., & Millar, J. 2011. Feedback: Focusing attention on engagement. *Studies in higher education,* 36 (8): 879-896.

Pring, R. 2001. The virtues and vices of an educational researcher. *Journal of philosophy of education,* 35 (3): 407-421.

Punch, K. F. 2009. *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches.* London: Sage Publications.

Quintal, G. 2015. What you need to know about #FeesMustFall. *Mail and Guardian.* 19 October. [Online] Available at: http://mg.co.za/article/2015-10-19-four-things-you-need-to-know-about-feesmustfall#.Vih8l2qxP0o.facebook [Accessed: 3 February 2017]

Ramsey, P., Franklin, T., Ramsey, D. & Wells, R. 2002. Rethinking grades for sustainable learning. *Innovations in education and teaching international,* 39 (2): 117-123.

Robinson, S., Pope, D. & Holyoak, L. 2013. Can we meet their expectations? Experiences and perceptions of feedback in first year undergraduate students. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education,* 38 (3): 260-272.

Rootman-Le Grange, I. & Blackie, M. 2017. The lens of semantic gravity: Revealing the weakness in assessment. Unpublished paper delivered at the Second International Legitimation Code Theory Conference, 3-7 July, Sydney, Australia.

Rosslyn, F. 2004. Literature for the masses: The English literature degree in 2004. *The Cambridge quarterly,* 33 (1): 1-10.

Rust, C. 2002. The impact of assessment on student learning. *Active learning in higher education,* 3 (2): 145-158.

Rust, C., O'Donovan, B. & Price, M. 2005. A social constructivist assessment process model: How research literature shows us this could be the best practice. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 30 (3): 231-240.

Sadler, D. R. 2010. Beyond feedback: Developing student capability in complex appraisal. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 35 (5): 535-550.

Sadovnik, A. R. 2001. Basil Bernstein (1924-2000). *Prospects: The quarterly review of comparative education,* 31 (4): 687-703.

Shay, S. 2008. Beyond social constructivist perspectives on assessment: The centring of knowledge. *Teaching in higher education,* 13 (5): 595-605.

Shay, S. 2011. Curriculum formation: A case study from History. *Studies in higher education,* 36 (3): 315-329.

Shenton, A. K. 2004. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for information*, 22 (2): 63-75.

Szenes, E., Tilakaratna, N. & Maton, K. 2015. The knowledge practices of critical thinking, in M. Davies & R. Barnett (Eds.). *The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education*, London: Palgrave Macmillan., pp. 573-591.

Tang, J. & Harrison, C. 2011. Investigating university tutor perceptions of assessment feedback: Three types of tutor beliefs. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 36 (5): 583-604.

Tapp, J. 2015. Framing the curriculum for participation: A Bernsteinian perspective on academic literacies. *Teaching in higher education,* 20 (7):711-722.

Thomas, G. 2011. The case: Generalisation, theory and phronesis in case study. *Oxford review of education,* 37 (1): 21-35.

Tomas, C. 2014. Marking and feedback provision on essay-based coursework: A process perspective. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 39 (5): 611-624.

Trowler, P. 2011. Researching your own institution: higher education. *British Educational Research Association online resource.*

Tuck, J. 2012. Feedback-giving as social practice: Teachers' perspectives on feedback as institutional requirement, work and dialogue. *Teaching in higher education,* 17 (2): 209-221.

Underhill, J. & MacDonald, J. 2010. Collaborative tutor development: Enabling a transformative paradigm in a South African university. *Mentoring and tutoring: Partnership in learning,* 18 (2): 191-106.

Underhill, J. L., Clarence-Fincham, J. & Petersen, N. 2014. Developing a mentorship programme for junior lecturers working with student tutors at a South African university: Emergency shifts in pedagogy and identity. *Education as change*, 18 (2): 357-371.

UWC history. 2013. [Online] Available at: https://www.uwc.ac.za/Pages/History.aspx [Accessed: 3 September 2017]

Van der Berg, S. 2007. Apartheid's enduring legacy: Inequalities in education. *Journal of African economies,* 16 (5): 849-880.

Van Heerden, M., Clarence, S. and Bharuthram, S. 2017. 'What lies beneath': Exploring the deeper purposes of feedback on student writing through considering disciplinary knowledge and knowers. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 42 (6): 967-977.

Vardi, I. 2012. The impact of iterative writing and feedback on the characteristics of tertiary students' written texts. *Teaching in higher education,* 17 (2): 167-179.

Värlander, S. 2008. The role of students' emotions in formal feedback situations. *Teaching in higher education,* 13 (2): 145-156.

Wakefield, C., Adie, J., Pitt, E. & Owens, T. 2014. Feeding forward from summative assessment: The Essay Feedback Checklist as a learning tool. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 39 (2): 253-262.

Walker, M. 2009. An investigation into written comments on assignments: Do students find them usable? *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 34 (1): 67-78.

Waugh, P. 2016. Discipline or perish: English at the tipping point and styles of thinking in the twenty-first century, in A. Hewings, L. Prescott & P. Seargant (Eds.). *Futures for English Studies: Teaching language, literature and creative writing in higher education*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 19-38.

Weaver, M. R. 2006. Do students value feedback? Student perceptions of tutors' written responses. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 31 (3): 379-394.

Webbstock, D. 2016. Overview. *South African higher education reviewed: Two decades of democracy.* 5-62. [Online] Available at: http://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/publications/CHE_South%20African%20higher%20education%20reviewed%20-%20electronic_0.pdf [Accessed: 3 September 2017].

Weurlander, M., Söderberg, M., Scheja, M., Hult, H. & Wernerson, A. 2012. Exploring formative assessment as a tool for learning: Students' experiences of different methods of formative assessment. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 37 (6): 747-760.

Wilder, L. & Wolfe, J. 2009. Sharing the tacit rhetorical knowledge of the literary scholar: The effects of making disciplinary conventions explicit in undergraduate writing about literature courses. *Research into the teaching of English,* 44 (2): 170-209.

Williams, K. F. 2009. 'Guilty knowledge': Ethical aporia emergent in the research practice of educational development practitioners'. *London review of education,* 7 (3): 211-221.

Wingate, U. 2010. The impact of formative feedback on the development of academic writing. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 35 (5): 519-533.

Wolff, K. & Hoffman, F. 2014. Knowledge and knowers in engineering assessment. *Critical studies in teaching and learning,* 2 (1): 74-9.

Woolf, H. 2004. Assessment criteria: Reflections on current practices. *Assessment and evaluation in higher education,* 29 (4): 479-493.

Wootton, S. 2002. Encouraging learning or measuring failure? *Teaching in higher education,* 7 (3): 353-357.

Yin, R. K. 1981. The case study crises: Some answers. *Administrative science quarterly,* 26 (1): 58-65.

APPENDIX A

OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH 111/121 ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment	Due date	Text	Description of assignment
Test 1	Term 1 Week 4	"The Test" – a short story by Njabulo Ndebele	A five-paragraph essay that focuses on answering a set question based on a close analysis of a given extract from the text.
Essay 1	Term 2 Week 2	"A love poem" – a poem by Jeremy Cronin	A five-paragraph essay in which the poem is analysed in order to prove whether the poem is, in fact, a love poem
Essay 2	Term 2 Week 6	*Reef* – a novel by Romesh Gunesekera	A five-paragraph essay that focuses on answering a set question based on a close analysis of a given extract from the text.
Test 2	Term 2 Week 8	*Karoo moose* – a play by Laura Foot	A five-paragraph essay in which students are asked to agree/disagree with a critic's view on the play
Test 3	Term 3 Week 5	*Nervous conditions* – a novel by Tsitsi Dangarembga	A five-paragraph essay that focuses on answering a set question based on a comparative close analysis of two given extracts from the text.
Essay 3	Term 4 Week 1	*Macbeth* – a play by William Shakespeare	A five-paragraph essay that focuses on answering a set question based on a close analysis of two extracts from the text (one given, one selected by the student).
Essay 4	Term 4 Week 6	*Great expectations* – a novel by Charles Dickens	A five-paragraph essay that focuses on answering a set question about the text and which needs to be answered by doing a close analysis of student-selected extracts from the text.
Test 4	Term 4 Week 8	Unseen poem	n/a

In 2016, Terms 1 and 3 were 5 weeks long, and Terms 2 and 4 8 weeks long (usually, terms are about 7 weeks long). In the past, therefore, students would have submitted Essay 1 and Test 1 in Term 1 (and so on).

APPENDIX B

- as taken from the Department of English Student Handbook (n.d.: 19-21)

MARKS ARE GIVEN ACCORDING TO THE FOLLOWING SCALE:

A   90%+   Outstanding in all respects.

        80%+   Exciting and individual, extremely perceptive and well-written

        75%+   Very perceptive and clearly written.

B   70%+   Very good analysis and persuasively expressed, heading for an A. Often given to students whose ideas are very perceptive and individual, but who could develop these ideas more fully or clearly.

C   60%+   Competent. Has convincing details and insights, but lacks individuality and curiosity, so ideas are not fully or creatively explored. Covers the field but could explore further.

D   53%+   Has some competence, knows the work, knows what is required; but is hindered by weakness of organization and expression (especially limited vocabulary and formulation difficulties), and a failure to analyse closely or to use evidence. Work in this category may also show lack of reflective thinking on issues, a tendency towards generalizations, clichés and superficial or unassimilated opinions.

D/E 48%-53%   Borderline. Has tackled the question, but at a very superficial level. If expression of ideas is reasonably clear, 53%. Otherwise, 48%. Very many borderline cases reflect excessive paraphrase or demonstrate that they do indeed know the set work but have tended to ignore the specific requirements of the question. This usually means that there is a lack of detailed analysis, and a tendency to ramble or generalize or to ignore the set passage. We do not award marks of 50% for specific assignments, although students may well have 50% as a final mark for a course, resulting from the average of their other marks.

E   45%+   Either major expression problems which affect promising ideas, or generally weak but with some idea of what is required. Work is often generalized and unfocused. There is potential for development and more practice would improve the analytical skills, expression or organisation for

		a pass.
F	40%+	Weak and very unclear expression, rambling commentary rather than analysis, failure to identify what the question requires.
G	39%-	Degrees of ignorance of the set work, neglect of the terms of the question, very weak comprehension and often confused or contradictory ideas, ideas unclear and expression very confusing for the reader.
	25%-	This is the bottom line. The work is either extremely unclear, weakly expressed, uninformed, or careless; or a potentially competent answer may have been affected because the student ran out of time in an examination and was unable to tackle the question adequately.
	0%	This mark means that the topic and the text were totally ignored, or that there is evidence that the student does not know the set work at all. This mark is also given for any kind of dishonesty, including plagiarism.

[...]

LEARNING FROM COMMENTS AND MARKS

Your marks and your comments (especially for tutorial essays) are there to help you to develop your writing and analytical skills; they are not simply aimed at grading your work. Always read your marker's comments; they are far more important to your development than your actual mark.

If you continue to receive the same critical comments on your essays, and are unclear about how to improve your work, consult your marker. Discuss your essays and progress with your tutor during his or her consultation times.

Common Student Errors Noted in Essays:

SS: Sentence Structure. Incorrect use of punctuation. Restructure as shorter sentences.
T: Tense. Incorrect or confused use of tense
P: Punctuation
SP: spelling
Pr.: Incorrect preposition
A: Agreement. Subject-verb agreement or noun-pronoun agreement.
^: point needs further clarification
X: incorrect information

APPENDIX C

THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK IN ENGLISH STUDIES:

TUTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Tutor

This questionnaire forms part of the study I am undertaking for my PhD degree in English Studies. The aim of my project is to determine what tutors perceive is the role of feedback in English Studies, how they approach giving feedback, and what they say to students, and why, through feedback.

I would like to thank you for participating in my study.

Kind regards,
Martina van Heerden

SECTION A: General Information

1. Name and Surname [this will be kept confidential] _____

2. Your pseudonym _____

3. What is your highest qualification?_____

4. Are you currently studying towards a degree? If yes, please indicate which degree.

5. When did you start tutoring? _____

6. When did you start tutoring English 111/121? _____

7. For 2016, how many English 111/121 tutorial groups do you have per semester?_____

8. How many students, more or less, are in each tutorial group?_____

9. Do you tutor in any subject(s) outside of English 111/121? If yes, which subject(s)? _____

   _____

SECTION B: English Studies and Feedback

1. How would you define feedback?

   _____

   _____

   _____

_____
_____
_____

2. Have you received any training on how to give feedback? If yes, provide details on when, where, how, and by whom; if not, do you feel training on how to give feedback is necessary?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. What do you anticipate will be your biggest challenge in giving feedback?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. What do you think is the pedagogic purpose of English Studies?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5. What do you think is the pedagogic purpose of feedback in English Studies?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6. How have you experienced receiving feedback and does this influence how you (will) give feedback?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. What do you think is the most important thing feedback in English 111/121 should focus on (please motivate):
   - language and grammar
   - content
   - referencing
   - skills development
   - other (please indicate)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. What do you think is the least important thing feedback in English 111/121 should focus on (please motivate):
   - language and grammar
   - content
   - referencing
   - skills development
   - other (please indicate)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. What do you think is students' role in the feedback process?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. _____ W

hat do you hope students will do and/or achieve with the feedback you give them?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE 2

THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK IN ENGLISH STUDIES:
TUTOR QUESTIONNAIRE 2

Dear Tutor

This questionnaire is based on the responses I got to the first questionnaire, as well as the feedback on the first assignment. This questionnaire aims to get further information on some of the points made in the questionnaire, as well as to discuss patterns in feedback.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,
Martina van Heerden

From the questionnaire:

1.When asked for the definition of feedback, the two most common terms used were to 'develop' and to 'improve', and specifically in relation to 'writing skills, critical thinking, and meta cognition'.

1.1 If you had to pick a term - develop or improve - which one would be best to describe what feedback does? Please motivate.

_____
_____
_____

1.2. In relation to the above, what would you say is the most important thing to develop and/or improve through feedback: writing skills, critical thinking, or meta cognition? Please motivate.

_____
_____
_____

2.When asked what the anticipated greatest challenge in giving feedback will be, the responses were split between two topics: time management and balancing comments.

2.1 With regards to time management: what do you think is the biggest problem there? Do you think you compromise on feedback when faced with time constraints? If so, how?

_____

_____

_____

2.2 With regards to balancing comments: the challenge seems to be balancing giving 'negative' feedback (in the sense of telling students what their essay's weaknesses are) and not discouraging students, and positive feedback (which needs to be both encouraging and useful). (How) do you think you manage this balance?

_____

_____

_____

3. When asked what the pedagogic purpose of English Studies is, the responses were divided between 'critical thinking' and 'critical analysis' which should be 'taught', 'developed' or 'acquired'.

3.1 What do you think is more important for success in English Studies: critical thinking or critical analysis?

_____

_____

_____

3.2 Which verb do you think best describes what English Studies should do: teach, develop or acquire?

_____

_____

_____

4. When asked what the purpose of feedback is in English Studies, the verbs used were mostly 'develop', 'demonstrate' and 'guide'. Which one do you think best describes what the purpose of feedback should be?

_____

_____

_____

5. Almost everyone indicated that the way they received feedback influenced the way they give feedback. For instance, if poor feedback was received, then the aim would be to avoid doing the same, while if 'good' feedback was received, then the aim would be to replicate that. What would you define as 'poor' feedback and what would you define as 'good' feedback? You can use examples if necessary.

_____
_____
_____

6. When asked what the most important thing is that feedback in English 111/121 should focus on, the two most common answers were 'skills development' and 'content'.

6.1 What are the most important skills that need to be developed?

_____
_____
_____

6.2 In terms of content, how do you aim to give feedback on content?

_____
_____
_____

7. When asked what students' role in the feedback process is, the words used ranged from 'interpret, 'evaluate', 'engage', 'apply' and 'transfer'.

7.1 What do you think is the most important thing students should do with feedback? Please motivate.

_____
_____
_____

7.2 All of the words listed, suggest that students should be active participants in the feedback dialogue. Do you think this is the case? Please motivate.

_____
_____

_____

From the test on "The Test" feedback:

1. What do you think the primary purpose of feedback should be in test situations: to justify the mark, to provide feed*back* (i.e. indicate what students did wrong/right), or to provide feed*forward* (suggests ways of improving work). Please motivate.

_____
_____
_____

2. As part of the feedback, students received a lot of ticks ($\sqrt{}$), with students in the upper range receiving more ticks than those in the lower ranges.

2.1 What motivates you to give a tick?

_____
_____
_____

2.2 What are you saying with that tick?

_____
_____
_____

2.3 What does a 'double tick' ($\sqrt{}\sqrt{}$) mean?

_____
_____
_____

3. Often in the test feedback, questions were asked regarding the content, for instance: 'When was Thoba the centre of attention?' 'Is [Thoba's mother] a nurse?' 'Why do you think this will happen?' 'Is he more self aware?' 'Does he not see the consequences?'

3.1 What do you think is the purpose behind these questions? i.e. what to you hope to achieve?

_____
_____
_____

3.2 How do you think students will interpret these questions?

_____
_____
_____

4. In terms of language feedback, students in the lower ranges got more feedback on language than on structure, content or other aspects (referencing, quoting conventions, or register).

4.1 Do you think it is a coincidence that students with more language errors receive lower marks?

_____
_____
_____

4.2 Do you correct and/or identify all/most/some/none language errors?

_____
_____
_____

4.3 What is your motivation behind correcting and/or identifying language errors?

_____
_____
_____

5. Below, you will find an example body paragraph from the test. Please provide feedback on it as you would for a 'normal' test.

As the story begins with the soccer match, it is almost as if Thoba has an internal argument with himself whether or not he wants to continue playing in the rain. "He watched the other boys who seemed completely absorbed in the game. They felt no rain and no cold... No, decided Thoba, he would play on" (Ndebele, 1). He basis whether or not he want to continue playing off whether the other boys still wanted to play. For him, it felt lik he needed to fit in, needed a sense of belonging for once and that lead to him continuing the game in the rain

_____
_____

_____
_____
_____
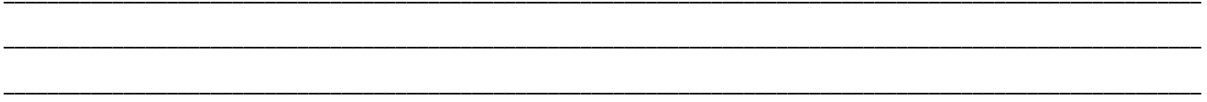
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
English Department

Private Bag X17, Bellville
Cape Town
7535
South Africa

Tel: (021) 959 2964 / 9592225
Fax: (021) 959 2202
March 2016

Principal Researcher: Martina van Heerden

Research Project Title: What Lies Beneath Tutors' Feedback? Examining the role of Feedback in Developing 'Knowers' in English Studies

Informed Consent

Purpose of the study

This study will examine the perception English 111/121 tutors have about the pedagogical purpose of feedback and how this influences what they say to students (through feedback) and why. This will not be an evaluation of tutors' feedback methods (that is, the study will not distinguish between 'good' or 'bad' feedback-givers) but will focus on how tutors perceive their role in the feedback process.

Participation and withdrawal

If you agree to participate in this study, your position is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any stage, leaving the information provided still protected. There will be no consequences should you decide to withdraw from this study.

Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Confidentiality will be maintained by keeping you anonymous, either by assigning a random number to you, or by having you select a pseudonym of your choice, or both. We will determine this as a focus group, to ensure that everyone feels protected.

Participant tutors will be asked not to discuss or divulge information shared by others in the group or the researcher outside of this group to protect the confidentiality of the space.

When the results of the study are published, no names of participants will appear in the publication/s. Participants and their data will in no way be connected for the reader/s of the publication. Confidentiality in publication will therefore be maintained at all times

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Complete two questionnaires. The questionnaires will consist of largely open-ended questions on your views on feedback, which will be discussed in greater detail in the focus group, and more close-ended questions that will determine basic data, such as how long you have been tutoring and what your qualifications are. This will help determine a better overall picture of the participant pool and may only be used if significant correlations between this set of data and the discussion data are found.
- Participate in focus group discussions. The focus group discussions will meet at a convenient time twice per semester (at least) after assignments have been marked. These will be audio recorded and transcribed. Should you wish to do so, you may ask for a copy of the transcriptions in order to check for accuracy and validity.
- Provide marked essay samples with high(est), middle and low(est) marks. These will be photocopied and kept confidentially. For convenience, use the same three students' essays throughout the year. Any discernible feedback patterns will be discussed in the focus group meetings. You will have to obtain permission from your students for using their essays; a student consent form will be provided to you.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Martina van Heerden (researcher)
martinavanheerden13@gmail.com

Dr. Sherran Clarence (supervisor)
sherranclarance@gmail.com

Dr. Sharita Bharuthram (co-supervisor)
sbharuthram@uwc.ac.za

Dr. Fiona Moolla (English Department Post-Graduate Coordinator)
fmoolla@uwc.ac.za

Consent Form – Focus Group Discussions

What Lies Beneath Tutors' Feedback? Examining the role of Feedback in Developing 'Knowers' in English Studies

Researcher: Martina van Heerden

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. (If I wish to withdraw I may contact the lead research at any time)

3. I understand my responses and personal data will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the reports or publications that result for the research.

4. As a participant of the discussion, I will not discuss or divulge information shared by others in the group or the researcher outside of this group.

5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

6. I agree for to take part in the above research project.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature
(*or legal representative*)

_____   _____   _____
Lead Researcher   Date   Signature
(*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*)

Copies: All participants will receive a copy of the signed and dated version of the consent form and information sheet for themselves. A copy of this will be filed and kept in a secure location for research purposes only.

APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Meeting 2

(This meeting focused on obtaining a fuller understanding of the various steps that tutors take in giving feedback, from before the assignment is submitted to afterwards)

Pre-Feedback:

- What do you tell your students before the time? i.e. what do you place emphasis on during the essay prep class?
- In how much detail do you go through the essay question with students?

During feedback:

- Do you have an 'ideal' essay in mind while marking?
- What would you say a 'good' essay looks like?
- What does and English 1 student need for success?
- When giving feedback, do you fall into 'patterns' (e.g. use certain phrases)
- Do you explain these to students?
- What have been the biggest issues you've had to address?

Post-Feedback:

- How have students responded to feedback thus far?

Meeting 3

(This meeting focused on discussing the 5 types of feedback identified from a preliminary analysis of the marked sample essays. These categories focus very much on the 'how' of feedback – how concerns are pointed out to students – and so the questions focus largely on tutors' considering their motivation for giving feedback in this particular manner. Each category was explained, using examples from their scripts for clarity)

Observations

- What is your motivation for/reasoning behind using observation statements?
- How do you think students interpret these observations?

Questions

- Why do you think questions are largely related to the text?

- What is your motivation for/reasoning behind using questions?
- How do you think students interpret these questions?

Suggestions

- What is your motivation for/reasoning behind using suggestions?
- How do you think students interpret these observations?

Praise

- What is your motivation for/reasoning behind using praise?
- How do you think students interpret praise?
- Do you think taking marks off is (good) feedback practice?

Error identification/correction

- What is your motivation for/reasoning behind identifying and/or correcting errors?
- How do you think students interpret this?

Appendix G

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

English Department

Dear Student

I am participating in a feedback study in the English Department. This study will examine the perception English 111/121 tutors have about the pedagogical purpose of feedback and how this influences what they say to students (through feedback) and why. This study will focus on how tutors perceive their role in the feedback process.

As part of the process, I need to provide sample marked essays in order for the researcher to examine my feedback practices. With your permission, I would like to submit a photocopy of your marked essay(s) to the researcher. Please note that the focus will not be on you (as student writer), but on *my* feedback-giving practices.

If you consent to this, please sign below. Your name and student number will not be included in the study and you will remain completely anonymous throughout.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Martina van Heerden (the researcher) at martinavanheerden13@gmail.com.

Thank you.

Kind regards,

_____
Name of tutor

_____

I _____ hereby allow my tutor _____ to submit my essay to the researcher in order to examine my tutor's feedback.

_____
Signature of student

_____

Date