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An investigation into the relationship between the use of academic language and attainment – with a focus on students from ethnic minorities

Project reference: #389

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0. Executive summary

Project objectives

At the OU, a gap in attainment exists between students who are White and students from ethnic minorities. The aims of this project were to investigate:

1. Whether there is a relationship between students' use of language and their attainment.
2. And whether this relationship explains the gap in the attainment of students who are White and students from ethnic minorities.

Methodology

The research employed textual analysis, tutorial observation and interview procedures. Language specialists worked together with subject tutors in three OU courses to investigate the features of student texts that are associated with higher scoring assignments. The researchers then assessed whether students from BME backgrounds were less likely to produce these language features.

Texts were obtained from 78 students with a range of assignment marks, from the following ethnic groups: African, Caribbean, Pakistani, Other (Bangladeshi, Chinese and Asian Other) and White (White British and White Other). A total of 220 texts drawn from three subject areas were analysed.

The courses chosen for investigation were a level 1 course in Social Sciences, a level 1 course in Technology and a level 2 course in Health and Social Care (DD100, T175 and K204). The language specialists studied course materials, visited tutorials, met with students and analysed the first, mid and final tutor marked assignments (TMAs) of students in their group. The text analysis was carried out using the MASUS (Measuring Academic Skills of University Students) assessment procedure developed at the University of Sydney. The MASUS procedure assesses students' academic writing skills in five areas: A. *Use of source material*; B. *Structure and development of text*; C. *Control of academic writing style*; D. *Grammatical correctness*; and E. *Presentation*. They are given a score in each of these areas: a low score indicates that the student needs support in this area of language use. The data from the MASUS procedure were analysed statistically and qualitatively.

Results

Analysis of the MASUS data indicated a strong correlation between students' marks and their use of language (0.52). It also showed that:

- The relationship between language and attainment was stronger in earlier TMAs on all courses. There was a stronger correlation between language and attainment in the Social Sciences and Health and Social Care courses than in the Technology course.
- The areas of language use that related to the role of language in how content is presented (*Use of source material* and *Structure and development of text*) were particularly significant in determining a student's marks on early TMAs. These are also the categories that tutor feedback focused on.
- There was no statistical correlation identified between students' mark and the areas *Academic writing style* and *Grammatical correctness*. However, qualitative analysis indicated that these features distinguished high performers from middle performers. There was little



tutor feedback on these categories, and their role in how content is presented and linked was not recognised by the tutors or the course materials.

A large number of the total sample – as many as 47%– had language scores that indicated a need for additional support in the areas identified, both in their initial TMAs and in TMAs later in the course (see Table 1 below). This percentage was higher for students in this sample from ethnic minorities. This may at least partially explain the comparatively poor attainment of students from ethnic minorities that has been identified.

In this sample, students from ethnic minorities were more likely than students who are White to receive low scores in the area *Use of source material* (35%, compared with 6%). Plagiarism and problems with referencing were also more likely to occur among students from ethnic minorities.

Students from ethnic minorities were more likely than students who are White to receive low scores in the area *Structure and development of text* (53%, compared with 17%). This gap in language performance narrowed in later TMAs, but is still notable.

Table 1: The number of students in sample with low language scores

	<u>Initial TMA</u>			<u>Later TMA</u>		
	Total	% of BME	% of White	Total	% of BME	% of White
<i>Use of source material</i>	29%	35%	6%	24%	25%	6%
<i>Structure and development</i>	47%	53%	17%	39%	40%	11%
<i>Academic writing style</i>	45%	40%	56%	34%	28%	33%
<i>Grammatical correctness</i>	24%	23%	22%	39%	37%	22%
<i>Presentation</i>	17%	13%	28%	12%	12%	6%
	(n=78)	(n=60)	(n=18)	(n=69)	(n=55)	(n=14)

Students who are White were more likely than students from ethnic minorities to receive low scores in the area *Academic writing style*, particularly in the initial TMAs (56%, compared with 40%).

Students from ethnic minorities were more likely than students who are White to get low scores in the area *Grammatical correctness*, particularly in later TMAs (37%, compared to 22%). The number of students with low scores in the area *Grammatical correctness* increased over the period of the course. While this area was not found to correlate statistically with student attainment, the researchers who analysed the texts identified a number of grammatical features that appeared to be particularly important for high achievers:

- correct sentence structure
- use of noun phrases for topic development and conciseness
- correct and appropriate use of modals in argumentation
- use of passive voice for organising information



Apart from the first feature, the significance of these grammatical features lies not in their 'correctness' (which is a matter of form) but in their 'appropriacy' (which is a matter of how they are used). These features play an important role in students' use of source materials and structuring and development of texts.

Other findings

The investigation suggests that the role of language in how content is presented and linked is not recognised by the course materials or the tutors.

Course materials

Tutors are encouraged to focus their marking on students' understanding of key concepts in the course. The role that language plays in how these concepts are understood, presented and linked is not acknowledged in the courses' assessment guidelines. As a result, the students perceive the significant amount of generic language support material available as peripheral.

Students' success in assignments was found to be linked to following the conventions of the text type (or 'genre') and using the writing style (or 'register') expected by the tutor and referred to in the Assignment Guidelines. In some cases, the assignment guidelines were found to be complicated (e.g. 5½ pages long) and to demand a range of text types and writing styles. This presents further challenges for students unfamiliar with this range of genres and registers.

Mixed messages are conveyed to students about the style which is appropriate in academic writing. Students may be offered articles to read which are more 'academic' and formal in style, but the 'voice' of most OU material is friendly and relatively informal.

Tutor feedback

In all courses, aspects such as writing style, grammatical correctness and punctuation were not often commented on or corrected by tutors. At times, tutors did not comment on sections of texts where the researchers perceived a student's ability to communicate ideas to be severely affected.

On some assignments, marks were allocated for grammatical correctness and structure, but some students obtained full marks when these aspects of their writing were judged as being far from perfect.

When tutors gave language feedback, they tended to 'tell' and not 'show'. This did not seem to make a significant impact on student performance.

Tutors did not always provide good language models in their feedback.

Students in one group who had direct and sustained contact with a language specialist showed more progress in their writing development than those in the other groups.

Implications

The research suggests that language plays a significant role in student attainment. A large number of the students from ethnic minorities in the sample had language scores that indicated a need for additional support, particularly in the areas *Structure and development of text*. This area is particularly significant in determining students' marks and could explain in part the gap in attainment.



But, this investigation suggests that the role of language in how content is presented and linked is not recognised by the course materials or the tutors. Nor does the generic language support available seem to be serving its purpose, as the number of students with low scores in the area *Grammatical correctness* increased as the courses progressed.

The findings suggest that it may not be in the students' best interest to be waved through a course without sufficient attention paid to their language needs, as this may prove a significant barrier to achieving above a certain level (*cf.* O'Shea-Poon and Kimura 2008, who found that non-fluency in English appears to be a significant barrier to achieving above a certain level in OU courses).

Recommendations

It was not the primary purpose of this research to generate recommendations for practice but a number of good practices are suggested by the findings.

Tutors should be supported in raising their awareness of the importance of language in student attainment and in giving helpful feedback on students' language use across the span of a course.

Only by linking grammar and vocabulary development to the categories *Use of source material* and *Structure and development of text* is it possible to go beyond notions of language as 'a problem' that interferes in students' performance towards notions of language as 'a resource' to be developed as part of students' academic attainment.

Feedback on students' language use should concretely demonstrate how to do things, instead of abstractly telling them. The use of language in tutor feedback should also provide a model.

Students and tutors could be offered models of good writing practice in addition to the assignment descriptions they already receive in Assignment Guidelines. These could be exemplars of text types and writing styles appropriate to key assignments on a course (see, for example, the concept maps for TMAs designed as part of this project).

A diagnostic might be a useful tool to identify those students who could benefit from some support with academic English. Tutors could then target that support most effectively.

Further research

Further data should be collected on students' language backgrounds.

Other useful studies to gain more insight into the relationship between language use and attainment would include further examination of:

- the grammatical constructions required in the structuring and development of assignments, particularly in the areas of grammar identified in this project; instances of plagiarism and problems with referencing; use of informal language
- tutor feedback on language use
- the research instruments used in this project.

Further information

Please contact Elizabeth Erling or Jim Donohue in OpenELT for any further information on this project, including a copy of the full report, which includes case studies of the three courses involved



(DD100, T175 and K204): e.j.erling@open.ac.uk ; j.p.donohue@open.ac.uk. Contact Rachel Hawkins in Student Services regarding any actions: r.a.hawkins@open.ac.uk.

Project team

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- the tutors, course teams and Regions that allowed the project to take place; and
- the students who volunteered to participate.



1. Introduction

This report is in response to a request at the Student Services Executive meeting on 12 July 07 for OpenELT to carry out an investigation into the possibility that the gap in attainment that exists between students who are White and students from ethnic minorities at the OU is due to language use.

2. Aims

The aims of this investigation were to identify

1. Whether there is a relationship between students' use of language and their attainment.
2. And whether this relationship explains the difference in the attainment of students from ethnic minorities and students who are White.

3. Background

3.1 The gap in attainment

The motivation for this research is the evidence that there is a gap in attainment between White and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students reported at British institutes of Higher Education in general (Connor et al 2004). Research has found that students from ethnic minorities do not do as well in degree performance as students who are White on average, even when variables like previous education and socio-economic circumstances are controlled for (Connor et al 2004).

At the OU, students from ethnic minorities have lower progression rates from course to course than students overall. Students who are Black and students who are Asian who complete the course are also less likely to pass the course compared to students overall (Monitoring Diversity at the OU 2003). However, this is not the case across all Faculties, and there are some courses where particular groups of students from ethnic minorities do better than students who are White. For example, students who are Asian with high previous education qualifications (PEQs) have a higher progression rate than OU students overall with high PEQs (Monitoring Diversity at the OU 2003) (See Table 2 below).

Table 2: Pass rates by ethnicity (Equality and Diversity Annual Monitoring Report 2007)

	Full-time equivalents			%		
	2003/04	2004/5	2005/6	2003/04	2004/5	2005/6
BME	843.5	824.9	996.8	88.6%	86.1%	84.3%
White	10787.7	10233.0	11137.6	94.2%	93.3%	93.4%
Unknown	1672.5	1704.6	1987.9	88.4%	89.8%	90.2%

Pass rates for level 1 courses worsened for all groups between 2003/04 and 2005/06 but worsened more for BME groups so that the difference in pass rates increased. In 2005/06, the difference in pass



rates between students from ethnic minorities and students who are White at level 1 was 9.1 percentage points. There was an even greater difference between students who are Black and students who are White: 12.3 percentage points (O’Shea 2007).

Moreover, Richardson (2005) has found that students from ethnic minorities who are awarded Bachelor’s degrees with honours by the OU are less likely to obtain good degrees than students who are White. The likelihood of obtaining a good degree is roughly 60% for students who are White, 40% for students who are Asian and 20% for students who are Black (see Table 3). This tendency for graduates from ethnic minorities to be less likely to obtain good degrees than White graduates “is essentially independent of the students’ age, gender, academic background and socio-economic circumstances” (Richardson 2007: 12).

Table 3: Percentage frequency distribution of degree classes awarded by the OU in 2003–04 categorised by graduates’ ethnicity (Richardson 2005)

Ethnicity	n	Degree class				Percentage of good degrees
		I	II(i)	II(ii)	III	
White	5946	17.8	41.7	30.9	9.6	59.5
Asian	94	10.6	30.9	38.3	20.2	41.5
Black	83	2.4	16.9	53.0	27.7	19.3
Other	35	22.9	25.7	45.7	5.7	48.6

Note: n, number of graduates; I, first class honours; II(i), upper second-class honours; II(ii), lower second-class honours; III, third class honours.

The OU has identified the need to address the student ethnicity attainment gap as one of its key equality challenges and has committed to conducting ‘further research to understand the causes of the attainment gap between the target groups [including ethnic minority students] and other students, and act on the findings’ (OU Futures 2008). This research project was one of three responses to this call (see also O’Shea-Poon and Kimura 2008 and Richardson 2008).

Previous studies have indicated that poor performance in OU courses is *not* necessarily associated with students’ perceptions of academic quality of OU courses, perceptions of personal development as a result of taking an OU course or satisfaction with the course (IET End of Course Surveys 2005, 2006). Nor is it related to academic engagement with the course (Richardson 2005). The factors that *may* impact on student attainment include conceptions of learning and approaches to studying (Richardson 2006), prior attainment, number of courses taken simultaneously, previous educational qualifications, age, subject choice and access to and take up of support services (O’Shea 2007). The role of language in student attainment has not yet been thoroughly investigated, and this project has attempted to fill this gap.



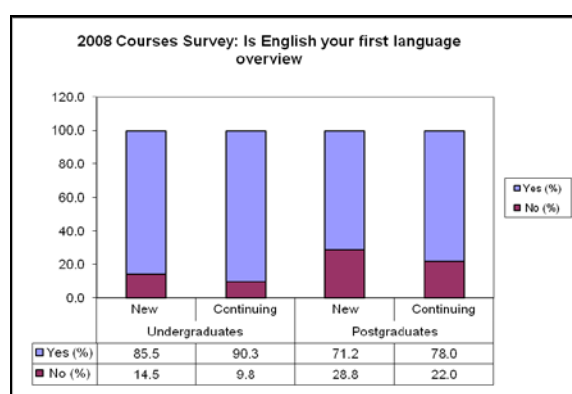
A definition of ethnicity

It should be recognised that ethnicity is a complex, multidimensional construct. In this project, we have used the definition, also used by Richardson (2007), of ethnicity as “a fundamental category of social organization which is based on membership defined by a sense of common historical origins and which may also include shared culture, religion or language” (Stone 1996: 260-261). In order to analyse the variable of ethnicity, we have used the ethnic categorisations used by the OU, which align with the classification used for official Government statistics in the UK Census (see Appendix 3 for a list of the ethnic categorisation used in this report). While such ethnic categories are not discrete, Richardson points out that they are valid to the extent that people from different ethnic groups in the UK are generally prepared to use them to describe themselves for both formal and informal purposes. The information about ethnicity obtained by the OU is based upon students’ self-identification at the time of registration.

3.2 Students with English as an additional language (EAL)

Another part of the impetus for this research arose from the work of the English as Additional Language Special Interest Group at the OU. This group was formed in response to a perception of a growing need for additional support for the increasing number of students with English as an additional language (EAL) at the OU (see Nathan and Mutlow 2006). One of their objectives was to gain insight into the number of students with EAL at the OU in order to identify the scale of the implications for course design and delivery. Further information on students with EAL has been collected through a study conducted in IET (Jelfs and Jones 2008). This study found that the number languages spoken by OU students has been underestimated. In this survey of students selected from Level 1 and Openings courses, 27% reported having EAL. Results from the 2008 End of Courses Survey show that, among undergraduate students, 14.5% of new students have English as an additional language.

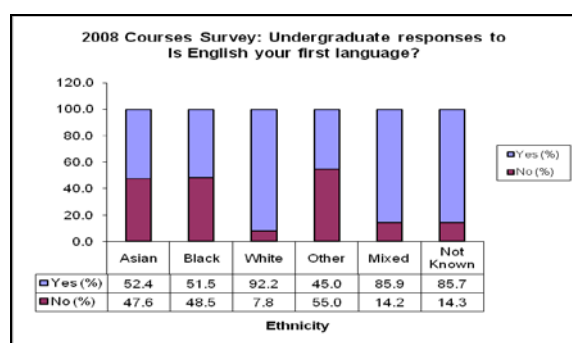
Table 4: Number of students with EAL



This number is significantly higher for students from ethnic minorities: 47.6% of students who are Asian report having EAL, 48.5% of students who are Black report having EAL and 7.8% of students who are White report having EAL.



Table 5: Number of students with EAL by ethnicity



The current study does not directly focus on the attainment of students with EAL. Nevertheless, it has incidentally generated data on the role of language in the attainment of students who have EAL. This has been inevitable as students with EAL are a subset of both students who are White and students from ethnic minorities. However, this study has not assumed that students from ethnic minorities have EAL. Nor has the category of EAL been used to label speakers of English-based Patois, who may identify themselves as BME. Moreover, correlating ‘language use’ with the performance of students from ethnic minorities does not preclude a correlation between ‘language use’ and the performance of students who are White of all cultural and language backgrounds.

4 Context

4.1 The Open University (OU)

The OU has had a long-term commitment to openness and diversity, with an open entry policy and a large population of ‘non-traditional’ students. One of the University’s strategic initiatives is to promote ‘fair access to all’ and widening access and participation is at the heart of its mission. In order to ensure that the OU curriculum includes courses and programmes which are accessible to and meet the needs of learners from the audiences being targeted, there has been a campaign to increase the levels of participation and attainment levels of students from under-represented groups and from disadvantaged communities. There has been a long tradition of research into the experiences of non-traditional students in higher education (e.g. Lea 1998, Lillis 2001, Rai 2000).

4.1.1 Study skills and language support

At the OU there is also a long history of skills development and a bulk of material designed to support students with literacy and study skills development in OU courses (e.g. Northedge 2005). But with an increasingly diverse student body, there has been a growing concern that students’ language needs may not be receiving enough informed attention. Generic language support material is available through the Studenthome website (OU 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2008e). Course tutors can also refer individual students to Study Support for extra help with language issues. Some language support sessions are also provided within the Open University at a regional level.

4.2 Courses: DD100, K204, T175

As there is considerable variation in attainment rates among students from ethnic minorities in the various Faculties (Equality and Diversity Annual Monitoring Report 2007), this study has analysed groups



of students from three different faculties. The courses chosen for investigation for this study were two large level 1 courses, one from the Social Science Faculty (DD100) and one from the Maths, Computing and Technology Faculty (T175) and one level 2 course from the Health and Social Care Faculty (K204).

Table 6: Courses chosen

Code	Title	Faculty	Level	Points	Start-End
DD100	An introduction to the social sciences: understanding social change	Social Sciences	1	60	Feb.-Oct. 2008
K204	Working with children and families	Health and Social Care	2	60	Feb.-Oct. 2008
T175	Networked living: exploring information and communication technologies	Maths, Computing and Technology	1	30	Feb.-Oct. 2008

4.2.1 Rationale

These courses were identified as having a relatively high percentage of students from ethnic minorities, a high withdrawal and/or failure rate, and/or a significant gap in attainment (see Table 7). In 2003, the Technology faculty had the great number of Black and Asian registrations and 23% of Black and 22% of students who are Asian registered in this Faculty; however, these students also had the lowest progression rates. 20% of students who are Black are registered in the Faculty of Health and Social Care (Monitoring Diversity at the OU, 2003). These courses were also found to have a relatively high number of students with EAL, estimated rather conservatively at between 7-10% (Mutlow and Shrestha 2006). More recent data indicate that this might be as much as 10-13% (2008 End of Courses Survey). The courses were also chosen as their faculties expressed an interest in further supporting students with language use. Permission was obtained from Course Team Chairs.

Table 7: Failure and withdrawal rates for courses chosen (supplied by IET)

	All	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Other	Not known
DD100							
Fail-no resit	24.2	24.0	29.3	25.5	21.1	34.8	23.8
Withdrawn	20.5	19.4	23.3	32.4	19.7	17.4	24.1
K204							
Fail-no resit	15.7	14.2	12.8	33.3	10.0	--	
Withdrawn	23.3	22.3	24.4	14.3	30.0	--	27.7
T175							



Fail-no resit	21.2	19.3	25.3	32.8	15.8	15.4	28.6
Withdrawn	15.3	13.2	31.3	21.9	21.1	15.4	17.9

4.3 Regions

Three tutor groups were selected in regions with the highest percentage of students from ethnic minorities. In 2003, 50% of Black and 31% of Asian registrations were in the London Region (Monitoring Diversity at the OU, 2003). Thus Region 01 (London) and Region 04 (West Midlands) were selected for the Intervention groups. Data indicate that as much as 25% of students in Region 1 have EAL while 7% of students in Region 04 have EAL (2008 End of Courses Survey). Permission to undertake this research was granted from Regional Directors in Regions 01 and 04.

4.4 Researchers

There were a total of nine researchers working on this project. They worked in teams of three: one subject specialist, an internal language specialist and an external language specialist. These groups undertook the research process in collaboration. The subject specialists are tutors on the courses in the study. The language specialists are ALs who were involved in the EAL SIG and/or who work as tutors on one of the University’s English Language courses (e.g. U211, E300 or E303).

Table 8: Research teams

	DD100	K204	T175
Subject specialist	Chris Lee (CL), R01	Harish Mehra (HM), R04	Zoe Doyé (ZD), R01
Internal language specialist	John Kearsy (JK)	Elizabeth Erling (BE)	David Hann (DH)
External language specialist	Kerry Bannister (KB) ¹	Christine Buller (CB)	Christina Healey (CH)

4.4.1 The subject specialists

The subject specialists provided the project with expertise in the subject area and with a link to the students. One subject specialist researcher per course was identified by their Staff Tutor as a dedicated AL who would have an interest in working on such a project. Their brief included the following:

- To guide the internal language specialist in how to be involved with the tutor group and to provide a link to students.
- To inform the language specialists of whether the students have grasped the content in their TMAs.
- To help the language specialists define the concepts and terminology that are important in the discipline/assignment.

¹ Due to illness, Kerry could not complete her research for the project.



- To increase their awareness of the role of language in student attainment.

4.4.2 The internal language specialists

The internal language specialists attended tutorials, engaged with course materials and students and conducted the student interviews. Their brief included the following:

- To attend some tutorials and become familiar with the materials (particularly those relevant to the TMAs that were analysed).
- To become familiar with the language of the discipline.
- To get to know some of the students.
- To constantly exchange with the subject specialist about their role as a researcher in the tutor group and their perceptions about the role of language in the course.
- To do a MASUS analysis of the TMAs of the students in the Intervention group.
- To interview the students.
- To give them feedback on their writing, if desired.
- To do a MASUS analysis of half of the TMAs in the Comparison group.
- To moderate the MASUS analyses of the other half of the TMAs in the Comparison group.
- To collate the data collected in the research group and report it back to the lead researcher.
- To make a concept map of one of the TMAs on the course.
- To write a brief report of a linguistic feature that is criterial in student attainment.

4.4.3 The external language specialists

The external language specialists engaged with course materials, but not with students. They did not attend tutorials. They provided an external view for triangulation. Their brief included the following:

- To become familiar with some of the materials (particularly those that are relevant to the TMAs analysed).
- To become familiar with the language of the discipline.
- To exchange with the group about and their perceptions of the role of language in the course.
- To do a MASUS analysis of the TMAs of the students in the Intervention group.
- To do a MASUS analysis of half of the TMAs in the Comparison group.
- To moderate the MASUS analyses of the other half of the TMAs in the Comparison group.
- To make a concept map of one of the TMAs on the course.
- To write a brief report of a linguistic feature that is criterial in student attainment.

4.5 Students

A total of 78 students were involved in the project: 28 gave their permission to be involved; a further 50 students had their assignments analysed.



The students are listed below by ethnicity group and course (A complete, anonymised list of the students involved in the project can be found in Appendix 2).

Table 9: Students in analysis by ethnicity and course

Ethnic category	DD100	K204	T175	Total
Black or Black British – Caribbean	4	9	4	17
Black or Black British – African	9	6	3	18
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	4	2	7	13
Asian or Asian British- Bangladeshi	4	1	1	6
Chinese or Chinese British	1	1	0	2
Asian or Asian British – Other	0	1	3	4
Total BME	22	20	18	60
White Other	1	0	1	2
White British	8	6	2	16
Total White	9	6	3	18
Total	31	26	21	78

5. Language and attainment

In order to determine how to investigate the relationship between ‘language’ and ‘attainment’, initial decisions about what these terms mean was needed. Student attainment can be defined and measured in different ways. For purposes of this research, attainment was equated with students’ scores on tutor-marked assignments (TMAs).

Language can be defined in even more ways and whether and how language use and development can be measured is subject to the definition of language adopted. Many assessment tests of language competence and performance exist. Ultimately they all depend on applying to the performance of test candidates a set of criteria derived from a model of language. Usually, language tests are administered in test conditions where candidates carry out test activities designed for the purpose.

For this research, it was decided that language assessment would be carried out in the context of the courses where the writing was taking place. An assessment instrument that could be applied to students’ TMAs was used and, additionally, some ethnographic-like immersion of the researchers in the learning environment of students was employed.

Language assessment is a subjective procedure. With this in mind, the research project was designed with as much triangulation as possible to moderate both the subjective judgements and preconceptions derived from the model of language employed. To achieve this, researchers worked in triads, observed tutorials, interviewed students and each other, triangulated MASUS assessments of each text, and participated in a sequence of workshops designed to share experiences and perspectives. Interviews



with students were also undertaken in order to account for their views of their writing and attainment. The ethnographic aspects of the project were also important in approaching the complex natures of the variables language, ethnicity and attainment, as well as the relationships between them.

5.1 The model of language

In the underlying model of language used in this study, “language is seen to reflect the social and cultural situations or contexts it is used in” (Drury and Webb 1991: 7). In an educational environment, this leads to a ‘language-based theory of learning’. The premise is that educational environments are composed of diverse subjects, studied at various levels, by means of language that reflects the social and cultural situations of those environments. When students enter such environments, they are expected to learn to produce particular text types (genres), using particular language styles (registers). These texts are the main way that students are required to demonstrate knowledge of the subject. Thus, the development of the relevant and appropriate language skills and knowledge is integral to students’ academic development and success.

Such a view of language in learning is not universally accepted. The proposal sometimes expressed that students ‘know the subject, they just don’t know how to write about it properly’ is one alternative view. This implies that students have learned the subject matter through their reading (or discussion) but do not have the writing skills to communicate what they know. This may be sometimes be the case, but a language-based theory of learning emphasises that language is not a neutral conduit through which learners convey what they already know; rather it is a live medium in which they construct what they know. What a student knows after writing an assignment is not the same as what they knew before writing it. A language-based theory of learning also emphasises that constructing knowledge in writing is different from constructing knowledge in speaking, and that it is written knowledge construction which is critical for students’ attainment in a culture which favours written assessment.

A second alternative view is that evaluating student writing in terms of the established writing styles and literacy practices in higher education is to ignore students’ own preferred writing styles and literacy practices (e.g. Lillis 2001). This, it is argued, disadvantages students’ own styles and practices, even though these are what students bring to their learning and are in fact central to students’ identities as learners. There is not space to engage in the arguments indicated here other than to acknowledge their importance. The OU has traditionally sought to make academic knowledge accessible to ‘non-traditional’ learners both by adapting the language of the learning materials and by recognising the diverse writing styles and practices that students bring to their assignments. How far adaptation of styles and practices can go and still be culturally significant remains a central issue.

A concept that is central to a language-based theory of learning is that of ‘genre’. Like many concepts in literacy theory, this is a contested term and that fact can only be acknowledged here. To perceive writing in terms of genre means that writers engage in creating texts that achieve particular social purposes according to expectations about how readers of the texts will read them and about what such readers expect the texts to be. ‘Genre’ is therefore a form of text, designed for particular social purposes according to particular social expectations. Examples of academic genres are the essay, report, case study, and reflective journal, all of which can vary in purpose, content, organisation, and language style. Academic genres can be contrasted with other genres such as news articles, hospital shift reports, and business proposals. More delicate genre typologies can be obtained from closer analysis of the



social purposes of familiar genres, for example description, narrative, explanation, exposition and argument.

A second concept that is central to a language-based theory of learning is 'register'. This refers to the 'language style' that genres are written (or spoken) in. Language style is a complex notion but an indication of its meaning can be given by imagining how the style of an academic journal article on the topic of celebrity would compare with the style of a tabloid newspaper article on the same topic. Students entering higher education will have experience of language registers from different life situations which may or may not resemble the language registers of the texts they will read and write in university study.

5.2 The measurement of language: MASUS

In this project, the instrument used to assess the language and attainment of students' TMAs is called MASUS. MASUS stands for Measuring Academic Skills of University Students, a procedure that was developed by the Learning Assistance Centre at the University of Sydney. It employs a checklist of criteria for assessing texts in the context of the subject being studied. It was designed to be part of a collaborative process between content and language specialists in order to measure academic literacy skills and provide information on which to base feedback and support.

The MASUS instrument has five assessment areas, each of which have several sub-criteria: Its main descriptors cover the following:

- A. *Use of source material*
- B. *Structure and development of text*
- C. *Control of academic writing style*
- D. *Grammatical correctness*
- E. *Qualities of presentation*

Because MASUS adopts a language-based theory of learning, it addresses aspects of language not traditionally perceived as 'language' at all. Traditionally, 'language' was largely seen in terms of sections D and E, that is correctness of grammar, spelling and punctuation. This corresponds with the conduit image of language, in which errors in students' grammar and vocabulary obscure the meaning that they actually know already but do not have the writing ability to communicate. Sections A-C of the MASUS checklist reflect the much broader vision of language assumed by the approach, in which language is integral to the entire performance of a student's assignment and is not something which can be evaluated apart from – or in addition to – that performance. While these different areas of language are separated into five sections, they inevitably overlap. For example, how clearly one writes will partly depend on one's command of grammar. Furthermore, student mistakes are not easy to categorise. The same error could legitimately be seen as showing a lack of lexical knowledge, an incomplete understanding of punctuation or an incomplete grasp of the task set. While the categories used are not watertight, they provide a useful checklist and organisational device for managing the complexity of linguistic features that comprise written text. They can also be useful in raising both tutors' and students' awareness to these features and in identifying areas where students may need additional support.



When analysing an academic text with the MASUS procedure, researchers give a rating of 4-1 for each of the criteria A-E to represent the degree to which a student's written response demonstrates control of the language features relevant to the section. The rating system is an arbitrary four-point scale:

- 4 = excellent/no problems/accurate/very appropriate
- 3 = good/minor problems/mainly accurate/largely appropriate
- 2 = only fair/some problems/often inaccurate/often inappropriate
- 1 = poor/major problems/inaccurate/inappropriate

A low score on the MASUS (2 or 1) is seen as an indication that a student needs additional support in the areas identified. The MASUS procedure was designed not to test students' knowledge but rather to assess "their ability to think about a given body of knowledge in an analytical and critical way, and the ability to manipulate the resources of language in order to depict this thinking" (Bonanno and Jones 1997: 3). It also provides a useful framework to provide students with further feedback on their language use and development.

5.3 Detailed description of MASUS

The following is a more detailed description of the sub-criteria of the five different sections of the MASUS grid (A-E).

As the assignments were different, the criteria listed in each of the sections differed for the three different courses and the various TMAs within them. In this generic description of the MASUS, only the central criteria that were common to most of the TMAs are listed. A sample MASUS grid for each of the courses is listed in Appendix 1.

In applying the MASUS analysis, the researchers had to make decisions about whether the use of a certain linguistic feature was 'appropriate'. The apparent normative nature of this description can be seen as problematic. But for this project, it was agreed that two aspects of 'appropriacy' would be considered:

- 1) whether students' use of a linguistic feature contributes effectively towards the construction of the assignment, particularly in relation to the 'argument' of the assignment (as determined by the Assessment Guides and the subject specialist) and
- 2) whether students' use of a linguistic feature is correct or standard as determined by both the language and subject specialists.

It should be noted that in this project the researchers have not challenged the language and genres expected of students in the OU's assignment criteria. They have accepted the norms dictated by the course materials and the tutors and not attempted to link alternate linguistic practices to other interests and goals which students may have (see Erling and Bartlett 2008).

Section A: Use of source material

Section A of the MASUS is designed to assess the linguistic evidence of a student's grasp of content and engagement with the course materials. It assesses whether information taken from the source material



is appropriate to the task and well integrated in the text. In some cases, this includes the student being able to relate the course materials to their personal experience.

Table 10: MASUS Section A

<i>A. Use of source material</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• relevant information selected• use of suitable examples• text is free from plagiarism• accurate referencing

Section B: Structure and development of text

Section B of the MASUS is designed to assess a student's use of language to structure and develop the text. This includes whether the text is clear and appropriate to the title of the assignment. In many cases, the structure required contains an Introduction, Main body and Conclusion. This structure is proscribed in the *Good Study Guide* (Northedge 2005) and is stipulated in the Assessment Guide in all of the TMAs on K204 and most of the TMAs on DD100. The assignments on T175 often require different types of responses (the structure of these assignments will be described in detail in the Section 8 below).

Table 11: MASUS Section B

<i>B. Structure and development of text</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• structure is appropriate to the task• introduction engages with the question and outlines how the argument will be presented and discussed• claims build up the argument• information flow in the argument is linked and connected• statement of conclusion follows from argument & relates to title

Section C: Control of academic writing style

Section C of the MASUS is designed to assess whether a student's text conforms to appropriate patterns of written academic English. It refers to students' use of both course-specific and general academic vocabulary. It also refers to the level of formality of the text and whether it conforms to the expectations of written (and not spoken) academic texts.

Table 12: MASUS Section C

<i>C Control of academic writing style</i>
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- appropriate choice of vocabulary
- appropriate use of technical terms from the field
- language appropriately formal and discursive/analytical
- appropriate use of connecting language

Section D: Grammatical correctness

This section is designed to assess whether a student's grammar conforms to appropriate patterns of written academic English. It includes linguistic devices required of academic texts in the genres analysed.

Table 13: MASUS Section D

<i>D Grammatical correctness</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• accurate sentences• correct subject-verb agreement• correct and appropriate use of articles• correct and appropriate use of, nominalisations and noun phrases• correct and appropriate use of tenses• correct and appropriate use of modals• correct and appropriate use of passives

Section E: Qualities of presentation

Section E refers to the general impression that an assignment makes and the amount of attention the student has paid to detail. It includes paragraphing, punctuation, capitalisation, appropriate word processing and consistency in referencing.

Table 14: MASUS Section E

<i>E Qualities of presentation</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• paragraphing reflects essay structure• spelling generally correct• appropriate mechanics (i.e. punctuation, capitals, italics etc.)• word processing appropriate• consistency in referencing/citation



6. Research methods

This project involved the researchers undertaking textual analysis using the MASUS procedure and ethnographic investigation. It had two phases and two populations for analysis: an Intervention group and a Comparison group.

The goals and methods of the project researchers were negotiated in two workshops at the start of the project. There was also a mid-term session where the researchers met to share experiences and check the consistency of their procedures. The researchers' time allocations and deliverables were agreed and then dispersed via email (see Appendices 4 and 5).

6.1 Textual analysis using MASUS

The researchers employed the MASUS procedure on a total of 220 student tutor-marked assignments (TMAs): 84 from DD100, 75 from K204 and 61 from T175 (see Table 16 below for details).

Table 15: Number of TMAs analysed by course

Course	TMAs from Intervention group	TMAs from Comparison group	Total TMAs analysed
DD100	38	46	84
K204	19	56	75
T175	16	45	61
Total	73	147	220

An initial, mid and later TMA were chosen for analyses (see Table 17). The assignments were chosen for each of the courses based on their suitability for analysis and whether they were compulsory on the course. For analysis, the initial TMA was labelled TMA 01, the mid-TMA was labelled TMA 03 and the late TMA was labelled TMA 05.

Table 16: TMAS chosen from the courses

Course	Assessment	TMAs analysed
DD100	7 TMAs	TMA 07 ² , 02, 04
K204	6 TMAs + Exam	TMA 01, 03, 05
T175	4 TMAs, 3 CMAs, Exam	TMA 01, 02, 04

The MASUS checklist was adapted in collaboration by the researchers to suit each course and TMA (see Appendix 1 for examples of the MASUS). This was done to take into account the different types of writing that students are required to produce in different faculties, courses, levels and assignments. The

² On DD100, the first TMA is TMA 07, which is followed by TMAs 01-06.



checklist differed for the language specialists, where genre and language descriptions were relatively technical, and subject specialists, who had more general criteria.

The nature of the intervention in this project meant that in the Intervention groups, both subject tutor and students received information that contributed to their understanding of the language and literacy of their course. The research design allowed for discussion between the subject and language specialists so that they could come to a consensus on valued characteristics of writing and assessment in a particular discipline (cf. Bonanno and Jones 1997: 2). Through this process, the subject specialists became increasingly aware of students' language use and language specialists of subject expectations. They also gained insight into students' uses of language and its effect on their marks.

The textual analysis of student TMAs was carried out with consideration of student attainment. The researchers sought identify what language features were features of high scorers' texts and of low scorers' texts. They listed the language features that were used to effectively produce the genre required of the assignment. They identified uses of language that were disruptive to meaning making. In particular, they sought to identify 'syndromes' which may undermine student attainment on a continuous basis or adversely affect tutors. They analysed places in the text where students seemed to be struggling and tried to identify what linguistic features made tutors remark that their writing was 'muddled' or 'unclear'. Finally, they sought to identify models of topic development – particularly successful ways of organising a text and an argument in that discipline/on that course.

6.2 The Intervention groups

The Intervention groups were the focus of the first phase of the project in which the internal language specialist visited the subject specialists' tutorials and met the students in the tutor group. This phase required both language specialists to become familiar with the course materials of the courses they were analysing. The research process for the Intervention groups combined textual analysis using the MASUS procedure with ethnographic investigation.

28 students consented to take part in the intervention (15 from DD100, 3 of whom dropped out of the course; 7 from K204, 1 of whom dropped out; and 6 from T175, 1 of whom dropped out). These students had contact with the tutor and the internal language specialist in their group. Their TMAs were analysed as part of the project and the students were also interviewed by the internal language specialists.

Table 17: Students in the Intervention groups

Course	#Students	# BME	# Dropped out	Final
DD100	15	6	3 (1 BME)	12, 5 (42% BME)
K204	7	1	1 (1 BME)	6, 0 (0% BME)
T175	6	3	1 (0 BME)	5, 3 (60% BME)



Total	28	10	5 (2 BME)	23, 8 (35% BME)
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6.2.1 The MASUS Procedure in the Intervention groups

The researchers analysed the texts by students in the Intervention groups as the course was proceeding. TMAs were rated independently by the subject specialist and the two language specialists. While rating, the language specialists were not aware of the mark that the students had been given. The language specialists and subject specialist met after applying the MASUS procedure to discuss and collate information from the analysis. Subjects of discussion included:

- Did they all rate the TMA similarly?
- If not, where were the differences and why?
- Did the linguistic analysis correlate with the mark given to the TMA?

In this process, the language specialists were guided by the subject specialist about what makes a high scoring assignment good.

After this meeting, the internal language specialists met or talked to students about their assignment, giving additional language feedback if necessary and/or desired.

6.2.2 Ethnographic investigation with the Intervention groups

Procedures drawing on ethnographic methodology were used to complement the textual analyses undertaken in this project. This was deemed necessary, as isolating 'language' as a category influencing attainment would fail to recognise other important factors that influence attainment, for example gender, age, previous educational qualifications, socio-economic status, income, expectations, ambitions and life events. The ethnographic investigation also allowed for further insights into the researchers' interpretations of students' writing and the students' own perceptions of their language use.

The ethnographic aspects of the project included the following:

- Collaboration with participating subject specialists
- Observation in face to face tutorials
- Interview/collaboration with students in the tutor groups
- Subject ALs' and language specialists' research journals.

Students' writing and academic attainment was followed throughout the course. The language specialist took part in the tutorials and thus became familiar with the material, the subject specialist and the students.



Students were interviewed by the language specialist over the period of the course. Information was sought about students' ethnicity, language background, previous educational background, socio-economic status, motivation, support network, etc. The interviews were carried out using the prompt sheet included in Appendix 8, which contained questions also asked in the questionnaire carried out in the survey undertaken by Jelfs and Jones (2008). The interview sessions also involved discussions and feedback about the participants' writing. It was considered unethical to prevent students from profiting from the potential positive impact of the additional attention of the researcher. The accounts of the interviews are included in Appendix 8.

This rich data helped the researchers to deal with the delicate nature of the variable of language as a factor in attainment, as well as the complex nature of the categories language, ethnicity and attainment, and the relationships between them. Interaction with students has informed the project throughout.

Other relevant aspects of the research process were captured in the researchers' research journals. The researchers were asked to reflect on the following:

- Experiences of meetings and working with each other
- Thoughts on the procedures, hunches on results
- Information on students
- Notes from MASUS and reflections on students' writing development

Of particular relevance is whether/how the use of the MASUS influenced the subject specialists' marking practices, feedback and thoughts on language.

6.3 The Comparison groups

The Comparison groups were the focus of the second phase of the project. Because the intervention had the potential of effecting tutor and student perceptions and practices regarding language awareness and language support (an 'observer effect'), texts by students who did not take part in the intervention also were analysed. Assignments from students on DD100, K204 and T175 were collected from 50 students from BME backgrounds who were selected through Assignment Handling. The students were not contacted. Data were only used from students for whom a full set of assignments was available (i.e. TMAs 01, 03 and 05). A range of high, mid and low scorers were selected. Students who identified themselves as Black Caribbean and Pakistani were to make up the focus of the analysis. These groups were targeted in order to further investigate the statistic that there is only a 20% likelihood to get a good OU degree for students who are Black, which rises to 40% for students who are Asian and 60% for students who are White (Richardson 2005). Students in these groups are also likely to have English as an additional language or to be speakers of an English-based Patois.

However, the sample of students whose texts were analysed wound up to be more diverse than planned. Selecting students from only these two ethnic backgrounds did not prove to be straightforward, firstly because only students who had completed all three TMAs were selected and



secondly because only students who submitted all three assignments via the e-TMA system were included. For some courses, it was not possible to find a large number of Black Caribbean or Pakistani students who submitted all of their assignments this way. Therefore, the sample was widened to include students who identified themselves as being Black African and Bangladeshi. There was also one Chinese student in the sample.

Table 18: Students in the Comparison groups

Course	Black or Black British - Caribbean	Black or Black British - African	Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	Asian or Asian British- Bangladeshi	Chinese or Chinese British	Total
DD100	4	4	4	4	0	16
K204	9	6	2	1	1	19
T175	4	3	7	1	0	15
Total	14	12	13	6	1	50

A complete, anonymised list of the students involved in the project can be found in Appendix 2.

6.3.1 The MASUS procedure in the Comparison groups

The language specialists applied the MASUS procedure to the TMAs of students in the Comparison groups. This was done after the course had finished and after the language specialists had developed insight into the genre expectations of the relevant assignments through their work with the Intervention groups. The same MASUS grids were used. In general, one language specialist did the analysis of the TMAs from the students who identified themselves as Asian, while another did the analysis of the TMAs from the students who identified themselves as Black. They completed the MASUS analysis without knowing the students marks or their ethnicities. Once the analysis was complete, they exchanged texts with their partner language specialist, who either confirmed the MASUS score or noted any differences in how they would have assessed them.

The purpose of the comparison between the students in the Intervention groups and the students in the Comparison groups was to see if any of the following could be identified:

- differences and similarities in the performance of the genre required of the assignment
- differences in the incidence of linguistic features which correlate with high-scoring and low-scoring performance.

Because of the means we had to use to collect the students TMAs, we could not interview the students in the Comparison groups to find out more about their experience of the course and their writing processes. Interviews with these students would have given more insight into their language backgrounds, which can only be guessed at, as well as any other significant factors that may influence their attainment.



6.4 Methodological issues

6.4.1 Obtaining consent

Despite the enthusiasm of those students who attended tutorials and agreed to participate in the project, obtaining student consent via other means proved to be a challenge that was underestimated in the design of the study. Students who attended tutorials and were informed about the project directly by the researchers were eager to participate and get extra feedback on the writing. However, the majority of students did not attend tutorials and were therefore more difficult to gain access to. In the main, these students also did not respond to emails about the project. As a result, we phoned students to ask for consent. Once personal contact was established, the students were interested and willing to participate. This personal approach to research seems to be much more effective among OU students. However, we suspect that there are a large number of students with EAL and/or from ethnic minorities who have opted not to take part in OU research. There is some evidence that this may be the case, as the 2007 Standard Courses Survey results confirm that students from ethnic minorities are less likely to respond. However, caution should be exercised in interpreting these results, as the total number of students from ethnic minorities who were surveyed was much lower.

Table 19: Response rates to surveys (Standard courses survey 2007)

	Asian Total	Black Total	White Total	Other Total	Mixed Total	Not Known Total	Total
Total Surveyed	600	737	20764	140	231	2311	24783
Total Responses	276	359	12850	72	123	1151	14831
Response Rate (%)	46.0	48.7	61.9	51.4	53.3	49.8	59.8

6.4.2 Allocation of time and resources

In the planning of resources, there were oversights in the time, resource and budget allocations. Administrative support was not budgeted for, nor were the costs of assignment handling. The time allocated to the researchers to undertake MASUS was significantly underestimated. Therefore, smaller samples were chosen than originally indicated. The time allocation for writing up results was also underestimated. Resources and time for quantitative analysis of the data were not planned for, as the need for significant quantitative analysis of the data was not foreseen at the project's inception. While all of these oversights were effectively managed in the end, such costs should be considered for future studies.

6.5 Research ethics

Throughout the project, we made every effort to follow the University data protection and ethics regulations. Approval from SRPP and from the HPMEC ethics committee was sought at the project's initiation. Further approval was sought when the research procedure was revised to include a Comparison Group of TMAs by students from ethnic minorities. Approval was also sought from the relevant Course Team Chairs and Regional Directors.

Throughout the research process, we have ensured that all students involved and their work remain anonymous, and there will be no risk of any harm, either physical or psychological, for any participant.



Moreover, Maki Kimura of CHERI advised all the researchers in the project on using ethnographic methods and probing into sensitive areas that involve issues around ethnicity and language. She also trained the researchers in protecting themselves when undertaking such research.

All of the students who participated in the intervention part of the project – those whose tutors were involved – gave their consent either in tutorials or by email (see Appendix 3 for an example of the Letter of informed consent given to students).

Whenever a language specialist was present at a tutorial, their presence was announced at the beginning by the tutor. In general, the students were very keen to participate, as they are generally keen to improve as writers, and responded by saying things like, “I’ll take whatever help I can get.” Only one student at a tutorial refused to be involved in the project, and it was later discovered that she had misunderstood what the researchers were asking; she then enthusiastically agreed to participate.

Because of the potential of the research to support students in the Intervention groups with their academic writing development, it was decided that any impact that could positively support students should not be hampered. The impact this could have on performance was recognised.

These students were given a book token as an honorarium for being involved in the project.

7. Results

This section reports on both the quantitative and qualitative results from both the Intervention and Comparison groups. First, the results of the quantitative results are presented³. Then, the qualitative aspect of the project is discussed.

Statistical analysis of the results provides insight into patterns in the data. In most cases, the qualitative results confirm these patterns. However, this is not always the case. The statistical analysis may not have been sensitive enough to capture some of the more subtle impressions that the researchers noted while undertaking the MASUS procedure. Additional analysis of the data would have to be carried out to explain this further.

7.1 Quantitative results

7.1.1 Students’ marks on the TMAs

Regarding student attainment in the courses analysed, the average mark for the entire cohort of students was 65. In all courses, the average mark was highest for the mid TMA. This may indicate that the middle of the course is the point at which students are most motivated and active in their course work.

Marks tended to be slightly higher in the level 1 courses than in the level 2 course. Expectations may be higher in level 2 courses.

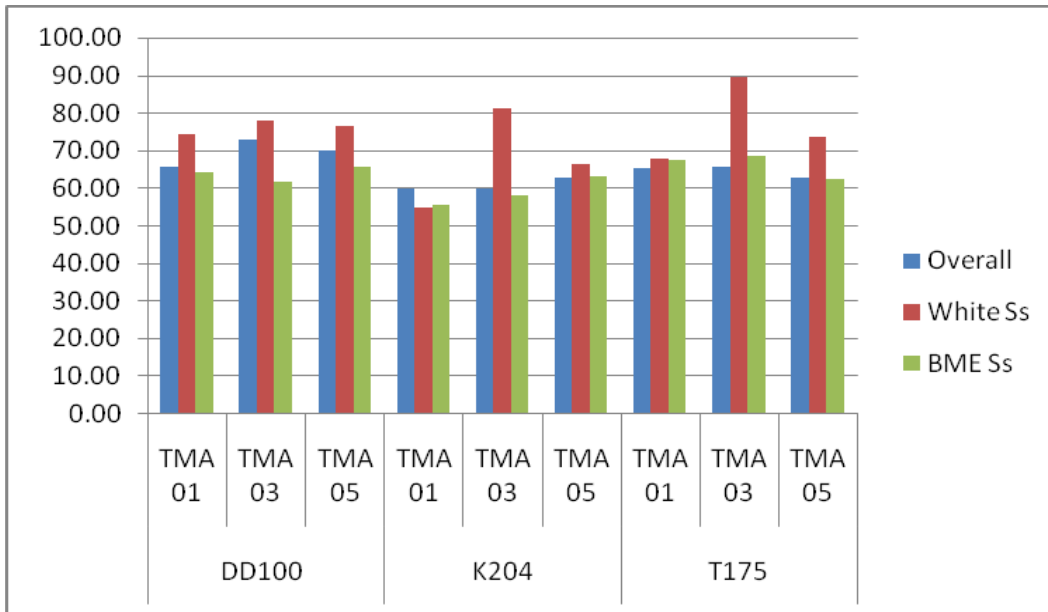
In all cases but one (K204 TMA 01), the students who are White in this sample outperformed students from ethnic minorities; however, often the difference was only slight. The biggest gap in performance

³ Thanks to John Richardson in IET for his assistance in preparing and interpreting these statistics.



between students who are White and students from ethnic minorities were for the averaged marks TMA 03 on K204 and T175.

Table 20: Students’ marks on TMAs by course and ethnic group



7.1.2 Correlation between language and attainment for the whole cohort

The results of the statistical analysis indicate that there is a relationship between students’ scores on the MASUS and their TMA marks in all three courses analysed. For the whole cohort, there is a Pearson Correlation of .524 between students’ results on the MASUS analysis marks and their marks. This would be regarded as a large effect in theoretical and practical terms (Cohen 1969: 76–77). The square of the correlation coefficient reflects the proportion of the variance that two measures have in common. In this case, $0.52 \times 0.52 = 0.27$, and so the MASUS scores and the TMA marks have 27% of their variance in common.

While the correlation is clearly a strong one, it is not absolute. When a student’s marks and language scores don’t line up, this may indicate that a student has failed to answer one part of the question (as was common on T175) and lost points for this, although their responses to the other questions were well composed. Students may also lose points for writing under the word limit, while what they write might have been judged highly by the language specialists. Divergence in language and attainment scores may also reflect the fact that tutors give credit to students for listing the relevant key concepts mentioned in the Assessment guide without paying much attention to how these concepts are analysed and linked in the students’ texts. Also, the tutors may be compliant readers who read meanings into texts which are not as clearly expressed by students as they could be but, as tutors, they are concerned to support learners in their attempts to make meaning rather than penalise them for shortcomings.

The data indicate that students’ results on their first assignments are a strong indicator of how they perform in the rest of the course. The language score on students’ first TMA predicts their mark on the last TMA. Similarly the language score for the final TMA predicts students’ mark on the first TMA. Their

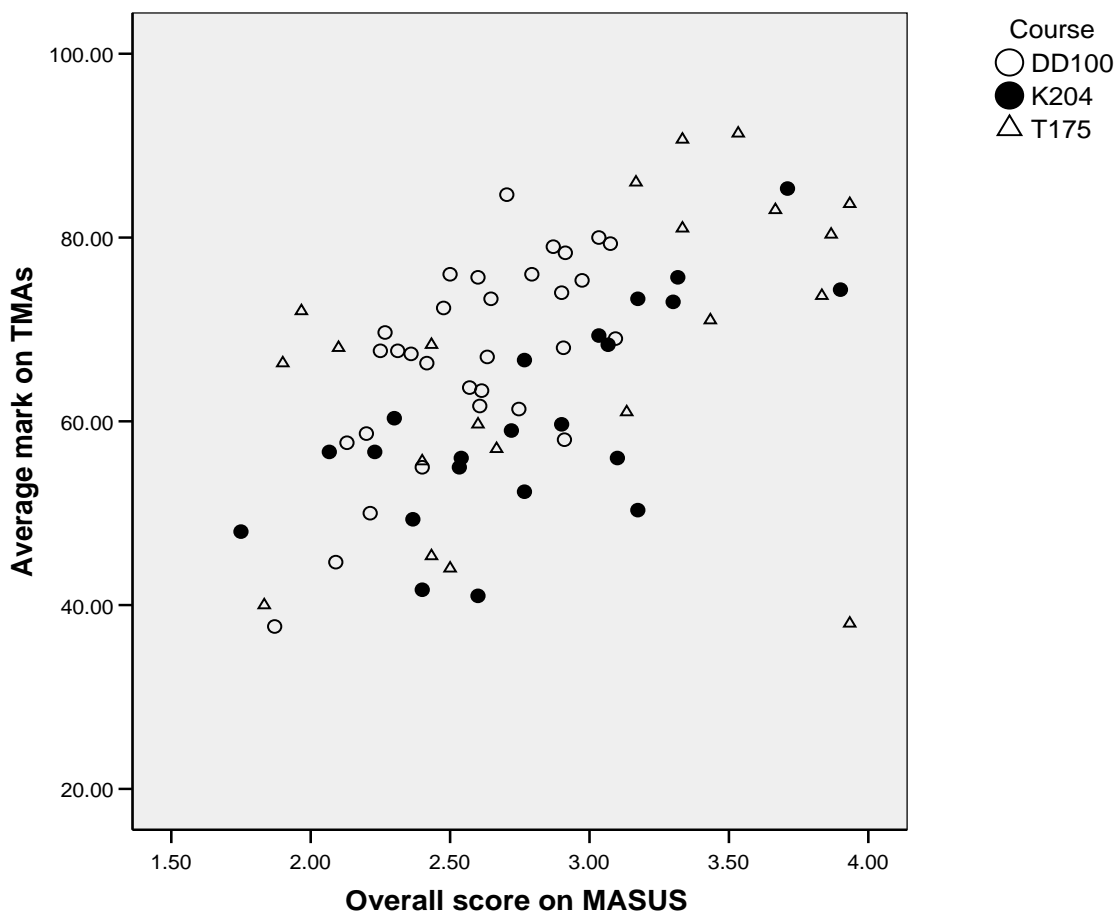


TMA marks and their MASUS results remain relatively consistent over the span of the three TMAs analysed. If the students perform well at the beginning of a course, they are likely to remain high performers. Similarly, low performers are likely to remain low performers. This was also confirmed by the researchers, who detected minimal, if any, language development over the course. However, it was difficult to assess students' writing development in this study. Often different genres are required in assignments as the course progresses and each task gets more cognitively challenging. For each assignment, further development is required to keep pace with the demands of assessed tasks. Moreover, student performance varies greatly depending on how much time students have for a particular TMA. Students often experience various employment or domestic crises as their courses progress and their TMA scores are thus affected. All of these factors may mask any writing development. Regardless, the fact that students do not tend to improve is likely to negatively affect their motivation, which may have an effect on their performance and attainment. This should be further explored.

7.1.3 Correlation across TMAs

While a relationship between language and attainment has been established, this relationship differs across the TMAs and across the courses analysed (see Table 21). Statistical analysis reveals variation in the relationship between language and attainment across the three TMAs. The correlation is stronger for the first TMA in each course (29%) than for the mid TMA (17%) and the final TMA (13%).

Table 21: Correlation between students' marks and MASUS scores by course





This difference might be explained by the fact that tutors focus a great deal of attention on students' use of language in the first TMAs, particularly in supporting students in their acquisition of the appropriate genre required of the discipline. For example, tutors place importance on the appropriate formulation of an introduction and following the guidelines specified in the Assessment Guide. As the course goes on, they tend to comment less on students' introductions either because the student has started to conform to the norms or because the tutor gives up. As one K204 tutor wrote in the feedback to TMA05: 'There is very little that I can say that hasn't already been said regarding how to structure an introduction, referencing and analytical writing.'

In earlier TMAs, tutors seem to consciously allocate or deduct marks for structure and language use, but in later TMAs they do not consciously do so. They seem to try to be compliant readers and to not get diverted by a student's use of language. Instead they focus explicitly on content, without recognising how the construction of that content is influenced by the student's use of language.

7.1.4 Correlation across courses

The statistical analysis indicates that there is a stronger relationship between students' results on the MASUS and their marks in the courses DD100 and K204 than in T175. Therefore, T175 students' use of language seems to be less important as a predictor for their marks on TMAs. This can be seen in Table 21 where the scatter is greater among T175 students and the outliers are T175 students. Examples of such outliers are T415, who had a very low averaged score of 1.0 on the MASUS for TMA 01 but a relatively high mark of 60, and T962, who had a very high averaged score of 3.9 on the MASUS for TMA 01 but a barely passing mark of 44 (it is interesting that both of these students are students who are Black in the Comparison groups, to be discussed further in Section 7.4).

The differences in correlation across the courses may be explained by the fact that the assignments in DD100 and K204 conform more to the traditional academic essay genre, and were therefore easier for the researchers to align with the MASUS grid. The researchers working on T175 reported difficulties in applying the MASUS to the texts required in TMAs, which were often made up of several short questions that did not require an essay response (see Section 8.3 below). The differences could be further explained by the fact that the focus of assessment in T175 is more on technical skills than language skills or because of the elusive nature of the texts required of technical genres (Bloor 1996).

7.1.5 Correlation with different sections of the MASUS

The statistical analysis shows that certain sections of the MASUS are more indicative of students' marks than others, but this differs across the TMAs. Overall, Section A *Use of course material* and Section B *Structure and development of text* are most significant in predicting students' marks. These are the two sections of the MASUS that are usually seen as being related to content and not language. However, this view does not recognise the role of language in the construction of that content. The MASUS evidence suggests that conceptual and cognitive requirements cannot be separated from the linguistic requirements.

For TMA 01, Section B *Structure and development of text* has the highest correlation with students' marks. This suggests that appropriate structuring and development of text is important for predicting high scores on this assignment. Section A: *Use of source material* is also significant.



For TMAs 03 and 05, Section A, *Use of source material*, is the section on the MASUS that has the highest correlation with students' mark. This seems to indicate that the tutors have slightly shifted their attention in assessment to students' engagement with the content and away from the structure. However, structure and development is still relevant.

There was no significant statistical correlation between students' mark and the areas *Academic writing style* and *Grammatical correctness*. However, these two areas correlated highly with Sections A and B in a factor analysis, which implies that they play a role in how students' construct the content of their assignments. Moreover, the qualitative analysis suggests that it is these language features that distinguish high performers from middle performers. There was a high instance of low scores in these areas.

7.1.6 A focus on ethnicity

In this sample of 18 students who are White and 60 students from ethnic minorities, many students, regardless of their ethnic and language backgrounds, seem to struggle with expressing themselves in academic English. A large number of the total sample – as many as 47%– had language scores that indicated a need for additional support in the areas identified, both in their initial TMAs and in TMAs later in the course (see Table 1 below). While there were students with high marks and high MASUS scores in all of the groups, a considerably high number of the students who come from ethnic minorities had language scores that indicated a need for additional support (i.e. scores ranging from 1.0-2.4). This may at least partially explain the comparatively poor attainment of students from ethnic minorities.

Table 22 below shows that students from ethnic minorities were more likely than students who are White to receive low scores in Section A *Use of source material* (35%, compared with 6%).

Students from ethnic minorities were more likely than students who are White to receive low scores in Section B *Structure and development of text* (53%, compared with 17%). This gap in language performance narrowed in later TMAs, but is still notable. For TMA 01, African students got the lowest scores on this section.

Table 22: The number of students in sample with low language scores

	<u>Initial TMA</u>			<u>Later TMA</u>		
	Total	% of BME	% of White	Total	% of BME	% of White
<i>Use of source material</i>	29%	35%	6%	24%	25%	6%
<i>Structure and development</i>	47%	53%	17%	39%	40%	11%
<i>Academic writing style</i>	45%	40%	56%	34%	28%	33%
<i>Grammatical correctness</i>	24%	23%	22%	39%	37%	22%
<i>Presentation</i>	17%	13%	28%	12%	12%	6%
	(n=78)	(n=60)	(n=18)	(n=69)	(n=55)	(n=14)

Students who are White were more likely than students from ethnic minorities to receive low scores in Section C *Academic writing style*, particularly in the initial TMAs (56%, compared with 40%). This might



indicate that the students from ethnic minorities have learned English as an additional language and are more au fait with written academic standards, but this would have to be further investigated.

Students from ethnic minorities were more likely than students who are White to get low scores in Section D *Grammatical correctness*, particularly in later TMAs (37%, compared to 22%). The number of students with low scores in the area *Grammatical correctness* increased over the period of the course. This may mean that after students become more comfortable with the overall demands of the genre (the structure and referencing) that their weaknesses in grammar become more apparent to the reader.

While this area was not found to correlate statistically with student attainment, the researchers who analysed the texts identified a number of grammatical features that appeared to be particularly significant in students' performance on assignments:

- correct sentence structure
- use of noun phrases for topic development and conciseness
- correct and appropriate use of modals in argumentation
- use of passive voice for organising information

Apart from the first feature, the significance of these grammatical features lies not in their 'correctness' (which is a matter of form) but in their 'appropriacy' (which is a matter of how they are used). Thus, these features play an important role in students' use of source materials and structuring and development of texts. They will be discussed in detail in Section 9 below.

7.2 Qualitative results

In the following, the qualitative results from the research process will be reported, i.e. the MASUS analysis and interviews with students in the Intervention group and the MAUS analysis of the texts in the Comparison group. First an overview will be given. This will be followed by a detailed account of the courses in which the research was undertaken, which includes the following:

- a description of the language support in the course materials;
- a description of the Intervention groups;
- the results of the interviews undertaken with students in Intervention groups;
- a discussion of the MASUS analyses done in the Comparison groups; and
- the researchers' reflections on tutor feedback and students' use of language.

This part of the report was compiled from the reports from the three internal language specialists working on the project (DH, JK and BE). Although an attempt at consistency across the three courses has been made, the detail provided in each of the sections may differ due to the different focuses of the researchers. As the lead researcher for this project worked on the research team for K204, more data from this course was collected than for the other groups.

The qualitative analyses of student assignments indicated a relationship between students' language use and their attainment. It also sought to identify features of successful writing and also to identify the



most common difficulties that students had when writing. The ethnographic-like investigation with the students in the Intervention groups informs these findings. Moreover, an analysis of the course materials and tutor feedback suggests that the role of language in how content is presented and linked is not recognised by the course materials or the tutors.

7.2.1 Language use and attainment

The researchers in all three groups detected a relationship between students' use of language and their attainment, and they all noted that there were several students whose use of language was limiting their attainment. In the case of T175, use of language is even explicitly part of the marking criteria stipulated in the Assignment Guide. However, the researchers noted that tutors made an effort to focus on a student's grasp of the course content and use of course materials. They felt that Sections A on the MASUS *Use of course materials* was the most important indicator of a student's mark, and this was confirmed by the quantitative analysis.

The researchers in all three groups felt that structure played a particularly important role in the presentation of content in students' essays. They noted that from their impressions of undertaking the MASUS, it could be the case that students in the Comparison groups were more likely to get low scores (i.e. 2-1) on the category B on the MASUS, and this was confirmed by the quantitative analysis. It was thus decided that we would further analyse the structure of two TMAs per course and create a concept map for them. The results of this will be presented in Section 8 below.

While the course materials and tutor feedback did not tend to focus on students' use of vocabulary and grammar, Sections C and D *Academic style* and *Grammatical correctness* were also judged as playing a role in students' attainment. They contribute to an overall impression of confidence and expertise in the subject matter, and researchers proposed that it was a student's performance on these sections of the MASUS that determined a high-scoring TMA from an average-scoring TMA.

The researchers agreed a list of features of high scoring essays. They found that successful TMAs:

- Respond to the assignment title
- Structure and develop the text as stipulated in the Assignment Guide
- Make reference to the course materials
- Relate theory to practice, or relate course material to practical examples
- Make claims and use evidence to back them up
- Recognise the value of key concepts in the course
- Recognise various perspectives in the field [for DD100 and K204 only].

The researchers noted that many students' texts seem to indicate that they had difficulties with the writing demands of the courses. These difficulties may be because of:

- Limited understanding of the content of the course materials
- Not developing in their assignment text the conceptual structure prompted by the assignment title, and/ or
- Apparent lack of language skills to produce the type of texts required.



In the case of low-scoring assignments, it was often difficult for the researchers to judge whether a student seemed to be struggling more with the content of the course or the appropriate language to express the content and/or the type of text required. The researchers therefore suggested that the conceptual and cognitive requirements of a course cannot be separated from its linguistic requirements.

The researchers identified a few areas of difficulty where students seemed to have most problems with use of language, and to lose most points in their MASUS assessment. These were:

- Moving from course materials to personal or practical experience
- Critically engaging with course materials
- Linking (between sentences, paragraphs)

K204 was the only group where the intervention seemed to have an obvious impact on students' writing development. Both the marks and the MASUS scores of the students involved increased considerably between TMA 01 and TMA 03. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the internal language specialist in this group had more direct and sustained contact with the students in that group. The subject tutor of DD100 also felt that the project positively benefited the students in her tutor group, even if the effect was not immediately obvious. She felt that the students were definitely more alert to and interested in language issues as a result of the intervention. Moreover, the project made a strong impact on the type and quantity of feedback she gives students.

All of the researchers who worked on this project (all OU ALs) viewed it as 'a wonderful opportunity to take a close look at your own teaching, and your students, and how the two align.' They hoped there would be more opportunities to learn about and share good practice in supporting the development of students' writing skills.

7.2.2 A focus on ethnicity and language background

According to the researchers, there did not appear to be major differences in the texts produced by students who are White and students from ethnic minorities. The researchers found that many students, regardless of their ethnic and language backgrounds, seem to struggle with expressing themselves in academic English, and this was noticeable in their TMAs, the tutor feedback and the student interviews.

The researchers suggested two areas where differences might be found. Their analyses seem to indicate that it is possible that students from ethnic minorities:

- are more likely to have problems in referencing and be accused of plagiarism (in K204 9 out of 13 students in the Comparison group were identified as having problems in this area).
- are more likely to use features of informal register in their assignments (in T175 it was suggested that students from ethnic minorities were more likely to use informal or spoken-like language in their assignments).

These findings were not substantiated by the quantitative analysis and would have to be further explored in a more in-depth analysis.

One further point of interest that all the researchers noted is that it is surprisingly difficult to determine whether a student has English as an additional language or not (and this cannot be confirmed one way



or another in the Comparison groups). There are, however, a few indicators that students might have EAL:

- Noticeable problems with subject-verb agreement
- Non-standard use of articles
- Non-standard use of singular nouns to refer to plural concepts (e.g. adult instead of adults)
- Non-standard use of prepositions

It was also noted that whether or not a student had EAL was not a straight-forward issue and it may or may not mean that the student faces more challenges in writing their university assignments. Some students who have EAL may have a grounding in academic English from their schooling. These students may be better off, in terms of an understanding of academic English, than some of their peers who learnt their English in the UK by using the language in everyday, informal situations. However, some members of this second group may appear to be the more fluent in spoken English.

But not all students with EAL have a solid grounding in academic English. Moreover, these students may have little opportunity to practice their academic English within academic discourse. This is a particular issue for students working within a distance learning context such who don't necessarily undergo the immersion in academic language experienced on a full-time course. As has been recognised in OU support materials, some students come from different cultures, which can create cultural barriers to the use of academic language forms (see *Studying with the OU: UK learning approach*). Some of these students may also be unfamiliar with comparable forms in their first language (see interview with DS2).

One example of an extract from a text that was clearly by a student with EAL is the following:

- Referring back to the nature vs nurture debate. Freud's model of psychosexual development is influenced by focusing on nurture. A psychodynamic theory, when "EGO babies can learn and adapt in a complex social environment", (Roger W.S, chapter 22, p208). Like gender specific roles, doctor's male and nurse's female. His ego babies can able to exceeds his/her basic needs for more. This is to satisfy his/her needs for own desire. SUPER –EGO stage is when the child matures and could judge from his/her desire, even when opposing thoughts learnt from social rules and culture influences. An example of gender-specific roles with play in pirates games,(DVD sequence 1,part3). Freud's theory views that nature can be enhance further by nurture experience and socialization for a positive outcome. Thus to improve social environment to aide people's experiences. (K550 TMA 03)

This particular extract might well represent the type of texts that tutors struggle to give feedback on, as they may be overwhelmed by the amount of language support needed. However, in this case, the tutor only noted the following: 'A little confused – add the fact that Freud helped us understand the unconscious can hav an influence' (sic). This particular student received a mark of 50 on the assignment and was praised for 'good referencing and good concluding'. The tutor feedback focuses on the students' engagement with the theories presented and implications of the theory for practice and policy. No mention of language use was made.



This seems to be all too common. In both T175 and K204 it was noted that students were given comparatively high marks when their scores for use of language were marked low by the researchers. But it may not be in the students' best interest to be waved through a course without sufficient attention paid to students' language needs, as this may prove a significant barrier to achieving above a certain level (*cf.* O'Shea-Poon and Kimura 2008, who found that non-fluency in English appears to be a significant barrier to achieving above a certain level in OU courses). Furthermore, if there is no attempt to support students in their development of academic language use, they may never have a chance to improve.

7.2.3 Course materials

In all three courses, tutors are encouraged to focus their marking on students' understanding of key concepts in the course. The role that language plays in how these concepts are understood, presented and linked is not acknowledged in the courses' assessment guidelines. As a result, the students perceive the significant amount of generic language support material available as peripheral.

Students' success in assignments was found to be linked to following the conventions of the text type (or 'genre') and using the writing style (or 'register') expected by the tutor and referred to in the Assignment Guidelines. In some cases, the assignment guidelines were found to be complicated (e.g. 5½ pages long) and to demand a range of text types and writing styles. This may present further challenges for students unfamiliar with this range of genres and registers and may be particularly challenging for students with EAL who have been found to have more problems handling a range of genres (Cameron and Besser 2004).

Mixed messages are conveyed to students about the style which is appropriate in academic writing. Students may be offered articles to read which are more 'academic' and formal in style, but the 'voice' of most OU material is friendly and relatively informal.

7.2.4 Tutor feedback

In each of the groups, the subject specialists noted that their primary focus in marking was to see that the students had an understanding of the key concepts listed in the Assignment guide. However, they all noted that language played an important role in how the student presented and linked these concepts. The overriding focus of tutors' feedback to students TMAs in both groups was how thoroughly and relevantly their students drew on course material to the question. The feedback for all students focussed primarily on understanding course content and answering the questions as fully as possible (within the word count constraint). It may be that doing this requires so much time and effort that they cannot go further to include more. Of tutors may not have the language awareness to identify and comment on problematic areas of students' language use.

In all courses, aspects such as writing style, grammatical correctness and punctuation were not often commented on or corrected by tutors. At times, tutors did not comment on sections of texts where the researchers perceived a student's ability to communicate ideas to be severely affected.

On some assignments, marks were allocated for grammatical correctness and structure, but some students obtained full marks when these aspects of their writing were judged as being far from perfect.

When tutors gave language feedback, they tended to 'tell' and not 'show'. This did not seem to make a significant impact on student performance.



Tutors did not always provide good language models in their feedback. Their use of language was often far from perfect and contained several syntactical and grammatical errors.

Students in one group who had direct and sustained contact with a language specialist showed more progress in their writing development than those in the other groups.

7.3 Results from DD100

7.3.1 Course description

DD100 is an introductory course that often deals with students new to the OU and a fair number who are new to higher education. The course description tells students that they will be introduced to ‘some of the best practice and most interesting ideas in contemporary social science, always in connection with practical and pressing social concerns’. It also states that students are taken through ‘all the basic skills that any university-level learner needs (reading, taking notes, writing, organising your programme of learning) and that any social science student requires (reading statistics, evaluating evidence, constructing and assessing theoretical arguments).’ Therefore, gaining academic literacy in this field is a main aim of the course. The main text type used for assessment in DD100 is the essay, although a few assignments used other mixed genres. Students are expected to write theoretically from a social science perspective and to use evidence to support their arguments. This course description thus seems to put language development at the heart of academic attainment. However, the language support material in DD100 does not seem to cover all of the aspects of language that students might need to develop as writers.

7.3.2 Language support in the DD100 course materials

In addition to the regular course books for DD100, there is a large quantity of DD100 study support and language support, including separate texts (e.g. *Looking back and moving on: writing essays and evaluating theories*), a recommended book (Redman, 2006), material within the course books including specimen responses to TMAs (Kelly et al., 2000), the preambles to each of the assignments (e.g. OU, 2007) and language-based tutorial activities. The focus of this guidance is in the areas of *Use of source material* and *Structure and development of text*. Students are even encouraged to hand in an essay outline with their TMAs. There is also some support material about *Academic writing style*. However, there is very little support for *Grammatical correctness*. Appendix 8 demonstrates that the coverage of the following grammatical features is sparse:

- passive voice
- modality
- appropriate use of noun phrases and nominalization
- appropriate use of adverbials to control the style
- appropriate use of main and subordinate clauses.

A summary of the language skills provision included in the DD100 resources is included in Appendix 7, while Appendix 8 matches these course materials against the MASUS grid.

As with all courses, students may elect to study these support materials or to prioritise learning other aspects of the course. There is no guarantee that students have used any of these resources before



attempting assignments linked to them. It is therefore difficult to comment on the effectiveness of these support materials and the amount of time spent by students on these materials.

Use of language does not feature prominently in the course outcomes. To “communicate effectively in an appropriate and accurate written form” is one of twenty four general learning outcomes for DD100 (OU, 2008b). This is the extent to which language skills competence is emphasised within the assessment strategy and presumably informs any decisions which students take regarding their study of material aimed at improving language skills. This relatively low profile of language does not match the course description, where literacy and writing skills are emphasised.

7.3.3 DD100 Intervention group

The DD100 Intervention group took place in Region 01. In the subject specialist’s tutor group (with CL), there was an ethnically mixed group of students, 15 of whom agreed to take part in the intervention. The language specialist researcher (JK) attended four tutorials. The tutorials – an optional aspect of study on DD100 – were open to 22 students from two tutor groups. However, attendance was nine (19.02.08), seven (04.03.08), one (29.04.08) and one (24.06.08).

The subject specialist reported that she and the students enjoyed having the internal language specialist at the tutorial sessions and that all learned from his contributions on language issues. She felt that the students became more alert to and interested in language issues and felt that their participation in the project benefitted them, even if the effect was not immediately discernable in their marks.

7.3.3.1 Interviews

Three students were interviewed in this group. One interview did not take place because the student concerned was unavailable. Two of the students interviewed were from ethnic minorities (DS2 and DS8) and were educated in Africa in English. DS14, who is classified as White (Other), was educated in Europe in Italian and had learnt English after his arrival in the UK.

The interviews indicated that the students seemed to be focused on the subject aspects of TMAs, and on the main course materials, rather than on language proficiency activities included in the course materials. The language proficiency activities were perceived to be peripheral. This is not surprising, given that their reasons for studying were focused on the content of the course, on vocational issues, on improving employment prospects and on getting a degree, rather than on improving the standard of their English.

These students generally perceived the standard of their English to be more than adequate and this was confirmed by their TMA marks, which were in the mid-60s to low-70s. However, the students’ averaged MASUS scores ranged from 2.2-2.7, just above the indicator for needing more support. Their scores were especially low in the areas *Academic writing style* and *Grammatical correctness*, which are areas that are not focused on in the course materials or the tutor feedback. It may therefore be the case that these students didn’t fully appreciate the potential value of the improvements to the quality of their academic attainment, and nor did their tutor. It may also be that they didn’t recognise a need to develop their academic writing as a consequence of the general adequacy of their English capability in everyday life. Although several of the students worked in jobs requiring interpersonal language skills, they were only exposed to academic English in their OU studies.



Despite seeing language as peripheral, all three students expressed some problems with the course that could be related to language use. DS2 mentioned having problems with using and understanding idioms on the course and with thinking in her own language and having to express herself in English. She found internet materials useful for dealing with language issues.

DS8 mentioned some problems with the meanings of particular words but felt that she had this under control. This student found difficulty with TMA questions which asked students to justify an argument. She had used some of the language support materials provided in the course and had found them helpful. She felt that a separate course in academic language would be useful for her. In hindsight, she would have been happy to have studied such a course before studying DD100.

DS14 said that he found difficulty expressing himself in writing at this higher level but he thinks that this will come with practice. He does not write much English in his everyday life. However, this student found face-to-face language sessions offered “really helpful”. The only drawback was that he found them difficult to attend because they tended to be organised at the weekend when he was working. He would find specimen responses to assignments useful as examples of how to write assignments.

7.3.3.2 Tutor feedback on language

At the outset of the project, the subject specialist in the Intervention group said that she tried to focus on students’ grasp of content and not mark them down for their use of language. Her usual practice was not to give students much language feedback. But during the course of the intervention, she became increasingly alert to and interested in the role of students’ use of language in their attainment and actively tried to better support students’ development of language. She noted in particular that taking part in the project affected the feedback she gave. The comments she gave about language in her TMA feedback increased and were better informed and targeted. Examples of this can be seen in her feedback to TMA 02:

- If you could use that noun here, instead of the phrase about ‘outside the actions’, it would make this section stronger and clearer. Ask me if you don’t understand what I mean. (DS2)
- The mark isn't higher because there seem to be mistakes in a few places. This could be because you rushed things, or because you've chosen the wrong word. (DS8)
- You might work on the use of articles ('a', 'the' or nothing before a noun). David Crystal's Rediscover Grammar is quite good on this. I've marked some examples on your essay where you've chosen the wrong one. (DS14)

Clearly, this subject specialist is making an effort to better support students in their use of grammar and vocabulary.

7.3.3.3 Correlation between students’ marks and MASUS scores

Discussions between the researchers in this group revealed that the MASUS assessments made were similar but not identical. There were also slight differences in approach. Still a general correlation between MASUS result and students marks was revealed. The disparities occurred in texts by students from ethnic minorities or students with EAL. In these cases, the marks seem to be slightly inflated, and the MASUS scores suggest that the tutor was overcompensating for language use.



TMA 07 is the first assignment attempted by students. There are some disparities between language use and mark with DS14 and DS2, both of whom come from ethnic minorities. DS2 got high scores despite her poor structure. Her tutor commented on this and said it was a reason for her to have lost some marks, but also praises the student for her understanding of the content. DS14 got lower MASUS scores because of his performance in *Academic writing style* and *Grammatical correctness*. While the tutor does give some vocabulary advice, she does not comment on the student's problems with grammar. She is presumably very satisfied with his grasp of the content: 'you understand social scientists' arguments and that you have an interest in this area.'

Table 23: Relationship between MASUS and marks on TMA 07

DS4	n	83
DS7	3.1	80
DS3	3.0	65
DS1	2.9	86
DS6	2.9	74
DS5	2.9	73
DS10	2.9	72
DS13	2.8	80
DS16	2.5	80
DS9	2.5	65
DS11	2.4	58
DS15	2.4	55
DS2	2.3	73
DS14	2.2	70
DS8	2.2	65

For TMA 02, separate data were collected concerning the two parts involving numerical data on the one hand and textual data on the other. A separate MASUS analysis was carried out for each section. The results were then averaged to get an overall score for the assignment. Again, a general correlation between students' marks and MASUS scores can be seen, with some minor exceptions.

Table 24: Relationship between MASUS and Marks on TMA 02

DS3	3.1	83
DS1	3.0	81
DS13	2.9	84



DS5	2.9	80
DS7	2.8	85
DS10	2.8	?
DS11	2.7	75
DS4	2.5	75
DS2	2.4	73
DS8	2.4	67
DS14	2.2	65
DS9	2.1	64

TMA 04 is the final continuous assessment assignment within the course. Here again a general correlation can be detected between students' marks and MASUS scores, with some exceptions. This is particularly obvious in the cases of DS14 (who has EAL) and DS8 (who comes from ethnic minorities); they both got comparatively high marks when their language scores were considerably low. In particular, they both had relatively low scores (2.2 and 1.8) on section D *Grammatical correctness*, but this was not commented upon by their tutor.

Table 25: Relationship between MASUS and Marks on TMA 04

DS5	3.3	87
DS13	3.1	84
DS3	2.8	78
DS7	2.8	70
DS1	2.8	70
DS10	2.7	80
DS2	2.7	71
DS4	2.7	69
DS11	2.7	58
DS14	2.5	74
DS8	2.3	71
DS9	2.0	47

7.3.4 DD100 Comparison group

When comparing the DD100 Intervention and Comparison groups, there are no significant differences in performance, although the Intervention group was slightly more likely to have higher MASUS scores and



marks. Table 26 shows that the averaged TMA mark on DD100 TMA 01 is 67%. The Intervention group was slightly more likely to perform better on this TMA than the Comparison group. The Intervention group was also more likely to perform better on Section A *Use of course materials* in the MASUS for TMA 07, as well as for TMA 02. While the Intervention group received better marks on their TMAs for TMA 04, the difference in language performance becomes less marked.

Table 26: Averaged results from the MASUS analysis for DD100

		Whole group	Intervention Group	Comparison Group	Courses combined
DD100		n=31	n=15	n=16	n=78
TMA 07	Mark	67.06	71.13	63.25	63.50
	MASUS score	2.62	2.64	2.60	2.74
	A	2.70	2.89	2.54	2.78
	B	2.55	2.54	2.56	2.58
	C	2.29	2.18	2.38	2.58
	D	2.73	2.73	2.74	2.85
	E	2.82	2.86	2.78	2.91
TMA 02	Mark	65.71	71.67	61.25	66.30
	MASUS score	2.35	2.69	2.09	2.77
	A	2.18	2.40	2.01	2.75
	B	2.31	2.33	2.30	2.61
	C	2.76	2.80	2.73	2.69
	D	2.90	3.04	2.80	2.80
	E	2.62	2.68	2.56	2.99
TMA 04	Mark	68.07	70.08	66.56	65.41
	MASUS score	2.72	2.82	2.64	2.82
	A	2.68	2.72	2.66	2.85
	B	2.29	2.41	2.19	2.79
	C	2.59	2.64	2.54	2.64
	D	2.59	2.73	2.73	2.76
	E	2.80	2.83	2.78	3.01



7.4 Results from T175

7.4.1 Course description

This level 1 course aims to take students ‘on a journey towards understanding information and communication technologies’. Students study examples of ICT systems, learn about the concepts they are based on, and consider the contexts in which they are used. They also develop skills in communication, numeracy, information literacy and learning, which are considered vital for effectively about these systems, both in this course and in your further studies. Most assignments in T175 are made up of several questions that require a discursive answer of a paragraph or two. There are no essays. But like DD100, this course also seems from its description to embrace a language-based approach to learning.

7.4.2 Language support in the T175 course materials

There is no specific language support embedded into T175, nor given as an optional extra. Despite this, part of the course objectives is to develop skills in communication. The T175 Assignment Guide states that “answers will be marked on structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation” as well as content. Thus, the grading scheme for some T175 assignments allows marks specifically for grammatical accuracy and structure.

The subject specialist in this group reported that through the research project, the complexity of the TMA instructions on T175 became apparent to her. She noted that the complex instructions made student jump from style to style of writing and may not have helped them to write coherently.

7.4.3 Results from the T175 intervention

There were six students who volunteered for the project from the Intervention group. The course structure of T175 meant that there were few tutorials and day schools. Of the target group, only one person (TS3) took the opportunity to attend these. As a result, she was the only person who the language specialist met in person. Although her input was useful, she did not fit into the target profile for this project (she was a graduate with excellent written and spoken communication skills).

7.4.3.1 Interviews

Interviews were carried out with five students. TS6 proved elusive despite agreeing to take part in the interview process. This was unfortunate because she would have been an interesting informant in terms of the focus of the project (she had been educated outside the British schooling system; English was not her first language; she struggled with the written assignments, both in terms of understanding the material and expressing her own ideas clearly on paper). Again it seems as if the students most in need of support are the ones most hesitant to embrace additional support (or perhaps to have time to take it up).

The interviews took place rather late in the course. Because of this, it had relatively little effect on students’ writing development during the project. Nevertheless, those students who were interviewed provided some interesting food for thought (see interview data in Appendix 8).

7.4.3.2 Research process

When comparing scores for the MASUS, the researchers found that they were in general agreement. However, they felt that sometimes it is difficult to decide which criterion something falls under. In part,



this is due to the fact that readers don't always know exactly what the writer means. It also reflects that, by the nature of these criteria, they inevitably overlap.

7.4.3.3 Correlation between students' marks and MASUS scores

Below is a comparison between the mark on students' TMA 01 and the totalled MASUS score. There is a general correlation between marks and scores, although there are discrepancies, particularly with students TS1 and TS5.

Table 27: Relationship between MASUS and marks on TMA 01

	MASUS	TMA mark
TS3	4	91
TS5	3.9	67
TS2	3.7	69
TS4	2.5	57
TS1	2.1	68
TS6	2.1	42

TS1's TMA mark was relatively high (68) against his MASUS average (2.1). The low MASUS score can primarily be attributed to the area of *Grammatical correctness*. If one makes the effort to look beyond the imperfect grammar, the awkward phrasing and the occasionally confusing sequencing of ideas, the student seemed to have a reasonable grasp of the course material. This suggests that at least in this instance, Section D, Grammatical correctness, was not highly significant in determining this student's mark.

Compared to his MASUS score (and, indeed, compared to the TMA marks he achieved subsequently), TS5 obtained a fairly modest score for his first assignment (67). In part, this may have been because he didn't answer Q2 and Q3 as fully as he might (meaning that the MASUS score of 3.5 for criterion A may have been a little generous).

Below is a comparison of the TMA mark on TMA 02 and the totalled MASUS score for each student. Again, there seems to be a correlation between the MASUS score and the TMA marks which the students obtained.

Table 28: Relationship between MASUS and marks on TMA 02

	MASUS	TMA mark
TS35	3.9	91
TS3	3.9	89
TS2	3.9	88
TS4	2.8	66



TS6	1.5	23
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With TMA 04 previous reflections on the MASUS process were reinforced. Below is a comparison of the totalled MASUS score and the TMA mark for each student.

Table 29: Relationship between MASUS and marks on TMA 04

	MASUS	TMA mark
TS3	4	71
TS2	4	64
TS5	3.9	83
TS4	2.1	44
TS6	1.8	55

Discrepancies can be seen in TS2's relatively low score (64) compared to his MASUS (4); this can be put down to the fact that he omitted Question 3. This means, in effect, that he lost a quarter of the possible marks from the outset. Like TS2, TS3 failed to answer one of the questions (in this case, Q4). This highlights the extent to which the MASUS score could reflect on the completeness of the assignment. In the cases of TS2 and TS3, the scores may have been coloured by the researchers' knowledge of the competence of these students. They assumed that these questions were not answered because of lack of time rather than because of an inability to tackle the tasks.

7.4.4 T175 Comparison group

Table 30 shows that the T175 Intervention and Comparison groups got similar results on their TMA marks and their MASUS scores. The language specialists noted no apparent differences between the students' texts analysed. They noted that in both groups Section A on the MASUS seemed to be the best determiner of the TMA grade achieved by students. The Intervention group was more likely to get higher marks for Section E in TMA 01, but the Comparison group got higher marks for this Section on TMA 04, which made this difference insignificant.

Table 30: Averaged results from the MASUS analysis for T175

T175		n=21	n=6	n=15	n=78
TMA 01	Mark	68.19	65.67	69.20	63.50
	MASUS score	2.96	3.05	2.92	2.74
	A	2.93	3.00	2.90	2.78
	B	3.02	2.92	3.07	2.58
	C	2.79	3.00	2.70	2.58
	D	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.85



	E	3.07	3.42	2.93	2.91
TMA 02	Mark	70.55	71.40	70.27	66.30
	MASUS score	3.09	3.20	3.05	2.77
	A	3.08	3.10	3.07	2.75
	B	3.45	3.30	3.50	2.61
	C	3.03	3.30	2.93	2.69
	D	2.83	3.00	2.77	2.80
	E	3.05	3.30	2.97	2.99
TMA 04	Mark	63.45	63.40	63.47	65.41
	MASUS score	2.90	2.84	3.08	2.82
	A	2.75	2.73	2.80	2.85
	B	3.23	3.27	3.10	2.79
	C	2.80	2.73	3.00	2.64
	D	2.68	2.50	3.20	2.76
	E	3.03	2.93	3.30	3.01

The researchers noted a significant difference in the feedback given by the tutor in the Intervention group and the tutors in the Comparison groups. While all tutors focussed on keeping to the word count and referencing correctly, there was generally more feedback on grammar and writing style by the tutor in the Intervention group. Other tutors in the Comparison group commented thoroughly on content and far less so on how that content was packaged and presented by students. In fact, some students obtained full marks for grammatical accuracy and structure when these aspects of their writing were far from perfect. This difference in tutor feedback may be attributed to the fact that the tutor who served as the subject specialist in the Intervention group also tutors on a writing course and has been actively involved in EAL SIG activities at the OU.

The language specialists noted that although some students weren't marked down for their use of grammar, some stylistic problems and grammatical errors were distracting when reading the assignments and it would have been interesting to see if there had been any improvements from the students' if these had been highlighted systematically throughout.

In terms of linguistic features, it was noticeable that the Comparison group had a slight tendency to 'overuse' the present continuous tense (which might be contributable to L1 interference) and had more difficulty with the use of definite and indefinite articles. Some of the students in the Comparison group used an informal register (see, for example, the tendency towards a note-taking style – T337 - or, in one case, using texting conventions -T485). Further analysis would need to be undertaken to verify whether this is systematically the case.



As with the Intervention group, some slipped into wordiness and making awkward lexical choices when attempting to sound academic, e.g. T599. However, this is probably part of the learning process as students attempt to write in an unfamiliar genre.

7.5 Results from K204

7.5.1 Course description

K204 is designed to meet the educational and training needs of those who work with children (aged 0–11) and their families across social care, childcare, health, education, and leisure settings. Unlike DD100 and T175, no mention of study skills and language development is made in the course objectives. The only type of assignment in K204 is the discursive essay, and students are expected to be familiar with this genre when they start the course.

7.5.2 Language support in the K204 course materials

As a level 2 course, there is less study and writing support provision in K204. However, there is guidance for writing TMAs in the Assessment Guide for the course. Language is mentioned in both the Tutor Marking Notes and the Assessment Guide for the course. The Assessment Guide clearly explains how language will be assessed under the heading “Style of presentation” (p. 33):

This general heading covers a large number of factors which affect the communication of ideas. [...] It refers to use of language, the provision of references for quotations, appropriate subheadings, even punctuation and spelling. Your tutor will not rate this particular aspect of your work too stringently. They will draw your attention to any shortcomings you may have in this area, but you will not be penalised seriously unless *your ability to communicate your ideas is affected*. (emphasis added)

This description does not make any clear reference to use of grammar and vocabulary. What is not clear, and what remains to be a central focus of this investigation, is at what point a student’s use of language affects their ‘ability to communicate ideas’.

The subject specialist (HM) in the Intervention group also spent time at tutorials giving guidelines for essay writing. For example, at the first tutorial he gave student ‘Top 10 tips for essay writing’ from *Sesame* as well as essay writing tips from the Skills for Study website. He also read out a high-scoring TMA at the second tutorial.

7.5.3 Results from the K204 Intervention group

There were a total of seven students who volunteered for the project in the tutor group in Region 04. Four of these students attended the first tutorial and agreed to participate (KS4, KS6, KS7 and KS3), two of whom students were particularly keen to participate in this research project as their tutor in the last course criticised their academic writing (KS4 and KS6). Three students signed up to participate through email (KS1, KS2 and KS5), either on their own initiative or because the subject specialist recommended it to them.

The internal language specialist attended the first two tutorials to get insight into the course and the assignment criteria and to get to know the students. Four students attended the tutorials regularly (KS4, KS6, KS7 and KS3). At the first tutorial, the tutor gave students guidance on their assignments and gave out several hand-outs on essay writing. He also did an activity from the course materials and the



researcher worked with one of the students (KS4). At the second tutorial, the subject specialist gave feedback on some of the TMAs, as they had been due the day before and he had already marked some of them. He also read out one good example to the class. Students commented that his doing this helped them to understand what a high-scoring TMA is like. They shared their experiences of writing the TMA; many of them had found it very challenging.

K204 was the only group where the intervention seemed to have an obvious impact on students' writing development. Both the marks and the MASUS scores of the students involved increased considerably between TMA 01 and TMA 03. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the internal language specialist in this group had more direct and sustained contact with the students in that group. It may also be because of the students' and tutor's enthusiasm for the project.

7.5.3.1 Interviews

The internal language specialist conducted interviews with all seven students, taking place over a series of telephone and face-to-face interviews (for a full report of this, see Appendix 9). The first interview served for some students as a means of emergency support before TMA02, as many of them got rather low results on their first TMAs. In general, the students seemed to enjoy talking about their writing and study practices and they reported that they profited from the additional writing support.

7.5.3.2 Research process

The researchers met twice to discuss the results of the MASUS for TMA 01 and TMA 03 (time and budget constraints did not allow for a face-to-face meeting after the MASUS for TMA 05, so these were discussed via email). The scorings of the three researchers were rather similar and the researchers were easily able to come to a consensus on them. There were some occasional differences, which formed the bulk of the discussion.

7.5.3.3 Relationship between students' marks and MASUS scores

The students' marks closely correlated with their results on the MASUS, as Table 31 below demonstrates. The only discrepancy found was that KS4 had been marked quite low by the subject specialist, while the language specialists had given her a higher score for language use. Upon closer analysis, the subject specialist thought that he might have marked her too severely. This explains why her MASUS score doesn't correlate with her mark, while all of the other TMA results do.

Table 31: Relationship between MASUS and marks on TMA 01

	TMA 01 MASUS	TMA 01 SCORE
KS3	3.73	80
KS4	3.22	56
KS5	2.54	56
KS2	2.76	55
KS1	2.57	54
KS7	2.5	45
KS6	1.69	40



All three researchers agreed that KS3 had the best essay, both in terms of content and language. The language specialists initially thought that more skilled language use and structuring of arguments could have made the text a top-band essay. However, the subject specialist revealed another area that required improvement: the student had failed to mention some key points (the Children Act 1989 and Every Child Matters). Thus it may have been the case that both her control of course materials and language brought her down just below the top-band bar.

When undertaking the MASUS analysis for TMA03, the researchers noticed that this essay was particularly difficult for students to organise. This may be because TMA 01 was more of a practice-oriented title, while TMA 03 invited more interpretation and application of theory. Students had to engage with the ideas of several theorists – such as Piaget, Freud and Vygotsky – and incorporate much information. The complexity of this assignment is reflected in its Concept map, which is presented in Section 8.2.2 below.

When the researchers met to compare MASUS scores, the language specialists were initially surprised at the high TMA marks that several of the students got, particularly since the marks were so much higher than for TMA 01. However the subject specialist was clearly impressed with students' control of content and language improvement. It might have been the case that the subject tutor was slightly more generous with his marks, as he thought that many students had made a great improvement in their writing. Still, a clear correlation between MASUS scores and marks could be seen, as the highest scorers also got the highest results on the MASUS (see Table 32).

At this point in the course, the students were in regular touch with the internal language specialist working on the course and were very aware of issues with language. The tutor was also excited to see significant writing development among the students in the Intervention.

Table 32: Relationship between MASUS and marks on TMA 03

	TMA 03 MASUS	TMA 03 SCORE
KS3	3.6	96
KS2	3.55	96
KS4	3.36	96
KS1	2.79	65
KS7	2.5	70
KS6	2.5	65
KS5	n	n

For TMA 05, there were very few discrepancies between the researchers' MASUS analyses and their scores generally aligned. The marks were not as high as they had been for TMA03 despite the fact that analysis revealed that many students had made an improvement, both in terms of engaging with course concepts and in terms of academic writing. The tutor's marks aligned well with the MASUS scores (see Table 33).



Table 33: Relationship between MASUS and marks on TMA 05

	TMA 05 MASUS	TMA 05 SCORE
KS3	3.8	80
KS2	3.5	69
KS4	3.4	75
KS1	3.3	60
KS7	2.6	50
KS6	2.5	65
KS5	n	

In general, there was alignment between language and mark on K204 TMAs. This may not be surprising for a Level 2 course where essays are the only form of assessment. While Sections A and B are clearly very important, the researchers in this group proposed that it was a student's performance on Sections C and D of the MASUS that determined an average-scoring TMA from a high-scoring TMA. A good example is the difference between KS3's performance on TMA01 (80) and TMA03 (96) (where she links her ideas together much better; however, this is not reflected in her MASUS score, possibly because the researchers became less generous). But although her language had clearly improved by TMA05, she lost marks for missing out some key points in her assignment. So while her skilled use of language is important in her attainment, the mentioning of certain key concepts is a decisive criterion that strongly influences her mark.

7.5.3.4 Tutor feedback on language

One focus of the analysis was on how the subject specialist was supporting his students in their language development. In TMA01, the subject specialist focused his feedback on issues from Sections A and B of the MASUS. He made comments when a student failed to mention key concepts (and praised them for mentioning them) (Section A). His comments on language focused on the global structure, making sure that students had an introduction and conclusion and that they labelled them so (Section B). His comments on other linguistic devices focused mostly on spelling (e.g. the difference between hear/here) and the use of apostrophes (Section E). He occasionally added commas or full stops. The subject specialist also gave students feedback on the format of the references (Section E).

The subject specialist gave limited language feedback on the linguistic features mentioned in Sections C-D on the MASUS. At the sentence level, he sometimes made comments that a sentence was 'too long' or 'muddled up'. Other comments include: 'This sentence is not clear at all.' 'This is not right sentence.' Several of the students, KS6 in particular, had problems with 'muddled sentences' (she is a student with special needs who is also getting writing support from the region). (See Section 9.3 for examples of unclear and run-on sentences). On KS1's PT3 form, he wrote: 'some sentences were not clear and there were a number of grammatical errors'. This was a comment that she took in and she was much more aware of her language use throughout the rest of the course.



7.5.4 K204 Comparison group

Table 34 shows that the students in the K204 Intervention group got much higher marks than the students in the Comparison group for TMA 03; their results on Sections A and B of the MASUS were also higher. However, by TMA 05, the difference between the Intervention group and Comparison group disappears, and the students in the Comparison group did better on the Sections A and B of the MASUS.

Table 34: Averaged results from the MASUS analysis for K204

K204		Whole group n=26	Intervention Group n=7	Comparison Group n=19	Courses combined n=78
TMA					
01	Mark	55.46	55.14	55.58	63.50
	MASUS score	2.71	2.72	2.70	2.74
	A	2.77	3.02	2.67	2.78
	B	2.25	2.56	2.13	2.58
	C	2.74	2.58	2.80	2.58
	D	2.86	2.80	2.88	2.85
	E	2.87	2.63	2.94	2.91
TMA					
03	Mark	63.56	81.33	57.95	66.30
	MASUS score	2.81	3.02	2.75	2.77
	A	2.93	3.38	2.78	2.75
	B	2.43	2.94	2.27	2.61
	C	2.84	2.95	2.80	2.69
	D	2.83	3.00	2.78	2.80
	E	3.05	3.01	3.07	2.99
TMA					
05	Mark	64.00	66.50	63.21	65.41
	MASUS score	2.96	2.89	3.17	2.82
	A	3.06	2.96	3.38	2.85
	B	2.53	2.45	2.79	2.79
	C	2.89	2.91	2.85	2.64
	D	3.01	2.89	3.35	2.76
	E	3.23	3.21	3.27	3.01



No other significant differences could be detected in the analysis of MASUS scores of the Intervention and Comparison groups for K204. The language specialists in this group felt that the texts were similar in quality. However, they felt that none of the assignments in the Comparison group were as well written as the highest scoring assignments texts in the Intervention group (which were written by White British students, KS2 and KS3). They also noted that there also seemed to be more instances of plagiarism and problems with referencing in the Comparison group; 13 out of 19 students had feedback that indicated problems with referencing and/or plagiarism.

It is also interesting to note that there are several syntactical and grammatical errors in the tutor feedback.

7.5.5 More detailed results from K204

This section looks at K204 TMAs in detail, with reference to each criterion on the MASUS grid used for these assignments. It gives insights into the language that is needed to perform well on K204 TMAs and gives examples of high and low scorers.

Section A: Use of source material

Use of key concepts

According to the Assignment criteria, students on K204 need to demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of course materials for higher grades: “Minimal use of [relevant material] to answer the question set” and “limited use of course material and other relevant information to support arguments” is a main area for students to lose points (K204 *Assessment Guide* 2008, p.35).

‘Quality of life’ is an example of a key concept from the K204 courses materials which students were expected to engage with in order to achieve high marks. It was clearly stated in the Assessment Guide for TMA01 that students should demonstrate “knowledge and understanding of what constitutes a good ‘quality of life’”. Thus unsurprisingly, this was something that the subject specialist looked for when marking the assignments. If a student neglected to define ‘quality of life’, the subject specialist feedback to the students something like: “It could have been helpful to give definition of Quality of life using some quotations from Jeremy Roche’s Chapter in the Reader here”.

An example of ‘demonstrating knowledge and understanding of what constitutes a good quality of life’ can be seen in the following excerpt from a TMA by a high achiever in the Intervention group. It comes from the second paragraph of the student’s essay:

Quality of life may be seen by some as a matter of wealth and well being but it is far more complex than that; it is also likely to be more than meeting an individuals needs at a particular time and place. *Quality of life* encompasses factors such as physical and mental health, independence and relationships with the social and their environment (Roche in the Reader, pg. 80) (KS3 TMA01, my emphasis).

This section of the text shows that this student has fulfilled at least three important course criteria: she has recognised the importance of this key concept and defined it at the beginning of her essay; she has recognised there are different perspectives of ‘quality of life’; and she correctly cites the course



materials. Moreover, the student can skilfully use the linguistic devices needed to define and discuss this abstract concept, e.g. modals, complex or abstract noun phrases, passives.

Another key concept of the course is 'Understanding and valuing diversity'. In order to demonstrate understanding of this concept, students were expected to recognise and mention that each child is an individual and that different individuals may have different needs according to their gender, cultural background, ethnicity, ability, etc. A failure to engage with the concept of diversity in a TMA often resulted in a loss of points.

Key concepts of K204 are often in the form of complex or abstract noun phrases such as 'quality of life' or 'listening to children'. They therefore relate not only to the section on the MASUS that analyses whether students are able to effectively use source materials but also to Section C, which considers *control of academic writing style*. It is therefore curious that the statistical analysis showed a negative correlation with Section C of the MASUS and students marks. Further analysis of the data is needed to better understand this contradiction in the findings.

Another interesting point regarding students' use of source material is their handling of concepts like 'theory'. In the following example, the student's writing is very unclear and his use of the word and the comparison to 'findings' suggests that he is struggling to understand the course concepts. The tutor made no comment on this.

- Vygotskys (topic eight pg 12) theory was different to Piaget findings, his views can be related to nurturing because he believes in social and culture and his name the Zone Proximal Development explains in brief detail the importance of intervention by others and similarities to nurture. (KS7 TMA 03)

KS7 also seems to struggle to manage key concepts like 'attachment theory' and he lacks the language (and perhaps also conceptual knowledge) to handle abstract theory:

- Bowlby *wrote* his attachment theory and he stated that children went through a sensitive period were it was felt that if a child didn't form a bond with their mother it would prove to be detrimental in a child's development. (TMA 03)

Recognition of various perspectives in the field

In K204, students' work is expected to recognise various perspectives in the field and show awareness of conflicting arguments. This requires students to engage in a debate, which means that they need to be able to appropriately use the linguistic devices to synthesise information, critically evaluate it and link and compare it to other information (using e.g. nominalisation, adverbials, modals, cohesive devices, which are discussed further below).

Relating course materials to practice

As K204 is a practised-based course about working with children and families, another key aim of the course is to 'enable students to acquire the analytical and conceptual skills needed to link theory and practice in an effective manner' (K204 Introduction and Study Guide, pg. 10). In order to demonstrate this skill, students need to bring in examples from either case studies in the course materials or from their personal or profession experience to back up ideas from the course materials. They also need to be able to employ the linguistic devices required to relate the course materials to practice. However, feedback from tutors indicates that several students have difficulty doing this, as they fail to incorporate



any examples. This includes higher achievers. The following is an example of tutors' comments on this (comments on high achiever in the Comparison group):

- you need to say what are positive or negative aspects of this theory and how it can be used in practice.
- what are the implications of this for practice? (see reader page 211 and Topic 8 page 9)

In other cases, examples that are listed are not effectively linked to course materials. For example, examples were listed from personal experience but these were not relevant to the course themes (K897, TMA 01). While this posed difficulties in both groups, there were few students who were able to do this very well in the Comparison group (but see KS3 TMA03).

Plagiarism and accurate referencing

As K204 is a level 2 course, it is expected that students make reference to whatever ideas they take directly from the work of others, and students are told in the Assessment Guide (2007, pg. 17) that they 'may lose marks if your assignment is not properly referenced.' Thus plagiarism and accurate referencing was a focus of many tutors' feedback and seemed to considerably affect students' marks. In the Intervention group, the subject specialist gave extensive feedback on the incorporation of references in the early TMAs and encouraged students to follow the citation guidelines given in the Assessment guide. Students mentioned in their interviews that they quickly caught on to the importance of this.

The students in the Comparison group seemed to have more issues with referencing than those in the Intervention group. According to tutor feedback and the MASUS analysis, 13 out of 19 students had problems with referencing. The problems range from either no in-text referencing to course materials to sentences or even paragraphs simply lifted from the course materials (cf. PT3 TMA01 K251). There was one serious case of plagiarism identified by the researchers where the student received a high mark (76) because the tutor hadn't noticed that the text was copied from the course materials (K897, TMA05). The tutor had pointed out some referencing problems in TMAs 01 and 03, which the student failed, but didn't seem to notice problems with referencing in TMA05, which was a much more fluent essay. This is unfortunate, as the student benefited from plagiarising and her high mark might encourage her to do so again in the future, instead of writing in her own words.

Section B: Structure and development of text

In the K204 analyses, it seemed as if performing well on Section B of the MASUS played an important role in determining students' marks. The statistical analysis confirmed that Section B correlated more strongly with mark, particularly for TMA 01. It was essential that students' essays conformed to the traditional essay format, as spelled out in the *Good Study Guide* as well as the K204 Assessment Guide (2007, pg. 16):

1. Introduction
2. Discussion
3. Conclusion

The importance of structure in students' marks is well encapsulated by the following comment a tutor fed back on a student's essay: 'Better overall structure would have given you higher marks'. (K626). This can be seen in the example of KS5, the only student from ethnic minorities who participated in the



Intervention group for K204. He received a 56 on TMA01 and he received reasonably high scores on Sections A, C and D of the MASUS. Regarding A, his essay engaged with the topic of the assignment, but he did not engage with the key theme of diversity, which lost him some points, both on his mark and his MASUS score (2.7). Regarding Sections C and D, he was scored with 3.0 on the MASUS (quite a high score) because he had a clear, descriptive writing style and his arguments were appropriately hedged with modal verbs (e.g. *may*). He was able to use complex noun phrases appropriately as well as passive and modal verbs, as an example from his writing shows:

In many societies the child is deeply dependent on the adult and not often allowed to participate or involve in feed back as to how they feel. *Desires of parents to offer the best for their children* [complex noun phrase] may vary due to lack of choice and provision. People's desires *are shaped* [passive] by their situations and *long established deprivation* [complex noun phrase] may lead to low level of desires. (KS5 TMA 01, my emphasis).

However, regarding Section B of the MASUS, this student received a low MASUS score of 1.5 because the structure of the essay did not conform to that listed in the Assessment Guide. He failed to write an introduction, instead starting the essay by telling a story (which was relevant to the topic but was not incorporated into the argument). This was the main reason that the student's score was low (and also part of the reason why he nearly failed the following assignment). Arguably, the student was unfamiliar with the rhetorical structure expected of the assignments (and with the importance of following the guidelines in the Assessment guide), even though he was strong in sentence level grammar. Eventually, the student dropped out of the course. In an interview, he mentioned that English is an additional language for him and that he recognised this as a barrier to higher education (along with time management). He was considering taking an academic writing course at another institution.

The introduction

An important criteria of the essays required of K204 is that they have introductions that engage with the question and outline how the argument will be presented and discussed. The *K204 Assessment Guide* contains very specific guidelines on what to include in an introduction:

Here you should show your understanding of the question: identify the different elements; specific terms to be defined and concepts to be explained; and outline how the argument will be presented and discussed. You might indicate 'exclusions' which you consider not directly relevant to your argument. The introduction should be lucid and concise – an outline without discussion. (Don't try to avoid the issue by spending several pages setting the scene.) (p. 18).

Accordingly, the analysis of texts and feedback forms shows that K204 tutors look for a clear introduction that spells out what the student is going to do in the essay and how they will respond to the question. The following is an introduction that was praised by the K204 subject specialist and therefore presumably fulfils the appropriate criteria:

In this essay I will describe what constitutes a good quality of life for children, I will also use the viewpoints of children from a local primary school. I will discuss some of the different policies that can be used to support adults that are trying to help children achieve a better quality of life. I will also discuss how listening to children is a crucial and effective way for adults that work with children to improve practice and outcomes for children. I will also describe some of the different



methods that could be used to facilitate good communication between adults and children. (KS3, TMA01)

The tutor's feedback to this introduction was '*good introduction*'. He doesn't comment on the fact that the paragraph is slightly repetitive and only uses a small variety of modals (i.e. I *will*). The paragraph also could be better linked. But because none of this is mentioned, the student loses the opportunity to improve her writing. But this example demonstrates that, at least in this case, the organisation of the text (Section B) is more significant in the student's mark than control of academic writing style (Section C).

The following includes further examples of introductions that tutors feedback on. Such guidance is common, particularly on TMA 01:

Children can be viewed as our future, it is today's' children who will grow up and take care of society and raise the next generation, in order to sustain the world and for everyone to have a future, we need to equip children with the tools to do this. Traditionally children were viewed as something to be seen and not heard, a view that is hopefully buried in the past. Children need to be seen as people now not something that will happen, hopefully by listening to their views and allowing them to participate in decisions that have a direct impact on their lives, society will improve for all that are part of it. This assignment aims to consider how listening to children in a meaningful way and then where appropriate act on what they say can improve polices and practices in the world done with children and their families and consequently ensure a good quality of life for all, not just the chosen few. (KS2 TMA 01)

In this case, the tutor noted that only the section of text highlighted '*belongs to Introduction.*' He further notes:

Thr (sic) rest of it does not. You need to put in the Introduction how you would to tackle this piece of Work. That's all. You can write in I form.

Here, the tutor criticises the students for including a general introduction about children and he encourages her to include something about her approach to the question. Interestingly, the tutor does not point out the grammatical problems that make the text difficult to understand, e.g. should it be 'acting on'; could the student rephrase 'policies and practices in the world done with children and their families' to something like 'the policies and practices of working with children and families'? This shows that structure (Section B on the MASUS) dominates the focus of tutor feedback. Sentence-level grammar seems to be further down the priority list at this early stage of the course.

Other examples of tutor feedback on introductions include the following. They further confirm the importance of structure in these early TMAs:

- It might be useful to include some brief references for some of the concepts you discuss here – you can only refer briefly to them here and then you can spend some time later on in your TMA building on this good work. This works to set a framework for your TMA. You might also consider telling the reader of what your stance or what some of your answers on the TMA questions are likely to be here as this helps to reinforce your message also. (K605 TMA 01)
- It is a good idea in your introduction to focus on telling the reader **how** you are going to answer the question, including your approach and which theories you will use. (K911 TMA 01)



- It is good to say what you are going to do, but this introduction is too short. It needs to include more about the issues you are going to cover. (K592 TMA 01)

For student K626, the tutor even implies that it is the student's failure to compose an effective introduction that is keeping her from achieving a high-band essay.

While some students' introductions seem to improve in response to the tutor's feedback, many of them don't. In fact, although his tutor remarked on the absence of an introduction in TMAs 01, 03 and 05, the student KS7 never managed to write a clear introduction that states how he will tackle the assignment. This suggests that students don't necessarily understand what their tutors mean when they are told to 'include some brief references for some of the concepts you discuss' or 'tell the reader what your stance is' or 'how you are going to answer the question'. Or perhaps the students are satisfied with their fair performance and don't aim to be high achievers.

Conclusions

While conclusions are important on K204, they do not seem to influence students' marks as much as introductions do. However, tutors expect them to appear at the end of the essay under the heading 'Conclusion'. The subject tutor mentioned that gets annoyed with conclusions that are from the wrong genre, e.g. something like "we will just have to wait and see..." Appropriate conclusions often end with suggestions and recommendations for practitioners, as noted in Section 9.2 below.

Evidence and other experience is used that supports the claims in the argument

This sub-criterion relates to the Section A criteria about use of source materials, but focuses more on making claims and backing them up with evidence. It is also very important consideration for tutors while they are marking essays, as the following comments show:

- One thing that will help your writing is using case studies/examples to illustrate your points (K014 TMA 01)
- Try not to make sweeping, generalized statements and assertions which were not based on any evidence or reference to research or theory (K677 TMA01)

Such comments were common on the feedback to assignments in the Comparison group.

Section C: Control of academic writing style

The language specialists felt that control of academic writing style contributes to the general impression of the assignment.

Appropriate choice of vocabulary

Not many tutors focused on students' use of vocabulary in their feedback, and most students seemed to get relatively high marks on this part of the MASUS.

Appropriate use of technical terms from the field

Students also received relatively high scores regarding the appropriate use of technical terms from the field.



Appropriate use of connecting language

Regarding appropriate use of connecting language, the MASUS analysis shows that very little was present in the majority of students' essays, and this was a criterion of the MASUS that students consistently scored low on, regardless of group. This also relates to appropriate use of adverbials (*however, nevertheless, etc.*)' in Section D. But while this was of interest for the language specialists, it may not be particularly important for the subject tutors when marking the assignments. Not one tutor commented on a students' ability to connect ideas or their use of connecting language. Texts that were considered not particularly well linked by the language specialists – and given low MASUS scores in this area – were still given high marks by the tutors.

Connecting language is particularly important for effectively criticising and managing various perspectives, one of the key concepts of the course. One student, KS2, had linked her TMA03 particularly well, and she received an averaged score of 3.28 on Section C of the MASUS. Examples of the language she used to recognise various perspectives in the field is listed below. The central devices used to manage the various perspectives are linking words like *such, though, but, unlike* and *even though*. The student also effectively uses abstract or general nouns to label perspectives and make them the subject of the sentences. Thus the linking is further enforced by the information flow of the sentences (i.e. theme-rheme).

Connecting language used to manage 'various perspectives in the field'

Theorists such as ...

His theories, though interesting, seem to have little impact on ...

But he did initiate ...

This can help practitioners to highlight problems with ...

Such theories are helpful but can cause unnecessary worry...

Unlike behaviourists who ...

Unlike Freud, ...

More recent studies have confirmed

Even though Piaget has been criticised, ...

His ideas still influence

Another theorist

Like Piaget ...

He also believed...

One of the greatest influences

A major criticism of Bowlby...

Though ..., it can be difficult ...

The argument follows that ...



However we also need to recognize that ...

The language used here is in no way representative of the linguistic devices used by the average K204 student. In fact, this student, who is White British, has A-levels in English, did a Diploma in English language at the OU and received high marks on her OU Level 3 English courses. It would be interesting to see if the use of such devices would transform the writing and attainment of other, less successful students in the sample.

Other language to manage various perspectives in the field can be found in the text of a student in the Comparison group (K251, TMA03), who got an overall score of 3.3 on Section C of the MASUS. This language shows that the student is attempting to connect up the theories and recognise various perspectives.

Further research on Piaget's theory to test his ideas has brought about a number a shortcomings

Other criticism of Piaget's work as described in k204 includes ...

One of the most recent criticism to Piaget's work is in the use of techniques and methodology ...

Language appropriately formal

Students were also likely to get lower MASUS scores for their language not being 'appropriately formal'. There were several examples of features of 'spoken language' used in assignments. KS7 occasionally slips into an informal, spoken-like register on TMA 03. For example:

- The problem I have found with Piaget stage theory.
- This is the stage that I like to call the WHAT IF STAGE...
- This brings me round to ...

Use of informal language is something that some tutors may comment on, as was the case with K039, who received a 2.4 on Section C of the MASUS and a 2 on the criterion 'language appropriately formal'. In response to the sentence below, this student's tutor wrote 'I really don't think that this is an appropriate sentence to be in your essay'. It is interesting that the tutor did not explain why the sentence was not appropriate.

Nobody who has had to cope with a toddler's temper tantrum, a baby's constant crying or a 7-year-old deliberate provocation needs to be told that anyone who look after children needs similar support opportunities and consideration to the children themselves. (K039 TMA 01)

A further example of language not being appropriately formal is the student's use of 'you' to address the audience, which is common in spoken language and was also commonly found in many of the K204 assignments. In this excerpt, the student is discussing a scene from a DVD used in the course where children are playing:

You may have noticed that the children appear to know each other well. [...] When they are playing what I notice was how much they all talked to one another, they discussed things . [...] You may think that the sword fight which comes to dominate the action towards the end of the



sequence is almost to real. What struck me was the difference with the older kid the 9.10 yrs, because the girl had a lot more to say in that one. ...

In this example, the language is informal, the example is not well integrated to back up a point that the student is arguing and there are several grammatical errors and as well as errors in spelling and presentation. However, none of this is commented on by the tutor. This may be because of two major problems with the assignment: it was over 10% under the word count and there was no referencing at all. These two factors caused the student to fail the assignment, and that was the focus of the tutor's feedback.

Section D: Grammatical correctness

Section D of the MASUS seems to correlate strongly with Sections A and B of the MASUS, but it was not particularly significant in predicting student's TMA marks.

Regarding 'spelling and grammar', students are told the following in the Assessment Guide (2007, pg. 16):

If your assignments are written in poor English with frequent grammatical errors, your tutor will give you advice on how to improve. Although poor spelling and grammar will affect your mark, don't give up. Practice will gradually improve your standards.

While the course materials tell students they will be supported if they have problems with frequent grammatical errors, there seem to be limits on the advice that tutors (can) give students on how to improve regarding spelling and grammar. This may be because the students who have major problems with spelling and grammar also seem to be struggling with structuring their essays and referencing their work (as with K039 above). These are things that tutors seem to see as higher priorities for feedback. In any case, there was very little tutor feedback on grammatical correctness. When there was feedback on grammar, it is not always easy to determine what particular features of grammar the tutors refer to, so that students may not have a precise idea about features of grammar that they should work on. For example:

- You lost marks due to ... your grammar ... you do need to make sure that you proof-read your work before you send them to me. (K930 TMA03)
- Unfortunately the inaccurate grammar and sentence construction makes the meaning of your work difficult to work out. Try reading your work out loud to help spot lack of clarity and grammatical mistakes. (K677, TMA01)

This lack of feedback is unfortunate for the students, as their use of grammar clearly has an impact on the overall impression of their assignments. The K204 subject specialist informed us that even if the student knows the subject and terminology, if the grammar is not correct, 'it makes me ... irritated', with the result being that he marks the student down.

In some cases, students' problems with grammar are not even mentioned. The following excerpt from a student's TMA is practically incomprehensible:

- The argument also with the theory behind the findings from Piaget and Rousseau is that what interaction are the children receiving for them to develop in these stages positively and what happens when the interaction is negative, it is a debate that can be never ending.



But the only tutor comments on this sentence were the following:

- this is an interesting point and illustrates the ‘norms’ approach to development doesn’t really match the very varied experience of children – see Topic 8.

The advice that students are often given regarding grammar is to read their work out loud or to have it proofread by someone. These can be useful tips for some students, but don’t come without their own problems. Firstly, a text with grammatical errors could sound perfectly fine to some students, even when they read it out loud. Also, some students may not have friends or colleagues who can effectively read through their work. In fact, this was the case with KS6 who later rejected this suggestion. After being told that she had a problem with her writing, she got feedback from friends who either had no experience of HE or who did not work in her area of expertise – they altered one or two things that were originally fine.

From the MASUS analysis, there does not seem to be much evidence in our study that students improve significantly over the course, as promised in the Assessment Guide. This was also reflected in the statistical analysis, which showed that there was very little writing development over the span of the course.

Clause structure follows recognisable and appropriate patterns of English

Regarding clause structure, students are told to ‘make sure your meaning is clear’ in the K204 Assessment Guide (2007, pg. 16). It advises:

Try to write in complete and unambiguous sentences. Sometimes sentences have to be long but short ones generally convey ideas more clearly.

The MASUS analysis revealed that a very large number of students had at least some problems in writing sentences, and this seems to be a major cause for tutors to remark that their meaning was ‘muddled’ (See detailed linguistic analysis of clause structure in Section 9.3 below).

Appropriate use of noun phrases and nominalisation

As mentioned above in the discussion of Section A, students need to be able to use noun phrases effectively in order to present key course concepts, as many of these are in the form of noun phrases such as ‘quality of life’.

The subject noun phrases used in students’ texts can also be a good sign of whether the text simply summarises course materials or recounts a story (see G below) or if the essay engages with the abstract concepts and critically reflects on theories in the course (see J below). Table 35 below lists the subject noun phrases used in a high-scoring TMA (J) and a low-scoring TMA (G). Here, it can be seen that J employs more complex and abstract noun phrases, while G tends to use simple and concrete noun phrases. The noun phrases that J uses tend to be abstract or complex noun phrases (e.g. the term, value judgements, taking a purely adult perspective of parenting), while the noun phrases that G uses tend to be concrete, personal and simple (e.g. we, people, children).

Table 35: Subject noun phrases used in high-scoring and low-scoring K204 TMAs

J (high-scoring TMA)	G (low-scoring TMA)
The term	Parenting



The term	Parent
Parenting	We
“Bringing...”	We
It	The issue
Taking a purely adult perspective of parenting	People
A great deal of focus	Other people
Value judgements	There
A number of government policy documents and the popular media	There
Images and concerns about ‘bad parenting’	There
Everyone involved with parenting	Children
The problematisation of families that are facing challenges, frequently families experiencing poverty and social inequality,	Being strict parent
It	It
This	We

Furthermore, some students’ sentences could be more clear and concise by using noun phrases and nominalisation, as explained in Butt *et al.* (2001): “As written texts become more specialised, formal and abstract, some clause combinations give way to increasingly compact constructions in which complex meanings are packaged into noun groups” (p. 177). A good example of a complex noun phrase that is used to express several complex concepts is the following:

- *One of the most significant events to influence changes in practice and policy* was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child. (KS3 in TMA01, complex noun phrase in italics)

The building of gerunds (nouns in the –ing form) can also be useful to condense complex information in the subject of a clause, as this student does in the following sentences:

- *Promoting children’s rights, listening to them and creating opportunities to improve their life opportunities will be important elements also contributing positively to children’s QoL [when] living away from home.* (italics added)
- Listening to children, giving them time, accepting them as playing an important part in making decisions in their lives will improve their self esteem and make them take more responsibility. (KS5 TMA01)

This can be compared with the following sentence, which does not use complex noun phrases in the subject:



- It is also important how we listen to and communicate with children. (KS3 TMA01)

The following excerpt could also benefit from a more skilled use of nominalisation:

- This assignment aims to look at various developmental theories, including ages and stage, constructivist theories, social theories and psychodynamic approaches *and how they have influenced* the policies and practices used when working with children and families, and their influence on how practitioners respond to children.” (SS TMA03, italics added)

Use of nominalisation would help here: writing ‘their influence’ instead of “how they have influenced” would make the sentence shorter and clearer. The student is nearly there, as she has used “their influence” in the last part of her sentence.

Use of modal verbs

The use of modal verbs also seems to indicate whether a student is engaging in a critical argument, or if the text is highly summarised. This is discussed in detail in section 9.2 below.

8. CONCEPT MAPS FOR TMAs

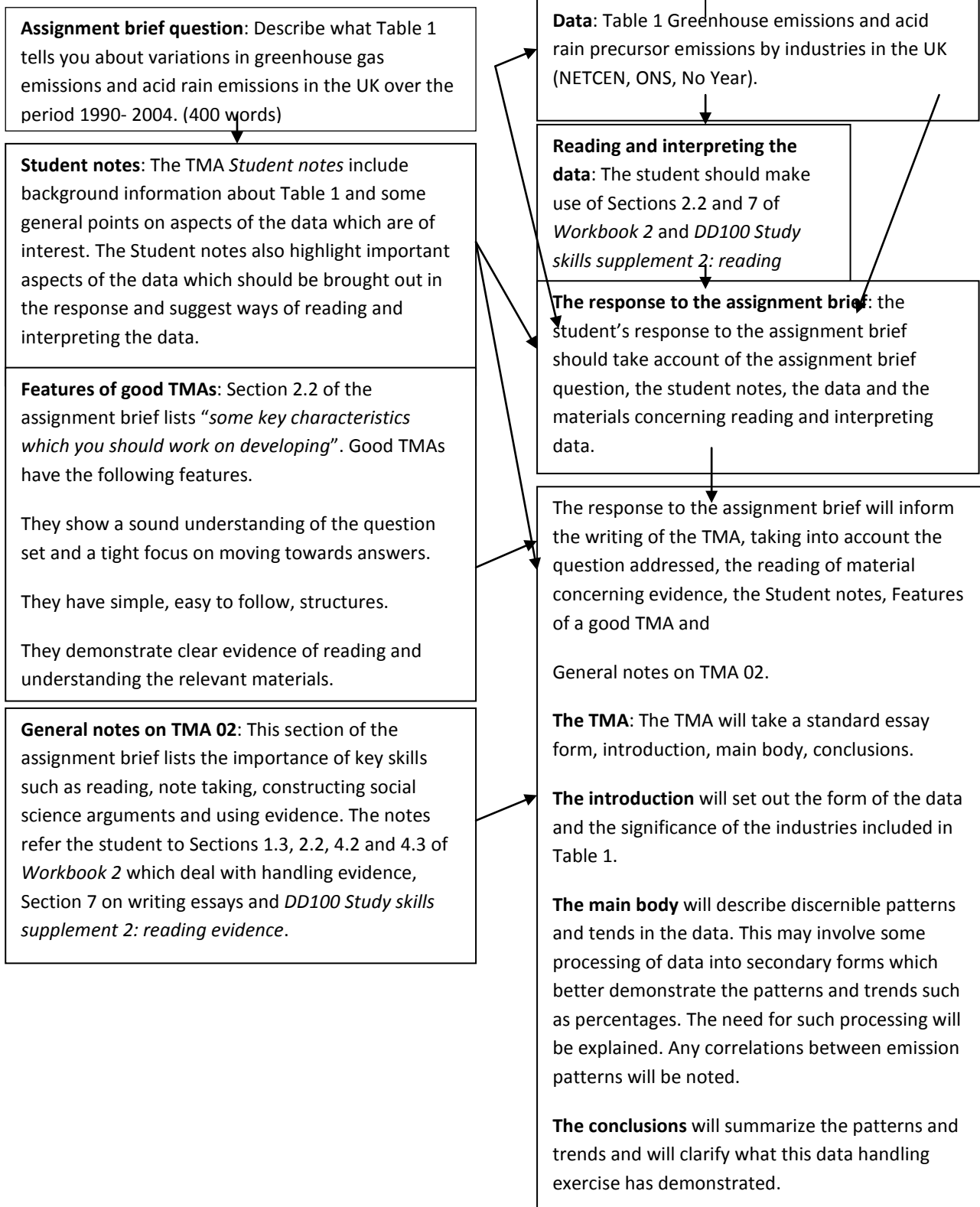
Having established a correlation between the use of language and attainment, the next stage in our research project attempted to better define the nature of this correlation. In order to further investigate the elements that make up a successful assignment, we drew up concept maps for two assignments in each of the courses. By concept map we mean diagrams that visually represent the relationships among key concepts in assignments. A Concept map demonstrates the structuring of the content of the text from a conceptual rather than a linguistic perspective.

We then discuss how well the students were able to perform the genre required of the assignment and compare these genre descriptions to the texts in the Comparison groups.

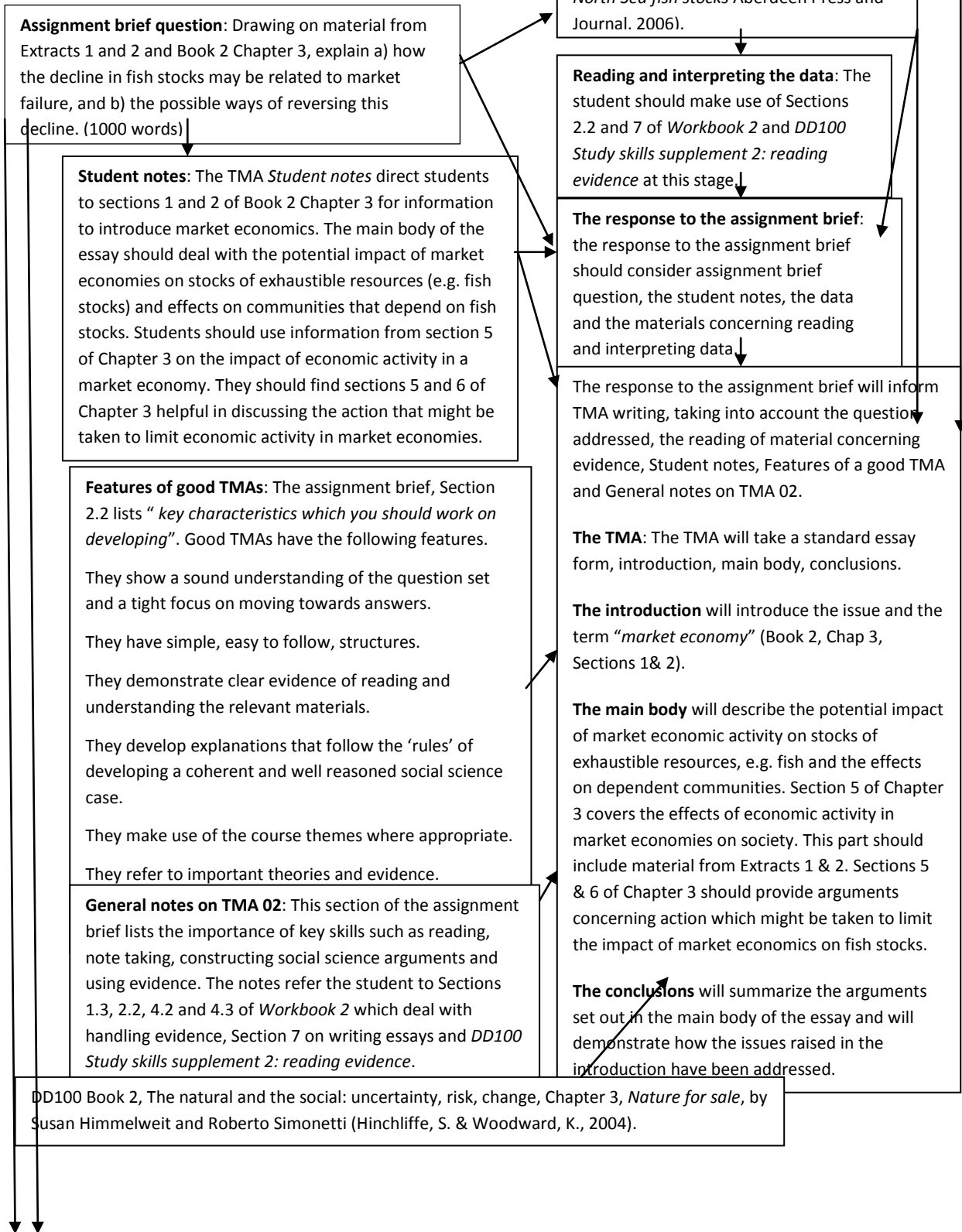


8.1 DD100

8.1.1 Concept map for DD100 TMA 02 Part (a)



8.1.2 Concept map for DD100 TMA 02 Part (b)





8.1.3 Commentary on DD100 TMA 02 Concept maps

As an introductory course, DD100 deals with study and social science skills, as well as with concepts, and this aspect of the course and the assignment is reflected in the concept maps. The skills aspect of the course in the material is also represented in the guidance given and the intended roles of various course documents in the students' responses. A clear perspective of this plays a key role in an understanding of the nature of the assignment brief and the learning outcomes expected from it. There is a strong sense in this course of developing students' capabilities and making them ready for bigger challenges ahead in Level 2 and Level 3 courses.

TMA 02 is quite an early assignment in DD100. There were two distinct but complementary parts to the assignment, one dealing with numerical data, the other dealing with textual data. This format is reflected in two concept maps of similar form with common and similar elements. This assignment was as much an opportunity for students to demonstrate capability in data handling skills, acquired through participation in the course, as it was an opportunity for them to write about concepts and theories studied within the course.

Use of materials: This is set out on the two concept maps.

Concepts: These are set out in the two concept maps. Handling of numerical and textual data are important skills covered in this assignment. The assignment addresses the following learning outcomes (OU, 2008b, 2007):

- The general learning outcomes for DD100
- Knowledge and understanding of the interrelationship between the natural and the social
- Reading information from a table, graph, pie chart or bar chart
- Interpreting or summarising information from data presented in various forms.

Linguistic requirements: Both parts of the assignment require a response in the form of a three-part essay: introduction, main body and conclusions. Details of the required content are set out in the concept maps. In addition, the concept maps set out the relationships between various sources of linguistic advice provided for the student, and the assignment.

Each introduction should clearly state the purpose and possible trajectory of the piece of writing and should introduce the data. The main bodies should set out any trends and patterns in the data. The conclusions should summarise these trends and patterns and show how the issues raised in an introduction have been addressed. The main linguistic challenges concern interpreting information and transforming it from one form into another, more academic, form.

The numerical data were presented as a table with footnotes. Students were required to articulate the information presented within the form of the rows and columns of the table itself as text. They were also expected to articulate the information presented in the form of trends in numbers and relationships between numbers in the table as text.

The textual data were presented as material from a BBC website (BBC, 2004) and an item from a newspaper (Aberdeen Press and Journal, 2006). Here the linguistic challenge was to convert the



material from a journalistic genre, to an academic one. In addition, students were expected to integrate the ideas presented in these two pieces of writing into a coherent whole. This part of the assignment was supported by material from one of the course texts.

Students' ability to tune into structure: Some students found both aspects of the numerical data handling task very difficult. Although students were asked to look for trends and patterns in the data provided, they were presented with a table of the data, rather than a histogram or both a table and a histogram. Academics use histograms as tools to demonstrate trends and patterns, so it would have been appropriate to present the data as a histogram. Students found difficulty in selecting the more important trends and patterns presented to them. They tended to identify that one figure presented was larger than another, rather than the relative sizes of the differences and the relationships between these numbers and the starting figures. Several essays gave equal weighting to the relevant and the trivial.

Students generally found the text-based task more straightforward to attempt than the numerical based data task. However, several took the data presented at face value and did not give sufficient consideration to the difference between the audience and purpose of the writing presented, and the audience and purpose of their writing. They did not identify the need to be more objective than the writer of the source material.

Too many students took the opportunity to write about something of interest to them personally, rather than deal with the data in the manner set out in the brief. They made the mistake of going beyond the data presented, introducing new ideas. Several students treated the two extracts separately rather than integrating the information presented, as required in the assignment brief. The selection and integration of material was an important aspect of this part of the task. Students found difficulty in selecting the more important trends and patterns presented to them. Several essays gave equal weighting to the relevant and the trivial.

Several responses to the brief did not include appropriate conclusions at all. Others did not effectively relate back to the ideas presented. Others introduced new material in the conclusions.



8.2 K204

8.2.1 K204TMA 01

Topic

Why should we listen to children? Critically analyse how listening to children can improve policies and practices in work with children and families.

Learning outcome

The TMA should demonstrate how [students] have:

knowledge and understanding of what constitutes a 'good quality of life' for children, the conditions required to enable children to achieve a 'good quality of life', and the contribution that services and support can make to enabling all children to achieve it.

Student notes on how to approach TMA 01

Students are reminded that one of the course themes, quality of life, is crucial. They are directed to Nigel Thomas' chapter in the Reader, 'Listening to children' (Activity 3 in Topic 3) and to Jeremy Roche's, 'Quality of life for children'. The notes also point to Topic 3 Section 5 and Topic 4 Activity 9, 'A Children's Commissioner'. In addition, students are asked to "use examples of both policies and practices" to "illustrate their discussion".

Concept Map

Introduction

- engages with the question: how listening to children is crucial in improving policies and practices when working with children
- states how the essay will tackle the question: quality of life, children's viewpoints, [+ examples], participation, policies, practices including methods used to communicate with children

Definitions of quality of life

Complex concept: wealth and sense of well-being; physical and mental health; independence; social relationships; relationships with environment.

Children's views may be different from adults'; quality of life linked to expectations, which can be lower as a result of oppression or deprivation

+ Personal examples

Views of children

Traditional view: vulnerable and dependent on adults, in need of control and protection

Other perspective (CMs): human beings with their own rights and capabilities

Traditional focus on families rather than children's needs

+ Awareness of conflicting arguments



Policies supporting children's participation

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Article 12: participation; if capable of forming views, children have the rights to express them freely

Children's Commissioner for Wales; works in consultation with children on matters which affect them

++ The Children Act 1989; Every Child Matters (for higher scores)

Practices encouraging children's participation

First steps: listening to children; ways of communicating with children

+ Personal examples

More practices encouraging children's participation

Providing for disabilities; children involved in decision making; children's best interests; giving time and reasons for decisions

+ Awareness of diversity, different abilities and cultures

Giving children a feeling of control over decisions (e.g. when designing facilities)

Conclusion

Summary of main points; conclusions

Children's rights and professionals' responsibilities/ skills



+ : points made by higher scorers

TMA1: Students in Comparison Group

After carrying out the MASUS on both groups, we tried to examine whether the students in the Comparison group were less likely to conform to the genre required of the assignment. The following three examples show how well three students in this sample were or were not able to follow the map.

Example 1: K930, Mark: 39, MASUS 2.1, MASUS Section B 1.4

Introduction (not clear or detailed enough)

How children are perceived

Children's needs

Children's needs continued: essentials such as clothing, education, food and shelter

Low earnings, diversity

(1 paragraph) social problems, discrimination, prejudice and racism (not answering question). Families should not be blamed



Policy and practice. Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA)

Children should be seen as individuals

Give them a voice

Conclusion? (too long) (inappropriate genre: “are our future” etc.)

Students’ ability to tune into structure: The text structure shows that the student is not answering the question very well.

Example 2: K251, Mark 40, MASUS 2.7, MASUS Section B 1.9

Very short introduction

Definition of quality of life (quote + explanations)

3 reasons to listen to children (plagiarised)

Practices: how to communicate with children

Policies + the Commissioner (example is well integrated)

Conclusion

Students’ ability to tune into structure: Text structure closer to conceptual map but TMA too short + plagiarism

Good structure, closer to conceptual map.

Example 3: K778, Mark 7, MASUS 3, MASUS Section B 2.4

Introduction (last part less clear)

Adults’ attitudes towards children. Role of children in society.

Children’s needs. Warehousing and greenhousing

Quality of life for children

Definition of quality of life

UNCRC Art. 12

Benefits of listening to children. Better decisions

Ways of communicating with children

Benefits of dialogue with children

Children and policies

Conclusion

Students’ ability to tune into structure: Structure is not very clear. No real flow, arguments go back and forth; they don’t really follow from each other.



8.2.2 K204 TMA 03

Topic

Child development theories can have both a positive and a negative influence on how practitioners respond to children. Using material from Topic 8 and other parts of the course, critically discuss some of these influences and their effects, positive and negative.

Learning outcome

The TMA should demonstrate how [students] have:

reflected on and critically evaluated practice, promoted the development of good practice, and increased the focus on evaluation.

Student notes on how to approach TMA 03

The majority of the material for this TMA is located in Topic 8, and you may also want to refer to the Reader chapter by Stainton Rogers. They are told to provide a brief overview of different developmental theories. They may refer to: ages and stages, constructivist theories, social theory and psychodynamic approaches. To make links to practice, you may draw on practical examples from different parts of the course, particularly the video activities in Topic 9. They need to show how aspects of developmental theories have become embedded in policies and practice, and how they affect the way practitioners respond to children. To answer the question fully, they need to address both positive and negative effects of these theories, to offer some critique of developmental theories (the course identifies several shortcomings).

To respond to the needs of each child, children need to be seen and valued as individuals. References to the need for competent practitioners with skills in observation and listening may support discussion of this.

Concept map

Introduction

--engages with the question: how developmental theories have influenced policies and practises in working with children and families.

-- states how the essay will approach the question: negative and positive effects discussed (using examples from the CMs and personal experience)

+ [-- conclusions (children seen as individuals and importance of observation and listening skills)]

Overview of different development theories/ setting scene

--**Ages & Stages** (help practitioners gauge children's 'normal' development)

++ Mention the 3 types of theories to frame the discussion:

- 1) nature
- 2) nurture



3) combination of both

Summary of theories, framed by the nature/nurture discussion (1-5)

1. NATURE --**Constructivist**/stage theories of child development (**Piaget**) /

4 stages

Neg: only cognitive development; his children; not that rigid; doesn't account for exceptions

+ [Example of stage: **DVD** (hard to fit children into categories)]

+ Optional: Personal experience

2. NURTURE – Skinner / [contrast with Piaget](#)

Learning theory – punishment/reward

3. INTERPLAY BETWEEN NATURE AND NURTURE 1

[-- Psychodynamic approaches (Freud and Erickson)

Initiated other theorists, little impact today.

4. INTERPLAY BETWEEN NATURE AND NURTURE 2

-- Attachment theory (Bowlby)

Pos: Children are cared for as individuals and emotional needs are a concern

Neg: only studies children in care; only looked at attachment to mother (Rutter)

+ Practical/personal experience

5. INTERPLAY BETWEEN NATURE AND NURTURE 3

--Social theory of child development (Vygotsky)

Physical environment, scaffolding

How he's like Piaget

Pos: differences from Piaget

Neg?: (doesn't seem to be much critique in the course materials)

Discussion + key concepts

++ End /discussion criticism (can also be conclusion):

What's normal? Children don't fit into categories (consider class, culture, gender, ethnicity disability)

Could mention **DVD**, personal experience

Good skill: **listening** and **observation**



Natural environment

Conclusion

(could have the final critical points mentioned above)

Students' ability to tune into structure

This was a difficult task, as it required students to engage with and summarise several development theories and apply them to practice and their personal experience. However, students in the Intervention group got their highest marks on this assignment. Three students in the Intervention group got a mark of 96 (KS3, KS2 and KS4). Their scores were also high on the MASUS rating.

KS2, Mark 96, Averaged MASUS Score 3.9, Section B on MASUS 3.6

KS2 got a high score because she appropriately engaged with the course materials and was particularly strong in presenting 'various perspectives in the field' (points A3 and A5 of the MASUS).

KS4, Mark 96, MASUS 3.4, Section B on MASUS 2.6

This essay also received a high mark, but the averaged score on the MASUS was not quite as high as KS2's; the essay was not as well linked and did not engage much with the practitioner's perspective. The high mark seems to have resulted from the fact that this student had a very effective introduction, which shows the importance of a well-composed introduction to students' marks. Moreover, a focus of the essay was that diversity should be valued in children (a key concept in the course). KS4 seemed to be aware that her marked was slightly inflated as she reported in her interview that it was 'probably not supposed to be that good'.

KS6, Mark 65, MASUS 2.5, Section B on MASUS 2.6

KS6 had been struggling in the course, but she improved on TMA 03. While writing this assignment, she had some extra language support, both from the language specialist and from the Region. There were still many problems with sentence construction in her assignment, despite the fact that this had been the focus of her support. The strengths of the essay were that she had composed a strong introduction that engaged with the topic and she had covered a large variety of the relevant course materials. However, the essay shows that she is still struggling to assemble her ideas.

- She hardly uses any linking language.
- She relies quite heavily on course materials in certain parts of the essay (e.g. Topic 8, Stages of Development, at the beginning of essay).
- She struggles when using the language of abstract concepts and with the composition of complex sentences. For example:



- Piaget is a Psychologist, who uses the nature debate to research into child development and specifically expresses his views using a Constructivist approach. (KS6, TMA 03)
 - Freud is a psychologist who bases his research on the interaction theory as highlighted previously, he identifies his model of theories on psychosexual development. (KS6, TMA 03)
 - Erickson is a psychologist who researches child development using the interaction theory, for his model of research uses the children's psychosocial development to establish his theories. (KS6, TMA 03)
- She has severe difficulty critically evaluating the theories covered in the course and relating them to practice.

While KS6 struggles to summarise the course materials, she does not seem to plagiarise. In her interview, she claimed to understand the course content well. However, she falters quite severely when trying to critically evaluate the theories and relate them to practice. In fact, in TMA 03, KS6 seems to have completely misunderstood what it means to evaluate the influence of theories on how practitioners respond to children. She ends her essay by recommending that childcare practitioners 'need to have a qualification such as NVQ or college course in childcare' – instead of recommending why they would (or would not) profit from engaging with the theories covered in the course. Indeed, KS6 recognised 'being critical' as a weakness in her interviews and intends to work more on this at Level 2.

KS7, Mark 70, MASUS 2.7, MASUS Section B 2.3

KS7 also made a great improvement on this assignment. The subject specialist was impressed by his recognition of difference and disability, although he later stated that he was perhaps too generous with the mark. KS7 engaged with many of the theories covered in the course as well as the criticisms and applications of these theories. However, there are no citations and few references to the course materials. He most often refers to the CDs and DVDs, and KS7 reported that he found it easier to find time to engage with these materials rather than the reading materials. There are also signs that KS7 is struggling with many aspects of academic writing. He doesn't have an introduction that spells out his response to the title (despite the fact that his tutor has mentioned this to him in previous feedback), nor is the essay summed up in a conclusion. KS7 also has problems constructing complex sentences, and he did not use much linking language (although there was some). There are spelling and word processing problems.

KS6, n

At this stage in the course, KS6, the one student from ethnic minorities in the Intervention group had dropped out.



8.3 T175

8.3.1 T175 TMA 01

Question 1	<p>In your preparation for Block 1 you developed a weekly study planner. Describe how you have planned your time to study the rest of this course. You should consider your weekly timetable as well as any time management issues over the course as a whole, such as holidays, work or other planned commitments.</p> <p>What are your difficulties and constraints and how do you plan to overcome them?</p>
Use of material	students' own timetable
Concepts	time planning
Linguistic requirements	writing in a personal style, referring to timetable, describing difficulties and solutions
Students' ability to tune into structure	Some Ss had difficulty separating out a) and b). Some were marked down for not including long-term contingencies as well as weekly commitments in answering a). The most successful student divided her answer into a) weekly and long-term demands and how to overcome them b) unplanned demands and how to overcome them. Maybe the phrasing of the question itself caused problems in dividing answers a) and b).

Question 2	<p>The block diagram in Figure 3 shows some of the components of an electronic punching system for an orienteering event. Based on your reading of Part 2, list the ICT processes which should appear in the block for i) the electronic card? ii) the start station? iii) the printer?</p> <p>Write one or two sentences to explain how each process takes place in the system.</p> <p>Write an explanation of the safeguards in the system.</p>
Use of material	systems diagram
Concepts	ICT processes (functions and safeguards); how elements within a system interconnect
Linguistic requirements	'systems' language using the present simple tense in the active voice; 'zero' conditional to explain what happens in case of problems or disputes
Students' ability to tune into structure	Some Ss incorrectly identified processes – in a couple of cases, scripts suggest a problem with understanding the meaning of 'manipulates' 'retrieves' etc. Best Ss not only identified all relevant processes but showed understanding of how whole system interconnected. Some Ss had



	difficulty explaining system both concisely and comprehensively.
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Question 3	<p>Make some notes that identify the main points in this article. Your notes should be written in bullet points or a spray diagram. Imagine that your notes will be read by someone who is not a technology expert.</p> <p>Use the notes to write a summary which briefly explains how the Ndiyo system works, its benefits and the difficulties and constraints that Stafford-Fraser encountered in developing the system. The summary should be written in sentences.</p>
Use of material	newspaper article
Concepts	Ndiyo system – functions, benefits; difficulties and constraints in its development
Linguistic requirements	'systems' language. Explaining, exemplifying and evaluating. Comparatives – benefits compared to previous solutions. Note-taking in a) and full exposition in b).
Students' ability to tune into structure	Selection of relevant information from the article was a problem for the majority of Ss. In part, this may have been inability to identify key information. However, this may also have been due to confusion about the level of knowledge of the reader (tension – writing for reader who knows about the subject as if s/he doesn't). Some Ss had problems in b) with foregrounding and connecting ideas using cohesive devices. As a result, their note-taking and expanded style was similar. The best student in the sample was comprehensive in identifying benefits, difficulties etc , prioritising them and putting them together coherently and cohesively.

Question 4	<p>Choose a message that you have sent to your T175 Group forum that you feel was successful. With reference to the Netiquette principles, explain why you consider the message was successful.</p> <p>Choose a message that you feel could be improved. Explain how you could apply one or more Netiquette principles to improve your message.</p>
Use of material	own email postings to forum
Concepts	Netiquette principles – relate own writing to these
Linguistic requirements	evaluating and exemplifying. Use of past modals – 'I should/could have...' Personal register. Relating language – 'in relation to...' 'according to...' 'adhere to...'
Students' ability to tune into structure	Students' ability to tune into structure – The most successful student related all her comments to Netiquette principles while others lost marks



	for not always doing so. The informal register here was well realised by the students. Interestingly, of the two best students, one sounded nit-picking in looking for shortcomings in one of her posts while the other submitted something he'd found on the internet. Maybe Q4a needs to be rethought. Interestingly, one of the weaker students analysed two very brief posts while another didn't answer the question because she had not posted something to the forum. A forum must be an extremely daunting prospect for those who lack confidence in their writing ability.
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General comment – in this assignment, Ss had to draw on a number of different sources (their own timetable, articles, their own posts). How comprehensively they did this seemed crucial to the score they obtained. Although the tutor corrected language problems, she didn't mark them down, except where this led to difficulty in understanding. Such lack of clarity was particularly prevalent in Q3b which, perhaps significantly, was the only part of the TMA which required a fuller exposition where ideas had to be connected and prioritised.

8.3.2 T175 TMA 04

Question 1	(a) Choose three reasons (b) Write a set of notes on the benefits and drawbacks . . . under the following headings (c) Give one potential benefit . . . giving example(s) to illustrate (d) Explain why telemedicine could have particular benefits (in Africa). Give reasons why this potential has not yet been achieved.
Use of material	Set article Own experiences with accessing medical information
Concepts	Social issues related to use of ICT Comparison of different forms of ICT
Cognitive requirements	Ability to select relevant material from an extended piece of continuous prose.
Linguistic requirements	Writing in a formal style c) Ability to handle language of reasons i.e. "the use of mobile telephony in Africa is increasing rapidly because ... "as opposed to simple description of the situation. d) Understanding conditional tenses.
Students'	Instructions around Q.1 (b) very complex involving a hypothetical



ability to tune into structure	situation “Imagine that you ...” + construction of a quasi table with three headings given and two interacting headings (benefits & drawbacks) implied + requirement for ‘notes’ but in ‘complete sentences’. This is a lot of things to achieve at once so it is easy to lose marks.
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Question 2	(a)Using a table ... show ... indicates ... show... Explain your reasoning. (b)Explain why ... justify... (c)Explain ... how... could be used
Use of material	Part 2 of block 4 Own web resources
Concepts	Idea of road charging Comparison of different technologies
Cognitive requirements	a) Ability to construct a table to re-present ideas. b) Synthesising material to support a stated opinion
Linguistic requirements	a) Use of technical terms. b) Explanations. Quoting & referencing.
Students’ ability to tune into structure	b) asks both for ‘own words’ and for ‘short quotations’. c) specifies only ‘own words’. Could be confusing messages.

Question 3	a)Explain the topic... cover (three things) b) Post a reply to the blog you have chosen c) Critical analysis of a blog
Use of materials	Blogs
Concepts	Ethical /political uses re use of ICTs
Cognitive requirements	Web searching skills a) Ability to extract and summarise from diverse electronic readings b) How to post blogs c) Understanding of PROMPT and how to apply it



Linguistic requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Ability to deal linguistically with abstract moral issues. Explanations. b) The language of blogs c) Ability to use headings to organise ideas
Students' ability to tune into structure	Some students could not handle (or were not interested in) discussion of abstract issue

Question 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Formal response to task as posted on tutor-group conference b) Compare ... Discuss ... strengths & weaknesses in terms of (1), (2) and (3) c) any other features? d) recommendation
Use of materials	Websites
Concepts	Medical uses of ICTs
Cognitive requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to be 'objective' How to use given criteria.
Linguistic requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) The language of comparison. d) Giving reasons
Students' ability to tune into structure	Some student ran out of material and repeated themselves.

There are two pages of Learning Outcomes listed for T175 Block 4 under the headings: *Knowledge and Understanding*, *Cognitive skills*, *Key skills* and *Practical and professional skills*. Although the subject specialist did not make explicit use of these Outcomes with students some other Tutors whose work I have looked at have done. The thirteen Learning Outcomes listed under *Knowledge and Understanding* all start with the verbs 'Be aware', 'know' or 'Understand', which are all straightforward. However the ten Learning Outcomes under *Cognitive skills* start with a range of verbs like 'compare', 'give examples', 'explain', 'distinguish' and 'identify', which would suggest that rather than being skills in their own right these are just the ways the students are able to demonstrate the Knowledge and understanding Learning Outcomes.



The five *Key Skills* include two which could be said to be language-based.

- Extract and interpret information from articles with an ICT context.
- Consult a bibliographic reference in author-date format.

The five *Practical and Professional Skills include* four which appear to be applied maths or technology and one which seems to be of a different order:

- Recognise social, ethical and political issues relating to the use of ICTs.

TMA 04 Companion (p. 2) identifies 'social & ethical issues' as well as technical issues- social and ethical issues are normally explored through discursive verbal discourse in which a range of ideas are somehow linked either in supporting or challenging roles. At what age would students have become familiar with this form of discourse? Is it possible to have missed out on this stage of development in English? E.g. by being educated in another language, poor schooling etc. The distance learning delivery assumes that students feel comfortable reading discursive discourse even though this is technology course.

Group tutorials can build up experience in this kind of spoken discourse which can then be transferred (hopefully) to writing. But tutorials are only an optional part of T175 delivery and do not appear to be well attended.

What does not come out clearly analysing just one TMA is the way in which previous tasks (related to the student forum) are drawn upon later. Any student who hadn't participated in previous on-line activities is penalised in later assignments. This requires detailed time management and also a willingness to fit into tutor-controlled schedules. Not all adults have this willingness.



9. INVESTIGATING PARTICULAR LANGUAGE FEATURES

As well as producing concept maps for particular assignments, the researchers investigated particular language features and the extent to which students accurately and appropriately used them in their assignments. They also endeavoured to discover whether such usage had an impact on the scores achieved. In the following five studies, each undertaken by one of the language specialists, criterial linguistic features from the MASUS are examined in detail. These are: the use of modals, joining clauses, the use of the passive and the use of cohesive devices.

9.1 The use of modal forms in the introductory social sciences course DD100, JK

As the summary of DD100 language skills provision in Appendix 7 shows, the coverage of grammatical features in the course materials is sparse. This includes the use of modal verbs and other expressions of modality. The only resources available for the use of modal forms are the models of modal use provided by the course texts and example responses to assignment briefs. Consequently, the following looks at the use of modal forms in depth as an important form in academic language which is not covered in the course materials. It also considers issues surrounding the use of modal forms in academic reasoning and the role of model texts in the use of modal forms in assignments.

Modal verbs are used to express ideas such as possibility, intention, obligation and necessity. The verbs *can*, *could*, *will*, *would*, *shall* and *should* are some examples. One could argue that modals are intricately implicated in academic thought (Swales, 1990, p. 136). Words like *may*, *should* and *could*, can be used to imply choice between alternatives. This is the heart of academic discussion. These constructions facilitate the speculative analysis required of academic writing. They lie at the heart of the presentation of arguments and the justification of perspectives. They facilitate predictive propositions or speculations of the form, for example: *On the basis of this argument, if A then the outcome could be B or C.*

This study concentrates on the performances of three pairs of students from the DD100 Intervention group on TMA 02 part (b). Since they belonged to the same group, one might assume that these students had experienced similar tutorial and tutor guidance. Their work was MASUS rated within the same rating session. DS2 and DS14 scored 1 (poor) on modality, DS9 and DS13 scored 2 (fair) and DS5 and DS10 scored 3 (good).

The study examines three aspects of modality. First, it looks into whether there is a gradual progression in competence in the use of modals. It will be interesting to see whether there is a breakthrough point below which modals are not used at all, or a ceiling beyond which all performance is excellent. Secondly, it will examine whether lack of this skill impairs students' ability to reason in academic language. Lastly, it will explore the effects of language support material in this area of linguistic capability.

1. A gradual progression

There was a gradual progression in the numbers of times modal forms were used in the responses to the assignment, poor students DS2 and DS14 (6 and 10), fair students DS9 and DS13 (17 and 17) and good students DS5 and DS10 (43 and 21). There was a less marked progression in the numbers of types



of modal forms used in the responses to the assignment, poor performers DS2 and DS14 (4 and 4), fair performers DS9 and DS13 (5 and 3) and high performers DS5 and DS10 (6 and 3).

DS2, one of the poor performers, only used modals towards the end of their main discussion:

- *“This **should make** the market become more efficient”.*

However, they did not include modals in conclusion. DS14 used modal forms throughout their essay but in statements rather than in a speculative academic way:

- *“It **might look** as if money plays a vital part in what we **can and can’t do** about it.”*

DS9, a fair performer, provides modal forms throughout their essay, but in a descriptive way, including the introduction:

- *“The delicate ecosystem on which the environment relies on **could be affected** and as a result species **could become** extinct”)*

And the conclusion:

- *“informing them of the effects it **would have** on their lives”).*

DS13 uses modals in a similar way, descriptively in the introduction:

- *“The market **may be** world wide”*
- *“buyers **may need** to be constrained”.*

They then use modals within in a conclusive statement about the work of others in their discussion:

- *“it has been argued that the only successful solution **would be** a complete ban.”*

They also use modals in the conclusion:

- *“It **would appear** that no single solution would halt the decline of fish stock”.*

DS5, a high performer, uses a modal form to pose a proposition in the introduction:

- *“I will attempt to address how the decline in fish stocks **may be** related to market failure.”*

They present the descriptive material in the introduction in a speculative way:

- *“A market economy **can be described** as.....”*
- *“An example of this **could be**.....”*

They also use modals speculatively in their argument:

- *“consideration is needed to address ways in which the trend **can be reversed** so as not to further damage the exhaustible resource which **could ultimately lead** to fish stocks being unrecoverable”.*

Then they use modals speculatively in the conclusion:

- *“Therefore, it **could be argued** that one solution which **could provide** fish for future generations and for the protection of the environment **could mean** a detrimental effect to some fishing communities”.*



DS10 speculates in the introduction with the following:

- *“a ban on fishing..... **could lead** to an improvement in this shared resource”.*

Modals appear in DS10’s argument:

- *“both these solutions **would**, to some degree enable natural to repair the damage done..... but on an economical level, unemployment **would be** on the increase”.*

DS10 concludes with:

- *“..... some of the pressure **would be off** and it **could** even **become** fashionable or even traditional to be environmentally friendly and enjoy alternative fish markets instead”.*

In this analysis, the poor performers use the modal form less and generally in statements. The fair performers use the form more often than the poor students. They use it descriptively in an introduction and in a conclusion. The high performers use modals descriptively, speculatively and to put propositions in an introduction; they use them speculatively within their argument and speculatively in conclusions. There is a gradual progression in the level of use of modal forms, in the range of uses and in the parts of essays where they are used.

This finding has implications for the teaching of these forms as an important part of the academic language of the subject. The course language materials refer to the three Section Essay (see Appendix 6). The different uses of the modal form within each part of the essay, putting propositions and describing in the introduction, describing and speculatively in the argument or main discussion and speculatively in the conclusion, could be pointed out to students as part of this work on essay writing.

2. The effect on reasoning

It was argued above that the use of modal forms actually facilitates academic thought. If this is so, non-users should find difficulty in expressing themselves academically and thinking in an academic way.

DS2’s introduction is made up of statements:

- *“Market failure arises when attention is not paid to the after effect of over exploitation of natural resources available”.*

Compare that with DS5’s invitation to debate:

- *“In Extracts1 and 2 we **can see** how society and nature converge to create uncertainty and risk for dwindling fish stocks.....”.*

In one instance, DS2 uses “perhaps” in a statement which might have been constructed with a modal:

- *“**Perhaps** parties were not aware of such effect at the time of exploitation of resources.”*

Compare that with DS5’s:

- *“The consumer **may be unaware** of the consequences of the market places on the value of fish which **may not be** the case for the ones who fish the affected waters”.*

There is some uncertainty about DS2’s sentence. DS5 is much more forthright and direct.

Another alternative to modals used by DS2 is “seem”:



- “... all stakeholders in the fishing industry **seem** to be currently aware of dwindling fish stocks”.

Compare that with DS5’s:

- “Evidence shows that fish stocks have shrunk..... One such suggestion for this **could be** overfishing”.

The use of “seem” is rather uncertain and imprecise. It suggests that there is something deceptive about that which appears obvious. DS5 is clearer, more forthright and more certain.

The conclusions in particular suffer in DS2’s modal poor response to the assignment brief. Compare DS2:

- “In conclusion, market failure seems inevitable, but continuously managing the stock and the fleet in operation seems to be the most positive way towards achieving the gradual reversal of the decline.”

with DS5’s assured conclusion:

- “Therefore, it **could be argued** that one solution which **could provide** fish for future generations and for the protection of the environment **could mean** a detrimental effect to some fishing communities”.

In this example, DS2 has put forward an uncertain possibility while DS5 has developed a testable hypothesis.

3. The effect of the model presented

The course resources for DD100 present examples of academic writing which enable students to practice reading and writing the academic language that they need to use proficiently for effective performance on assignments and to articulate the subject discourse. For some students using these materials are their only opportunities to practice using such language and engage in the discourse.

In terms of practicing their writing, whilst OU students are encouraged not to plagiarise text and to write in their own words (OU, 2008b, p.5; 2007, p.1), they may model their academic writing on the material which they read in the course texts. Book 2 Chapter 3, section 2, (Himmelweit & Simonetti, 2000, pp. 84- 87) supports TMA 02 (An analysis of the section is presented in Appendix 6). This section of Book 2 acts as a model of the use of academic language, including the use of modal forms, for DD100 students. As demonstrated in Appendix 7, apart from the use of modals in examples of responses to TMA assignment briefs, this model is the only support available for the use of modal forms in the DD100 language support materials. The four page text includes a number of modal forms. However, nineteen of these were “can” or “cannot”. There is only one “would” and one “could”. There are no examples of any other common modal forms which students might have used in their essays.

DS2 uses “would” once “should” once “might” once and “may” three times. DS14 uses “could” once, “should” once “might” six times and “can” or “can’t” three times. These students, who were poor performers in terms of the use of modals, are obviously aware of a range of modal forms. They have not solely used the main example presented in the model text. The challenge for DD100 tutors to encourage students like these to use modal forms to express academic language.



DS9 uses “*would*” four times, “*should*” three times, “*could*” five times, “*can*” four times and “*may*” once. DS13 uses “*would*” eight times, “*should*” twice, and “*may*” seven times. These students who were fair performers in terms of the use of modals are also aware of a range of modal forms. The lack of variety of modal forms in the main example presented has not affected the performance of these students. The challenge for DD100 tutors is to stretch these students further in their use of modal forms.

DS5 uses “*would*” five times, “*could*” thirteen times, “*can*” eight times and “*may*” eleven times, “*might*” five times and “*must*” once. DS10 uses “*would*” twelve times, “*could*” 8 times and “*can*” once. These students are good at using modals and are well versed in the use of modal forms. However, they could be encouraged to use them thoughtfully to produce clear, concise coherent academic discourse.

It is interesting to note that the weakest student studied, DS2, used a broader range of modal forms than one of the fair students and one of the strongest students. This finding might indicate that this student may be familiar with the modals forms but have difficulty using them appropriately in academic English. This student learnt English in Africa and her education was mainly through the medium of English. Consequently, she may have experienced the use of these forms within academic discourse, albeit in the dim and distant past. DS14 learnt English in the UK but had no formal education in English. This may explain his tendency to use modals within statements rather than in the speculative use typical of academic English.

Conclusions

This study uncovered a steady progression in competence in the use of modal forms in the small sample investigated. The progression was evident in terms of the frequency in which modals were used, the parts of the essay in which they were used speculatively, the uses that they were put to and, to a limited extent, the range of modal forms employed. There was some continuity in the progression in performance at the three levels. This small sample did not indicate a breakthrough point in the use of modals below which their use disappeared altogether, or a ceiling point beyond which performance was equally good. However, no student was rated with the highest score of 4.

It was possible to show that a lack of skill in the use of modal forms might affect the level of articulation of language possible and the level of academic reasoning which an individual was able to demonstrate in their assignment. In addition, the study indicated that the quality of a model text, in terms of the variety of modal forms demonstrated, does not necessarily affect the frequency with which students used modal forms or the variety of those forms which they employed.

9.2 Report on the use of modals in K204 TMAs, EJE

This short report attempts to gain insight into the use of modals in K204 TMAs. It will show how the use of modals is intimately connected with the successful performance of K204 learning outcomes. The connection between modal use and performance has been assessed first by looking at the number of modals used in a small sample of student assignments and then by analysing how students use modals to achieve the learning outcomes stated in the K204 Assessment Guide.

Following Gibbons and Marwick-smith (1992) and Buller (2007), modals were analysed in a sample of TMAs written by students in the Intervention group. The number of clauses in each text was counted, as well as the number of modalised clauses. Then the percentage of modalised clauses was obtained. Only clauses with a subject and a verb were counted, or clauses that should have a subject and a verb had



they been in standard written English (i.e. there were 'errors' in several of the clauses examined). Table 36 presents the findings from this analysis.

Table 36: Modals per clause in K204 students' TMAs

Student	Mark	# of clauses	# modalised	% modalised
KS3 03	96	115	37	32%
KS2 03	96		22	
KS4 03	96	107	21	20%
KS3 05	80		49	
KS4 05	75		19	
KS7 03	70	95	25	26%
KS2 05	69		34	
KS1 03	65		32	
KS6 05	65		26	
KS6 03	65		20	
KS1 05	60		34	
KS7 05	50	125	49	39%
				Mean: 29%

Here one can see that the highest scoring essay does have a high number of modalised clauses, which might imply some correlation between a student's use of modals and mark, and this small sample of students seems to be using a large number of modals, particularly compared to the exam scripts analysed in Buller's study of K100 exam scripts (2007). However, the lowest achieving essay contains the highest number of modalised clauses in this small sample. So this analysis does not suggest a correlation between the number of modals present in a student's assignment and mark.

But upon closer examination of the student assignments, it seemed as if there could be a correlation not between the number of modals used by students and mark, but *how* the modals are used. The following analysis suggests that there is a correlation between the 'appropriate' use of modals and a student's mark. It indicates how high-scoring students appropriately use modals to positively impact their scores. In the MASUS grid for K204 essays, the rating of a student's use of modals is limited to section D, *Grammatical correctness*, under the rubric 'appropriate use of modality'. However, this analysis will show that modal use is integral in successfully performing several of K204's learning outcomes, which are reflected in Sections A-C on the MASUS. These include recognising various perspectives in the field (A), outlining how the argument will be presented and discussed in the introduction (B), presenting and managing conflicting arguments (B), using appropriate evaluation language (C) and establishing an appropriate relationship with reader (C).



First of all, appropriate use of modals is required for outlining how the argument will be presented and discussed in the introduction. This is often done by using the modal 'will', as the following examples show:

- I *will* look at what affect it has on me as a parent and go on to discussion the argument of whether it is nature or nurture which determines a child's development. I *will* look in turn at a number of child development theories and how they have developed as technology and research has improved. (KS4 TMA 03)
- In this essay, I *will* give a brief overview of ... An explanation *will* be given on how these theories *may* be a useful guide to ... I *will* show how these theories *can* have positive and negative consequences for different children. (KS3 TMA 03)

As well as featuring the modal 'will', the second example also contains the modals 'may' and 'can'. These modals help the writer to make hedged suggestions and to establish an appropriate relationship with the reader. The use of modals in this example shows that the writer has an awareness of audience and is sensitive to the fact that this audience may not share their view (Gibbons and Marwick-Smith 1992: 98). By using 'may' and 'can', the student does not force her opinions on the reader.

Similarly, modals are also used to 'recognise various perspectives in the field', a key learning outcome on K204. This is shown in the following examples:

- Child abuse *can* be defined in different ways.(K686 TMA 05)
- Child development theories *can* have both a positive and negative influence on how child practitioners respond to children. In one respect, it *can* give parents and practitioners a set of standards, but in another it *could* possibly make a parent feel that they are not doing their job correct. (KS7 TMA 03)
- Those working with children *may* find developmental theories a useful guide, particularly... others *may* not be particularly helpful... trying to place children in developmental boxes *could* actually impede their development.
- All of these experiences *can* prove to have a positive input on a child's life but unfortunately children in these settings *can* be stereotype and this *can* lead to the children feeling socially segregated.

Another similar and related key concept in K204 is 'understanding and valuing diversity'. Students must demonstrate that they understand that the children and families they work with are individuals who come from various different cultural and social backgrounds. They should demonstrate that they value this diversity and show that they understand that some people may react one way to a particular theory or practice while in another context another theory or practice may be more valued or effective. The demonstration of this is often realised linguistically with the help of modal verbs, particularly 'may' and 'could'. Examples from student texts that demonstrate that the writer values diversity include:

- Winnecott suggested that children in residential care who lost a significant carer *could* have strong feelings of rejection. This *could* happen frequently for those in care, who are moved from one placement to another ... (KS3 TMA 05)
- These labels *can* make children feel socially excluded.



- The disadvantage of this is that a child *could* be labelled as not developing ‘normally’ ... (KS4 TMA 03)

Finally, as K204 is a practically-oriented course, students are expected to relate course materials to practical experience in the field of health and social care. This is often done by making suggestions for practitioners, which often occurs in the conclusions of students’ essays. It is interesting to note that in K204, the assignments often conclude with recommendations, a technique which might not be appropriate in the conclusions of assignments on less practice-based courses. Such recommendations are linguistically realised through the help of modal verbs like ‘must’, ‘should’ and ‘have to’, as the following examples demonstrate:

- this is something that practitioners *must* take into consideration when working with these children, particularly if they are displaying behavioural difficulties. *We shouldn’t* assume that all children will be damaged beyond help; each child would be treated as an individual and their feelings and opinions should be listened to, so that they can work their way through any negative feelings that they may have. (KS3 TMA 05)
- *We must* also be careful not to stereotype children... *we should not* assume that they can only achieve... they *must* be given ... (KS3 TMA 01)
- As carer looking after children, *we have to* value diversity and promote equal opportunities for all. (KS7 TMA 01)
- another factor which we *must* take into account is the separation from familiar surroundings. (KS7 TMA 05)
- To really move forward and look to the future not only *must* we have practitioners with skills in observing and listening, but we also *need to* take a more encompassing view of all members of society. (KS4 TMA 03)
- It is in these circumstances that practitioners *must* follow the theories that relate to the times we are living in ... (K578 TMA 03)
- The main focus *should* be on interagency and inter-disciplinary interaction in order to provide accessible and competent workers and workplaces which inform current national policies, and guidelines in working with children and families. (K686 TMA 05)
- Workers with young children *should* have an understanding of the influence of gender on children’s behaviour. Theories on child development can be used to understand and comment on how gender specific roles develop. (K375 03)
- Workers *should* bear in mind that each child is individual and as such *should* be regarded as such and not pigeonholed. (K375 03)

These examples show that the appropriate use of modals is essential for engaging with the course materials as an experienced practitioner. The students’ use of the collective subject ‘we’ shows that they see themselves as belonging to a community of health and social care professionals. And the use of the modals ‘must’, ‘should’ and ‘have to’ shows that they understand their obligations, which are stressed in the course, to value diversity and different perspectives when working with children and families. These obligations are also reflected in the essay titles, e.g. ‘Why should we listen to children?’



Having established the importance of using modals in K204 TMAs to linguistically realise some of the course's key learning outcomes, this report will now look at how modal use seems to correlate with performance on TMAs. In particular, it shows how some students' writing could be improved by additional use of modals and/or more appropriate use of modals.

Modal use is a linguistic feature that distinguishes a persuasive or opinion text from a factual or descriptive one; it plays a vital role in the construction of argumentative texts (Gibbons and Marwick-Smith 1992: 98). Thus the presence of modals in students' assignments is a sign that there is a critical discussion of the essay topic – and, likewise, the absence of modals suggests an absence of critical discussion. Analysis of modal use in students' TMAs showed that some students did not use many modals at all, particularly in certain sections of the main body of the essay. The introduction and conclusion were more likely to contain modals. A lack of modals, and the corresponding lack of discussion, seemed to indicate that a student was struggling cognitively with the ideas they were presenting, and as a result, they relied on summarising the course materials. For example, in TMA 03, KS2 had 22 uses of modals, which included a good variety (e.g. 'can', 'could', 'should', 'may') that were scattered throughout the text. However, few or no modals appeared in two middle paragraphs about Bowlby and Vygotsky, where KS2 seems to be less comfortable with the course contents. This also seems to be the case with K592, who only had 15 uses of modals in TMA 03. There are only sparse uses of modals in the student's paragraphs about the child development theorists like Bowlby, Piaget and Vygotsky. These paragraphs also mainly function as summaries of the course materials with little discussion of the essay title and few links to practice. The impression that this student is struggling with the content is further supported by the fact that the tutor notes that parts of the essay are 'heavily paraphrased'. Thus it seems that the more confident a student is with the course materials, the more likely they are to engage with that content and treat knowledge as negotiable.

Modality also allows a writer to demonstrate caution or tentativeness. The lack of modals, or the inappropriate choice of modals, might cause a writer to sound too categorical or too sure of the claims they are making. Several K204 students' essays were criticised in their tutor's feedback for not supporting their claims with evidence. But in some cases, the language specialists felt that the evidence was present in the essay, but not presented appropriately. This can be related to a students' use of modals. The impression that a student is making unsupported claims can be exacerbated by the fact that many students seem to have problems citing the course materials following the University's referencing conventions (another problem that students often have). An example of this can be seen in the following extract:

- The other negative to come out from this finding is that, if interaction with a child is not met and the vital positive foundations not laid, this *will* affect children and the chances are they *will* group up with low self-esteem along with the mental health issues mentioned earlier and counselling *will* be required at some stage in their early life, chances are it *will* be in school. (K578 03)

Here the student uses the very certain modal 'will' instead of a more tentative modal like 'could'. The tutor remarks that the student 'needs to look for a source to back up that conclusion'. This suggests that the modal 'will' could have been an appropriate choice if the student had supplied the evidence to support the strong claims made. This is similar in the following example, where the relatively certain modal 'would' is used, and the student is criticised for not making any references to course materials.



Using a more tentative modal like ‘may’ and providing an example would much improve this student’s argument:

- There was strong evidence that attachment and bonding were the two most important aspects in child development and without the two the chances were that the child *would* produce mental health issues in later life being behaviour issues or suffer from low self esteem.

Finally, modals can be used to make suggestions or arguments instead of posing rhetorical questions. Many lower-scoring texts feature rhetorical questions, a stylistic feature that is often not considered appropriate in academic writing. For example:

- ...Is this because the drug users no longer use the youth club or is it because the children have had their point of view listened to? (KS7 TMA 01)

This point could be rephrased more appropriately as a statement with modals, as follows:

- ➔ ...This *may* be because drug users no longer use the youth club, but it *may* also be because the children had their point of view listened to.

Similarly, this student’s conclusion could be more successfully and persuasively argued by turning the question into a modalised statement:

- Development theories may have some place in practice, but how can there be a clear actual definition of normal development in such a diverse world? (KS3 TMA 03, final sentence of the conclusion)
- ➔ Development theories may have a place in practice, but no one theory *can* adequately define child development in such a diverse world.

The final example shows how a student used rhetorical questions in her introduction to an essay, when her arguments could have been more effectively and powerfully made with modalised statements.

- Why should we listen to children is a question we have to ask in order to ensure that children’s rights and care are protected along with being at the fore front of any work we do with children. Along with the question of why we should also comes the question of how should we listen to children? How do we protect them as citizens in their own right? (K778 TMA 01)
- ➔ This essay *will* argue that we *should* listen to children in any work we do with children in order to ensure that children’s rights and care are protected. It *will* explore and *will* argue that we *should* protect children as citizens in their own right.

Pedagogical suggestions:

In all of the TMAs analysed, not one tutor made any comments about a student’s use of modals, nor was it ever brought up by the subject specialist in the Intervention group. However, the language specialists noted that use of modals does seem to have an impact on a student’s marks. Perhaps this means that tutors should be sensitised to the importance of modals in writing assignments and be trained to identify students who need support in learning how to appropriately use modals in academic assignments.



9.3 Clause structure in K204 TMAs: joining clauses and run-on sentences, CB

Clause structure plays an important part in creating meaning and connecting ideas. In the MASUS, clause structure is categorised under category D, *Grammatical correctness*, 'clause structure follows recognisable and appropriate patterns of English'. This brief investigation explores whether there is a correlation between students' marks and their ability to form grammatically correct clauses in the TMAs of K204 students. It then goes on to determine the point at which a student start losing marks for lack of structure at clause level.

In the K204 marking criteria it is clearly stated that if communication is impaired, a students will lose marks on an assignment. According to the K204 Assessment Guide, the marking criteria 'Style of presentation'

covers a large number of factors which affect the communication of ideas. [...] It refers to use of language, the provision of references for quotations, appropriate subheadings, even punctuation and spelling. Your tutor will not rate this particular aspect of your work too stringently. They will draw your attention to any shortcomings you may have in this area, but *you will not be penalised seriously unless your ability to communicate your ideas is affected.* (p.33, italics added)

A student's ability to effectively communicate ideas tends to be reflected in the number of tutor comments on language to be found on the script (see KS6 TMAs 01 and 03). While fewer run-on sentences were identified in the Comparison group than in the Intervention group, most of the K204 TMAs analysed, regardless of their score, contained some examples of run-on sentences or errors in joining clauses. The determining factor for students' marks was how far this affected meaning. The presence of run-ons (clauses joined in a grammatically incorrect way) did not necessarily have a negative impact on student's marks. If a student only had a few errors in joining clauses or a few run-on sentences, there was no tutor comment and no apparent loss of marks. However, if sentences were generally unclear or marked 'muddled' by their tutor, the student lost marks. Therefore, the ability to join sentences correctly and coherently seems to have an impact on a student's marks. This was apparent in the work of one student in the Intervention group (KS6). She wrote unclear sentences at the beginning of the course and received low marks and lots of language feedback from her tutor. She then received extra writing support. As a result of more attention paid to sentence construction, her sentences became clearer in later TMAs and her marks increased.

The recurrence of run-on sentences in the K204 scripts analysed suggests that many students are not really proficient in connecting their ideas at sentence level. There were only a few exceptions to this in the sample. The following lists examples of good practice in joining clauses from students' TMAs:

- *Despite* my wishes to remain at my local school, I was told the decision had already been made. *Although* my parents thought they were looking after my best interests for a good education at a high performing school, I was never really accepted by X. (KS4 TMA 01, italics added)
- He felt that children were born with the ability to adapt and learn from their environment, unlike behaviourists who felt children had to be taught everything. (KS2 TMA 03)

In the first example, the student effectively uses dependent clauses that start with the prepositions 'despite' and 'although' to join clauses. The second sentence contains a good use of 'unlike' to join clauses and show different perspectives in the field.



These examples of good practice can be compared with the sentences below, which were marked by tutors as being ‘muddled’ or unclear sentences:

- Then again not all countries have the opportunity to policies in place as such quality protects countries in non- westernise countries may not even have a welfare system for children and families to access. Which means that children quality of life can be affected more then children that have systems in place that enhance their quality of life. (KS6 TMA 01)
- Article 12 has been a major breakthrough for children in care its given them a chance to have their say and have their views respected as long its in the child’s best interest and if it doesn’t place the child in any undue danger. (KS7 TMA 01)
- However, this is not in all cases, low earnings or poor family will need support from service provider in the area of housing known as council flat which is subsidized, accessible schools, free education and free travel as it is currently in the UK which was introduced about two years ago, child day care or nursery where the children can mix with other children of their age group and play while learning at the same time. (K930 TMA01)
- We listen to children because it acknowledges their right to be listened to and for their view and experience to be taken seriously about matters that affect them of the difference listening can make to our understanding of children priorities, interest and concern of the difference listening it can make to our understanding of how children feel about themselves.” (K039 TMA 01)

It is interesting to note that, although problems in joining sentences were apparent in both groups, fewer run-on sentences were identified in the Comparison group than in the Intervention group (apart from K778 TMA03). A possible explanation for this might be that some of these students from ethnic minorities have learnt English as an additional language. They may therefore be making a more conscious effort to write in English, might be more aware of grammatical conventions, and also perhaps more aware of differences between spoken and written English – but this is only conjecture. The following attempts to explain why difficulties in joining clauses might frequently occur in students’ texts.

i. Problems understanding course materials

The first explanation might be that use of language at clause level may reflect the students’ understanding of the course materials and their ability to critically review course concepts. In the example below, the sentence structure becomes less clear when students attempt to mention some of the course concepts. Note also the number of run-on sentences and fragments and unclear use of ‘they’. This suggests that KS3 is struggling to understand and explain the content:

- The first stage is known as sensori-motor thought and occurs from 0-2 years, a child’s cognitive thinking at this stage is limited to their senses and movement (such as grabbing a rattle), Piaget believed these were instinctive. Stage 2, pre-operational thought (2-7 yrs), the child is able to use their imagination and intuition. Stage 3, concrete operational thought (7-11 yrs), is the ability to think logically and finally formal operational thought, the ability to hypothesise, which occurs from age 11 and on into adulthood (Stainton Rogers in Reader p. 203-206). (KS3 TMA 03)

This part of the course materials, which explains Piaget’s theory of child development, seems particularly difficult for students to explain, as this additional example shows:



- [...] children [...] have four cognitive developmental stages which transform how children think. Sensori-motor thought (birth-2years), pre-operational thought (2-7years), concrete operational thought (7-11 years) and formal operational thought (11-adulthood). (K897 TMA 03)

ii. Being in a rush

Also in the following example, there are long, unclear sentences:

- And lastly there is a problem of how and when to intervene it is expected that practitioners should when to intervene to safeguard a child from harm but in practice this is really difficult for most workers because a lot risk that children are expose are out of sight which means there might be a late intervention in some cases especially cases that results in the death of the child or the child being severely harm. (K251 TMA 05)

The sentences and ideas in this students' TMA 05 are much less clear than in this student's TMA03. One cannot know whether the student has more difficulty understanding and expressing the relevant course materials and ideas for this essay, or whether the student has simply not managed her time wisely in writing this assignment. At least the 'stream of consciousness' impression of the text suggests that the student was rushed in writing it. Other indications that the TMA was written in a rush include that it is short (1625 words instead of 2000), some references are missing and whole parts of it are copied from course materials.

Another example of a text that seems to have been written in a rush is the following, which is a long slew of run-on sentences. This paragraph comes at the end of the essay and suggests a rush to finish it:

- This brings me round to the nature/ nurture debate is intelligence a matter of genetics (nature) are you born intelligent or is it down to life experiences and education (nurture). Is development a natural process does it just happen or is development down to experience or is it a combination of the two this is called the interactional theory. Is character, personality, intelligence and sexuality a result of genetics are these qualities in bred or are they a result of life's experiences do we learn from the environment within which we live or are we born the person which we are and cannot change. ... (KS7, TMA 03)

This paragraph also suggests that the student is struggling with content (particularly their understanding of interactional theory) and a problem shifting from spoken to written language.

iii. Unfamiliarity with difference between spoken and written language

The fact that most students seem to use some run-on sentences could indicate a problem moving from spoken to written language. According to Butt *et al* (2001):

- Knowing how to recombine the rambling chains of independent clauses in spoken language into the more crafted clause combinations of written language is essential for students developing skills in English literacy. (p.177)

The following sentences are run-ons, but there were no tutor comments about them. One can therefore presume that the meaning of the sentences is clear, i.e. not 'muddled'. However, the extracts are reminiscent of spoken language, and could have been commented on by the tutor to help the student improve.



- Children frequently complain that they are not listened to, indeed that was my own experience I often heard the phrase ‘children should be seen and not heard’. (KS3 TMA 01).
- [...] of all the policies put in place it was felt by children that the most important one was safety basically every child matters was a reworking of The Children Act 1989. (KS7 TMA 05)

Similarly, one can see that the following extracts, in which the word ‘and’ is repeated several times, are reminiscent of spoken language. Butt et al (2001) argue that “in spoken language English speakers are more likely to link chains of independent clauses together using the conjunctions *and*, *then*, *so* and *but*” (p. 175). These students would profit from feedback on how to join sentences and use more cohesive devices.

- By the age of two a child will have their first proper abstract thoughts; the child at this age will become able to use mental imagery *and* will also develop language skills *and* will be able to use imaginative play *and* also have the ability to remember things long after the event has occurred. (KS7 TMA 03, italics added)
- Also from my experience on working with children from a foster carers point of view we have found that children who have been in care are more likely to place their own children within the care system *and* they are also more likely to suffer from substance misuse *and* are more likely to serve a term of imprisonment *and* have early and unplanned births this was also quoted by (Jones et al 2005) on page 6 of the course book topic 16. (KS7 TMA 05, italics added).

iv. Problems relating course concepts to personal experience

Errors in joining clauses or run-on sentences seem to occur when students are reflecting on their personal experience and relating it to course concepts. Examples of this can be seen below:

- From experience of working with children and having to observe, monitor and complete assessments on their development children have allocated milestones to achieve at set ages. (KS6 TMA 03).
- Has a childcare worker that works within a residential setting, there is a high turn over of childcare workers due to shifts that workers do. (KS6 TMA 03).

In the following, further common errors that were found in the K204 TMAs analysed are listed, followed by examples.

v. Incorrect use of ‘by + – ing’:

The family unit has been the focal point of services that have not always recognised that children may have different needs to adults and that *by addressing* the families needs, may not always directly benefit the child. (KS3 TMA01)

- *By listening* to children it will greatly improve their quality of life and give the child a greater sense of autonomy. (KS7 TMA 01)

vi. The use of ‘due to’

The phrase ‘due to’ is followed by a noun group. Examples of good practice in the use of ‘due to’ include:



- Some children need to spend periods in hospital due to illness
- ...due to their work commitments... (KS3 TMA05)

Examples of poor practice include the following, which also contains a run-on sentence. In the feedback, the tutor recommended that the student start a “new sentence” and commented on the student’s use of ‘due to’:

- Freud describes this part of the personality as “animal nature, selfish, savage, irrational and uncivilized” (Stainton Rogers, in the reader, p.208.), initially he says that babies display this aspect of personality, due to they are demanding until they adjust to a routine in which they start to comply. (KS6 TMA 03)

This sentence also contains a problem with the use of ‘due to’, uses ‘that’ instead of ‘than’, is a run-on sentence and contains errors in punctuation:

- Thomas also touches on the issue surrounding children who due to disability, find it difficult to express their views or make decisions, however Thomas suggests that children are often more sophisticated and diplomatic than adults give them credit for.” (KS4 TMA 01)

Conclusion

This analysis shows that clause structure may have an effect on student attainment. It shows that the students need help with academic writing, to enable them to transfer from spoken to written language and to connect their ideas both at sentence and text level. Finally, it would be interesting to study whether there is a link between difficulties in writing and student retention, both short term on the course and long term.

Useful websites:

For explanations and exercises on run-on sentences see the Bristol University tutorial:

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/page_77.htm

For help with joining sentences, see <http://webster.commnet.edu/sensen/>

9.4 A report on the use of the passive voice and enablement verbs by T175 students, DH

An analysis of student texts in T175 reveals that students are required to produce several different text types and several different styles of writing to succeed in the course. In this course it may be students’ ability to adapt their style to the needs of the task that relates to attainment.

In an attempt to explore this hypothesis, this brief report investigates how students answer two questions from TMA 01 from the T175 course. The first is Q1 (sections a and b), where the students are asked to describe how they will plan their study time and how they will overcome any difficulties arising from their personal circumstances. The second is Q3b where they have to use notes that they have made from an article to write a summary of the benefits of the Ndiyo system, as well as its limitations and constraints.



These two questions were chosen because they require different written registers, the first being less formal in nature than the second. As well as contrasting in register, the questions also have something in common: they require the students to explain, among other things, an enabling element. In the first, they need to show how their planning will help them with their studies; in the second, they need to discuss, among other things, how the Ndiyo system helps its users. Conveniently for comparison purposes, the word-length requirements for answers to the two questions are the same (200 words).

The first linguistic feature analysed is the passive voice, which is often associated with a more formal academic style. The reasons it is often used in this genre are, firstly, that it allows the acted-upon rather than the agent to be the focus of a sentence and, secondly, that it is a useful tool in managing information flow. One could hypothesize that its use would be more prevalent in answering Q3b than in answering Q1.

The second feature focused on is the 'enablement' verbs - 'be able to', 'enable', 'let', 'help' and 'allow' along with the modals 'can' and 'could' (Polias 2006, p138). One could speculate that 'be able to' and the modals will appear more frequently in Q1 and the others more often in Q3b. This is not just a matter of which 'sound' more or less formal. 'Let', 'enable', 'help' and 'allow' are verbs which may be used in the structure '(the feature) enables (the user)(to) do something' or '(the feature) enables (something) to be done'. If one were to attempt to convey the same meaning with the modals or 'be able to', one would have to say '(the user) can/is able to do something with (the feature)'. Rather like the use of the active and passive voices, either the agent or the feature is foregrounded, depending on which one chooses. One could hypothesise, therefore, that the focus in Q1 is on the agent ('I') while in Q3b it is on the features of the system. This should be reflected in the distribution of the above verbs and modals. Needless to say, the fact that I have chosen these particular features does not preclude the fact that 'enablement' can be expressed in other ways.

In terms of the main criteria for the MASUS, these features link most closely to C 'control of academic writing style', although, in light of the nature of the T175 assignments, this could be relabelled as 'control of appropriate writing style'. It also relates to D ('grammatical correctness') as students need to have structural command of relevant features.

Total figures for the use of the passive and the 'enablement' verbs by the research subjects does indeed show that the two questions attract contrasting use of these features:

Features	Question 1	Question 3b
Use of the passive voice	2	10
Use of 'be able to'/'can'	8	2
Use of 'enable'/'allow' etc.	1	12

It is interesting at this point to see if these features arise in the course material that pertains to these questions. In fact, none of them appear in the questions themselves or the guidance notes that accompany them. However, they do occur in the article on which Q3b is based. Although the vast majority of finite verbs are in the active voice, unsurprisingly, when the focus is on the equipment rather than the agent that constructs it, the passive voice appears e.g. 'Fraser wanted to build a widget,



something so small and elegant *it could be made* in millions..’, ‘..one that *has been framed* in wood and *is used* simply..’. In addition, enablement verbs are also utilised e.g. ‘..extremely useful protocol *lets* you see..’, ‘..to *allow* remote troubleshooting.’ So, the use of these constructions could encourage the students, subconsciously at least, to use them in their own summaries of Q3b.

In order to investigate whether students’ success in assignments is linked to their ability to switch between registers, we need, of course, to look into the distribution of these figures among the individuals. However, before doing this, it is useful look at their TMA and MASUS scores for this assignment:

TMA 01	Crit A	Crit B	Crit C	Crit D	Crit E	MASUS SCORE	MASUS SCORE -A	TMA MARK
TS1	2.5	2	2	2	2	2.1	2	68
TS2	3	3.5	4	4	3.5	3.7	3.75	69
TS3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	91
TS4	3	2	2	2.5	4	2.5	2.88	57
TS5	3.5	4	4	4	4	3.9	4	67
TS6	2	2	2	1.5	3	2.1	2.13	42

We can see from the above that the students fall into two clear categories when it comes to criteria C and D: Ss 2,3 and 5 all score maximum points while Ss 1, 4 and 6 fail to obtain anything higher than 2.5 for these criteria. The first three students also, along with TS1, obtained the highest TMA marks. TS2 and TS5 obtained lower scores than they did with subsequent TMAs primarily because they failed to supply some relevant information in a couple of their answers.

Looking at the distribution of target features among these two groups reveals the following results:

Ss 2, 3 and 5

Features	Question 1	Question 3b
The passive voice	2	4
Use of ‘be able to’, ‘can’	4	2
Use of ‘enable’, ‘allow’ etc.	-	7

Ss 1, 4 and 6

Features	Question 1	Question 3b
The passive voice	-	4 +(2)
Use of ‘be able to’, ‘can’	4	-



Use of 'enable', 'allow' etc.	1	3 + (2)
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(..) signifies a usage where there is a grammatical mistake related to the target feature.

As can be seen, the general trend amongst both groups is as expected. The high scorers for criteria C and D use the target features slightly more frequently while there are a number of structural inaccuracies in the realisation of the forms among the second group.

TS1 (TMA mark 68; MASUS total 2.1: C 2; D 2)

TS1 is a frequent user of the target features, using them 7 times (a raw score only surpassed by the top marker TS3). In Q1, he says:

'..I *would be able* to fit in my studies...'

'..I *might not always be able* to stick to the plan...'

'..I not always *will be able* to follow the plan...'

It's interesting to note how TS1 gets the construction wrong in the third example and yet is accurate with his first two. This suggests that part of his problem may lie with his concentration levels as much as it may with his linguistic limitations.

In answering question 3b, he uses the passive voice:

'..a Nivo box, the size of a cigarette packet, *was created to be connected* to a main computer...'

He also uses enablement verbs:

'..a network which *enables* to use one computer to see...'

'.. a useful protocol that *enables* to see and operate the screen...'

'..and *helped* him in the final realisation of the project.'

TS1 uses the passive successfully in a verb complex. With 'enable', he fails to provide the necessary direct object that the verb demands.

In summary, TS1 seems to be aware of when to use particular constructions but often realises them inaccurately.

TS2 (TMA mark 69; MASUS 3.75; C 4; D 4)

In Q1, TS2 uses the construction 'be able to':

'..I *am also able* to work lunch hours'

'.. I *will be able* to allocate the necessary time to my studies.'

Most of his main clauses have 'I' as the main subject and are, of course, active. However, he also uses the passive on one occasion - ..this has already proved useful when additional time *is required* to address my studies...'

In Q3b, he uses the passive voice and enablement verbs:



'The Ndiyo system *is based* on the principle of thin client technology.'

'..to *enable* someone to use an interactive computer desktop...'

'..to *enable* the system to function.'

He also uses the modal 'can':

'One PC acting as a Ndiyo server *can* service about half a dozen users.'

To summarise, TS2 uses the passive and enablement verbs infrequently but without any problem. His use of the passive in Q1 sounds perfectly apt.

TS3 (TMA mark 91; MASUS 4; C 4; D 4)

In answering Question 1, the student uses active constructions throughout. She uses lexis appropriate to the informal nature of this question e.g. '..flop in front of the television' '..I intend to get away for a couple of weekends'. 'Be able to' is used on a couple of occasions:

'..so that I *can* enjoy my breaks.'

'I *am* therefore *able to* keep track...'

In Q3b, she uses the passive voice:

'..and *being connected* directly to a computer.'

'..several terminals *can be run* from one mobile link...'

She also uses enablement verbs:

'The Ndiyo system *enables* one computer *to be shared*.' (combined with passive)

'The latter contains a chip which *enables* connection to the Ndiyo system.'

'..which *allows* remote troubleshooting.'

'..it can also *enable* commercial ventures *to be set up*..' (combined with passive)

As was seen above, she also uses the modal 'can':

'..as several terminals *can* be run...'

'..it *can* also enable...'

It is perhaps significant that TS3, the top scorer in this TMA, is a frequent and accurate user of enablement verbs, including using them twice in passive verb complex constructions.

TS4 (TMA mark 57; MASUS 2.5; C 2; D 2.5)

The student uses active constructions throughout in answer to Q1. He does use an enablement verb:

'..lunch breaks at work *help* aid my overall study each week.'

He also uses a modal:

'I *could* make way for more study time...'

However, the last example is indicative of awkward phrasing. It's interesting to note that his lexical choices sometimes suggest that he is attempting an academic style e.g. 'I am *partaking* in shift work.'



In his answers to Q3b, TS4 uses the passive and enablement verbs:

'..has led him to the Nivo chip *being sold* by Samsung...'

'..Camvine which *has been set up* to fund...'

'The future success of the Nivo box *is continually achieved* by Stafford-Frasor...'

'The benefits for the consumer *are seen* as good for the consumer in terms of value for money and being more energy efficient.'

'..a free and useful protocol that *allowed* users to view and engage on the screen of...'

'..to *help* fund these chips.'

Although he is not afraid to use the passive voice, TS4 has some problems with constructions. This can be seen in his use of verb complexes and in the present continuous form of the passive voice. In fact, TS4 is one of those students who would probably benefit from simplifying his language rather than attempting an academic style which is often beyond him.

TS5 (TMA mark 67; MASUS 4; C 4; D 4)

TS5 uses both the modal 'can' and 'be able to' in answering Q1:

'..I *can* comfortably make up the time...'

..when I *am unable to* study...'

He also uses a passive:

'My study time *will be transposed* to the evenings and weekends.'

It's interesting to note here that TS5's use of the passive sounds stilted compared to its active equivalent 'I will move my study time to the evenings and weekends'. Also his choice of 'transposed' may be due to the impulse to sound academic.

The use of the passive and an enablement verb can be found in TS5's answer to Q3b:

'..little hardware *is required* compared to conventional networks...'

..a system that *allows* many monitors that contain custom processes to access and manipulate data...'

The fact that TS5 only uses an enablement verb once may reflect his tutor's feedback that he needed to say more in his answer about the benefits of the system. TS5 also tends to prefer the active e.g. 'The server *sends* the video out back to the Nivo box which *displays* the output...'. His grammatical accuracy at sentence level is very good.

TS6 (TMA mark 42; MASUS 2.1; C 2; D 1.5)

As can be seen from her scores, TS6 has the most difficulties of the group in this assignment. It seems significant that she uses no enablement verbs in either Q1 or Q3b. She uses the active voice throughout her answer to the first question and uses one passive in her answer to the second:

'..it *could be made* in millions as a single chip...'



Although her answers are peppered with problems in terms of lexis and grammar as well as in terms of the macro-level organization of her ideas, it is interesting to note that this investigation seems to indicate that her problems are revealed as much by what isn't there as what is.

Conclusion

The students seem to be aware that different registers demand different lexis and constructions. However, the realisation of those structures causes difficulties for some students (see TS1 and TS4). More significantly, the academically weakest student doesn't use any of the features focussed on here while the highest scoring student is also the most frequent user of them. However, it is too easy to fall into the trap of equating such features to successful writing. TS5, for example, does not use them often, yet is a generally effective writer.

We need to be aware that our students, certainly on courses like T175, are asked to write in a number of styles, not just the one that is associated with a traditional discursive essay. It is interesting, for instance, to see how the passive voice is used twice among the more 'able' group. Its use by TS5 sounds stilted, as does the accompanying lexical verb. TS4 also uses an oddly formal verb in answering Q1 (see above). This phenomenon is present throughout the students' writing that I have read for this project and indicates that they are in as much danger of over-reaching themselves in the search for an academic style as they are of sounding too 'chatty' in what they write.

9.5 Investigation into the use of cohesive devices by TS2 in TMA 04, CH

This brief investigation seeks to identify when and how cohesive devices have been used (or not used) in TMA 04 by two T175 students. It first defines what is understood by cohesive devices. It then analyses TMA 04 in detail to identify where such devices could reasonably be expected to be used by students in their answers. Following that, it looks at two student TMAs - one highly marked and one less highly marked. Finally the investigation attempts to explore what can be learnt about effective (i.e. highly marked) student writing from this analysis.

Cohesive devices can be described as the linguistic devices needed for logical coherent discourse – or “those surface structure features of ... a text which link different parts of sentences or larger units of discourse, e.g. the cross referencing function of pronouns, articles and some types of adverbs” (Crystal 1997). The forms of cohesive devices expected to be found in T175 texts were deictic words which “refer backwards or forwards in discourse (anaphora and cataphora) sometimes known as discourse deixis” (Crystal 1997). Examples of this include *that*, *the following*, *the former* and the use of the definite article. The arrangement of clauses within sentences and of sentences within a piece of continuous writing was also noted.

The use of cohesive devices is an important part of successful academic writing. Cohesive devices are listed in the MASUS framework in category B, *Structure and development of text*, under the rubric of ‘information flow in the argument is linked and connected’.

For the analysis of T175 TMA 04, the MASUS was adapted to be applied to short stretches of continuous writing that were given in response to the four fragmented questions in the assignment (which are further sub-divided into twelve sections in total). The T175 Assignment Guide states that “answers will be marked on structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation” as well as content. The following



investigation attempts to uncover whether the cohesive devices under scrutiny are an essential factor in the achievement of this “structure”. In order to do this, areas in the text where cohesive devices were likely to be necessary were identified and the likely linguistic forms which might be needed to provide ‘cohesiveness’ to a response to this question were listed in Table 37 below.

Table 37: An analysis of the requirements of the TMA04 in terms of logical coherence

Question 1	The need (or not) for cohesive devices	Likely linguistic manifestations of this requirement
(a) Choose three reasons	NOT explicitly needed. Numbering would do.	n/a
(b) Write a set of notes on the benefits and drawbacks ... under the following headings	Essentially requires a set of structured notes. This structure, if followed by the student, means cohesive devices are not required. However the Q also asks Ss to ‘include ... notes on why mobile telephony could be a more effective...’	<i>mobile telephony could be a more effective ... because ...</i>
(c) Give one potential benefit ... giving example(s) to illustrate	YES. Need to link the benefit with the example in a logical way, i.e. the high level with the low level.	<i>One benefit is... An example of this is ...</i>
(d) Explain why telemedicine could have particular benefits. Give reasons why this potential has not yet been achieved.	YES. Essential to structure (and so communicate) the argument	<i>Telemedicine could offer X benefits in developing countries because . . . But these potential benefits have not yet been achieved . . . firstly because. . .and secondly because . . .</i>
Question 2		
(a) Using a table ... show ... indicates ... show... Explain your reasoning.	Use of a table is likely to avoid requirement for cohesive devices. But what about the explanation?	
(b) Explain why ... justify...	YES. Essential to explain and support argument.	<i>The Galileo system is expected to give more precise positioning information ... This will make it more useful... because ... This view is supported by... and by</i>
(c) Explain ... how... could be used	MAYBE. Could require just a list but the use of the modal ‘could’ implies for some kind of argument.	
Question 3		



(a) Explain the topic... cover (three things)	Probably YES because of need to distinguish three different kinds of things. Also it is difficult to demonstrate awareness of ethical, social and/or political concerns in a simple list.	
(b) Demonstrate your reflection	YES Needed to structure reflection and give it 'depth'	
(c) Write a critical analysis	Maybe NO since PROMPT offers five headings to give structure.	
Question 4		
(a) Formal response to task as posted on tutor-group conference	???? Not sure the exact linguistic form that tutor- set task would take. Ask Zoe.	
(b) Compare ... Discuss ... strengths & weaknesses in terms of (1), (2) and (3)	Could be answered as a table but would such an answer be penalised? As a piece of continuous prose definitely needs cohesive devices.	
(c) Mention any other features	NO. Could be a list	n/a
(d) Recommend ... picking out main factors	YES. Statement has to be supported	<i>I would recommend X firstly because... and secondly because... For me the clinching factor was</i>

After areas in the text where cohesive devices were likely to be necessary were identified – as well as the likely manifestations of this requirement – an analysis was carried out of the use of cohesive devices in a highly marked and a lowly marked TMA.

Tables 38 and 39 examine in detail the use of cohesive devices in these two students' TMAs, including tutor comments and some commentary from the researcher. Cohesive devices are emboldened.

Table 38: Answer from a higher achieving TMA

Question 1	General tutor comments: Q.1 Excellent answers! Well done.	
(e) Choose three reasons	(a) Three reasons for the rapid increase in the use of mobile telephony include: The technology is relatively inexpensive – especially when usage can be via shared cell phone services such as Village Phone in Uganda and Rwanda or Smile in South Africa, where prepaid airtime is sold by the second. Other telecommunications infrastructure is poor or non-	



	<p>existent – for instance Village Phone antenna can pick up cellular signals from 25 kilometres away whereas landline access for some areas is very limited</p> <p>Other forms of information, such as internet, is not always beneficial – particularly in areas of low literacy levels amongst the population. .</p>
Tutor comments:	Good
Researcher comments:	The answer follows the identified requirements in that the three reasons are not linguistically linked and could be in any order. However the S does build two of his reasons on a comparison with other technologies – requiring use of cohesive devices such as ‘other’ and ‘whereas’ and he introduces the list of three in a way which links the answer to the question asked.
(f) Write a set of notes on the benefits and drawbacks ... under the following headings	<p>(b) Notes on the benefits & drawbacks of developing a mobile-telephony-based medical information service in Africa:-</p> <p><u>Access: availability</u></p> <p>Benefits:</p> <p>Wireless and mobile technology is not dependant on large scale telecoms infrastructure, so deployment and reach is easier.</p> <p>There is wider availability and access to mobile phones, especially via independently run shared cell phone services.</p> <p>Majority of the population have access to a mobile phone rather than a landline.</p> <p>Drawbacks:</p> <p>Access is still relatively limited compared to the population levels involved.</p> <p>Availability of adequate reliable power sources can also prove to be a problem.</p> <p><u>Access: skills</u></p> <p>Benefits:</p> <p>In terms of literacy, a mobile phone based information service is more practical in areas where literacy is low.</p> <p>There is little skill required in operating a mobile handset.</p> <p>Drawbacks:</p> <p>Due to the nature of the equipment, there is a practical limit as to the amount of information that can be imparted via a mobile phone.</p>



	<p><u>Access: cost</u></p> <p>Benefits:</p> <p>Relatively cheap call costs, especially via shared services, means low call costs for users.</p> <p>Cheaper for governments as conventional telemedicine technology is invariably beyond their budget.</p> <p>Drawbacks:</p> <p>Expensive outlay for handsets puts outright ownership beyond the reach of the majority of the population.</p>
<p>Tutor comments:</p>	<p>Tutor adds one of two pieces of information S has missed.</p>
<p>Researcher comments:</p>	<p>Essentially requires a table. So NO cohesive devices required. S answer supports this analysis. However some cohesive devices are used. Note also use of comparative adjectives (wider, cheaper & easier) as a cohesive device. This makes sense in that, behind the requirements for a 'set of notes' is the meaning making requirement to compare and contrast.</p>
<p>(c) Give one potential benefit ... giving example(s) to illustrate</p>	<p>One potential benefit for users who opt to use PC-based internet access to health information is one of having a more permanent record of the information obtained. Whereas not all the information received in a mobile phone call may be remembered, when using a PC-based service the user would have the opportunity to print out all the records or results of searches that had been made. Invariably the wealth of information received from the internet means that the user would then have the ability to review the output at his or her leisure</p>
<p>Researcher comments:</p>	<p>YES. Need to link the benefit with the example in a logical way i.e. the high level with the low level.</p> <p>This S follows the question requirement to give one benefit which is then followed up by two sentences which expand on sentence 1. These are not exactly 'examples' but they serve the required purpose. The most essential structuring device here is word order - the argument would not happen if the sentences were in any other order. Cohesive devices sentence 1 'more' & sentence 2 'whereas' & 'when' build on the implied comparison between two technologies. 'Then' in Sentence 3 links with Sentence 2 and emphasises the chronological order. NB The S has expressed sentence 3 very badly but, interestingly, this does not seem to detract from the overall cohesion of the answer.</p>
<p>(g) Explain why telemedicine could have particular benefits. Give reasons why this</p>	<p>Telemedicine could provide benefits in developing countries in many ways. One of the major advantages is that of patient /doctor locations. Often it is not ideal, too costly, or time consuming to move patients to a medical centre or hospital. Particularly, where the transport system is poor and the medical infrastructure required to move patients to hospitals is virtually</p>



<p>potential has not yet been achieved.</p>	<p>nonexistent, telemedicine can provide a means for providing medical advice and skills without a doctor needing to be present.</p> <p>This can be simply a case of accessing information about non-serious conditions or, in more serious or complicated cases this, can even extend to remote monitoring of conditions or the transfer of images, via digital cameras, and sound files, via transducers and amplifiers, that can relay vital visual and aural information back to remote specialists. Webcams can also provide the ability to have a “face to face” consultation with a doctor, or for a doctor to dictate the correct positioning and use of medical equipment.</p> <p>The reasons why this particular form of telemedicine has not yet been achieved in Africa include cost, which limits the availability of broadband, or even dial up, access to all but a very small percentage of the population, and the level of literacy and necessary skill set to understand and use PC's and the internet within the population in general.</p>
<p>Researcher comments:</p>	<p><i>YES. Cohesion is essential to structure (and so communicate) the argument</i></p> <p><i>S answer follows the question faithfully including repetition of word ‘could’ and ‘has not yet’ and ‘this’ as a cohesive device to link the two parts of the answer. NB Note again unclear expression - ‘this potential’ in the question is substituted by ‘this particular form of telemedicine’</i></p>
<p>Question 2</p>	
<p>(a)Using a table show ... indicates ... show...Explain your reasoning.</p>	<p>S provides table.</p>
<p>Tutor comments</p>	<p>A good table here. Well done! And a strong discussion of Galileo with a good use of quotes. (Followed by correction of referencing).</p>
<p>Researcher comments:</p>	<p>Use of a table is likely to avoid requirement for cohesive devices. But what about the explanation?</p>
<p>(b)Explain why...justify...</p>	<p>(b) The use of Galileo rather than the GPS network of satellites is more beneficial to national road charging schemes due to its increased level of accuracy. GPS, being fundamentally a military application, is prone to inaccuracy due to the complicated timing adjustments required to pin point an exact location. Transport for London, for instance “rejected GPS technology for the city's congestion charging scheme after concluding that it had a margin of error of up to 50 metres”¹</p> <p><i>(missed potential for a cohesive device here)</i> Using information from either 3 satellites, or even 4 satellites, to provide an accurate location, therefore, may not be enough to provide the level of accuracy required for road charging.</p>



	<p>Tracking software may correct these inaccuracies, but their assumptions may be wrong and place the vehicle in a nearby, but incorrect road. If the correct road and the incorrect road have varying charges then the vehicle may be incorrectly charged. IBM, however, states that “on an open road, it can get the margin of error down to 10m.”²</p> <p>Galileo, on the other hand, may use 10-12 satellites to pin point the position of the vehicle and therefore provide a much more accurate location. This obviously benefits road charging models and even gives the government the capability to “potentially form the basis for general “pay-as-you-go” road pricing proposed for the UK as a replacement for road tax and petrol duty.”³</p> <p>Other potential charging applications could be according to distance travelled or “you might want to vary the charge according to speed, or whether someone is travelling through a city centre,” Hans-Peter Marchlewski, general counsellor for the Galileo Joint Undertaking”⁴</p>
Researcher comments	Cohesive devices marked in bold .
(c) Explain . . . how . . . could be used	<p>(c) DSRC networks could be used to improve vehicle safety on the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localised adverse road conditions could be shared between vehicles included in the network. These could be used to display or alert drivers to conditions that they are about to encounter. • Traffic accidents and queues could be detected and broadcast to local vehicles. This would give the drivers time to reduce their speed accordingly or find alternative routes. • Excessive braking behaviour in the form of emergency stops could be pin pointed accurately and drivers liable to be affected could take evasive action in good time.
Tutor comments:	A small point, but it would have read better here if you hadn’t written this using bullet points
Researcher comments:	Cohesive devices are used within each bullet point but not across the whole answer. However the answer coheres to the question.
Question 3	
(a) Explain the topic... cover (three things)	NOT ATTEMPTED
(b) Demonstrate your	NOT ATTEMPTED



reflection	
(c)Write a critical analysis	NOT ATTEMPTED
Question 4	
(a)Formal response to task as posted on tutor-group conference	<p>(a) Copy of message posted to forum: Saturday, July 26, 2008 7:30 PM +0100 From: Daniel Beacock Subject: Evaluation of www.surgerydoor.co.uk</p> <p>To: T175 zd24 tutorial bk4 From: Daniel BeacocTop of FormThis is an evaluation of the website www.surgerydoor.co.uk for the ailment of migraine.</p> <p>Evaluation and findings</p> <p>In terms of content, the immediate impact from the site is one of sponsorship! The top and right hand side banners are both dominated by adverts which scroll or change continuously. Not being a great fan of that form of advertising, although I guess it is a necessary evil, this was an immediate put off. However, the obvious appearance of the search facility at the top left of the screen, meaning that scrolling any lower to find it was not necessary, is a welcome addition. Also there are other forms of narrowing down searches including drop down boxes for age and sex related health via the "Your Surgery Door" option, plus "Living with" giving common serious and not so serious ailments. I'm sure this is useful for getting directly to the user's needs.</p> <p>On the left hand side of the screen the usability was also enhanced again with links to common issues of healthy living, travel health, NHS details and even complimentary medicine.</p> <p>On entering the word "Migraine" in the search box, I was presented with a listing of links under certain headings. The top one was again a sponsored listing from a well known pain killer product, Nurofen. Other headings included "Diseases in Depth" with details of migraine, home healthcare and also news stories relating to migraine. I liked this division of headings, breakdown of approaches and the ideas behind it, although the news stories were a little old dating back up to 5 years.</p> <p>On clicking on the sponsored link this was surprisingly lacking in references to the sponsor, but I guess there must be rules policing this! It did however give a clear concise summary of migraine.</p> <p>The most useful link, however, was the "Diseases in Depth" link which gave facts, links to a specialist Q&A, treatment options and clinics and even the Migraine Action Association and how they can assist.</p>



	<p>In testing the search engine, I tried various spellings, although relatively close to the correct name but clearly incorrect, none of which got even a listing of possibilities. Other searches included "headache with flashing lights" and "splitting headache" neither of which got a listing either. Only when I entered "headaches" did it list a reference to migraine, so finding the ailment by its symptoms was a little perplexing and harder than I'd imagined.</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>In summary I would say that the site worked well, (despite an apparent virus, which is rather ironic!), the search engine threw up a moderate but not overwhelming listing of links, and those that were listed led to some interesting and useful content. On the whole, apart from the sponsorship banners, I was happy with the experience.</p>
Tutor comments:	You provide a good summary of the information provided by the surgerydoor on migraines. I wonder if you could have said a little more on usability and accessibility?
Researcher comments:	This posting is written in an appropriately informal and personal style. It is easy to read and combines information giving with the communication of the writer as a person and fellow student. I have emboldened some of the cohesive devices. I would suggest that these devices significantly contribute to the ease of reading.
(b) Compare ... Discuss ... strengths & weaknesses in terms of content, usability and accessibility	<p>(b) Surprisingly, considering the obvious cost and breadth of information that you would expect to find on the government's NHS Direct website, (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk), the first two items that came up after using the "Search NHS Direct" facility with the word "Migraine", were two broken links both referring to the same address! (Link: http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/en.aspx?articleID=248). Not the most auspicious of starts!</p> <p>The third search result that came up was a "Self Help Guide – Headache in adults". Being in the format of answering "Yes" or "No" to a series of questions, I was also a little alarmed, having only the first question which was</p> <p><i>Do you have a non-stop headache that came on very suddenly, is getting worse and is stopping you from doing anything?</i></p> <p>to which I answered "Yes" as I thought these were probably reasonable symptoms of a migraine, to be told on the next screen to dial 999 and ask for an ambulance! Backtracking and answering No I found that in the first 4-5 questions any answer of Yes prompted the response of "Call 999 and ask for an ambulance". Ultimately I admit this is a useful way of dealing with self diagnosis,</p>



	<p>but may be a little alarming for hypochondriacs!</p> <p>What was useful in the Self Help Guide and is obviously a service unique to NHS Direct, was that once the symptoms had been identified by further questioning, a page prompted you to call NHS Direct to discuss further with a nurse. A summary of the responses so far to the answers in the survey was also displayed for reference.</p> <p>Other search results on the word migraine included the “Health encyclopaedia” which gave further breakdown including Symptoms, Diagnosis, Treatments, Medicine Guides, Complications and Treatments. On the whole I found this useful, comprehensive and informative.</p> <p>Using the same vague search criteria as for surgerydoor, I was pleased to find that using either “splitting headache” or “headache with flashing lights” brought up largely the same results as using the word migraine, i.e. the Self Help Guide for headaches. Interestingly the top results again were dead links on the word “Headache”. Amusingly one of the results for “splitting headache”, in fact listed at number 2, was “Emergency contraception zone”! A nod to frustrated husbands perhaps....</p> <p>On the whole the experiences and resulting information were similar. The obviously more advanced search engine of the NHS Direct website made finding the information and diagnosis easier, although the dead links at the top of the search results were a little disappointing.</p>
<p>Tutor comments:</p>	<p>You talk very well about content but say very little about usability and accessibility.</p>
<p>Researcher comments:</p>	<p>Since the instruction is ‘compare’ one would expect a lot of logical cohesive devices. However the S does not systematically compare the two sites (as the T comments). The tone is a continuation of the previous posting and so easy to read but doesn’t fully fulfil the task requirements.</p>
<p>(c)Mention any other features</p>	<p>(c)In terms of other distinctive or unusual features, or relevance as sources, there was little to differentiate between the two. Both had search facilities, both gave forms of information, symptoms, treatments and medicinal guides to the ailment in question. The NHS site did invariably appear slicker and better funded, whereas the surgerydoor site was rather over-plagued with sponsorship and adverts [Tutor: an important point], but I suppose that is to be expected with a purely commercial venture, even though it is off putting to some.</p>
<p>Tutor comments:</p>	<p>Were there any distinctive features that you could have mentioned? NHS Direct for instance has a body plan?</p>
<p>Researcher comments:</p>	<p>More like the comparison structure required in (b) but much too brief.</p>



(d)Recommend ... picking out main factors	(d) In conclusion I would say that the NHS Direct site was my preferred site. The main reasons being the Self Help Guide method of diagnosis, lack of adverts and of course the ability to have a two way interaction, i.e. information “push” and “pull”, with the access to trained NHS medical staff.
Researcher comments:	Succinctly fulfils the requirements of the task i.e. is cohesive with the question.

Table 39: Answer from a lower achieving TMA

Overall tutor comment: Some good information here. You lost marks overall because quite often your answer wasn't focused enough on what the assignment question was asking.

Question 1	
(a)Choose three reasons	<p>a) Three reasons that I feel particularly contributed in the use of mobile telephony in Africa are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Internet emerging as a promising mechanism for social and political change. Governments are unaware of technology that exist even if they commit media blackouts. [Tutor: Although the Internet is not mobile telephony] -Enables communication and information to be more easier and accessible to people in Africa. Missed opportunity for a cohesive device. [Tutor: Can you explain how?] -People have been able to open up their own business and become stand alone mobile operators and make a good living setting up shop and selling phone calls to other villagers. [Tutor: Good]
Tutor comments:	Some good points made here, but you unfortunately at times didn't explicitly answer the questions asked.
Researcher comments:	As previously identified cohesive devices are not essential here although S answer makes an attempt to cohere with the Question. Evidence of problems with understanding key terms in the Question
(b)Write a set of notes on the benefits and drawbacks . . . under the following headings	<p><u>Access: AVAILABILITY</u></p> <p>3.5% of the world's internet users are in Africa.</p> <p>People will use low-cost cell phones rather than PC's for connectivity.</p> <p>In 2006, mobile cellular use is 7.2% in Africa. The majority of the continent doesn't have use of mobile phones at this time.</p> <p>Apart from Nigeria, Morocco, Egypt, South Africa, Sudan, Kenya, Algeria, Tunisia, Zimbabwe and Uganda other countries in Africa would struggle in the use of mobile phones.</p> <p>In Cities, internet access can be quite slow(dial-up).</p>



	<p>[Tutor: You have some good information here, but you needed to put it into context e.g. availability: benefits. Mobiles are becoming rapidly more available for use in rural parts of Africa and growth of use is more than double in Africa than the rest of the world]</p> <p>availability: drawbacks</p> <p>only a small % of the population has access to cell phones]</p> <p><u>Access: SKILLS</u></p> <p>Vital data and information is easily accessible and transferable for community-based workers, farmers and providing political/social information which is beneficial for people.</p> <p>Shared cell phone services have been in use in Uganda and Rwanda. Shops are set up in homes selling phone calls to other villagers. These businesses have proved beneficial for the proprietors as well as the customers that use it.</p> <p>In Uganda, the businesses called 'Grameen' and 'MTN Uganda' have been thinking of ways to come up with a solution to sell other services including internet access.</p> <p>[Tutor: But you need to talk specifically here about skills e.g. You don't need to be literate to use a cell phone which is benefit in terms of relaying health information]</p> <p><u>Access: COST</u></p> <p>Kiva.org has web entries updated via camera phone. This web-site is seen as cheap and is an easy online-access.</p> <p>Governments find it hard to spend more than \$10 per capita for conventional telemedicine technology. Money heavily spent is seen as impractical.</p> <p>However (this could been seen as a cohesive device but use wrongly since its role is to signal a contrast but this is not what its doing here) some rural medical workers may be illiterate and would be seen as money wasted if spent here. Some African countries have limited equipment and supplies as well.</p>
Tutor comments:	It would have been good if you had been more focused on the provision of a mobile-telephony medical information service as opposed to providing this service by Internet. Separating out your information into benefits and drawbacks would have helped you to clarify your discussion.
Researcher comments:	S has partially followed Q instructions. If done fully this would have been a substitute for linguistic cohesion. The S has also ignored the part of the Q which says "include ...notes on why mobile telephone could be a more effective way for communicating..." The cohesive device



	'because' is not used at all.
(c) Give one potential benefit ... giving example(s) to illustrate	<p>One potential benefit for end users to use PC-based internet access for obtaining health information rather than mobile telephony could be the fact mobile phone technology is heavily reliant on data as well as voice transmission. A lot of memory is needed if transporting health related information, a PC is able to have faster, efficient and powerful access for this information to be transferred.</p> <p>At 2 Mbps a mobile phone could struggle to send such information and in doing so may be slower to transfer. If a user was sending such information in a moving vehicle such information may drop to 144 kbps. However a data rate of 10 Mbps may be transferable using 'MIMO'(Multiple Input Multiple Output) but this may prove to be 'expensive'.</p>
Tutor comments:	A good point here. A website can also be used to "push" information. This could include information that is relevant to the season etc
Researcher comments:	The S does use language to cohere with the Question. Also comparative adjectives are used appropriately. Although no linguistic devices are used to highlight the example the order of the sentences serves this role.
(d) Explain why telemedicine could have particular benefits. Give reasons why this potential has not yet been achieved.	<p>d) Telemedicine could have particular benefits in developing countries bringing medical help and expert advice to individuals who are unable to travel for long distances if their medical centre/hospital is far to reach.</p> <p>This potential has not been reached due to the lack of spending governments have decided to spend for Telemedicine. [Tutor: And also lack of infrastructure] Certain countries in Africa are richer than others, for example, South Africa and Morocco. (lack of cohesive device here) It is hard for the whole of Africa to benefit from using Telemedicine.</p> <p>Also, there is the fact that some people even in the medical field could lack literacy so the Telemedicine service could only hamper a situation. [Tutor: Also specialists are needed to operate the remote end of the system]</p>
My comments:	Good attempt to 'cohere' with Question by repeating the wording. Some problems due to lack of cohesive devices in middle section. However this is an appropriate answer and this is reinforced by the use of cohesive devices.
Question 2	
(a) Using a table ... show ... indicates ... show ... Explain your reasoning.	S provides a table which is not analysed here
Tutor comments:	A good table here - well done



(b) Explain why ... justify...	<p>b) The Galileo system of navigation satellites is more useful than the US GPS system as it is quoted by the Department for Transport that 'Galileo satellites are leading to more accurate and reliable equipment. Prices are falling, satellite navigation systems are to become standard fitting on mainstream popular cars within a few years'.¹</p> <p>At metre range the Galileo system is measured with precision down to a range in metres, more precise in measurements than GPS.² [Tutor: this sentence isn't that clear]</p> <p>The US GPS is a system controlled and governed by the US Government which was purposely set up and used by the U.S. Military.³ [Tutor: OK – but how does this point relate to road charging?]</p> <p>The US GPS system may be constructive in war situations whereas the Galileo Satellite system is more directed towards travelling and directions.</p>
Tutor comments:	I felt that you could have said more about the Galileo system with regards to road charging specifically. Also, although you referenced your information three times, only one time was this clearly a quotation whereas the assignment question asked for 'three or four short quotations'.
Researcher comments:	There may well be a correlation between the paucity of cohesive devices and the lack of logical argument.
(c) Explain ... how... could be used	c) DRSC may possibly be used to improve the safety of a vehicle and its occupants by becoming user friendly for itself and occupants as well as other vehicles behind it. If it were to run into fog or bad traffic/road conditions ahead the applications of the DRSC if fitted and in use would be potentially beneficial to all road users.
Tutor comments:	I felt that you could have given me more information
Researcher comments:	The presence of two cohesive devices doesn't mitigate the fact that the S hasn't said anything.
Question 3	General tutor comments: I felt that this needed to be a lot clearer and focused on a particular piece of ICT and how it is used that has political, ethical or social implications. For instance, in your reply to the blog, you make no mention of ICT.
(a) Explain the topic. . . cover (three things)	<p>The topic I have chosen to explore is from a blog entitled, 'A game of snap' posted on April 18th 2008. It is quite a controversial yet interesting blog post regarding the president of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and the then Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano.</p> <p>The blog relates to a conversation the two had via mobile phone regarding a future election and how they have concluded that victory is</p>



	<p>theirs before the election has already begun.</p> <p>The blogger known as 'Ben' also posts of how recordings of their conversations were leaked to media and later bloggers online. Programs such as 'bit-torrent' also announced these leaked conversations.</p> <p>The use of the internet as well as the bugging of mobile phones has really questioned political concerns of the government in terms of what has been written in this blog. The title gives the impression as concluded in the blog that it is dissenters against the government, 'a game of snap'. It seems like an unlimited competition, a technology race that will never end. The political handling of the Philippines is seen as in doubt.</p>
Tutor comments:	<p>Although here you were meant to talk about the use of ICTs by governments that had ethical, social or political implications. I am unsure if what you mention here can be included within this bracket; you needed to set this out more explicitly. Are you talking about mobile phones? Or bugging software?</p>
Researcher comments:	<p>Since the S hasn't answered the Question is there any point looking for cohesive devices?</p>
(b) Demonstrate your reflection	<p>http://community.eldis.org/.599537f4/Blog/</p> <p>[Tutor: full reference?]</p> <p>In a fascinating and comprehensive session Manuel L Quezon III examined the rise of technology in the Philippines, and areas of advocacy, enhanced journalism, and expression. Whilst I can't even hope to do justice to his extensive talk I would like to draw attention to a few salient ideas.</p> <p>I think a key point which I took from his talk is that the same technology which again and again is used as tools of repression and corruption, can also be utilised in acts of political dissent and justice. In the 'Hello Garci' political scandal and electoral crisis, mobile phones were the preferred method of communication for the incumbent president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and the then Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano. When recordings of their conversations, which suggested a pre-determined win, leaked traditional media but later bloggers and programmes such as bit-torrent and tag teaming publicised the conversations. In now a delicious reversal, one of the worlds most down loaded ring tones is a recording of the president saying 'Hello, Garci?' - a simple but effective act of political dissent.</p> <p>Equally the NBN/ZTE deal, a US\$ 329.5 contract between the Chinese government and the Philippine National Broadband Network was conducted virtually with practically no paper trail. However a senate investigation found a yahoo account with details of bribes. It would seem that whilst paper can be shredded, technology has infinite memory.</p>



	<p>People in their everyday lives also use technology as a tool of dissent – they often have two cell phones, one that is registered and therefore likely tapped and one that is private. They use ‘twitter’ in times of emergency with coded alerts and, whilst the government hire recent graduates to spam controversial online columns, people still write the blogs to air their opinions. It feels like a game of snap, with increasingly higher stakes. Or maybe its competition, a technology race between dissenters and governments, only there is no end and the boundaries are limitless.</p> <p>My reply to this blog posting will be:</p> <p>There have been very interesting issues raised here in this blog. I tend to get the impression that you have a strong feeling and are opinionated in terms of the dissenters. Am I right? Forgive me if I am wrong but that is the impression I am getting. For me I have no opinion, I'm yet to know much more, yet I find it interesting as to what you have posted. A game of snap is a worthy title and one that suits your blog posting. The issues raised are of interest because all talk of political corruption is nothing new to which I have heard before. I as a British born Filipino feel that information like this is controversial yet informative.</p>
Researcher comments:	The S doesn't seem to have really 'reflected' on the blog.
(c)Write a critical analysis	c) The blog is kept short, sweet and to the point. The ICT's mentioned are mobile phones which were reportedly tapped and the internet, which apart from the media helped generate the news. I thought the poster, Ben had said enough and posted it with thoughtfulness and conviction. He ended his ICT democracy post with an ending that is thought provoking.
Tutor comments:	You needed to mention PROMPT (Presentation, Relevance, Objectivity, Method etc). See Section 5, Topic 2 of the Safari site.
Researcher comments:	Since the S hasn't answered the Question is there any point looking for cohesive devices?
Question 4	General tutor comments: a solid start here but I would have liked to have read something about usability and accessibility here (see section 5 of part 3 book 4).
(a)Formal response to task as posted on tutor-group conference	<p>a) The website given to me was: http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/</p> <p>I have been allocated the ailment of 'high blood pressure'.</p> <p>I feel it was quite difficult looking for this ailment on my given website as scanning through the page high blood pressure does not immediately stand out.</p> <p>There is a link of an A-Z of illness and conditions on the site. However once on here it came to prominence that I had to do a bit more searching. I clicked on 'blood disorders' and 'heart and blood vessel</p>



	<p>disorders' but to no avail. I then when to the search bar and typed in 'high blood pressure'.</p> <p>The first search entry found was 'Hypertension'. This is the main term used to describe blood pressure.</p>
Researcher comments:	S has used some cohesive devices
(b)Compare . . Discuss . . . strengths & weaknesses in terms of (1), (2) and (3)	<p>b) http://www.surgerydoor.co.uk/</p> <p>The website chosen for S1, S2 and S3, for 'high cholesterol' gives the impression that she had to do some searching as well. It is ironic however that upon looking on her given site, there is a search engine upon clicking it gives the subject of 'high blood pressure'. Had I have been given her website, it would have been slightly easier for me to explore my subject.</p> <p>Going further analysing my subject in S4's website, it leaves a brief outline of blood pressure and gives out terms such as 'systole,' when the blood is pumped out of the heart, and 'diastole,' which is when blood returns to the heart. There are also a number of helpful links below the brief description, if I wanted to explore the subject even further.</p>
Tutor comments:	Some good information here, but the assignment question asked you to look at content, usability and accessibility
Researcher comments:	The S doesn't make use of the structure required. There is also absence of comparatives despite the requirement to compare.
(c)Mention any other features	c)The website given to Maaluxmi, Maria and Daniel had irrelevant adverts containing stories of Bird Flu and giving information below of having plastic surgery in South Africa as well other pieces of information and advertising which wasn't reliant to the overall website. [Tutor: Good] It proved to a bit distracting having these google ads on their website.
Tutor comments:	And were there any distinctive features worth mentioning?
Researcher comments:	The relative absence of cohesive devices just highlights the limitations to the S answer which is a 1/6 th of the length expected.
(d)Recommend . . .picking out main factors	<p>d)Bianca, Alex and Chris may have found it easier with their website searching for their given ailments. The 'NHS Direct' website stood out for me.</p> <p>http://search.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/kbroker/nhsdirect/nhsdirect/search.lsim?qt=repetitive+strain+injury&hs=0&sm=0&ha=1054&sc=nhsdirect&mt=0&sb=0&nh=3</p> <p>A simple type of the condition in the search box and the findings tend to be more (but in comparison to what?) reliable, accurate and efficient.</p>



Tutor comments:	Can you tell me more here as to why you would recommend this site?
Researcher comments:	Limitations in length of answer makes for absence of cohesive devices.

Table 40: Breakdown of Tutor's marks for two T175 students on TMA 04

	High achieving TMA	Low achieving TMA
Question 1		
(a) Choose three reasons	4	2
(b) Write a set of notes on the benefits and drawbacks... under the following headings	9	4
(c) Give one potential benefit... giving example(s) to illustrate	4	4
(d) Explain why telemedicine could have particular benefits. Give reasons why this potential has not yet been achieved.	5	4
Question 2		
(a) Using a table... show... indicates... show... Explain your reasoning.	6	6
(b) Explain why... justify...	7	3
(c) Explain... how... could be used	7	2
Question 3		
(a) Explain the topic... cover (three things)	Didn't do	3
(b) Demonstrate your reflection		3
(c) Write a critical analysis		0
Question 4		
(a) Formal response to task as posted on tutor-group conference	6	2
(b) Compare... Discuss... strengths & weaknesses in terms of (1), (2) and (3)	4	2
(c)	3	2

One thing that emerged from this analysis was that there are two kinds of cohesion that are important for success on an assignment. One might be described as 'internal' cohesion - the structuring and linking of internal parts of the answer. The second is 'external' cohesion, i.e. what makes the answer cohere naturally to the question being asked.



In the texts analysed, both students are able to make use of cohesive devices. Satisfying as it would be to claim that the high achieving TMA gets better marks than the lower achieving TMA, this is not borne out conclusively by the analysis. The low achieving TMA gets fewer marks because his answers are shorter and less focused than those of the high achieving TMA. Maybe the student lacks basic language and learning skills to do with processing source material and interpreting questions. As the tutor points out on a number of occasions, he doesn't answer at sufficient length (inability to make use of word limits?) and what he does write is not always a focused response to the instructions. Limitations on the use of cohesive devices may be a symptom of wider language /learning difficulties, but they can hardly be identified as a cause. Although this is a disappointing conclusion it is based on a very limited sample. The next stage would be to widen the research to the other four available TMAs.

10. Conclusions, recommendations and further research

10.1 Conclusions

This research project attempted to uncover whether the use of academic language can help to explain the difference in attainment between students who are White and students from ethnic minorities. In order to do so, it first investigated the relationship between students' use of language and their attainment and found that there was a clear correlation between students' use of language and their TMA marks. This may not be surprising, given that any type of assessment that employs or requires language is in part a test of language. Analysis of student assignments revealed that structure and development of text is particularly significant for student attainment, and having the correct and appropriate language to structure and develop assignments, as stipulated in the courses' assignment guidelines, is essential to being a high achiever.

While use of language clearly plays a role in student attainment, this study found that language development is generally seen as peripheral in the courses at hand. Marking guidelines and the tutors who mark assignments are encouraged to only give cursory attention to students' use of language and to mainly focus on the students' grasp of course content. In fact, some tutors were seen to be compensating students' poor language (cf. O'Shea-Poon and Kimura 2008). The importance of sentence structure and use of vocabulary in the framing of that content and the structure and development of texts is not recognised. As a result, students often do not get useful feedback on their use of language and students who need additional writing support are not targeted for it. But it may not be in the students' best interest to be waved through a course without sufficient attention paid to their language needs, as this may prove a significant barrier to achieving above a certain level (cf. O'Shea-Poon and Kimura 2008, who found that non-fluency in English appears to be a significant barrier to achieving above a certain level in OU courses).

Regarding the language use of students from ethnic minorities, this study found that the students in this sample had a relatively high likelihood of getting language scores that indicated a need for additional support, as much as 47% of the whole population in some cases. Furthermore, 35% of students from ethnic minorities received low scores in *Use of source material*; 53% received low scores in *Structure and development of text*; 40% received low scores in *Academic writing style*; and 37% received low scores in *Grammatical correctness*. These relatively low scores in academic language use may in part



account for the difference in attainment. This research project was not able to account for these students' language backgrounds when undertaking the textual analyses. However, the 2008 End of Courses Survey indicated that a large number of students from ethnic minorities have EAL: 47.6% of students who are Asian and 48.5% of students who are Black (compared to 7.8% of students who are White). Students who have to obtain and demonstrate academic knowledge expertise in a language other than their mother tongue are likely to be at some disadvantage in higher education.

But while use of language is clearly a factor in the gap in attainment between students who are White and students from ethnic minorities, it is only one factor. Prior educational qualifications and variations in conceptions of learning have also been found to play an important role (Richardson 2008). Students with lower prior educational qualifications are also likely to have less experience with academic language use. A better understanding of the relationship between students' conceptions of learning and their language use might give further insight into understanding the gap in attainment. In this project, it was found that other factors also have a clear impact on student attainment, like whether students leave part of the assignment incomplete or whether they have kept to the word limit. Having difficulties with time management and having less access to support resources may be a reason for this – and students from ethnic minorities may be more likely to have these issues. A longitudinal case study of the educational experience of students from ethnic minorities at the OU might help explain why such problems persist. While this would be ideal, in this project we have found that those students most in need of support are the ones who it is most difficult to get access to for research and support purposes. This remains to be a challenge.

The OU is committed to better understanding the persistent and growing gap in attainment between students who are White and students from ethnic minorities (OU Futures 2009), and it is hoped that this study makes a useful contribution to understanding the role of language in that gap. In particular, this study sheds light on the type of texts that are required in various OU assignments and the specific uses of language that are necessary for high achievement, and has attempted to map them out (see Section 8.0). It has also shown the importance of certain features of language (e.g. modals, passives, cohesive devices) in framing arguments and presenting examples in OU assignments (see Section 9.0). An examination of the role of language in understanding and presenting subject expertise has provided an ideal context for language and subject experts to collaborate and share. It is hoped that our findings can provide the basis of discipline-specific language support materials for students and ALs and to inform Faculties of the importance of language in their students' attainment and to target this support at the students that most need it. The challenge remains to provide this support without reinforcing negative stereotypes about ability (cf. Rai 2000).

10.2 Recommendations

It was not the primary purpose of this research to generate recommendations for practice but a number of good practices are suggested by the findings.

Tutors should be supported in raising their awareness of the importance of language in student attainment and in giving helpful feedback on students' language use across the span of a course.

Only by linking grammar and vocabulary development to the categories *Use of source material* and *Structure and development of text* is it possible to go beyond notions of language as 'a problem' that



interferes in students' performance towards notions of language as 'a resource' to be developed as part of students' academic attainment.

Feedback on students' language use should concretely demonstrate how to do things, instead of abstractly telling them. The use of language in tutor feedback should also provide a model.

Students and tutors could be offered models of good writing practice in addition to the assignment descriptions they already receive in Assignment Guidelines. These could be exemplars of text types and writing styles appropriate to key assignments on a course (see, for example, the Concept maps of TMA's in Section 8.0).

Finally, it might be useful to have a diagnostic tool available that students and tutors could use to identify specific language and study needs and to target the use of time and resources effectively. With the current bulk of study and language support material, it is unlikely that students would be able to identify their specific needs. If students were asked to use a diagnostic tool, tutors might be able to identify those students who could benefit from some support with academic English. Tutors could then target that support most effectively.

10.3 Further research

It would be useful if further data could be collected on students' language backgrounds, so that we could better estimate the number of students from ethnic minorities who also have EAL. It would also be useful to do longitudinal case study investigations of students from ethnic minorities as they progress through their courses in order to better understand the relationship between prior educational qualifications, conceptions of learning, use of language and attainment.

Other useful studies to gain more insight into the relationship between language use and attainment would include further examination of:

- the grammatical constructions required in the structuring and development of assignments, particularly in the areas of grammar identified in this project; instances of plagiarism and problems with referencing; use of informal language
- tutor feedback on language use
- the research instruments used in this project.

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Appendix 1: Examples of the MASUS grid

DD100 TMA 02

NAME _____

KEY TO RATING

4 = excellent/no problems/accurate/very appropriate

A = appropriate

3 = good/minor problems/mainly accurate/largely appropriate

NA= not appropriate

2 = only fair/some problems/often inaccurate/often inappropriate

1 = poor/major problems/inaccurate/inappropriate

<i>A. Use of source material - is information retrieval and processing of visual and verbal data correct and appropriate for the task?</i>	4	3	2	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> relevant information selected information is integrated with the text text is free from plagiarism use of suitable examples accurate referencing 	A		B	
<i>B. Structure and development of text - is the structure and development of the answer clear and generically appropriate to the question and its context</i>	4	3	2	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> generic structure is appropriate to the task thematic progression [at macro, hyper, and theme level] includes discussion of social science context of market economy main body includes reference to concepts of externalities etc Section A: patterns and trends identified Section B addresses questions posed 	A		B	
<i>C Control of academic writing style - does the grammar conform to appropriate patterns of written academic English</i>	4	3	2	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> language appropriately formal and discursive/analytical passive voice modality appropriate use of noun phrases and nominalisation appropriate use of adverbials to control the style appropriate use of main and subordinate clauses appropriate language for the audience/tenor sentence structure is clear and concise logical flow of ideas appropriate choice of lexis 	A		B	



<i>D Grammatical correctness</i>	4	3	2	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• accurate sentences• correct subject verb agreement• consistent and appropriate tense choice, correctly formed• appropriate use of articles• concordance of referents	A		B	
<i>E Qualities of presentation</i>	not rated			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• spelling generally correct• paragraphing reflects essay structure• each paragraph has a single theme• appropriate punctuation is used	A		B	



K204 TMA 01

[Adapted from materials created by the MASUS Project, University of Sydney]

Why should we listen to children? Critically analyse how listening to children can improve policies and practices in work with children and families.

KEY TO RATING: NA= not appropriate/ A = appropriate

4 = very good/ hardly any problems/ mainly accurate/ largely appropriate/ 3 = good/ minor problems/ some inaccuracies/some inappropriacies / 2 = only fair/some problems/often inaccurate/often inappropriate/

1 = poor/major problems/inaccurate/inappropriate

CRITERIA					COMMENTS
<i>A. Use of source material and personal experience - is information taken from study, research and experience correct and/or appropriate for the task?</i>	4	3	2	1	
1. used relevant information from reading	A			NA	
2. irrelevant information from course material is avoided					
3. information from course material and other research or personal experience is interpreted and transferred correctly					
4. text is free from plagiarism/ information is integrated with your own words and ideas					
5. recognition of various perspectives in the field					
6. accurate referencing in text/ bibliography or reference list is correct					
<i>B. Structure and development of text - is the structure and development of the answer clear and appropriate to the question and its context?</i>	4	3	2	1	



<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. introduction engages with the question and outlines how the argument will be presented and discussed 2. text structure is appropriate to the task 3. claims build up the argument 4. beginnings of paragraphs and sentences orientate to the argument 5. conflicting arguments are presented, addressed and effectively managed 6. evidence and other experience is used that supports the claims in the argument 7. information flow in the argument is linked and connected (e.g. beginnings of paragraphs and sentences orientate to the argument & argument moves between high level generalisations and low level details and examples) 8. statement of conclusion follows from argument & relates to title 	A		NA	
<p><i>C Control of academic writing style - does the grammar conform to appropriate patterns of written academic English</i></p>	4	3	2	1
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. appropriate choice of vocabulary 2. appropriate use of technical terms from the field 3. unambiguous referents 4. appropriate use of connecting language 5. language appropriately formal and discursive/analytical 	A		NA	
<p><i>D Grammatical correctness</i></p>	4	3	2	1
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. clause structure follows recognisable & appropriate patterns of English (run-on sentences; fragments; joining clauses) 2. correct subject-verb agreement 3. consistent and appropriate tense choice, correctly formed 4. appropriate use of modality 5. appropriate use of passives 6. correct singular-plural noun agreement 7. appropriate use of articles 8. appropriate use of adverbials (<i>however, nevertheless, etc.</i>) 9. appropriate use of noun phrases and nominalisation 	A		NA	
<p><i>E Qualities of presentation</i></p>	4	3	2	1



1. paragraphing reflects essay structure	A		NA	
2. each paragraph has a single theme				
3. punctuation use generally correct				
4. spelling generally correct				
5. capitals, italics etc				
6. word processing appropriate				
7. consistency in referencing/citation				
TOTAL AVERAGE:				



Appendix 2: Students involved in the project

	Course	Student ⁴	Ethnicity	TMA 07	TMA 02	TMA 04
1	DD100	D867	Black or Black British - African	54	63	68
2	DD100	D857	Black or Black British - African	63	72	68
3	DD100	D944	Black or Black British - Caribbean	54	75	72
4	DD100	D074	Black or Black British - Caribbean	66	55	78
5	DD100	D788	Black or Black British - African	38	35	40
6	DD100	D756	Black or Black British - African	85	89	80
7	DD100	D930	Black or Black British - Caribbean	58	50	65
8	DD100	D384	Black or Black British - Caribbean	85	70	65
9	DD100	D453	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani		81	
10	DD100	D917	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani		65	
11	DD100	D365	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	69	56	
12	DD100	D973	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	41	48	
13	DD100	D372	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	45	52	
14	DD100	D261	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	57	68	
15	DD100	D308	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	80	55	
16	DD100	D428	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	78	46	
17	DD100	DS1	White British	86	81	70
18	DD100	DS2	Black or Black British - African	73	73	71
19	DD100	DS3	White British	65	83	78
20	DD100	DS4	White British	83	75	69
21	DD100	DS5	White British	73	80	87
22	DD100	DS6	Chinese or Chinese British	74	n	n
23	DD100	DS7	White British	80	85	70
24	DD100	DS8	Black or Black British - African	65	67	71
25	DD100	DS9	Black or Black British - African	65	64	47

⁴ The students in yellow were analysed by the language specialist 1 in the group; the ones in green by language specialist 2. The students in white were in the tutor groups of the subject specialists.



26	DD100	DS10	White British	72	75	80
27	DD100	DS11	Black or Black British - African	58	75	58
28	DD100	DS12	Black or Black British - African	68	40	66
29	DD100	DS13	White British	80	84	84
30	DD100	DS14	White Other (Italian)	70	65	74
31	DD100	DS15	White British	55	n	n
32	DD100	DS16	White British	80	72	n
				TMA 01	TMA 03	TMA 05
30	K204	K592	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	37	36	52
31	K204	K550	Chinese	50	50	70
32	K204	K605	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	59	74	72
33	K204	K578	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	62	59	60
34	K204	K911	Black or Black British - Caribbean	51	60	40
35	K204	K375	Black or Black British - Caribbean	80	68	75
36	K204	K686	Black or Black British - Caribbean	69	74	76
37	K204	K774	Black or Black British - African	53	30	40
38	K204	K052	Black or Black British - African	57	54	57
39	K204	K897	Black or Black British - Caribbean	35	66	76
40	K204	K930	Black or Black British - African	39	57	52
41	K204	K778	Black or Black British - Caribbean	70	66	72
42	K204	K378	Black or Black British - Caribbean	78	66	56
43	K204	K251	Black or Black British - African	40	65	52
44	K204	K039	Black or Black British - African	44	28	72
45	K204	KS1	White British	54	65	60
46	K204	KS2	White British	55	96	69
47	K204	KS3	White British	80	96	80
48	K204	KS4	White British	56	96	75
49	K204	KS5	Asian, Sri Lankan	56	n	n
50	K204	KS6	White British	40	65	65
51	K204	KS7	White British	45	70	50



				TMA 01	TMA 02	TMA 04
52	T175	T557	Black or Black British - African	45	47	87
53	T175	T415	Black or Black British - Caribbean	60	65	74
54	T175	T390	Black or Black British - Caribbean	80	90	88
	T175	T962	Black or Black British - African	44	23	47
55	T175	T611	Black or Black British - African	68	35	33
56	T175	T806	Black or Black British - Caribbean	77	92	44
57	T175	T830	Black or Black British - Caribbean	68	79	69
58	T175	T485	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	41	49	42
59	T175	T897	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	54	64	53
60	T175	T541	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	68	75	40
61	T175	T352	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	76	76	53
62	T175	T962	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	88	82	73
63	T175	T337	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	83	83	83
64	T175	T599	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	89	95	90
65	T175	T801	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	97	99	76
66	T175	TS1	White Other (Italian)	68	n	n
67	T175	TS2	White British	69	88	64
68	T175	TS3	Asian Other (Goan, born in Kenya)	91	89	71
69	T175	TS4	Asian British Other (Pilipino)	57	66	44
70	T175	TS5	White British (S. African descent)	67	91	83
71	T175	TS6	Asian	42	23	55

$$71 \times 3 = 213 - 3 = 210$$



Appendix 3: Ethnic categorisations

White

- White British
- White Irish
- Other white background

Mixed

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Other Mixed background

Asian, Asian British

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Other Asian

Black, Black British

- Caribbean
- African
- Other Black

Chinese, Chinese British, Chinese English, Chinese Scottish, Chinese Welsh or other ethnic group

- Chinese
- Any other background



Appendix 4: Student consent form

The connection between language use, achievement and ethnicity among students at the OU

Jim Donohue, OpenELT, Faculty of Education and Language Studies, j.p.donohue@open.ac.uk

Elizabeth Erling, OpenELT, Faculty of Education and Language Studies, e.j.erling@open.ac.uk

Dear students,

We would like to ask you to participate in a research project that will be exploring whether a connection can be established between how students write, what kind of marks they get in their courses, and what relationship (if any) this has with their ethnic background.

We would attempt to explore this connection by having a researcher follow the students in this tutor group to monitor your progress over the course and the writing you do in your assignments. We would also like to interview each of the students on the course to find out more about your background and your experience of education at the OU. This would involve the researcher:

- being present at (at least some of) your tutorials and day schools. This researcher would also ;
- having access to your course website, including discussion forums;
- collecting and analysing your university assignments (TMAs);
- interviewing you either face-to-face or over the phone.

Your participation in this project may also involve you getting extra feedback on your

Please indicate your willingness to take part in this project by signing and completing the details below. At any time during the research you will be free to withdraw, and your participation or non participation will not affect your access to tutorial support or the results of your assessments.

The results of any research project involving Open University students constitute personal data under the Data Protection Act. They will be kept secure and not released to any third party.

I am willing to take part in this research, and by signing below I give my permission for the data collected to be used anonymously in any written reports, presentations and published papers relating to this study.

My written consent will be sought separately if I am to be identified in any of the above.



Appendix 5: Time allocation

Activity	Deliverables	Time
Research workshops in ethics, methodology, using MASUS procedure	Create awareness of categories, procedures and instruments; develop MASUS checklist and procedure	2 x 6 hours workshop; 2x2 hours reading; homework
Language specialists attendance at tutorials, monitoring communication on course website, etc.	Familiarisation with subject-specific language; research log on tutor group interaction	2 x 20 hrs
Continue training of researchers in MASUS		2 x 0.5 days
Collaborative application of MASUS procedure to three TMAs in tutor groups	Analysis and collation of TMAs and PT3s	3 lang specialists x 3 days per TMA (3) à 27 + 3 subject ALs x 1 day per TMA (3) à 9
Moderation and triangulation of MASUS procedure on three TMAs	Analysis and collation of TMAs and PT3s	3 lang specialists x 1 day per TMA (3) 9 x 3 x 1 day
Meeting of language specialists and subject ALs after applying the MASUS procedure to the TMAs	Establish whether there is a difference in perception and marking of the language use; Subject ALs develop greater language awareness	3 lang specialists x 3 days per TMA (3)
Non-interventionist application of the MASUS procedure to three TMAs with other groups	TMA and PT3s analysed and collated	3 lang specialists x 2 days per TMA (3)
Quantitative text data analysis of three TMAs	Analysis and collation of TMAs and PT3s	3 lang specialists x 1 day per TMA (3)
Moderation and triangulation of MASUS procedure after three TMAs	Triangulation	3 lang specialists x 1 day per TMA (3)



Language specialist interviews with students		3 x 2 hrs x 20 students
Research journal	Insight into process	8 days
Wrap up meetings between language specialist and subject tutors		6 x 2 hrs



Appendix 6: Deliverables

Intervened with groups: DD100, K204, T175

Deliverable	Responsible	Comments	Deadline
Copies of completed MASUS & TMAs from <u>each</u> researcher/group	DD100 K204 T175	Send in an organised a format electronically or as hard copies. No need to make copies. Send through internal post. Students should be anonymised.	ASAP, beg. of Nov. would be ideal, mid-Nov. at the latest
Excel file of MASUS scores and Marks on TMAs	KB BE DH	For each TMA, list an averaged or agreed on score for each section of MASUS (A-E), plus an averaged overall MASUS score for the whole TMA (once including category A and once leaving it out). Also include the mark that the AL gave the students.	ASAP, beg. of Nov. would be ideal, mid-Nov. at the latest
Report on Key Findings from MASUS experience	BE & CB JK & KB DH & CH CL, ZD, HM	This should be an organised report of things noted through the research process in your intervened with groups, in your notes and/or your research log. You can each write a report or create one in collaboration for your team – could also get feedback from the Subject Specialist.	ASAP, beg. of Nov. would be ideal, mid-Nov. at the latest
Copy of research log (optional)	ALL CL, CB, CH	If you have kept a log, I would like a copy of it. But if you haven't, your report is fine.	ASAP
Short report on the features of language that seem to play a particularly important role in determining a student's mark	BE & CB JK & KB DH & CH CL, ZD, HM	This can make up a part of the overall report from your group – but each researcher should contribute their Section By choosing one or two criteria from each section of the MASUS (A-E).	Mid-Nov.
Short report on one particular criterial feature that you have noticed plays a significant role in determining a student's mark	ALL	Write a short description of this linguistic feature. Choose examples of good and poor practice from students' TMAs. JK: the transfer from descriptive to complex, analytical language KB: nominalisation (subject NPs and how Ss handle concept words)	Mid-Nov.



		BE: modals CB: joining sentences DH: passives + lexical choice CH: logical coherence devices	
Conceptual map of one TMA	JK: DD100 TMA 02 KB: DD100 TMA04 BE: K204 TMA03 CB: K204 TMA01 DH: T175 TMA 02 CH: T175 TMA 04	Map of the ideal generic structure of one TMA, to be determined from the Title, the Assignment Booklet, and students' essays. Include a note on students' ability to tune into this structure -- whether those who didn't follow it were more likely to get a lower score. Also mention key concepts that students have to engage with to succeed.	Mid-November
Interview write-ups	JK BE DH	Write up results of the interviews, perhaps in the form of a case study. Tie in with performance on TMAs. Should have at least 6 per group.	ASAP, mid-Nov. at the latest

Comparison groups (BME): DD100, K204, T175

Deliverable	Responsible	Comments	Deadline
Part 1 of BME MASUS	BE & CB	For each course, there are two sets of TMAs. Each of you will be responsible for one group of about 10 students with 3 TMAs from each (the same assignments that you analysed in the groups we intervened with). Use S's PIs as identifier.	End Oct.
Copies of completed MASUS & TMAs	JK & KB		
Excel file of Students from ethnic minorities MASUS averages, individual scores and guessed marks	DH & CH	Do MASUS analysis of one student's 3 TMAs (back-to-back). 1) Give each section and each TMA a MASUS score 2) Guess the mark that you think the AL may	
Report on key			



<p>findings, commenting on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) students' use of the generic structure b) students' use of the criterial feature c) any other things that you notice 		<p>have given the TMA.</p> <p>3) Do a second read of the TMAs paying particular attention to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Whether the TMAs conform to the generic structure you identified in the TMA you made a conceptual map for (only the one you looked at). b.) the criterial feature that you identified in the intervened with groups TMAs. Are there any differences in how it is used by these students? <p><u>Don't look</u> at the PT3 forms until you have finished all of the MASUS. Make sure that your research partner does not see the marks, too – they should be blinded to them when they undertake their external control (Part 2).</p> <p>We are working with hard copies of the essays, which you can write on. Use the MASUS that you devised for the groups intervened with (either hard or electronic copy). No need to make copies.</p>	
<p>Part 2 of BME MASUS</p> <p>External control of BME MASUS and guessed marks</p>	<p>JK ↔ KB BE ↔ CB DH ↔ CH</p>	<p>Exchange copies of completed MASUS & TMAs with partner researcher.</p> <p>Do an external check of your partner's MASUS score and guessed Mark – confirm them or note any differences in how you would have assessed them.</p> <p>Read through the report to see if you agree with the findings – add anything else that you notice.</p> <p>Make any comments on the MASUS or the report in 'track changes' or in a different colour.</p>	<p>Mid-Nov.</p>



Return everything to Beth			28 Nov.
Beth to circulate draft report for feedback			Early Dec.
Final meeting to discuss results and plan dissemination			Early Dec. 5 10-16



Appendix 7: Course specific language development materials available to DD100 students

Support materials	Form of material	Commentary	Linguistic skills covered	Other skills covered
<p>A. Preparing to study DD100/DD121: Reading and note taking</p>	<p>A booklet of activities designed to be attempted before the student starts the course with the <i>Introductory Workbook</i> and <i>Introductory Chapter</i>.</p> <p>The booklet includes examples of brief jotted notes, ideas gleaned by skimming and notes made after focused reading. There are also examples of lists of key ideas, highlighted text and the use of abbreviations and symbols. In addition, the booklet includes examples of summaries and spider diagrams extracted from exemplar texts, ways to reorganise notes and writing in <i>one's own words</i>. The booklet covers referencing and</p>	<p>The booklet deals with reading strategies such as scanning, skimming and focused reading. It also provides examples of different sorts of reading material such as newspapers and academic writing.</p> <p>Section 3 "<i>Strange words, long sentences and lost meanings</i>" is an introduction to academic writing focused on unfamiliar words and difficult sentences.</p> <p>Highlighting key ideas.</p>	<p>Difficulties with lexis</p> <p>Use of a dictionary or social science dictionary</p> <p>One main idea to each paragraph.</p>	<p>Avoiding plagiarism</p> <p>The value of references to scholars</p> <p>The selection and editing of material in order to support a particular case.</p>



	<p>bibliographies.</p> <p>Additional activities explore bias in source material and how to detect it. In particular, it looks at the relationship between evidence presented and eye catching headlines.</p> <p>There is some overlap between this material and the DD100 Introductory Workbook which is dealt with in more detail below.</p>	<p>Reproducing ideas in your own words</p> <p>The importance of referencing in academic writing</p>		
Support materials	Form of material	Commentary	Linguistic skills covered	Other skills covered
<p>B. DD100 Introductory Workbook</p> <p>3: Reading (and note taking) pp. 15- 23: Text</p> <p>4: Note taking (and reading) pp. 24- 26</p> <p>5: The Crime</p>	<p>Text and activities on self selected and provided texts</p> <p>Text and activities on provided text and model notes on the provided text. The text includes a table of strategies and when to use them.</p>	<p>Reading strategies</p> <p>Note taking strategies</p> <p>The model notes are used as a discussion point with the reader. They might be considered</p>	<p>Difficulties with lexis</p> <p>Use of a dictionary or social science dictionary</p> <p>Individual readings of text</p>	<p>Reading strategies. Breaking difficult passages down.</p> <p>Identifying: seeing what's important.</p> <p>Extracting: taking it out of the text.</p> <p>Processing: making your own sense of what you have extracted.</p> <p>Re-processing: reproducing what's important in your</p>



		The value of consolidation and reflection. Storing and referencing notes and their contribution to the writing of TMAs		
Support materials	Form of material	Commentary	Linguistic skills covered	Other skills covered
8: Assessing your work	Text and a specimen TMA 07* brief, outline of a response to a TMA and specimen response to a TMA.	The specimen outline of a response to a TMA brief and the specimen response to a TMA brief might be considered as examples of good practice by the student. In the author's opinion, the specimen TMA scored 2 (Fair) on Section C (<i>Control of academic writing style - does the grammar conform to appropriate patterns of written academic English</i>) of the appropriate MASUS schedule. It included a number of examples of passive and noun phrase forms but much fewer nominalisations, modal and adverbial forms.	Suitable language and discussion for writing assignments. The use of academic discourse. There is some implicit presentation of necessary linguistic skills through example here.	General and OU specific pragmatic study skills concerning assessment and the submission of assignments.
C. Tutorial activities (4 tutorials attended) Newspapers and websites as resources for study	Newspaper stories	Textual language of headlines and visual language of pictures. Academic language and language of the subject Conventions of layout Planning assignments: language issues touching on	Textual language of headlines Academic language and language of the subject. Planning assignments: language issues touching on subject	Textual language of headlines Conventions of layout. Planning assignments Layout of



<p>Referencing exercise</p>	<p>Students had the opportunity to ask questions</p> <p>Use of sheets to practice correct referencing</p>	<p>Open University specific jargon</p> <p>Language of instruction</p> <p>Meaning of “<i>using your own words</i>”</p> <p>Academic language and language of instruction and the conventions of these forms.</p> <p>Referencing is a convention of academic language and is part of the discourse of the subject.</p> <p>There are many variations on referencing systems.</p>	<p>subject and academic language. Words like “<i>explain</i>” and “<i>discuss</i>” have specific meanings.</p> <p>Implications for language use and using the language of the subject and academic language.</p> <p>Language of instruction and conventions of academic language.</p> <p>Referencing is a convention of academic language and is part of the discourse of the subject.</p>	<p>Avoiding plagiarism</p>
<p>Support materials</p>	<p>Form of material</p>	<p>Commentary</p>	<p>Linguistic skills covered</p>	<p>Other skills covered</p>
<p>Looking at key concepts e.g. structure and agency</p>	<p>Group discussion and listening to a tape.</p>	<p>The differences between these two words which are part of the lexis of the subject.</p> <p>Students made various suggestions using various examples.</p> <p>The differences between the concepts turned out not to be clear cut.</p> <p>This was an opportunity to hear the discourse of the</p>	<p>The differences between these two words which are part of the lexis of the subject. The differences between the concepts turned out not to be clear cut.</p> <p>Identification of the language of the subject and the need to articulate this language within</p>	



<p>The structure of an essay</p>	<p>Discussion of a handout</p>	<p>subject used verbally by an expert practitioner.</p> <p>Three Section Essay plan.</p> <p>Introduction: Brief outline and context. Focus on the essay title. Explain how you plan to attack the essay defining key terms. Signpost order of points.</p> <p>Main body: main points and argument, supporting evidence and examples.</p>	<p>the course.</p> <p>Demonstration of the use and importance of the language within the discourse of the subject.</p> <p>The language of the subject was linked to theories and theorising</p> <p>It became clear that the language of Social science is unclear and imprecise.</p> <p>Three Section Essay plan.</p> <p>Introduction: Brief outline and context. Focus on the essay title. Explain how you plan to attack the essay defining key terms. Signpost order of points.</p> <p>Main body: main points and argument supporting evidence and examples.</p>	<p>General and OU specific pragmatic study skills concerning assessment and the submission of assignments.</p>
<p>Support materials</p>	<p>Form of material</p>	<p>Commentary</p>	<p>Linguistic skills covered</p>	<p>Other skills covered</p>
		<p>Conclusion: should not include new material. Summary of essay. Responds to questions</p>	<p>Conclusion: should not include new material. Summary</p>	



<p>TMA Feedback activity</p>	<p>This activity involved the use of a sheet which had been provided as feedback for a previous TMA 02**. The sheet was included a list of key points which could have been included in a response to the TMA.</p>	<p>posed in the introduction.</p> <p>As the student worked through the activity, the tutor pointed out that not only was the information important, but that it was also useful to look at the language used in the feedback. This academic language is a form which could be used in assignments.</p>	<p>of essay. Responds to questions posed in the introduction.</p>	<p>General and OU specific pragmatic study skills concerning assessment and the submission of assignments.</p>
<p>TMA Debrief</p>	<p>Discussion of the feedback which the tutor had given on a TMA.</p>	<p>Refining responses.</p> <p>Keeping to a word count.</p> <p>Following a plan.</p> <p>Dividing words between sections.</p> <p>Editing.</p> <p>Setting out sections.</p> <p>A point for every paragraph.</p> <p>You are expected not to introduce any new material in the conclusions.</p> <p>Useful words and phrases.</p>	<p>This activity highlighted the use of authoritative examples of academic language in a context which the student had tried to tackle herself.</p> <p>Varied work on language skills. None of the students complained that they did not understand the course materials or the questions posed in the assignment briefs.</p>	<p>General and OU specific pragmatic study skills concerning assessment and the submission of assignments.</p>
<p>Concept word activities</p>	<p>Sheets to fill in and keep for</p>	<p>This is a subject language exercise. Concepts are important. Subject language is important.</p>	<p>There was no obvious pattern of difference between BME (Black Ethnic Minority) and non-BME students' responses to the activity. Although this is not significant evidence of similar issues for ethnic minority students and majority culture</p>	



	reference with concepts and related meanings. These were sometimes presented as		students, it is an indication of this. This is an exercise in lexis and in the precision needed in academic language.	
Support materials	Form of material	Commentary	Linguistic skills covered	Other skills covered
Categorisation activities e.g. gender identities set out in the lonely hearts adverts	quizzes. The sheet directs the students to the relevant pages in the textbook for each definition. The students were given sheets to fill in a keep for reference.	Representation qualities of language. Putting technical terms in to context. Categories are linguist labels. Categories don't actually exist. They are arbitrarily imposed through language.	Representation qualities of language. This is an exercise in lexis and in the precision needed in academic language. Academic language creates categories and defines them.	
Reading and comprehension activities		This was an activity dealing with comprehension and understanding.	This was an activity which obliquely deals with the nature of academic discourse.	
Brain storming	Discussion of the arguments put forward in pieces of text.	This was a discussion activity which developed a list of terms linked to "globalization". The discussion led to the articulation of terms within the discourse of the subject.		
Arbitrary boundaries and transcending	This was a discussion activity involving the construction of as spider diagram on the whiteboard.	This activity looked at arbitrary boundaries which can be used fruitfully in academic thought. To some extent, the progression of academic thought relies on making, breaking and remaking	The activity addressed issues about subject lexis and discourse. It facilitated the practice of lexis and discourse.	



<p>Discussion of evaluation or arguments</p>	<p>This was a short discussion of evaluation in preparation for TMA 04.</p>	<p>tasks are generally polarised. They tend to love them or hate them. In this case the cloze task was used as a starting point for a discussion, rather than as an end in itself.</p> <p>However, the cloze task did enable the tutor to check students' understanding of discourse and lexis.</p> <p>The main aims here were to check that students understood what was required in the TMA and what responses might look like.</p> <p>In academic discourse one provides evidence in support of arguments. A good evaluation</p>	<p>This is essentially an activity which addresses academic discourse. The activity was an opportunity to examine burden of proof aspect of academic discourse.</p> <p>The discussion provided opportunities for practice,</p>	<p>General and OU specific pragmatic study skills concerning assessment and the submission of assignments.</p>
<p>Support materials</p>	<p>Form of material</p>	<p>Commentary</p>	<p>Linguistic skills covered</p>	<p>Other skills covered</p>
		<p>examines the quality of the argument. An examination of the quality of the argument inevitably leads to a discussion of the quality of the evidence provided in the arguments presented. Good arguments are founded on relevant evidence from appropriate sources.</p>	<p>articulation, experimentation and feedback.</p>	
<p>D. Workbook 1: Sections 1.3 and 7</p>	<p>Section 1.3 comprises text and an activity and covers essay writing.</p>	<p>The activity encourages the student to write a short piece in</p>	<p>This activity provides an opportunity to practice the use of academic</p>	<p>General and OU specific pragmatic study skills concerning</p>



	<p>The advice includes, writing the essay in your own words, answering the question asked, organizing the material into a coherent structure and what a social sciences essay looks like.</p> <p>Section 7 comprises some advice about writing essays in preparation for TMA 01. in the form of <i>Frequently asked questions about essay writing for TMAs</i>. These cover whether one should follow the student notes, the type of language which one should use and how to deal with one's own opinions and ideas. The advice on <i>preparing to write an essay</i> includes, looking back, reading the question, identifying the relevant material, organizing the material and progression from first draft to final version.</p>	<p>preparation for their attempt at TMA 01.</p> <p>The activity encourages the student to reflect on what they have learnt about academic discourse and lexis in preparation for their attempt at TMA 01.</p>	<p>discourse and lexis.</p> <p>There is some implicit presentation of necessary linguistic skills through example here.</p>	<p>assessment and the submission of assignments.</p>
Support materials	Form of material	Commentary	Linguistic skills covered	Other skills covered
<p>E. Workbook 2: Sections 2.4,3 and 7</p>	<p>Section 2.4 comprises text and an activity concerning Writing skills: structuring your argument.</p> <p>Section 3 comprises text and activities concerning skimming notes to determine key</p>	<p>This section includes some useful advice about the flow of ideas and writing essays.</p> <p>This is useful advice about the form and structure of assignment responses, looking at</p>	<p>Implications for academic discourse.</p>	<p>General and OU specific pragmatic study skills relevant to the writing of assignments.</p>



	<p>ideas, representing this diagrammatically, using data and making essay plans.</p> <p>Section 7, which addresses TMA 02** directly, is comprised of text. It concerns using evidence, writing essays, supporting arguments, selecting evidence, reflection and communicating arguments to a reader. It includes bullet points about the structures of paragraphs and whole essays.</p> <p>There is some advice about recapping and signposting, referring back to the question and the use of link words and phrases within an essay.</p>	<p>data, interpreting it and representing the flow of ideas.</p> <p>This is useful advice about the form and structure of assignment responses, looking at data, interpreting it and communicating it. Section 7.4 <i>Communicating your arguments to your reader</i>, deals with, thinking about the audience, clear sentences and paragraphs giving essays direction and making them flow.</p>	<p>There is some references in the material to the fact that “<i>the social sciences have formal written styles and specialized vocabularies</i>” and “<i>Academic disciplines need a complex language to be able to deal with complex issues</i>”.</p> <p>However, linguistic forms are not discussed.</p>	<p>There is some useful advice about considering the audience for a piece of writing.</p> <p>General and OU specific pragmatic study skills relevant to the writing of assignments.</p>
F. Workbook 3: Section 6	<p>This Section Comprises text. It covers general tips on TMA 03 (the timed assignment) and dealing with the returned marked assignment.</p>	<p>This is an opportunity to review and practice skills of working under examination conditions.</p>		<p>General pragmatic study skills relevant to the writing of assignments.</p>
G. Workbook 4: Section 6	<p>This Section Comprises some advice about writing essays in preparation for TMA 04***.</p> <p>The advice covers the nature of</p>	<p>The text refers the student back to <i>DD100 Looking back and moving on: writing essays and evaluating theories booklet</i>.</p>		<p>General pragmatic study skills relevant to the writing of assignments.</p>
Support materials	Form of material	Commentary	Linguistic skills covered	Other skills covered
	<p>the question, the length of response required, the central</p>			



	<p>subject matter, the definition of terms, the identification of key arguments and conflicting theories, the location of main sources of evidence, the formulation of conclusions and the structure of the response.</p>			
<p>H. Workbook 5: Section 6</p>	<p>This Section Comprises some advice about writing essays in preparation for TMA 05. The materials include a practice TMA and the corresponding student notes, some comments on the nature of the question, the length of response required, the central subject matter, the definition of terms, the identification of key arguments and conflicting theories, the location of main sources of evidence, the formulation of conclusions and the structure of the response.</p> <p>The section also includes some comments on the key concepts, the key sources cross referenced to the main course text and AV material on a section by section basis.</p>	<p>The text refers the student back to <i>Workbook 2, Workbook 4</i>, The student's essay for TMA 04*** and their tutor's feedback on the essay that they wrote for TMA 04***. As such it encourages reflection on performance.</p> <p>These comments demonstrate the relationship between the main course texts and the assignments.</p>	<p>There is some implicit presentation of necessary linguistic skills through example here.</p> <p>There may be some revision and reflection on lexis in a student's work on this section.</p>	<p>General and OU specific pragmatic study skills relevant to the writing of assignments.</p> <p>General and OU specific pragmatic study skills relevant to the writing of assignments.</p>



Support materials	Form of material	Commentary	Linguistic skills covered	Other skills covered
<p>I. DD100 Looking back and moving on: writing essays and evaluating theories booklet</p>	<p>This booklet includes activities which advise the student to return to the activities in the DD100 Introductory Workbook and to look at sections 3 and 7 of Workbook 2 and section 6 of Workbook 3.</p> <p>The booklet includes specimen outlines of responses to TMA briefs and the corresponding specimen response to TMA briefs and lists of references.</p> <p>One of the specimen answers is matched against the task with indications of marks awarded.</p> <p>There is some useful advice about referencing including examples of different</p>	<p>This reinforces those previous activities and outcomes.</p> <p>Examination of the language of assignment briefs.</p> <p>Preparation for timed assessments.</p> <p>Essay structure.</p> <p>Types of essay</p> <p>Assessing arguments</p> <p>The specimen outlines of responses, TMA briefs and the corresponding specimen response to TMA briefs might be considered as examples of good practice by the student</p> <p>Students are encouraged to review their work critically.</p>	<p>This reinforces those activities and outcomes.</p> <p>This is an important discussion of the language of instruction.</p> <p>There may be some revision and reflection on lexis and academic discourse in a student's work on this section.</p> <p>There is some implicit presentation of necessary linguistic skills through example here.</p>	<p>General and OU specific pragmatic study skills concerning assessment and the submission of assignments.</p> <p>Students are encouraged to review their work critically.</p> <p>Practicing important referencing skills.</p> <p>The value of references to scholars.</p> <p>Avoiding plagiarism</p>



	referencing	Notes on spelling and punctuation. Notes on using your own words and opinions.		
J. DD100 Study skills Supplement 2: reading evidence	This document comprises text and activities which deal with numerical data presented as charts and tables as well as textual data.	In the introduction, this booklet refers the reader back to <i>Introductory Workbook</i> and the reading skills covered there.		
Support materials	Form of material	Commentary	Linguistic skills covered	Other skills covered
	Some examples of textual evidence are discussed in some detail	The booklet sets out four stages in <i>Reading numbers and diagrams, preparation, find a way in, details and extracting the information</i> . Evidence presented as text is dealt with under the heading “ <i>Qualitative evidence</i> ”. Students are advised to practise reading textual evidence, and to “ <i>understand the conventions of writing which operate in the different forms of writing we encounter</i> ”. “ <i>When we want to understand their value as social science evidence we need learn a different approach</i> ”	There is some analysis of a piece of journalistic text covering the needs for it to sell newspapers, to mollify regular advertisers, to be short and pithy with short sentences and frequent paragraphs to make the reading a pleasant experience and the need to simplify complex debates into headline grabbing issues. The references to different forms of writing may highlight the particular form of academic language and	By implication this activity covers issues of bias and surrounding the selection and discussion of material discussed in essays. The booklet concludes with the following key points. Reading evidence is a skill which we use in our daily lives. There are two main elements to it namely, practice and learning the conventions associated with



		<p><i>to them</i>". The student is referred to various examples of textual evidence found in Book 1 and Book 2 of the course materials. Reading qualitative evidence is presented as a four stage process; <i>preparation, find a way in, details and extracting the information</i>. This section refers the reader to Book 1 Chapter 1.</p> <p>An activity from this booklet was used effectively within one of the tutorials which attended.</p>	discourse.	forms of presentation. Qualitative evidence adds depth and richness to our understanding of social phenomena by personalising and humanizing them.
Support materials	Form of material	Commentary	Linguistic skills covered	Other skills covered
K. Writing in your own words by Peter Redman	<p>This is supplementary material from the Faculty of Social Sciences in the form of text including an example of rewritten material.</p> <p>It explains the action which tutors might take when they come across copied or closely paraphrased material.</p>	<p>This is important advice to help students avoid plagiarism.</p>		<p>General and OU specific pragmatic study skills relevant to the writing of assignments.</p> <p>Students are encouraged to review their work critically.</p> <p>Avoiding plagiarism</p>



<p>L. Good essay writing by Peter Redman</p>	<p>This is a book about writing essays which students are told about in their first mailing for DD100. A flyer invites them to purchase the book if they think that they might need it.</p> <p>The book covers; what tutors are looking for when marking essays, what constitutes a social science essay, matching response assignments to assignment briefs. Several stages of writing are presented, writing introductions, writing the main section, writing conclusions and referencing.</p>	<p>This is useful advice about the form and structure of assignment responses.</p> <p>The book deals with common student worries and provides some examples of student essays.</p>	<p>The book may provide some revision and reflection on lexis and academic discourse.</p>	<p>General pragmatic study skills the writing of assignments.</p> <p>Students are encouraged to review their work critically.</p> <p>Practicing important referencing skills.</p> <p>The value of references to scholars.</p> <p>Avoiding plagiarism</p>
<p>M. The course text. I will comment on Book 2 Chapter 3, section 2, which supports TMA 02, as an example of the course texts. The sample comprises five pages of text from page 84 to page 88.</p>	<p>The course text plays an important role as an example of academic text which the students can use as a model for their own academic text written in TMAs.</p>	<p>The style of writing is quite friendly and engaging.</p> <p>“.....we have to understand what is meant by a market and how markets allocate resources. You may have thought of.....”</p>	<p>It is an interesting question whether this provides a good model for academic writing.</p> <p>Most academics would argue that academic writing should be more formal and more analytic.</p>	<p>The course text provides accessible text on which the student can try out skills of reading, note taking and writing outlined in other course materials.</p>
<p>Support materials</p>	<p>Form of material</p>	<p>Commentary</p>	<p>Linguistic skills covered</p>	<p>Other skills covered</p>
		<p>This may not be as</p>	<p>The text provides various</p>	



		<p>formal and analytic as some academic writing but it is discursive. The section includes plenty of examples of the use of the passive voice.</p> <p>The text includes a number of modal forms. However, nineteen of these were “<i>can</i>” or “<i>cannot</i>”. There is only one “<i>would</i>” and one “<i>could</i>”.</p> <p>The text includes noun phrase forms and some nominalisations.</p>	<p>models of the use of the passive form.</p> <p>The text provides models of modal forms. However, this was predominantly one form.</p> <p>Some forms, which are useful to academic discourse, were not represented at all. These forms are not generally used in everyday discourse but provide an important aspect of academic discourse. The course text is an opportunity to model various modal forms and to demonstrate ways in which they facilitate academic thought.</p> <p>It might help the student if more models of nominalisations were provided. They provide an important aspect of academic discourse and are not generally used in everyday discourse.</p> <p>The course text could model the use of nominalisations and to demonstrate ways in which they facilitate academic thought.</p>	
Support materials	Form of material	Commentary	Linguistic skills covered	Other skills covered



		<p>There are far fewer examples of the use if adverbials.</p> <p>Generally, the course text provided examples of the appropriate use of main and subordinate clauses.</p> <p>The language the text is appropriate for its audience, namely DD100 students, in terms of accessibility. It is an interesting question as to whether it is appropriate in terms of acting as a model of academic language as they should us in their writings.</p> <p>The sentences structure is clear and concise, there is a logical flow of ideas and an appropriate choice of lexis.</p>	<p>Adverbials provide opportunities to control style and provide precision in academic writing. It would help the student if the text provided more models of this form.</p> <p>This provided a good model for the student.</p>	
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(TMA 07 was one of the assignments used for the MASUS study of DD100, ** TMA 02 was one of the assignments used for the MASUS study of DD100 and *** TMA 04 was one of the assignments used for the MASUS study of DD100. The materials analysed are available from the DD100 website (OU 2008a) and Redman (2006).)*



Appendix 8: A review of the features of academic language addressed by various DD100 course language materials

Feature of academic English expected of student writing	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
Language appropriately formal and discursive/analytical		X	X	X	X				X			X	
Passive voice		X											X
Modality													X
Appropriate use of noun phrases and nominalization		X											X
Appropriate use of adverbials to control the style													
Appropriate use of main and subordinate clauses		X											X
Appropriate language for the audience/tenor		X	X	X	X								
Sentence structure is clear and concise			X	X	X				X	X		X	X
Logical flow of ideas	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X		X	X
Appropriate choice of lexis	X	X	X	X				X	X				X

(*These features are taken from Section C of the MASUS form for DD100 TMA 02, A. Preparing to study DD100/DD121: Reading and note taking, B. DD100 Introductory Workbook, C. Tutorial activities, D. Workbook 1: Sections 1.3 and 7, E. Workbook 2: Sections 2.4,3 and 7, F. Workbook 3: Section 6, G. Workbook 4: Section 6, H. Workbook 5: Section 6, I. DD100 Looking back and moving on: writing essays and evaluating theories booklet, J. DD100 Study skills Supplement 2: reading evidence, K. Writing in your own words by Peter Redman (2006), L. Good essay writing by Peter Redman and M. The course text. These course materials are available from the DD100 website (OU, 2008).)



Appendix 9: Student interviews

Interview prompt sheet

Interviews: The relationship between the use of academic language and attainment (with a focus on students from ethnic minorities) – some of the questions dovetails ones asked in the IET EAL Web-readers survey

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research.

This interview will focus on the language issues which Open University students encounter within their studies. The interview will take about half an hour. You can terminate the interview at any time. You can refuse to answer any of my questions if you wish.

The interview should cover:

1) Previous educational and university study

- Where?
- What level?
- Positive/negative experiences of education?
- In English or other languages?
- Previous experience with distance learning?

2) Experiences at the OU

- Why are you taking this course? (motivations) What is your goal?
- What expectations do you have for yourself in this course? What marks would you like to receive? Are you pleased with your performance so far? Why or why not?
- What OU courses have you taken before? (started and completed)
- What are your expectations of OU courses/distance learning? Have the courses met your expectations?
- Experience of study on the course they are now taking (i.e. T175, DD100 or K204) (in relationship to others, or not having done others)
- Experience of shifting levels or disciplines (E.G. from Sociology to Biology; from face-to-face to distance; from Level 1 to Level 2; from Openings to Level 1)
- Experience of reading on the course – what was the reading load like? Was it manageable?
- Experience of writing on the course – experiences of writing assignments, processes, circumstances. Feelings about your marks on assignments?

Do any of the following give you difficulties when studying?



(Please cross all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Listening generally | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Listening in groups | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Speaking generally..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Speaking in groups..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Writing notes..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Writing assignments..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| English grammar..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Learning specialised vocabulary..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other <i>(please specify below)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

[We agreed that we could check student records AFTER the interview to compare, but not before.]

3) Family

- Family circumstances – Would you mind telling me a bit about your family background?
- Job (and other family members' jobs)
- How do you fit OU studies into their lives?
- Family history of education
- Family attitude toward education
- Family support (who looks after kids while studying, etc.)
- Are you the first person in your family to go into higher education?

4) Language

- How do you feel about the way the course support your development of language?
- What language skills do you think you need to develop now, if you are to become an even better student?
- Have you ever made use of the learning support that the OU offers (internet sits, regional tutorials, extra tutor help, etc.)
- Have your tutors ever given you any feedback on your language use?
- If so, how did you feel about that / make use of that?

How would you best describe your skills in:



	Very good	Good	OK	Not very good	Poor
Reading English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Oral communication (speaking)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any qualifications in English Language (e.g. GCSE, IELTS, TOEFL)?

Yes No

Which qualifications?

Is English your first language

Yes No

Please list in order the languages you speak? Which language(s) do you speak at home/ at work?

Ethnicity/background/identity

- In an OU tutorial, you have to introduce yourself to your partner for an activity. What do you say?
- How do you usually answer the question, "Where are you from?"
- If you have to tick a box on an equal opportunities form, what do you usually tick? How do you feel about that?



DD100 Student interviews

DS2

Date: 7th October 2008, on the telephone

Previous educational and university experience

DS2 has not studied at undergraduate level before. She was educated in Nigeria, mainly in English.

Experiences at the OU

DS2 is studying DD100 in the hope that she will go on to get a BA in International Studies. She has signed up for another year on U213. DS2 is doing the course for personal development, for the satisfaction of gaining a degree. She started studying with the Open University some time ago. DS2 has an "M" Open University personal identifier but talked of taking courses in 1999/2000. DS2 did T102 and another course at that time but gave up owing to family commitments with her children at the time. DS2 did pass these courses. She is well on the way to getting a degree with the Open University.

Depending on how well DS2 does with her BA in International Studies, she may study further. She thinks that Open University courses are better now than they were when she previously studied with the Open University because one can now use the Internet. You can go on line if you can't get to the tutorials. There are so many ways of getting information now. The technology helps people with language problems. DS2 is all set to complete her degree. She found the examinations OK in her previous courses but ran out of time in one of them. However, she does not think that she ran out of time due to language issues. Although DS2 tried Science courses before she now thinks that she is more comfortable with the social sciences.

DS2 likes the fact that study with the Open University is convenient. She can study at a time which suits her. She doesn't have to hurry to classes. She can organise her own timetable. DS2 likes the flexibility. She doesn't use the course websites a lot but certainly uses them sometimes. However, most of what DS2 needs for her TMA is included in her study pack. She tends to use the study material before going on the Internet. DS2 goes there if she needs more information.

There are links between her Open University studies on DD100 and other aspects of her life because social science is all about everyday life. The previous courses which DS2 has done were less connected with everyday life. The Social science is about things like Health, families and work. It's about things which you can't help coming into contact with. It gives her the opportunity to think about what is going on around her.

Family



DS2 is married with four grown up children and two grandchildren. Her oldest child is 37. The family speak Yoruba at home. When they got here from Nigeria they spoke Yoruba at home so that their children would grow up knowing this language. The children are able to speak Yoruba when they visit relations in Nigeria.

Languages

DS2 Speaks Yoruba and English. She was educated in most subjects in English in Nigeria. DS2 has spoken English since childhood. She sometimes thinks in English and sometimes in Yoruba. She may think in Yoruba when she is doing her Open University work because she feels more competent in Yoruba than in English. DS2 is more confidence in her own language than in English even though she has been learning English since she was young. She thought that this was also true of other members of her tutor group including an Italian. She thought that there were times when he had difficulty relating what was in his head in Italian, to meanings in English.

English is the lingua franca in Nigeria. In Nigeria people use English to talk to Nigerians from other parts of the country. There are also people in Nigeria who speak pidgin English.

This is not the first time that DS2 has studied in English and she doesn't think that studying in English makes it difficult. She is comfortable with the language of textbooks and course texts. DS2 doesn't think that she has any problems with English except expressing herself. DS2 understands what she is reading all right.

DS2 knows what she wants to say in Yoruba but sometimes has difficulties putting it into English. For example, if you want to say, "*Do you understand English?*" in Yoruba you say "*Do you hear English?*". Sometimes when DS2 works out what she wants to say in English it becomes unclear. Her tutor pointed some of these errors out to her, but it was difficult to explain to the tutor what she was trying to say because the tutor did not understand Yoruba. It would help her if she could work with a Yoruba speaker who also understood English properly. She has a Yoruba/English dictionary but views language as something which one does not learn word for word.

The Open University could help her more with self assessment and referencing. She sees the problem with self assessment as more a personal issue than a cultural one. Before she gets to an examination she generally feels that she hasn't read enough but when she actually gets to the examination she finds that she can answer. This is where self assessment could help her.

She found the DD100 guidance on matters such as essay writing helpful.

Ethnicity/background/identity

DS2 is not working at the moment, She is a housewife. She has not worked since the family moved to the UK. She is 58. She is studying the course for self improvement. She comes originally from Nigeria. DS2 and her husband came here in 1983 when her husband was posted here. Her children went to



school here and they are now working here. DS2 stayed on with the children even when her husband went back to Nigeria. DS2 and her husband lived in Lagos before coming here but both originate from Ogun state and speak Yoruba.

Feedback on academic writing

DS2 has some problems with idioms and expressions. We talked about the fact that if she were at university full time, she would get more opportunity to use these expressions and idioms with her fellow students around the campus and that loss of such opportunities was one of the disadvantages of distance learning.

When she thinks about the way she says some things in her own language it becomes a bit awkward to say it in English. It is bit unclear. We talked about whether DS2 needed some help with some key words which were different in Yoruba and English like the example cited above. However, these key words would have to be identified. DS2 certainly thought that this approach might be tried out. We talked about the differences between everyday talk and discursive writing. We talked about the value of reading as much as possible to the improvement of writing.

DS8

Date: 15th September 2008 on the telephone

Previous educational and university experience

DS8 has not been in education for a long time. She last did a college course in 1999. She has not studied at undergraduate level before. She has studied at colleges before but not at University. She studied in the UK at the City of London College which has now become the City of London University. She did data processing and management. They were courses around computing and management at Higher National Diploma level.

She has studied in English before. All her education since she was able to start preschool has been in English. She would not study in any other language apart from English. She tends to think in English as well as in her own language. Everything which she has learnt has been in English.

Experiences at the OU

DS8 has thoroughly enjoyed DD100. She started with the Open University this year. She wanted to push herself and to enjoy the experience of studying at this level. She is hoping to pursue a Psychology course which is linked to what she does at work. She was advised that DD100 was the best course to start with for that and can now see why. It makes so much sense. She has enjoyed DD100 a lot. It is a very well



designed course. She was worried about the study and how she would cope with it but it has worked out well.

She finds that tutorials are more about subject content issues than language issues. She would definitely recommend the Open University to her friends and family. She hopes to gain a BSc in Psychology. She now intends to take a break and to start her next course in February to give a chance to look at her options. She will probably speak to a careers advisor in the meantime to see what else she could go into. She hasn't used the website much but has discussed the course with colleagues who are doing the same course.

DS8 was attracted to the Open University because both her sister and her sister's husband are Open University students. She also thought that it would suit what she does in terms of time and commitment. She thought Open University study would give her some discipline. She also liked the courses on offer. She liked the guidance that she got from the Open University. She also liked the idea of doing something else before she started the Psychology course.

Other universities which DS8 had approached would have taken her straight into a psychology course. That frightened her a bit because she didn't think that she knew a lot. In addition, she had not studied for a while and she wanted to progress into psychology. DD100 has been absolutely perfect from her. These other courses were much more demanding in terms of time and she didn't think that she could do them along with working full time. She would have had to have made a lot of adjustments to her life style including giving up her weekends and studying several days during the week. The Open University fits in with her lifestyle at one evening a week. She allocates a few hours a day to study.

There are links between DS8's Open University study and her work. She thinks that the nature of her work, helping people with learning difficulties helps study in the social sciences and psychology because she can draw examples from her work and that study in the social sciences and psychology will help her in her work. The link with her work has made DD100 very helpful. One of her colleagues is doing the same course and they both feel the same about it. It has opened them up to more than they expected and that was the surprise which they got. The course is quite vast and they have learnt much more in the last nine months than they ever thought they would. She and her colleagues find that they are constantly relating what they have learnt on the course to life around them.

The difficulties she has with language are linked with the fact that the course is at a higher level than that which she had previously experienced. However, she couldn't decide whether the problem was to do with the language or with the fact that it was a different level of studying and a new subject with new words. She found the new words difficult. She found the introduction of a new vocabulary difficult. She has got used to this new language over the months. She had wondered whether the new language was due to the subject or the level of study. She felt that doing a lot of reading helped.

DS8 found the language support materials provided in DD100 very useful. She has also used her dictionary to check out language and words as she studies and has found that helpful. DD100 has added a few words to her vocabulary. She hopes that she has become more creative in the use of words. She would like help with written English. She has difficulty with putting what she is thinking down on paper in the right language. She sometimes wonders what she meant in essays which she has written. The tutor might comment on her work that she (*the tutor*) didn't understand the meaning and DS8 would



read it back and agree that she didn't know what it meant either. There were gaps in what she was thinking and what turned up on paper.

DS8 thought that she would benefit from an English course. She now knows how to plan and how to prepare an essay. She is short in being able to say what she wants to say. She thinks that this is more due to language than knowledge of the subject. What she has written does not reflect what she wants to say. She finds it particularly difficult when she has to justify her argument. She is looking for the words to put in when she comes up against this. She thinks that verbal TMAs would be better than the written ones because she finds it easier to express herself verbally. Given the option, DS8 would do an English course alongside a psychology course rather than before the English course. However, knowing what she knows now, she would have opted to do an English course before studying DD100. This would have given her a broader understanding of English before starting her main course.

Family

DS8 lives on her own. She doesn't have any children yet. She doesn't have the responsibility of caring for another person apart from herself. This makes taking up new responsibilities very easy. She plans to have children in the future, but not at the moment. One of her sisters lives in the UK. The rest of her family are in Zambia and all over the rest of the world, South Africa and Ethiopia. The majority of her extended family still live in Zambia. She is sixth of eleven children. She would rather be right at the bottom because being sixth still gives her some responsibilities. These days, She doesn't go back to Zambia as often as she did when she first came to the UK. She hasn't been back since 2002 but her father has come here to see her.

Languages

DS8 speaks Bemba and English. She spoke mainly English in Zambia before coming to the UK. She spoke English from an early age and was taught that to learn English you needed to speak it often so they spoke it even outside of school. This was even more than their local language. If she was in Zambia she would be speaking a mixture of English and Bemba. She is no longer able to speak Bemba fluently because she has mixed it with English. However, if she was back in Zambia she would speak to elderly members of her extended family in Bemba. That is seen as a sign of respect unless they wanted to speak to her in English. However, in the first instance she would talk to them in Bemba. If she was speaking to her mother she uses mostly Bemba, but she speaks mostly English to her father. Bemba is both a spoken and a written language. Most people in Zambia speak Bemba.

Ethnicity/background/identity

DS8 is originally from Lusaka in Zambia. She has been in the UK for sixteen years. She works with adults with learning difficulties. There's lots of psychology involved. She works in a multi-disciplinary team with



psychologists. She does project management and IT support. She manages groups of people and directly supports clients. DS8 has previously worked for an airline.

Feedback on academic writing

We discussed the difficulties of studying in English but agreed that this was the only feasible option for DS8. It would take her a long time to become proficient enough in another language to study in that language.

We talked about the individual languages of individual courses and whether this was to do with the language of the individual courses or the language of education or a bit of both. We discussed whether these issues were best addressed through English course before subject courses or alongside those courses. We came to the conclusion that both approaches have their advantages and their drawbacks.

We did discuss her problems with written English and how she might come to terms with this. It was difficult to work out the type of provision which would best help with this. Writing a discussion was slightly harder than usual writing but it was justifying arguments which she found particularly difficult. I pointed out that these are not the constructions which you find in everyday life. However, I think that the biggest problem that she had was that she was looking for words to use, when I think that she should have been looking for forms such as modals and nominalisations.

We talked about integrating language support with subject content and the value of using the subject content as examples in the language support material. She felt that this would be very good. She has not used the website much and was not aware that there was language support material on the website.

DS14

Date: 14th October 2008 on the telephone

Previous educational and university experience

DS14 has not studied at a university level before. He studied French and Italian at school, but not English. He has done a couple of English courses since he has been in the UK. He managed to achieve a certificate in English. In Italy he attended a college or liceo. He studied up to the equivalent of A Levels.

This is the first time that he has studied in English. When he was in Italy he studied in Italian. He doesn't think that studying in English makes it difficult.

There are definitely some differences in culture between learning in English and learning in Italian but they were not a problem for him. The learning process is different in English and Italian. In Italy, it is assumed that everybody knows the basics of a subject, whereas in the UK courses start from the basics.



Experiences at the OU

This is DS14's first Open University course. He didn't manage to attend tutorials regularly, but he found them "*really delightful*". He has not been to many other Open University events because they take place at the weekends and he is often working at the weekend.

He realised that he wanted to go back to school a few years ago. He realised that he needed to get a degree. The Open University was the best solution for him as he was not young and he needed to work. He can fit the Open University in around his work and does not need to attend tutorials and lectures. He has to earn a living while he is studying.

DS14 sees Open University study as a "*professional way to get a degree*" it makes it easier for people who have to work at the same time as getting a degree. The Open University fees are more affordable than other university fees. It is economical and he likes it. He has already applied to study an environment studies course next.

DS14 decided that he wanted to study DD100 because he really wanted a degree in Environmental Studies. He needed a level 1 course and he wanted to go on to environmental studies, he has really enjoyed doing it. The kinds of topics which he has studied on this course have always been in his interests. He is interested in the environment and in giving his support to society in general. DD100 has actually touched on some environmental issues. The biggest link is with his religion and philosophy of life. He believes in the link between human beings and the environment. If he can do something to create a better life for everyone that will be great for him.

This is the first time that he has studied in English. It was not the same as studying in one's own language but it was quite understandable. He still studies in Italian as well as English, he reads Italian and thinking in Italian comes quite spontaneously.

DS14 has found it difficult to express himself in writing but thinks that this will come with practice. This is how it works in music, the more you do, the better you get at it. He can write in a "*really proper way*" in Italian but will need more practice to do this in English. Unfortunately, he doesn't get opportunities to practice his written English as part of his work. This is one reason why he tries to read as much as possible at different levels. He reads quite slowly in both English and Italian but his speed of reading in the two languages is about the same.

He doesn't think that he needs help with his academic writing from the Open University because he thinks that it will come with practice. It is just about "*moving to a higher level*". He has been to classes about writing essays organised by the Open University during DD100 and has found these really helpful. The only problem he had was that some of these sessions were at times when he was really busy with his job and they clashed with his work commitments.

DS14 thinks that the Open University has given him all the support which he has needed. It is up to the student to take advantage of this help. He needs to be able to write in a more academic way. It would be helpful if there were examples of well written assignments on the Internet so that students could see how it should be done. It would something that the student could go back to.



He hasn't contacted Study Support about his language issues but he has talked to his tutor about them and she was really helpful. He felt that by the end of the course his writing of assignments had improved. He became more used to the academic writing.

Family

DS14 lives with wife who is also Italian in London and has a cousin who lives in the UK.

Languages

DS14 speaks Italian. He studied French at school. He also speaks English. For the last ten years, he has sung in English and American for most of the time. He used to sing in English and American in Italy before he came to the UK. When he first came to England, eight years ago he couldn't speak a single word of English. He learnt to sing in English without properly learning the language. He sang the words without knowing what they meant.

He doesn't have much trouble expressing his feelings and communicating his ideas in English, but his first language is Italian. He reads environment literature in both Italian and English. He doesn't see much difference between the languages in this respect.

He has a couple of friends who work in the environmental field and he occasionally practices his academic English by talking to them. However most of the time he does not speak in an academic way.

Ethnicity/background/identity

DS14 is Italian. He comes from Sardinia. He is a musician. He has been in the UK for eight years. He is 33. There are definitely some differences in culture between learning in English and learning in Italian but they were not a problem for him.

Feedback on academic writing

We discussed the issues about attendance at writing workshops and considered the possibility of using on-line resources. He thought that this was a good idea.

I had a conversation with DS14 about his tendency to write in long paragraphs. He explained that this was a cultural thing. This is the way that he expresses himself in Italian. It is a cultural difference between the UK and Italy. He is getting used to writing in shorter paragraphs. He just needs to remind himself when he starts an assignment.

We also discussed the use of impersonal forms in academic writing.



K204 Student interviews

KS1

Spoke: 1 May 2008, 27 June 2008, 3 Nov. 2008

TMA01 54, TMA02 69, TMA05 60

Previous educational and university study

She always wanted to be a teacher. She did 5 O-levels and then got married. She never got around to doing her A-levels. She got a NNEB in Nursery (25 yrs ago). She enjoys working with early years, children under 5.

She worked as a nanny, ran play group and worked in a school. It was then that she realized she wanted to progress. As a result she did courses in Special Needs at Worcester University. Then did OU course E660 (Assistant Teacher).

Family

KS1 is married with two older children. Her son is 20; he did his A-levels, didn't want to go to university, and is now doing very well at work. Her daughter is 17 and currently doing A-levels (arts, drama, English); she wants to go to uni. They share a computer. She said her husband is very, very supportive – he drove her to tutorials and then they did something afterwards. “The kids just get on with their own thing.” She doesn't think that anyone in her immediate family has been in higher education.

She studies in the evenings after 5.30 (after she gives the kids their tea). Her husband works shifts – and is often not there on evenings or weekends, so she works then. Basically, she uses any spare moment (e.g. while she's making tea). She has a notebook with her at all times and keeps notes for activities and ideas about assignments. She generally studies 3 hours in the evening during the week, over the weekends and at tutorials.

Ethnicity/background/identity

In response to the question “Where are you from?”, KS1 says “a small town in Staffordshire”. Then she would say she's married with two children and what her job is. She ticks White British on equal opportunity forms.

Experiences at the OU



She started her studies in 2001 but then changed job. She's now doing a Foundation Degree for Early Years. She took some time off from her studies because her husband lost his parents. Then she changed job again. Now she's only got one more course until she gets her degree. She wanted to go on and become a teacher, but now she's been put off (June 08). In our last conversation in November, she was again considering whether she might go on with her studies. She sounded much less bitter about having had to return to higher education.

Her reason for studying at the OU is that her role at work requires it. She manages a pre-school. There was a government initiative to get more qualified people in to such jobs, so she has to extend her learning to keep her job (despite her 20 years of experience). She resents that a bit. As she says, it's a very, very demanding job. She says she won't get any reward because of her degree – no increase of pay, no better job.

Besides K204, the other OU courses she's taken are E660, E115 and E124. In November, she had already started E215, Extending Personal and Professional Development (Level 2, 60pts), which is the last course in her foundation degree. It requires her to collect data and relate things to her practice.

Her job is very demanding, and she has to work a lot with social workers and children with special needs. As a result, she finds it difficult to manage her studies and she feels she hasn't been able to give them 100%. But she has been able to use her own knowledge and relate it to the course. She finds the reading and assignments much easier when she can relate them to her job.

Experience of K204

Although she was in HM's tutor group, she went to tutorials with another AL, as it is closer. After TMA 02 she switched to this tutor's group – but she and her new tutor agreed that she could stay in the research project.

KS1 wanted to do K204 to go beyond young learners, to test herself and go beyond her comfort zone. She was pleasantly surprised to find that could relate well to the course materials and it enhances what she's doing. Now at work she's always thinking about issues like Quality of Life and she refers back to what she learned.

She enjoys the OU materials and likes how the OU works: studying on her own, getting up early to read, fitting it in with her life. She generally does all the activities. In K204, she hit 60s on her TMAs all the way through and felt that she could have done better. If there were anything about her studies that she could change it would be to add more tutorials, more opportunities to meet in groups (with or without the tutor) and more ways to build a sense of community. She recognized conferencing as a way of doing that, and she said that some students did. She didn't feel confident to join in very often, though (but she did try), as she felt that all the students already knew each other.

When I spoke to her in June, she was finding the course really hard. She felt that she was reading but not retaining. There was a lot she can relate to, but it was a lot to take in. At that point she said she's been quite happy with her marks: "As long as I pass, I'm happy." She told me she's 'not an academic person really'. Again in November she mentioned that there was a lot of reading on the course and that



she found the course materials 'hard going'. She tended to enjoy the reading in the Reader more, as she got more out of it, saying that it was straight to the point and she could relate to it better. She found the materials in the binder harder going and too much.

Experience of writing on K204

When I spoke to her in April, she was disappointed with the results of her 1st assignment. She thought the content was there but that she was marked down because of punctuation and spelling. It was like being "back at school". Everyone had the same experience of the first TMA – all the students in her tutor group were disappointed. Her tutor says that's normal.

When we spoke in June, she had just finished TMA 04 and struggled, even though it was about Early Years. She feels she repeats herself – even though she uses a thesaurus.

Her typical writing procedure is: read TMA question, marks up things when she's reading the course materials, starts with introduction, breaks it down into 3 parts. She then breaks down the middle again. Throughout, she'll refer to the Assignment Booklet, but doesn't use the grid. She says she does the assignment minute.

Essay writing process:

Gather info

Tutorials

NOTES

Plan intro

Main part – example: Piaget: ideas + analysis (padded out)

Conclusion – what she's learnt, the main idea of the TMA, what the assignment is about

Writes by hand

Word processing

Reads out loud

Goes through each of the sections

Cut & paste (has another page where she moves things in and out)



Highlights things in course mats / underlines in reader

Assignment Booklet

Some extra reading in the internet (e.g. UNCRC)

How long?

99% of tutorials working on TMAs

1 week planning and collating

1 week on and off

Every evening

Weekend

She's self-taught on the computer and is dubious of the eTMA system. She lurks in forums and chat rooms, but doesn't participate.

As far as her language abilities go, she's fine about listening in tutorials and really enjoyed that and felt comfortable in her tutorial group. She also has no problems speaking. She finds writing the hard part – particularly finding a logical order, looking at things critically and reflecting on practice. She also found it a challenge to stick to the word order. She felt she had improved as she went along on her grammar. She became more aware of it and beat herself up over it. But she didn't get any more comments about her grammar after TMA 01. She also found learning specialized vocabulary difficult and that you don't get enough support on this from the course materials.

Writing support

KS1 gladly accepted a bit of extra writing support. She said: "I'll have any help I can". She finds writing difficult and thinks her problem is that she writes as she speaks. She hasn't got a lot of experience of writing.

On 1 May 08, we talked about proofreading, grammar, and HM's critique of her TMA 01. For proofreading, she could get people at her school, colleagues, her daughter (who is doing A-levels). In her last course, she had the support of a mentor and thought that would be beneficial in other courses.

She took into account HM's comments for TMA02. She ran spell check, grammar check, read it out loud. He didn't mention language on TMA 02. She's paranoid about grammar and punctuation. She said her grammar school teacher would be disappointed with her. She has O-level English.



On 27 June, I gave her praise for her use of course materials in the TMA and for having a good structure. I suggested that she work on links between her ideas and paragraphs. I emailed her a list of sentence stems. She asked if I had noticed a change in her writing and that she is doing better at incorporating examples. She said it's very helpful to have me because it's good to know that she's on the right track (even though I felt like I hadn't done much).

She had changed tutors but hadn't really noticed a difference in their marking style. With her tutor, they do an outline of the assignments together in the tutorial. She said that the tutorials have been excellent. Her tutor goes through things in a way she can understand. She likes the OU and is generally pleased.

On 3 November, KS1 again said that she enjoyed the course – that the tutorials were very good and the feedback from her tutor was also useful. The exam went better than she thought and she felt more confident when she was writing. Her tutor mostly gave writing feedback on TMAs to the group in tutorials, and they also spent a lot of time in tutorials planning for the next TMA. She said that her writing developed because of my support and she found it really useful to talk to me, an English specialist (I found this a bit strange as I didn't really feel I had made a big impact). She said that her K204 tutor was really brilliant, that she really knew the field, but that she didn't know the ins-and-outs of English. Throughout the course, she tried to put what I said into practice, but that she still did not feel very confident about writing. When we spoke she was just doing TMA 01 for E215 – she didn't feel like it's full of big academic words (just plain language).

KS2

TMA01 55, TMA03 96, TMA05 69

Exam: she has no idea. Needs a 70% to keep her high score.

Spoke: 30.04.08, 03.11.08

SS doesn't go to the tutorials. I've only spoken to her on the phone. She has emailed with and spoken to HM.

Previous educational and university study

She's got A-level English. Didn't want to go on to uni at the time.

She started university (studied psychology) in her 20s. dropped out because of money and went to work.

She did a Diploma in English language at the OU and passed Level 3 English courses (from 2004-2007). Then switched to HSC (2007). Got marks in the 70s and 80s in U212.



She thinks Level 1 OU courses are similar in level to A-level. Beyond that was more difficult. But she didn't have any problem making the jump from Level 1 to Level 2.

Experience at the OU

She's working towards a degree in Childhood and Youth Studies and only has 2 more Level 3 to go (already signed up for the Research course). She's not worried about it. She'll get there. She's doing the courses 'just to keep her brain going'. K204 is her 5th OU course (so she has the most experience of all the students in the group); she completed every course she started. She's also completed every assignment. There's never been an assignment that she couldn't do – it's always manageable.

OU fits her life. She's got 3 under 5s at home and has stopped working. She worked in HR for 18 years but would like to move into counseling or work with youngsters. She volunteers in a school.

SS finds it a challenge to switch between the disciplines. She said that when she was studying English, there was no right or wrong; it's just about how well you argue your point. In U212 they did not ask for your opinions. In K204 you can include your opinion – so she finds it difficult to measure and hard to stay objective. But she finds the Assignment Booklet helpful. She says that a lot depends on the tutors' particular likes and dislikes. It's not that her writing has developed – it's that you get used to what a particular tutor wants from you.

Experience of K204

She feels that K204 is like 'common sense'. It has not been her favourite course. Everything is intertwined and everything overlaps. She finds it hard to keep it all separate. Maybe it's also less relevant to counseling, what she wants to do.

The reader was really interesting. The course is easy to read, but there's a lot of it. Does not do a lot of the activities (probably normal).

Her marks have been up and down this course. She's not really sure why. She said that the feedback that HM gives is not that much different, regardless of whether she got a 50 or a 90. If there were one thing that she could change, it's that she would get more feedback.

HM is 'lovely' – but he hasn't given much feedback. Only mentions if she doesn't mention race or equal opportunities, things like that. He didn't say much about writing.

She says she's independent. Having contact with others would just make her panic about what she's writing. In the evenings, her children have activities so she can't go to tutorials. But she also doesn't feel she needs them. The OU structure suits her well.

Language



Her biggest challenge in the TMAs is keeping to the word limit and deciding what to include from all of the course materials (1500 words is not a lot): how to be succinct without missing major things out. She wishes that she could be given more guidance about what to exclude.

She tends to study around the assignment she was pleased with her mark on TMA02, but disappointed in TMA 01. In 02, she knew what they were looking for.

Her writing practices are 'old-fashioned' – making rough notes and writing a draft by hand. Then she moves to the computer. She does it over a couple of days, which makes her focus. She gets her husband to proofread for her.

She seems satisfied with her writing/performance.

Writing process:

Looks at the title

Breaks it down

Finds the relevant bits of the course

Hand write draft

Go to computer to type it up

Proofread by husband

She has the assignment booklet and guide in front of her the whole time she's writing.

Gives herself 7-10 days to do this.

Needs about a total of 6-8 hours to complete it.

Family

Her husband went to uni. Her son will be going next year (Maths/Actuary) – otherwise no one.

She's older and says that makes her more organized and knows what she wants. She works during the week, in the afternoon when the kids are out. She has time to work/study when the kids are out during the day. Her husband works abroad 1 month and then is home 1 month. She works at the company from home.



Ethnicity/background/identity

If someone asks her “Where are you from?”, she says Wolverhampton . on equal opportunities forms, she ticks White British.

KS3

TMA01 80 (highest in the course), TMA03 96, TMA 05

Met: 06.02.08, 12.03.08, 11.06.08

Spoke: 14.04.08, 30.04.08

Couldn't get in touch again – her email is defunct and didn't answer mobile

KS3 regularly attended the tutorials and actively participated. At the first tutorial, she mentioned that she lost her mom when she was young; went to live with aunt; then moved with father and step mum. As a result, she has a lack of trust, difficult to build up relationships. This she also mentioned in her TMA 05.

She's a police officer – a schools' liaison officer. Her job is to liaise between schools and the police. She gives teacher sessions with schools, provides 'bully training', etc.

Experience with the OU

K204 is her 3rd course at the OU. She started in 2005 and also did K100 and U212. She's doing it to prove to herself that she can. A friend of hers was doing OU and she thought I'm cleverer than you. She wants to prove to people that she can – people that think she's 'mad' or 'scatty'. The courses also help her in the role she's in now, and her employer is paying for the courses. The topics are related to her role – she works with youth and children. She's in a specialist role. By doing the course, she's making herself indispensable.

Experience of K204

KS3 always goes to tutorials. And when she's writing her assignments, she makes good use of the Assignment Book. At the second tutorial, after TMA 01, HM read her essay out to the group as a good example. He didn't realize it was her and she didn't tell the others (until afterwards).

Writing support 04.04.08

One the phone, we talked about punctuation (comma use and run-ons) and apostrophes (I recommended *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*). She doesn't seem too bothered, though, as her tutor doesn't



comment on these things. I gave advice on breaking up paragraphs, writing topic sentences, incorporating examples and proof.

Writing support 14.04

She uses a proofreader—a mate of hers, a ‘smart guy’. She also asks her typist at work to look through it (although it was discovered later that the typist often gives bad advice).

By the end of the course, KS3 had much improved on joining sentences.

Ethnicity/background/identity

Although I didn’t ask her, I would say that KS3 is White British.

KS4

TMA01 56, TMA02 70, TMA03 96, TMA05 75,

Met: 06.02.08, 12.03.08, 11.06.08

Spoke: 14.04.08, 30.04.08, 29.09.08

Her last tutor (U212) told her that she has problems with academic English; she’s still not sure what that means. She was happy that I was there to look at this with her.

Previous educational and university study

GCSEs – didn’t get great advice.

Started 3 A-levels in English, German and Geography. But in College she went off studying, because it took the fun out of it; she dropped out. Only stayed with English – got a D.

Then Travel & Tourism B Tech National Diploma (her mum made her go – said she wasn’t just going to sit about), 2 yrs, got a B

Job in hotel reception

Lloyds Bank

Now quite set on teaching (took a long route to find out what she wants to do).



Not guided in the right direction. She wanted to join the army. Her parents expected her to get her GCSEs and go to college. They did not go to higher education, and she thinks that's why they (particularly her mother) pushed her into it (b/c her mum regretted it).

Experiences at the OU

KS4 said she's doing the course because she's bored at home with the kids. She started when she was in Germany (2004, 10 pt. Openings) because she had one child in the house and she was bored. She said she wanted to use her brain. Her husband was in the army and they were away from home. Now he has a job in the Midlands with the police. She studies when the kids are asleep – he does shifts. She says she's 'just' a stay-at-home parent. She has some insecurity about not working in the field. She doesn't work in the field and sometimes feels that she doesn't have anything to say – and that her course mates have much more experience. She's insecure about her lack of experience of working with children. In the first tutorial, I encouraged her to use her experience as a mother.

She's working towards a degree in Childhood and Youth Studies. Other OU courses she'd done are K100 (2005) – didn't enjoy, too much about health care when she wants to focus on children. U212, Openings, and now K204, which she thought was really interesting, good. She's now on a Level 1 Teaching Assistant course (works in a school 1 day/week). She wants to keep in with the OU b/c it might come in handy later.

After finishing K204, KS4 was accepted to start new teaching degree at Wolverhampton. So in 3 years she'll be qualified to teach Primary, specialising in Early Years. She now feels that face-to-face university is boring, because there's too much class time and not enough independence: It's not her style of learning. She hated it at first and went to see a lecturer, who reassured her that later it will get more practical. She was pleased because loads of what she's done in K204 had come up, so it's been really useful. She's 'ahead of the game'. It was interesting that she has gone from novice to the expert, since she was so insecure at the beginning of her OU course and now she feels like she knows a lot more than her fellow students: "I didn't think that having my two children was like a real thing". Now she sees the value of this experience as a mum, particularly in comparison with the young students (who just think kids are cute).

I asked if she would get any credit for the courses she did at the OU and she won't, unfortunately. But she said the OU courses helped her get on the course.

She told me that in her new university course they had English as a unit – to see how much they know. They're paying more attention to writing (HM was more focused on the course). She asked me questions about homonyms, synonyms, etc. and was worried because she doesn't know those things. She had to do exercises like 'underline the verbs in the sentence'. She says she'll have to make an action plan for writing and she thinks she has a lot of work to do. But she seems much more confident now than when I first met her.

Experience of K204



When I spoke to her the first time in April, she was disappointed with her mark on TMA 01 – how does she feel now?

For some reason, she didn't feel as much under pressure with K204 as with previous courses– she had gotten used to it. She said she never did the full 16 hours of work that they suggest.

She 'gets on alright' with the reading – says it's easy to read stuff, but she sometimes finds it a bit much. She said the course reader was really hard going and too heavy; it 'didn't keep you engaged' and she couldn't relate. She found the ring binder much easier to read because 'If someone writes from personal experience – I can read and take it in more.' She says she has problems with 'massive academic writing'.

She found K204 completely different than U212 and that her tutors were very different. That was hard because they had different expectations. HM wanted them to have an understanding of the course, while the U212 tutor was more interested in how they wrote. I asked her which approach she thought was better. She replied that 'how you write is better as far as moving on in your career. You need to know how to write as well as content. Writing is equally important. Just as important as knowing what you're talking about. Someone needs to make sense of what you write.'

But when she was on U212, she didn't profit from the tutor's comments on her language because she didn't know what he'd meant. She never could take in comments on the PT3 form. 'What does he mean? Need to be more academic?' She couldn't get to tutorials back then and she tried to ring him once but gave up. K204 is the first time she's been able to attend tutorials and she's seeing the value of them.

She liked HM as a tutor. She said he was always available, he always emails, and he marks quickly. In her view, he's dedicated and he knows his subject area. If you had a problem, he would get back straight away. If you're stuck, he'd help. She felt he wanted students to do well (which showed in the fact that he brought in old exam papers, gave them study tips, etc.) So she was 'very pleased with him'. HM didn't mind about their language. I asked if she wished he had. She said that she was glad he didn't because it meant that she got better marks. But now she worries that 'it's gonna come back and bite her.'

She says her problems with writing are that she writes like she speaks and that she needs more words to use. She thinks there should definitely be more writing support. She now thinks that she should have gone to writing workshops offered by the OU, but she didn't for some reason. She says it's nice to know that you've understood the course – but that they could have done more on academic language. She would have definitely taken that up. She thinks that her writing has developed, but she still has lots to do. When she looks back at TMA01, she thinks it looks very repetitive. But in general, she was pleased with her marks. She didn't do TMA 06 and focused on revising instead. 96 was her highest score, but she thinks it 'probably wasn't supposed to be that good' (indeed we thought HM was slightly generous when we did the MASUS). On TMA 05 she got a 75. She thinks that someone else would have given her a lower grade and would have viewed her language more critically. In her last course, all her marks were just the same: 50s and 60s. On each PT3 form, she got the same comments, same marks; she doesn't think this keeps you motivated.



Language wise, she doesn't really have any problems listening generally. She said she did have problems understanding HM in the first tutorial, but that she quickly got used to his accent. She doesn't like speaking in tutorials that much because she's shy and she really doesn't like to make presentations. She says she's alright at writing notes, but could have done with some help with English grammar and learning specialized vocabulary.

Family

KS4 is married with two children; she's a 'housewife'. Their family recently moved to Birmingham because of her husband's job. She misses her family's help and support. Her husband does shift work and only has one weekend off a month. He did GCSE & BTEch in Public Uniform Services – he always knew he wanted to be a policeman.

Now that she's doing the new university course, her husband has the kids until 1. He's more supportive now that she's going to a f2f university. He didn't seem to value the OU. She has a friend whose husband really takes it very seriously and helps her a lot so that she can do it. He does it 'with a bit of a push'. He's never taken them for a full day. Now he's got to take it more seriously and realizes how hard it is with a 2 year old (he's also about to start an OU-German course, so he'll see what it's like).

Language

Her U212 tutor mentioned that she had problems with academic English.

Writing advice 14.04

She was a bit disappointed with her first mark on TMA 01. I told her that I thought it was better than she had been given and told her that we had discussed this in the research team. This seemed to encourage her. We talked about 1) referencing 2) creating flow 3) topic sentences and 4) making an outline. After TMA02, she wrote me to tell me that she had improved: "I just wanted to say thank you for all the points you gave me the for my assignment. I tried everything you said and I got 70% (Got it back this morning) I bet you will see a big difference when you read it! I am soooooo happy and it has really inspired me and given me much needed confidence for the next one, so thank you again, your comments really helped!!"

Writing advice in June

She says she doesn't feel ready to go on to Level 3 after this course and is considering taking another Level 1 course first.



She couldn't believe that she got a 96 on her assignment – and didn't take it as a general trend but as a fluke.

Ethnicity/background/identity

In response to the question “Where are you from?”, she never knows what to reply. She doesn't know if people mean ‘originally’ (because she has a strong Geordie accent) or where she now lives in the Midlands. She can't believe that people don't hear that she's from Newcastle, but some people don't recognize it. So her answer depends on that. On equal opportunities forms, she ticks White British.

Speaks German.

KS5

TMA01 56, TMA02 40, Dropped out

Spoke: 05.05.08, Emails

Ethnicity/background/identity

KS5 is Sri Lankan. He came to the UK to work when he was 25. He started university then and dropped out. He did community work for 7-8 years, working with children in London. He was new to Birmingham and now works for Midland Arts. He wants to do a degree in social work and was looking for a placement in this area.

Experience of K204

KS5 was the only BME student in HM's tutor group that was involved in the project.

I spoke to KS5 on the phone once and exchanged several emails with him. He got a 56 on his first assignment. After this assignment I spoke to him and tried to arrange writing support for him. But it was too late to help with TMA 02. When I emailed him, he replied:

“Thank you for your email and the phone call. It is 545 in the morning and I'm still typing my essay TMA2. I was in London during the week and returned 4am Monday morning then to work. I was so tired and I could not call you back.”

He got a 40 on TMA 02. He said he got this low mark for the following reason:

“I think because I did not use much of course material and did not address disability, ignoring my tutor's warning for the second time.”

At the same time that he was doing K204, he was preparing for the K100 exam in June 2008. In K100, his lowest mark was a 47 and his highest was a 60.



Writing support

He studied mostly in English before coming to the UK, but the focus of his study was literature. He recognized English language competence to be a barrier for him in higher education. He says 'structure is missing'. He had already inquired about language courses in Birmingham, but noted that they are quite expensive (£1000). In his own words (from an email):

"I am so glad to hear from you, as you may have notice from my work I have not grassped writing skills and grammer. I need help in these areas. English is not my first language may well explain my situation. On top of that time keeping too is problem and trying finish my TMA at 5 in the morning on the 15th April (TMA cut off date) would explain it better."

I recommended him for extra writing support from the region, and he met with someone there. He also expressed interest in seeing a high-scoring TMA from one of his fellow students, so I arranged to have a KS3 send him her assignment. When he got this, he wrote: "*I can see the difference, It is plain and simple with small sentences and to the point.*" I also recommended that he try to attend the tutorials. We talked about formulating an introduction (as this was his main weakness in TMA 01). I advised him not to just write a story but to use his story to support the course materials.

He met with regional support and got an extension for TMA 03. He said that they had 'really an helpful session'. In an email he wrote: "I have not given TMA 3 yet, I got 2 weeks extension, I will be handing it this week. I have changed the writing structure, My tutor is extremely helpful, you all are such an inspiration." He also wrote: "I feel more confident in writing my essay and and I want to see tutor's comments this week so I could improve them as it goes."

Unfortunately, KS5 never turned in TMA 03. He wrote HM to say that his father died and he had to go to Sri Lanka unexpectedly. HM gave him an extension, but never heard back from him.

After the course finished, I spoke to him again. He had officially dropped out of K204 and was taking a break, but was going to try again the following year. He had passed his K100 exam in the meantime. He said that the main issue with his studies was time keeping. He said he was also looking into taking an English language course. I encouraged him with his writing and told him that he had good writing skills – in fact much better than many other students on the course. I said that if he followed the assignment guidelines, worked on time management and attempted to attend the tutorials then he would certainly be fine.

KS6

TMA01 40, TMA02 45, TMA03 65, TMA05 65, TMA06 75,

Met: 06.02.08, 12.03.08, 11.06.08

Spoke: 14.04.08, 30.04.08, 24.10.08

We also shared several email exchanges.



KS6 always attended the K201 tutorials. When we first met, she said her last tutor (U212) said that she had problems with academic writing and written expression. She wasn't quite sure what that meant. With the OU, she did a dyslexia assessment, a 'psychological test'. She is not dyslexic, but has problems with writing and speed reading. Her reading skills and spelling are fine. She is allocated more time to do her exams. She has had language support from the region.

Family

KS6 lives with parents. It sometimes seemed as if there may be some difficulties there. She's got 1 brother and 1 sister and nephews that come around at the weekend. She is the only person in her family to pursue a degree, although she has one cousin who went to university. They support her and are really pleased for her. They know that if she wants to do something, she'll do it.

Ethnicity/background/identity

She usually answers the question "Where are you from?" with Wolverhampton. On equal opportunities forms, she ticks White British.

Previous educational and university study

NVQ, Level 3 (2004-05) through work

First Aid

College – Nursing 97-99, BTech Early Childhood

Sign language (didn't pass Level 1), wanted to work with deaf people

She has a very demanding job working with children and teens that can't be placed in care. At work, she has to write reports.

She would like to do get a job more on the counseling side, something like Play Therapy. She has always wanted to work with young children (not teens like she does now). Her job is too draining.

Experiences at the OU

KS6 liked the OU degree programme because it combines all age and combines Teaching and Education and has a good combination with social work and childhood/education. She also likes it because it's flexible and because she can mix and match her courses. She enjoys the courses.



KS6 is working towards a BA Honours in Children and Youth. Now she feels she's 'well on her way'. She has taken the following OU courses: K100 (Oct. 2005), U212 and K204. Her next course will be Managing Care, Level 3, which starts in February. She's wanted to do that course for a long time. After that, she'll do an Education course. Earlier, she had mentioned that she was nervous about trying out a Level 3 course, but after K204 she feels better about it. She first wants to get used to Level 3 in a field that she's more familiar with before she has to take her next Level 3 course, which is in Education (and she's found it difficult to switch between the disciplines). This plan shows a real awareness of her abilities and a clever strategy. Before her next course starts, she wants to do some Sentence Construction work from the website I recommended (Sentence Sense).

Her study time is generally from around 11.30-4.30 on the days she's not working, but she can't study on the days she's working. At home it's quiet during the day (but not on weekends when her nephews come). She doesn't have a desk and works on a laptop on the bed. She sometimes goes to the library. She has learned to do a couple of hours and then break when she's writing assignments. She's also learned to be organized with managing her time (with finance and studying).

The OU courses have changed her practices and how she thinks about things at work, but she doesn't show off to her colleagues or think she knows better (it seems like practice is valued more than education in her field). Her studies don't impact on her work. She doesn't get financial support from work (but from the OU). She does get Prof. Dev't time from work, support and time off for assignments – e.g. they change the rota for her.

Language

As far as her language abilities go, she sometimes has difficulties with listening because of a hearing problem. She orders transcripts of the spoken materials and sits in the front of the class. She has no problems with speaking generally but doesn't like giving presentations. She keeps good notes, but no one else would understand them. She has problems with general writing issues like the differences between their/there, etc. And she notes that she still has room for improvement on grammar. She learns specialised vocabulary through study and understands more than she may use. She says her strength is her good working memory. The reading is fine for her, but she has problems with the writing. It's not the course materials that give her problems; it's the writing

She's had a lot of support from the OU: from HM, the internal language specialist and the Region. It was the OU that picked up her disability last year. She is really grateful for the assessment: "It's like a protection at work" (she gets hassled there because of her handwriting). She's glad she did it and feels fortunate that the OU paid for it. She's learned a lot about her strengths and weaknesses through it.

The language skills she thinks she needs to develop now are making connections, sentence structure and being critical (a pretty accurate assessment, I'd say).

Writing feedback on 14.04



I gave her advice on proofreading and advised her to try reading her sentences out loud. I advised her to write short sentences and to use her computer's spell check program. I tried to get across to her that her problem is with sentence construction, but found this very difficult over the phone. She said she makes mind maps in planning her essays. She knows that her problem is not what she says (she knows her stuff), but how she says it.

Writing feedback on 30.04

She was encouraged because she made a 5 point improvement on her last TMA. Said she'd read her assignment and "saw what we were talking about with her sentences". She got her mother to read the assignment too [the writing support tutor mentioned that the mother put some mistakes into the essay, too – so this is a real problem for her]. HM told her that it's best to get someone with a degree to read it. She was frustrated because she doesn't know many people with a degree, but now has asked a couple of people at work. She also got a copy of a fellow student (KS3's) high-scoring essay. Frances from the Region had got in touch and arranged to meet her before the next TMA. Later at a tutorial, we talked about the students using each other as experts to read each other's papers – they all were upset about HM's advice to ask people with a degree; they don't know people with degrees.

With Frances, KS6 worked through a TMA, looking at the sentences. As Frances reported back, "KS6 has also tried to take the advice to write in shorter sentences but, because as you say, she is unsure about the construction of sentences, she divides a long sentence into two quite arbitrarily. Identifying why she had made certain errors or why she had written in a way that left her point unclear was helpful for her, I think. She said that one to one help is what helps her most." KS6 was not sure about using the online help, thinking she might have to complete it before the next TMA so Frances reassured her that it was intended to be worked with over time, gradually building an awareness of how to construct sentences. Frances offered to look through a draft of her next TMA, and will continue to do so.

Writing feedback in June

She made a much higher score on her last TMA. I tried to talk to her a bit about subjects and verbs, but it was difficult because the other students were there. She really needs to be worked with in a face-to-face situation. I gave her some extra materials on sentence composition (which probably are too difficult for her).

Writing feedback in Oct.

She felt really good because she got a 75% on her final TMA. In the last year, she had thought about quitting. She now wishes she had done K204 before U212, as she and SH had issues with the tutor. But now she feels she has improved a lot, because of the following:

Sharing on how KS3 did her assignments



Seeing how it needs to be done.

Learned about linking

Reading up

Making mind maps

Looking at the question and highlighting her reading

Linking between the question and what we need to write

She knows she needs to be more critical.

But she has now rejected the idea of getting someone to proofread for her, since she has done better when she hasn't gotten proofread. Her feedback from her mother, colleague and cousin led her in the wrong direction. The last TMA she did on her own without getting any help and she did best. [Note from Frances: One or two of the errors were made by KS6's mother. She gave her mother the draft and her mother altered one or two things that were originally fine.]

This year has given her extra confidence to do Level 3.

KS7

TMA01 45, TMA02 50, TMA03 70, TMA05 50, Dropped out – didn't go to exam

Met: 06.02.08, 12.03.08, 11.06.08

Spoke: 01.05.08, 03.11.08, KS7 doesn't use email and is difficult to get a hold of.

Previous educational and university study

Left school 20 years ago.

When I spoke to KS7 in May, he was working full time as an engineer, doing youth work, doing an NVQ computing course, doing K204 and fostering several children. He says the NVQ is good for him, so that he can get a job more related to his area of interest. He wants to be a social worker or work with special needs children. He loves working with children.

In November, I found out that he hadn't finished K204 (he did TMAs 01-05 but didn't make it to the exam) because of a change in his circumstances. All of his pressures built up and he didn't have time to study nor to attend the exam. He's keeping his full time job as an engineer, but also got a part-time job



working with autistic children, which is what he really wanted to do. He's doing his NVQ and is going to finish that. His plan is to keep his full-time job, pay off the mortgage, and then eventually go into care full time. When he's finished with his NVQ, he will probably go back to the OU and do his BA in Child and Youth Studies. His new job will pay for the OU study later (maybe in a year or so). So, as he said, "It wasn't all for naught." The OU helped him get his new job and he learned a lot about writing. He plans to come back to it.

Experiences at the OU

KS7 attends most tutorials. He obviously has a lot of experience working with children. Other OU courses he's taken are K100 and U212. He likes the OU courses because they're about life experience. He wants to go for his Masters – he tends to really go for whatever he does.

Experience with K204

KS7 was rushed when he wrote TMA01, so he got an extension to write TMA02. He got a 50 on it, and was happy that it had got better. He said he doesn't really mind how he does, as long as he passes. He feels that his "experience in life outweighs my language ability". He says, 'I'm never going to be a grade 1.' He says he's just scraping by at the OU because it's difficult to create the time to do the work. He likes the audio materials, because he can bang on a CD and listen to it all day.

Experience of Writing on K204

He needs about 2 weeks to do a TMA and takes a few moments here and there. He makes lots of notes and ties himself in knots for the assignments. He knew that he didn't relate to the course materials in the 1st one. I asked if he got any one to proofread his stuff – he said he might, as the social workers that always come to his house.

Writing process: 20-30 hours (with research)/ last one 8 hours

If he had time, planned, structured, etc.

If he didn't have time: write, research, write, more 'hit and miss'

'I was doing o.k.' took on too much.

Started poor

Improved in middle



Time got less and less, his grades suffered.

KS7 came to the tutorial in June, even though I thought he wouldn't. I hadn't prepared for him. He was pleased with his marks, though.

He said the course was good. It was very informative. But he lost interest when it was not practical. Sometimes it was a 'load of rubbish' and 'not relevant'. He felt one would really only need to read about half of it: it's 'too much' and 'bulked up'.

He said he definitely improved his writing because of HM's feedback, which he found very useful. His writing got better when he had more time (and his marks reflected that). He thinks he still needs to work on his writing, particularly on structure.

Family

KS7 is married and is a foster carer and always has several children in the house (has had 13 in 4 years). In May he had 3 and in November he had 6. He says it's a fresh challenge every day and that he learns more doing that than at any course he's done. His life is pretty hectic with all of the health workers and social workers in the house. In the end, he couldn't manage with all of his other pressures, but he was very positive that he would go back to it.

Ethnicity/background/identity

In response to the question "Where are you from?", he says Rowley Regis (close to Dudley), not where he was born, but close by. On equal opportunities forms, he ticks 'White, Other: European' (even though he's White British). He said: 'we're European, aren't we?'

T175 Student interviews

TS1

Date: 8th September 2008 on the telephone

Previous educational and university experience

TS1 went to school in Italy (he grew up near Milan). His parents (and more especially his mother) sent him to a school which specialised in classical music training – TS1 learnt the flute. He remembers studying French at the time. However, he was distracted by music, sport and cars, leaving school at 15 without formal qualifications. He enjoyed the place in terms of the friendships he made but was 'lazy' when it came to study. His next experience of education was when he worked for a jeweller, attending some evening classes in chemistry (again, encouraged by his mum). Ten years ago, TS1 studied for and



passed the Cambridge First Certificate at Westminster College (this was about five years after he had arrived in the UK). He had had no previous experience of distance learning before the OU.

Experiences at the OU

TS1's original motivation for starting at the OU was to obtain a BA in Business Studies. Although his career ideas have changed since he joined (he now wants to be a personal trainer), he feels that such a qualification will still stand him in good stead for future employment.

He has done various courses and has a mixed track record. He recently gave up T175 and has enrolled on E112 (Introduction to Sport, Fitness and Management). He says that his reason for this is primarily to do with his interests and his comparatively new idea of becoming a personal trainer.

As English is a second language for him, he has sometimes found studying a challenge. Writing remains the main difficulty (he has no experience of writing academically even in Italian). Reading was not easy at first but he thinks that he has fewer problems with it now. He hasn't taken advantage of the OU's support systems but finds the materials helpful and feels that the tutor feedback has assisted him to write more concisely and clearly than he once did (interestingly, he comes across as a very confident speaker and has no difficulty understanding colloquial English – in fact, his inaccuracies often go unnoticed because of his fluency).

He feels that he could have done better on some of his courses, although this was in part to do with the demands of work and, with one course especially, difficult personal circumstances.

Family

Neither of TS1's parents was particularly well educated but both encouraged him and his older sister to study. Apart from one cousin, TS1 is unaware of anyone in the extended family going on to further education.

TS1 studies at the weekend and in the evenings when he's not too tired. In fact, he's changing job now – he's been a media installer for Virgin but is going to be a driver delivering to catering businesses. He says that he decided to change because the Virgin job encroached too much on his free time. He has his own space for studying and is using a PC which he borrowed from a friend.

Languages

(see previous notes on the challenges of using English academically)

TS1 feels that, in some ways, his English has deteriorated since he split from his Czech girlfriend (whose English was impressively good). Although he needs the language for work, he doesn't have to extend his repertoire very much during his working day. Socially, he tends to mix with Italian ex-pats, so his English use is limited in that context too.

Italian is his first language. His parents do speak the local dialect of Veneto but the family tended to use standard Italian at home. TS1 speaks some French, but he regards English as his second language now. His medium of instruction at school was, of course, Italian.



Ethnicity/background/identity

TS1 is proud to say he's Italian. However, because he's been in London for 15 years now, he's also happy to say that he comes from Italy and lives in London. His second nationality is 'Londoner'! He ticks White Other on equal opportunity forms.

Feedback on academic writing

As TS1's writing shows a number of grammatical weaknesses, DH concentrated on two of these which, in part, spring from first language interference – the dummy subject ('it is raining') and word order. DH dictated a few short sentences from his TMA 01 to see if he could correct them himself. His confidence deserted him at this point and, although he could correct some mistakes, he was unsure about the general rules to follow ('it rings a bell from when I did First Certificate but I can't remember very much').

(TS1 comes across as an engaging and likeable character whose studying is impeded to some degree by language difficulties. However, he also seems rather unfocussed and would be so even if studying in his first language)

TS2

Date: 2nd September 2008 on the telephone

Previous educational and university study

TS2 went to Alleyns School in Dulwich, a private selective school. He enjoyed the social rather than the academic aspects of school life and left at the age of 16, after his 'O' levels. He then joined his father's shipping and import company. Subsequently, TS2 moved into accountancy and attended accountancy evening classes through his work. Studying while working wasn't easy but TS2 felt that it helped to develop his self discipline. He had no prior experience of distance learning before the OU.

Experience at the OU

T175 is TS2's second course at the OU. He has just completed M150 which he passed in the summer. He has decided to do a degree at the OU for his own personal satisfaction and to improve his career prospects. He wants to move away from mainstream accountancy and into IT. He says that he may well end up working in accountancy software systems. He chose the OU partly because it offers flexibility that is difficult to find elsewhere and partly because his cousin, who completed an OU course a couple of years ago, recommended it to him.

In terms of his experience so far, TS2 greatly enjoyed M150 which dealt with technical 'nuts and bolts'. He has found T175 interesting but thinks that the emphasis on skills is rather too much. However, he does recognise that these will be useful for him on his future courses.

TS2 is reasonably happy with his performance so far but knows that level 2 and 3 courses will provide a greater challenge. He feels fairly secure about his oral and writing skills.



Family

TS2's parents, although not themselves academic, were keen for their children to do well at school. TS2 feels that he disappointed them and was a little lazy and unfocussed at school. He has two sisters, one of whom went on to university.

In terms of family circumstances at the moment, both TS2 and his wife work. They have three-year-old twins which sometimes makes life logistically difficult. For TS2, OU study sometimes impinges on the time in the evenings and the weekends which he usually sets aside for the children.

Languages

English is TS2's first and only language. He remembers little of any language study at school.

He is reasonably happy that he has the requisite communication skills for his study and hasn't called upon any extra support from the university. The support that he does get from his tutors through their feedback has been very useful .

Ethnicity/background/identity

If asked, TS2 sees his ethnic identity in local rather than national terms and would say that he was from Dulwich: it is where he was born and grew up. His parents are both from Kent. TS2 would tick the 'White British' box in an Equal Opportunities form.

Feedback on academic writing

TS2 puts his ideas together in a coherent and reasonably clear way. So, DH concentrated on his punctuation, taking a small passage from his TMA 02. He was able to correct many features himself, such as misplaced commas and inappropriate full stops. However, he had no idea of the rules for the possessive apostrophe which DH had to teach him. Once this had been done, TS2 was able to apply them appropriately.

TS3

Date: 26th August on the telephone

Previous educational and university study

TS3 went to a Catholic girls' school in North London. It turned comprehensive in her third year there, changing from a rather genteel place to somewhere a lot less protected and protective. Overall, this was a good thing as TS3 felt that it prepared her for the 'real' world. She was interested in music and pursued this at 'A' level along with the sciences. It formed an element of her first degree at City University which she attended between 1979 and 1982.

Although she enjoyed university, TS3 was less impressed with the teaching there than she had been at school (the lecturers were rather young and hedonistic).



Experience at the OU

The OU is TS3's first experience of distance learning. She is relatively new to the place, T175 being her second course (she has just completed M150). She is most impressed by the professionalism and 'humanity' of the tutors. She likes the flexibility that distance study allows but also finds the face-to-face contact important. She feels that she is fortunate to be studying in London because of the frequency and accessibility of tutorials.

Her reasons for studying at the OU are primarily personal, although she feels sure that it will help on the career side (she may pursue work in the computer programming field). She is pleasantly surprised by her own self-discipline.

TS3 finds that, when comparing T175 with M150, the former is, in terms of her own needs, a little too focussed on skills rather than the subject matter itself. However, she does recognise that some students need this and wonders whether the materials that deal with skills might form a supplementary element to the course rather than being incorporated within it.

TS3's work experience has benefitted her in her studies. When she worked in housing, she often had to write reports - an activity that she feels stood her in good stead for the rigours of academic writing.

Family

TS3's parents originate from Goa although she was born in Kenya. The family came to the UK when TS3 was five or six years old. Her father was very well read but not formally educated. Her parents always encouraged her with her studies and she was the first to go to university. She felt a sense of responsibility in this regard in retrospect rather than at the time of her first degree. She does have a brother who was rather lazy at school and didn't go into higher education. However, he's now an auditor and doing very well for himself.

Languages

TS3's parents both spoke Portuguese and Konkani (the local language of Goa). However, they were both very 'correct' English speakers and thought it best to bring TS3 and her brother up in a monolingual household. In retrospect, TS3 feels that this was an opportunity missed. She herself tried to learn Portuguese later in life but with no great success. She speaks some basic Spanish.

Ethnicity/background/identity

In answering the question 'where are you from?', TS3 is far happier saying that she's from London than saying that she's from the UK. She feels that she is a Londoner – especially on those occasions when she has visited Goa!

Whenever she's had to complete an equal opportunities form, she always ticks 'Asian – other' but doesn't think that it encapsulates her sense of ethnic identity at all.

Feedback on Academic Writing



TS3 writes well, so DH was fairly brief with this. Together they looked at her TMA 02 and DH pointed out the need to make her bullet points grammatically consistent. She was able to rephrase her own writing without any difficulty once this area for improvement had been pointed out.

TS4

Date: 27th August 2008 on the telephone

Previous educational and university study

TS4 went to school in London. He left school at 16 and got GNVQ qualifications. Subsequently, he started a BA in Design at the London Metropolitan University. His father died at the end of his first year and, partly as a result of this, TS4 didn't complete his course. There has been a 10 year gap between that and his starting his studies at the OU, although he did a summer course in design at St. Martin's in the interim which he thoroughly enjoyed.

TS4 says that he generally enjoyed his educational experiences, although he was not always the most hardworking of students.

Experience at the OU

TS4 has returned to study for both personal and career reasons. He wants to obtain a degree partly from the general desire to 'better himself' and to honour his father who always wanted him to go to university. He is also ultimately interested in doing something on the design front, maybe working in the advertising industry on posters, billboards etc. He feels that a degree would help him achieve this ambition.

T175 is TS4's first course at the OU. He has found the work challenging and enjoyable. However, finding the time to study is not easy. He has just started a new job as a bus driver and finds that he often has to catch up with his reading during lunch breaks or on the way home from work.

Initially, he found it daunting to read and write academically. He would say that his biggest difficulty is learning the specialised vocabulary of the subject. He also finds it hard to express his ideas in a way that is both interesting and concise. He feels that his performance so far has been OK, although he could have done better with his work in the latter stages of the course.

Family

Partly because he was an only son, TS4 was always encouraged in his studies, especially by his father. Indeed, at times he felt pushed rather than supported in this regard.

His father was Filipino and came to the UK in 1975 which is where he met TS4's mother (also Filipino). TS4 was born in the UK as was his wife (although she too is of Filipino extraction). TS4 says that he finds his wife's support and encouragement crucial in motivating him in his academic work. They are expecting their first child which will add to the external pressures on TS4's studies.



Language

TS4's education has always been conducted in English. However, at home, the family spoke a mixture of English and Ilocano (a language of the north of the Philippines). He and his wife usually speak English but she sometimes switches to Tagalog (which TS4 understands but doesn't speak very well). Apart from that, he speaks a little French.

Ethnicity/background/identity

Although proud of his Filipino roots, TS4 feels more British than anything else. He's comfortable saying that he is from the UK. When he occasionally visits the Philippines, he feels that he has a connection to the place but is still an outsider looking in. He always ticks the 'Asian British Other' box when filling in forms.

Feedback on Academic Writing

Although usually able to communicate his main message, TS4 does have various problems expressing his ideas elegantly. In view of the limited time for the interview, DH decided to concentrate on ironing out unnecessary repetition and redundant phrases. When looking at particular passages in the assignment, TS4 was able to identify some of these but not all. Once identified, he could edit his writing appropriately in some instances but needed help in others. The exercise revealed that TS4 did not have complete confidence in his own writing abilities.

TS5

Date: 24th August 2008 on the telephone

Previous educational and university study

TS5 was born in the UK and went to school in London, leaving at the age of 16 to get an apprenticeship. Although he enjoyed some of his academic subjects, especially those with a 'hands-on' element (art, technical drawing), he was 'lazy' at school. He did a number of 'O' levels and then left. His educational experiences since then have been of a vocational nature. He has done various computer courses at IT colleges, paid for by his employer. These did not involve academic writing of any sort. TS5 has no previous experience of distance learning.

Experience at the OU

TS5's reasons to do this course are primarily personal. He feels that it will provide some cerebral stimulation for him. Also, he regrets the fact that he left his school early and didn't go on to higher education. Later in the interview, he also mentioned that a degree might well open the avenue to teaching, a career he feels drawn to (he would seriously consider teaching IT).

T175 and M150 are his first courses at the OU. As this is his first experience of Higher Education, he is pleased with the progress he's made. He found his tutors' advice useful in adapting his style to the academic register. However, he feels that his own work experience of writing to customers and



explaining things verbally and on paper to colleagues was very useful in ensuring that the transition was not too difficult. He also reads a lot and feels that this has proved invaluable in helping him to write concisely and clearly.

He finds that the two courses he's undertaking at the moment are similar in their format and in their expectations of students. He's found them interesting but is looking forward to the greater challenge of level 2 and 3 courses.

Family

TS5's father was a printer. Neither of his parents was particularly well educated but encouraged the four children to better themselves through education. All TS5's siblings went to university – one sister is now a head teacher, another is a film producer and his brother is a BBC journalist. TS5 sometimes feels that he is the failure of the four despite carving out a successful career in IT (he started off in his father's footsteps as a printer but gradually moved into the IT side).

In terms of his immediate family, his three daughters are from a previous marriage and don't live with him – so childcare is not usually an issue. In addition, TS5 is helped by the fact that he works three days a week, allowing him time for his studies.

Language

English is TS5's first and only language, apart from holiday Spanish, French and Italian (he likes speaking other languages but has dedicated no time to studying them). He feels reasonably confident about his speaking, comprehension, reading and writing skills.

Ethnicity/background/identity

In answering the question, 'where are you from?', TS5 would be happy to say he is British, although he would probably mention his South African antecedents (despite the fact that these don't really have any cultural impact on his own family background and experiences).

On an equal opportunities form, he would mark himself down as White British.

Feedback on Academic Writing

TS5 generally structures his ideas very clearly and accurately. However, DH did look at one of his previous TMAs and identified a problem with the possessive apostrophe. He then dictated a number of sentences to TS5 to see if he could place the apostrophe correctly. He admitted that his knowledge of the rules in this regard was somewhat hazy and his attempt at the exercise was not 100% successful. However, when DH had gone through them with him, he was then able to correct all the mistakes he had previously made in his assignment. It was interesting to see that someone as obviously capable and motivated as TS5 had not previously investigated his uncertainty about the apostrophe.