Re-situation challenges for international students 'becoming' researchers

Margaret Franken

Abstract This paper presents data generated during a semester-long programme to support international students from countries in Melanesia and Asia embarking on masters research in education in a New Zealand university. All were scholarship recipients. The researcher-and facilitator-of the programme, was interested in documenting and understanding the nature of the students' experience as they planned and wrote research proposals. The process of developing a research proposal, as one of the early stages of 'becoming' a researcher, highlighted a number of challenges for the six case study students. The challenges are viewed from a transition or 'resituation' perspective (Eraut in Stud Contin Educ 26(2): 247–74, 2004, 2008) rather than an adjustment one. A resituation perspective assumes that students brought with them "personal expertise, practical wisdom and tacit knowledge" (Eraut 2008, p. 42) which needed to be reconciled with what was demanded of them by different aspects of the research planning process. The resituation challenges experienced by the students included situating a perceived problem or issue in the research literature; reconciling personal research goals with the limitations of one's own agency as a researcher; integrating new learning with research goals; and reconciling the new role or identity as a researcher with the previous role as colleague or community member. The paper presents a case for providing a context for postgraduate students in which explicit recognition of what they bring to the research task, and acknowledgement of the resituation challenges can take place.

Keywords International postgraduate students · Educational challenges · Transition · Resituation

Introduction

International students face many challenges as they begin their studies in higher education in academic contexts that are different from their own. The extensive research that has

M. Franken (✉)
Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand
e-mail: franken@waikato.ac.nz

sought to document challenges faced by international students has, according to Daly and Brown (2007), fallen into three major areas: cultural adjustment, educational adjustment and language use. The present study focuses on educational adjustment, specifically at a postgraduate level. According to Daly and Brown educational challenges include becoming "accustomed to differing attitudes of learning, and styles of thinking and writing" (Daly and Brown 2007, p. 1). While such areas of investigation are important and offer useful guidelines and interventions for teachers of international students in higher education (see for example, Ballard and Clanchy 1997; Biggs 2001), they need to be supplemented with more in-depth investigations that consider what students already know and can do, and as such, have a 'transition' perspective rather than an 'adjustment' one. An adjustment perspective focuses on the need for students to come to know the codes and conventions of the academic community which they wish to become a part of (Lea and Street 1998). A transition perspective takes into account the assumptions made about students by the host institution, what students bring to the learning context, and how this can best be integrated with the teaching and learning of new knowledge and skills. In this view, the academic community with its codes and conventions does not predominate—the students do.

The present study adopted a transition perspective, drawing on Eraut's (2003, 2004) concept of 'resituation' to explore the educational challenges faced by international students, who were scholarship recipients, as they planned their research projects for their masters in education, and as they wrote this plan in the form of a proposal. The following sections discuss institutional assumptions about international students at a postgraduate level; the concept of resituation and why it is helpful in understanding the challenges faced by these students.

Assumptions about students and what they bring to the learning context

Acceptance into a postgraduate programme may suggest to those involved in teaching and supervising that the international students have achieved a level of academic success in their home countries; that they are sufficiently knowledgeable in their disciplines and domains; and that they have a good level of academic literacy to achieve at postgraduate level. However this is often not the case. Programmes and faculties may have admission requirements that these students have met in terms evidence of language proficiency and academic achievement in their undergraduate programmes, but meeting these requirements is not necessarily predictive of academic success at a postgraduate level. The predictive validity of language tests such as IELTS or TOEFL has been discussed at length (see for instance Dooey 1999; Feast 2002; Hirsh 2007; Woodrow 2006). Other factors including the personal (for example age, gender, personality, attitude, and motivation) are seen to interact with language proficiency to enable or to limit students' academic success (Feast 2002; Hirsh 2007). With respect to prior academic achievement it is often difficult to assess equivalency of particular grading systems and degrees from other universities—even though guidelines are provided by agencies (such as the New Zealand Qualifications Authority in New Zealand). Therefore while formal criteria are applied, in reality they may not be valid or reliable indicators of successful or unsuccessful transition.

The fact of having been a successful undergraduate students together with other 'evidence' of readiness for postgraduate study may lead teachers and supervisors to assume that the transition from undergraduate and graduate taught courses to a research thesis will be a smooth and unproblematic one. Tobbell et al. (2010, p. 262) comment that a

continuity is often assumed. Associated with this assumption is the view that, while postgraduate study is more complex and demanding, the knowledge and skills required are not substantively different from those at an undergraduate level. However this is not the case as what is required in the new research context in an 'educational' sense (Daly and Brown 2007) is a resituation of knowledge (Eraut 2003, 2004, 2008).

A resituation perspective

The notion of resituation is helpful in understanding and appreciating how students new to postgraduate study face challenges, particularly with respect to academic knowledge and skills. Proposed initially by Eraut to analyse the transition from academic study to workplaces, resituation has been used recently by a number of researchers looking specifically at transitions within academic study contexts (Edwards 2005; Tobbell et al. 2010). Eraut (2004) explains that resituation involves understanding the new situation, recognising what knowledge and skills are needed in that situation, extracting them from the context(s) of previous learning, transforming them to fit the new situation, and integrating them with other knowledge and skills in order to think/act/communicate in the new situation (Eraut 2004, p. 256). Edwards (2005) suggests what this might mean for pedagogy when he advocates "building relationships between domains and extending the learning context beyond specific sites".

In the domain of academic coursework, the knowledge that students need to gain is made explicit through the statements of learning outcomes, the written assessments, the course texts and other textual artifacts. Knowledge which has been made explicit in this way is referred to by Eraut as 'codified knowledge'—knowledge which is "embedded in texts and databases and the cultural practices of teaching studentship, scholarship and research" (Eraut 2003, p. 55). While codified knowledge is constituted by discourse communities, Eraut draws our attention to the fact that members of a group or community interpret knowledge gained in a group context within "a personal context and history that has been shaped by experiences in other groups, both prior and contemporary" (Eraut 2003, p. 56). Postgraduate students transitioning into research therefore bring with them personal knowledge—"aspects of personal expertise, practical wisdom and tacit knowledge" (Eraut 2008, p. 42). The research situation, involving planning, conducting and writing up research, demands that codified knowledge from postgraduate coursework (and also of course from previous academic learning) is integrated with personal knowledge. In other words, it is 'personalised'. Eraut explains the relationship in the following way: "Personal knowledge is defined as the cognitive resource that a person brings to a situation that enables them to think and perform. This incorporates codified knowledge in its personalised form, together with procedural knowledge and process knowledge, experiential knowledge and impressions in episodic memory" (Eraut 2000, p. 114).

The present study explores the challenges involved for students as they plan research projects, as they seek to build a relationship between the domain of their previous lives and the research domain; and as they seek to extend their recent learning to their own contexts. This constitutes a resituation perspective.

Focussing on the student and student experiences

The aim of the study was to capture the students' experience of transitioning into a research thesis from the structured environment of a taught programme, with a view to better

understanding what they brought to the new learning context and the knowledge and academic literacy demands faced by them. The transition to becoming a research student involves a change, a new way of being, or a becoming of something else—invoked in part by the resituation challenges that students are presented with. Given that the study sought to capture what it is that presents challenges in terms of resituation, the research method guiding the study is phenomenography, which potentially provides "a description, analysis, and understanding of… experiences" (Marton 1981, p. 180). Phenomenographic research has contributed much to our understanding of what conceptions students have about learning in general. The work of Säljö (1979) led to a taxonomy of learning conceptions, to which others (e.g. Cliff 1998; Marton et al. 1989) have added. Alternative taxonomies have also been developed such as that by Boulton-Lewis (1994) specifically to capture the conceptions of learning held by tertiary students. Entwistle and Pearson (2004) provide a useful overview of this work and related concepts such learning orientations and approaches.

At the postgraduate level of research degrees, the initial learning task for students is to understand what research is, what it involves and how to do it, before embarking on their own theses. This involves exploring conceptions of not just of learning but also of research (McCormack 2004). Studies exploring the notion of conceptions of research have been carried out, but the majority are at the doctoral level (see for example, Bieber and Worley 2006; Brew 2001; McCormack 2004). However many doctoral students, in New Zealand at least, have begun their research journey as masters level students, and therefore arguably, it would seem even more important to focus on the master's level. McCormack (2004, p. 320) suggests that "qualitative investigations of the way in which research is experienced by those who undertake it" are hard to find. The present study was interested in conceptions of research, but more than that, it seeks to understand how a group of international students made sense of the research process and experienced challenges related to it. A phenomenographic approach is appropriate for such a goal.

The present study

The students

The study focuses on a group of six international students, five of whom who had received NZAID scholarships[1] to study a master's in education in a New Zealand university, and one of whom had received a scholarship from her own country, Malaysia. Up until arriving in New Zealand, all were working as practising teachers, principals, or managers in educational organisations.

The six students were in the second semester of the first year of postgraduate study, having completed two taught papers in the first semester, and studying another two at the time the programme ran. The programme entailed 1 year of taught postgraduate papers followed by a research based thesis that they had a period of 15 months to complete. The unspoken expectation of a cohort of students such as these is that they engage in new learning in their coursework and that this somehow informs their research study which needs to be situated in their own contexts and communities. The students are expected to return to their countries for a 3-month period to collect data, after submission and

---

[1] Scholarships offered by the New Zealand Government for tertiary study, open to students from selected developing countries.

acceptance of proposals and approval of their ethics applications by the Faculty's Human Research Ethics Committee.

The group consisted of two students from the Solomon Islands (Matt and Lisa), two from Papua New Guinea (Stan and Emma), one Vietnamese student (Ana), and one from Malaysia (Suzi). All are identified by pseudonyms fairly similar to their own, mostly English, names. The one exception was the student from Malaysia.

Method

The data was collected in the context of a semester long not-for-credit workshop programme to support the students to write a proposal that would allow them entry into the Masters of Education, a programme requiring them to write thesis of between 30 and 40,000 words. Students were not required to attend, although all did on every occasion. The students were aware of the fact that I was collecting data and had received information sheets and consent forms as required by the university's Human Research Ethics Committee. They had also seen and discussed my own ethics application as a model.

I was the facilitator of the workshop programme and as such could be considered a participant to some degree. However my role was also that of researcher. In considering the issues that this dual role presented, I was guided by Laverack and Brown's (2003) model of ideal facilitation in cross-cultural groups, stressing the importance of high levels of rapport, and an interplay of empathy and engagement. They explain, "Empathy involves the facilitator being able to achieve insightful understanding by taking the view of the other. This is most likely when rapport (an equivalence of meaning construction between parties) is high and facilitator direction is low. Engagement also requires high rapport together with great levels of facilitator direction, for example where the facilitator encourages a particular direction for discussion" (p. 336). This model served both my role as the teacher and the researcher.

Each week the students and I met and discussed the aspects of the research process that needed to be represented in their proposals. The workshop plan showing these aspects is represented in Fig. 1.

In the weekly 2-h workshops, we shared the emerging proposal texts as they were produced, students raised questions about aspects of the research process, clarified their understanding and offered responses to the questions of their peers. All workshop sessions were audiotaped and transcribed, capturing students' questions and comments, student/student interaction, and student/facilitator interaction. Also included in the data set were artefacts generated from activities such as students' written responses to reflective question prompts. Thematic analysis was carried out on the transcripts from the workshop sessions and the written responses. The transcripts and the analysis were returned to the students for checking.

Findings

The data generated understandings about what challenged these case study students as they developed their research proposals. These challenges related to the need to reconcile "personal knowledge" (Eraut 2000, 2004) with what was demanded of them by different aspects of the research planning process. This included situating a perceived problem or issue in the research literature; reconciling personal research goals with the limitations of one's own agency as a researcher; integrating new learning with research goals; and

July	August	September	October	November	December

Research topic, questions,

and justification

    Data gathering methods

        Data gathering tools

        Literature review

            Presentation to

            potential

            supervisors

                Ethics application

                    Submission of

                    ethics

                    application

Fig. 1 Outline of workshop programme

reconciling the new role or identity as a researcher with the previous role as colleague or community member. Each of these findings are discussed and exemplified below.

From 'knowing' a problem to situating the problem in research literature

The first aspects dealt with in the programme were: identifying a topic area; a statement of why that area was of importance (a type of justification); and proposing a number of questions related to the topic (initial research questions). The students began their search for a topic and research questions in what they knew from experience. Stan expresses this in an early iteration of his research topic and justification:

> I've been working with both children and adults with disabilities in PNG, over the last eight years, while attached to a non government organisation that provides education, training and health services to persons with disabilities. I've experienced the huge discrimination between persons with disabilities and the society and that makes them live even below the poverty line…. Therefore, I want do a study into the community based organisations or institutional leaders' views on this issue as this is happening in the communities where they live and serve as educated and highly respected figures.

None of the students had difficulty in identifying an area of interest. Matt for instance quickly identified a problem he had experienced as a school principal in his context.

> In our context teachers are not becoming effective in discipline…. They're becoming really slack.

The students (previously teachers, principals, and education managers) clearly had in-depth knowledge of the contexts in which they had worked prior to coming to study in New Zealand. What was however challenging for them was to move beyond personal knowledge. The facilitator comments on how the selection of an issue or problem for the students' research studies needs to have been acknowledged by other research. She prompts Matt about this and then elaborates on this in the following statement.

F   Do you know that? Is there research?
Matt   You can just see it happening…
F   You have to put your research into the place where there is no knowledge. You can't say "I've seen it happening and I assume it to be the case…". So I think part of your research should be, "Is there an issue with student discipline?"

When initially working on research questions it was apparent that what drives research questions, how they should be framed, and what their purpose is, was unclear to students. Stan showed that he believed them to be the questions that are asked of research participants, when he initially drafted the following:

> What do you think about disability and persons with disabilities living in and around your community?
> Do you think persons with disabilities, especially children, can go to school like other non disabled children do? And why?

Emma expressed the view that she initially had that research questions are not genuine questions that you are seeking to answer when she said,

> I thought we could come up with any questions. The questions, that I should know the answer to the questions. But here I learned that you shouldn't know the answer to the questions. You find out the answers by doing the research.

To write effective research questions is to know your context and the important issues, and to have read and come to know the relevant research literature. If students do not understand that research questions provide a focus for an issue and frame a research study in a global sense, they may not understand their role in positioning the research in an epistemic space.

The examples of students' statements above suggest that the students initially had little or no understanding of the way in which a research project needs to build on, and move further than what has already been established by previous studies. Students need to place their personally perceived problem into the research space, a space of "codified knowledge" (Eraut 2000, 2004). Emma shows a deepening understanding of this in the following interaction with the facilitator, later in the programme when reflecting on her literature review.

F   You can't say it's definitely the case that women are under-represented. It's definitely the case that women don't get jobs even though you know it from experience you have to say something like, "Research shows that…"

Emma   Yes I have to use references that have been done not my own opinion even
        though it's a reality
F   You can say personal observation suggests that. It's a soft verb. It's a kind of soft
        thing to say. You can't say I know definitely that women are under-represented.
        You can't stand in the research space just because you see it. You have to stand
        there and you have to have some researchers' support behind you

As the discussion above acknowledges, personal experience and knowledge has a role
but "academic criticism" (Cheng 2006), and the reading and thinking that underpins it, is
critical. As Bazerman (as cited in Mathison 1996, p. 314) explains, students, like other
researchers and scholars, are expected to "read the texts of others to construct their own
positions, dismantling and reconfiguring knowledge claims as they work to transform
disciplinary information." To do this within a personally identified topic area, requires a
resituation of personal knowledge. The challenges faced by these students may well be
shared by other students who have a strong experiential knowledge base to work from.

Reconciling research goals with the limitations of one's own agency as a researcher

When drafting the justification section of their proposals the students were asked to
respond to a prompt, "I'm motivated to do this research because…". Most of the students
displayed a communalist orientation in their planning of their research. Such an orientation
is indicative of a social or moral obligation to one's community and has been documented
by other researchers working with minority group or international students (Boulton-Lewis
et al. 2000; Cliff 1998; Pratt 1992; Purdie et al. 1996). The strongest statements of such an
orientation were found in the responses offered by the following four students:

> I have an interest in women and gender issues. I want to see that most females are
> educated so that they live independent and productive lives. They are able to make
> their own decisions and live life. (Emma)
> I've worked in this field and it is an emerging field in my country. There is a great
> need of research to be carried out in order to address issues regarding inclusive
> education and disabilities in PNG. (Stan)
> It helps me to create new knowledge that can improve the existing educational
> information in my context. (Lisa)
> It relates to my practice and it should contribute to the wellbeing and growth of
> educational leadership in the Solomon islands. (Matt)

Each of these comments is imbued with a sense that their contexts—from the national
("my country") to the more local and professional ("educational leadership") are
undeveloped, lacking in knowledge and research, and in policy and practice. Each also has
a sense that their research can make a knowledge contribution. All of these four students
come from Melanesia.

Ana's response (with revisions retained) identifies personal outcomes for herself as well
as a research contribution:

> I can learn many interesting things and I can learn about explore the reality to find
> help improve the reality.

Suzi appears to be the most personally motivated in that she speaks of her own interest, and
by implication her wish to gain more knowledge in her topic area.

I have a very deep interest in Japanese language teaching and its curriculum development.

It would seem that some of the students were cognisant of the expectations of the communities in which they lived and worked; and their responsibility as a scholarship holder. Stan in particular articulated this:

The way I see this. I come from a country where we have problems. We need to do research and right now the country's spending millions of […] getting research people from outside. To be on a scholarship like this is something it's maybe one of the aims of the government, and doing research is really crucial for PNG.

All of the students except Suzi, expressed a strong motivation to implement change. Initially at least, they saw that their research could do this. Ana's thoughts on what her thesis could achieve were perhaps the most modest in she saw that it could stimulate her participants (more senior colleagues and leaders at her university in Vietnam) to think about the concept of sustainable leadership.

F   Why do you think it would be particularly interesting to look at this [sustainable leadership] in the context of Vietnam?
Ana   Because in Vietnam, they just lead but they don't really have, the top one may have but the middle one… because they are just from the teachers and they are just put in the position. They are not prepared. I hope that the thesis will help them to have some ideas at least to think about that

Matt expressed a desire that his research would support the establishment of a school leaders' forum. In Matt's case, this is a goal that he had had for some time, and a goal that appeared achievable.

In doing the research I want to achieve my goal which is related to collegial practices amongst principals in the Solomon Islands – and that the school leaders forums be realised.

While a sense of obligation may be felt by all scholarship holders, international and domestic, few domestic students would perhaps articulate goals as having such a wide sphere of influence, and outcomes in such a communalist way.

The students had a 3 month period in which to return home and collect the data for their theses. Stan however articulates a somewhat ambitious goal based on what he feels needs to be addressed by research.

In Papua New Guinea special education is a sector that's grown outside the mainstream…. There's a big need and I want to do something do a research where I can be in a position to implement my own findings.

For Stan in particular there was the challenge of downscaling his research from a project that planned an intervention, to one that merely described a phenomenon.

Stan   I have many questions. My first question will be, "Will an inclusive education position created and situated across PNG be able to realise the goals of the inclusive education policy?"
F   You're going to write a PhD, actually two PhDs
       [laughter]
Stan   It's too big aye?

F   Remember this is a masters—you need to remember the limitations of your data collection. So anywhere we're looking at effects such as you're looking at. Can we actually put into place an effective inclusion policy?…. Most of you will not be able to do an intervention study

The resituation challenges described above represent the fact that students need to reconcile their own research goals and community expectations with the reality of what they can achieve as masters students working under institutional time constraints. Evident in the way in which the goals were expressed by the students from Melanesia was a consciousness that the contexts/countries they come from are 'epistemologically lacking' (Ward 2010). Their identities as researchers appear to be shaped by this consciousness.

Integrating new learning

The students experienced new learning in the taught papers they had studied and were studying as the first part of their postgraduate programme. Essentially the framing of a research proposal demanded that they draw on this new and 'codified' knowledge and integrate it into their proposals. Students showed different levels of success at responding to this particular resituation challenge, and showed that this was a challenge that took some time to resolve. Matt's new learning associated with collegial leadership aligned with a previous goal in his professional context, and was successfully integrated into his research proposal. Suzi successfully worked to refine her proposal by specifying she would look at language learning outcomes in her analysis of curriculum documents. She had completed a course in second language acquisition theory that had touched on but not fully discussed curriculum. Lisa developed a proposal focusing on school principals, and a community of practice model of professional development. She focused on principals because of her work in educational leadership assuming that leadership applied to senior levels of school administration. She changed this to work with geography teachers (her colleagues) after developing a deeper understanding of the fact that leadership was a concept not restricted to those in formal leadership roles. For a number of weeks in the workshop programme, Ana toyed with concepts of 'women leaders' and 'young leaders'. She was also initially taken with the learning about distributed leadership—an area she had had some exposure to previously. She commented on her final choice of the concept, sustainable leadership.

> I like it because the sustainable leadership is a new concept for me. Distributed I know already. It's popular in the west but it's a little bit hard for Asian cultures. Sustainable is more easily accepted.

Ana demonstrated a careful evaluation of new learning and what it meant in the context in which the research was to be conducted.

Stan failed to resolve his two domains of study: special education and educational leadership, switching between the two with the insertion and subsequent removal of new concepts such as "appreciative inquiry", "distributed leadership", as they came up in his coursework. For Stan it seemed as the codified knowledge from coursework learning dominated and disrupted the knowledge he had gained from personal experience of occupational practice, leaving him unable ultimately to focus on a research topic.

While challenges with personalising knowledge gained from coursework are possibly difficult for all students, these international students appeared to have had little or no exposure to many of the concepts presented to them. Some also appeared to be ill-prepared to evaluate how the concepts could be applied to their own contexts.

Being the researcher of and with the community

One major focal point of the discussion about data collection methods for the students' research concerned the students visualising themselves in the locale collecting data. This represents a consideration of the "performance domain" (Eraut 2003, p. 62) associated with the generation and collection of data. Aspects of the performance domain include the contexts, conditions and situations that the students would find themselves in as researchers. For these students this could have been challenging as it required them also to consider what they have 'become'—emergent researchers collecting data from those with whom they had previously had relationship as a colleague. The students expressed their responses to this performance domain in terms of feelings and visualisations, as prompted by the facilitator. Lisa commented that in doing this she felt comfortable.

F   Do you think that do you feel like you can see yourself doing the research?
Lisa   Now that… I changed I feel more comfortable seeing myself fit with geography
       teachers and asking questions

Emma identified the act of writing the statement of purpose in her proposal document as the trigger for her visualisation.

Emma   Yes I can see myself there and I can see what it's like when I write a statement of
       purpose… that supports my data, where I come from in Papua New Guinea… I
       feel like I can do the research

Unlike the other students, Ana had previously carried out a research project as part of her undergraduate studies in Vietnam, and possibly this made the task of collecting data from those she had previously known as senior colleagues a little less daunting.

F   Can you see yourself doing the research? Can you see yourself as the researcher
       carrying out the research?
Ana   I think so… Like I'm some kind of baby researcher
F   Can you picture yourself in the place in the space doing it?
Ana   I think so because this is the second time I do a thesis so I can imagine that space

The statement below from Matt also incorporated an element of evaluation. It appeared as if the visualising allowed him to see the value of the data gathering tool he had planned to use.

Matt   I've been visualising myself already [laughter]. I've been kind of, all these times
       when it comes to, I see myself in those places. The principals, I see them sitting
       around and discussing. This RET thing, this, I was kind of visualising my principals
       interacting so I think it's a good thing to do. I think it's a rich way of getting
       information and actually. This is a more intense way

Matt appears to 'own' the research in the above statement by referring to his participants as "my principals".

All students perhaps feel challenged by the performance aspect of data generation and collection. These students were helped by visualising themselves in a familiar context, but in an unfamiliar situation and with unfamiliar conditions. In this way the challenge associated with being a researcher both of and with the community was addressed. The comments and responses of the students above indicate a level of comfort with this changed role. However, what may be a more valid observation, is how they experience the reality. The present study does not present data about students' actual experiences of

collecting the data, to see if their sense of comfort with their changed roles was sustained in the reality of data gathering. Another aspect of resituation is of course that required when they return after having successfully completed their masters research—or not.

At the time of writing this paper, two of the students, Ana and Suzi had submitted their theses; Emma and Lisa were still working on their theses; and Stan, and Matt had failed to continue to conduct research and chose to complete their masters by coursework.

Discussion

Specific to this group of students was the fact that they were scholarship beneficiaries. This appeared to have affected their orientation to study and research, and also to have influenced the challenges they experienced. Most of the students expressed a sense of responsibility—a social or moral obligation to their communities (Boulton-Lewis et al. 2000; Cliff 1998; Pratt 1992; Purdie et al. 1996). Had these been self-funding students, they may have different expectations of themselves and their host institution. This has certainly been observed by Hellstén (2002, p. 8) who reported that in her study of self-funding students, "material investment" and getting "value for money" were important considerations. These students expressed "communalist" views when speaking about what motivated their research topic and research questions. Perhaps those who tempered such a view with personal goals, such as Ana and Suzi, found it easier to sustain the research process.

The disclosures brought to the fore in the interactions between and with the students indicated that challenges arose for them in integrating what they knew and wanted to do, with what they came to learn, and what research allowed them to do. The resituation challenges arose from: needing to place the research issue or problem in research literature; needing to reconcile what they wanted to achieve with what they could reasonably achieve (given the institutional constraints associated with their masters programme); needing to integrate new learning; and needing to 'perform' as a researcher in their communities.

These students, like many postgraduates, came to the new learning context with prior knowledge from previous study, and a wealth of professional knowledge. They 'knew' their contexts and communities deeply and they were deemed to be successful in their previous professional roles. What they knew then came to be subject to resituation as they were exposed to codified knowledge and theoretical learning in their academic course work. What this new learning meant in their contexts needed to be reflected on and evaluated for its validity and usefulness in the research they planned to do. In addition, in order to make use of the research literature effectively in their proposals so that it provided grounds for their own studies, the students needed to engage in "analyze and enact academic criticism" (Cheng 2006. p. 281). Cheng comments that we need to understand more about "how learners develop knowledge of academic criticism in concrete reading and writing practices" (Cheng 2006 p. 281). Those who managed to do these things were able to frame research projects that were authentic and meaningful in the context, but which were also appropriately theoretically informed.

Assuming that postgraduate coursework is a context that affords "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave and Wenger 1999), fails to account for the fact that each and every student brings to the learning process their own personal knowledge which will impact on 'becoming' a researcher in unique ways. Eraut (2003, p. 56) offers the comment that focusing "selectively on common rather than differentiated features of people's knowledge… fails to recognise the need for an individual situated (as well as socially situated)

concept of knowledge…". It is crucial that, as Macaulay advocates, "Adult educators emphasise the importance of personalising education by integrating the experience of the learners with that which they are learning" (2000, p. 6). She continues, "This ensures that the learning is both relevant and authentic and that it does not become spurious intellectualisation. In this sense the experience of the learner is not merely seen as something to take account of—it is crucial to the learning process" (Macaulay 2000, p. 6).

The workshop operated as a community in which aspects of students' research planning and proposal writing were clarified, negotiated and co-constructed. Without it the students may well have struggled to plan and write up a research project in the form of a proposal, and to develop identities as emergent researchers. It was a productive context in which personal knowledge and goals could be articulated, reflected on, and reconciled with institutional knowledge and imperatives; and a context in which the knowledge skills and expertise of the students could be brought to and integrated into the research task. It represents what Edwards (2005) has referred to as "a hybrid space of in-between contexts".

The move from taught papers to research is often treated as if it is a seamless process, and personal knowledge and expertise is not considered or revisited in this transition. This study has shown the complexity of knowledge, beliefs and motivation that students bring to the research task. These must be accounted in the way supervisors guide their students to become researchers. Ultimately, a recognition of what a student brings to the task shapes the nature of the supervisory relationship so that the student is not constructed as a novice in all respects.

Conclusion

The students who featured in this study were involved in a process of 'becoming' researchers. Barnacle says of becoming, "Becoming suggests a transformation over time: a becoming other than what one is already" (Barnacle 2005, p. 179). What is involved in this process of transformation has been seen to be complex and challenging in knowledge terms. As a case study of six international scholarship students, the study does not seek to generalize, however observation and experience suggest that students such as those featured in this study are not alone in experiencing challenges that arise from the need to resituate knowledge. The present study was situated in an instructional context, a semester long workshop programme facilitated but not strongly directed by the researcher. The students largely determined the focus of the sessions by sharing and discussing their developing proposals, raising questions and offering comments about the proposals of others. This context generated data that supported the "description, analysis, and understanding of… experiences" (Marton 1981, p. 180). A resituation perspective allows us to focus on the challenges that arise as part of those experiences.

References

Ballard, B., & Clanchy, J. (1997). *Teaching international students: A brief guide for lecturers and supervisors*. Deakin, ACT: IDP Education Australia.

Barnacle, R. (2005). Research education ontologies: Exploring doctoral becoming. *Higher Education Research & Development, 24*(2), 179–188. doi:10.1080/07294360500062995.

Bieber, J. P., & Worley, L. K. (2006). Conceptualizing the academic life: Graduate students' perspectives. *The Journal of Higher Education, 77*(6), 1009–1035.

Biggs, J. (2001). *Teaching for quality learning at university. What the student does*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Boulton-Lewis, G. (1994). Tertiary students' knowledge of their own learning and a SOLO taxonomy. *Higher Education, 28*, 387–402.

Boulton-Lewis, G. M., Marton, F., Lewis, D., & Wilss, L. A. (2000). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students' conceptions of formal learning and experiences of informal learning. *Higher Education, 39*, 469–488.

Brew, A. (2001). Conceptions of research: A phenomenographic study. *Studies in Higher Education, 26*(3), 272–285.

Cheng, A. (2006). Analyzing and enacting academic criticism: The case of an L2 graduate learner of academic writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 15*, 279–300.

Cliff, A. F. (1998). Teacher-learners' conceptions of learning: Evidence of a "communalist" conception amongst postgraduate learners? *Higher Education, 35*, 205–220.

Daly, A. J. & Brown, J. C. (2007). Lecturer communication in a multicultural higher education context. Paper presented at ISANA international conference, 27–30 November, Glenelg, Adelaide, Australia. Retrieved from http://eprints.utas.edu.au/4794/1/4794.pdf.

Dooey, P. (1999). An investigation into the predictive validity of the IELTS Test as an indicator of future academic success. In K. Martin, N. Stanley and N. Davison (Eds.). *Teaching in the disciplines/learning in context*, 114–118. Proceedings of the 8th Annual Teaching Learning Forum, The University of Western Australia, February 1999. Perth: UWA. Retrieved from http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/tlf/tlf1999/dooey.html.

Edwards, R. (2005). *Contexts, boundary objects and hybrid spaces: Theorising learning in lifelong learning*. Paper presented at the 35th Annual SCUTREA conference, University of Sussex, England, UK.

Entwistle, N. J., & Pearson, E. R. (2004). Conceptions of learning and knowledge in higher education: Relationships with study behaviours and influences of learning environments. *International Journal of Educational Research, 41*, 407–428.

Eraut, M. (2000). Non-formal learning and tacit knowledge in professional work. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 70*, 113–136.

Eraut, M. (2003). Transfer of knowledge between education and the workplace. In H. P. A. Boshuizen (Ed.), *Expertise development: The transition between school and work* (pp. 52–73). Netherlands, Heerlen: Open Universiteit.

Eraut, M. (2004). Informal learning in the workplace. *Studies in Continuing Education, 26*(2), 247–274.

Eraut, M. (2008). Learning from other people in the workplace. In Hall, K., Murphy, P., Soler, J. (Eds), *Pedagogy and practice. Culture and identities*. London: Sage.

Feast, V. (2002). The impact of IELTS scores on performance at University. *International Education Journal, 3*(4) Retrieved from http://www.flinders.edu.au/education/iej.

Hellstén, M. (2002). Students in transition: Needs and experiences of international students in Australia. Paper presented at the 16th Australian International Education Conference, Hobart Australia. Retrieved from http://www.aiec.idp.com/pdf/Hellsten_p.pdf.

Hirsh, D. (2007). English language, academic support and academic outcomes: A discussion paper. *University of Sydney Papers on TESOL, 2*(2), 193–211.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1999). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Laverack, G. R., & Brown, K. M. (2003). Qualitative research in a cross-cultural context: Fijian experiences. *Qualitative Health Research, 13*, 133–342. doi:10.1177/1049732302250129.

Lea, M. R., & Street, B. V. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education, 23*(2), 157–171.

Macaulay, C. (2000). Transfer of learning. In V. Cree & C. Macaulay (Eds.), *Transfer of learning in professional and vocational education* (pp. 1–26). London and New York: Routledge.

Marton, F. (1981). Phenomenography—describing conceptions of the world around us. *Instructional Science, 10*, 177–200.

Marton, F., Dall'Alba, G., & Beaty, E. (1989). Conceptions of learning. *International Journal of Educational Research, 19*, 277–300.

Mathison, M. A. (1996). Writing a critique, a text about a text. *Written Communication, 13*, 314–354.

McCormack, C. (2004). Tensions between student and institutional conceptions of postgraduate research. *Studies in Higher Education, 29*(3), 319–334. doi:10.1080/03075070410001682600.

Pratt, D. D. (1992). Conceptions of teaching. *Adult Education Quarterly, 42*(4), 203–220.

Purdie, N., Hattie, J., & Douglas, G. (1996). Student conceptions of learning and their use of self-regulated learning strategies: a cross-cultural comparison. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 88*(1), 87–100.

Säljö, R. (1979). *Learning in the learner's perspective. I. Some common-sense conceptions*. Reports from the Department of Education, University of Goteberg, No. 76.

Tobbell, J., O'Donnell, V., & Zammit, M. (2010). Exploring transition to postgraduate study: Shifting identities in interaction with communities, practice and participation. *Educational Research Journal, 36*(2), 261–278.

Ward, J. S. (2010). Third world identity. In Jackson II, R.L. (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Identity*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: Sage. Retrieved from http://duq.academia.edu/JoelWard/Papers/670 998/Third_World_Identity_in_Encyclopedia_of_Identity_Ed._Ron_Jackson_SAGE_Press.

Woodrow, L. (2006). Academic success of international postgraduate education students and the role of English proficiency. *University of Sydney Papers on TESOL, 1*, 51–70.