Higher Education Drafting Practices in Professional Communication and Identity Formation

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Abstract: This article demonstrates the usefulness of introducing draft planning devices such as topic outlines to help students crystallize their thinking and deliver better constructed and balanced final reports to real-life clients. This topic outlining exercise is used on a professional communication course offered to senior students in a commerce domain in tertiary education. The course is embedded within an environmental scenario which provides the context and backdrop to all communication practices in and out of the classroom. It aims to show how authorial stance and modality or "truth value" cum credibility are instantiated through student products and processes and how their design choices contribute to their growing professional identities in higher education and beyond.

Key words: professional communication and identity, sustainability, topic outlines, authorial stance and modality, higher education

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

A course on professional communication offered to senior commerce students highlights a number of draft planning and writing processes which students practice in order to deliver better end products to a target client. Besides exploring various literacy practices (Street and Street, 1991), students do so within a particular scenario which is selected to add value to the course as a whole. The subject matter of this scenario is sustainability, particularly environmental sustainability, of their particular tertiary institution (Grant, 2010; 2012). By embedding the entire course in environmental scenarios, investigative student teams experience and learn about the processes and products of oral and written research and reporting as well as existing attitudes to sustainable policies and practices on campus. Not only has environmental governance suffered corporate and government neglect in past decades in terms of bottom line reporting, many tertiary institutions have failed to incorporate sustainable business practices in their curricula and this seems to be a world-wide phenomenon (Grant and Borcherds, 2008; Mabry, 2011). As signatories to the Talloires Declaration on sustainability (1990, 2002) and more recently the Gulf Campus Charter (2011), the university, like many others, has undertaken to put sustainability and "environmental literacy" at the heart of curriculum development. So, besides primarily teaching professional communication practices, the secondary aim of this course is to contribute to this mission on sustainability.

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1.2 Aims of Article and Definition of Terms

This article seeks to highlight modality and authorial stance in academic and professional discourses. Jewitt (2002, 2006, 2009) uses the term modality to signify the "truth value" and credibility inherent in communicative modes. According to Hyland (1999), authorial stance relates to the communicator-receiver relationship and how committed communicators are to their material and audience. In later work on metadiscourse, Hyland and Tse (2004) refine the taxonomy of stance features to include *interactive* and *interactional* resources to *guide* and *involve* the audience respectively. *Hedges* (to show uncertainty and lack of commitment), *boosters* (to show certainty and full commitment), *attitude* and *engagement markers* (to show stance, feeling and relationship) and *person* or *self-mentions* such as you/yours; I/our/we are examined.

Although not interchangeable, modality and authorial stance are related: modality may be regarded as a crucial aspect of authorial stance in terms of how credibly the message is perceived by all participants: communicators and receivers. How modality in particular discourses and domains is heightened or lowered and how authorial stance contributes to this raising or lowering are questions which are explored. The instantiation of authorial stance in various verbal draft interventions such as topic outlines is not only possible but desirable in the sense that the sooner student writers put their authorial stamp on their material in terms of topic selection and design, the sooner they can move towards shared understanding and achieving their communicative goals and professional identity.

At the start of the course, students choose report topics from a variety of environmental scenarios involving transport, energy, waste and water management. The final end products comprise an oral and written report. This article analyses two draft products involving Hazardous Waste Management (HWM) and Sustainable Building Design (SBD). The HWM student, who worked alone, came from a science background and transferred to the commerce faculty to undertake postgraduate students in accountancy. The SBD partnership comprised two finance honors students. The article focuses on shifts in authorial stance and ends with concluding comments on their academic journey towards transforming their verbal products and professional identity in the process.

After some initial research, students brainstormed their scenario topics in order to come up with focus areas and investigative direction. Associative, free writing and mind mapping exercises allowed students to initiate their research projects. These often playful drafting exercises serve to alert sign-makers to new ways of shaping and reconfiguring semiotic resources along their developmental trajectory. Based on negotiated discussion, in- and out-of-class reflection as well as additional in-class instruction, teams then set out to redesign their material for classroom display. They were tasked with transforming their rough report ideas into a hierarchically arranged, numbered topic outline comprising main and sub-headings. These were then projected and displayed on screen. As a building block of design, the formal, ordered topic outline affords a coherent channel of discursive realization and emerging professional identity.

2. Methodological and Theoretical Framework

Although the analysis of product and process was augmented by classroom observation and survey sources such as course assessments and follow-up interviews, the focus of this article is on a social semiotic analysis of student draft work.

2.1 Combining Media and Sites of Display in Both Product and Process

As students explore and merge various discursive, generic and modal practices, the key concepts which arise

in this social semiotic analysis are participant interest (Kress, 2003; 2010), authorial stance and metadiscourse (Hyland, 1999; Hyland and Tse, 2004), modality within particular domains (Jewitt, 2006; 2009) and emerging identity as professional communicators (Bernstein, 2000; Beck and Young, 2005).

The various analytical sections that follow are underpinned by a metafunctional examination of the epistemological and ontological meanings as manifest in the modes used, primarily writing including size and type of font, and layout (Halliday, 1978; 1994; 1985; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006; 1996; Kress, 2010). A metafunctional gaze is useful in analysing ideational, interpersonal and compositional elements within the work as these metafunctions underpin the communicator/participant relationship and stance (Halliday, 1978, 1994; 1985; Halliday and Hasan, 1985). These comprise spatial semiotic resources as does the position and posture of the presenter in relation to the equipment during the presentation. Besides spatial relations, temporal semiotic resources mainly speech, pace, movement, gesture and eye contact during the presentations also contribute to meaning-making (Jewitt, 2002; Norris, 2004).

Questions of interest include:

• what embodied decision-making — reflecting the cognitive and affective life worlds, interest and identity of presenters as sign-makers — seem to have been prompted in the design and construction of these products,

• why did students select particular words, phrases and ordering principles and arrange these in a particular fashion in their topic outlines, and

• what struggles with authorial stance and professional identity are evident and how do they grapple individually and collaboratively with these in order to transform their work during draft stages?

The analytical focus shifts between the product as artefact and the process of presentation as the two go hand in hand. All the elements of where displayed, how displayed and how presented, contribute to meaning making and modality. The media and sites of display (projector, screen and presenter) and the act of presentation occurred simultaneously. Given this simultaneity, this product/process "shift" was not so much a permanent act as a multi-layered to and fro iteration of various genres and modes, each with their own affordances. The displays as artefacts could be independently read/viewed when the projector was switched on but they did not persist in the same way as a paper-based display; they were not accessible to the audience the whole time and their availability was controlled by presenters when it was their turn. The oral presentations, albeit simultaneous to the reading/viewing, added yet another dimension; together these multiple viewing and listening modes aimed to reinforce the cyclical converging and diverging nature of representation and communication (Grant and Borcherds, 2008).

Elements which may have enhanced modality in a professional domain were the sequential formality of these neatly typed and mediated presentations and the elevated, illuminated screen which created an uninterrupted view of the topic outlines being presented. They rose above the speaker. The presenter bodily orchestrated position, posture, movement, gesture and eye contact to focus attention and direct gaze in relation to projector, screen and audience (Norris, 2004). Pointers were used to draw attention to particular points of the display as topic outlines were examined. The creation of a vector, a line of sight, contributed to coherence and emphasis as topic, direction and pace were dictated.

Besides the equipment, presenters were important sites of display in their own right. They boosted interest by directing proceedings and adding explanations to headings and sub-headings as they progressed. Where they stood in relation to the projector and screen and how they moved and used gesture also informed and underscored meaning. The ensemble of visual and verbal modes in both presenters and illuminated artefacts encompassed

meaning as combined sites of display (Jewitt, 2002, 2009; Unsworth, 2006).

2.2 Discursive and Generic Orchestrations

Draft products such as topic outlines are underpinned by what Bernstein (2000) labels "professional knowledge" relating to more diffuse fields of practice such as "business studies". These artefacts do not instantiate a singular or "pure" discourse (Bernstein, 2000; Beck and Young, 2005) or fixed identity. Borrowing from Foucault's body of work, Preece (2009) posits the notion of a "discoursing subject" constructing relationships with various "discursive fields", much like Bernstein's discursive "regions". These topic outlines are therefore characterised by a number of discursive strands. Although located within a commerce domain and the "business" of environmental concerns, social rather than economic factors dominate. Evidence of scientific and academic discourses emerge in some artefacts depending on topic choice, the conceptual treatment of data as well as feedback provided. Some discursive strands merge seamlessly and appropriately construct authorial stance in relation to purpose and audience while others jar and demonstrate the struggles and inconsistencies still being experienced within social semiotic practices and emerging identities.

Belonging to and moving in and out of multiple and oftentimes competing discourse communities — some with more permeable boundaries than others — may prove confusing to students. These movements and accommodations aim to allow students to become more mindful of the norms that seek to govern the "communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991) to which they aspire to belong in the future and the genres apt for these particular communities. At this stage and in particular on this course, these novice accountants or would-be marketers can more accurately be described as, to borrow from Gee (2004), a loosely affiliated "affinity group". The environmental topic itself informs and underpins various discursive threads which mesh and merge within the wider domains of commerce and industry. This discursive blurring, with greater or lesser effect, is manifest in their respective draft products. This is not to say that this blurring is inappropriate and will automatically cause incoherence; it may be entirely apt given the draft stage of the work and the realistic demands of a communicative world characterised by change and hybridity.

In terms of the topic outline, the first noticeable characteristic involves appearance. It can be argued that the generic "look and feel" of a topic outline is similar in that it attempts to "'fix' meaning" in habitual ways (Kress, 2010, p. 95). A topic outline is "organized through the affordances" of writing and numbering, "using the semiotic logic of space and the modal affordance of spatial relations between simultaneously present entities" (Kress, 2010, p. 95). It is rare that a topic outline runs over two pages so viewers can scan it at a glance without having to turn a page. It also dictates a precise order; one starts at the top and works down the page and reads from left to right; there is little room for confusion in terms of reading path. It resembles a report table of contents (for which it proves a most apt planning device).

In terms of layout on the page, the outline is characterized by consistent indentation and spacing to distinguish main from sub-headings. Thus the eye may track down the vertical assembly and in an instant ascribe prominence and emphasis to data segments. It is clear that the major headings provide an overarching umbrella under which the rest of the gathered information is classified in more concrete detail in a particular order. As can be seen in examples below, the hierarchical display of main and sub-points is prominent and prescriptive. This exercise in ordering and logical subordination allows students to grapple with authorial stance and modality within a professional domain. Teams need to think about how to distil and abstract information that will provide the essence of their investigative thrust and show connection inductively or deductively, through cause and effect

or comparison and contrast. The considered acts of selection and design encourage the adoption of a formal stance both in product and its presentation. As a member of an emerging "affinity group" (Gee, 2004), this exercise may act as a precursor to assist students in developing their thinking and identity as professional communicators. Students took turns to present their topic outlines to the rest of the class.

3. Semiotic Analysis of Verbal/Visual Integration and Ensemble

The analysis focuses on the negotiated and collaborative decisions participants made in transforming their brainstormed ideas and how their semiotic choices hindered or accelerated their developmental trajectory.

3.1 The Scientific Take on Hazardous Waste Management (HWM)

At first glance, HWM's topic outline (see Figure 1 below) seems to display academic rigour. Contributing factors are the choice of scenario, the narrow scope, the strictly environmental focus on waste (which is listed eight times) and the formality of the ordered topic outline genre.
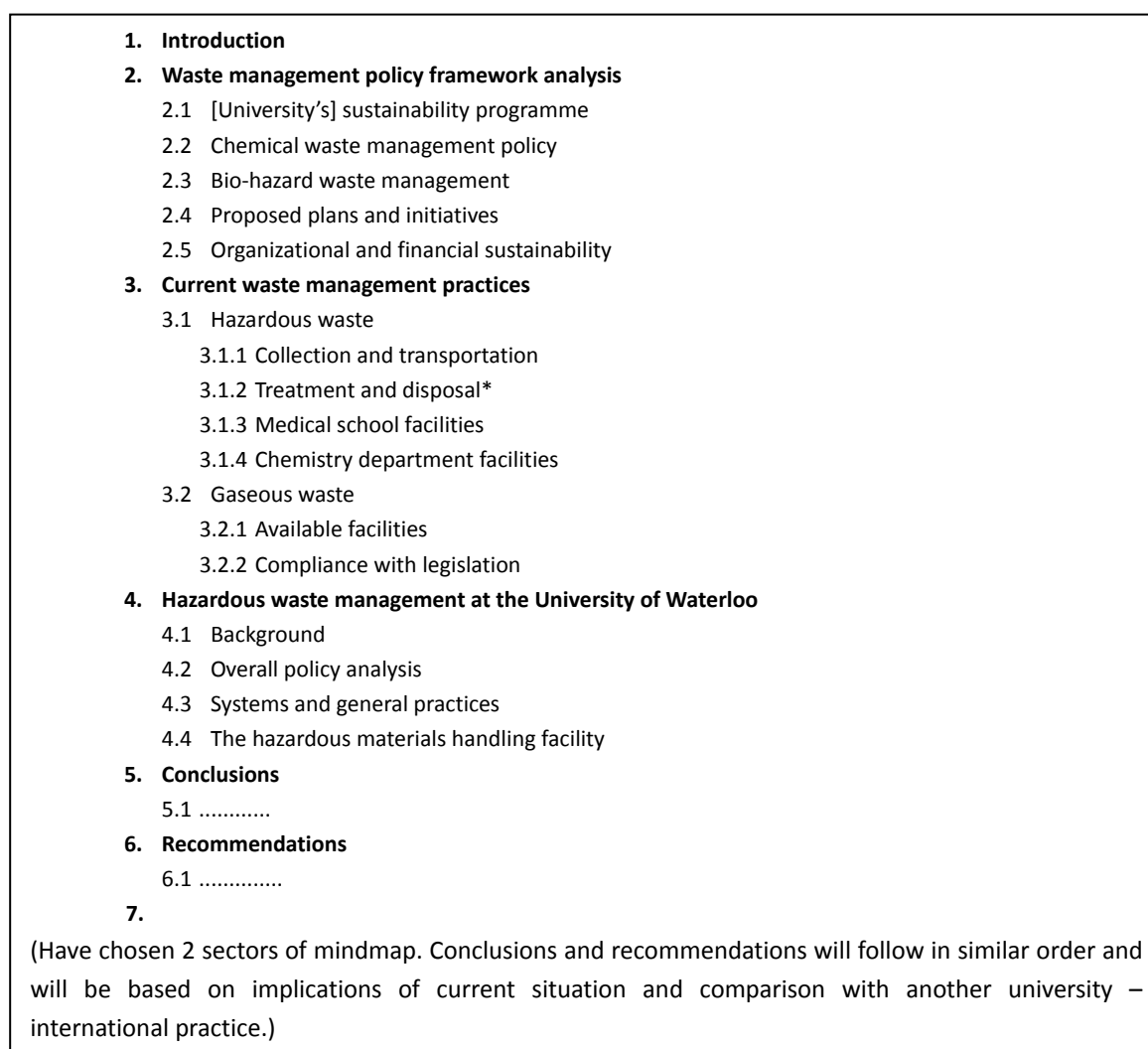
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1. **Introduction**
2. **Waste management policy framework analysis**
   2.1 [University's] sustainability programme
   2.2 Chemical waste management policy
   2.3 Bio-hazard waste management
   2.4 Proposed plans and initiatives
   2.5 Organizational and financial sustainability
3. **Current waste management practices**
   3.1 Hazardous waste
       3.1.1 Collection and transportation
       3.1.2 Treatment and disposal*
       3.1.3 Medical school facilities
       3.1.4 Chemistry department facilities
   3.2 Gaseous waste
       3.2.1 Available facilities
       3.2.2 Compliance with legislation
4. **Hazardous waste management at the University of Waterloo**
   4.1 Background
   4.2 Overall policy analysis
   4.3 Systems and general practices
   4.4 The hazardous materials handling facility
5. **Conclusions**
   5.1 …………
6. **Recommendations**
   6.1 …………..
7.

(Have chosen 2 sectors of mindmap. Conclusions and recommendations will follow in similar order and will be based on implications of current situation and comparison with another university – international practice.)

Figure 1   Topic Outline: Waste Management at [University's Name]

Although one may be hard pressed to argue that "situated practice" emerged from the student's direct "lifeworld experience" (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000), it seems feasible to conclude that the selection of hazardous and gaseous waste in the chemistry department and medical school was of greater interest to this student. As a science undergraduate registered for the postgraduate commerce accounting conversion course, she was more familiar with and had greater knowledge of scientific experiments and practices than her commerce counterparts. Her "schooled literacy practices" (Street and Street, 1991) seem firmly instantiated in a scientific discourse. Encouraged by the audience during earlier classroom discussion to tackle lesser known and more dangerous/toxic waste management practices, she had readily agreed and traces of former domain identity and habitus (Bourdieu, 1991) are firmly instantiated in her topic outline. According to Street, Pahl and Rowsell (2009, p. 196), "multimodal texts [can] be understood in relation to the social practices that [are] sedimented within them". As can be seen above, the technical and scientific background of an undergraduate science degree is clearly evident in HWM's main and subheadings as well as her explanations during the oral presentation.

Preece (2009, p. 27) argues that identity is "discursively constituted", "located within a particular setting" and emerges in a "fluid and multifaceted" way "in interactions with others". This is certainly the case with HMW who positions herself and is in turn positioned by others in relation to her subject matter and sense of identity. Students actively produce themselves through meaningful participation and negotiation and it is this communicative and collaborative immersion with others that releases understanding.

The title of the topic outline, *Gaseous and Hazardous Waste Management at [university]*, immediately communicates the exact scientific focus of the forthcoming report. She anchors her findings by including a section upfront on the *Waste management policy framework analysis*, particularly the university's *sustainability programme* (2.1). By looking at the existing situation first, she provides an orientation of the "here and now", a fixed point on the map in terms of what is given (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006; 1996; 2001). This policy framework section includes *Chemical waste management policy* and *Bio-hazard waste management* [policy] (2.2. and 2.3 respectively). In other words, policies come before (and authorize) practices, the topic area of section 3. This epistemological foregrounding of cited knowledge creation underscores the ideational perspective of her scientific investigation and a more emphatic authorial stance. This clarity and certainty is not maintained, however, in either this section or the next.

Less emphatic is a monetary concern. Whereas costs and budget were particularly salient in earlier work — and crucial in a commerce domain — here there is very little emphasis on financial matters. As can be seen, *financial sustainability* merely shares a sub-heading and is placed last in the section. Not only are costs not given their own major section, they are not evident in either 3 or 4, an unusual omission in a course such as accountancy. HMW seems to have lost interest in cost-effectiveness and ceased to priorities economic considerations.

At the start of the course, new to the commerce faculty and possibly lacking in confidence, she embraced commercial conventions and ethos and highlighted costs and financial feasibility more than any other aspect. Credibility as a commerce student seemed tied up with a focus on costs and profitability and she felt compelled to reflect this focus in earlier discussions. For HWM, the tension between economic issues and their prominence in commercial domains and environmental features as classified in the sciences seems to have led to a decision to change focus completely. Although she acknowledged her scientific leanings both in interest and personal identity in a post-course interview, she thought an accountancy degree would give her an entree into a "higher status" profession with, undoubtedly, better prospects. She believed that "converting" to accountancy and re-shaping her "affinity" (and identity) would accelerate her mobility, secure a more valued knowledge base and enhance her

cultural capital and professional habitus (Bourdieu, 1991; Beck and Young, 2005). The social contexts of economic versus environmental discursive traditions may often compete and conflict with one another — an either/or opposition rather than either/and synergy and this tension seems apparent in this draft product.

This tension is similarly evident in public and private sector interests which may privilege indiscriminate "progress" at the cost of sustainability. Various fields of study may also find themselves increasingly "dependent on the requirements of the external fields of practice" particularly "business studies" where "commercial considerations are likely to become increasingly dominant not only in shaping the content, but also in determining the pace and directions of change" (Beck and Young, 2005, p. 189). Students, generally first generation university graduates from previously disadvantaged communities such as HWM, feel especially beholden to their families and cultural affiliations to "prosper" and make them proud (Preece, 2009). Feedback from the class to "relax" her commercial stance granted her a respite to tackle her environmental subject in terms of scientific rather than business discourse practices.

Despite initial impressions of academic rigour, ideational confusion is evident upon closer inspection. There are a number of inconsistencies in the way HWM represents herself and her audience which may lower credibility and modality in both academic and professional domains. The lack of parallel structure in terms of the title and headings and headings with sub-headings hinders structural coherence. The title may have you think that *Gaseous waste* will be dealt with first. Reader expectation may be sustained in section 2 when *bio-hazard waste management* is mentioned second. Section 3, however, switches places and proportion by putting *Hazardous waste* first. Under section 2, the sub-headings comprise chemical and bio-hazard waste management. Is chemical waste thus gaseous (and not bio-hazardous)? Section 3 seems to contradict this. This section looks at current realities in terms of *Current waste management practices*. This is further sub-divided into *Hazardous waste* and *Gaseous waste*, the former starting this section. In terms of first position primacy, this may or may not be an important consideration. In fact, unless one is an expert on this type of waste, it is difficult to know what should come where and in what order. Under hazardous waste, both medical school and the chemistry department are mentioned. Although one can assume that medical school and chemistry also have gaseous waste, this is not mentioned under 3.2. From this division, one may also assume that gaseous waste is not hazardous — a questionable assumption — or that it has separate waste management policies and practices.

Despite the word order in the title, hazardous waste seems to enjoy greater primacy and salience and comprises four sub-sections in section 3. Under gaseous waste, on the contrary, a much more generic approach is taken with *Available facilities* (3.2.1) being used as a catch-all for both types and location of facilities. On the other hand, *Compliance with legislation* (3.2.2) is part of this section only. The audience may assume at a glance that compliance is not relevant to hazardous waste management which is clearly not the case. In the section 4 comparison with an international university (*Waterloo*), a much narrower focus is evident and only *hazardous materials* are included; gaseous is not mentioned.

Besides ideational confusion in how this information and view of the world are represented, textual, compositional confusion is also evident. At a glance there is overall unity of theme but coherence suffers and emphasis shifts between the two types of waste management. This confusion also creates a disjuncture between presumed scientific expertise and knowledge, on the one hand, and displayed uncertainty and inaccuracy, on the other.

The use of Calibri in a formal, scientific domain could also be seen as a disjuncture. As a more informal font, Calibri seems more apt for a magazine, brochure or newsletter. One may argue, however, that this is a draft

exercise and as a "friendlier" font, Calibri may serve to "soften" the academic rigidity of the outline. Teams may also have viewed this session as an oral rather than written event. Choice and size of font, use of bold or color, spacing and indentation may have been used to heighten visual interest and build rapport. This may set up an interesting tension between a formal authorial stance in the topic outline as "standalone" written document to be read and a less formal stance and register as oral presentation to be viewed and listened to.

Despite the inconsistencies and omissions, the topic outline appears more regulated and impersonal than the brainstorming "conversations" conducted earlier. The formality and impersonal style constructs the audience and the relationship with the audience differently. Authorial distance is instantiated through the use of a formal notation system and referential statement headings. The regimentation of vertical main and sub-headings clearly delineates hierarchy with subordination of categories at a glance. Phrase headings are uniformly used with no mixture of sentence and phrase headings. Metadiscourse features are not common in genres such as topic outlines comprising headings rather than continuous prose. A single identifiable hedge could relate to the word 'proposed' in sub-heading 2.4 as *suggested* or *possible* plans and initiatives. Rhetorical flourishes such as question headings would have engaged the audience more directly and personally which HWM clearly felt would be "unscientific". The only subtle flagging of the reader in the outline itself is the asterisk next to section 3.1.2 *Treatment and disposal* which indicates the likely position of a possible illustration, and the dotted lines in sections 5 and 6 to highlight "unfinished business".

Nominalization further augments authorial distance. Words such as *management*, *collection*, *transportation*, *treatment* and *disposal* rather than manage, collect, transport, treat and dispose create an abstraction which serves as static noun subject matter rather than the vigorous enacting of various practices, made possible through using verbs. Had the above verbs been used in headings, they may also have served as authoritative imperative instructions (recommendations) which would further have engaged the audience more directly and personally.

Only the first letter of each heading is capitalized (sentence case) and this is consistent throughout except for University of Waterloo, regarded as a proper noun phrase. The uniformity of style and format provides a grammatical and structural consensus and heightens professionalism and modality within a scientific and academic discourse. This distant, referential relationship seems appropriate for the report genre which is regarded as a formal, regulated and impersonal document.

Although there is formal grammatical consistency in the topic outline, the note addressed to the reader below the outline has a less formal, oral tone. (Have chosen 2 sectors of mindmap. Conclusions and recommendations will follow in similar order and will be based on implications of current situation and comparison with another university — international practice.)

This note is clearly not part of the topic outline and the use of parenthesis reinforces this separation. The brackets create a footnote which directly flags and addresses the reader and provides a "by-the-way" oral aside, an interactional *engagement marker* (Hyland and Tse, 2004) which seeks to highlight "the presence of [her] readers and [herself]" (Hyland, 1999, p. 102). The first section in the note is a phrase. The subject of the sentence (I) as a *self-mention* may be missing but is presumed understood: ("[I] have chosen 2 sectors of mindmap..."). Ellipsis is evident in the note as a whole but seems more marked in this opening phrase. Yet, despite this and the less formal "2", rather than "two", it seems to garner more rather than less salience by virtue of the   emphatic "will follow" and "will be based", its concluding position (last impression: recency effect) and the juxtaposition of a phrase and sentence. More importantly, when HMW started her presentation, she immediately drew the audience's attention to this note by way of explanation. This "introductory" aside confirmed her narrowed focus based on earlier

feedback. The concept of parallel structure was also clearly understood as evidenced in the statement that the "conclusions and recommendations" would "follow in *similar order*" (my italics). Evidence of explicit instruction was also manifest in the statement that the conclusions and recommendations would be "based on implications of current situation and comparison with another university". In this way, she provided the scope and limitations of the investigation early on and verified decisions collaboratively negotiated in class. The principle functions of conclusions which include evaluating implications, drawing inferences, labelling assumptions and considering the consequences and significance of the major findings were also clearly demonstrated.

Emphatic authorial stance became far more prominent during the oral presentation of the topic outline although this was collaboratively negotiated, particularly during the discussion and feedback session following the presentations. The interaction of participants in communication helped to clarify perceptions and smooth out inconsistencies. Using Hyland and Tse's taxonomy on metadiscourse features (2004), a few examples will serve to demonstrate the dialogical nature of the exchange. HMW started her presentation with statements of *personal certainty* such as "**I will definitely** cover... and then **I will**..." The *self-mentions* and *boosters* provided an emphatic force to her intentions. During her introduction, an audience member asked: "How big is **your** study **now**?" This question related to mindmap advice given previously to narrow the focus to which she confidently replied: "**For sure, I've** already cut it... **you'll see**." During the discussion and feedback session, *engagement markers* such as questions were used far more by the audience than the speaker and often included *self mentions* and *hedges* such as "**Could** you **possibly** look at? "**You** talked about..... **What about also** looking at...?"; "Are you going to...?"; "**Could** you **maybe**...?" Replies were boosted by *personal certainty*: "Yes, **I will**.."; "**I have decided**.."; Yes, **definitely**..." and *personal hedging*: "**If** I **can** find..."; "It **depends**..."

HWM took notes after her presentation to summarize feedback whereas Team SBD, comprising a partnership, could alternate as note-takers during and after their shared presentation.

3.2 Sustainable Building Design (SBD)

Of all the scenario topics, sustainable building design more readily resonates with the concept of a sustainable pedagogy. The metaphor of creating a solid, long-lasting foundation is crucial in both construction and pedagogy. Using the building blocks and "blueprints" of draft products, scenario pedagogy aims to inculcate sustainability in teaching and learning as holistic, collaborative and negotiated practices; similarly, sustainable building practices also seek to provide holistic and credible environmental solutions. Transforming the old and redesigning for sustainable futures seems apt for both buildings and mindsets (Grant, 2012).

Team SBD decided to investigate the newly completed (2007) female residence building on the middle campus known as Graça Machel Hall (named for UCT's Chancellor and the wife of former president, Nelson Mandela). They were emphatic about specific issues relating to a building's carbon footprint and ensured precise scope and limitations in their topic outline: only solar heating and water cooling for air conditioning would be included in their investigation as "possible green alternatives". As the facilitator requested that the body of the report not exceed ten pages, this narrow focus is apt as it strengthens the possibility of their investigative goal being accomplished. An authorial stance of certainty is evidenced through their specific choices, recorded in parallel in their topic outline below.

1. Introduction

Current situation (older buildings vs. Graca Machel, Kramer)

Cost involved in introduction of sustainability plan into buildings (old vs. new)

Carbon footprint associated with intro of sustainability plans to buildings

Focus on Graça Machel Hall and current new developments on middle campus

2. Current conditions of Graca Machel

Background info

Carbon footprint

Current sustainability plans in place

3. Solar heating

Methods in place at Graca Machel

Other available methods

Effects of methods

Feasibility of implementations of such strategies

4. Water cooling as an alternative to air conditioning

Methods in place at graca

Other available methods

Effects of methods

Feasibility of implementations of such strategies

5. Future buildings on middle campus

Currents plans for new buildings with regard to solar heating and water cooling

Other possible methods

6. Conclusion

7. Recommendations

Changes to Graca

Additions to future buildings

Figure 2   Team Sustainable Building's Topic Outline

Although the content parameters seem clearly delineated, format and layout seem problematic. This topic outline is visually different in layout and appearance to the previous one analyzed above. Whereas the former example more closely resembles a report preliminary (table of contents), with clearly delineated sub-sections, this topic outline seems like an informal set of notes, quickly jotted down for the benefit of the writers as sign-makers rather than the audience as recipients. Numbering is sparse (although the instruction was to produce an outline to the third level heading), there is little use of space, save between major sections and no variation in font size or type (Calibri 11). The headings are normal **bold** which does provide some contrast in emphasis as does the use of italics for all sub-sections. The effect of the italicized informal font is interesting as it more readily resembles cursive handwriting than a more formal font in normal mode. Once again the impression is of informal notes rather than a conventional numbered topic outline. The italics may also evoke a more emotive, personal touch, at once casual and aesthetically attractive, yet unprofessional and inappropriate for the task at hand. As can be seen

above, the lack of indentation, spacing and numbering to show sub-ordination of main and sub-headings make it appear more like a draft of a topic outline (itself a draft product) than a conventional, "formal" topic outline.

There is a tension between vagueness and unfamiliarity with the report format in some sections and a more professional and precise approach in others. On the surface, all report sections seem to be present but discursive and generic tensions in both format and layout emerge which makes it difficult to determine whether this is a topic outline of an academic essay or a professional report. An essay is not a professional genre; a report, whether business or technical, is. Even though both have introductions, the communicative goals and reader expectations of this section differ considerably. A report Introduction aimed at a professional reader comprises "fixed format" features such as subject, background, objectives, scope and limitations and so on. There may be up to seven separate sections, none of which should pre-empt the findings. As the format of a formal report introduction is similar, the facilitator instructed teams to focus on the body sections only in their topic outlines. Team SBD ignored the instruction (and format) and "introduced" "body" sections (findings) to the Introduction, which is entirely acceptable in an academic essay or paper. In an essay, the sub-sections such as *Current situation*, *Cost*, *Carbon Footprint* and *Focus on Graça Machel Hall* could all be used to "set the scene" in terms of *sustainability* (which is mentioned twice) and to briefly summarize what is to come. In a business or technical report, these four sections are sure to include findings and would therefore be considered inappropriate in an introduction. The *Conclusion* (6) rather than Conclusions once again points to confusion of genre, the former being more appropriate in an essay, the latter in a report. Each has its own function and set of conventions which are apt for purpose and audience and these are not readily interchangeable.

The four body sections do not appear to be concise sub-headings as such but rather lengthy phrases describing what the section will entail. Read together, they provide a succinct summary of each section. However, each one comprises separate parts such as comparison of *older buildings vs. Graca Machel [and] Kramer* (the *current situation*). Then there is *Cost* plus *introduction of sustainability plan into buildings* plus another comparison of (*old vs. new*). *The Carbon footprint* section is also *associated with intro of sustainability plans to buildings*. Finally there is a *Focus on Graça Machel Hall and current new developments on middle campus:* four sections but each with a number of sub-sections within them. In other words, had these four main sections appeared in the body of the report, they could easily have been sub-divided to the third level. This would maintain the 'summary' in terms of content but show subordination within the topic range, improve the overall structure of the outline and heighten modality in a professional domain.

Section 2 focuses on *Current conditions of Graca Machel* but then adds more *Background info,* more on the *Carbon footprint* and more on *Current sustainability plans in place*. There is a blurring of introductory material with findings which may appear vague and further lowers modality. Sections 3 and 4 cover the two areas of focus: *Solar heating* and *Water cooling as an alternative to air conditioning*. These sub-sections mirror each other and seem more precise at first glance. Parallel structure such as instantiated here generally heightens modality in both academic and professional discourse. These sub-headings comprise *Methods in place at Graca Machel* which presumably covers methods already implemented, *Other available methods,* presumably not [yet] implemented, *Effects of methods* and the *Feasibility of implementations of such strategies*. It is unclear from the last two sub-sections, however, whether the team will look at effects and feasibility of both methods "in place" and "other" methods. Likewise, terms such as "effects" and "such strategies" could cover existing and other. So, although these sections aim to provide a sense of parallel development, overall unity, cohesion and emphasis, the language lacks precision which may lower modality. Once again, separating the headings to the third level may have

clarified matters and created a more professional finish. The efforts to heighten modality such as parallel structure are eroded by the tensions and confusion caused by the paradoxical elements mentioned above.

A further tension arises from the mixture of formal and informal styles. Formal expressions such as "associated with"; polysyllabic words (in every section); and nominalised words ("introduction of"/"implementations of" instead of introducing, implementing) create a number of headings characterized by indirectness and passivity. These attempts to heighten authorial distance, a feature of academic discourse, are contradicted by casual informality and a hurried approach. Abbreviated words such as "vs.", "info" and "intro" and grammatical errors (*Currents plans*), suggest a hurried nonchalance. For example, in section 3 "Graca Machel" is written out in full but in 4, it becomes "graca" (shortened and lower case). Only once is the name of the residence complete and spelt correctly: Graça Machel Hall, using the Cedilla "ç". As this residence is named for a real person who is still alive and enjoys a prestigious position and profile within the university, country at large and abroad, this type of slapdash "error" creates a disjuncture which undermines the overall credence of the work.

Despite inconsistencies, Team SBD correctly ends with Recommendations (7) and provide two: *Changes to Graca* and *Additions to future buildings*. Although the lack of either direct or indirect imperative once again points to unfamiliarity with readings, explicit facilitator instruction and feedback offered during the mindmap presentations, it does confirm their aim to have two sets of recommendations, one linking to Graça Machel Hall and the other to [future] new buildings. This in turn aligns to the earlier section 5, *Future buildings on middle campus,* which also focuses on *solar heating* and *water cooling* as well as *Other possible methods*, a rather abstract "catch-all" phrase which may refer to anything.

It must be noted that the only mention of cost is in the introduction, more, seemingly, of historical background interest to the investigation than a major section within the body of the report. Once again, given the importance of cost-effectiveness and feasibility of existing and "other possible methods", this oversight weakens modality within a commerce domain (particularly for finance honors students). Sustainable building practices are known to be more expensive initially but reducing a building's carbon footprint purportedly saves money in the long-term. Proof of these claims is necessary in the body of the report if this argument is to be sustained in conclusions and recommendations for additions to Graça Machel Hall or plans for future buildings.

Authorial stance and modality can be instantiated though more than just written or spoken language, however. As Norris (2004, p. 65) contends, "other communicative modes" such as posture, gaze and gesture also need to be accentuated in interactions in order for more "complete messages" to be communicated.

4. Final Comments: Reconfiguring and Transforming the Semiotic Terrain

The first overtly transformative act evident to the audience was the progression from informal in-class brainstorming sessions to mediated topic outline. This developmental trajectory reflected decisions around content: what would be left in, what left out and how what is left in, might be highlighted (verbally and visually), adapted and reconfigured depending on feedback, self-reflection and ongoing investigation.

In HWM's case, the technical explanations and inconsistencies in headings were noted and clarified and the discussion session allowed the audience to confirm that the whole report would revolve around both solid *and* gaseous hazardous waste management policies and practices. Furthermore, her science background, identity and interest in chemical rather than bio-hazardous waste management practices, were also confirmed. The in-class

discussion helped her reach consensus and, with the help of facilitator and peers, streamline and transform the content to the satisfaction of all participants and herself. In SBD's case, the oral presentation helped clarify sections, particularly as this "outline" was less ordered than the HWM example. Each heading and sub-heading could be extended and elaborated, allowing presenters to move from the general to the particular, the abstract to the concrete and to coherently explain the hierarchies within their sets of headings.

Pedagogically, an aspect of situated practice refers to the familiarity that presenters and audience now have of the topic. At this stage, about a month into the course, teams seemed more confident with their material. They had all carried out more document research and contacted various environmental experts via telephone, email, online or in person. The more information they gathered, the more decisive and authoritative they became. Deeper knowledge of content and presentation techniques reflected growing mastery over both subject matter and more assured delivery styles, as evidenced in the classroom. The imitative, apprentice-like "bootstrapping", to use Gee's term (2004), seemed less evident than earlier attempts. In their course assessments, all team members "agreed" and "strongly agreed" that "process writing is more motivating as one can get help before final hand-in" and that "draft assignments contributed to their developing expertise and confidence" and "enhanced planning skills in a controlled environment". All participants also "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that experiencing different roles and activities (e.g., outlining, writing, presenting, editing, etc.) allowed for wider communicative expertise and skills development. They also found that having the facilitator and particularly expert "external sources" for consultation during the course provided a "general overview" of the field, "good support" and "real", "authentic", "1st hand information". In a post-course interview, HWM reiterated how helpful these draft stages were not only in sharpening her focus but also in boosting her confidence.

The shifts in mode which occurred during the design of the topic outline as product and the presentation and classroom interaction as processes served to co-contribute to negotiated meaning making. These embodied activities also reinforced the relationship by building rapport and deepening understanding between participants as well as presenters and their material.

Although the focus of facilitator instruction was on the classification of verbal content, structural coherence, layout and the use of numbering, the experiential activities in class widened the teaching/learning experience to encompass speaking (some prepared, some impromptu), listening and handling questions. This active learning-by-doing aimed to consolidate growing mastery of respective content areas as well as the report genre, format and layout. Studying the topic outlines above, it is clear that the report genre is more than merely embryonic. Students' report knowledge was further substantiated and reinforced during the formal oral presentations of the topic outline. Mediated by projector, screen and light source, presenters delivered their mini oral reports, mostly uninterrupted. During these presentations, audience members respected this formality and waited their turn before participating in discussion. Hands were raised for questions and the discussion was mediated by the facilitator. Instead of the entirely appropriate free-for-all of earlier brainstorming sessions, these presentations took on a semblance of formality, as a precursor to their final oral presentation. This too is an element of transformed practice and of learning and knowing how to act and what acceptable practice for different genres and occasions involves.

Role switching saw presenters and audience as engaged participants alternating as speakers, listeners, teachers, learners, facilitators, writers, readers, leaders, followers, critics, editors and distributors. Even though only a few of these role functions are overtly examined and graded, the implicit need (and tacit requirement) to explore varied communication practices in order to emerge as effective professional communicators aims to

mimic the variable demands of workplace practice and on-the-job change and unpredictability. "You learn things not only in communication but the environmental scenario you are working on" stated HMW. Even though students tackle different scenario aspects, their growing familiarity with the university's sustainability programme and continuing primary and secondary research, are seen to deepen their understanding, commitment and professional identity. Their growing environmental knowledge in related areas and the difficulties and challenges they faced in sourcing primary and secondary data allowed them to ask pointed questions and provide equally pointed and helpful answers. This collaborative negotiation and negotiated collaboration — both are relevant — saw teams teach and learn from one another in terms of process and product and transform their thinking and behaviour. Comments from HMW included: "Small groups encourage *individual* learning and *communal* participation" (my italics). This individual and communal knowledge creation, interpersonally and dialogically negotiated, helped shape their lifeworlds and identity and deepen professionalism and confidence. Luckett and Luckett (2009, p. 474) argue that "the achievement of selfhood and personal identity are not solitary achievements, but rather forged through interpersonal relations and dialogue" and that the concept of selfhood should not be too "individualistic and monological" (2009, p. 474). As HMW has suggested, I would like to hold both these arguments in partnership and posit that identity and selfhood are both individually and dialogically constituted and intra- and interpersonally negotiated through self-talk and talk with others. With every creation, display, presentation and discussion, emerging authority and professional identities became more manifest as students got to grips with their professional disciplines, domains, discourses and personal sense of who they were becoming (Preece, 2009; Kapp and Bangeni, 2009; Bangeni, 2009). Besides communication specific know-how, teams also started demonstrating much greater technical expertise, focus and critical awareness of broader sustainability issues.

These informal draft products are imbued with literacy practices "of everyday life", a way of trying out "stuff" on the road to more "'schooled' literacy practices" as instantiated by the professional oral and written reports to follow (Street and Street, 1991). The translation from draft modal choices and practices to coherent verbal-visual ensemble of final professional products represents the migration of draft products to business oral and written reports, recognized business genres within recognized business and professional discourses and domains.

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