

# Responding to Supervisory Feedback: Mediated positioning in thesis writing

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The process of responding to supervisory feedback requires student writers to position themselves towards both the provider and content of that feedback, indicating their stance in the interaction and their evolving disciplinary competence. How positionings are discursively shaped, developed and enacted to influence thesis revisions, however, has been relatively unexplored. In this paper, we trace how two master's students construct their positions in supervisory interactions and in the subsequent revisions of their literature review drafts. Through discourse and intertextual analyses, we propose three dimensions of interpersonal positioning (*co-operative*, *self-assertive*, *explorative*) which are co-constructed to reinforce local supervisory cooperation and modify conceptualisations of the research work. We highlight *scaffolded*, *responsive*, and *reflexive* types as concrete expressions of mediated positioning which help regulate the ways students orientate to their writing and their discipline.

**Key words:** positioning, supervisory feedback, revision, L2 writers, thesis writing

## 1. Introduction

Positioning is a process by which individuals locate themselves in relation to others in an ongoing discourse. It therefore involves both alignment and contestation and contributes to the reinforcement of social relationships and the management of power in interaction (Zhang & Hyland, 2021a). For students, positioning is a key means of associating themselves with their disciplinary field and establishing a territorial map of who and what to align with (Paré, Starke-Meyerring & McAlpine, 2011). It is perhaps most clearly revealed in constructing a literature review (LR) in a dissertation or thesis, as it requires sophisticated maneuverings among conceptual understandings and the evaluation of source texts to pull off successfully. The process of creating an LR therefore orients the student towards audiences to demonstrate “knowledge of academic lineage, allegiance, positioning and authority” (Badenhorst, 2018, p. 59). This is, however, often daunting to novice writers, not least as they need to “undertake several varieties of positioning” in the process of creating the text, and the concrete forms of these vary across situations (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 30). As Ongstad notes (2002), positioning can “function as framework, strategy, and method” (p. 347).

In this study, we explore how positioning functions as a resource for novice writers in developing orientations to their texts by examining two L2 students studying for a master’s degree in Applied Linguistics at an English-medium university in Hong Kong. To help explain the situated negotiations involved in shifting situations, we develop the concept *mediated positioning*. Seeing positioning as a *mediated* process of revealing multiple cultural views and linguistic resources, we trace how the two writers constructed various forms of positioning in responding to supervisory feedback. Specifically, we address two questions:

- (1) What kinds of positionings are constructed in the process of responding to supervisory feedback?
- (2) How do these positionings reinforce textual reorientations in master's-level theses?

## **2. Feedback, positioning and intertextuality**

The act of negotiating feedback is a form of mediated interaction (Aljaafresh & Lantolf, 1994) that shapes novice writers' emergent disciplinary knowledge and writing expertise (Zhang & Hyland, 2021b). In postgraduate contexts, such negotiations frequently occur in supervisory contexts, as students are helped to navigate decisions about "whose theories have currency, who should be placed where in the hierarchy, with how much attention, and why" (Paré et al, 2011, p. 227). This mediated orientation guides them to appropriate positioning in a disciplinary hierarchical map. As learners respond to advice in different ways, they develop ever-shifting positioning to justify their discourse practices and establish a framework for learning. It is a process of manipulating textual resources, such as model utterances, which links their communicative goals to the mediational tool of feedback. Van Compernelle (2015) refers to this as "a bidirectional process of inward and outward growth in which mediational means are appropriated as one's own" (p. 47).

Appropriating another's words or behaviors is not a self-contained, blind adoption of amorphous norms, but involves writer agency in responding to earlier writers handling similar situations (Bazerman, 1988). This agentic engagement helps to accomplish meaningful social functions, such as positioning, and slowly but gradually, shapes the "hierarchical, complexly differentiated, sociohistoric worlds" (Prior, 1994, p. 487) in which writers represent themselves. From a sociohistoric, developmental perspective, this engagement shapes and is shaped by an evolving relationship between response, revision, learning, and enculturation (Prior, 1995).

Texts and writers are therefore mutually embedded and mediated by a wide range of external and internal forces – both semiotic and material – “progressively, constructively internalized” (Prior, 1994, p. 487). Feedback helps students to construct mediated action, which Prior (1994) refers to, as “a complex interaction of participants’ sedimented tools” (p. 512), and to establish the enabling conditions which facilitate the reproduction and interconnection of motives, thoughts and sociocultural forces (Wertsch, 1997). Responding to feedback thus engages students in co-constructing roles, developing mutual expectations and understanding power relations with their supervisors in a way that helps them towards a solution (Zhang & Hyland, 2021a). We see this solution as a local negotiation interactively developed though contingent, changing, perhaps conflicting, influences of their supervisors addressing different writing situations and of the interventions of multiple feedback networks that students interact with (Zhang & Hyland, 2021b). As the supervisors “literally embody the discipline and institution” (Kamler, 2008, p. 286) for students, their actions point to a key form of positional mutuality.

Reproducing the thinking and utterances of others as they write involves students in acts which can be seen as the negotiated outcomes of multiple positions. Writers come to adopt and employ the “collective experience and historically structured affordances” of the discipline (Prior & Thorne, 2014, p. 19) by responding to their past utterances, orienting towards the immediate context of discourse, and taking future utterances and situations into account. Their intertextual engagement is made visible in the words and/or ideas of others they use to articulate their authoritative position (Morton, Storch & Thompson, 2014). Intertextuality is therefore made explicit in the writer’s text through the links connecting dominant disciplinary voices with his or her intended meaning-making. This intertextuality allows individuals to identify and locate themselves within worlds of multiple texts (Bazerman, 2003) while constraining their textual

decisions. Positioning, which emerges from these negotiations, thus manifests and re-constitutes social and intertextual connections to represent the learning of discourse.

### **3. Positioning in discourse**

Positioning results from a writer's regulation of his/her communicative purpose and scholarly representation in discourse. It helps us understand how people locate themselves in a text through interaction with others, building a "bridge between identities and Discourses" (Hyland, 2012, p. 35). In the process of encountering conflicting opinions and developing new positions, writers acquire understandings about themselves and their social worlds, and at the same time master the skill of behaving like someone in that position. Seeing positioning as an enabling condition for individuality, Hyland (2012) addresses the importance of understanding how writers occupy and speak their positions "staking out a distinctive territory" in discourse (p. 25). The mutual influence of discussants is revealed when they discursively act upon each other, build positional convergence, and achieve a shared purpose of co-operation (Widdowson, 2012).

Widdowson (2012) calls this process interpersonal positioning and sees it as involving both projecting and protecting personal positions. This means reconciling the *co-operative* and *territorial* imperatives, seeking to occupy a convergent space while asserting the speaker's own personal area against intrusion. As interactants discursively negotiate positions and reconcile the demands of these two imperatives, they manoeuvre shared social territory while conforming to sociocultural conventions. Interpersonal positioning, managed in individual ways, thus can be "immediate, tactical and largely unpredictable" (Widdowson, 2012, p. 20). When seen in educational contexts, this means that learners connect their familiar, cultural positions with the immediate interactional positions in different negotiated encounters (Carbaugh, 1999).

From the perspective of positioning theory, Davies and Harré (1990) argue that the positions adopted by speakers can be provisional and open to revision, occupied momentarily in the discourses. They observe:

In speaking and acting from a position people are bringing to the particular situation their history as a subjective being, that is the history of one who has been in multiple positions and engaged in different forms of discourse...Positioning, as we will use it is the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines. (Davies & Harré, 1990 p. 49)

When interactants seek to position other participants, they are likely to “assume and invoke the ways of being that the participants take themselves to be involved in” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 50). Interaction of any kind is thus an essential force shaping positioning. It results from interaction and facilitates the understanding of a multiplicity of selves. Davies and Harré (1990) further note that,

Positions are identified in part by extracting the autobiographical aspects of a conversation in which it becomes possible to find out how each conversant conceives of themselves and of the other participants by seeing what position they take up and in what story, and how they are then positioned. (p. 50)

In this view, the positions created for oneself or taken by others are cumulative elements of an autobiography and adopting them can be an appropriate expression of the self. A text comprises multiple acts of positioning, indicating the rhetorical expression of the learner’s social experience

and of others' published texts. The interaction between the self and others helps to create new positionings (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999).

These emergent positionings are particularly revealed through the writer's textual reproduction which help him/her to reinterpret "multiple discourses, multiple histories, and diverse institutional and personal interests" (Prior, 1994, p. 522). This reproduction of the texts and writers is therefore sociohistorical, and the process reflects the interactively achieved nature of revisions and underlines the writer's role as an active, knowledgeable agent constantly developing while conforming to the discipline's values and norms. The ongoing effort in creating disciplinary coherence builds the writer's mediated agency (Prior, 1994), presenting disciplines as dialogic heterogeneous networks (Prior, 1997) rather than as static and anonymous. Shifting between individual and perceived disciplinary preferences, the writer constructs his/her disciplinary positioning as a recognizable discursal feature. This is achieved by demonstrating his/her rhetorical savvy and interests, skillfully employing genre knowledge as situated cognition (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1993). Any instance of an actual textual revision, however, might not be a result of disciplinary conventions impinging directly upon the text, but a decision "socially formulated and negotiated through a sequential, multiparty interaction" (Prior, 1994, p. 517).

Moghaddam (1999) proposes positioning operating at interpersonal, intrapersonal and intergroup levels and mutually influencing one another. Each of these types are *mediated* in the sense that they result from the ongoing negotiation of complementary or conflicting subject positions of participants. They are negotiated outcomes of writers' interactions with different voices of the discipline (see also Wilder, 2021) through which the writers' existing positions are appropriated and utilized as affordances to show their learning. We refer to this process as *mediated positioning* and see it as co-constructed and available for shared interpretations of self-

presentations. The view that it is *mediated* refers to the writers' different ways of using interpersonal and intrapersonal resources, which in turn mediates their self-representation. The supervisors' comments, for instance, are a crucial mediational artifact which help shape student writers' collaborative performances and reorganize their understandings to mediate learning. This is a scaffolded process in which varying forms of negotiated assistance are combined to influence the learner' positioning development.

In their interactions with others, writers will combine different voices and views to produce *multi-faceted* positioning. Ivanič and Camps (2001), for example, identify three types of positioning operating simultaneously in writing: *ideational positioning* for expressing interests and beliefs; *interpersonal positioning* for conveying authoritativeness, certainty and relationships with readers; and *textual positioning* for showing their views towards the written text. So, on one hand, writers are positioned by their advisors' disciplinary views and orientations towards genre conventions which regulate their language choices and positioning. On the other hand, they can assert their own understandings and navigate their evolving positioning by combining their interpersonal purposes with intrapersonal reflections.

Added to this, we have to consider a writer's social positioning (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, class) which can influence his/her perceptions of a discourse and whether he/she feels able to authentically speak within it (Falconer, 2019). Falconer, for example, reports the case of Ann, a young African American woman who chose to speak using authoritative disciplinary language, representing a confident stance and her developed positioning. The multiple positions a student occupies are inevitably brought into an interplay with discourse demands, which shapes, but does not determine, how the writer sees those norms (Falconer, 2019). The process of negotiating



rhetorically appropriate positions leads the writer to recognize the characteristics and attributes of a social group and to perform a socio-culturally grounded, *mediated* identity.

Various factors impact the writer's rhetorical construction of an authoritative position. Ivanič (1998), for example, explored an undergraduate's multiple positioning in an assignment, uncovering in the text the aspects of the self she chose to reveal (as a member of the academic community with a feminist's point of view, and a person who had stance, feelings, and a sense of humor) and disguise (as an apprentice social worker). Ivanič saw this positioning as a struggle to discover 'who I am', with the writer herself ambivalent about whether she could present a 'textual self' she totally identified with. Traces of this ambivalence can be seen in language choices at sentence, paragraph, and discourse levels, so that the use of 'I think' and subordinate clause, for example, can indicate what the writer tries to hide or reveal to avoid having to commit to any of the positions (Petrić, 2010).

The ways a writer allows his/her textual expressions to be mediated also reveal a dynamically evolving identity. Prior (1995), for instance, relates how Moira accepted Professor West's advice but resisted her tone. So, despite receiving authoritative and persuasive input, Moira maintained the ownership of her text by seeing utterances as "dynamic, negotiable spaces" (1995, p. 291) that could be adapted to preserve her writer identity in co-producing a text. This process may require reconciling the tensions between expected arguments and the tone taken by the writer to reveal his/her authority (Blakeslee, 1997). The writer's self-presentation (i.e., self-assertion), as a marker of self and positioning in the discourse community, can be strategically developed through citations, vocabulary choices, tone, and directly claiming a contribution (Myers, 1985). Myers (1985), for example, contrasts two researchers' images, one as a competent, accepted contributor to the disciplinary literature able to boldly stress broad implications of his research,

and the other as a cautious skeptical servant carefully downplaying the controversial aspects of his project. While using different methods to mark their subspecialties, both tried to associate their work with the consensus in the field, carefully crafting a representative position to display a fit between their work and the discipline.

In a literature review, a writer's critical analysis of sources taking different stances and employing different frameworks, if carried off well, could represent a credible scholarly image. The writer's positions in a LR are often established through evaluative expressions towards other texts (Gil-Salom & Soler-Monreal, 2014) or through personal pronouns towards a textual identity (Vergaro, 2011). The evaluative space is, accordingly, managed through a balance between different positions, and between the writer's emergent position and the various sources. The literature often presents positioning as where a writer's voice, visibility and framing of the field are located (e.g., Hood, 2012; Guinda, 2012). Yet how writers reach this position, using feedback to establish positioning to influence writing development, is relatively unresearched.

In this study, we see positioning not as a writer's autonomous voice but as a *negotiated* and *mediated* process that shapes interactional, intertextual engagement in and through writing. Drawing on key insights of positioning theory, in particular the connection between positioning and rhetorical redescription (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999), we traced how interpersonal and intrapersonal positioning is used as a resource to develop rhetorically intelligible actions in master's level thesis writing. We examined the two students' interpersonal positioning by drawing on Widdowson's (2012) framework, and then traced how they used this in their subsequent revisions. The intertextual links we seek to establish thus include (1) the possible positions or stances expressed by supervisors and students, including how they converge and

diverge; and (2) the changing *mediated* positionings collaboratively constructed in different situations.

#### **4. Participants and data**

Our participants were Tom and Ed, both pursuing master's degrees in Applied Linguistics by coursework at a research-intensive English-medium university in Hong Kong. Their supervisors were Mandy, a native English speaker from Australia, and Linda, a Cantonese-speaking teacher who had supervised master's students for many years. The two students were from Mainland China and had taught English for some years in private tutoring centres in China. Neither had extensive exposure to English academic writing, however. Tom had studied Translation at a university in Hong Kong and had developed some understanding of academic writing, but Ed's background was a bachelor's degree in Business at a university in China and he had no prior experience of assignment or thesis writing. Their different writing needs led them to utilize institutional support and writing service in different ways. Tom, for example, was proactive in approaching writing tutors to solicit advice on assignments. He regularly attended writing consultations provided by Mandy before she became his thesis supervisor. Ed, in contrast, preferred to learn what he could from his teachers' written feedback on coursework, but like Tom, he had had previous contact with his supervisor Linda before his supervision began.

The first author of the present article began observing the two students in the first semester of their studies and followed the whole five-month process of their thesis writing. She observed and audio-recorded three thesis supervision meetings in Tom's case, and two in Ed's case. These were one-to-one interactions conducted entirely in English and lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. Neither student began with much knowledge of their supervisors' research

expertise but began to more closely work with them and develop emergent positions in relation to their advice. Through the discussions of focused research issues, the supervisors similarly gained greater familiarity of the two students and their existing positioning, such as the beliefs they brought to their writing and how they drew on their prior teaching experiences, readings and linguistic resources.

Analysis of the overall supervision process showed that supervision can be divided into two stages,:

Stage One: *guiding* and *encouraging* their initial positioning in relation to the existing literature

Stage Two: *prompting* the critical rethinking of their positioning to cultural resources, theoretical frameworks and target audience

The two stages represent the learners' development of positionings and their supervisors' different forms of guidance. These orientations, through supervisory oral and written feedback, connected the two students to the literature intertextually. Table 1 lists the key research issues discussed in this process.

Table 1 Focal points of discussion in thesis supervision processes

Key research issues discussed in the supervision process	
Stage One:	Stage Two:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framing the scope of literature review</li> <li>• Making sense of different elements of research, including theories, concepts, methods, and context</li> <li>• Developing approaches to LR</li> <li>• Establishing <i>initial positioning</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data analysis and interpretation</li> <li>• Linking research context with data</li> <li>• Re-organizing LR Chapter</li> <li>• Adjusting research focus and writer stance</li> <li>• Crafting <i>increasingly-established positioning</i> with critical thinking</li> </ul>

We focused our analysis on the observational data from the two writers' first supervision meetings as these focused extensively on the structure and features of LR writing and on their

revised LR drafts and outlines. In addition to observing supervision meetings, the first author carried out initial analysis of the written artifacts (e.g., supervisors' written feedback, early LR drafts) she had collected before attending the supervisory meetings. She then conducted in-depth qualitative (i.e., discourse-based) interviews in Chinese with the two students immediately following these meetings to trace observable intertextual links between the observational, interview, and textual data sets. Her observation notes also helped to highlight the convergence and divergence of the two parties' opinions, facilitating the tracking of changes related to specific supervisory advice. Table 2 presents the different data sets incorporated to present our findings.

Table 2 Data sets selected for presenting the findings

<b>Tom and Mandy</b>	<b>Ed and Linda</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First supervision meeting (51 min)</li> <li>• Tom's LR Outline 1 (40 words), LR Outline 2 (82 words), LR Outline 3 (102 words), LR draft 1 (2733 words), LR draft 2 (5776 words)</li> <li>• Supervisor written feedback on three LR outlines and two LR drafts</li> <li>• Tom's immediate response to supervisory feedback and his revisions of two LR drafts</li> <li>• Interview with Tom (55 min)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First supervision meeting (32 min)</li> <li>• Ed's LR Outline 1 (104 words), LR Outline 2 (119 words), LR draft 1 (7131 words), LR draft 2 (6325 words)</li> <li>• Supervisor written feedback on two LR outlines and two LR drafts</li> <li>• Ed's revisions of two LR drafts</li> <li>• Interview with Ed (46 min)</li> </ul>

By transcribing interview data provided by the students (from Chinese to English), we sought to reconstruct student participants' stories, including their stated realities and cultural meanings (Simons, 2009), from their perspectives. The analysis of the interviews attempted to connect the students' local interpretations with broader developmental processes and emphasized two foci: (1) interpreting specific feedback examples and their history, function, and context; (2) linking selected feedback examples with student responses and writing. We understood feedback

here as stimulated elicitation (Prior, 1994) to bring out the students' perceptions of the interactions among different texts.

We chose not to interview the supervisors because we wanted to focus on the students' interpretations of their engagement; the first author did, however, participate in a series of informal chats with the supervisors about their supervision styles and approaches to teaching writing, which helped us to better understand the supervision process. These conversations then informed the scope and focus of our analysis, reinforcing our analytical positioning to the research context by allowing us to incorporate greater details of the participants' interest, cultural backgrounds and interactions with the supervisors.

The first step in interpreting the observational data was to transcribe supervision meetings, revealing the focuses and subtopics of each meeting and exploring the two parties' joint meaning-making. In order to examine the process of how supervisory oral input/response mediated students' uptake and learning, we decided not to include features of oral speech, such as intonation. In the analysis of these meetings, we particularly attended to how the two students related to specific advice and resources (e.g., theories, quotations, the supervisor's words) to show their interpersonal positioning. We were especially interested in how particular words of advice were borrowed, circulated and incorporated to highlight students' textual positioning.

Drawing on Widdowson's (2012) 'co-operative' and 'territorial' imperatives, we developed a model that conceptualizes the process of negotiating different dimensions of interpersonal positioning (detailed in the next section). We then explored how these dimensions were drawn on in different ways to modify the students' textual revisions, tracing how positions developed in previous supervisory encounters were brought into writing and further modified to advance their positions. Intertextuality is thus revealed in the complex interplay between

oral/written advice, immediate responses/reactions, concrete textual changes, and identifiable changing positionings.

The first author of this paper member-checked with the two students concerning their interpretations of their supervisors' suggestions, particularly the revision strategies they developed to safeguard their positions. Interpretations of textual analysis were discussed with the second author to generate themes depicting different forms of positioning under the main framework. In particular, we analyzed how the two writers' positioning was developed by articulating an attitude, evaluating others' words, incorporating cultural resources and addressing the supervisors' advice. The generated themes were tested and redefined by examining how they were represented in different sources of data and particular data sets (including the links between them). Tracing this intertextual development, we sought to uncover thesis writers' "semiotic and material tools-in-use" (Prior, 1994, p. 526) in different situations, and to understand dynamic positioning as a "diffuse, partially emergent, property of *mediation action*" (Prior, 1994, p. 526) co-developed in feedback interactions.

## **5. Dimensions of interpersonal positioning**

We suggest that interpersonal positioning consists of three dimensions: *cooperative*, *self-assertive* and *explorative*. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship of these dimensions and shows how learners creatively integrate aspects of discussions to collaborate, negotiate and reinforce engagement with the topic and other participants. The *cooperative* and *self-assertive* dimensions suggest how learners build alignment and safeguard their conceptual space, corresponding with Widdowson's (2012) 'cooperative' and 'territorial' imperatives of interpersonal positioning. But while Widdowson (2012) sees students' ability to reconcile conflicts as an internal process of

constructing ‘co-operative’ and ‘territorial’ imperatives, we highlight the *explorative* dimension of positioning in this process. This is an independent stage, a process of building common ground, which helps to rationalize the writers’ decision-making, such as where to stand and how to build a shared social territory.

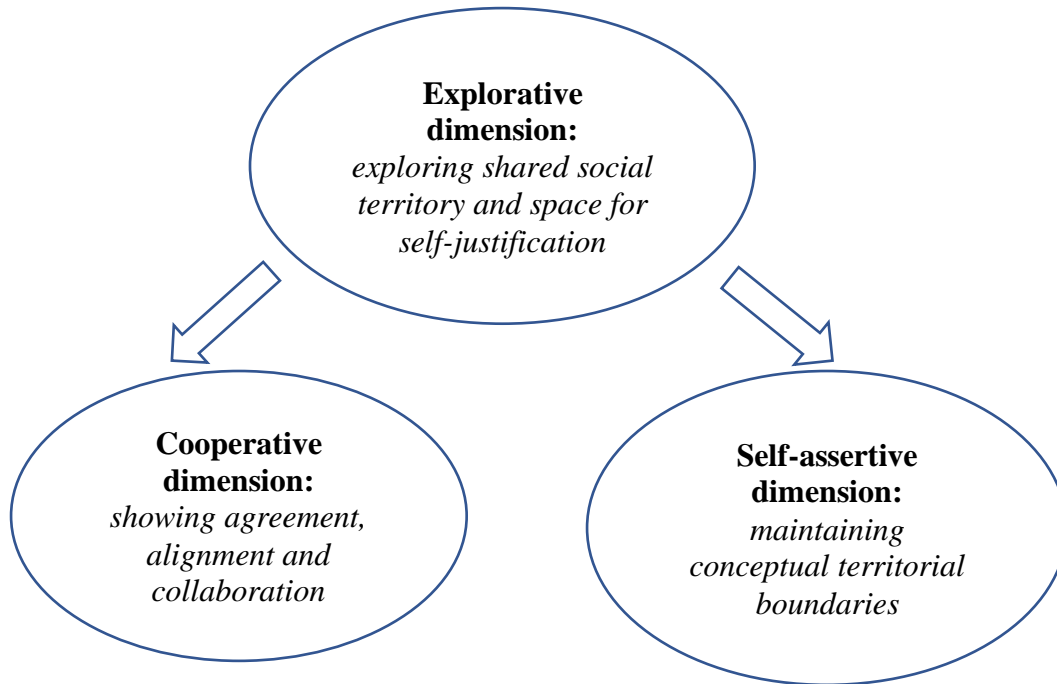


Figure 1 Three dimensions of interpersonal positioning

We can gloss the three dimensions of interpersonal positioning as follows:

- (1) *Co-operative dimension*: writers adjust their interest, beliefs, stance, and use of semiotic resources to express positional convergence with others, acknowledge alignment, and reinforce collaboration.
- (2) *Self-assertive dimension*: writers protect or maintain their conceptual space and territorial boundaries, and manage the influence of input by drawing on culturally and empirically informed understandings (e.g., disciplinary and cultural knowledge, social identity).



(3) *Explorative dimension*: writers reinterpret shared social territory and reconcile conflicts of different positions (e.g., their previous positions and immediate interactional positions) to carve out space for reflection, self-justification and shared social territory.

The process of engaging with supervisory feedback essentially entails the participants' interaction with these three dimensions of positioning. The interplay between them also informs how learners understand their engagement and themselves as “observably and subjectively coherent participants” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 49). In the following sections, we explore these dimensions of positioning as a *mediated* process through the analysis of oral supervisory sessions and textual changes in response to supervisory feedback. We focus, in turn, on scaffolded, responsive and reflexive positioning.

## **6. Scaffolded positioning through oral interaction**

Initially the progress of the two writers' towards a desired positioning in the use of their literature sources was substantially scaffolded by their supervisors' oral advice in supervisions. This positioning was characterised by their considerable *collaborative* and *explorative* engagement, which in turn led to more *self-assertive* statements of where to stand in relation to the literature. This is what Widdowson (2012) refers to as “the authorized mode of thinking” (p. 21). We illustrate this with examples from each student's supervisory interactions.

In early stage of thesis writing Tom struggled with how to position himself in relation to different concepts and perspectives (Transcript 1).

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Transcript 1 Positioning in relation to theoretical concepts and perspectives (first research meeting)

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- 01 Tom: okay. So I don't have to go into some of the Critical Discourse Analysis related to this issue?  
02 Mandy: I think maybe you want to mention that there is whole other body of work  
03 but you're not focusing on that for x reason.  
04 Tom: Yeah, yeah. Cause it's interesting, when they talk about the topic, they always talk about  
Critical Discourse Analysis.  
05 When they talk about the genre, we see, you know, the language features in different genres,  
they talk about interpersonal metafunctions, a little bit about textual metafunction.  
06 So, it's very interesting.  
07 I mean um there is a reason.  
08 I know maybe there is interest there.  
09 But in my research, I don't know if it is right to talk about, you know, something like that.  
10 Mandy: Why would you say you don't want to do things from the Critical Discourse Analysis  
perspective?  
11 Tom: Because it is also criticized by...  
12 cause, my study is about the language use of...not too much about...  
13 Mandy: So to position yourself, you know, from the SFL perspective  
14 and to justify that, you don't need to say that Critical Discourse Analysis is wrong.  
15 Tom: Ah, okay. It's not wrong.
- 

First, Tom asks whether he should include the discussion of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). He then builds positional convergence with Mandy's advice (line 02) by aligning with her suggestion (line 04). Revealing his thoughts and concern (lines 05-09), Tom was however dimly aware that critical positioning could be developed by justifying his chosen research approach (SFL Discourse Analysis) while commenting on other possible approaches such as CDA. Mandy's question (line 10) then provokes his uncertainty about how to reconcile others' view of the literature and his original interest in the topic. Tom reorganizes his thoughts to justify his position (*'Because it is also criticized by...'*, [lines 11-12]), presumably seeking to build a shared conceptual space accessible to his supervisor. He seems to utilize the *explorative* positioning as a way to invite an alternative view.

In other words, his *explorative* engagement with supervisory advice, as a resource of exercising agency, helps negotiate what positioning acts to take subsequently (Bomer & Laman, 2004). He becomes more self-assertive (*'Ah, okay. It's not wrong'*, [line 15]) after Mandy

confirms that “*you don’t need to say that Critical Discourse Analysis is wrong*” (line 14).

Mandy’s advice thus helps co-operatively regulate Tom’s expression of individual position (Widdowson, 2012).

In our second example, in Transcript 2, we see Ed struggling to structure relevant literature sources in his review and receiving advice from Linda to broaden the scope of the analysis, prompting Ed’s consideration of how to position himself in relation to the literature.

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Transcript 2 Positioning in relation to aspects of the study (first research meeting)

- 01 Ed: I have an outline of the second literature review part  
02 but I’m not so sure, so I want to show it to you.  
03 Linda: okay ‘Introduction to curriculum’, ‘student evaluation’  
04 so this means students’ evaluation of the curriculum, right?  
05 Ed: yeah I will look at ‘curriculum’ and also ‘student evaluation of the curriculum’  
06 so the first section is... also the definition of the curriculum is important.  
07 I’ve checked some books, they have different definitions about the curriculum  
08 so if I need to do an evaluation of the curriculum, then the definition is crucial, I think.  
09 Linda: Good, so you will refer to a number of definitions and then at the end...  
10 Ed: I will choose one.  
11 Linda: you choose one or you generalize and come up with, not say a new one, but say these are  
the areas that are important in looking at curriculum.  
12 Ed: And this can support my decisions of why I choose this one
- 

The extract opens as Ed invites Linda’s intervention to co-construct a shared conceptual analysis of the literature, the *explorative* dimension of positioning, by stating his uncertainty of how to organise his text (line 02). After Linda reinterprets Ed’s view (lines 03-04), Ed clarifies that he is going to examine two aspects of curriculum (line 05) and articulates his rationale for providing the definition of curriculum (lines 06-08). Ed is self-assertive here, maintaining his territorial boundaries in term of why he thinks ‘*the definition is crucial*’ (line 08), which appears to be an essential act of self-justification. Linda then intervenes to suggest that he discuss ‘*a number of definitions*’ (line 09), which contrasts with Ed’s ‘*I will choose one*’ (line 10). Linda further explicates how to occupy a critical position by conducting a broader analysis of the

definitions. Her advising act, ‘*you choose...or...*’ (line 11), helps to broaden the space for building positional convergence. While Ed is not skilled in justifying his focus (‘*so the first section is...*’, [line 06]), he draws on Linda’s dialogical support, which reinforces the *collaborative* dimension of positioning (‘*Good,....*’, ‘*not say a new one, but say...*’, [lines 09 & 11]). Ed utilizes Linda’s oral advice, which helps rationalize his decision-making, to build elements of *self-assertive* positioning (‘*this can support my decisions of why I choose this one*’, [line 12]). Linda’s advice thus becomes an essential resource for building Ed’s *mediated* positioning – an increased degree of conformity to writing conventions and rationalized individual initiative.

## **7. Responsive positioning: conceptually and linguistically mediated engagement**

Both writers drew on their supervisors’ oral advice and used it to establish a positional convergence which shaped their early-stage LR drafts. Their outlines in particular showed their conceptually and linguistically mediated engagement with supervisory advice and their responsive positioning ‘momentarily called’ by the discourse (Davies & Harré, 1990).

For Tom, this involved presenting a radically different second outline, including a completely new numbering system and more sub-sections (Figure 2). Except for *appraisal theory*, Tom deleted all other parts of Outline 1 and systematically restructured it. Mandy’s oral advice appears to have been a vital source that explicitly mediated Tom’s decision-making of what aspects of the theory to draw on. Her oral input ‘*Then you have 2.2.1 ....you’ve got SFL....maybe you got Appraisal*’, for example, guided Tom to divide the second section into two subsections: ‘*2.2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistic*’ and ‘*2.2.2 Appraisal*’. Her written advice on

explaining ‘*whole other body of work*’ also led to a new section: ‘*2.3 Other Related Research*’ in Outline 2.

LR Outline 1	LR Outline 2	Mandy’s written feedback (WF) on LR Outline 1 and her oral feedback (OF) associated with changes in LR Outline 2
Part 1. Positioning of the Research News and Editorials Systemic Functional Grammar to News Discourses Summary of Studies on News Reports and Commentaries The Studies of Language Use of the Post  Part 2 Theoretical Concepts  Appraisal Theory  Unit of Analysis  Being deleted	2.1 Introduction  2.2 Theoretical Orientation 2.2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistic 2.2.1.1 Nature of SFL 2.2.1.2 Strata of SFL 2.2.1.3 Instantiation  Being deleted  2.2.2 Appraisal 2.2.2.1 Nature of Appraisal Theory 2.2.2.2 The Position of Appraisal in SFL 2.2.2.3 Affect in Attitude 2.2.2.4 Inscribed and Invoked 2.2.2.5 Reading Position ...  2.3 Other Related Research 2.3.1 Genre Studies 2.3.2 Interpersonal Metafunction Studies 2.3.3 Textual Metafunction Studies 2.3.4 Critical Discourse Analysis	WF1 Use a numbering system for your headings and subheadings  WF2 You need at least a few paragraphs/a page on what SFL is... viewed on a series of strata...info about how this relates to genre, register and the meta-functions  OF1 And then you’ve got Section 2.2, something like theoretical maybe orientation to the research. Then you have 2.2.1, you’ve got SFL. And then you’ve got 2.2.2, maybe you got Appraisal. Yeah, maybe you got 2.2.2.1, things like Attitude, or you know, etc. yeah?  WF3 At this stage, you also need to explain how Appraisal theory fits into SFL and also the aspects of Appraisal that you are focusing on. See this all as a process of narrowing down the theory to what you are specifically utilizing in your research. You are going to need to explain inscribed and invoked  OF2 I think maybe you want to mention that there is whole other body of work, but you’re not focusing on that for x reason.  OF3 So to position yourself, you know, from the SFL perspective, and to justify that, you don’t need to say that Critical Discourse Analysis is wrong.

Figure 2 First-round LR revision outline responding to supervisory feedback: Tom’s case.

Tom’s emergent theoretical positioning can be seen in his incorporation and arrangement of different constructs, which appeared in Mandy’s advice such as ‘*appraisal*’, ‘*attitude*’, ‘*affect*’, ‘*inscribed*’, and ‘*invoked*’. He utilized the positional convergence developed in the supervision meeting as a *strategy* to deal with the possible tension of introducing different theoretical perspectives. Influenced by Mandy’s oral advice ‘...*you don’t have to say CDA is wrong*’, he added the subsection ‘*2.3.4 Critical Discourse Analysis*’. Tom continued to refine the structure of the chapter, and in Outline 3 (Table 3) he deleted ‘*Interpersonal Metafunction Studies*’ and ‘*Textual Metafunction Studies*’, and added ‘*2.3.1 An Overview of Approaches to*

*Journalistic Discourse Analysis*’ and ‘2.3.4 Discourse Semantics’. Tom displays his intentional *self-assertive* positioning as a competent discourse analyst by saying ‘*this is the approach this paper adopts...*’ and interprets SFL as a tool to study discourse semantics. It seems that Tom was able to adopt not only an authorized mode of thinking but also an authorized mode of expression (Widdowson, 2012) to show his engagement with discourse.

Table 3 Revised LR outline, student response and the supervisor’s further comments (after 1<sup>st</sup> supervision meeting)

LR Outline 2	Supervisor’s written comments on Outline 2	LR Outline 3	Student replies (SR) to supervisor feedback	Supervisor’s further comments (SFC)
2.3 Other Related Research  2.3.1 Genre Studies  2.3.2 Interpersonal Metafunction Studies  2.3.3 Textual Metafunction Studies  2.3.4 Critical Discourse Analysis	I would start with paragraph(s) which explain that there are many forms of discourse analysis which is used to analyze journalistic discourse.  Give examples and these four, show your knowledge of the field, and then justify why you are using SFL	2.3 Approaches to Newspaper Discourse Analysis  2.3.1 An Overview of Approaches to Journalistic Discourse Analysis  2.3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis  2.3.3 Genre Studies  2.3.4 Discourse Semantics	This is the approach this paper adopts. But, it seems that to study discourse semantics in news reports and editorials, researchers chose SFL as tool to analyze.  So here should I say something about the justification of use SFL? Or leave it to the next section: ‘nature of SFL’??? Because many times the justification for using SFL is the nature of SFL stated by Halliday.	Yes, I would not list this is as discourse semantics but SFL and yes, discuss in general terms (using terminology which doesn’t need definitions) and then say this this approach is going to be discussed in more detail in the following section. Then discuss the theory.

Mandy’s written comment ‘*there are many forms of discourse analysis...to analyze journalistic discourse*’ clearly influenced Tom’s thinking and textual planning. Tom said,  
  
I changed ‘related studies’ into ‘new approaches to discourse analysis’. I think ‘related studies’ can be confusing, as it can mean use of the same approach. But I want to address

the different approaches that existing studies used, so I revised it. (1<sup>st</sup> interview with Tom)

However, Mandy's advice on justifying the use of SFL, which urges Tom to claim some authority through self-positioning, seems to confuse him as he raises questions to clarify how he could do this (*'So here should I say...'*). He further negotiates his position through a display of knowledge and agency (*'Because...the nature of SFL stated by Halliday'*), which leads to Mandy expressing a personal stance (*'I would not list...'*) which further mediates Tom's thinking and *explorative* positioning, leading towards a more mutually-supporting stance.

Ed, like Tom, accepted nearly all his supervisor's suggestions, together with her error corrections, on his early LR drafts (Figure 3). He modified and reworded subheadings, and relocated subsections in Outline 2, thus *'Defining'* replaced *'Definition'*, and *'strategies'* replaced *'methods'*, for example (the words in bold type were corrected by Linda). These changes are the result of Linda's direct corrections and oral advice on appropriate wording, for example, using *'strategies for curriculum evaluation'*. In the supervision, Linda repeatedly suggested *'The review should compare and contrast...and lead to research questions'* and *'what we should really look at is not just presenting...'*, and this led to the addition of section 2.2 and section 2.3 in Outline 2.

In particular, the revised section *'2.4.2 Definitions of and methods for curriculum evaluation'* reveals Ed's use of the co-constructed *collaborative* positioning from the supervision. Despite disagreeing with Linda on using different definitions, he seems to accept Linda's oral advice *'you shouldn't say I would use this particular definition'* and *'so you will refer to a number of definitions'* to inform his thinking. By applying Linda's suggestions, Ed includes several definitions in the outline instead of just one, taking up the position expected of

him as a competent master's student. He therefore connects his familiar, cultural positions based on prior experiences with the immediate interactional positions co-constructed with the supervisor (Carbaugh, 1999). This process involved reconciling the multiple positions he had occupied as a language school tutor in China keen on examining aspects of a local curriculum with his new position as a novice researcher confronting a wider range of issues in curriculum development.

LR Outline 1	LR Outline 2	Linda's written feedback (WF) on LR Outline 1 and her oral feedback (OF) associated with changes in LR Outline 2
2.1 Introduction	2.1 Introduction	
2.2 The <b>definition</b> of curriculum and curriculum evaluation 2.2.1 The <b>definition</b> of curriculum 2.2.2 The <b>definition</b> and strategies for curriculum evaluation	2.2 Main areas studied in private tutoring Being added	WF1 The review should compare and contrast related past studies and point out the strengths and weaknesses to identify the research gaps and lead to the research questions.
Being corrected and relocated	2.2.1 The demand and supply of private tutoring 2.2.2 The positive and negative aspects of private tutoring	OF1 Remember in Literature Review, what we should really look at is not just presenting, or reporting on what you have read, you have to put in your thoughts about, that means comparing, for example, definitions, comparing and then contrasting
2.3 Student evaluation of curriculum 2.3.1 Student evaluation of teaching effectiveness 2.3.2 Student evaluation of teacher behavior 2.3.3 Student evaluation of course experience and engagement 2.3.4 The "module approach" and the computer-based "cafeteria" system	2.3 Research questions Being added	WF2 After reading the section, it is unclear what strategies are there.
Being relocated	2.4 Defining curriculum and curriculum evaluation	OF2 Good, so you will refer to a number of definitions and then at the end...
2.4 Private tutoring in China 2.4.1 The demand and supply of private tutoring 2.4.2 The positive and negative <b>sides</b> of private tutoring	2.4.1 Defining curriculum 2.4.2 Definitions of and methods for curriculum evaluation	OF3 you shouldn't say I would use this particular definition
Being corrected and relocated	2.5 Student evaluation of curriculum 2.5.1 Student evaluation of teaching effectiveness 2.5.2 Student evaluation of teacher behavior ...	WF3 It is not a good idea to refer to one single definition. You should come up with the definition that you use in the study by reviewing various definitions. That means you should synthesize various definitions for the meaning of the term that is appropriate for your study and that you use it in the rest of the dissertation.
2.5 High <b>stake</b> English tests for Chinese college students 2.5.1 The <b>overview</b> of the College English Tests 2.5.2 The <b>overview</b> of the <b>GSEEE</b>	2.6 High-stakes English tests for Chinese college students 2.6.1 The overview of the College English Tests 2.6.2 Overview of the Graduate School Entrance English Examination	
Being corrected and relocated	2.7 Summary	WF4 Research questions should be developed naturally from reviewing literature
2.6 Summary		

Figure 3 First-round LR revision outline responding to supervisory feedback: Ed's case.

Ed seems to show an increased awareness of research synthesis, perhaps drawing on his prior social positioning as a teacher in a Chinese tutoring center to develop an integrative approach



to evaluate material about course evaluation. In LR draft 2, he deleted the entire section 2.4.2, and reshuffled sentence ② to create a new section ‘2.3 *Research questions*’ (Figure 4). His re-description of the research gap (sentence ②), supported by cited work, compares the ‘*primary and secondary contexts*’ with his own focus, the tertiary setting, to more specifically highlight his contribution. In addition, by explicitly identifying the research gap ‘*Thus this study will fill this gap by...*’ (sentence ③) and connecting it with his evaluative views (sentence ②) rather than placing it in Summary, he shows his collaborative positioning, responding to Linda’s advice that research questions should emerge ‘*naturally from reviewing the literature*’. By revealing his earlier position as a private tutor (sentence ④), he also re-asserts a socio-culturally informed view that had influenced his material manipulation of the text (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999).

Such a rhetorical description of what happened and should be cited might be seen as an act of mediated positioning that reproduces a culturally meaningful focus. It shows Ed’s justifications resulting from his *explorative* positioning. The decisions involved in this were almost certainly informed by the supervisor’s disciplinary orientations and supported by Ed’s personal insights on English acquired through his four-year teaching experiences. These insights are, in Prior and Thorne’s words (2014), the “historically structured affordances that are relocalized for the purposes at hand” (p. 19); and in this case, they evolved to be a resource mediating a concrete writing situation contributing to how Ed wished to position himself towards the literature.

<p><b>Original section 2.4.2, LR draft 1</b></p> <p>①After the review of literature pertinent to private tutoring, with the strong demand and supply of it, and the discussion in terms of the positive and negative impact of it. ②We can notice that the research of private tutoring covering tertiary level is scant, and the research of the curriculum centers on the private tutoring is rare. Hence, these areas could be the niche of this paper.</p>	<p><b>Revised section 2.3, LR draft 2</b></p> <p>①After the review of literature pertinent to private tutoring, with the strong demand and supply of it, and the discussion in terms of the positive and negative impact of it, ②we can notice that the research of private tutoring has mainly been focusing on primary and secondary students (Bray, 2012; W. Zhang, 2014) while the research covering tertiary level is scant, this would be the niche of this paper. ③Thus this study will fill this gap by investigating the private tutoring at college students' level, whose findings could contribute and supply to studies in this field. ④Additionally, as a private tutor who had taught courses to the college students for four years in this industry, it is meaningful to explore the curricula of English courses from the students' perceptions. For this end, three research questions were raised.</p>
<p><b>The associated supervisory written feedback on LR draft 1:</b></p> <p><i>The review should compare and contrast related past studies and point out the strengths and weaknesses to identify the research gaps and lead to the research questions.</i></p> <p><i>Research questions should be developed naturally from reviewing literature.</i></p>	

Figure 4 Text extracts from two LR drafts

## 8. Reflexive positioning: towards self-mediated orientations

The textual changes made by the two writers in their later drafts seemed to be driven not only by supervisory feedback, but their own reflexive positioning prompted by ongoing revisions and engagement with the literature. This positioning reveals how feedback messages were appropriated as the learners' own and transformed as they applied them to their texts. In other words, these messages were integrated as a tool mediating the feedback commentary and reutilized as a resource of self-mediated learning and reflection on that commentary.

An illustration of this is a paragraph Tom added to his third LR draft (Table 4). Guided by Mandy's suggestion concerning the need to support reader interpretations with concrete examples,

Tom added this paragraph to show interactions between the different positions he assigned to source texts. Stating that *‘some studies....play a considerable part in the news reports’*, he discusses *‘inscribed Attitude’* and *‘invoked judgement’* through comparisons. His evaluation uses boosters (e.g., *‘only specifies...’*, *‘play a considerable part’*, *‘frequently used’*) to strengthen the relationship between different views and consolidate his own position. The rhetorically highlighted features are addressed through the use of comparatives (e.g., *‘more flagged Attitude’*, *‘even greater tendency’*), which reveals his bolder presentation and positionality in the research field. Here, Tom was apparently self-assertive in analyzing the source texts, revealing a greater degree of specificity of meaning-making (i.e., *‘in terms of...’*, *‘for example’*). This contrasts with his brief comment on others’ textual acts in early supervision meeting (as he said, *‘they talk about...a little bit about textual metafunction...I mean there is a reason’*, Transcript 1).

Table 4 Revisions associated with supervisor written feedback

<p><b>Tom’s added paragraph in section 2.7, LR draft 3</b></p> <p>In addition, it was noticed that while Martin and White (2005)’s reporter voice only specifies the patterns of inscribed Attitude, some studies (e.g. Thompson, 2013) have shown that, in fact, invocation can also play a considerable part in the news reports. In a comparative study of Attitude in Italian and British news reports, Pound (2010) found that there was more flagged Attitude in Italian news reports. In terms of invoked judgement in particular, some cases have shown even greater tendency. For example, a PhD student found metaphors and non-core vocabulary were frequently used to provoke judgement in the news reports she collected (Mugumya, 2013).</p>
<p><b>The associated supervisor’s written feedback in LR draft 2:</b></p> <p><i>Examples are needed to help the reader understand what you are trying to explain</i></p>

Mandy’s oral suggestions on using concrete examples and recognising reader perspectives apparently promoted these changes. The advice seems to have been accepted, resulting in a more self-mediated positioning in the draft, a consequence of being ‘privately’ mediated (Lantolf, 2000)

by his insider's knowledge. Tom's reflexive positioning was developed through constantly questioning himself regarding what groups of readers he should consider and how to accommodate various established frameworks to balance the presentation of others' voices with his own. He said,

My supervisor said if the reader is not from a linguistic background and not familiar with this theory, then he/she might be confused. So, we need to foreground something to help them make sense of my argument. But if my readers are experts, I need to establish a 'scenario' first, something like a central claim, before presenting a way to analyze my sources. These approaches are different. (1<sup>st</sup> interview with Tom)

While Tom previously saw writing a literature review as gathering and listing information, he learnt how using specific language and having clear rhetorical goals can function to show the significance and credibility of his research. He was thus not only 'privately' mediating his own learning, but reiteratively connecting it with his intrapersonal purposes. We repeatedly observed this kind of self-mediated orientation in the later stages of his thesis writing, which was in contrast to the supervisor-oriented revision in his early stage of writing. This orientation, then, reveals his mediated agency (Prior, 1994) – how he could operate within different positions (including his supervisor's), adding his own voice while responding to regulatory practices of the discourse community. Tom's reflexive learning of how to rhetorically convey his position in the literature provided a guide for him to enact a more self-empowered role in his ongoing revisions (Zhang & Hyland, 2021a). His self-expressive positioning appears to be an essential step towards acquiring authority, as a marker of his writing competence.

Ed also displayed this reflexive positioning in his LR draft, and an example of this is shown in Figure 5.

Original statements in section 2.2.1, LR draft 1	Revised statements in section 2.4.1, LR draft 2
<p>①From this definition, it seems the term “curriculum” has a broad meaning and it is a holistic process ranging from planning, teaching to evaluation, and within this process <del>the activities taken, the materials used and methods employed</del> are all included. ② On the other hand, instead of to define “curriculum”, Scriven (1965) puts forward the term of “educational instruments” which views curriculum as put to use than abstract definition, and it includes “processes, personnel, procedures, programs, and the like that are operative when formal educational activities take place” (Tyler, 1972, p. 86). ③Actually, the new term still stresses the broad sense of curriculum, including the holistic process and all the activities that have taken place. ④Based on these understandings, the curricula of English courses within the targeted institution will be evaluated in <u>this study</u>.</p> <div data-bbox="630 751 828 823" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;">Being deleted</div>	<p>①It seems this definition also acknowledges that curriculum is a holistic process and within this process the activities taken, the materials used and methods employed are all included, ②but Christison and Murry (2014) further point out that planning and evaluation should also be stressed in the process rather than merely the teaching activities. ③Overall, in order to generate a more comprehensive picture of the features of the curricula of the English courses in this private tutoring institution, ④this study will base on Christison and Murry’s definition of curriculum which views it as a holistic process ranging from planning, teaching to evaluation and all the activities, materials and methods in this process will be included.</p>
<p><b>The associated supervisory written feedback on LR draft 1:</b></p> <p><i>You already mention that the term has a broad meaning above.</i></p> <p><i>It would be helpful to give a sum up of the key aspects of the term “curriculum” from the above that you based on and used in your study.</i></p>	

Figure 5 Supervisor’s comments on LR draft 1 and associated student revision

We can see that Ed extensively revised this paragraph from section 2.2.1 in LR draft 1 through considerable deletions and rewriting into a new section 2.4.1, principally resulting from Linda’s comments on draft 1 (‘*You already mentioned that...*’ and ‘*give a sum up of the key aspects of the term...*’). But while he conformed to Linda’s suggestion to provide different definitions of curriculum, thereby displaying his responsive positioning (in early changes to LR Outline 2), he deleted all the statements that introduce these definitions (see sentence ②). Part of the discussion describing curriculum as *a holistic process* (see sentence ③) was revised and developed into a new statement that highlights the key elements of this process (‘*the activities taken, the materials used and methods employed*’, sentence ①).

Ed's positioning was thus fluid and provisional in that while he believed he only needed to provide a single definition of curriculum in his early-stage writing, he modified the LR Outline 1 and later incorporated different definitions in LR Draft 1 to show his positional convergence. His close alignment with supervisory advice could be an interactional strategy adopted at an early stage. However, he returned to his previous decision, removing Scriven's and Tyler's statements from the draft and focusing on Christison and Murry's definition to demonstrate his dominant textual positioning. His positioning here appears to be a critical decision after navigating through conflicts between previously occupied positions and the emergent ones. In Blakeslee's (1997) sense, it is a negotiation of tensions between what is expected and what is taken to show writer authority. Drawing on Christison and Murry's claim (*'this study will base on...'*, sentence ④), Ed assertively articulates his position that 'planning' and 'evaluation' should be valued. These "agentive, improvisational acts of positioning" (Bomer & Laman, 2004, p. 430) help to construct a more coherent storyline, which contrasts with his vague description *'Based on these understandings...'* in the first draft (see sentence ④).

Ed's shifting positionings across revised drafts clearly shows his mediated agency, which was less influenced by his early collaborations than his evolving beliefs about how to build a stronger textual presence. Although he incorporated both Linda's words and research advice, he maintained his ownership of the text by asserting beliefs and adjusting his approach to construct a shared social territory (i.e., a locally meaningful discussion of curriculum features).

These textual changes appeared to be, at least in part, influenced by Ed's own reflexive positioning – a deeper sense of how to position his approach to the literature in relation to the focuses of other empirical research. As Ed said,

It is very difficult to find research that discusses all the different issues of my own classroom context. So I have to use one or two parts of these studies done in western contexts. Honestly, I don't think they were particularly relevant to my discussion. I wasn't trying to give a complete discussion about 'curriculum' in Chinese contexts. Instead, I want to focus on the evaluation of courses as part of the curriculum. (2<sup>nd</sup> interview with Ed)

Ed's fluid positionings across different stages of writing were influenced by his evolving thinking about his study, a rhetorical negotiation based on his own research in relation to the texts he was reading and thoughts on how to shape his social positioning. This incorporated a practitioner's reflection to create a theoretically meaningful and rhetorically acceptable position. These repositionings seem to result from his representation of both semiotic tools and materials (Prior, 1994), and from his relocating of the self "in unfolding personal stories told to oneself" (Moghaddam, 1999, p.75). They were shaped through the supervisor's modelling of agency (i.e., critical analysis of sources) and developed as an interactional, rhetorical accomplishment as he met the demands of discourse while maintaining interpersonal relations with his supervisor.

## **9. Conclusion**

In this paper, we have discussed *scaffolded*, *responsive*, and *reflexive* positioning as three concrete forms of *mediated* positioning which resulted from two students' engagement with the process of thesis writing. These three types of positioning reveal the two writers' shifting purposes of communication as they moved through the process of writing a literature review. We show that writers' positionings are fluid, multi-faceted and constantly changing to reconcile the conflicts which arise between the various positions they come to occupy. The interpersonal positioning co-

constructed with the supervisors in oral interactions is, in particular, the consequence of maintaining co-operation and developing mutually agreed directions of learning (Widdowson, 2012). We conceptualize this positioning as consisting of three dimensions (*co-operative*, *self-assertive*, and *explorative*), which simultaneously function to construct shared territory, assert intellectual space and extend possibilities of learning.

Like Prior (1994), we found the students' use of the supervisors' words and deviations from previously established positions are a *socially negotiated* and *mediated* practice. Added to this, we believed that the two master's writers' textual redescription was not only mediated by their interpersonal and intertextual purposes, but also regulated by their intrapersonal reflections. We view these three levels of positioning (*interpersonal*, *intertextual*, *intrapersonal*) as mediational processes shaping the two students' writing development. These mediated positionings resulted from their evolving interpersonal and intertextual commitment, and were continuously regulated by their intrapersonal orientations. We see here reciprocal interactions between persons, texts, different positions, changing beliefs/perspectives, and interconnected sociocultural resources – all of which are cumulative elements of a person's 'lived autobiography' (Davies & Harré, 1990).

These different levels were substantially *scaffolded* for the two writers, especially in the early stages of thesis writing. At this point they were unskilled in dialogically justifying their stance and developing critical, conventionally accepted statements. We found the positional convergence co-constructed in supervision meetings was immediately utilized as a resource by the students to revise their LR outlines. The interpersonal positioning thus became a framework or strategy (Ongstad, 2002) for the writers to structure their thoughts and regulate their discursal decisions.



The writers' *responsive* positionings are shown in their revisions of their LR outlines and later drafts. These revisions, particularly their conceptual mapping of theories, resulted from close alignment with their supervisors' advice. Their incorporation of the supervisors' language helped expand their dialogic repertoires; we also noted, however, that previously established interpersonal positioning was not always internalized. Ed, for example, fell back on using a single definition of curriculum in his second draft, despite having incorporated Linda's advice to discuss different definitions in LR Outline 2. He seems to have relied less on external mediation to support his positioning and more on immediate purposes, intentionally utilizing his social positioning to develop a *mediated* identity in writing.

*Reflexive* positioning became a tool to claim emergent expertise for the two writers in the later stage of thesis writing. It played a considerable role in shaping the early established *collaborative* positioning and in modifying their concrete rhetorical representations such as cited sources and linguistic markers. Such reproduction in turn showed their ongoing *explorative* engagement and carefully crafted *self-assertive* stance. While scaffolded, responsive, and reflexive positioning seemed to feature in different stages of the writers' textual revisions, they could occur simultaneously. Importantly, however, they reveal the writers' situated engagement as feedback was adjusted in the supervision process. These types provide concrete evidence of positioning development – all developed under a scaffolded framework of thesis advising.

In order to provide a more detailed picture of the concepts, we have limited our discussion to only two writers and one section of their theses. Clearly there is more to say about how positionings function across different types of writing and contexts and how these are mediated as learners draw on other cultural views or interactive resources to regulate discourse. Future studies could pay close attention to a particular micro-context of supervision to uncover how different

forms of positioning are developed over time. A longitudinal observation of the interplay between positioning and writing competence is likely to be of considerable interest to both researchers and practitioners who study or teach postgraduate writing.

But while further research needs to be done, we have pointed in the direction such research might take and, at the same time, elaborated some of the dynamics of how writers develop discursive, fluid positionings. By examining both oral and written forms of communication in supervisions, we have traced the workings of intertextual links between feedback, writer positioning and revisions. This work ultimately supports Davies and Harré's (1990) view of positioning as a *shaping* factor of a writer's claimed or desired identity. It further suggests that, by investigating the interaction of positioning with rhetorical reproduction, we can usefully reveal the writer's mediated learning as he or she co-builds positioning, adjusts goals and negotiates discoursal norms.

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