Becoming a Scholar: Feedback, Writing, and the Doctoral Research Proposal

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis contributes detailed portraits of five PhD students in the social sciences as they learned and negotiated disciplinary and institutional expectations to craft their doctoral research proposals over time, in preparation for Transfer of Status. Transfer of Status, also known as upgrade in the UK or the proposal defense in North America, is a key institutional milestone that serves to consolidate doctoral students' initial research thinking and signals the student's passage into the next phase of research. Yet, while much attention has been paid to the thesis, little research has focused upon Transfer of Status despite its important role in doctoral education.

Drawing on rhetorical genre theory, this thesis frames the research proposal as part of a genre system in which successful Transfer of Status is the goal. This genre system includes various feedback, drafts of the proposal, and institutional forms, as well as the student writer, the supervisor(s), examiners, and others, ultimately presenting the proposal as a complex site of learning and social interaction, which performs a specific institutional function: convincing examiners that the student is competent to carry out doctoral-level work and progress to the data collection phase of research. In turn, the Transfer system is encompassed by a larger genre system of which the final PhD thesis is part. Combining the conceptualization of the Transfer system with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) 'chordal triad' of agency, this thesis explores how prior experiences and personal goals influence the ways in which students approach and navigate the proposal stage of the doctoral thesis in relation to supervisor feedback and evolving temporal-relational contexts.

In order to examine the individual trajectories of doctoral students over time, this thesis employed a qualitative longitudinal multi-case study, tracing the experiences of five first-year PhD students during the beginning of their programs through successful Transfer of Status. In total, data was collected over a period of 15 months (October 2018-December 2019). Participants came from three departments in the social sciences: Anthropology, Education, and Sociology. To create rich portraits of each participant's experience and triangulate the findings, various sources of data were collected that reflect different aspects of the Transfer system, including semi-structured interviews, recordings of supervision meetings, copies of written feedback and drafts of the research proposal, a visual mapping exercise called the journey plot, and Transfer of Status examiner reports. The data was first analyzed within cases using a combination of a priori and emergent coding situated within an overall narrative analysis, and then analyzed across cases to detect patterns in participant experience.

The findings suggest that prior experiences and goals for the PhD and/or future careers influence how first-year doctoral students approach their research proposals and theses overall, as well as, the extent to which they comply with or resist supervisor feedback. Further, the Transfer viva is a critical experience in which failure to pass on the first attempt leads students to reassess their practices and views of the PhD, often resulting in new (usually pragmatic) approaches to the thesis in which examiner feedback is privileged. The findings also suggest that supervisors (and examiners) are important representations of institutional structure, and the extent to which supervisors recognize and discuss the role of the research proposal in relation to the larger Transfer and thesis genre systems are instrumental in shaping students' understandings of the purpose of Transfer.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the problem

Over the past 30 years, interest in doctoral education has increased. In the UK, as elsewhere, doctoral education has been recognized as central to the growing knowledge economy (Department for Education, 2017), and since the 1980s there have been various changes to the structure of doctoral programs to improve research training and address concerns about attrition (UK Council for Graduate Education, 1995). Yet, even as the number of doctoral graduates increases in the UK and abroad (see Cyranoski, et al., 2011; HESA, 2020), data suggests that completion rates of PhD programs may remain relatively low: in the UK it was estimated that only 72.9% of full-time students who began doctoral programs in 2010-11 would graduate within seven years (Jump, 2013), and previous figures from the United States suggest that only 56.6% of students finish their PhDs within ten years (Sowell, Zhang, Redd, & King, 2008).

Writing accounts for a substantial portion of doctoral work and research suggests that writing is major challenge for many doctoral students (Aitchison & Lee, 2007; Cotterall, 2011; Lee & Aitchison, 2009). For some, the thesis may be a significant obstacle to PhD completion (Torrance, Thomas, & Robinson, 1994). Further, growing pressure on academics to publish in order to advance their careers and acquire research grants, compounded by institutional and financial pressures to graduate on time, results in an environment where writing is often a site of tension and anxiety for both students and their supervisors (see Aitchison, et al., 2012).

Part of what makes writing particularly difficult is that it not only requires an understanding of the expectations and nuances of the thesis genre but also represents the synthesis of disciplinary and methodological knowledge, becoming both an expression of and tool for thinking (Klein, 1999; Yore, Florence, Pearson, & Weaver, 2006; Yore, Hand, & Florence, 2004). Scholarly writing is a "complex literate activity that includes reading and writing, feeling and thinking, speaking and listening, observing and acting" (Bazerman & Prior, 2004, p. 7), a nonlinear and iterative process that varies from individual to individual (see e.g. Yore, Hand, & Florence, 2004). It requires the writer to draw from and analyze multiple sources and concepts in order to create new knowledge in a process of meaning-making (Ivanic, 1998) that extends from the literature review through the writing up of results (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). In many ways, the writing

process and the research process are intimately related, and evidence indicates that researchers use writing to construct and present knowledge, vacillating back and forth between data collection, writing, analysis, and inquiry (Yore, Florence, Pearson, & Weaver, 2006, p116). Further, Kamler and Thomson (2014) argued that doctoral writing also involves 'identitywork,' a process through which PhD students fashion themselves into scholars over time:

> But the process of writing that text, of drafting and drafting and struggling to find the right words, has material effects. It creates the scholar who at the end of writing is different from the writer who began. Perhaps a bit more knowing and confident, perhaps still worried about having something worthy to say, perhaps a bit bolder or willing to take greater risks…writers often experience difficulties and textual struggles because they are negotiating textwork and identitywork at the same time. (p. 16)

Although this thesis does not delve into theories of identity, Kamler and Thomson expressed the complexity of doctoral writing as it reflects and facilitates the transition from student to expert in the field, the tangible textual evidence of changes undergone in the doctorate. This view of doctoral writing is based on the premise that writing is a social practice, meaning that scholarly writing is situated within a discipline and a discourse, and becoming an academic requires in part learning to use the language within one's discipline and positioning oneself within the field of research in order to contribute to the scholarly conversation (Lilis, 2001). In framing their conceptualization of doctoral writing, Kamler and Thomson (2014) drew on Fairclough (1992), and Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice to theorize how the doctoral thesis is embedded within the larger social contexts of the university, the discipline, and the policies and practices of higher education, all of which are mediated to some extent by the supervisor who facilitates the PhD student's participation in the relevant communities of practice.

While the theory of communities of practice has been useful in exploring how doctoral students learn the relevant conventions and expectations in order to gain expertise as recognized members of their academic communities (Can & Walker, 2014; Chiu, 2011; Ho, 2017; Lassig, Dillon, & Diezmann, 2013; Schulze, 2014), other work has suggested that the transition from student to scholar is not a straightforward journey, and issues with writing and supervision are influenced by students' individual contexts (Li, 2018; Soong, Tran, & Hiep, 2015). A contribution of this thesis is thus a framing of doctoral writing that places greater emphasis on the agency of students in making decisions on how to craft their doctoral research proposals and negotiate disciplinary

expectations in ways that are affected by their prior experiences and future goals. I argue that positioning the thesis—and the research proposal—as part of a larger *genre system* that encompasses numerous drafts, supervisor and other feedback, the proposal defense and final viva, allows for a fuller understanding of how supervisors, students, and others interact, as students negotiate their goals and prior beliefs with disciplinary and institutional expectations in order to understand the purpose of the proposal within the genre system.

Although most students complete Master's degrees before beginning doctoral work, factors including the level of knowledge, duration of study, and learning and assessment styles implicit in research degrees mean that many students find the transition to doctoral work intimidating and disorienting, resulting in imposter syndrome and novel challenges (McPherson, Punch, & Graham, 2018). It is not surprising then that studies on doctoral education indicate that students most often rely on their supervisors for writing support when developing the research proposal (Anderson, Day, & McLaughlin, 2008; McAlpine & McKinnon, 2012; Sidhu, Kaur, & Fook, 2016), as students are still new to doctoral study and the proposal is a place where they can explore their research options before consolidating their research goals and methods. Yet, studies on this formative, transitional period of doctoral development remain limited. Further research on how new students negotiate their preconceived understandings of doctoral study, past experiences, and plans for the PhD and beyond may provide insight as to how to best support new doctoral students and offer suggestions for supervisory practices early on in doctoral education.

1.2 The Master's project and pilot study

This project emerged from a Master's dissertation I completed at the University of Oxford in 2016 under the supervision of Professor Lynn McAlpine. The Master's research was conducted from February to May 2016 at the University of Oxford Department of Education with two first-year PhD student participants. The research questions guiding that study were: *1) How do doctoral students use supervisor feedback in revising their Transfer of Status papers?* and 2*) How does response to supervisor feedback and revisions of the Transfer of Status paper reflect and facilitate development of research thinking and scholarly identity?* The findings suggested a relationship between the agency of the student in engaging with supervisor feedback and her

confidence in herself as a researcher, as well as a relationship between prior experience and perceptions of feedback (see Inouye & McAlpine, 2017). Further, as the participants received and used feedback, they developed their understandings of the research process, where their research fits within the wider field, and how to assess and defend their own research and writing decisions. The Master's project also offered an opportunity to work within an agentive framework for identity development and to test the methods employed in this doctoral study—a longitudinal approach combining multiple instruments and sources of data, including interviews and successive drafts of the research proposal.

Following the Master's project, I conducted a brief pilot study in the spring of 2018 in preparation for the thesis data collection that began in fall 2018. This pilot involved three first-year doctoral student participants, again from the University of Oxford Department of Education. Participants were recruited via email and took part in a series of exercises and monthly semi-structured interviews spanning March through May 2018. The purpose of this pilot was to test two instruments: sentence-completion exercises intended to capture initial reactions to supervisor feedback, and the journey plot, which asked participants to identify emotionally significant events related to their doctoral work. Results suggested an intimate relationship between both academic and non-academic events and how participants felt about their research journeys. Supervisor feedback was often identified as significant, either eliciting very positive or negative responses that affected participants' sense of themselves and their research, while conference and research group attendance were critical in shaping the participants' research thinking and for providing additional feedback to that received in supervisions. The results of the pilot thus prompted the incorporation of additional instruments for data collection, reinforced the significance of supervisor feedback in motivating and facilitating academic progress on thesis, and highlighted the importance of individual contexts in shaping the research and writing experience, which is a focal point of this study.

1.3 Doctoral education in the UK: The role of the research proposal and Transfer of Status

This study took place at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom. At Oxford, the 'PhD' is referred to as the 'D.Phil.'; however, for the purpose of this study I will use the more widely-used term, 'PhD'. In the UK, PhD education traditionally adopted an

apprenticeship model in which doctoral students studied independently under a supervisor. Beginning in the 1980s, doctoral education in the UK began shifting towards a more structured system in response to concerns about completion rates (UK Council for Graduate Education, 1995). The 1986 Reynolds Report followed by the 1991 ESRC research training guidelines introduced taught elements to doctoral programs, placing more responsibility on institutions to support and train their research students (UK Council for Graduate Education, 1995). In the ensuing years, these early developments were followed by the establishment of graduate schools, doctoral training centers (DTCs), doctoral training partnerships (DTPs), and doctoral colleges—all in response to growing institutional accountability and towards improving and centralizing doctoral education.

Alongside changes to the structure of the PhD, the doctorate itself has diversified to include professional doctorates (such as the EdD) to accommodate the growing numbers and range of students pursuing doctoral study; unlike in the past, where the PhD was viewed as a vehicle towards a career in the academy, increasing numbers of PhD holders have begun to pursue work in a range of sectors. Likewise, the traditional monograph doctoral thesis has also evolved to include thesis by publication and thesis by integration (Merga, 2015; Robins & Kanowski, 2017), which has stretched understandings of what doctoral thesis writing might look like and what purpose the doctorate achieves. However, current UK policy outlined in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Characteristics Statement declares that "All UK doctorates, regardless of their form, continue to require the main focus of the candidate's work to demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge" (QAA, 2020, p. 3), and that doctoral graduates should be able to "think critically about problems to produce innovative solutions" as well as synthesize large bodies of information and communicate with diverse audiences, amongst other things (QAA, 2020, p. 3). This policy statement sets the backdrop against which all UK doctorates should be assessed, characteristics of which must be reflected in the thesis and final viva voce.

The focus of this project is on the research proposal. Within the thesis writing process, the research proposal—the document setting out the questions, literature, and methods guiding the research—is typically the first step in doctoral programs and the first significant piece of writing students are required to produce. The research proposal thus represents a synthesis of students' research plans, disciplinary knowledge, and writing skill, presented in the shape of a document that must conform to specific institutional requirements. Therefore, in composing the research proposal students must work towards

goals and standards similar to those characterized by the Characteristics Statement; the purpose of the milestone is to convince examiners that the student is capable of PhD-level work, an acknowledgement that they are trustworthy and independent enough to go into the field.

In the United Kingdom, the research proposal is typically accompanied by a defense—an oral assessment—passage of which represents a transition from doctoral students' initial probationary status to full doctoral candidate, which is most often referred to as 'upgrade'. Although UK doctoral programs require applicants to submit a brief research proposal alongside other application materials to indicate their research interests and tentative plans for investigation, as well as assist in matching them with appropriate supervisors, *for the purposes of this study, 'research proposal' refers to the extended written document submitted as part of upgrade and examined orally.* Typically, the research proposal builds upon the proposal submitted with the PhD application—though it is not uncommon for students' research projects to shift between time of application and upgrade. In cases where research interests change significantly, a subsequent change in supervisor(s) might be necessary.

At the University of Oxford, where this research takes place, the proposal defense (upgrade) is called *Transfer of Status.* Transfer of Status is the first of three institutional milestones: Transfer of Status, Confirmation of Status, and the final viva voce. Oxford is unusual in having an additional defense (Confirmation of Status) based on the methodology chapter and at least one results chapter, which typically takes place six months before thesis submission and the final viva. However, the focus of this study, Transfer of Status, generally occurs during the end of the first year or beginning of the second year of the doctoral program. The Transfer of Status application usually requires a set of documents including ethics forms, fieldwork risk assessments, a timeline for the thesis work, and most importantly, in the Humanities and Social Sciences Divisions, a 10,000 to 20,000-word document (the research proposal), which is sometimes also referred to as the Transfer paper.

While the precise requirements of research proposals vary from department to department, the purpose of Transfer of Status is to ensure that students are "making satisfactory progress in the development of the research, to ensure that the work is of potential D.Phil. quality, and that the methodology of the research is appropriate and practicable" (University of Oxford, 2019, p. 1). Further, "the Transfer process provides the opportunity for the student to discuss their work with two independent members of

staff and to receive feedback" (University of Oxford, 2019, p. 1). Elements of successful Transfer papers or research proposals generally include:

> …a plan for the thesis, which locates the research in the context of earlier work in the field, sets out the questions, hypotheses or issues on which it will focus, and describes and explains the methods by which these will be answered, tested or addressed. (University of Oxford, 2019, p. 1).

Essentially, students must show they are competent researchers and are making satisfactory progress by presenting a coherent and feasible plan for research that demonstrates knowledge of the field and the potential for their projects to be completed in a timely manner. Thus, Transfer of Status is critical in that it allows students to progress to the next stage of doctoral work—data collection—and represents a consolidation of their research goals, disciplinary knowledge, and an understanding of methodology that indicates researcher competence and reflects the work of a budding academic.

In the three departments in which this study was based—Anthropology, Education, and Sociology—data on Transfer of Status outcomes was obtained from the Divisional offices by request. In the five years prior to this study, 2012-2017, 92.66% of first-year doctoral students in Anthropology passed Transfer on their first attempt, in contrast with 69.92% of Education students and 71.83% of Sociology students. This data suggests that there are not only differences across departments, but that Transfer of Status is a challenging milestone for a significant number of doctoral students, particularly in the Education and Sociology departments.

1.4 Research aims

Building upon the findings of the Master's project and pilot study, this thesis aimed to examine how doctoral students created successful research proposals for Transfer of Status while navigating their individual, institutional, and disciplinary contexts over time. Using a multiple case study design, this research drew upon various sources of data including semi-structured interviews, recordings of supervisions, visual exercises, drafts of the research proposal, and other documents, and spanned a total of 15 months from the beginning of the doctoral program through the end of the first year of study and successful completion of Transfer of Status. This thesis contributes a nuanced glimpse into the experiences of five first-year doctoral students in the social sciences as they exercised agency by drawing on and negotiating various sources of influence—most

notably, supervisor feedback—to shape successful research proposals within their evolving temporal and relational contexts.

1.5 Research questions

Given the issues around doctoral writing and the research proposal discussed above, this thesis is underpinned by the overarching research question and sub-questions: ***How do first-year doctoral students in the social sciences shape and negotiate a successful research proposal over time?***

Sub-question 1: What sources of influence are most crucial to students' changing understandings of research and doctoral writing over time?

Sub-question 2: How do temporal-relational contexts affect how doctoral students make decisions in creating their research proposals?

1.6 Chapter outline

Chapter 1 begins by framing doctoral writing as a challenging and socially-situated process in which greater attention to student agency is needed to understand the influence of individual contexts. The chapter then presents the rationale for the research, problematizing the research proposal as a critical milestone in doctoral education that represents students' knowledge of their chosen topics and research methods. A successful research proposal, therefore, examined through Transfer of Status, solidifies the student's doctoral status and facilitates progression to data collection. The chapter concludes by presenting the research context and research questions.

Chapter 2 discusses the conceptual framework underlying this study, which conceives of the research proposal as a particular genre intended to convey the student is capable of carrying out a feasible doctoral-level research project. It draws upon rhetorical genre theory (see Bazerman, 1994; 1997) to situate the proposal genre as part of larger genre system encompassing the thesis and Transfer viva that serves the purpose of advancing first-year PhD students to the more independent, data-collection phase of research. This genre system includes the set of documents, actors, and social relationships involved in creating and assessing the proposal. I then argue that a conception of agency that allows for greater emphasis on the role of the individual is important for understanding how individual histories and goals influence the ways in which doctoral students navigate the proposal genre within the larger context of their disciplines and institutions. Thus, to the

concept of genre systems I introduce Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conceptualization of agency to explore how doctoral students might navigate and negotiate the constraints and expectations of the research proposal genre within their temporal-relational contexts, and how their decisions may change in relation to those evolving contexts.

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Chapter 3 reviews the empirical literature in the areas of doctoral thesis writing and supervisor feedback. I argue that given the framing of this research around the Transfer genre system, a variety of literature is needed to inform different aspects of this system. This literature review identifies seven categories of research relevant to this thesis: 1) PhD writing prior to data collection, 2) supervisory relationships, 3) supervisor feedback, 4) student responses to feedback, 5) peer feedback, 6) what students bring to the PhD—individual contexts and goals, and 7) the viva voce. In this literature review, I argue that two major gaps in the literature exist. First, there is a failure to address the development of PhD research and writing *over time*. Second, there is a general lack of work on the research proposal and the early stages of doctoral programs, which this thesis begins to address. Finally, this literature review offers methodological support for this thesis's research design, showing how issues around writing and research development can be appropriately examined through qualitative case studies, though longitudinal studies in this area are lacking.

Chapter 4, "Research Design and Methodology," begins by returning to the research questions guiding this study, explaining the purpose of each question and the data needed to answer it. The chapter then describes the methodological approach—the longitudinal multiple case study—and puts forth an argument for the multiple case study as aligned with the conceptual framework informing this research. Finally, the methodology chapter explains the research design in greater depth alongside the specific set of methods used to collect and analyze data, followed by a discussion of ethical implications, limitations, and my positionality as a researcher.

Specifically, this project employs multiple methods for data collection and analysis, including semi-structured interviews, audio recordings of supervisions, a participatory visual exercise called the journey plot, and collection of documents (drafts of the Transfer paper and written feedback). The data was analyzed first within-cases using a combination of a priori and emergent coding, and then analyzed across cases to detect possible patterns in experience.

Chapter 5 (Ben) is the first of five within-case results chapters, and presents an analysis of the participant, Ben. An outlier amongst the other participants, Ben had clear goals for a career outside academia, which shaped his perceptions of feedback and the strategies he used to advance his research proposal. Ben's case was unique in this study due to his minimal supervision, active feedback-seeking, and clear positioning of himself as expert in the thesis topic.

Chapter 6 (Charlie) is the second within-case results chapter. Charlie, who entered the PhD with no previous experience in the discipline, was both the most supervisor-reliant of the participants and the participant who exhibited the most change in confidence and understanding of the Transfer system. Peer relationships were also critical to Charlie's emotional and mental well-being, particularly during the first months when he was uncertain about his progress and overwhelmed with readings.

Chapter 7 (Natalie) is the third within-case results chapter. Her case conveyed a growing understanding of the way research goals must be negotiated in relation to the constraints of the proposal genre expected by the institution. Natalie's case thus highlights: 1) the centrality of the genre in the success of the research proposal, and 2) the Transfer viva as a critical and emotionally significant part of the proposal genre system, capable of catalyzing changes in how PhD students think about and approach the doctorate.

Chapter 8 (Shankar) is the fourth within-case results chapter. As a result of his prior educational history, Shankar's experience of crafting the research proposal demonstrated a tension between two ways of thinking about research—Western and non-Western—and his determination to draw on aspects of both to create a successful proposal document. This tension appeared in three ways, emerging primarily in supervisory discussions: 1) the challenge of sufficiently narrowing Shankar's research focus into manageable research questions; 2) clearly defining terms; and 3) the structure of the proposal document.

Chapter 9 (Ethan) is the fifth within-case results chapter. More so than the other participants, Ethan's approach to the research proposal was characterized by compromise as he recognized compromise was needed to both pursue research that was meaningful to

him but also feasible within the PhD program. Ethan's supervisors were pragmatic in conveying the purpose of Transfer of Status and paid particular attention to the form and language of the document in addition to the research design itself, so Ethan had ample genre support in preparing his proposal. His supervisors also emphasized the examiners' expertise and what aspects of the proposal they would be likely to comment on, ensuring that Ethan was prepared for multiple aspects of Transfer of Status. Ethan's successful Transfer might therefore indicate the interaction between the student's writing and revision choices (compliance versus resistance) and the supervisory style in relation to crafting a successful research proposal.

Chapter 10, "Patterns Across Cases," is the sixth and final results chapter, a cross-analysis of the five participant cases presented in the five preceding chapters. This chapter, organized around the research questions, identifies four themes common across the five cases: approach to the PhD, the role of the supervisor in mediating the student's learning of the proposal/Transfer system, compliance with and resistance to supervisor feedback, and Transfer viva as a critical event. The chapter begins by identifying three key approaches to the PhD thesis: pragmatic/strategic (adopted by Ben and Charlie), idealistic (adopted by Natalie and Shankar), and realistic (adopted by Ethan). The chapter then discusses the role of the supervisor in facilitating the student's understanding of the genre system, arguing that supervisor feedback serves as its own form of structure. Next, I discuss the third theme, assessment of supervisor expertise and compliance with and resistance to feedback over time, connecting the students' approach to the PhD with their responses to supervisor feedback. Finally, I present the Transfer viva as a critical event within the proposal genre system that has the power to alter the participants' overall approaches to the thesis.

Chapter 11, "Discussion," contextualizes the results within the conceptual framework and the empirical literature reviewed in Chapter 3 to suggest how supervisors' views of the thesis and research proposal may affect students' understanding of the genre system. Trends in temporal orientations to agency (iteration, projectivity, and practical-evaluation) are explored, and the Transfer viva is discussed as an important structuring experience, which may inspire changes in agency and decision-making while also positioning the examiners as perhaps even more influential than supervisors in conveying the purpose of the research proposal within the Transfer system.

Chapter 12, the conclusion chapter, briefly returns to the research questions and then shifts to a discussion of suggestions for future research, ending with wider implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 2: Navigating the Genre System

2.1 Introduction

This study draws upon rhetorical genre theory, a sociocultural theory that views genres as dynamic "frames for social action" (Bazerman, 1997, p. 19), providing guidelines for communication within which individuals shape their ideas (Fowler, 1982; Swales, 2004). Positioning the PhD research proposal as a genre that serves a specific purpose within a larger genre system, in this chapter I argue that we must also take into account the role of individual student contexts and how these contexts—prior experiences, goals, and present circumstances—influence how doctoral students make decisions in revising and shaping their research proposals. Framing doctoral education as a non-linear supervisor-supported journey from dependent to independent researcher in which success is linked to students' ability to work within the constraints of the thesis—and proposal—genre systems, I introduce Emirbayer and Mische (1998)'s chordal triad of agency in order to examine how first-year doctoral students navigate the evolving contexts of the Transfer of Status genre system in order to develop their research proposals over time.

The chapter opens with an overview of rhetorical genre theory, its key theoretical roots and researchers, followed by a discussion of what it lends to the study of doctoral writing. Specifically, I highlight the concept of the genre system as a way of situating the PhD research proposal. I then draw on the relevant doctoral education and supervision literature in order to further locate the proposal genre within the wider context of PhD Education. Finally, I introduce Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) approach to agency as a way of conceptualizing student behavior and decision-making in relation to their personal contexts, future goals, and the current, evolving structures of the research proposal genre system.

2.2 An overview of rhetorical genre theory

Broadly speaking, rhetorical genre theory is concerned with the manner in which people use genres to achieve certain purposes in response to social situations. Though rhetorical genre theory acknowledges the textual regularities commonly associated with traditional notions of genre, genre in this context is more accurately described as a "socially recognized, repeated strategy for achieving similar goals in situations socially perceived as being similar" (Bazerman, 1988, p. 62). In other words, a genre is a way of categorizing forms of rhetorical strategy—the subpoena, the cover letter, the medical

history form–-are all genres because they perform specific functions in similar recurring situations. Rhetorical genre theory therefore understands genres in terms of what they *do*, and views genres as determined by time, place, audience, community—*context*. Rhetorical genre theory also gives rise to the notion of genre systems, which includes the relationships between documents and the people who produce them, and is closely linked to the concept of the discourse community. Rhetorical genre theory thus presents a complex framework for understanding and analyzing various forms of communication. Guided by rhetorical genre theory, the research proposal is framed as a genre with a particular purpose—to allow PhD students to enter the fieldwork phase of doctoral research—and located within contexts that influence its shape (the discipline, department, university, national academic culture).

Rhetorical genre theory evolved from the North American tradition of New Rhetoric, which emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s. Its social view of writing stood in contrast to the product and process-centered approaches that dominated North American composition studies in the 1960s and 70s. While product-based approaches focused on writing as an end-product and process-based approaches emphasized the role of the writer in constructing the text, the social view shifted the focus to the contexts in which writing takes place and how those contexts influence both process and text. New Rhetoric thus extended the social approach to writing by examining not only the influence of social contexts but what writing does within those contexts.

Rhetorical genre theory is often traced back to Carolyn Miller's (1984) essay "Genre as social action." In her seminal paper, Miller, building upon work by Campbell and Jamieson (1979), wrote that similar types of situations recur, which call for particular responses, thereby creating an *exigence*—an urgency, a demand for response–that necessitates the use of a genre. Miller therefore argued that genres may be understood not only by the particular forms discourses may take, but by the social purposes they fulfill, and that likewise, genres are involved in shaping the social situations that give rise to them. Miller's pivotal work thus represented a transition from the traditional view of genres as fixed systems for the classification of texts and reflected changes in thinking about the effects of contexts on discourse and vice versa, influenced in part by advances in social theory like Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration (Artemeva, 2004).

Around the same time, Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on addressivity, dialogism (1986), and the chronotope (1981) were published, and lent three central concepts to rhetorical genre theory that have been taken up and built upon by scholars in composition

and rhetoric: genre as communicative, genre as flexible, and genre as located in time and space. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of addressivity proposed that all acts of speech are directed toward someone (1986) and therefore communication—whether spoken or written—involves genre (see also Bawarshi, 2000). Similarly, dialogism speaks to the way that each utterance, and therefore each genre, is dialogically created, assimilating prior discourses—literatures, discussions—in a way that frames speech and writing as socially and historically informed by what has been said before (Bakhtin, 1986). In other words, while genres respond and are directed towards particular audiences, which inform the nature of the genre, genres also draw upon and embody the relevant discourses; genres—and all texts generally—are part of an ongoing conversation.

Part of learning a genre, therefore, is both becoming familiar with the discourses that surround and constitute the genre, and also being able to invoke them effectively. That said, Bakhtin further argued that genres are *flexible* and may be reshaped in response to the particularities of a situation (1986), reflecting the tension between structured expectations and the changing nature of situations in which genres are called upon to perform. Because of this mutability, genres have also been described as "stabilized-for-now or stabilized enough sites of social and ideological action" (Schryer 1993, p. 200). Clearly, Bakhtin's work complemented Miller's (1984) re-conception of genre as social action; genres could be conceived of as dynamic, constituted by the socially-situated purposes they served and the audience(s) they were addressing.

Bakhtin's other key contribution to rhetorical genre theory, the chronotope (1981), is the concept that *time and place are connected*, and is interested in the way time and space are represented in literature. Specifically, the chronotope sets expectations for how time and space are constructed and used within texts, adding to the socially-situated concepts of addressivity and dialogism the role of time and place in restricting or expanding the writer's capacity for change within a genre. The discussion around genre and time and space was furthered by Anne Freadman (1987), who argued that time and space may actually constitute genre, as time and place determine the situations that give rise to certain genres and create expectations between people[1].

The notion of time and space in defining genre is also linked to the concept of discourse communities (Swales, 1990). A discourse community is a group of people with

[1]Freadman (1987) gave the example of TV programming—the times that certain shows are broadcast are directed by the audiences for whom they are intended.

common goals who share information, language, and genres (Swales, 1990). Learning how and when to use particular genres thus signals membership within particular discourse communities. In academia, for instance, common genres are the journal article and the conference paper, which convey to other members of disciplinary discourse community the writer's expertise and contribution to the literature. Similarly, the completed PhD thesis not only confers the doctorate degree, but also represents a transition from student to recognized researcher. Discourse communities, however, are not static; the genres that are produced in relation to rhetorical situations are responding to a number of readers who share a common language and also bring their own perspectives to the text, allowing both genre and community to change over time.

2.3 The genre system

Because genres are often embedded within multiple discourse communities and each discourse community typically includes multiple genres (Tardy, 2003), a key concept under the umbrella of rhetorical genre theory is that of genre systems, which adds an additional dimension to the situatedness of genres. Genre systems expand the notion of genre as response to a recurrent social situation to also take into account the other forms of speech and writing—additional genres—that interact and work together as systems (Bazerman, 1994) or "ecologies" (Spinozzi & Zachry, 2000). In his seminal essay, Bazerman (1994) offered the example of the patent, which, though a genre in itself with its own structure and language, is predicated upon a number of other documents/genres that include the patent application, existing patents, research, and various correspondence. In order for the patent to exist, these other documents are needed, and they are expected to appear in a certain order at certain times. Simultaneously, the patent is situated within the historical and legal contexts that shape the nature of the patent and are in turn shaped by the patent, which also involves patterns of interactions between people. For instance, there is the patent applicant and the person or people approving it, who are members of the discourse community in which the patent application process is taking place. Thus, the genre system encompasses both the genre set—the actual texts/genres involved—and the actors (and social interactions) involved in their creation; the set refers to the individual genres and the system is how they are related. Berkenkotter (2001) writes of genre systems as a means of examining discursive practices within a wider framework of texts and activity, while Yates and Orlikowski (2002) similarly discuss genre systems in terms of why, what, who/m, how, when, and where: "how people use sequences of

communicative actions to coordinate their activity over time and space" (p. 16). The genre system builds upon the elements of time and place to consider the roles of other texts and the multiple relationships involved in creating and sustaining genres within communities.

In the past, the concept of genre system has been used to conceptualize various forms of communication including academic grant proposals (Tardy, 2003), psychotherapy notes and session documents (Berkenkotter, 2001), and the case study write-up in business schools (Forman & Rymer, 1999). These studies use genre system to understand the established processes underlying particular genres. For instance, in her research on academic grant proposals, Tardy (2003) explored the types of genres and communities which comprise the academic funding genre system, and what knowledge writers need to successfully navigate that system. Similarly, Forman and Rymer (1999), used genre systems to understand the role of the Harvard case-study write-up within the larger case study genre system at business schools. Thus, not only is it useful to frame the doctoral research proposal as a genre with its own rhetorical features and social purpose, but conceptualizing the proposal as part of a larger genre system allows for examination of the relationships between the various other documents, actors/communities, and social interactions that doctoral students encounter and must master in order to be successful.

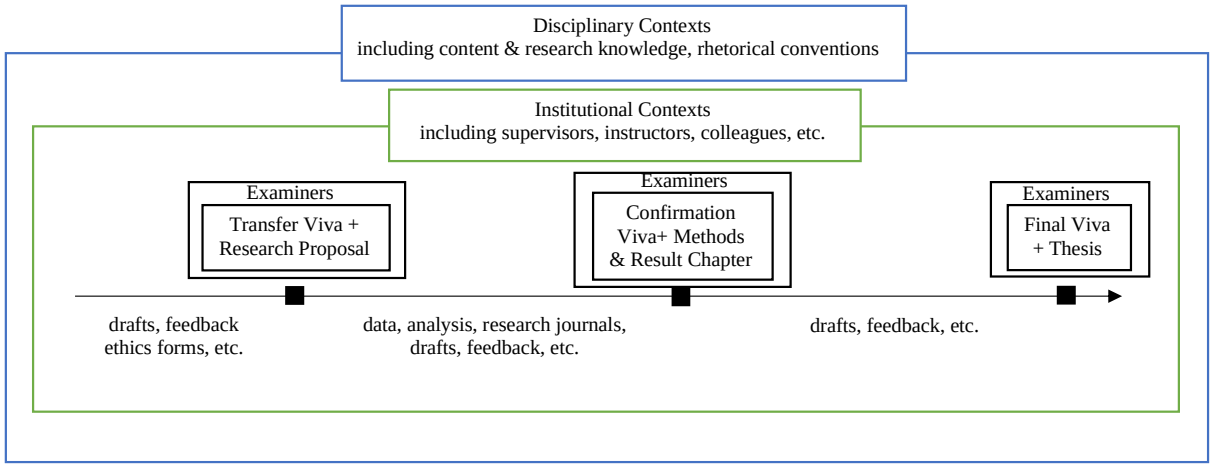
2.4 The doctoral research proposal as genre system

Drawing upon rhetorical genre theory and the concept of genre systems as way of conceptualizing the doctoral research proposal, I position the research proposal as a genre that is part of a larger Transfer of Status genre system (hereinafter Transfer system) with its own formalized expectations including word count, timing (deadlines for submission), and content (see Swales, 2004). It is located within a particular time and space (the university) that dictates the specific institutional requirements. As the first formal milestone in the thesis process, Transfer of Status serves the institutional purpose of presenting evidence to the examiners that the student is capable of carrying out the research project, while also facilitating a rigorous vetting of the research so as to avoid future problems. The research proposal at the center of Transfer of Status is the result of a series of drafts and feedback from multiple sources and is often formulated alongside university and department guidelines for Transfer, ethics forms, risk assessments, and class presentations, which constitute the genre set. These different genres are interrelated, referring to and building off one another. The system itself includes a range of social

interactions that involve the student, the examiners, and at the very least, the supervisor(s) who oftentimes is the person through which students implicitly or explicitly learn the characteristics of the genre, including disciplinary conventions and institutional requirements (Anderson, Day, & McLaughlin, 2008; McAlpine & McKinnon, 2012). At the same time, the Transfer system is part of a larger genre system that includes the thesis, viva, and examiner evaluations. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Doctoral Thesis Genre System.[2]



Although empirical work describing features of the Transfer system is lacking, there is literature that can contribute to a portrait of the central genre within that system: the research proposal. First, the research proposal is situated in terms of the discourse communit(y)ies of which the student is part. For instance, there are discipline-specific discourse communities that may have their own expectations for language, referencing, use of time, methodology, or theoretical framing in academic research—though there can be great epistemological and methodological variation, particularly in the social sciences. Then, there is the institutional or even departmental discourse community, which uses policy documents to articulate the purpose of the PhD research proposal and Transfer of Status/upgrade, with regulations for length, timing of submission, and sometimes form and content of the proposal, alongside other forms and documents. These discourse

[2] This genre system is specific to the University of Oxford, which has the Confirmation of Status milestone in addition to Transfer of Status and the final viva. Other national contexts also have markedly different systems that may include comprehensive exams (United States) or not require a final viva (Australia).

communities include the supervisors who guide the student, the texts the student engages with and draws upon, and the various other professors, peers, and researchers that participate in the research field. Because the genre of the doctoral thesis (and therefore research proposal) is circumscribed by disciplines, institutions, and even methodological epistemologies, the precise shape of the genre can manifest in different ways based on variations in form (monograph or series of articles), length, and organization (Swales, 2004). For instance, in the social sciences, where there are multiple (and no) prescribed theoretical approaches or paradigms, theoretical frameworks and methodologies are central in establishing the writer's approach and interpretation of the data (Parry, 1998). Doctoral students in the social sciences must explain and justify their conceptual choices to strengthen their arguments (Parry, 1998).

Rhetorical and linguistic features may further characterize the proposal genre. Signposting or metadiscourse—leading the reader through the structure of the document and being explicit about elements of the thesis connect—appear more frequently in theses than in other research genres (Bunton, 1998). Doctoral writing is also expected to contain technical language and tacit expressions of disciplinary knowledge[3] (Parry, 1998), and the structure of introductions tends to follow particular rhetorical moves, including providing background, defining terms, identifying a research gap, and outlining the structure of the document (Bunton, 1998). Thus, the PhD research proposal, variable in shape and structure, is a complex genre, encompassing disciplinary, rhetorical, and research knowledge, mastery of which necessitates skills and knowledge that new PhD students must acquire over time.

Features of the research proposal genre may therefore include rhetorical patterns as well as expectations for content, *while features of the genre system* can be thought of in terms of process (Tardy, 2003) and connections between the different genres within the system. In this case, features of the Transfer system may include the relationships between research proposal and Transfer viva, what the Transfer process entails, and the purpose of Transfer of Status in relation to the overall thesis process. For example, when supervisors refer to examiner selection, viva prep, or ethics forms in relation to the research proposal, they are making connections between different genres in the Transfer system and providing insight into the process of transfer and its purpose. Likewise,

[3] References to concepts or terms common to the discipline that assume the reader is part of the community and therefore shares in the substantive knowledge

discussion around the role of the proposal in relation to the thesis may be evidence of feedback connecting the proposal to not only to the Transfer system but to the wider thesis genre system. In contrast, feedback on content of the research proposal or its rhetorical features is *genre feedback.*

2.5 The individual in relation to the genre system: Agency in doctoral students

It is difficult to conceptualize the doctoral research proposal as part of a genre system without also considering the role of the proposal in the larger context of doctoral education. Common conceptualizations the doctoral education describe the PhD as a journey from dependence to independence, as becoming a researcher, associated with developing and taking on a new identity (e.g., Green, 2005; Pearson & Brew, 2002). Others have framed doctoral education as an apprenticeship (see e.g., Delamont, Atkinson, & Parry, 2000) or as a learning process that occurs through becoming part of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in order to explain the socialization processes of PhD students. Similarly, many studies on doctoral writing draw upon sociocultural frameworks (e.g., Chiu, 2011, Crossouard & Pryor, 2008; Lassig, Dilon, & Diezmann, 2013) to show how doctoral writing involves entering and participating in a discourse community. However, insufficient attention to the individual is one of the criticisms of such commonly used theories—as in communities of practice (see Billett, 2007).

Thus, it is important to acknowledge that doctoral journeys may not be linear processes of socialization. Doctoral students bring to the PhD unique sets of experiences, perspectives, and goals that influence how they negotiate the challenges and expectations of doctoral study. Because the PhD is situated in time, a liminal period often positioned as a stepping-stone towards an academic career (Araujo, 2005), the PhD is therefore located within personal contexts as well as institutional and disciplinary contexts. For instance, prior work completed for my Master's research suggested that PhD students' previous experiences with writing and feedback influenced the way they viewed and exercised agency in responding to critical supervisor feedback (see Inouye & McAlpine, 2017). Because the research proposal is a lengthy document, typically composed over the course of a year and because students bring preconceived ideas and experiences to the PhD, an investigation of how doctoral students navigate the Transfer system necessitates an examination of how change over time influences the choices students make in constructing their proposal documents.

In order to understand how individuals navigate the Transfer system, a conceptualization of agency is needed. Agency has long been discussed in the philosophical literature in terms of free will, as human independence for action grounded in Enlightenment era philosophy. In social science, agency is typically understood as the capacity of individuals to act independently and has been theorized in different ways depending on the extent to which social structure is believed to facilitate or constrain that capacity. Aldrich (1999) succinctly described this problem of agency as "how much scope…people have for independence and creativity in the face of social structural constraints on their understanding and behavior" (p. 23). Within the spectrum of social theory, socialization and sociocultural approaches tend to present a more constrained approach to agency, viewing individuals' actions as articulated by social structure, while structuration (Giddens, 1984) views agency and structure as co-constitutive and therefore analytically inseparable.

Agency in rhetorical genre theory framings of doctoral writing has been informed by Sewell (1992), who argued that structure provides agency. In other words, upon having access to the schemas that provide the basis for social and cultural rules, people then have the ability to adapt those schemas to a given situation. Thus, while people have agency, the extent of their agency is constrained by the particular contexts in which they are located; though people can apply schemas in different and new ways, that agency is limited to the schemas that are available in the first place: "Structures, in short, empower agents differentially" (Sewell, 1992, p. 21). In the context of doctoral writing, Pare (2014) posited that doctoral students are provided with the schemas (rules) of academic discourse and the thesis, but have agency in how they apply those rules in their writing. They may also take the rules they have previously encountered in other forms of writing, and try to extend them to the new context of the thesis, but find that some of the those rules are not working and therefore begin to write in new ways that reinforce the expectations of academic discourse.

However, I contend that while certain expectations need to be met in order to create successful research proposals, and action is to some extent limited by the contexts in which one is located, a stronger conception of agency that gives more credit to the individual is needed. As they create their research proposals, students engage in a range of agentic decision making through which they test the boundaries of expectation and work towards finding an approach to writing that works for them. In this sense, agency does not only involve experimenting with existing schemas for writing, but may also be

internally motivated, based on personal preferences and goals for the research and writing. Swales (2004) touched on the role of agency in his discussion on repurposing the genre of the PhD thesis. In acknowledging the widely-held view that the thesis is bounded by institutional, disciplinary, methodological, and other constraints, he argued that these sources of influence vary across cases. The purpose of the thesis and therefore the amount of influence afforded to different sources of expectation, are affected by individual contexts and purposes for PhD study that result in a "flexible configuration" in which "the actual behaviors and attitudes of the candidate are not as insignificant as might initially appear to be the case" (Swales, 2004; p. 137). Because this project is interested in development over time, a conceptualization of agency that places more emphasis on personal contexts is necessary, one which may be used to frame individual students' thinking as they create their proposals. Thus, in the remainder of this section I provide an overview of Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conceptualization of agency, the perspective I have chosen for this thesis, which takes into account the temporal nature of experience and human capacity for anticipation and planning.

Emirbayer and Mische's 1998 paper, "What is Agency?" argued that the concept of agency had previously been undertheorized in the literature, preoccupied with discerning the relationships between structure and agency while "fail[ing] to distinguish agency as an analytical category in its own right" (pp. 962-63). Specifically, Emirbayer and Mische asserted that theorists of practice like Giddens and Bourdieu had focused on agency as "routinized practices" (p. 963), while others privileged "deliberation and judgment" (p. 963). In their reconceptualization of agency, Emirbayer and Mische offered a perspective of the agency-structure relationship that places emphasis on temporality. Specifically, Emirbayer and Mische drew primarily on pragmatism, most notably the work of scholar George Herbert Mead and his ideas on sociality and the conception of time. Essentially, Mead's sociality rests on his assertion that systems—social and biological—are constantly changing, and thus people can be between different states, transitioning, for example, between social roles. In being between, people also are capable of reflection; we can reflect upon changes as they are happening, identify alternative paths of action and respond to situations. Mead further argued that "reality exists in the present" (1932, p. 1); the present retains notions of the past and anticipation of the future, and what we perceive as the past continually evolves in relation to present events.

In building upon these ideas, Emirbayer and Mische argued for a temporal framing of human agency, defining it as:

> the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. (1998, p. 970).

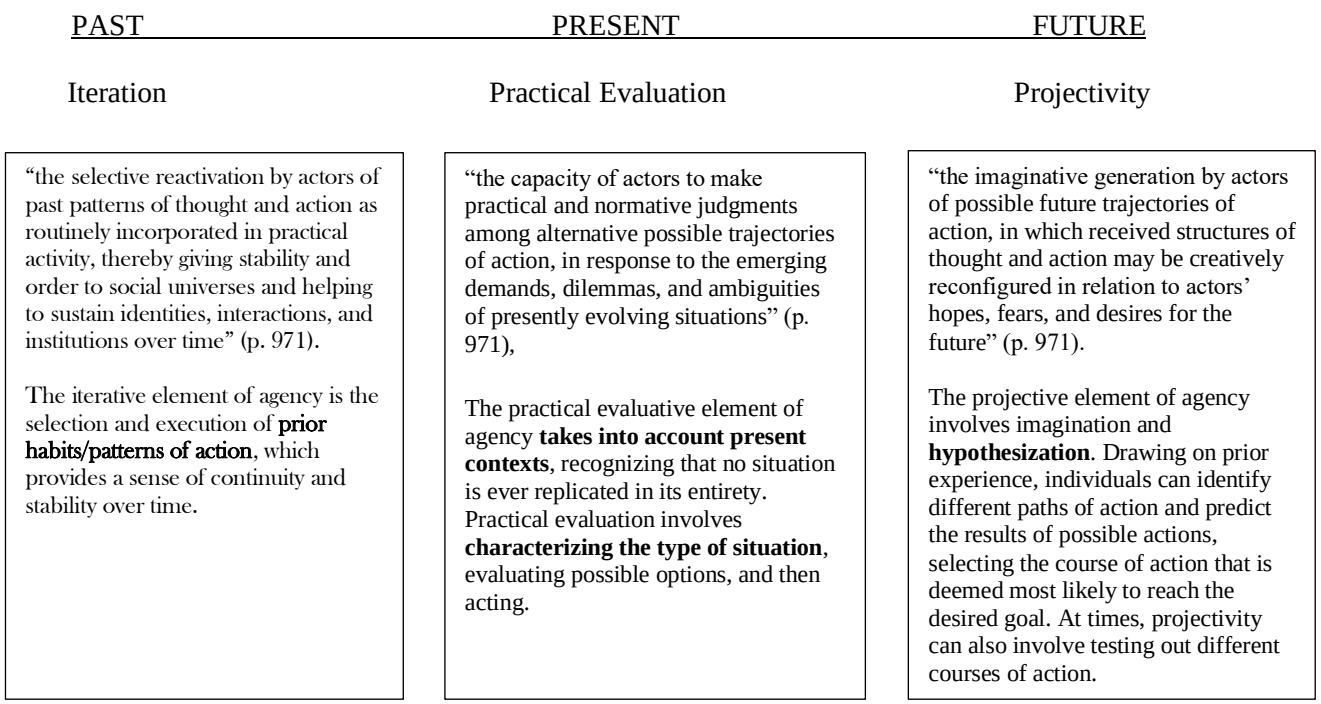
They referred to their approach as "relational pragmatics," viewing the concept of self as dialogical rather than metaphysical and arguing that the capacity for agency lies in humans' ability to self-reflect and adjust their practices over time. For Emirbayer and Mische (1998), agency is expressed through action and involves both interacting with contexts and "entering…relationship[s] with surrounding persons, places, meanings, and events" (p. 973). In other words, agency is acted out in the present in response to a given temporal/physical situation and is therefore linked inextricably to prior experiences, motivations, and the current evolving context, which also includes available social structures as well as future intentions—thus, the term "temporal-relational context." The term "temporal" points to the influence of time, and "relational" refers to and integrates a number of dimensions that affect thinking and action: research, culture, personal, institution. And in each temporal-relational context, different dimensions may be foregrounded.

In breaking down their conception of agency, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) described agency as a "chordal triad" composed of three elements that speak to different temporal orientations: iteration, projectivity, and practical evaluation. (See Figure 2). First, iteration is the "selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action" (p. 971). Iteration represents the role of prior experience, the particular schemas for action we form over time, which dictate how we behave in familiar situations. Essentially, iteration is habit, and explains how we invoke particular patterns of behavior upon recognizing particular situations in particular contexts, and act according to the appropriate schema. Second, is projectivity: "the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action" (p. 971). Projectivity is oriented towards the future, and has to do with the individual's aims, plans, and desires. Therefore, as people encounter situations, they envision different outcomes in relation to goals and try to adapt existing schemas for action accordingly, evaluating the possible courses of action and likely results. Finally, practical evaluation is "the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action" (p. 971), and thus

represents the role of the present. Practical evaluation speaks to the centrality of the emerging situation; action is tied to the particularities of the circumstance and individuals must therefore make decisions in response to the evolving context, recognizing it in relation to prior experiences and deliberating on the possibilities (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). As practical-evaluation assumes that the actor can assess the present situation and then act to better their circumstances, it is therefore practical-evaluation that also most facilitates insight and reflection upon past actions and paths forward within the specific context, allowing for decision-making that can ultimately alter those contexts.

Figure 2.

Emirbayer & Mische's Chordal Triad of Agency



In short, agency—action—involves a combination of the three elements of iteration, projectivity, and practical evaluation, though depending on the particular situation, one element may be more prominent than the others: "We might therefore speak of the *double constitution of agency and structure:* temporal-relational contexts support particular agentic orientations, which in turn constitute different structuring relationships of actors toward their environments" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1004, emphasis in original). In other words, as people act and therefore exercise agency in response to different temporal-relational contexts, they take in and assess the present changing

situation, draw upon prior experience and schemas for action, and consider goals, desires and possible outcomes in determining the appropriate course. This process can be more or less influenced by the past, future, or present 'tones' of agency, and can require more or less deliberation depending on the context; particular contexts may be more conducive to particular forms of agency.

Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) work has been taken up primarily by scholars in life-course research in order to examine how experiences and desires influence the way people make the decisions that shape their lives. Biesta and Tedder (2006, 2007) drew upon Emirbayer and Mische's model, adding that agency must be "achieved in and through engagement with particular temporal-relational contexts-for-action," (p. 136). Biesta and Tedder (2007) characterized this approach to agency as *ecological*, and placed greater emphasis on the role of structure. For instance, Emirbayer and Mische claimed that learning—i.e. the ability to change one's temporal orientations and in turn influence one's situational contexts—occurs through insight into past experiences, as through practical evaluation.[4] In contrast, Biesta and Tedder (2006) claimed that "[w]hereas Emirbayer and Mische seem to suggest that insight will lead to change, it may well be that it is *change that will lead to insight*, understanding and learning" (p. 4, emphasis added). Biesta and Tedder thus provided a measured critique of the chordal triad, adopting Emirbayer and Mische's framework but paying greater attention to the role structure may play in instigating insight and therefore change in individuals' temporal-relational contexts.

Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) chordal triad of agency lends two key things to the conceptual framework underlying this thesis. First, the iterative and projective elements of agency allow for consideration of how past experience and imagined futures/goals influence individual students' actions as they shape their research proposals, learning over time the expectations of the proposal genre and Transfer system through supervisor feedback and other relevant interactions and experiences, adjusting their choices accordingly. Second, the practical evaluative element allows for consideration of how students' present temporal-relational contexts change over time and affect how they evaluate and gain insight into their particular circumstances, which may potentially lead to changes in behavior—exercising agency to alter one's contexts. For instance, because every student has a different set of supervisors with their own views about the goal of the

[4] Biesta and Tedder describe this type of learning as biographical/narrative learning.

PhD and their roles as supervisors, each student is located within a unique supervisory context that may affect how that student understands the proposal genre and Transfer system. Supervisor feedback also changes or progresses as the student shapes the research proposal, and practical evaluation speaks to students' ability to alter their approaches to feedback, research, and writing based on changing circumstances and possible paths of action.

In this way, the creation of the research proposal may be framed in terms of the different structural influences present in the genre system—for instance, supervisor feedback, readings, institutional documents—that the student navigates through exercising agency (making choices). The decisions the student makes are in turn influenced by those changing structural influences (i.e. temporal-relational contexts) towards the goal of creating a successful proposal. Thus, using Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conceptualization of agency as a way of analyzing the temporal orientations of doctoral students' actions and decisions allows us to identify the ways in which prior experiences, future goals, and the present situation influence specific actions—for example, choosing to use or reject feedback, seeking additional feedback, and others—shedding light on the specific purposes and possible reasoning underlying these actions and how they may change over time in relation to the student's evolving temporal-relational contexts.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have drawn upon rhetorical genre theory to frame the doctoral research proposal as a genre that is situated within the Transfer system. This system includes the various texts, people, and social interactions that contribute to a successful research proposal. In turn, the Transfer system is located within a larger thesis genre system, which highlights the connectedness of the research proposal to the final thesis and its purpose in doctoral education. As doctoral students construct their research proposals they must make choices in how to navigate the Transfer system, which involves learning the expectations of both the proposal genre and the larger system. These expectations are informed by the various discourse communities within which the Transfer system is located. Applying Emirbayer and Mische's chordal triad of agency as a means of understanding how individual students navigate the Transfer system enables an examination of how prior experience, future goals, and evolving temporal-relational

contexts influence the choices students make and why, while also allowing for the capacity for reflection and therefore changes in patterns of action.

In the following chapter, I review the relevant empirical literature on doctoral writing, supervision, and feedback, further applying the conceptual framework presented here to show how a genre systems and agency lens may be useful in situating what we know about doctoral thesis writing, while also highlighting the need for longitudinal research that examines development over time.

Chapter 3: Review of the Empirical Literature

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the conceptual framework underpinning this study, which positions the PhD research proposal as part of the Transfer system. Doctoral students navigate this genre system by exercising agency in relation to their prior experiences, future goals, and present evolving temporal-relational contexts, which include the various documents, feedback, and other actors within the genre system. In this chapter, I turn to the pertinent empirical literature that inform different aspects of the Transfer system.

The literature on doctoral writing and feedback is diverse and plentiful, and the focus of this thesis draws from and implicates a wide range of topics including: writing pedagogy and development, supervisory relationships, students' responses to writing, and barriers impeding completion of the thesis, stemming from several disciplinary domains including: education, composition and rhetoric, and linguistics (see e.g. Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Can & Walker, 2011, 2014; East, Bitchener, & Basturkmen, 2012; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Xu, 2017). Because the aim of this thesis is to examine how first-year doctoral students navigate the Transfer system in relation to their (temporal-relational) individual, institutional, and disciplinary contexts, this variety of literature is needed to shed light on different aspects of the genre system—particularly the interactions between the key actors within the system. As a result, my intent in this review is not to characterize each of these literatures but to highlight relevant empirical contributions.

This literature review begins with a brief overview of the field of research on doctoral writing, followed by a discussion of the key empirical literatures, each of which contribute to a larger understanding of the Transfer system: 1) PhD writing prior to data collection, 2) supervisory relationships, 3) supervisor feedback, 4) student responses to feedback, 5) peer feedback, 6) what students bring to the PhD—individual contexts and goals, and 7) the viva voce. This is followed by a discussion of what is still missing from a comprehensive understanding of the genre system. Ultimately, I argue that despite the growing body of work on doctoral writing, little research has focused on the longitudinal nature of thesis writing or on the research proposal. Further, while various aspects of doctoral writing and the larger thesis genre system have been examined, research is needed that brings together these components and allows for investigation of how

different actors and contexts influence doctoral writing over time—which is the value of a conceptual framework that incorporates the genre system.

3.2 A brief overview of doctoral writing

Over the past ten to twenty years, the field of study on doctoral writing has rapidly expanded, inspired by growing numbers of graduate students in universities worldwide, and policy changes prompted by globalization and the demand for research production that place emphasis on the need for both faculty and students to publish as much as possible (Aitchison, Kamler & Lee, 2010; Lillis & Curry, 2010). In response to these changes, researchers turned their attention to writing, publishing, and graduate education, finding that academic writing was understudied and undertheorized (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). Today, a large portion of the literature on doctoral writing focuses on supervision and the development of peer writing groups and writing courses devoted to teaching scholarly writing skills and initiating students into the dialogic and process-oriented nature of academic writing (Aitchison, 2009), which includes studies on traditional PhDs and professional doctorates, on mature students and international students. However, what these studies have in common is an interest in how PhD students learn to write for thesis and other research genres, and what it means to communicate and contribute as part of an academic discourse community (Swales, 1990).

Consequently, a substantial portion of the research on doctoral writing focuses on the thesis itself—as in the written document—the major work representing PhD-level scholarship upon which the degree is conferred. For instance, 'how-to' manuals on writing a successful thesis abound (see, e.g., Bolker, 1998; Dunleavy, 2003; Eco, 2015) featuring step-by-step guides that include both writing and research strategies and instructions on how to format and structure a doctoral thesis. Similarly, many studies on the thesis tend to focus on the linguistic and rhetorical features of the thesis, intended to benefit second-language speakers by identifying the particular moves and structures that are expected, thereby shedding light on the rhetorical conventions of the genre. For instance, research related to voice[5] in doctoral writing tends to come from applied linguistics and often revolves around English as another language (EAL) students and the language challenges they encounter when trying to produce academic texts in English.

[5] Voice can be understood as the "imprint" the writer leaves on the text, which reveals how the individual situates him/herself within the disciplinary field (see Castello, Inesta, & Monoreo, 2009).

Such studies tend to be interested in citation practices (Dong, 1996) and plagiarism as misunderstood attempts at academic writing in new institutional and cultural settings (Abasi & Graves, 2008), strategies and processes EAL students use when they write (often for publication) (Chiu, 2011; Ho, 2017; Li, 2006), and corpus-based tools that help students identify commonalities in academic language and structure (Chang & Schleppegrell, 2016; Lee & Swales, 2006). The literature review, for example, has been identified as a commonly misunderstood genre in which graduate students tend to summarize literature rather than engage in synthesis and critical analysis (Badenhorst, 2018; Boote & Beile, 2005; de Magalhaes, Cotterall, & Mideros, 2019). Research suggests that students' citation practices (Badenhorst, 2018; Shi, Fazel, & Kowkabi, 2018), use of hedging and even sentence length may be evidence of developing a scholarly authorial voice (de Magalhaes, Cotterall, & Mideros, 2019). Citation practices, in particular the use of citations—single or group cites—and use of direct quotations as opposed to paraphrasing, reflect students' interpretations of the literature and ability to analyze and synthesize information, thereby showing how graduate students may use writing as an artifact-in-activity to frame information in order to support their own arguments and authorial intentions (Badenhorst, 2018; Shi, Fazel, & Kowkabi, 2018).

While most of the work on writing seems to come from English-speaking countries, a 2012 volume seeking to examine research on university-level writing across multiple countries and languages found that despite variations in culture, politics, and terminology (e.g., academic versus scientific versus research writing), many scholars draw on the same key people to inform their work, indicating that certain commonalities may exist in academic writing research that extend across international boundaries (see Castello & Donahue, 2012). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, this literature review examines the empirical work published in the English-language and focuses on thesis writing by PhD students.

It is also important to acknowledge that this literature review includes studies that focus on both native English-speakers and EAL speakers. Because students coming from different language backgrounds may experience unique challenges in relation to their feedback needs, English writing and reading abilities, and culturally-influenced understandings of academia, this study explores not only how doctoral students draw on different sources of feedback to craft their research proposals, but on how personal contexts affect engagement with feedback and writing, making students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds important factors to consider. That said, while EAL studies tend to

focus more on the language-level aspects of writing, research suggests that at the doctoral level, many native English speakers and EAL students may value similar types of feedback (Odena & Burgess, 2017), and experience similar challenges in transitioning to doctoral work.

3.3 PhD writing prior to data collection

Only three studies have examined doctoral writing prior to the data collection and 'writing up' phases of the thesis, one on the qualifying exam, and two that focused specifically on the research proposal. These three studies consistently noted the difficulties of transitioning to doctoral study, which involved establishing a sense of belonging, learning the expectations of the disciplinary field, developing research and writing skills, gaining ownership over the work, and understanding the nature of the doctorate —much of which is also tied to the writing process and the positioning of milestones like comprehensive exams and the research proposal within the thesis genre system. For instance, Fisher et al. (2019), which explored the US practice of doctoral qualifying (comprehensive) exams, used interviews and critical incident analysis to examine the experiences of three doctoral students as they prepared for their exams. The results suggested that the exams marked a transition from student to candidate, recognizing the students' knowledge and potential as doctoral researchers (Fisher et al., 2019). Further, the exam process was related to the writing process and a struggle to claim and construct knowledge (Fisher et al., 2019).

The two other studies—Creely and Laletas (2019) and Chatterjee-Padmanabhan and Nielsen (2018)—focused upon the doctoral research proposal. Creely and Laletas (2019) used phenomenological analysis to examine the experiences of one doctoral student, 'Kate,' prior to Confirmation—the Australian equivalent of upgrade/Transfer of Status in the UK and defense of the research proposal in North America. The authors found that Kate's experiences were characterized by a tension between learning the expectations of doctoral study and dealing with her insecurities about her ability to navigate these challenges. That said, Kate's determination and commitment to doctoral study appeared to mediate her experiences, allowing her to be resilient and ultimately successful during her first year of doctorate work (Creely & Laletas, 2019). Similarly, Chatterjee-Padmanabhan and Nielsen (2018), which framed the research proposal as a threshold phase of doctoral study, examined the role of a thesis writing group at an Australian university in facilitating the proposal process. The findings suggested that

students preparing the proposal "remained uncertain about what 'doctorateness' or doing a PhD meant" (p. 421) and continued to struggle with critically engaging with and locating their projects within the literature, particularly as they were still trying to grasp the breadth of their fields. These few studies on the beginning phases of doctoral research and writing point to the challenging and transitional nature of the PhD and make clear that much about the nature of early doctoral writing has yet to be explored.

3.4 The supervisory relationship as foundation for learning

What is most consistent across the literature on doctoral writing, and perhaps doctoral education more broadly, is the focus on the supervisor in facilitating student progress and satisfaction. Supervision has long been identified as the primary approach to teaching and guiding doctoral students (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross, & Burgin, 2012; Stylianou, Enright, & Hogan, 2017), as much doctoral work takes place in the planning, carrying out, and writing of a thesis under the guidance of a supervisor. Broadly, the supervisor's role can be understood as a social and iterative process of supporting and facilitating the student's development into an independent researcher, an expert in the field, "capable of adapting to various research arenas" (Pearson & Brew, 2002, p. 139). Supervisors are thus part of the Transfer of Status (and thesis) genre system, contributing formative feedback to assist doctoral students as they shape their theses.

As indicated by the limited literature on early stage doctoral education, doctoral writing can be an emotional process, often for both supervisors and students (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross, & Burgin, 2012). Students with limited feedback experience may suffer setbacks in confidence and self-efficacy as a result of critical comments (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000), while feedback that is misunderstood or viewed as having little utility may be ignored (Xu, 2017), resulting in frustration for the supervisor (Carter & Kumar, 2017). At the same time, supervisors may provide essential emotional and institutional support that contribute to students' overall doctoral experience and engagement within the academy (Anderson, 2017; Ai, 2017; McPherson, Punch, & Graham, 2018). For many students, supervisory relationships therefore provide the foundation for doctoral writing and doctoral experience overall.

Prior work on supervisory relationships has focused on the nature of supervisory approaches, noting that some supervisors adopt a 'hands-off' approach while others provide more structured guidance, drawing on their personal experiences to inform their conceptions of what it means to be a successful supervisor (Deuchar, 2008). Given the

variation in supervisory approaches, recent work has focused on identifying qualities and expectations of a good supervisor (e.g. Pyhalto, Vekkaila & Keskinen, 2015; Taylor, Vitale, Tapoler, & Whaley, 2018), which included timely and constructive feedback, open dialogue and collaboration, and structure as desirable qualities in a doctoral advisor (Taylor, Vitale, Tapoler, & Whaley, 2018).

However, because students have different backgrounds and different expectations, there is no single "best" supervisory style (Wright, Murray, & Geale, 2007)—rather supervisors must be attentive to individual student needs, as mismatches between student needs and supervisory approach may result in decreased satisfaction with the doctoral education experience (Pyhalto, Vekkaila & Keskinen, 2015). In fact, students and supervisors often perceive the supervisory relationship differently, with conflicting ideas of what roles supervisors are meant to fulfill. For instance, in their quantitative study of Finnish doctoral students, Pyhalto, Vekkaila, and Keskinen (2015) found that students identified research advice, emotional support, and feedback as essential aspects of supervision, while supervisors viewed their primary responsibilities as project management, provision of resources and funding, and quality assurance/gatekeeping. These differences in expectation could result in dissatisfaction in doctoral students who feel that their needs are not being met, which may in turn impede their research and program progress (Pyhalto, Vekkaila, & Keskinen, 2015).

When effective, supervisors are central sources of support, providing essential disciplinary knowledge and offering feedback and discussion that help students to shape their research questions, methodologies and research designs, data analysis, and disciplinary writing (Anderson, 2017; Murakami-Ramalho et al., 2011; Ai, 2017). Supervisors may be instrumental in encouraging doctoral students to be agentive in pursuing their work (Anderson, Day, & McLaughlin, 2008), while also providing support in terms of writing conventions, disciplinary knowledge, and institutional requirements (Anderson, Day, & McLaughlin, 2008; McAlpine & McKinnon, 2012). Encouragement to collaborate with supervisors on publications and to participate in workshops has been shown to build confidence and help students feel like academics, as they begin to view themselves—and begin to be viewed by others—as part of the academic community (Anderson, 2017; Cotterall, 2011). Because establishing academic identity is a central outcome of doctoral study (Green, 2005), encouraging students to being agentive in their research is critical, marking a tension between providing students with sufficient guidance and promoting independent work (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross, & Burgin, 2012); supervisor

feedback can contribute to scholarly growth by facilitating the transition to "self-corrected scholarly writer," or it can take ownership away from the student through "overwriting": imposing the supervisor's voice on the student's writing (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross, & Burgin 2012, p. 442). Balancing support and independence may be particularly problematic for students who are new to research or the discipline, or those who view their supervisors as "experts" and desire direction throughout the research process (Inouye & McAlpine, 2017). Such students may be reluctant to take an agentive approach to their projects, challenge their supervisor's suggestions, or write without supervisor confirmation (Inouye & McAlpine, 2017), indicating that achieving a balanced supervisory relationship is central to supporting students in becoming independent researchers.

Other research on supervisor relationships has examined the perceptions supervisors bring to their supervision practices (Akerlind & McAlpine, 2017; Kandiko & Kinchin, 2013; Murphy, Bain, & Source, 2007; Wright, Murray, & Geale, 2007). For instance, some supervisors focus on PhD completion, while others focus on preparing students for a research career (Wright, Murray, Geale, 2007). Kandiko and Kinchin's (2013) longitudinal study used concept mapping to examine changing supervisor and student perceptions of the purpose of a PhD. The results suggested that supervisors view the supervisory relationship as closely related to the thesis and emphasize development and learning "towards the integration of ideas in the wider disciplinary landscape" (p. 55). In contrast, new PhD students locate the supervisor as "tangential" to the thesis and focus on the thesis document itself and the accumulation of knowledge. Over time, Kandiko and Kinchin found that the student's perception of the PhD expanded to include other academic activities and skills, but there was no significant change in thinking about the purpose of the PhD as product-focused. There may also be differences between experienced and novice supervisors' conceptions of the PhD, as a novice supervisor placed more emphasis on rote learning and the scientific method as opposed to the experienced supervisor who took a more holistic approach to training students for a research career in the discipline (Kandiko & Kinchin, 2013).

Supervisory relationships are thus both complex and central to doctoral experience and doctoral writing, as supervisors are typically the key providers of feedback and guide the composition of the thesis. At the same time, supervisory practices vary based on individual student and supervisor needs and perceptions of the relationship, which may change over time. This speaks to the importance of examining temporal-relational

contexts as doctoral students learn and navigate the genre system alongside supervisory support.

3.5 Supervisor feedback: Foci, function, and furthering doctoral writing

The literature has established that the nature of the supervisory relationship can have lasting effects on student progress. Given the importance of the student's relationship with his or her supervisor, and the fact that feedback is the primary pedagogical approach within supervision, a more detailed understanding of supervisor feedback is needed. For the purposes of this study, feedback is understood as "information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p.81). Feedback is viewed as dialogic (Bahktin, 1981), providing doctoral students with critical information about what it means to be an academic writer, facilitating disciplinary 'enculturation,' while also accounting for a significant portion of the communication between supervisor and student.

A handful of studies have focused on identifying the types of supervisory feedback that PhD students commonly receive. These studies develop two types of frameworks: those that center on the *foci* of feedback—the aspects of writing or content that feedback addresses—and those that analyze feedback from a systemic functional linguistic perspective—what the comments *do*. For instance, studies that evaluated the foci of supervisor feedback suggested that argument, organization/logic, language, and genre are common features of supervisor comments (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014; Can & Walker, 2014; Xu, 2017), while research taking a linguistic approach suggested that supervisor comments fall into three major categories: 1) referential statements that provide information (editorial, organization, content issues), 2) directive comments meant to make the receiver act (suggestions, questions, instructions), and 3) expressive comments reflecting the supervisor's feelings (praise, criticism, opinion) (Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014; Xu, 2017). These studies suggested that the majority of written comments doctoral students received were referential, providing information about the content or organization of the student's writing (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Xu, 2017), rather than taking a topical focus on language and editing. While Kumar and Stracke (2007) and Xu (2017) were single participant case studies with limited generalizability, Basturkmen et al. (2014) drew on a larger sample of students across multiple disciplines, suggesting that these patterns in supervisory feedback may be useful across numerous settings.

While the body of work that identifies and classifies supervisor feedback is small, there are clear patterns that reveal both what is valued in academic writing and what is important in framing feedback to be effective. The research suggested that presenting an argument through the provision of evidence and ideas in a clear and cohesive manner using the language and format appropriate to one's discipline were the elements central to effective academic writing (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014; Can & Walker, 2014; Xu, 2017). Used alongside frameworks for linguistic functions of feedback, results suggested that comments on linguistic accuracy were typically referential, providing clear information on how to correct the word or sentence (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014), while comments on content were often framed as either expressive (Kumar & Stracke, 2007) or directive suggestions (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014). In other words, feedback on the substance of the paper was communicated as representing the supervisor's feelings/opinions or framed as suggestions, which speaks to the often emotionally-charged and contested nature of feedback that students and supervisors are required to negotiate in order to work together in productive ways (Li & Seale, 2007). However, this also means that most feedback on the content of the paper did not include straightforward instruction for how to fix or revise problematic sections. The lack of specific instruction could prove frustrating for students who seek more direction, particularly those who come from international backgrounds with different perspectives on the role of the supervisor (Wang & Li, 2011). Understanding the interactive process of feedback as encouraging reflection and discussion aligns with the larger goal of doctoral study—to produce independent researchers—in addition to communicating the features of research and scholarly writing.

Thus, a portion of the literature on doctoral writing has focused on examining and classifying supervisor feedback. Such findings are useful in framing what aspects of the thesis (and Transfer) genre/system supervisors most value, and how criticism is provided and negotiated. A few studies (see e.g. Akerlind & McAlpine, 2017) have also begun to explore the ways in which supervisors' personal views of the doctorate and their roles in relation to their students may shape the guidance they provide. If supervisors are gatekeepers to the doctoral thesis and research proposal genres and genre systems, further thinking about the types of feedback offered by supervisors and why may have important pedagogical implications for communication about the purpose and nature of doctoral study.

3.6 Student responses to supervisor feedback

Surprisingly, only two studies have focused on how graduate students actually make sense of, interpret, and use supervisor feedback. Xu (2017), who developed a framework for classifying responses to feedback as represented by changes in the text, built upon the work by Kumar and Stracke (2017) and Basturkmen, East, and Bitchener (2014). An analysis of drafts of her own thesis produced the following pattern of revisionary responses: no change despite feedback provided, changes made exactly as the feedback directed, changes made inspired by the feedback, and changes made without any feedback (Xu, 2017). The findings suggested that not responding to feedback was sometimes due to illegible handwriting or confusing wording. However, in some cases choosing to ignore feedback was evidence of critical evaluation, as reflected in decisions to reject suggestions when the author felt her paper did not need to be changed (Xu, 2017). Further, instances where changes were made without feedback demonstrated self-regulated learning based on prior comments the writer received that taught her what a quality academic paper looked like (Xu, 2017). These findings are consistent with other work on doctoral writing and identity development, which indicate a relationship between agentive evaluation of supervisor feedback and decisions to reject suggestions, and suggest that un-prompted revisions may be evidence of self-evaluation and confidence in one's work (Inouye & McAlpine, 2017).

Another insightful study by Vehviläinen (2009) that focused on Master's students used conversation analysis to investigate social interactions between two students and their supervisors when discussing the topics for their dissertations. The results suggested that while students acknowledged critical feedback they also tried to promote their "own agendas" (p. 197):

> …resistance strategies kept students from producing talk that would show that they had understood the feedback. Instead, they worked actively to maintain an approach in which they could focus on the work in terms of the text already written and choices already made. (pp. 198-99).

While supervisors tried to emphasize the most crucial feedback by repeating critiques until students verbally accepted them, acceptance did not necessarily mean understanding.

The two studies described above demonstrated how graduate students may respond to supervisor feedback, suggesting that resistance is evidence of trying to advance research goals or advocate for students' self-assessment of their writing. Yet, little information exists about how feedback is interpreted and manifested in text; as

Vehviläinen (2009) suggested, even if students appear to accept comments, whether or not they comprehend and incorporate them as supervisors expect remains a separate question.

3.7 Peer and other feedback

Though supervision continues to be the primary source of feedback for many doctoral students, feedback that takes place outside supervision can play an important role in doctoral students' understandings of scholarly writing and the expectations of their disciplinary communities (Kim, 2018). Such feedback can come from conferences (Kuzhabekova & Temerbayeva, 2018), writing centers, class discussions, or informal conversations related to the research (Kim, 2018). Informal settings may be particularly important, as they allow students to develop their ideas and risk their "intellectual selves" in safe spaces while also garnering emotional support from peers with experiences similar fears and challenges (Hockey, 1994, p. 186). Thus, peers are potentially important figures in the thesis and Transfer systems as doctoral students develop their understandings of the nature of the PhD and give and receive informal feedback on their research ideas.

Located within the literature on doctoral writing, a number of studies on writing groups and writing courses have identified peer feedback as an effective tool for writing and identity development in doctoral students. Though writing groups and peer feedback have long been a staple in North American undergraduate writing courses, championed by Peter Elbow (1998), in the 2000s, work out of Australia led by scholars like Claire Aitchison demonstrated the usefulness of peer writing groups as a tool for doctoral education. Situating writing groups within an academic literacies approach, writing groups created a site where students congregate to produce and critique writing, thereby participating in the social practices and discourses surrounding writing (Aitchison, 2009). Since then, research involving writing groups has rapidly expanded, resulting in a body of literature advocating for the social and pedagogical benefits of peer writing groups (Aitchison, 2009; Guerin, 2013; Lassig, Dilon & Diezmann, 2013; Maher et al., 2008; Wegener, Meier & Ingerslev, 2014).

Writing groups involving doctoral students (see Aitchison, 2009), early career researchers (Cameron et al., 2013), students from different disciplinary and linguistic backgrounds (Cuthbert, Spark & Burke, 2009), and students pursuing research degrees as well as professional doctorates (Larcombe, McCosker, O'Loughlin, 2007), focusing on thesis writing or writing for publication, have produced similar benefits, including:

increased confidence in writing and research (Ferguson, 2009; Guerin et al., 2013; Maher et al., 2008), greater understanding of discursive practices in academic writing (Ferguson, 2009), a sense of community among peers (Cuthbert & Spark, 2008), and development of academic identity, as students develop and test out academic voices in their writing, adopting technical vocabulary and becoming more critical of their own writing and self-positioning (Khalifa et al., 2017).

In a similar vein, structured writing courses and workshops for doctoral students have emerged as a strategy for supporting PhD students. While peer writing groups tend to be student-led, and writing courses are typically designed and facilitated by a professor or lecturer, the use of peer feedback continues to be a popular approach to teaching academic writing, as peer writing workshops are often integrated into the course curriculum (Adamek, 2015; Burgoine, Hopkins, Rech, & Zapata, 2011; Can & Walker, 2011; 2014). Such courses have been run in multiple fields, including education (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000), science, and nursing, and typically involve producing a portfolio of writing that includes multiple drafts of a manuscript—either an article for publication (Burgoine, Hopkins, Rech, & Zapata, 2011; Castello, Inesta, & Corcelles, 2013) or part of the thesis—with the goal of familiarizing students with the expectations, conventions, analysis, and process of scholarly writing.

The literature on peer writing groups and writing courses appears to highlight similar themes in terms of what makes them successful; namely, the learning of discursive features of academic writing within the discipline, and experiencing the writing process as a cycle involving writing, feedback, reflection, and revision[6] (Castello, Inesta, & Corcelles, 2013). In her study of doctoral writing groups at an Australian university, Claire Aitchison proposed two themes related to how writing groups fostered learning: *"*the centrality of the writing group as the locus for learning the 'working knowledge' required for successful PhD candidature, and…learning by critiquing" (Aitchison, 2009, p. 909). As students engage in the process of giving and receiving feedback, they learn from each other what is expected of scholarly writing in terms of language and argument, and as they hear and engage with their peers' ideas and grow as critical readers, they in turn learn to become more critical and reflexive when revising their own writing (see Aitchison, 2009). In this way, giving and receiving feedback facilitates the internalizing

[6] Within this thesis references to the 'writing process' will refer to this characterization.

and replicating of disciplinary expectations and critical reflection on the arguments and language in one's writing.

If doctoral students are receiving feedback from multiple sources, including peers, their supervisors, course instructors, and others, another point of investigation is how students choose what sources or pieces of feedback to prioritize. Aitchison's (2014) study began to address this question by examining how doctoral students in a writing group managed and assessed feedback, finding that supervisor feedback was privileged beyond that of other sources, and judgments regarding experience of the feedback-giver factored into decisions about what to rely upon: "supervisor as omnipresent…but not omnipotent…supervisors as a filter for screening the acceptability of peer commentary, and also as a guide when offering feedback to colleagues….Frequently feedback prompted further consultations with their supervisors" (p. 60). Over time, students also became more directive about what types of feedback they needed and the relevance of received feedback thus played a role in what comments were accepted (Aitchison, 2014).

3.8 What students bring to the PhD: Personal contexts and trajectories

As doctoral students are the central actors within the Transfer and thesis genre systems, understanding how their personal experiences influence their understandings of feedback and overall views and experiences of the PhD is important. Students bring a multitude of experiences and biographical factors to graduate study that may inform how they understand research and the purpose of the PhD (Deem & Brehony, 2000), cope with challenges in doctoral study (Hockey, 1994), and view writing and respond to feedback (Inouye & McAlpine, 2017).

The body of work that perhaps best begins to explore the impact of individual context on doctoral study is that on international students, a significant portion of which is focused on writing challenges experienced by EAL speakers and intercultural or cross-cultural supervisory practices (see Xu & Grant, 2017; Wu & Hu, 2018). Such literature tends to take shape in individual case studies, self-studies, and collaborations between doctoral students and their supervisors, centering on students from non-Western contexts (for instance, China) adapting to study in English-speaking counties, and how personal histories influence experiences of doctoral study, expressions of agency, and shifts in identities (Li, 2018; Soong, Tran, & Hiep, 2015). Specifically, the literature suggests that disparities between prior and current education and cultural contexts present significant challenges that international doctoral students must navigate throughout their PhD

programs. For Chinese students, such conflicts may involve learning what it means to have ownership over the research, and what it means to think critically, necessitating new understandings of what qualities make a 'good' researcher (Xu & Grant, 2017; Wu & Hu, 2018). Deem and Brehony (2000) further suggest that the extent to which doctoral students are able to access research cultures, which include disciplinary cultures, research training, and student cultures, differs depending upon their contexts and plans for the PhD. International students, for instance, may have more difficulty accessing academic research cultures[7] as a result of differences in language, cultural norms, higher education systems, and expectations of doctoral study, indicating the importance of examining how individual contexts influence students' experiences of doctoral education.

Plans for the future may also affect how students conceptualize their PhDs, "partly according to how these interact with their past and imagined future experiences and also partly in terms of how they feel their own experience compares with a 'normative' understanding of what a doctorate is or should be" (Mills & Paulson, 2014, p. 82), which includes the extent to which doctoral students come to see themselves as researchers in an international context (Lopes & Lourenco, 2019). As such, an area of interview-based literature relevant to how doctoral students view research and navigate their PhDs—and in turn, their theses—has given rise to several characterizations of the doctorate linked to students' goals and experiences. For instance, prior work has suggested frameworks for understanding doctoral students' conceptions of research (Stubb, Pyhalto, & Lonka, 2014), motivations for undertaking PhD work (Brailsford, 2010; Gill & Hoppe, 2009; Guerin et al, 2015; Leonard, Becker, & Coate 2005; Skakni, 2018), and beliefs about what it means to become a research professional (Taylor, 2007), which speak to students' perceptions and goals. See Table 1 below.

[7] Deem and Brehony (2000) describe academic research cultures as including "disciplinary or interdisciplinary ideas and values, particular kinds of expert knowledge and knowledge production, cultural practices and narratives (for instance how research is done, and how peer review is exercised), departmental sociability, other internal and external intellectual networks and learned societies" (p. 158).

Table 1

Comparison of Prior Frameworks Related to PhD Purpose/Approach

Study	Context	Framework
Brailsford (2010)	Australasian History PhDs' motivations for study	Influence of friends, family, colleagues and academics Employment and career considerations Personal motives
Gill & Hoppe (2009)	US and Germany professional doctorates' motivations for study	Entry into academia Professional development Professional advancement Entry to a new career Self-enhancement
Guerin et al. (2015)	Australian doctoral students' motivations for study	Family and friends Career progression Intrinsic motivation Lecturer influence Research experience
Leonard, Becker, & Coate (2005)	UK PhDs' motivations for study	Professional development Acquisition of research skills Interest in a particular research area Personal development Intellectual interest/joy of study Acquiring the degree
Skakni (2018)	Canadian PhD students' motivations and ways of navigating PhD	Professional (pragmatic, interest in career development, unemotional) Intellectual (research as a "calling", desire for intellectual stimulation) Self (self-actualization or social recognition)
Stubb, Pyhalto, & Lonka (2014)	Finnish PhD students' conceptions of research	Research as a job to do Research as obtaining qualifications and gaining accomplishments Research as a personal journey Research as making a difference
Taylor (2007)	EdD students' understanding of research professional	Conformity (learning how to research; interest in practical knowledge) Capability (desire to try different methods, share and develop ideas) Becoming and Being (personal and professional growth, research as a journey)

There are clear commonalities between frameworks; career-oriented/professional development and personal/intellectual fulfillment emerged as themes across studies, suggesting that PhD students have distinct ways of thinking about and possibly approaching their research. However, with the exception of two studies, existing

frameworks fail to explore in great depth how purpose (goals) for pursuing a PhD influences the student's approach to the thesis or perceptions of feedback. Taylor (2007) suggested that professional doctoral students had different preferences for teaching style in relation to their understanding of what it means to be a research professional. For instance, those with a conformity perspective appreciated structured lectures from course tutors, while those with a capability perspective enjoyed a combination of lecture and discussion, and 'becoming and being' students preferred collaboration and the space to critically evaluate literature. Skakni (2018) took her analysis of PhD student "typologies" a step further, examining patterns in the constraints, facilitators, and strategies used by different types of students during the PhD. She suggested that "self" types tend to struggle more with self-doubt, criticism, and identity issues, appreciating a strong emotionally supportive supervisory relationship, while "intellectual" types needed to build intellectual communities in which to explore ideas. Finally, professional types were strategic and pragmatic about the PhD, concerned with quick progress and desiring supervisors who could guide them through the institutional requirements and facilitate career opportunities (Skakni, 2018).

From the literature described in this section arises two key points: 1) that prior contexts and experiences may have a significant impact on doctoral students' understandings of writing, feedback, supervision, and academic cultures, and 2) that doctoral students' conceptions of the doctorate and motivations for pursuing a PhD may influence how they approach research and view feedback and supervisory relationships. In short, the literature on motivations for the PhD can prove valuable in framing the influence of goals and experiences on students' approaches to the doctoral thesis as they navigate the genre system.

3.9 The viva voce: Examiners and the relationship between written submission and oral exam

Although I am not aware of any studies that specifically examine the doctoral proposal defense, there is a small body of literature on the viva voce, the final oral examination of the thesis, which informs the relationship between the research proposal and the Transfer viva (Carter & Whittaker, 2009; Jackson & Tinkler, 2001; Tinkler & Jackson, 2002; Watts, 2012). Despite its high-stakes nature, the viva voce remains an occluded genre with often vague university guidelines for success (Tinkler & Jackson, 2002).

Many examiners view the viva as a formative experience where students can receive constructive feedback; in contrast, doctoral students tend to perceive the viva as a summative assessment, a judgment of their work (see Jackson & Tinkler, 2001; Share, 2016). Unsurprisingly, the viva voce has thus been associated with both positive and negative emotions, particularly for those who received referrals or major revisions (Share, 2016). Many students with referrals or major revisions also experience disillusionment and a reduced desire to work in academia (Jackson & Tinkler, 2001). The viva voce is therefore portrayed as a site of tension and uncertainty with sometimes significant effects on doctoral students' attitudes towards academia.

There is also notable variability across UK institutions as to the role and purpose of the viva as an assessment (Jackson & Tinkler, 2001). Through interviews with recent doctoral graduates, Share (2016) found that defense, authentication, and examination were viewed as the main purposes of the final viva. However, it was also suggested in Tinkler and Jackson (2001) that the purpose of the viva differed based on the quality of the submitted thesis; for instance, for candidates who submitted strong documents the viva might serve to discuss ideas and receive advice on publication, while for 'borderline' cases the viva presented an opportunity to defend the work.

Tinkler and Jackson (2002) further identified skills (verbal and intellectual), content, and conduct as the key components of the viva, finding that the conduct of the viva varied depending on examiner agendas. This means that strategic selection of examiners was central to the viva experience and possibly to the outcome (Tinkler & Jackson, 2002). Other research on thesis examiner comments suggested that argument, project (based in theory and literature), and fundamentals (research methods, presentation) are the key foci of feedback (Holbrook, Bourke, Fairbairn, & Lovat, 2014), which aligns with Pole's (2000) typology of the PhD. Pole's typology included four types of "knowledge/skill" that pointed to a combination of practical ability and thinking needed for doctoral success: substantive knowledge (of the discipline), technical skills (specific skills acquired through doing research), craft knowledge (knowing how to manage/do research), and personal/social skills (communication, collaboration, confidence, academic identity). The viva may therefore be construed as an opportunity for doctoral students to complement the written thesis by orally displaying the knowledge and communication skills not already included in the thesis.

3.10 What we still need to know about the genre system

The majority of the literature highlighted in this review is lacking in longitudinal research that allows for examination of change over time. Instead, common research designs focusing on doctoral writing included interview (Wang & Li, 2011), focus group (Cuthbert & Spark, 2008; Cuthbert, Spark & Burke, 2009), or survey-based studies, sometimes supplemented by analysis of student writing and/or written feedback (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014; Kumar & Stracke, 2007) or a combination of the above (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Can & Walker, 2014; Castello, Inesta, & Corcelles, 2013; Stylianou, Enright & Hogan, 2017). A number of these studies were retrospective, asking participants to reflect on their experiences of doctoral writing or supervision (Chatterjee-Padmanabhan and Nielsen, 2018; Cuthbert & Spark, 2008; Fisher et al., 2019), or were self-studies in which recent PhD graduates analyzed their experiences (Li, 2018; Xu & Grant, 2017). The handful of studies that were more longitudinal in nature often spanned the length of several months or a semester (Castello, Inesta, & Corcelles, 2013; Cotterall, 2011; Inouye & McAlpine, 2017; Kim, 2018). An exception was Anderson (2017), a multiple case study of PhD students in different stages of the program, which took place over the course of 16 months and involved interviews at the beginning and end of data collection as well as analysis of participant narratives on their academic experiences and samples of written feedback. However, while Anderson (2017) was pertinent in exploring how different sources of feedback influence doctoral students' sense of academic belonging, its focus was less on writing than on socialization as a whole; thus, the range of data neither captured all the elements focused upon in this project, nor was data collected often enough to perform the type of micro-level analysis of decision-making, writing, and revision that is a focus of this study.

Because the thesis genre system, and specifically the Transfer system, is navigated over a length of time (typically between 8 and 15 months for Transfer and 3-4 years for the complete thesis), longitudinal studies are needed to capture changes in PhD students' development alongside the evolution of supervisory relationships and the document itself. Additionally, as highlighted in this literature review, while there are numerous areas of research that are relevant to specific aspects of the Transfer system—supervisory relationships and supervisor feedback, peer feedback, doctoral students' individual experiences, and the viva voce—studies that bring these elements together cohesively are lacking.

Finally, this literature review is missing a discussion on student agency in doctoral writing. Prior work on doctoral student agency has focused upon agency in relation to seeking funding (see Borrego, Choe, Nguyen, & Knight, 2019), teaching (e.g. Christiansen, Du, Fang, & Hirvela, 2018; Ursin, Vahasanten, McAlpine, & Hokka, 2020), navigating relationships (Hopwood, 2010a; Jazvak-Martek, Chen, & McAlpine, 2011; Pyhalto & Keskinen, 2012), and engagement in various academic activities (Hopwood, 2010b). Agency has also been discussed peripherally in relation to PhD academic identity (e.g., Teng, 2020), and the few papers that do address agency in terms of doctoral writing tend to focus on international students (Chang, 2011; Ho, 2017). However, overall, agency is often not an *empirical focus* of investigation in research on doctoral writing. This speaks to another gap in the literature that highlights the value of the conceptual framework proposed in Chapter 2.

3.11 Conclusion

This literature review on doctoral writing and feedback has dipped into several relevant areas that contribute to the Transfer system, which speaks to the complexity of the research design of this study—and the genre system itself. Despite the expansive body of work on doctoral writing and doctoral education, there has been little attempt to connect key aspects of the genre system, let alone connect them as to examine students' agency in relation to their temporal-relational contexts. Nor has doctoral student writing and development been examined longitudinally to examine change over time, particularly during the formative early phases of PhD programs.

The next chapter describes the methodology and research design shaping this study. It takes on a longitudinal design and draws on multiple sources of data that reflect the various parts of the Transfer system highlighted in this literature review.

Chapter 4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Overview

The previous chapter described the relevant empirical literature that inform key aspects of the Transfer system. In order to explore how students navigate the complex genre system that encompasses the research proposal, this project takes the shape of a qualitative multiple case study, drawing on various sources of data that allow for in-depth analyses of individual experiences and perspectives, while also constituting a range of documents involved in the genre system linked to the research proposal. The richness of the case study data also provides evidence about the social context within which the research proposal is created, and how students view the purpose of the proposal and their learning and decision-making. Such an approach further aligns with the overarching conceptual framework of rhetorical genre theory and agency that anchors this research.

This chapter begins with a recap of the research questions, what they aimed to uncover, and how they are connected to the overall theory and purpose of this project. I then provide an overview of and rationale for the case study methodology, and the specific multiple case study approach I have chosen. Next, I discuss participant recruitment and selection, ethical considerations, the data and data collection procedures, and the analysis. This is followed by a section called 'Situating the Researcher,' which takes into account my positionality as a doctoral researcher and how I dealt with the challenges that emerged throughout this research. Finally, I conclude with discussions of the trustworthiness and limitations of this study.

4.2 Research questions

This study was driven by the following primary research question: *How do first-year doctoral students in the social sciences shape and negotiate a successful research proposal over time?* The purpose of this question is to capture the entirety of students' experiences of crafting the proposal, including writing, critical discussions, and other relevant activities that may contribute to the creation of a successful research proposal over time. While prior research has examined certain aspects of doctoral writing, focusing on supervisor feedback or how EAL students learn appropriate authorial stance, little research has looked at the writing process as a whole, taking into account the various contextual factors that surround doctoral writing, particularly in relationship to creation of

the research proposal—a formative period in which PhD students begin to develop their research thinking and familiarize themselves with the disciplinary and institutional expectations for writing and research. This question thus provides for the examination of the Transfer system and how individuals exercise agency in navigating that system. The question addresses the purpose of the proposal—to pass the Transfer milestone—and how students must negotiate their preconceived notions of the PhD, research writing, and their goals for the project while also adhering to disciplinary and genre expectations. Further, this question allows for both within-case and cross-case analysis: within-case analysis to explore the individual differences in experience, and cross-case analysis to determine whether there are any commonalities across experiences. The following sub-questions were generated to provide further detail into research proposal process:

1. *What sources of influence are most crucial to students' changing understandings of research and doctoral writing over time?*
2. *How do temporal-relational contexts affect how doctoral students make decisions in creating their research proposals?*

In order to explore these questions, data were gathered from various sources, including drafts of the proposal, written feedback from multiple sources, recordings of supervisions, and semi-structured interviews. These data serve to illuminate the various documents (genres), sources of knowledge, and other factors influencing how participants thought about their evolving research and made decisions in composing their proposals.

1. What sources of influence are most crucial to students' changing understandings of research and doctoral writing over time?

Developing the research proposal is not a linear process. The literature suggests that supervisor feedback is crucial to doctoral learning, particularly in the early stages of the PhD. Though feedback remains a focus of the research design, I am also interested in whether doctoral students identify additional sources of learning during the proposal process, and how the participants perceive them as helping. Further, the sources of knowledge or support that are most critical may change over time as students gain ownership over their work or encounter new experiences. This question aims to determine what factors are most important in doctoral students' learning about writing and research over time, within the context of the research proposal genre and the Transfer system. This question is thus linked to both the literature on doctoral writing and rhetorical genre theory's underlying premise that writing is a socially-situated activity.

2. How do temporal-relational contexts affect how doctoral students make decisions in creating their research proposals?

As shown in Chapter 3, little is known about how doctoral students make micro-level decisions about their research or their writing. Drawing connections between the reasoning—and the temporal influences—behind their decision-making and the actual revisions and theoretical and methodological choices that appear in the writing may add a richer understanding of the proposal creation process and the particular factors that affect individual student progress. This question draws directly on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conception of agency to explore how students navigate the expectations of the research proposal genre and Transfer system over time.

4.3 The case study

The research design chosen to address the above research questions is the case study. Generally, case studies are appropriate when examining events or phenomena in which context plays a key role (Yin, 2014). Case studies tend to rely on multiple data sources including interviews, and this approach has been defined in terms of the phenomenon or process being studied (Yin, 2014), or as a bounded (Merriam, 1998) or "integrated" system (Stake, 1995, p. 2). Creswell (2013) also offered a comprehensive definition of the case study approach as:

> …a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 33).

In other words, case studies are bounded systems within which a process, phenomenon, or person is being studied without direct researcher intervention (as in an experiment). A case study design is appropriate given the research questions because this sought to examine a process—creation of the proposal—embedded within the context of the university and disciplinary community, bounded by time (the first year through successful Transfer of Status) and cases (the students), and examined through multiple data sources.

There has been debate over the nature of the case study approach, as it has been referred to as method, methodology, approach, research design, and research strategy (Creswell, 2013; Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017), making the case study difficult to characterize. That said, three key methodologists who have written on the case

study—Yin (2014), Merriam (1998), and Stake (1995)—underline the need for an overarching methodology that guides the design of the case study and data to be collected, and highlight the versatility of the case study in the range of epistemological approaches it can embody. They argue that unlike research designs based in ethnography or grounded theory, case studies are designed in relation to a theoretical framework with theoretical propositions (Stake 1995; Yin, 2014). For instance Yin (2014) appeared to take a post-positivist view of the case study, highlighting replication and generalizability (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017), while Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) took a more constructivist approach, emphasizing the role of the researcher and how knowledge is constructed within contexts, allowing more flexibility for the case and its research questions to evolve over the course of the research as concepts and propositions are clarified. Given that the theoretical framework underpinning my framing of the research proposal and Transfer of Status— rhetorical genre theory —is a sociocultural framework, my epistemological approach to the case study most aligns with Stake's (1995) and Merriam's (1998) constructivist framing; in order to examine the Transfer system and address the research questions, the research design relies on a range of qualitative data to examine a process while acknowledging the role of the researcher. At the same time, the introduction of Emirbayer and Mische's chordal triad of agency pays attention to the individual and change over time, hence the longitudinal nature of this research.

In addition to identifying epistemological perspectives, methodologists have identified different types of case studies: qualitative versus quantitative or mixed; embedded versus holistic; descriptive versus exploratory, explanatory or inferential; ethnographic, sociological, or historical. (Merriam, 1998; Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2014). Following Stake (1995), I characterize this case study an instrumental collective (or multiple) case study, as the purpose of the research is to understand a particular issue—the creation and negotiation of the research proposal—through examining more than one case.

In defining the unit of analysis (the case) and the data to be collected, Stake (1995) recommended looking to the research questions, the literature, and the particular theory underpinning the study, all of which point to the nature of the case study design and are informed by the research questions or "propositions" (Yin, 2014) that emerge from the literature and determine the bounds of the case. Here, the purpose of the research is to examine how first-year doctoral students create and negotiate their research proposals, and the overarching theoretical framework is that of exercising agency within

the genre system. Thus, because the focus lies in the individual experiences of doctoral students, the phenomenon of interest is creation of the proposal and each doctoral student constituted a case; even though the participants were part of larger departmental, institutional, and academic cultures, I am not trying to understand the workings of the culture of doctoral education within departments, but how individuals develop as researchers, drawing on social resources but also mitigating them in relation to their personal goals. Hence, each student is a case. Each case is bound by the time period between the beginning of the first year of study through successful proposal defense. The cases are further limited to doctoral students in the Social Sciences Division, for reasons discussed in the following section on participant recruitment and selection.

Finally, a case study design approach aligns with previous in-depth studies on supervisor feedback, student perceptions, and doctoral writing, which were based on participant numbers of one or two (see Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Xu, 2017). Although several empirical studies reviewed in Chapter 3 drew on large sample sizes, those projects aimed to develop frameworks like those identifying categories of feedback that could be applicable to a larger audience (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Can & Walker, 2011). In this thesis the results intend to capture individual variation in experience as students navigate the genre system, thereby fulfilling the objective of presenting an in-depth longitudinal portrait of several students' development over time, an aim common in research based on case studies and narrative approaches (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013).

In sum, this research is a qualitative instrumental collective/multiple case study drawing on a number of data sources with the aim of presenting richly detailed portraits of each participant's experience, which is consistent with the purpose of this study and the conceptual framework that takes into account the various temporal-relational contexts (disciplinary, institutional, supervisory, personal) surrounding writing and its social functions. This study examines multiple cases, not to argue for generalization, but to explore individual variation across cases and identify similarities and differences in experience over time.

4.4 The participants: Recruitment and selection

The case participants were five first-year doctoral students from the Social Sciences Division at the University of Oxford, a large research-intensive UK university. Sampling for case studies should be "theory-driven," (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As discussed

above, the underlying theories are those of rhetorical genre theory and agency, which view writing in terms of social context and social action and take into account prior experience, present contexts, and future goals in decision-making. Because the focus of the study is on the research proposal as it is created within the Transfer system with its own set of expectations, first-year PhD status in a social science department was a requirement for participation (the cases), setting the case boundaries. I chose social sciences because I was already familiar with research methods in that context, and in the social sciences students generally have more agency in selecting their thesis projects, as compared with the natural sciences where the research is often linked to the particular lab/research group.

However, beyond these requirements (Social Sciences, first-year PhD students) participants were self-selected, as I did not want to seek particular cases and potentially create a sense of obligation to participate through purposive selection. Snowball sampling was also used two weeks after the initial call for recruitment in order to reach additional participants. Though there is no 'best' number of participants for a multiple case study, a minimum of five cases has been recommended (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In a multiple or collective case study, having multiple cases does not necessarily increase generalizability but can "maximize what we can learn" to enhance understanding of the issue being studied (Stake, 1995, p. 4). Under the theoretical framework for this study, a successful research proposal is one that meets to an acceptable extent the requirements for Transfer of Status that are expected by the examiners. However, how doctoral students create that proposal is subject to variation reflected in their exercise of agency as they make decisions about how to write and incorporate what they view as the requirements or expectations. Thus, while the overall goal (passing the proposal viva) should ultimately be the same, there may be individual variation in how students get there. Having multiple cases to examine the process of creating the research proposal is therefore useful in understanding the individual variation in student experience during their first year of study. Because a premise of this research is that each student comes to doctoral study with their own unique histories and goals for the PhD, I argue that it does not matter whether cases were purposively selected because the agency portion of the conceptual framework assumes that all students are different in their experiences and exercise of agency as they negotiate the constraints of the research proposal.

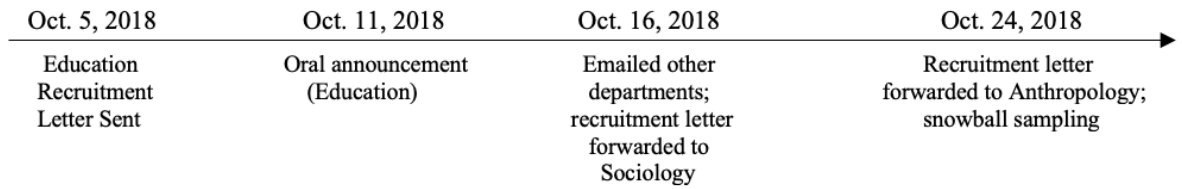
Participants were recruited in October 2018, during the first month of their doctoral programs. Invitations were initially sent to the Director of Graduate Studies of

the Department of Education, who forwarded a recruitment letter (Appendix A) to incoming doctoral students, asking for volunteers to participate in this research. A description of the study and my contact information were included in the letter, which was sent at the beginning of the first week of classes. I also made an oral announcement during week two in the doctoral students' required first-year course, the Research Training Seminar. Students in the Department of Education were initially targeted because it is a department with which I am familiar, and while many studies on academic identity and writing have been conducted in education departments, few have operated on a longitudinal timeline or focused specifically on first-year doctoral work such as the research proposal.

I initially hoped to have all five participants come from Education in order to decrease various departmental factors that could affect the expectations surrounding the proposal and genre system. However, upon receiving only one response two weeks after my initial recruitment letter, I then expanded the search to additional departments in the Social Sciences Division and sent copies of the recruitment letter to the Directors of Graduate Study of the Sociology, Anthropology, Politics and International Relations, and International Development departments. Only Sociology and Anthropology responded and confirmed that they forwarded my letter to their first-year PhD students. A copy of the letter was also published in the weekly Social Science Newsletter. Additionally, I asked my existing participant from Education whether he had any classmates who might be interested in participating (snowball sampling). See Figure 3 for a timeline of participant recruitment.

Figure 3

Recruitment Timeline



Once interested students contacted me via email, I sent them a copy of the participant information form (Appendix B) and set up initial meetings to go over the study in more detail, answer questions, and ask them to sign a participant consent form

(Appendix C). All interested participants were accepted into this study, regardless of language background, research focus, or knowledge of the social sciences, as one aspect of this research is to take into account how individual personal contexts affect how students interpret and draw upon feedback within the writing process to facilitate their research goals and evolving research proposals.

Because this project also involved recording supervisory sessions, with participants' consent I then contacted the participants' supervisors by email, explaining their students' involvement in my project, and attaching copies of the participant information and consent forms. Written consent from supervisors was obtained either by me or by the participant before any supervisions were recorded. Of the five participants, one asked that I sit in and observe sessions, three self-recorded based on either their or their supervisor's preference, and one requested that I did not record his supervisions. See Table 2 below for participant characteristics.

Table 2

Participant Characteristics

Participant	Discipline	Gender	Age	Nationality	First Language
Ben	Education	Male	26-30	European	Italian
Charlie	Sociology	Male	21-25	Chinese	Chinese
Ethan	Education	Male	26-30	British	English
Natalie	Anthropology	Female	40 +	British	English
Shankar	Education	Male	26-30	Indian	English

4.5 Ethics

Because the doctoral thesis is a major undertaking and feedback may provoke emotional responses in students as reflected in prior research, an initial concern was that participants might become uncomfortable with sharing their writing and supervisor comments and allowing me to record their supervision sessions, particularly when comments are critical. This tension could have been exacerbated by the fact that I too am a doctoral student; it could be potentially embarrassing for students to share their difficulties and academic issues with a peer. I addressed this possibility at the beginning of the research, letting participants know that if at any time they become uncomfortable with sharing their papers and feedback with me, we can discuss their concerns. I also assured them that I was not

making judgments about them or their work but was seeking to learn more about the writing and scholarly development process.

Likewise, it was possible that supervisors would be uncomfortable sharing their feedback and relevant emails, or allowing me to record their supervisory sessions, becoming hyperaware of their pedagogical practices and how they might be perceived. This could in turn affect how they interact with their students and the kinds of feedback they provide. Given the nature of this study, I had to account for these possibilities in altered feedback practices but tried to assure supervisors that my focus was on data collection and the student experience, encouraging them to approach me with any concerns.

Finally, a central ethical concern for both student participants and their supervisors was that of anonymity. The number of students entering the PhD program in each Department every year is relatively small, making it relatively easy to identify the students (and therefore the supervisors) participating in this research, based on their research topics. In order to address this issue, I discussed these concerns with participants at the start of the study and assigned each participant a pseudonym. All data was anonymized once downloaded and saved onto my laptop, and pseudonyms were used in transcribing interview and supervision recordings. In some cases I also redacted information about the specifics of their research projects, including the names of countries, cities, or institutions where they planned to conduct their field research, in writing up the results. Following data collection, I sent participants brief case summaries for review, asking for their feedback and whether there was any information I should change or redact due to concerns about anonymity. Of the five participants, only one expressed concern. I discussed the participant's concerns with my supervisors and came up with the compromise that I would make additional changes to the participant's department and research topic in any published papers that might emerge from this thesis, and also offered to redact that participant's chapter from the ORA version of this thesis. However, due to the nature of this study, which necessitates a rich portrait of experience and includes excerpts from the proposal, supervisions, and interviews, for the examined versions of the thesis I would include the participant's full chapter. I approached the participant with these proposals and the participant approved. The study received ethical clearance from the university in January 2018 (see Appendix D for the most recent version of the CUREC form).

4.6 Overview of procedure[8]

After obtaining written consent from each participant, I scheduled an initial interview wherein the participant was asked to complete the demographic information form (Appendix E) in order to collect basic information. That first interview also established the context for the rest of the study, focusing on the participant's history with writing and research, and academic and professional goals. From that point on, proposal process interviews took place every two months at a mutually convenient time and place—typically in a reserved room in the Department of Education or at a nearby café. I chose to conduct interviews every two months because in my Master's study, which used a similar research design, interviews were done every month. While monthly interviews were helpful in terms of the participants' ability to recall small events such as course sessions or conversations with peers, sometimes participants would not have supervisions between monthly sessions, particularly during the winter and spring breaks. This meant that at times participants had little progress to discuss, as a large portion of the interviews focused on revised drafts and supervisor feedback. Thus, for this thesis I chose to have two-month intervals between interviews, which allowed for more substance/progress to discuss with participants without having too much time pass between our meetings. I also introduced a list of five sentence-completion exercises that I asked participants to fill out following each supervision as a way of capturing their initial thoughts about their meetings. However, part-way through the study I chose to abandon this tool for reasons explained later in this chapter.

Although most interviews were in-person, a few were done via Skype while participants were away doing pilot studies or summer internships. All interviews were audio recorded on my recording device. Figure 4 below illustrates the timing of the data collection and analysis.

[8] A simplified version of this research design was used for my Master's research (Spring 2016) in which I focused on how first-year doctoral students use supervisor feedback in revising their proposals (see Inouye & McAlpine, 2017).

Figure 4

Data Collection and Analysis



At the beginning of each proposal process interview, students spent several minutes completing a visual exercise called the journey plot (Turner, 2015) that asked them to identify emotionally significant experiences they had encountered since the last interview. The interviews then began with a discussion of the journey plot before shifting to students' perceptions of their supervisor comments, plans for revision, and next steps in the research process, using the texts (and sentence-completion exercises) they had produced as guide. Each interview lasted between 35 to 55 minutes, depending on the amount of text to discuss.

Throughout the study I communicated with participants via my university email account to keep up to date about their scheduled supervisions, and to request copies of their research proposal drafts or related writings, (e.g. papers for the Research Training Seminar, literature reviews), their notes from supervision, and written supervisor comments. Participants sent via email their drafts, electronic feedback, photographs of

their notes, and recordings of their supervisions. The following sections detail the data sources and methods of collection.

4.7 The data

As previously discussed, a key characteristic of case studies is the in-depth and multiple sources of data, of which interviews are particularly central (Stake, 1995). Here, the data consisted of departmental regulations for Transfer of Status, demographic information forms, semi-structured interviews, journey plots and sentence-completion activities, student notes, drafts of the paper, written supervisor feedback, relevant feedback from other sources, and audio recordings of supervisory sessions collected over a total of 15 months (October 2018 to December 2019), depending on when participants completed Transfer of Status. Following Transfer, copies of the examiners' reports and any revisions were also collected. Some of this data, such as the Department Transfer Regulations, were used primarily to provide contextual information, while others, like drafts of the research proposal and written supervisor feedback, were central to the analysis.

The selection of data sources was informed by rhetorical genre theory, particularly genre systems and the socially-situated nature of writing. Because prior research suggests the supervisor (and especially supervisor feedback) is the most important institutionally-sanctioned source of support, and that students may also receive valuable feedback from courses and classmates, I placed an emphasis on feedback in relation to the proposal. I wanted to capture as many of these communications as possible as part of the Transfer system. With the exception of interviews, which are the subject of the next section, each type of data is discussed below.

Department Transfer regulations

Department regulations for Transfer of Status, which were available online, were collected in order to provide contextual information about Transfer deadlines, rules for the submission and viva, and guidelines for what each department expected in a successful Transfer paper/research proposal.

Demographic information forms

The demographic information form was a three-item questionnaire in which participants were asked to indicate their age range, first language, and gender. The purpose of this form was to obtain basic demographic information for contextual purposes.

Drafts of the research proposal and related writings

The drafts included any written materials related to the Transfer paper/research proposal, including relevant class work, research group or conference presentations, and various materials sent to the supervisor or others for feedback. In some cases, I also received drafts of ethics forms. Collecting successive pieces of written material allowed me to see how the participants' proposals evolved over time. However, because participants inevitably created dozens of drafts and continually revised, it was not feasible to access every existing draft of the proposal. Instead, I focused on collecting versions of the drafts that were also submitted to supervisors, in order to track how participants' writing and research thinking evolved in relation to their supervisions, though participants occasionally sent me additional drafts between supervisions. This data contributed to the overall research question: *How do first-year doctoral students in the social sciences shape and negotiate a successful research proposal over time?* by providing concrete evidence of the proposal's progress in various stages that supplemented participants' interview commentary on how and why they revised their proposals. The drafts also informed the proposal process interviews as a source of discussion.

Supervision recordings (and observations)

With participant and supervisor consent, supervision sessions were audio recorded to capture the oral feedback and critical conversations between supervisor(s) and students that may not have been reflected in written feedback or notes. Depending on what each participant was comfortable with, I either: 1) sat in, observed, and recorded the sessions, or 2) asked the participants to record the sessions using their own device or my recorder. If participants recorded using their own devices, they sent the mp4 files to my university email following the supervisions. Supervisions that I attended involved naturalistic observations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013) through note-taking meant to elicit a sense of the supervisory environment and how the supervisory relationship evolves over time to provide further context for the case. This data informed the sub-questions: *What sources of influence are most crucial to students' changing understandings of research and doctoral writing over time?* and *How do temporal-relational contexts affect how doctoral students make decisions in creating their research proposals?*

Written supervisor feedback (and other feedback)

Written supervisor feedback included any comments on the participants' writing, such as tracked changes, summative comments at the end of documents, emailed or handwritten comments, circles, and underlines. This data informed the sub-questions: *What sources of influence are most crucial to students' changing understandings of research and doctoral writing over time?* and *How do temporal-relational contexts affect how doctoral students make decisions in creating their research proposals?* Written feedback also provided reference points from which to draw possible connections between specific feedback, students' interpretations, and textual changes in writing.

Student notes

Student notes included any relevant notes the participants created during their supervisory sessions, courses, or Transfer vivas, and represented their perceptions and interpretations of significant feedback and discussions relevant to their research. Electronic notes were directly sent to my university email as PDFs or Word Docs, and handwritten notes were photographed either by me or by the participants and then emailed. This data informed the sub-questions: *What sources of influence are most crucial to students' changing understandings of research and doctoral writing over time?* and *How temporal-relational contexts affect how doctoral students make decisions in creating their research proposals?*

Journey plots

Participants were asked to complete journey plots at the beginning of each proposal process interview, and then elaborate on them in order to get insight into the various factors affecting their doctoral progress. Used in other research on early career researcher engagement and experience (Turner 2015; Skakni & McAlpine, 2017), journey plots ask participants to create visual representations of their experiences over time in relationship to the positive and negative emotions associated with important events. Presented on a graph with time on the horizontal axis and emotional intensity on the vertical axis, participants were asked to plot significant events (useful readings, positive or negative feedback, presentations, personal issues) in relation to their emotional effect. The purpose of the journey plots was to further contextualize the writing and research experience and for students to explain how their experiences contributed to or detracted from their perceptions of their research progress and perceptions of research and writing, as well as

stimulate discussion about what they had accomplished in the periods between interviews. Please see Appendix F for the journey plot template.

Sentence-completion exercises

The sentence-completion exercise consisted of five brief fill-in-the-blank items that participants were initially asked to fill out following each supervision. (See Appendix G). These exercises were designed to be short and capture the students' impressions of supervisor feedback and their research progress directly after meeting with supervisors in order to track the evolution of their thinking over time. In combination with the interviews, the journey plots and sentence-completion exercises were intended to facilitate discussion about the multifaceted aspects of scholarly engagement, the supervisor's relationship to those activities, and how the participant developed his/her research proposal. However, after several months of using the sentence completions, I decided to discontinue them for all but the one participant (Charlie) whose supervisions I did not record. This decision was made because the supervision recordings were sufficient to capture what was discussed, and interviews brought out what participants viewed as most significant. Further, participants often did not complete the exercises or did them only partially, decreasing their usefulness. Thus, except in Charlie's case where lack of supervision recordings made the sentence-completions useful in capturing initial reactions to supervisory discussions, the sentence-completions do not appear in the analysis.

Transfer examiner reports

Following the Transfer viva, participants sent me copies of their official examiner reports, which were used as supplemental data to further understand what made the proposals successful or not, linking to the overarching research question.

4.8 Designing the interviews

Semi-structured interviews are framed by key topics and questions that guide the focus of the interview, while also allowing the researcher freedom to pursue emerging lines of discussion in reaction to participant responses (Walliman, 2006). Semi-structured interviews provided a framework for exploring the key issues articulated in the research questions, while also allowing me the flexibility to pursue each participant's particular experiences. In this research, three types of interviews took place: an initial background

interview, interviews on the proposal process, and a post-Transfer interview. The interview questions were informed by the literature on doctoral writing (Brinkmann, 2013) and were constructed using open-ended questions that invited participants to elaborate on their responses and expound on their thinking. For the interview protocols, please see Appendix H.

The background interview

The background interviews focused on participants' writing and research experiences, their research topics and goals, and their plans for the doctoral program in order to provide a context for each case. These interviews were scheduled soon after participants joined the study, in mid-October to early November 2018. These interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

The proposal process interviews

Proposal process interviews took place roughly every two months: December 2018, and February, April, June, August, October, and December 2019, depending on when each participant successfully completed Transfer. As previously mentioned, these interviews began with the journey plot exercise and participants' explanations of their graphs, which served the dual purpose of easing participants into each interview while also updating me on their activities between interviews. In some cases, the journey plot exercises also triggered the participants' memories of events they might not have otherwise discussed.

Following the journey plot, the second portion of the interviews drew on the written materials the participants had sent in advance (drafts of the proposal, supervisory comments, and if applicable, feedback from additional sources), and addressed the kinds of feedback received, what comments were most and least helpful and why, future plans for revision, and next steps in the research process. If participants did receive feedback from writing groups, conferences, or courses, proposal process interviews also inquired as to whether this feedback was useful and if so, how it had affected their thinking about their research. Proposal process interviews thus asked students to reflect on their textual revisions, the reasoning underlying revisions, and how feedback and the writing process had impacted their research projects. In short, the interviews aimed to provide insight into: 1) how the students perceived feedback, 2) the factors affecting their progress, 3) how they revised their proposals, and 4) what other strategies they used to advance their proposals. The interviews thereby addressed both sub-questions and the overarching

research question. However, it is important to acknowledge that the interview questions evolved in response to how the research progressed (Rapley, 2004). Over time, the proposal process interview protocols were revised based on what emerged in the data, and while certain questions remained constant across interviews, the interviews also became more driven by each participant's individual experiences and the issues that appeared in the supervision recordings.

In conducting the proposal process interviews, I became accustomed to each participant's personality and interviewing style. Some participants were more verbal than others, providing lengthy answers to each question, while others required more prompting and probing. In time, I developed relationships with each participant, and as we built rapport, they became more open. For instance, Charlie, who had initially been reserved and somewhat uncomfortable in the presence of the recording device, began to share more of his experiences and personal opinions as time progressed.

The post-Transfer interview

The last interview, following successful Transfer of Status, focused on 1) any follow-up questions from previous interviews; 2) the participants' experience of Transfer; 3) their overall reflections on the first year of study, the proposal creation process, and what they may have learned; and 4) reflections on their participation in this study. For participants who needed to re-sit their Transfer vivas, I conducted interviews following their first Transfer attempt focusing on viva experience and plans for revision, and then did another round of interviews following successful Transfer.

What was shortsighted on my part was that I originally had assumed that all participants would pass with no or minor corrections on the first attempt, an assumption likely based on my own Transfer experience and the fact that I had heard rumors that nearly everyone easily passed Transfer—which I have since learned is untrue. As a result, when Natalie and then Shankar and Ben were given the result of referral and asked to resubmit, I initially did not have an interview protocol designed to examine an unsuccessful Transfer. I decided to focus these interviews on the participants' perceptions of the viva, what the examiners had been dissatisfied with, and in what ways the participants had felt prepared or unprepared for the viva. I was also mindful that receiving a referral was likely distressing for the participants in that it both pushed back their plans for fieldwork and also may have resulted in feelings of shame or disappointment. I thus tried to handle such interviews tactfully and allow participants the space to tell me only as

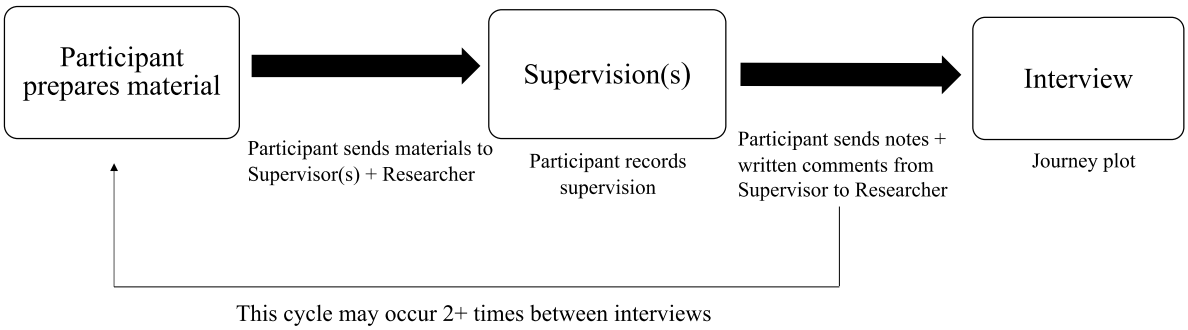
much as they wished to share. For example, below is an excerpt from an interview with Shankar following his first Transfer viva experience:

> **Kelsey:** Okay. So um, could you sort of tell me first…what was the exact outcome of the viva?
>
> **Shankar:** The exact outcome of the viva was they want some, they want some writing changes.
>
> **Kelsey:** Mhm
>
> **Shankar:** But they said that it would be better if I did a pilot as well as the writing changes.
>
> **Kelsey:** Mkay
>
> **Shankar:** And so they've asked me to do a pilot until, from August until October. And then resubmit in December.
>
> **Kelsey:** In December. Okay. So um, did your supervisors attend the viva?
>
> **Shankar:** Mhm
>
> **Kelsey:** Did you talk to them at all, right after?
>
> **Shankar:** Yeah, yeah I did.
>
> **Kelsey:** And what, what were their impressions?
>
> **Shankar:** Their impressions were, that it would be useful for me to, do the pilot. And it would solve a lot of methodological issues. Yeah.
>
> **Kelsey:** Do you think, were they surprised, do you think, at the outcome?
>
> **Shankar:** Mm…they didn't seem to show any surprise.
>
> **Kelsey:** Mm. Um, so how did you feel about the viva, just sort of generally?
>
> **Shankar:** Um. I thought it was great. It was um, I think that [the examiners] both created a supporting, not accusatory…environment. Um, I thought the questions were a bit vague. Um, and almost seemed to have answers that they expected.
>
> […]
>
> **Kelsey:** Uh, so could you tell me, sort of specifically what the main issues were that came up in the viva?
>
> **Shankar:** In how much detail would you like to know?
>
> **Kelsey:** As much as, as much as you'd like to give me, I guess.

As shown above, the tone of the post-Transfer interviews was informal, as I wanted the participants to feel comfortable sharing their experiences with me. Further, I had already been working with each participant for eight to nine months, and so we had established a relationship. Consequently, the participants spoke openly with me and shared as much as they deemed appropriate. Please see Figure 5 below for the data collection process for proposal process interviews.

Figure 5

Process of Data Collection for Proposal Process Interviews



4.9 Analysis: Overview

Given the research focus on individual experience, the data were analyzed primarily within cases. Specifically, the interview and supervision transcripts for each participant were separately analyzed via a combination of a priori (deductive) and emergent (inductive) coding (Creswell, 2013). The drafts of the paper, student notes, and supervisor comments were also coded for types of feedback received and subsequent revisions to the text, while the remaining data—journey plots, department regulations, and examiner reports—provided additional contextual information for each case. These various analyses were then situated within an overall narrative approach that captures a comprehensive portrait of the participants' experiences over time (Elliot, 2015; McAlpine, 2016; Riessman, 2008), tying together students' understandings of genre expectations for the proposal, perceptions of feedback, revisions, and overall perceptions of creating and negotiating the research proposal. Each case is presented in Chapters 5-9 as a narrative that incorporates findings from the a priori and emergent coding and excerpts from drafts of the proposal. Finally, once within-case analysis was complete, I

conducted a cross-case analysis in order to identify any commonalities in experience. Below, the different forms of analysis are discussed in greater detail. Please see Table 3 for an overview of each type of data, its purpose, how it was analyzed, and which research question it addresses.

Table 3

Purpose of Data in Relation to Research Questions

Data Source	Definition	Purpose	Analysis*	Research Question
Department Transfer Regulations	Official university regulations for Transfer of Status	To provide institutional context and requirements for Transfer	N/A	N/A—provides context
Demographic Information Form	A 3-item questionnaire designed to obtain basic demographic information	To obtain basic demographic information including age, gender, nationality, and first language and add contextual/background information for the case	N/A	N/A—provides context
Drafts	Any writing related to the research proposal/Transfer paper	To capture textual evidence of participants' writing and research thinking as it evolves over time	A priori coding	Overarching RQ
Written Feedback	Written feedback from any source (supervisors, peers, etc.)	To capture actual written feedback	Emergent coding + a priori coding	Sub questions 1 & 2
Student Notes	Notes student took during or after supervisions (or other relevant notes identified by participants)	To capture students' interpretations of supervisor feedback and relevant points brought up during supervisions, or in other contexts identified as important by participants	A priori coding	Sub questions 1 & 2
Supervision Recordings	Recordings of students' supervisory meetings	To capture the conversations between supervisors and participants, which may include oral feedback	Emergent coding + a priori coding	Sub questions 1 & 2

Journey Plots	Visual graphic exercise identifying emotionally significant events	To provide contextual information on new and ongoing experiences, and update the researcher on participants' activities between interviews	N/A	N/A—provides context
Sentence Completion Exercises (Charlie)	5-item fill-in-the blank statements regarding supervisions	To capture participants' initial responses to supervisions and feedback	Emergent coding + a priori coding	Sub question 1
Semi-structured Interviews	Flexible interviews guided by an interview protocol	To capture participants' perspectives and interpretations of their evolving research and writing around the proposal	Emergent coding + a priori coding	Overarching RQ
Biographical	First interview that focused on writing, research, and feedback history, goals for the PhD, and nature of the PhD research topic	To provide background contextual information relevant to the study	Emergent coding + a priori coding	Overarching RQ
Proposal Process	Interviews with participants focused on ongoing research, writing, and other related activities	To understand participants' ongoing activities in relation to their research and proposal, the kinds of feedback received and how it was perceived, revisions made to the drafts and why	Emergent coding + a priori coding	Sub questions 1 & 2
Post-Transfer	Final interview following successful Transfer, focused on participant's experience of the Transfer viva, reflections on first year of PhD and participation in the research.	To understand participants' perceptions of Transfer, overall reflections on the first year of the PhD and their own development; whether participation in this research has impacted their own research/writing experiences	Emergent coding + a priori coding	Overarching RQ
Examiner Reports	Electronic copy of the student's official examiner report from the Transfer of Status viva	To capture examiners' actual feedback and assessment of the proposal and viva/ determine what features examiners viewed as needed for a successful Transfer	A priori coding	Overarching RQ

*Generally, all data also contributes to narrative analyses of participant cases.

4.9.1 Data management and analytical software

All interviews and supervision recordings were manually transcribed into Excel spreadsheets. Following each interview or supervision, I downloaded the recording onto my password-protected laptop and deleted the file from my recorder. I transcribed recordings as they became available and took care to anonymize as I transcribed by redacting participant, supervisor, or other names and replacing them with first initials or pseudonyms. I re-listened to recordings after completing each transcript, inserting appropriate pauses, laughter, or indiscernible speech by making a note in brackets. I tried to transcribe the recordings as accurately as possible, including stammers, use of slang, and noting any interruptions in order to capture the atmosphere of each interview. Copies of all data were saved onto the university Sharepoint site in a protected folder accessible only by myself and my supervisors, as well as on my password-protected laptop.

Data was organized and coded with the assistance of MaxQDA12. As I completed transcripts or received drafts and other data from participants, I uploaded files into MaxQDA, creating a separate folder for each participant. All files were organized by date, with the most recent material on top, allowing for an accessible overview of the data collected and the participants' progress over time. Due to the large volume of data collected over the course of over one year, a management system like MaxQDA was essential for organization. However, when I began coding I created new MaxQDA files, one for each participant, and re-uploaded each participant's data accordingly. I decided to code the participants in separate MaxQDA files because variation in the emergent and sometimes a priori codes meant it was simpler to have separate files rather than multiple sets of codes and data all within one file. The coding process was done in multiple formats, including handwritten notes and annotations, Microsoft Word, and finally, via MaxQDA version 12 software.

4.9.2 Within-case analysis

The purpose of within-case analysis is to synthesize large volumes of data and become "intimately familiar" with each case (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 17). Within-case analysis can be approached in various ways, but typically involves detailed narrative description (Eisenhardt, 2002). Given the aims of this research and its theoretical underpinnings, I chose to use a combination of a priori and emergent coding situated within a narrative approach in order to identify features of the proposal genre and the Transfer system, track

relationships between feedback and revisions over time, and tease out patterns in how each student navigated their experiences in terms of decision-making and strategies for learning. I thus analyzed the data for each case individually, applying first four sets of a priori codes and then conducting emergent coding for additional themes. The coding process is discussed below.

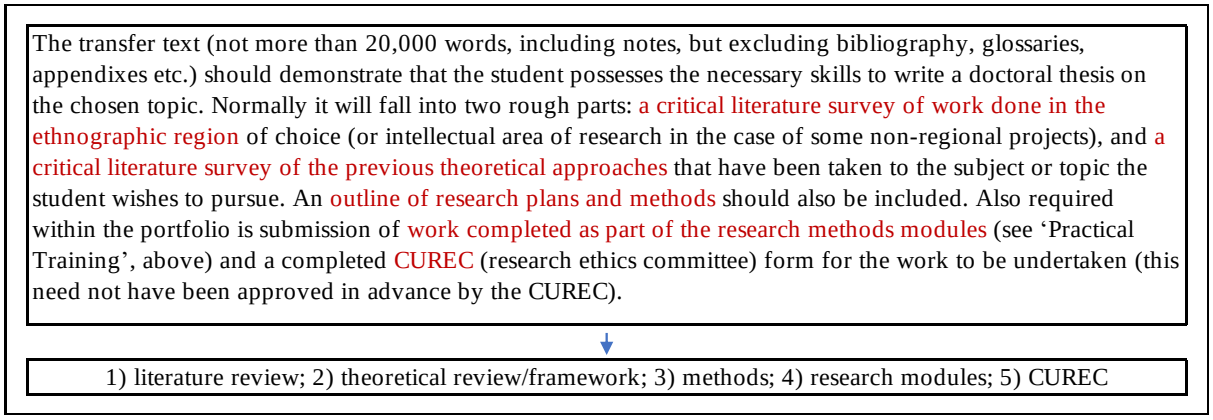
4.9.3 A priori coding

A priori coding, also known as deductive coding, is an approach where the researcher begins with a pre-determined code system that is applied to the data (Saldana, 2013). A priori codes are constructed based on the theoretical framework and/or literature informing a study, providing concrete foci that guide the analysis of data (Creswell, 2013; Elliott, 2018). However, Creswell (2013) recommended allowing for flexibility when using a priori coding so as not to overlook other relevant emerging themes. Here, a priori coding is thus used alongside emergent coding.

The a priori codes were developed using the following sources: 1) relevant department graduate handbooks, which set out the requirements and expectations for Transfer documents, 2) divisional guidelines on criteria for a successful Transfer, 3) the literature on features of the doctoral thesis genre, and 4) Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) chordal triad conceptualization of agency. This resulted in a total of four sets of a priori codes. The first set, based on the relevant department handbook, provided codes that identified the key components of a Transfer document. See Figure 6.

Figure 6

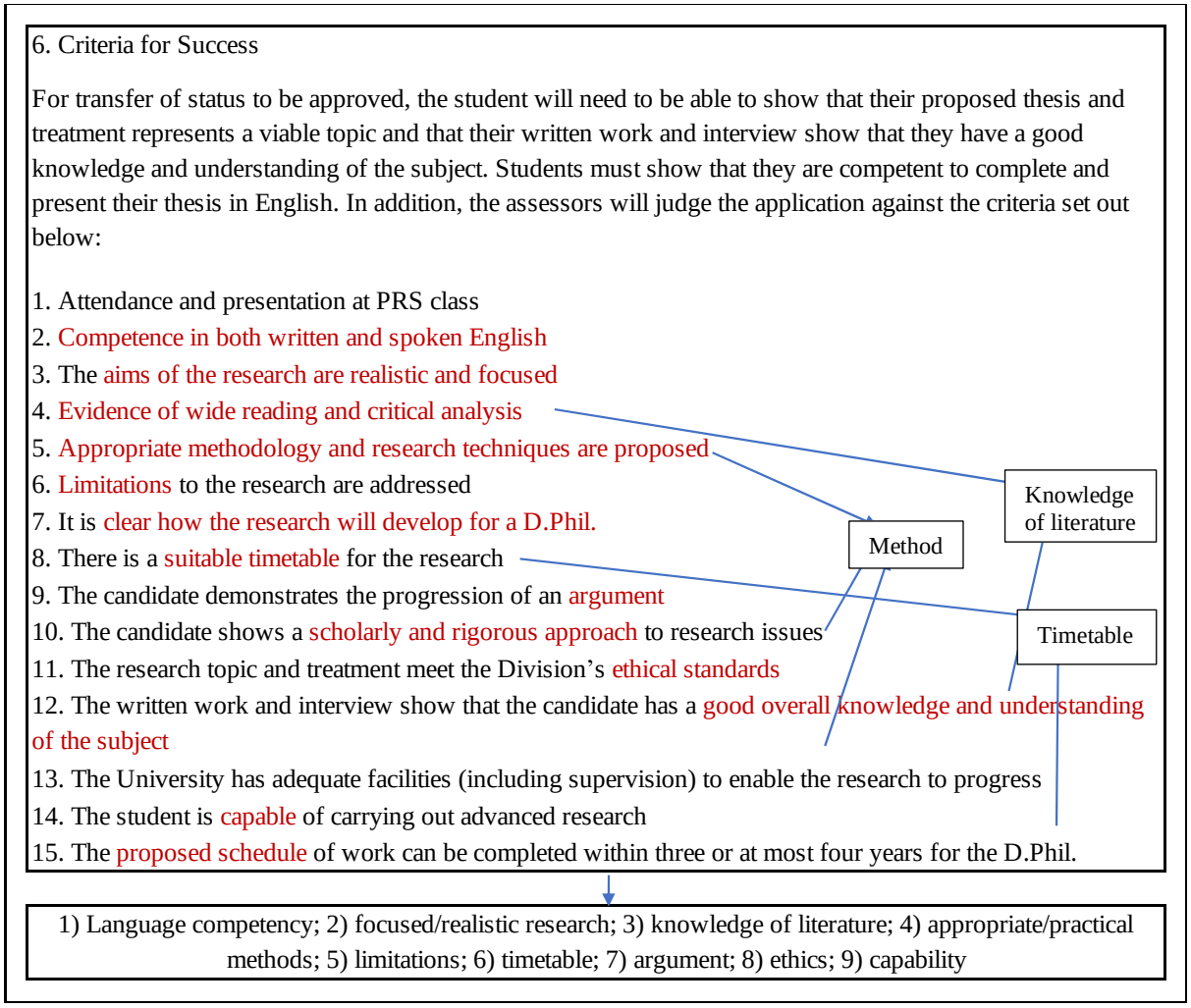
Example: Anthropology Graduate Handbook Transfer Requirements



The second set of a priori codes was developed using the Divisional Graduate Handbook, which also identified "criteria for success." These criteria provided guidelines for the content of the Transfer paper and what the student is expected to demonstrate. See Figure 7 below.

Figure 7

Social Sciences Criteria for Success



The third set of a priori codes was based in the literature on features of the doctoral thesis genre—a related document and the ultimate outcome of the proposal. The purpose was to generate a priori codes that would identify common aspects of a PhD thesis in terms of structure, format, language, and content, which in some cases overlapped with the structural codes. Research out of applied linguistics, specifically that of John Swales, provided the starting point for these a priori codes. I began by examining a chapter in Swales (2004) in which he synthesized his own research and that of others—

notably by Bunton (1998) and Parry (1998)—on the features of the PhD thesis. I then generated a list of a priori codes focusing on the rhetorical and linguistic features of the thesis/proposal. See Table 4 for the codes.

Table 4

A Priori Codes: Rhetorical Features

Code	Definition
Defining terms	Explicitly defining terminology
Establishing a niche/gap	Setting and stating the "gap" in literature the research will address
Setting research parameters	Setting the focus of the research (context, etc.)
Outlining structure of document	Explicit outlining of structure of document chapter by chapter
Tacit indication of disciplinary knowledge	References to commonly known concepts, people, etc. that indicate the writer is familiar with the relevant disciplinary literature
Hedging	Use of mitigating words, syntax to make statements less direct
Signposting	Using words, phrases to guide reader through the document
Citations/Referencing	Use of appropriate referencing style and use of references as expected in disciplinary context
Technical language	Use of terminology/language common to disciplinary community

These first three sets of a priori were thus based in rhetorical genre theory. Because an underlying premise of this project is that a successful proposal must meet the requirements for the genre that are expected within the student's disciplinary and institutional communities, part of addressing the overall research question, *How do first-year doctoral students in the social sciences shape and negotiate a successful research proposal over time?* requires an examination of students' understanding and application of the features of the genre, including content, function, and rhetorical structure. The a priori codes further serve a structural purpose, linking places in the drafts, notes, written feedback, supervisory recordings and interview transcripts that addressed common components of the proposal. This enabled me to relate, for example, supervisory discussions on research questions, to the students' notes about research questions, to revisions of the research questions in a draft, to the student's explanations of why he or she altered the research questions. This type of coding facilitated this study's interest in

development over time and how the student makes decisions in creating the proposal by showing relationships between sources of feedback, the student's thinking, and the resulting textual changes.

The fourth set of a priori codes, rooted in Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conceptualization of agency, was intended to guide the identification of participants' decision-making as they created their Transfer documents. Because the chordal triad framework takes a temporal approach to agency, the following codes were used, based on the three "tones" of agency outlined by Emirbayer and Mische: 1) iteration 2) practical evaluation; and 3) projectivity. The purpose of the agency codes was to examine the extent to which participant choices were influenced by prior experience, future goals, and the evolving situational context in which they were writing their proposals. In analyzing for agency, I focused on instances where the participant explained specific incidents of decision-making—for instance, the rationale behind textual revisions, acceptance or rejection of a piece of feedback, choices to approach certain people for additional feedback, or the adoption of a particular writing style. Due to focus of this project, my analysis of agency extended to any choices related to the process of crafting the research proposal—including decisions to attend conferences or seminars that further the participant's overall goal for the PhD (by which the research proposal is affected). Only actions that appeared unrelated to this process, such as enrolling in language courses or pursuing internships for personal enjoyment, with no apparent link to the research proposal were excluded from the analysis.

While Emirbayer and Mische's chordal triad framework encompassed the majority of agentive decision-making that appeared in the data, there were several instances in which participants chose *not* to act. Though Emirbayer and Mische's framework focuses on agency as expressed through action, I characterized the decision not to act an as expression of agency in itself as students showed clear reasoning behind their choices. I therefore added two additional sub-codes to the iteration and practical evaluation elements of agency: 1) rejection of iteration and 2) inability to move forward. Please see Table 5 below for definitions and examples of all agency codes.

Table 5

A Priori Codes Based on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) Framework

Code	Definition	Example
ITERATION	"selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action"	Kelsey: it seems like a lot of the work you do is very independent…I mean…when you're writing and revising you make a lot of these notes and things. Ben: Yeah…No, literally… I think it's something that… I started doing when I was working…So like…sometimes you're doing something and then you see the connection, with the following section and [you] write it down. [You] think about things [as you] write and then…try to…put it in the right section.
• REJECTION OF ITERATION	The recognition that one must act differently than in the past; the decision not to act in accordance with past patterns of behavior	Kelsey: do you find, you have any challenges writing within the social sciences as a discipline, or for sociology? Charlie: Yes… particularly in the theory things…when I did my [Master's], my department was very empirical. Like they don't care [about] theory….I write just literature review, what is known in the problem. What is not known. That's it, that's what I need to write in my literature…But in here, different people [say] different things, especially…other people in our department, they have emphasis on theory…So, I don't know, and also I've not read any, sociological theory before.
PRACTICAL EVALUATION	"the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action"	Kelsey: So, I know you're taking some quant classes now, right? Ben: I took them…the previous term…[N]ot now, 'cause I thought that…I needed to work on the broader research design, understand what I needed to do. 'Cause last term was useful, but … my idea of…really learning [is] not just sitting in class…So I thought…since by the end of the term it was starting to be a little bit, arcane, I said, there is no point really, in going again, [to] nominal training, …So I said let's focus more on the research design let's, find out whether you're actually going to work in quant, and then you'll have six months… of Trinity term, and then summer, to actually delve … into statistics… And I think it works way better for me because I really need to do all the stats. 'Cause…I need to… face some of the high school trauma that I had in math. And I think it would be just better to do it by myself and…at my own pace.

• INABILITY TO MOVE FORWARD	The realization, after evaluating the present circumstances, that one lacks the knowledge or experience to make a decision	Kelsey: You talked about this confusion surrounding the theory, that you want to use, and that's kind of started your, sort of decline. Charlie: Yeah. Kelsey: Can you talk a little more about that? Charlie: Yeah, so I've read my supervisor's book. And in his book, he basically didn't use one theory. Instead, he put four different concepts related to how cybercriminals work together. [So] I'm thinking, if I use this same strategy, basically I'm just copying his book….So I want to use one theory, to do with this situation. And I'm thinking about…the signaling theory. But I had a short chat with my supervisor about the theory and he was like, generally if you're gonna use one theory, you use the whole theory, just one theory. You don't use the other concepts. And then I realized that if I use signaling theory there are some thing[s] that I cannot explain. So I don't know how to deal with that situation and then my supervisor was like, we need to talk about it later, in the next meeting, but the next meeting has not come. Kelsey: Right. Charlie: So it's this Friday. So in between I'm struggle a lot. I'm struggling a lot. Like, I don't know what to do…I feel like I can't just do nothing, waiting for [the meeting]. Kelsey: Yeah Charlie: The more I read the more I get confused…So that's the main problem.
PROJECTIVITY	"the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action"	Kelsey: So when you look at feedback then, you think about all of these things. Where the person's coming from…and what assumptions they're making. And then, you decide to use it or not based on how it's— Ben: Based on my feelings, based on [the fact] that I'm the single author and I have in the end…if it gets out then I have to defend it. Not the people [providing feedback].

Once I had determined the a priori codes based on the literature, I applied them throughout the data sets for each participant individually, noting which features appeared, and adding additional codes if I came across a feature that was not already included. Please see Appendix I for the definitions of all previously discussed a priori codes. I began first with the department and divisional codes for Transfer requirements and elements of success, and then applied the codes for rhetorical features of the proposal, followed by the agency codes based on Emibayer and Mische (1998). I was especially interested in whether there were any discrepancies between what the supervisors emphasized as needed for the proposal, and what students identified as important when explaining their revisions. Differences in how participants and supervisors understood the features of the proposal genre were also of interest. This relationship between supervisor and student understanding was a focus of the analysis because, as pointed out in Chapter 3, research has long suggested that supervisors and supervisor feedback are the central mode of learning for doctoral students, especially in the first part of the PhD research. In order to keep track of what features emerged as important and how they were talked about by students and supervisors, I exported the data excerpts for the a priori codes for supervisors and students separately into Excel spreadsheets. One Excel sheet contained the coding for supervisions and written supervisor feedback, while the second sheet contained coding for interviews and student notes. I then looked at the frequencies at which different features of the genre appeared for each group and read through the excerpts to see whether there was variation in how these features were explained and whether there were changes in explanation over time, particularly on the part of the student. The results of this analysis appear as part of the larger participant within-case narratives and speak to the participants' changing understandings of doctoral writing and research.

4.9.4 Emergent coding

Following the analysis of the data using the a priori codes discussed above, I conducted emergent coding on each case in order to identify any additional themes that may have emerged from the interviews, supervisions, and written feedback. Emergent coding, also called open coding, is a common form of qualitative analysis in which the researcher creates codes to categorize information and identify themes in the data (Creswell, 2013). Emergent coding is data-driven and inductive, and was used to analyze the interview transcripts and supervisory session recordings. The coding was guided by the overall

research question and more specifically, the sub-questions, as the interview and supervision transcripts provided the heart of the data, intended to detect trends in student agency, thinking, and ways of responding to feedback. I followed the approach to coding described by Creswell (2013) in which data analysis is viewed as a "spiral" rather than as a linear process (p. 182), resulting in a rich narrative. This process includes organizing the data, reading through the data multiple times and taking note of key ideas or recurring concepts, classifying and interpreting the data, and finally visually representing findings in a way that shows the relationships amongst the various themes or patterns (Creswell, 2013). Further, the analytical process occurred alongside data collection, providing flexibility within the research design that allowed me to revise interview protocols and follow emerging lines of inquiry unique to each participant. In other words, the analysis evolved over time in relation to the data while engaging in reflective and analytical writing and in an effort to explore emerging themes and construct detailed case studies of participants' experiences (Richards, 2015).

As I conducted interviews, collected documents, and transcribed recordings, I kept notes in a research diary that served as the starting point for the emergent coding process. During interviews, I occasionally noted issues or questions, and following each interview, I wrote a brief reflection containing my impressions of the interview's content, how I felt about the interview, and things that surprised me. These reflections were also an exercise in reflexivity where I considered my interactions with the participants and how the framings of questions or my responses to their comments might have shaped the data. During transcription, I also took handwritten notes in the research diary that identified follow-up questions, connections to theory, or similarities and differences amongst participants. At several points during data collection, I composed case summaries for each participant to synthesize my perceptions of their stories and explore preliminary themes. These case summaries began at 800 to 1000 words each in February 2019, and then grew to roughly 3000 words as they were revised in April 2019 and again in June and July 2019.

When I began to near the end of data collection in May 2019—when several participants started to submit for Transfer—I started to code the data more formally. After organizing the data, which I had done on an ongoing basis via MaxQDA as previously described, I started within-case coding beginning with Charlie, who was the first to submit his Transfer paper and the first to pass the viva. I began by reading through all interview reflections and transcript notes in my research diary as well as the data in his

MaxQDA file, making a list of interesting points and possible themes in a Word document. At this point, I took note of everything of interest because I did not want to place limits on the analysis. After the initial reading, I went back through the data, specifically focusing on the interview and supervision transcripts, and paying special attention to the research sub-questions. I highlighted relevant codes from the first iteration and noted any additional ones that emerged from the second reading.

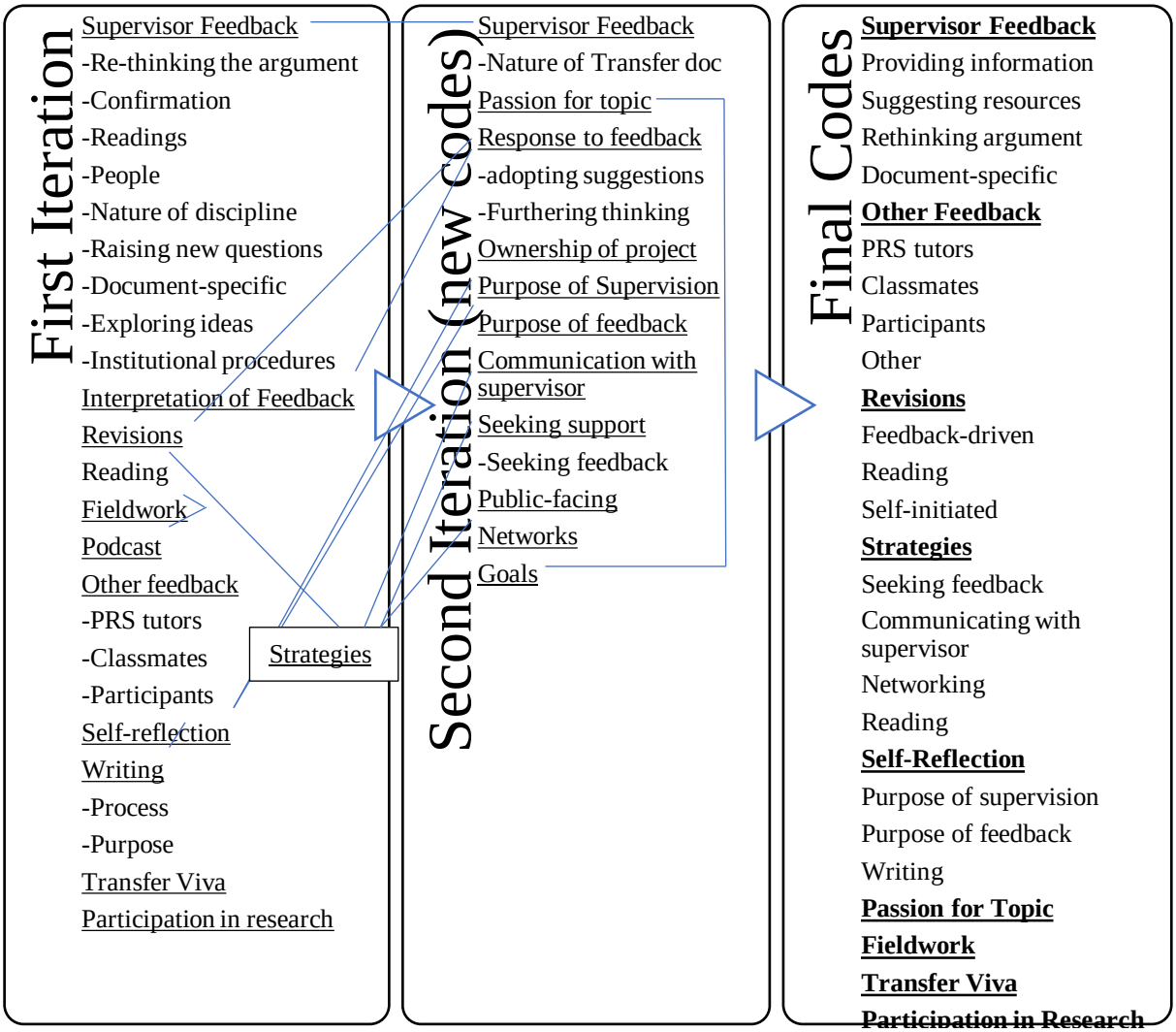
In the next part of the analysis, I examined the list of preliminary codes I had generated, to see whether any could be subsumed within another. I grouped codes based on which research questions they might address, with a number of codes applying to more than one question. I then drafted possible definitions for each code in order to create a codebook, and went back to the data set and copied and pasted quotes from the transcripts that fit with the codes and definitions I had generated in order to see whether the definitions were capturing the type of information I had intended, making adjustments to the definitions as needed. Please see Figure 8 for an example with Natalie as the case. Finally, I applied the coding system to the interview and supervision transcripts and written feedback in MaxQDA. The minimum segment coded was one sentence, and a single segment could have multiple codes.

This process was repeated and refined for each participant case between June and August 2019. Although I began the coding analysis for several participants (Ben, Ethan, Shankar) before I completed data collection, as new transcripts were added to the corpus of data, I continued to take notes and revisit the existing codes to see whether anything new had emerged and whether the definitions remained appropriate. Please see Appendix J for the codes and definitions for each participant. Over time, I noticed that a number of codes were recurrent across participants, such as codes and sub-codes for supervisor feedback and revisions, which was unsurprising given the interview focus on feedback and writing.

After applying all five sets of codes to the data set, I used the coded segments function to identify the frequency of certain codes, such as the number of supervisor comments on different sections of the research proposal, in order to discern patterns in what aspects of the proposal were focused upon by supervisors. I also used the code relations browser in MaxQDA to see the co-occurrence of codes and therefore whether any possible relationships between codes had emerged.

Figure 8

Emergent Coding Natalie



4.9.5 Analyzing the documents

Because the focus of this research is on how students create and negotiate their research proposals over time, the documents were generally used to complement the interviews and supervisory discussions by providing evidence of written feedback, interpretation of feedback as reflected in student notes, and evolution of the proposal document. As described earlier, documents, notes, written and oral feedback were linked through structural coding in order to trace relationships between feedback and revisions, supplemented by participants' explanations. That said, because I did not employ discourse-based interviews to focus on revisions on a micro-level it is difficult to say

precisely what influenced textual changes and what participants intended in making each revision. Instead, the documents reflect different points in each participant's development, and appear in the analysis and results only when referred to specifically in either the interviews or supervisions. Taking a wider view of the documents as evidence of changes in thinking and learning also aligns with the aim of this research which is not concerned with the minute textual changes in each document but with development over time.

4.9.6 Narrative analysis

The patterns that emerged through the a priori and emergent coding, as well as relevant excerpts from the documents, were all situated within a narrative analysis that allowed each case to be presented as a linear whole rich with 'thick description.' Narrative analysis or narrative inquiry, is based in a tradition of qualitative research with roots in the life history work done in sociology and anthropology (Riessman, 2008). As its name suggests, narrative analysis emphasizes storytelling—viewing the data from a holistic perspective that understands the studied events in relation to time and social setting: "Particular histories of individuals are preserved, resulting in an accumulation of detail that is assembled into a 'fuller' picture of the individual or group" (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). By approaching the data in a narrative way, the researcher is able to not only emphasize the voices of the participants, but also present a comprehensive portrait of experience located in historical and social contexts, making a narrative approach appropriate for case studies and the goals of this research. Here, the interview transcripts, journey plots, sentence-completion exercises, and data stemming from textual changes in drafts were narratively analyzed to present students' experiences of creating their research proposals over time. The narrative was supported by the results of the coding and specific examples from the transcripts and documents.

There are several strands of narrative analysis, including thematic narrative analysis, which focuses on the content of the story, and structural narrative analysis, which pays special attention to the text itself—what events are emphasized, and how they are expressed (Riessman, 2008). In this way, the narrative, in both form and content, not only provides information but also communicates the speaker's identity and how the individual experiences events. However, the specific branch of narrative analysis I employed is the naturalist stance, which focuses on generating "rich descriptions of the content of people's stories about significant issues" (McAlpine, 2016). Because this

thesis is concerned with what participants say rather than how they say it, in constructing the narratives, I formatted participant quotes by deleting stutters, pauses, and fixing grammar for clarity. By analyzing the data using an overall narrative approach in which to situate the other types of analysis, I aimed to produce in-depth individual cases of writing and research development over the course of the first year of doctoral study, focusing on the individual experiences and perceptions of each participant.

4.9.7 Cross-case analysis

As a final step in the analysis I searched for cross-case patterns to identify any common themes across participant experiences. Eisenhardt (2002) suggested three tactics for cross-case analysis in order to minimize the danger of jumping to conclusions based on personal biases or insufficient information. One of these tactics is to compare cases in pairs or groups of three and note similarities and differences between cases. The idea here is that purposeful examination of cases "can break simplistic frames" by looking for differences in apparently similar cases and vice versa (Eisenhardt, 2002, p.18). Using this approach, I began by re-reading all five within-case summaries listing the similarities and differences between cases, paying particular attention to the codes developed in the within-case analysis. I also referred to the various notes I had generated in my own supervisions, in which we had discussed emerging trends in participant experience and approaches to creating the proposal. Out of this process four key themes were identified: approach to the PhD, compliance with and resistance to supervisor feedback, the role of the supervisor in supporting learning of the proposal genre, and the Transfer viva as significant event. The first two themes gave rise to additional codes, the definitions of which I discussed with my supervisors. I then went back and recoded all five cases for these additional cross-case codes and finally, revised each within-case summary using the cross-case themes to structure each chapter in order to highlight these ideas and foreshadow the comparisons I planned to make in the cross-case chapter. See Table 6 below for the additional cross-case codes and definitions

Table 6

Cross-Case Codes and Definitions

Code	Definition
Approach to the PhD	The participant's beliefs about the purpose/aim of the PhD that influences overall decisions/actions related to the research proposal and research project
Pragmatic/Strategic	An orientation towards the feasibility/practicality of the research in relation to the PhD in terms of time to completion, financial constraints, or whatever will most efficiently facilitate quick and effective success
Idealistic	A romantic/idealistic orientation towards the research; a preoccupation with 'big' ideas, the creation of a very impactful project; often closely tied to deep personal roots/passion
Realistic	Recognition of the need to compromise research goals/vision for the project in order to meet standards/expectations
Compliance	Adopting supervisor (or other) suggestions and feedback
Resistance	Resisting/rejecting supervisor (or other) suggestions and feedback

4.10 Participant feedback

Participant feedback—more commonly known as member checking—has long been touted as a means of ensuring the validity of the data by sending participants copies of their transcripts, case summaries, or drafts of research reports for them to verify (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, in recent years the usefulness of member checking has been called into question, as there is little evidence explaining how member checking enhances the quality of the research, particularly in studies where generating theory or identifying patterns across experience are key outcomes (Thomas, 2017). Yet, in case study research where individual experience and participant perceptions are important, member checking may be useful in seeing to what extent the researcher has captured the participants' experience (see Stake, 1985). Member checking may also be appropriate when anonymity is a concern (Thomas, 2017). As discussed earlier, anonymity is a central ethical issue in this research due to the small size of social science departments at the institution and the fact that each participant's research topic is unique and therefore may be identifiable. Thus, following the end of data collection, I chose to send each participant a case summary for feedback to verify whether my understanding of their

experiences aligned (or not) with theirs, and as a way of facilitating reflexivity in how I approached the data.

Within two weeks after each participant successfully passed the Transfer viva and the final post-Transfer interview was conducted, I sent via email a case summary of about 2,500 - 3,000 words to the participant. The case summaries consisted of a narrative account of the participant's experiences over the year with some preliminary analysis regarding difficulties encountered, strategies used, and evaluation of the research and research proposal. The case summaries drew mainly on the interview data, supervision recordings, and their final Transfer reports. With each case summary, I sent three questions with the following instructions:

> **Instructions:**
> Please read through your draft case summary and respond to the following questions within 2 weeks of receipt. Failure to respond means that I will assume the case is okay as is. There are also a few clarifying questions I've included in the margins, and responses to those would be appreciated if possible.
>
> 1) Is there anything *factually* inaccurate? If so, what?
>
> 2) Is there any information that you are concerned about being included on the basis of *anonymity*?
>
> 3) Is there any aspect of the case that you disagree with or interpret differently? If so, what is your interpretation? *Please note that I will take into consideration your interpretation, but ultimately what is included in the thesis will be my analysis of the data.

In some cases, I also included several follow-up questions intended for clarification purposes. For example: *Is this how you would characterize the aim of the* [research training] *course?* The purpose of these questions was to check the factual accuracy of the data (as perceived by the participant), to address concerns about anonymity, and to ascertain whether the participant's perceptions of their first year and development of the research proposal was radically different from my own working interpretation. Two days before the end of the two-week period, I sent a reminder email, and after receiving feedback, I made changes to each case based on factual corrections (e.g. dates, course titles). As previously mentioned, for the participant who had concerns about anonymity, I discussed the issue with my supervisors and returned to the participant with suggestions in order to reach a compromise. Finally, none of the participants expressed issues with my interpretation of their experiences.

4.11 Situating the researcher

A major challenge throughout this study was that of positionality, maintaining my distance as a researcher while also cultivating relationships—and even emerging friendships—with participants as we worked together over their first year of doctoral study. Given the constructivist epistemology informing the research and qualitative methods, which assumes the researcher is an active participant in shaping all aspects of the research from design through analysis, considering my positionality as researcher is an important part of the discussion on methodology.

This research grew out of a shorter Master's project on the use of supervisor feedback to write and revise the research proposal. Fueled by the literature and data amassed from my Master's, I began my own doctoral study with preconceived ideas about what it means to be a doctoral student and what a PhD entails. This knowledge made me hyperaware of the need for agency in doctoral research and the fact that the PhD rarely goes as expected, particularly during fieldwork. I also anticipated that how students respond to supervisory relationships, supervisor feedback, and writing, is linked to their previous experiences with writing, feedback, and research, making writing a potentially emotionally charged activity. Further, my personal contexts have also shaped how I thought about and approached this study. I am a native English-speaker and harbor a childhood passion for reading and writing. Writing has never been problematic for me, and while I used to harbor emotional reactions to critical feedback, I do not any longer—again, a result of my own research. Finally, as previously discussed, I failed to take into account the fact that some participants might not pass Transfer on their first try, and thus was initially unprepared to interview those who received referrals.

Issues of positionality and insider/outsider status have long been a topic of discussion in social science, particularly in the field of anthropology in relation to ethnography and autoethnography. Here, I occupied the complicated position of being part insider, part outsider (Paechter, 2012). Though I worked on my doctoral thesis in the same department as three of my participants and in the same division as all of them, I was one year ahead, and had completed the research proposal/Transfer phase of my research, which is the phase at focus in this study. I had no existing personal relationships with any of my participants before data collection began. But where things became more complex was my potential shaping of their views and experiences of writing as a course co-convener and as their Student Liaison Coordinator, raising issues about the trustworthiness of the results. It is important that some distance remains between

researcher and researched in order to control for issues of bias, the effect of the researcher on the researched, and conflicts of interest, which can occur when the researcher occupies multiple roles, including that of teacher (Israel & Hay, 2008).

While collecting the data for this project, I was a second and then a third-year doctoral student. At the time, my role as Student Liaison Coordinator in my department (July 2018 – June 2019) entailed organizing weekly workshops for the graduate students in the department, mostly around research skills and career preparation, while holding myself out as a "middle person" between students and faculty, available for questions and advice at any time. Although few students contacted me directly for advice—and those that did were primarily Master's students—the types of workshops I organized and the facilitators I invited, all potentially had some impact on the students who attended. Further, in the second term of my second year of the DPhil (January – March 2019), I co-convened a course called Perspectives and Debates in Qualitative Research, which is a required course for first-year doctoral students in Education—including several of my research participants[9]. While the content of the course was co-constructed, my teaching activities involved leading break-out discussion groups with the doctoral students and a one-hour lecture on writing that highlighted the relationship between research and writing as an iterative process in which the writer positions herself within the relevant literature. That said, none of the participants attended the writing session.

There are a number of benefits attributed to being an insider that operate at different stages of the research process (see e.g., Paechter, 2012). Such benefits include easier access to participants and a likelihood that participants may be more open to sharing things with the researcher, allowing for 'richer' data (Paechter, 2012). In the case of my research, I initially believed access to participants would be easier as I was part of this university and part of one of the departments I recruited from, meaning that I had contacts through which I could reach potential participants. Further, in the case of Education, I was able to make a verbal announcement to the class and was also visible to the students as Student Liaison Coordinator involved in several induction week activities.

[9] I note that despite my involvement in a doctoral course, there was no conflict of interest with my Education participants because 1) doctoral students audited the course rather than having assessed coursework; and 2) I did not have any real institutional or tangible interest in how students performed in the course. Instead, the issue was one of influence on the thinking/development of the participants. In the context of the course, I did not treat the participants any differently from other students, nor did I ask about the course in interviews, leaving it to participants to bring up if they saw fit.

As a result, I initially hoped to have all five participants from Education, which would have provided a case of one department and minimized variation between different departmental cultures and regulations. However, in reality I found it difficult to recruit participants for the research, as only one student (Shankar) responded to my first call for participants.

One possible effect of my insider positionality is that the participants were more open with me due to my student status. However, while insider status means that the researcher has preexisting knowledge of the culture and expectations of the context they are studying based on personal experience, the role of researcher also necessitates a particular distancing so that the researcher can conduct the study without the overt influence of their personal biases/perspectives (Labaree, 2002). Again, I note that despite my additional 'insiderness' with the Department of Education, I only had one participant initially and I did not notice any significant differences in openness or tone of the interviews across departments.

The second issue related to positionality relates to the longitudinal nature of my research. Longitudinal research further complicates the researcher/participant, insider/outsider relationship in the sense that researchers may have a magnified effect on the phenomenon they are studying (Torres & Magolda, 2002), necessitating a balance between personal boundaries and roles. Such relationships, alongside the insiderness, may affect the researcher's sense of responsibility toward the participant. Indeed, as the research unfolded, I developed relationships with the participants, each slightly different in character, several of which may continue beyond this study. In some cases what began as a formal researcher-participant relationship grew more casual as we came to know each other and became more intellectually invested in each other's research, making it at times more difficult to differentiate between the researcher/participant and friend and colleague roles. As a result, I have had to be particularly reflexive in how I analyzed the data to ensure that personal feelings did not color my interpretations. Part of this process involved discussing the data and analytical process with my supervisors to receive their feedback on my approaches and interpretations.

One way to address insider status is through bracketing, which involves identifying the researcher's assumptions and biases and distinguishing between these and the participants' experiences and interpretations (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Strategies for bracketing include memo writing and fieldwork or research diaries in which the researcher reflects upon and examines their interpretations and feelings about the data

and the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2010). In other words, reflexivity, the examination of one's research decisions, underlying thinking, and emotions, is central to bracketing, creating and defining the lines between participant and researcher experience of the phenomena being studied. As mentioned previously, I kept a research diary throughout the data collection, where I wrote entries following each interview and after listening to each supervision recording. These entries usually included a brief summary of the interview/supervision, with my impressions, and in some cases, any concerns or other interactions that I felt may affect the data and the research. I also made additional entries after running into a participant on the street or in the department, after any off-record post-interview informal conversations, and social interactions. Thus, these entries not only represented preliminary analysis but also were an effort to examine my own thinking and practices. As I conducted this research, I also discussed my various concerns and relationships with my supervisors.

Consistent with the perspective that knowledge is co-constructed and the fact that I tried not to impact the participants' development, the emerging relationships and their very participation in the project influenced each participant's experiences of their research and writing over the first year of PhD. This impact came to my attention early on, in January and February of data collection, when several participants noted in interviews that their participation had affected either their writing practices or the way they thought about research and supervision. Further, my relationships with two participants in particular—Shankar and Charlie—were at times difficult to navigate, as I often found myself faced with the dilemma of how to address questions about my research or appeals for advice (see Appendix K for challenges to positionality). I thus asked each participant the following question in their final post-Transfer interviews to understand how participation had affected their development: *Has participating in this study had any impact on your own research or writing experiences this year? And if so, how?* The purpose of this question was to find out whether and to what extent each participant believed his or her interactions with me and the research had influenced the research proposal and their overall sense of development.

Finally, I must acknowledge the role that the research has played in shaping my own understanding of and approach to this thesis. Listening to supervision recordings and hearing how other supervisors explained aspects of the research proposal, including the theoretical framework and literature review, prompted me to reflect on those aspects of my own thesis during my revision process. I also found myself increasing my use of

signposting after finding that all supervisors emphasized the need for clear signposts throughout the research proposal document, and decided to record one of my supervision meetings when several participants commented on how useful it was to have the recordings to re-listen to and reflect upon. Lastly, being immersed in the literature around doctoral education over the past three years has affected the way I came to understand both what was expected of me and what kinds of challenges I should expect, contributing to what I believe has been a relatively smooth and enjoyable doctoral journey.

4.12 Establishing quality

Researchers have acknowledged that qualitative research, given its aims and philosophical roots, cannot be assessed for validity and reliability in the same way as quantitative research. Instead, quality in qualitative research is referred to as trustworthiness or authenticity, and often emphasizes transparency of methods and discussion of positionality and reflexivity (Trainor & Graue, 2014).

In 2002, Lincoln and Guba proposed a set of four criteria that could be used to assess the quality of qualitative case study reports: resonance, rhetoric, empowerment, and applicability. In explicating these criteria, Lincoln and Guba (2002) looked to both the quality of the process of inquiry, and the product—the case study narrative itself. Resonance speaks to the alignment between the philosophical paradigm underlying the case and how the written case is presented; for a constructivist paradigm, therefore, the case report should "reflect the multiple realities constructed by the respondents in the inquiry…take account of the value influences…and the values of the investigator himself" (Lincoln & Guba, 2002, p. 207). Rhetoric focuses on the presentation of the case report, which should be "open and problematic" (p. 207), while empowerment refers to the case's ability to catalyze action and expand awareness. Finally, applicability refers to the "extent to which the case study facilitates the drawing of inferences by the reader that may have applicability in his or her own context or situation … [in which] 'thick description' is needed" (p. 211). In short, Lincoln and Guba (2002) argued that quality case research is that which demonstrates a consistent commitment to its theoretical approach, is well-written and problematizes the issue, expands the reader's consciousness, and uses thick description that provides enough detail so that readers might make connections to other contexts.

Throughout this study I have tried to establish quality by making clear the influences of my theoretical positioning, being reflexive and transparent in my

methodological decision-making, and the potential limitations of the research. I also presented the results in a narrative that is guided by the research questions and analysis, providing a number of examples from the data, including excerpts from interviews, supervisions, and documents, in order to illustrate the arguments constructed within each case summary.

4.13 Limitations

This research has had several limitations. First, as previously mentioned, the data set captures only part of the Transfer system due to practical constraints. There are numerous other drafts in between supervisions and possibly other sources of feedback not captured, such as informal discussions between classmates, influential readings, and interactions at conferences that could have affected how students thought about their research and research proposals. Second, though I made efforts to bracket myself in this research, there were times (with Shankar especially) that I was caught off-guard by questions and shared thoughts about writing and research, partly because of a sense of obligation to respond to him as a colleague. Thus, it is possible that my interpretations of writing and the doctoral proposal could have affected Shankar's interview responses. Finally, in reviewing the interview transcripts, because most interviews ended up being guided by what emerged in conversation, there were times when I could have phrased questions/comments in a more objective way. For instance, I often tried to clarify what participants were saying by summarizing their responses, and it is possible that in some cases the language I used may have revealed my interpretations, which in turn influenced their responses. That said, the range of data I collected, including supervisory recordings and Transfer reports, alongside participant feedback, served to triangulate my findings and therefore reduce the risk of bias in my interpretation.

Further, while the focus of the research is on individual development over time as a way of examining how first-year doctoral students navigate the proposal genre, in the cross-case analysis I argue for emerging patterns in how doctoral students approach the shaping and negotiating of the research proposal in relation to the genre system, supervisor feedback, and other factors. Thus, another limitation is the fact that such patterns are based on the experiences of five participants from three disciplines, and therefore the sample is not reflective of the larger population of doctoral students in the social sciences.

4.14 Conclusion

This chapter has described the research design and the reasoning behind my methodological decisions. As an instrumental multiple case study, underpinned by a primarily constructivist epistemology that aligns with the rhetorical genre theory framing of the research proposal and Transfer system, a variety of qualitative data sources were analyzed through a combination of a priori and emergent coding and narrative analysis in order to provide richly detailed portraits of participant experience. This chapter has also acknowledged my positionality as researcher, doctoral student, teacher, and Student Liaison Coordinator, and how these various roles complicated the research process.

In the next five chapters (Chapters 5-9), I present the findings in the form of case narratives that demonstrate each participant's development in relation to the research questions. This is followed in Chapter 10 with a cross-case comparison of similarities and differences between the first-year PhD experiences of creating and negotiating their research proposals within the Transfer system.

Chapter 5. Ben

(Male, Late 20s, European)

> "There is a point that you reach, [where] your supervisor cannot help you." (June 2019, Interview).

5.1 Overview

Ben was a first-year doctoral student in Education. His research was a mixed-methods study of education and skills shortages. When Ben joined this project, he was three weeks into his PhD program, and was reading the literature on his topic as well as participating in various research training courses. Ben decided to pursue doctoral work in order to become a better researcher. Originally from mainland Europe, Ben had previously done a Master's in International Relations in the United States and was working in a policy think tank in his home country when he decided to do a PhD. His work at the think tank was what inspired his thesis topic. Following the PhD, Ben hoped to return to policy work, preferably as a researcher at an international organization.

Although English was his second language, Ben felt comfortable writing in English after doing his Master's in the United States: "I remember in my first quarter in the US, I wrote something [like] a hundred and twenty pages" (November 2018, Interview). At the time he did not particularly enjoy writing and learned that writing in his native language was very different from writing in English, in the sense that in English, he must be much more concise and direct. However, by the time he had completed the degree, he felt more knowledgeable about what was expected, and believed that writing no longer was a challenge. Still, Ben always asked for feedback after completing a draft. He received feedback from his partner, an editor, who could point out sentence-level issues with syntax and grammar. At the think tank, Ben would also reach out to his colleagues for substantive feedback. In receiving feedback, Ben critically evaluated comments, assessing them in part based on the expertise of the person providing the feedback and by the extent to which the comments convinced him to alter his argument:

> You need to be really convincing for me to change what I've written because in the end it's going to be my name. But I will say that I'm quite open to accept feedbacks from people who know [more] than me about a topic. (November 2018, Interview).

At the same time, Ben was also skeptical about overly positive feedback, recognizing that there was always room for improvement.

Ben had three supervisors, two in Education and one in another department. One of his Education supervisors, Supervisor E, served as his primary supervisor whom he met with most often. Ben typically met his supervisors separately, and only met with all three once, just before he sat for the Transfer viva. He saw each of his supervisors sporadically, but roughly once per term. Ben met with his primary supervisor, E, a total of three times: January, February, and June 2019. He met with his second Education supervisor, L, twice—March and June—and he met his other supervisor twice—March and June 2019.

Apart from his first supervisions with E to discuss his overall research plans, supervisions were primarily text-driven, based on comments on Ben's draft, as well as the Ben's various questions on ethics, Transfer examiners, and next steps that Ben brought to the meetings. As a result, the feedback Ben received in January and February was initially focused on the feasibility of his research questions and overall research design—particularly issues of access to participants, the importance of both qualitative and quantitative data, and additional sources of support for quantitative research design. In his supervisions with E, much of the feedback was confirmatory, giving Ben license to continue writing his proposal. In supervisions, Ben generally discussed his ideas and asked for oral and written feedback on his proposal drafts. These supervisions typically lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. However, Ben received the majority of supervisor feedback electronically through emails and as comments in Word documents. As part of his first-year doctoral research training, Ben also attended a Research Training Seminar that required students to present their ongoing projects.

Ben's work during the first term was entirely independent, as at the time he did not have official supervisors. As a result, Ben spent much of the first term writing a final report based on his prior research that would be published online, as well as attending several research training courses in qualitative and quantitative methods. His greatest challenge was the quantitative aspect of his research design, as he had no prior experience with quantitative research. Further, his supervisors were not quantitative researchers. Ben thus spent a significant amount of time reading and then discussing his ideas with other academics in and outside the university. At the start of the second term, Ben finally began meeting with his supervisors. He saw E, and L, and A once each. However, throughout the term Ben remained largely independent in his work, setting his

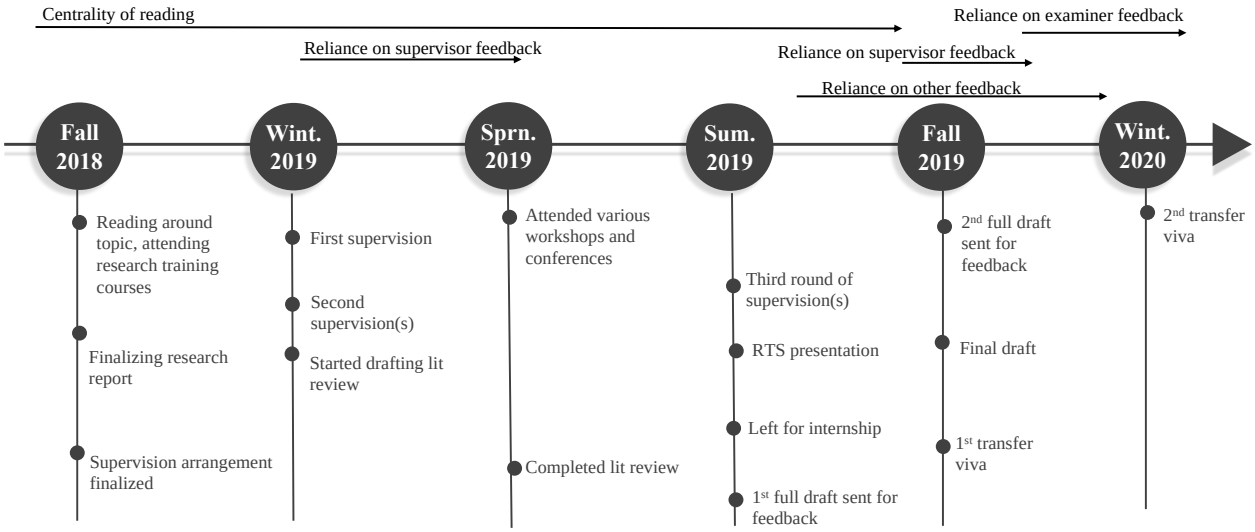
own goals and timelines, while engaging in various activities such as conferences and workshops that he believed would advance his abilities as a researcher and also broadened his career opportunities. Generally, supervisions with E served to provide information, identify resources including literature and other academics to consult about the research design, discuss the selection of Transfer examiners, and confirm Ben's ideas about the design and focus of his research. Through the spring Ben worked on writing his literature review, on which he received brief feedback from his supervisors in June. He then devoted the summer to the methods section of his proposal and sent drafts of the document to a number of readers, including his supervisors, for feedback in the early fall.

Ben submitted his research proposal in late October 2019 and sat the Transfer viva at the beginning of November, where he was asked to resubmit his application in December. In Education, Transfer of Status required a 10,000-word research proposal that must include a literature review, research questions, and methods. The proposal "should provide evidence of a convincing and realistic research design [and] highlight potential challenges or difficulties that may be encountered" (Transfer of Status, 2019). In addition to the proposal, students are also asked submit ethics and risk assessment forms, a timetable for the research that shows the feasibility of the project, references, evidence of presentation of the project at a seminar or conference, a skills review and training analysis, and the official university application form for Transfer of Status. Education students are expected to submit and sit the Transfer viva within one year of starting the PhD. Proposals must be submitted at least two weeks before the viva. However, because Ben was not formally assigned supervisors until December 2018, he was granted an extension. See Figure 9 below for an overall timeline of Ben's progress.

The remaining sections focus on the key themes that influenced Ben's development as he wrote and revised his research proposal: goals for the PhD, perceptions of supervisor feedback, and networking and feedback-seeking, followed by a discussion of his writing and revising process, experience of the Transfer viva and participation in this research.

Figure 9

Timeline of Ben's First Year



5.2 Goals for the PhD

For Ben, the purpose of the PhD was to advance his career prospects and improve his research skills, and he thus contextualized the PhD within a larger trajectory wherein securing a research position in an international policy organization was the end-goal. He focused on completing the PhD degree in a timely way, cognizant that he was only partially funded. Given Ben's larger career aims the PhD was framed as a necessary qualification, a stepping-stone, of which the research proposal was the first hurdle. This approach to his PhD and career development underpinned Ben's entire research experience as he developed his research proposal and prepared for Transfer. In interviews, he often reflected upon his own strengths and weaknesses as a researcher and assessed the different sources of expertise available to him. Ben also positioned himself as a "generalist," and a "social scientist," whose work was interdisciplinary, in line with his need as an aspiring project manager in policy research to have expertise in different areas. However, because two of his three supervisors were in Education, he was inclined to locate himself within that department while also maintaining contact with relevant research groups in other departments.

Ben's focus on career meant that his actions were often future-oriented, reflecting the projective element of agency as he made decisions that he believed would further his employment opportunities. While working towards his research proposal he situated

doctoral study within a wider goal of personal and professional development, engaging with research groups and participating in conferences that allowed him to develop research experience and network with potential employers or referees. He also continued to write op-eds for policy organizations as a way of getting his name out into the community. In this way, Ben was constantly working towards his larger objective of securing a research position in policy following the PhD: "I think I need to be part of a broader policy debate because that's my aim overall…so I need to go [to conferences]. Everything is part of [an] overall design of me getting better [as a researcher]" (February 2019, Interview).

5.3 Perceptions of supervisor feedback: Compliance and resistance

While Ben's pursuit of professional development and research training opportunities spoke to his larger career goals and were thus oriented towards the future, the specific actions he took towards creating and revising his research proposal—complying with and resisting feedback—moved between the iterational, practical evaluative, and projective orientations of agency. Because Ben's research was interdisciplinary and stemmed from his prior work in policy, he believed that his supervisors, while knowledgeable, were neither experts on the specific focus of his thesis nor his methods, and thus tended to rely on prior successful patterns of action (iteration) when writing his document. For instance, Ben was most comfortable working alone, reading extensively before beginning to write and seeking feedback primarily to confirm his work or when he felt he could no longer progress on his own—a strategy developed while working in policy and reinforced by Ben's assessment of his supervisors' expertise. Of his three supervisors, Ben perceived E as the most central, "understanding the broader, aspect of the research" while L might contribute to the "conceptual, assumptions [that] underlie my project" and A provided more general support "but not necessarily for the development of the research" (February 2019, Interview). Ben's supervisors further confirmed Ben's perceptions multiple times: "I am not an expert on the methodologies that you are seeking to deploy" (Supervisor E); "Since it is targeted on a research community that isn't mine, I don't have the competency to say how well it hits the target, but it seems well-written" (Supervisor A).

Ben's assessment of his supervisors was reflected in his use of feedback and in the other strategies he utilized to further his proposal and progress overall. In assessing supervisor feedback, Ben's decisions to comply or resist supervisor suggestions were often linked to the practical evaluation element of agency, as Ben was continually

assessing possible courses of action in light of new information from his readings or from feedback. After receiving feedback, Ben would evaluate the value of each comment and its usefulness in relationship to whether accepting the comment would substantially change his research objectives or further his goals. For instance, Ben chose to ignore literature suggestions from his supervisor because, "I thought [the readings were] not directly going into the direction that I wanted" (April 2019, Interview).

Although Ben did accept most supervisor feedback, which for the majority of the year consisted of minor comments on language and clarification, the one piece of feedback that he continually resisted was related to the scope of his research. For instance, in a discussion with Supervisor A on the scope of his research questions, first in June and then again in the fall, Ben rejected A's suggestion that the research questions might be too narrow:

> I thought it was interesting 'cause [A--] told me that the research question might have been a little bit too narrow. And I really agree. The research question is really narrow and it can be only a paper, basically 'cause I've seen papers like that, with just that research question. **[But] I challenged it by saying what I want to do is different from, what, basically anyone else has done so far [because of] my research design.** And the papers that I've seen so far [have] been co-authored by five, six senior researchers at big American universities. And I'm, by myself. They have received, an enormous quantity of funds. I have none. **So, I think, yeah sure, I mean the research question seems narrow for three years. But you need to take into account that I'm a single junior researcher with no funds doing it**. And [I have] to learn new research methods to deal with it. Plus there are multiple ways of scaling it up that's what I like about my research. So my overall, my answer to him was, given the research question and given the resources that I have [let's do the project, and then] we can scale it up…. (June 2019, Interview).

Ben's argument was thus a combination of practicality—what could feasibly be accomplished within three years by a single researcher—and contribution; he noted the novelty of his research design and the potential for scalability that would allow his project to expand and address wider questions in the future. Here, Ben's resistance was again reflective of his larger view of the purpose of PhD and his desire to complete the program in three years, demonstrating how his overall view of the PhD influenced his decision-making and exercise of agency in crafting the proposal document.

Timing was also important in Ben's decisions to comply with or resist feedback. Ben worked independently between March and August, meeting his supervisors only once in June for feedback on his literature review. He received the most crucial supervisor feedback during the last two months before he submitted his proposal in

preparation for the Transfer viva. This feedback was electronic and therefore there was little opportunity to discuss or explain comments. Because feedback came towards the end of the proposal writing process Ben was even more reluctant to consider significant changes to his project: "it seems like a lot of comments came a little too late" (November 2019, Interview). Indeed, Ben's supervisors, particularly Supervisor L, provided important feedback but only in late September and mid-October: "the wider framing of knowledge and intelligence could be discussed…it is not about the skills shortage alone but why so many are needed with these skills. You[r] outline of the research significance is [limited]. The references/ literature [are] limited" (October 2019, Emailed Feedback). L highlighted critical issues with the context and contribution of the research—central parts of the research proposal that Ben's Transfer examiners also critiqued. But because these comments came when Ben was trying to finalize his document, he felt unable to address all issues, particularly given the document's word limit, which he believed substantially constrained what was feasible. However, Ben's preference for independent work and the fact that he did not actively seek to meet his supervisors may have also contributed to the last-minute nature of the feedback. Thus, in assessing and integrating feedback, Ben's decisions to comply or resist were influenced by a combination of factors, including his personal goals for the PhD (timely completion), his view of his supervisors (somewhat lacking in expertise), and the temporal context in which feedback was received, demonstrating how changes in temporal-relational contexts may affect agentive decision-making.

5.4 Networking and feedback-seeking

Due to Ben's understanding of his supervisors' limited expertise in his research topic and general lack of supervision, two of the key strategies he exercised throughout the year were networking and feedback seeking. Ben was an active networker, forging relationships with not only the organizations he needed to partner with to achieve his research project, but also with post-doctoral researchers. Ben was proactive in joining relevant research groups at the university that were not within the Department of Education. He also sought contact with an emeritus professor who had authored books he identified as critical in his field. Ben thus constructed a substantial network of researchers upon whom he later relied upon for feedback on his research proposal, in an effort to garner comments on his research design. This approach to feedback-seeking was a habit Ben developed while working in policy, sending completed drafts of his reports to

colleagues for input, and thus reflected both the iterational and projective elements of agency—drawing on prior patterns of action while making choices that he imagined would further his goal of passing Transfer and proceeding with the PhD.

In selecting people to approach for feedback, Ben was again strategic in thinking about who to ask and what kind of support he might need:

> I usually tend to think about my immediate network. For instance, I like to ask postdocs because usually they're really generous with their time. And they're really good. They're more technical than the supervisors because they've been dealing with softwares more recently" (June 2019, Interview).

Although he spoke with various people throughout the year, receiving informal feedback on his research, once Ben completed a full draft of his proposal he sent the document for feedback to three people in addition to his supervisors: a former research methods instructor and two post-doctoral researchers. Ben selected these people because they had different areas of expertise and therefore might be able to comment on different aspects of his research from his supervisors, particularly on the methods.

Ben received a range of suggestions that included the need for definition of terms, organization, clarification, argument, and contribution—"You will need to be clear in what is the contribution of the thesis to this gap [and] explain why the research questions address this gap and why the methodology followed answers these questions effectively" (August 2019, Draft)—alongside the desired comments on methods. Having different sources of feedback allowed Ben to see what issues in his argument and his method were most problematic. Further, as demonstrated above, additional feedback provided more detailed information about the structure and rhetorical features of research proposals that Ben did not receive from his supervisors.

As with supervisor feedback, Ben evaluated and adopted or rejected feedback based on the extent to which each suggestion aligned with his overarching vision for the project. Consistent with ongoing concerns about his lack of quantitative experience, Ben was more inclined to comply with suggestions related to the methodology, and generally agreed with most of the feedback, which spoke to creating coherence within the document and the research. However, he characterized a number of comments as reflective ("you should think about this as well,"), and warned that one should "take into account where [the comments] come from. If [a suggestion] doesn't fit in overall with the research then you should be careful about integrating it just because someone told you to" (November 2019, Interview). He said, "I'm the single author and in the end I have to

defend it. Not the people [providing feedback].” Ben thus had a clear sense of ownership over the research and recognized his own growing expertise as giving him license to assess and resist comments. Therefore, Ben complied with the majority of feedback on his proposal document that asked him to strengthen his argument, expand, reduce, or reorganize sections, but he was resistant to implement comments that suggested more radical changes to his research questions or research design.

5.5 Learning the research proposal as genre system

In conceiving of his research proposal Ben drew on prior knowledge about research from his experience in policy, which informed in part his conceptions of what was expected of a research project and a research proposal. He also drew on readings to shape his understanding of research writing and research design, as well as various skills training courses and seminars; again, Ben displayed strategic decision-making intended to accumulate the knowledge and support that would allow him to craft a successful PhD project. In discussing what he believed were qualities of ‘good’ research and research writing and what he strove for in his work, Ben used words such as ‘rigor’ and ‘argument,’ and was aware that writing for policy and writing for academia were two different endeavors: “I tried to have it as rigorous as possible. There is actually a research design section of one page, which is never there in policy reports. But obviously I'm doing a PhD. I'm not a think tanker anymore” (December 2019, Interview). Ben thus had clear beliefs about what should and should not be included in his PhD research proposal, and supervisor and other feedback served to refine his understanding of these expectations, pointing to the need to situate the project (“the broader the context, or set of contexts, and debates into which you can locate the [the topic] the more likely it is that this will look like a robust PhD [rather] than one that's doing a very narrow, technical, almost sort of evaluation exercise”—Supervisor E), provide a rationale for the research design (“What are the possible research methodologies, and why is this one chosen?”—Supervisor A) and craft an argument rather than a summary (“Methodology section is too long at the moment, and too general. It should not read like a lesson on DID or counterfactual design,”—Supervisor L). Consistent with his concerns about the quantitative aspect of his project, much of the feedback Ben received from his supervisors focused on method (31 segments)—even though all three supervisors also acknowledged that they were not well-versed in the type of research design Ben planned to use. In addition to the method, Ben received supervisor feedback on the literature

review (15 segments), research questions (7 segments), hypothesis (2 segments), ethics (2 segments), and context (2 segments).

Because much of Ben's proposal-crafting process was done independently, most decisions on how and what to revise were based on self-assessment and evidenced by various comments to himself within the text and inserted in the margins of the document. At times, he also included his own comments and questions in versions that he sent out for feedback, and occasionally inserted bits of feedback he received and asked others whether he had addressed the feedback sufficiently. This was a practice Ben developed while working in policy that helped him to make connections and remember to develop various ideas in his writing. Examples included:

> HERE YOU NEED TO PUT SKILLS SHORTAGES IN THE BROADER CONTEXT OF THE LITERATURE BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT A PHD IS ABOUT (January 2019, Draft)
>
> Do I have to "translate" these variables into numbers? Is this a matter of survey instrument that it is used? (August 2019, Draft, question for feedback)
>
> How do I connect answers in survey 1 to answers in survey 2? (August 2019, Draft)
>
> Does this part need to be here at all or is it too detailed for the ToS? Maybe as an annex? (August 2019, Draft)

As shown above, Ben's comments focused on a range of issues including argument and ethics, as well as specific questions related to instrument design and organization. The various notes and questions he wrote to himself and others reflected his ongoing research thinking and demonstrate how he not only considered the more technical aspects of document structure, but also what was appropriate for the research proposal/Transfer of Status and the PhD overall. Ben also consulted the Department Handbook for the requirements of Transfer of Status, which he sometimes referred to in his notes.

Consistent with his understanding of the PhD's purpose, his view of feedback and negotiation of supervisor and other expertise, Ben relied on prior strategies for revision and previously acquired knowledge as the basis for many of his decisions on how to shape the proposal document, while also taking advantage of opportunities to learn within the university. As the document progressed and Ben received feedback from different sources, he integrated suggestions that he believed contributed to the document's quality and was proactive in seeking feedback on areas of specific concern. Ben's learning of the

proposal genre was thus influenced by feedback from supervisors, other academics, and his own projectivity-oriented actions.

5.6 The Transfer viva

For Ben, the Transfer viva was a critical experience that raised his expectations for the level of scrutiny at which his PhD would be assessed. However, despite having to resubmit, the Transfer viva did not prompt Ben to change the strategies or approaches he used in writing his document or evaluating supervisor feedback.

After sitting for the Transfer viva in early November 2019, Ben was asked to resubmit the following month. One supervisor (E) attended the viva, which took roughly one hour and ten minutes. Immediately following the Transfer viva, Ben and his primary supervisor, E, both believed he had passed with minor corrections as the examiners said the revisions could be done within two to three weeks. That said, Ben was rather confused because it seemed that the changes requested were substantial, leading him to think he might have received a referral (resubmission), but Supervisor E said he did not have to re-sit the viva, which meant that he passed with minor corrections. The confusion continued when Ben received the examiners' report two weeks later: he had in fact received a referral and did need a second Transfer viva. When Supervisor E followed up for clarification, Ben learned that the examiners thought that because the revisions were significant—new research questions—they decided the result was not minor but major corrections (referral) but were not aware this meant Ben would have to re-sit the viva. In recounting this experience, Ben was initially frustrated but ultimately reframed his referral positively: "what's the difference between [minor corrections], in which they give you two to three weeks to do changes, and a [referral] which, if it goes as they want I don't have to do [another viva]" (December 2019, Interview). Because Ben's primary concern was whether the Transfer result would affect the timeline for his research, and the examiners believed he could resubmit quickly and maintain his plans for collection, the result did not bother him—again, a reflection of Ben's pragmatism.

Ben's examiners requested that he expand the context section of the document in order to make a stronger case for the study, as well as add additional research questions in order to broaden the scope of the project. Ben noted that while there was some discussion around his methodology, the examiners did not request revisions of that aspect of his research, causing him to wonder whether his examiners had considered the full extent of the revisions they wanted, as adding research questions might also affect his

research design. Ben also commented that much of what his examiners asked him to expand on in his context section had been included in earlier drafts and later edited out due to word limit constraints, which made him question the feasibility of Transfer expectations.

Ben found the Transfer viva harder than expected. He felt unprepared in that his supervisors "downplayed" the intensity of the viva, leading him to believe that it would be relatively simple, consisting of general questions about the document. Overall, Ben liked the rigorous nature of the viva but was also concerned that he was not receiving enough critical feedback and therefore would be underprepared once it was time for his final viva, explaining that the Transfer viva challenged him in a way that he had never been challenged in supervisions:

> I think it was a little weird that I [had] 5-6 people read my ToS document. And [they] did not really provide any of the comments or, anticipate the comments that the examiners [contributed]. [It] made me feel that um, maybe supervision was, on a lower standard than the examination, which is very very dangerous. (November 2019, Post-Transfer Interview).

Ben also felt that some of the comments he received from supervisors were "not spot on," as the examiners raised a number of issues that had never been discussed. At the same time, Ben noted that the examiners did not question aspects of his project that he believed were problematic, specifically that he did not include a definition and conceptualization of 'interest' in his literature review, something that his research methods instructor had highlighted: "it seems weird that there's a dissertation on career interest and there [are] no parts on interest as a topic of study" (November 2019, Post-Transfer Interview). Ben had anticipated this question and created a folder on his computer with articles on interest to be read, and the fact that the question did not come made Ben reflect upon his examiners' economist backgrounds ("[perhaps] they're labor economists and they don't think about interest") and pointed out that two different examiners might have produced different set of comments, speaking to the somewhat subjective nature of the Transfer examination.

Finally, while Ben fulfilled his examiners' requests for further contextualization and additional research questions to widen the scope of the thesis, he did not necessarily agree with all of the feedback: "But you know I don't necessarily agree with the extension of the scope for various reasons. I think it it's not aligned with the design, and now the design might be faulty" (November 2019, Interview). This tension between resistance and compliance with examiner feedback is reminiscent of Ben's previous resistance to Supervisor A's concerns about the limited scope of the project. Again, Ben pointed to his

perceived constraints as a doctoral researcher. Nevertheless, Ben's compliance with examiner feedback again reflected his pragmatic approach to navigating the doctorate—in order to pass Transfer, he needed to make the changes. Ben passed his second Transfer viva in January 2020.

In sum, because Ben had little supervisory guidance, he felt underprepared for the Transfer viva. He believed his supervisors had given the impression that the viva would be a cursory exercise in which Ben would be asked general questions about his research, when in actuality Ben experienced a challenging viva that pushed him to explain and defend various aspects of his project. Further, his examiners' apparent confusion about the distinction between a referral (resubmission) and minor corrections was troubling and reinforced Ben's perception that examiner feedback and Transfer outcomes were quite subjective. Ben's resubmission experience also appeared unusual in that he made revisions without consulting his supervisors, who appeared to trust him to make whatever changes necessary. Additionally, Ben resubmitted his proposal within one month of receiving his examiner report, whereas students who are asked to resubmit typically take an entire term to rework their projects.

5.7 Participation in the research

Ben described his participation in this study as a good opportunity to "talk about the research and the process with someone else [and] rethink how [the PhD] started and whether it changed" (December 2019, Interview). The study enabled Ben to reflect on his process and his progress, which had the effect of increasing his understanding of what doing a PhD entailed. At the same time, Ben acknowledged that it was a research project and thus I could not share certain things with him and take on a mentorship role, but hoped that he could speak with me more freely about the nature of the PhD once he finished participating in the study.

5.8 Conclusion

Ben entered the PhD with a clear purpose: to improve his knowledge and skills in order to secure a research position at an international policy organization. This goal shaped his pragmatic approach to constructing and negotiating his research proposal. Ben positioned himself as emerging expert on his research topic and relied on past strategies for writing, feedback-seeking, and research, while also evaluating how feedback would influence his research timeline. Ben's relationships with his supervisors and experience of Transfer of

Status taught him to question the extent to which his supervisors could add to his research, thereby supporting his choices to seek feedback and network within various departments and organizations.

Chapter 6: Charlie

(Male, Early 20s, Chinese)

> *"*I feel my pressure level [decreasing], throughout the whole PhD period, from the beginning [when my supervisors] were not giving me...precise direction...and I worr[ied] about failing Transfer a lot. [But as] I move[d] forward, the less pressure I had" (July 2019, Interview).

6.1 Overview

Charlie was a first-year doctoral student in Sociology and his research focused on cybercrime. Prior to the PhD, Charlie completed a Master's degree in Criminal Science and had studied law as an undergraduate. Charlie had moved from China to the UK for high school, and as such, was fairly comfortable writing in English, though he sometimes felt that reading dense academic texts could be challenging.

When Charlie joined this study, he was three weeks into his PhD program and was enrolled in his department's research training course for first-year PhD students, while also reading the literature on his topic. Charlie decided to pursue a PhD when a friend suggested that he go into the field of social science where he could find a middle ground between law and criminal science. Because he was interested in research and unsure of what he wanted to do, Charlie viewed the PhD as a way of exploring career options and boosting his resume.

At the beginning of the PhD, Charlie viewed feedback as helpful when it was specific and offered suggestions for next steps. However, he viewed general or "abstract" comments such as "the research question is too broad" as less helpful when not accompanied by details on how to improve. Charlie typically relied on his supervisors for feedback, but occasionally went to his peers when he felt his questions were "too stupid, or too silly." When writing, Charlie noted that he had tried different strategies, including reading first then writing, and reading, taking notes, and then writing. Most often, he went back and forth between reading and writing, particularly when composing particular portions of a research paper, for instance, the literature review. He further noted that he tended to write many drafts, as his readings constantly added new angles and information that made him rethink what he had previously written.

As a PhD student, Charlie had two supervisors, one who he described as being more specialized in his area of research, and another who had more experience with the

PhD process overall. Throughout the year, supervisor feedback was the most important means of learning related to Charlie's research proposal. However, because his supervisors were very busy, Charlie initially found it difficult to get in touch with them and wished his supervisors would provide clearer direction and respond to his questions about the PhD and social science research. Supervision and supervisory relationships were therefore an additional source of anxiety for Charlie, particularly during the first term when one supervisor was on sabbatical and the other was away for fieldwork, making it difficult to correspond with either of them.

During term time, Charlie initially wanted to meet his supervisors every two weeks, but in actuality they met twice during the first term, once during the second term, and twice during the third term. Supervisions typically lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. Charlie also enrolled in additional courses, some relevant to the topic of his PhD, and some not. For instance, he took a language class for personal development, and a quantitative methods class in order to develop an additional research skill.

In Sociology, Transfer of Status required two key documents: a research proposal and one chapter of the thesis. Each document should be 5,000 to 7,000 words. The research proposal must include a project description, research questions, overview of the literature and research design, as well as justification for the form of the thesis (monograph or papers) (see Department of Sociology, 2018). The chapter is typically an extended literature review that may include empirical evidence. Additionally, students must submit a bibliography, timetable to completion, evidence of participation in the research training course, ethics forms (completed or in process), as well as risk assessment forms. The Transfer application should be submitted during the first week of the summer term alongside the university Transfer of Status form. The Transfer application is examined in a viva by two assessors typically internal to the department.

Charlie's first year centered around learning the expectations of a PhD in his discipline, while also navigating the completion of his research proposal and Transfer application. Charlie's peers initially served as the most important source of support, reassuring him that he was not alone in his uncertainty as he tried to manage his courses and thesis research. In particular, Charlie worried about the contribution of his thesis and how to use theory in his research—something he had not done before. However, over time, as Charlie became more familiar with the literature in his field, his supervisors became more central, providing essential feedback on expectations for the Transfer. Charlie's supervisors, particularly the supervisor he met with most often, supplied

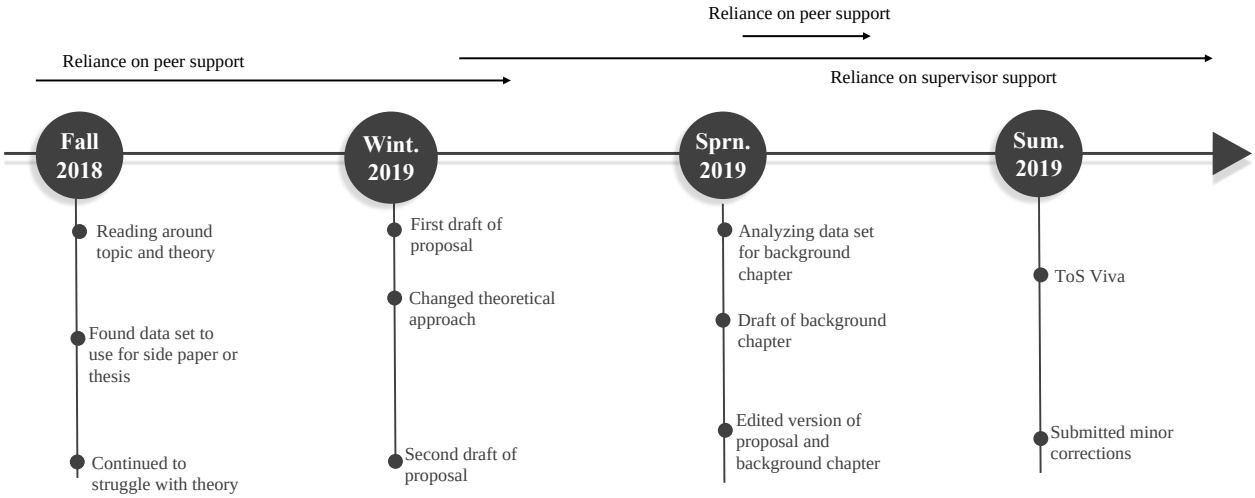
feedback that gave direction to Charlie's research, pointing out next steps, strategies for his ethics application, and how to address Charlie's difficulties with the theoretical framing of his study. Charlie reflected that while he adopted most feedback from his supervisors, it was because he realized that he thought similarly to his supervisors, and agreed with the suggestions that they made.

Charlie submitted his Transfer application in early May 2019 and sat for the viva in the beginning of July. He passed with minor corrections. Following the Transfer, Charlie was very relaxed and optimistic about his PhD, and had decided that he wanted to be an academic. Charlie noted that his supervisors had represented the possibilities for what an academic could be, showing him that he could engage with the general public while being an established researcher in his field. His supervisors had thus become role models, and Charlie hoped to emulate their scholarly careers.

The following sections describe in further detail the key themes underlying Charlie's journey over the first of year of PhD as he composed his research proposal: learning the PhD, complying with supervisor feedback, writing and revising the document, and relying upon peer support. This chapter then concludes with a discussion of Charlie's experience of the Transfer viva and his participation in this research. See Figure 10 below for an overview of Charlie's progress.

Figure 10

Timeline of Charlie's First Year



6.2 Goals for the PhD

Charlie viewed the PhD as an opportunity to explore academia and broaden his career prospects, while learning what it meant to be a researcher in the social sciences. The PhD was thus framed as a means of furthering his knowledge in order to achieve the degree in an efficient manner. This desire to understand the nature of doctoral study and its expectations was a central theme as Charlie prepared his research proposal for Transfer of Status, reflected in much of his thinking and the challenges he encountered. Specifically, because he was new to sociology, significant challenges included learning what it meant to do sociological research and how to write appropriately in his discipline.

Charlie's concerns were expressed primarily through questions that he would ask himself and pose to his supervisors, which ranged from what a PhD and research career entailed, to what questions can be addressed in a PhD thesis, how to structure his research proposal, how to choose examiners for his Transfer viva, and how to improve his research skills and gain work experience. As he dealt with these questions, his supervisors gave few responses to Charlie's questions, advising him to "stay focus[ed]" and noting that "quantitative and other skills can always be acquired from summer schools later" (May 2019, Meeting Questions). Thus, Charlie was left on his own to grapple with questions about what it meant to be a PhD student, relying on his observations and interactions with peers.

A particular challenge Charlie encountered was the role of theory in his discipline. Early on it was made clear that researchers in his department favored deductive, theory-based work, and therefore engaging with theory became a source of anxiety and a necessary part of learning how to do a PhD, with a direct connection to the research proposal. Charlie attributed his struggle to his lack of experience and felt he needed more guidance on the *"*idea of research in general*"* (December 2018, Interview). In this way, Charlie experienced an inability to make progress. Assessing the possible ways forward in terms of developing his research in relation to theory and communicating his difficulties was a problem Charlie confronted often during the first term:

> So how…when I [am] doing my PhD how do I structure my research, how do I progress…how do I develop my ideas? And…in general, how we develop theory, how to use the theory to explain things in data...I try to find out the answer by auditing lectures in Sociology Department but I didn't find answer, at the end. I read some books but…I'm still confused…I think…there are some confusions I don't know how to ask… I don't know how to explain.…Like it was hard to explain to you… I don't know what the exact confusion is…And it makes [it]

> very difficult, it makes [it very difficult for my] supervisor to answer. (December 2018, Interview).

Closely related to Charlie's desire to learn the expectations of the PhD was an ongoing interest in his own progress, specifically whether he was "on track." During the first half of the year, Charlie was worried because he had not been writing and did not want to fall behind. Charlie's awareness of his progress also extended into his research training course, where he felt he was behind his classmates. The challenges Charlie perceived in relation to learning the expectations of the PhD, what the process entailed, and the state of his progress, circumscribed his overall efforts to create and compose his research proposal, particularly during the first months of the PhD program. It was not until late spring that Charlie began to feel more accustomed to the nature of the PhD and the fact that people moved at different paces in their work, a change in perspective that he attributed in part to his peers and his supervisors.

For Charlie, the purpose of the PhD was to acquire research skills and broaden career opportunities. In order to be successful in the PhD, Charlie believed he needed to understand the expectations and process due to his lack of experience in the discipline. Although his supervisors initially left Charlie to struggle with these questions alone, over time Charlie learned that the doctoral thesis was an individual process, accepting the fact that uncertainty was part of the experience. Nevertheless, he continued to seek support and enroll in additional research training courses—such as quantitative methods—in order to further his learning and improve his employment prospects.

6.3 Perceptions of supervisor feedback: Compliance

Many of Charlie's choices to pursue additional training were influenced by an orientation to the future in anticipation of career and internship opportunities and the need to successfully complete the thesis. In assessing and responding to feedback, Charlie's choices were most influenced by the iterational and practical evaluation elements of agency. Because of his lack of experience in sociology, Charlie positioned his supervisors as experts who were best placed to guide him through the thesis and specifically, the Transfer phase of the PhD. Charlie thus tended to adopt all feedback his supervisors offered, resulting in an iterative process reflecting his trust in their advice. Charlie also claimed to agree with all of his supervisors' suggestions ("we think similarly"—July 2019, Interview), reflecting the intent behind his choices to implement feedback; he believed adopting feedback furthered the project or proposal in a beneficial way.

Besides the discussions that took place in his research training course, supervisor comments were the only source of feedback Charlie received. For Charlie, supervisor feedback primarily offered guidance in the form of next steps and how to shape the project. However, his supervisors also sometimes confirmed Charlie's ideas or understandings, provided information about disciplinary and departmental expectations, offered emotional and psychological support, and suggested resources. One key piece of feedback that Charlie identified as particularly helpful was his supervisors' recommendation that he abandon the deductive theory-driven approach to his research and instead adopt an inductive approach, "[a]lthough it was not very common, in our department" (February 2019, Interview). This resolved Charlie's ongoing struggle with theory and therefore eliminated a significant source of his anxiety:

> Due to the nature of my research, it's reasonable to do an inductive research. [We talked] about the strategy of choosing examiners…And … how to… do an inductive research. But, at the same time, not …go too far from the department's ideology…So we [must] show that we still have some theoretical things in mind. So using the language and phrasing for example, we need to talk about, we should write about hypothesis….But instead of list[ing] our hypothesis, and then test[ing] them, we should say [that] the end of the research is to generate, some theory [or] some hypothesis, for…people to test. (February 2019, Interview).

As demonstrated above, supervisor feedback was instrumental in guiding Charlie's progress; prior to his supervisors' suggestion to change the research approach, Charlie had been stuck and confused. His supervisors provided a new way forward with specific instructions on how to use the inductive approach that Charlie was more comfortable with, while also being mindful of the departmental ideology and how to strategically argue for an inductive project that also satisfied the department's emphasis on theory.

In allowing himself to be guided by his supervisors on key aspects of the proposal, Charlie learned about the process of research in his department and what was expected of doctoral work. By the time Charlie submitted his research proposal for Transfer of Status, he also felt that he better understood how his supervisors worked and had become more comfortable engaging with them: "I see things differently. Like previously I had some complaints about my supervisor, like…why didn't he do this, why didn't he …do that. But, now I [realize they] didn't do any[thing] intentionally…That's just how they work" (July 2019, Interview).

Over time, Charlie became accustomed to his supervisors' style of supervision, learning that while they would offer helpful feedback, they were not likely to answer all

of his questions or explain all the issues he became confused about. Instead, Charlie believed that perhaps his supervisors meant for him to struggle a bit and find his own way, particularly in the beginning when he was feeling out the direction of his research. Further, as Charlie developed a relationship with his supervisors he became more willing to engage with them in critical discussion. This change was reflected in a conversation Charlie relayed in which he questioned his supervisors about the distinction between journalism and qualitative research writing after reading one of their books; Charlie said his supervisors described qualitative research as more rigorous and evidence-based, but noted that he was not convinced—Charlie questioned their argument and reflected upon his own understanding of writing in different genres rather than automatically accepting their responses. In this way, Charlie's understanding of the purpose of supervision and his relationship with his supervisors appears to have shifted over time; while he initially expected (or hoped) that his supervisors would guide him through the PhD thesis step by step, by the end of his first year Charlie realized that he also needed to figure certain things out on his own while his supervisors provided support on a project that was ultimately his.

6.4 Peer support

In addition to the feedback received from his supervisors, peer support was central to Charlie's progress, especially during the first term of his PhD and the few weeks preceding the Transfer viva. For Charlie, mental state was an important factor that circumscribed all activities related to his research proposal. Initially, a significant challenge was learning to cope with anxiety and gain the confidence he needed to pursue his work. From the beginning of the program, Charlie was proactive in seeking support from classmates and more advanced PhD students, initially looking for "psychological comfort," and later for examples of ethics forms and information on what to expect for the Transfer viva. This support was particularly important during the first two months of the PhD when Charlie's supervisors were largely unavailable. Over time, interacting with his peers helped Charlie to feel less isolated by recognizing that the anxieties and confusion he experienced were common. Further, because the Transfer milestone was at the forefront of Charlie's consciousness and perhaps the most significant source of apprehension for much of the year, peer support in the weeks between Transfer submission and the Transfer viva was critical in alleviating Charlie's anxiety as he learned what to expect: "I feel from the first part of my [PhD] process…peers, like my

colleagues…are [most] important…. I learn[ed] a lot from them…about Transfer and PhD life… they put me on the right track" (July 2019, Interview).

Thus, although peer support did not directly impact his research proposal or research thinking, it did give him the psychological support necessary for persevering in the difficult months of his PhD, demonstrating the importance of mental well-being and how emotion underpins much of the PhD experience, including the conception and crafting of the proposal and preparation for Transfer of Status.

6.5 Learning the research proposal as genre system

In addition to guiding the shape and progression of Charlie's research, supervisor feedback provided information and influenced components of the research proposal genre, and occasionally, Charlie's understanding of the larger genre system. The a priori coding of Charlie's post-supervision meeting notes and relevant emails for elements of the research proposal that were specifically addressed in the Graduate Handbook, showed that Charlie's supervisors commented on research questions (3 segments), methods (3 segments), ethics (3 segments), the literature review (3 segments), theoretical approach (2 segments), and structure (1 segment). He also had one discussion with his supervisors about referencing. Most feedback on the research question appeared early in the year, prompted by Charlie's own questions about what "can be asked and answered in a PhD thesis" (October 2018, Email from supervisor), while discussions around method, ethics, and literature review emerged later in the year when Charlie was restructuring his research in accordance with his newly adopted inductive approach. Charlie's supervisors also suggested a straightforward structure for the proposed thesis (introduction, background, relevant literature, presentation of case studies, discussion and conclusion)—clear inclusion of the central components of the research proposal genre.

Supervisor feedback related to ethics was strategic, offering advice about how to obtain ethical approval given the vulnerable population Charlie was studying: "In order to get ethical approval, maybe it is better for [Charlie] to say… he will only interview the security employees, and law enforcement" (February 2019, Supervision Notes). Ethical approval was an important aspect of the genre system that could both advance Charlie's progress on the thesis overall and provide additional support for his Transfer of Status application. Further, as Charlie was required to submit one 7,000-word chapter of the thesis alongside his research proposal, his supervisors advised that he write a background chapter in which he include an analysis of an empirical data set Charlie discovered in the

fall, reasoning that including empirical data would strengthen the case for the research. Charlie's supervisors were thus influential in shaping the overall project, offering suggestions that spoke to practical aspects of creating a successful proposal document for Transfer of Status. In turn, by adopting their recommendations and working through the research process Charlie familiarized himself with the expectations and requirements surrounding both the proposal, Transfer of Status, and the larger thesis.

6.6 The Transfer viva

Charlie submitted his Transfer application in early May 2019 and passed his viva with minor corrections at the beginning of July. Specifically, the examiners asked Charlie to add two paragraphs expanding on the notion of "trustworthiness" in his theoretical framework. For Charlie, passing the Transfer viva was a significant experience that provided confidence and a sense of validation in his research, thereby placing his first year of doctoral work in a positive light despite the significant anxiety he had experienced.

Reflecting on the weeks building up to Transfer, Charlie described himself as "relaxed," due largely in part to discussions he had with his supervisors and classmates. In preparation for the Transfer viva, Charlie reviewed his proposal, engaged with literature that he did not previously have time to read, and spoke to students in his department who had previously gone through Transfer, including several of his own classmates who had unsuccessfully sat the viva before him: "I knew… people who failed their Transfer….And when I asked them they said…'I just collapsed…And I just stopped defending myself' (July 2019, Interview). Interestingly, Charlie said these conversations "helped me to relax*"* because their experiences showed him that even people who were "super smart" could fail, and therefore, "It's normal to fail" (July 2019 Interview).

Charlie thus relied on his peers for mental and emotional support. At the same time, he also received important information on what to expect in the Transfer viva. Knowing that smart, capable people had not passed on their first attempt had the effect of normalizing failure, which lessened the pressure. Talking to peers also provided Charlie with advice—maintaining his argument—that was congruous with the guidance from his supervisors: "you know your research [best] so keep a balance between accepting [suggestions]. [I]f you feel a question is very difficult that's [the examiners'] job [so] don't feel it to be personal, just keep calm, and then think, and answer" (July 2019, Interview).

During the viva, which took roughly two hours, Charlie said he continued to feel relaxed and that the examiners were much "nicer" than he was led to believe, making the viva feel more like a "friendly discussion." But perhaps most importantly, Charlie reflected that he defended his research with confidence, which, consistent with feedback from his peers and supervisors, he believed was important for success:

> **Kelsey:** [H]as the feedback [from your examiners] changed the way you're thinking about your research in any way?
>
> **Charlie:** No…so first I think I [defended] myself quite [well]… when they tried [to say], 'oh I think you should maybe focus on this,' I said 'no no no, this is not the purpose of my research…I could do that but that would be another research.' Something like that…So I basically [tried] my best to…fight back…keep the research going. And because they didn't, do research on my area…they didn't really, have a lot of opinions. It's more like they want to know what I'm doing. …So this is…my feeling of the interview process…half of the interview questions are [trying] to understand why do I do this research and what I am doing. And how I approach the research question…And the other half…is just testing…to see if I understand the issues in my research. (July 2018, Interview).

Charlie stood his ground and provided rationales for his decisions when questioned. He also stated that besides his supervisors, no one in the department specialized in his particular area of research, and therefore he believed that the examiners could not interrogate his research the way they might have had they been examining a student in their specialty. Charlie's experience suggests that while the content of the research proposal was important, perhaps what was equally important for success in the Transfer viva was the ability to rationally defend the research and the decision-making underlying the proposal. This also speaks to the Divisional Handbook's criteria for success, which states, "The candidate demonstrates the progression of an argument…shows a scholarly and rigorous approach to research issues [and] is capable of carrying out advanced research," suggesting that clear argument and capability are other key features of the research proposal genre that must be evident not only in the text, but in the student's presentation and discussion of the project in a viva.

Following the Transfer viva, Charlie completed minor corrections, namely to address "assumptions that within their world cyber criminals will be untrustworthy and if there are any expectations /hypotheses than can be derived from previous work...that can be applied/tested in your work" (Email from Examiner, Aug. 2019). He was asked to make the revisions before receiving his examiners report. Charlie received feedback from his supervisors about how to approach the revisions and sent them the updated research

proposal before resubmitting it to his examiners. The changes consisted of two additional paragraphs. Reflecting upon the examiner feedback, Charlie noted that it was useful to have the perspectives of people who were not experts in the area, as they were able to point out holes that he and his supervisors had overlooked or taken for granted.

6.7 Participation in the research

Charlie's participation in this research influenced his self-understanding and helped to "tidy up my thoughts" and clarify his thinking around particularly difficult issues such as the problems he experienced with theory and initial worries around supervision. Charlie reflected:

> After speaking to you sometimes I can put [my thoughts together] in chunks… So I understand myself better. And I, I can also see the progress and how my attitude changes and…how I struggled and how I get through the struggle and what helps me. And where I am now. So it's been quite helpful. (July 2019, Interview).

In other words, being part of this project did not necessarily have direct effects on the shape of Charlie's research or research thinking, but rather contributed to his ability to understand the challenges he encountered and appreciate his progress by allowing him to voice and make sense of his concerns.

6.8 Conclusion

Charlie began the PhD with the hope of expanding his career opportunities but had no prior experience in Sociology and little knowledge of what to expect in a PhD program. His desire to understand the nature of doctoral study and successfully complete Transfer of Status underpinned much of his decision-making throughout the first year of the PhD, manifesting in a concern with practical information and strategies for success. As Charlie progressed, the sources of support he relied upon shifted from his peers to his supervisors, reflecting the changing nature of his supervisory relationships and also the necessity of having a solid mental and emotional platform from which the research could develop. Passing the Transfer viva played a key role in this shift in confidence, affirming Charlie's competence as a researcher and confirming the value of his project and his faith in his supervisors.

Chapter 7: Natalie

This chapter has been redacted due to anonymity concerns.

Chapter 8: Shankar

(Male, Late 20s, Indian)

> "[The Transfer experience has been about] learning a particular way of creating knowledge… and the particular conditions in which that can be generated and sustained" (February 2020, Interview).

8.1 Overview

Shankar was a first-year doctoral student in Education. His research, an ethnography, focused on teacher education in India. When Shankar joined this study, he was one week into his PhD program and reading the literature around his topic as well as participating in the required research training courses. Shankar decided to pursue doctoral work because he hoped to teach at a university in India. Prior to the PhD, Shankar had taught in rural Indian communities and completed a Master's degree in Education, also in India.

Although Shankar was born in India, he considered English his first language because his parents spoke English at home. As a result, Shankar was very comfortable reading and writing in English. However, because the PhD was his first educational experience outside of India, he needed to adapt to the practices and expectations of academia in the UK. For instance, Shankar reflected that during his Master's he had very little feedback or contact with his supervisor and was largely left alone to conduct the research and write the dissertation. In contrast, his PhD supervisors were significantly more involved in guiding his work and Shankar appreciated the detailed and thoughtful comments.

At the start of the PhD, Shankar had two supervisors assigned to him on the basis of the research proposal he had submitted with his PhD application, which presented a sociological study of education in India. However, by the time he began the PhD it became apparent that his research interests had shifted towards teacher education and a passion for philosophy. As a result, after two meetings, his supervisors decided that they did not have the expertise needed to guide Shankar given his shift in focus. Shankar thus spent the remainder of the fall term drafting another document reflecting his new research interests, which would be sent to two new supervisors.

Shankar was introduced to his new supervisors in January 2019. He typically met both supervisors together except in instances where one was unavailable due to travel or

other projects. In supervisions, Shankar discussed his ideas and engaged in various conversations based on his supervisors' feedback on drafts of his research proposal. These supervisions typically lasted between one and two hours. During the first two months after the change in supervisors, supervisions were held every two weeks; subsequently, supervisions occurred every three to four weeks on average. As part of his first-year doctoral research training, Shankar also attended a Research Training Seminar in which he was required to present his evolving research plans.

In Education, Transfer of Status required a 10,000-word research proposal that should include a literature review, research questions, and methods. In addition to the proposal, students must also submit work ethics and risk assessment forms, a timetable for the research that shows the feasibility of the project, references, evidence of presentation of the project at a seminar or conference, a skills review and training analysis, and the official university application form for Transfer of Status (see Department of Education, 2018). Education students are expected to submit and sit the Transfer viva within one year of starting the PhD. Proposals must be submitted at least two weeks before the viva.

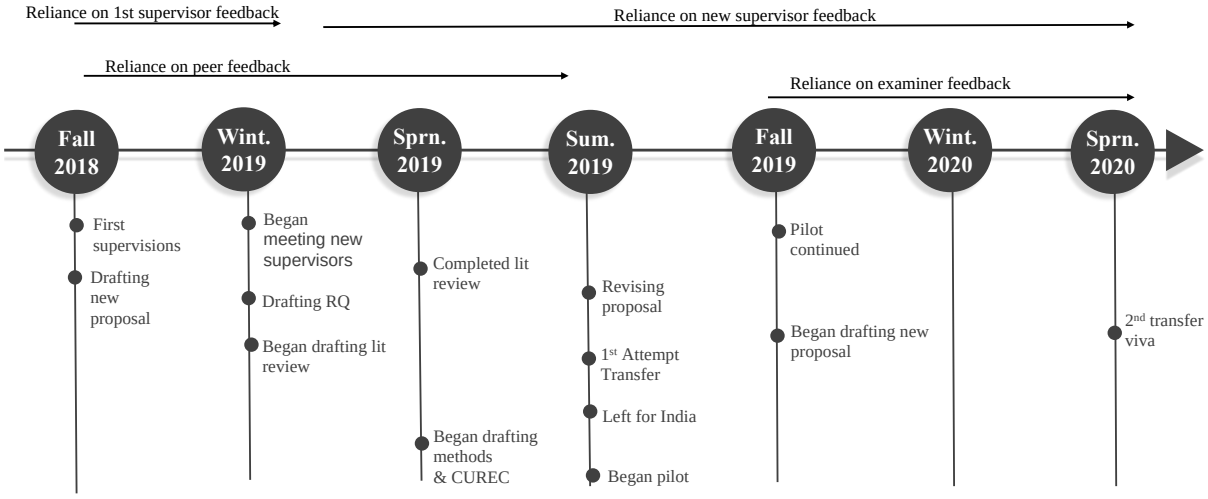
As Shankar spent the majority of the fall term composing a document representing his new research ideas in preparation for the change in supervision, he did not begin substantial work on the proposal until January. As a result, one of Shankar's challenges was time—he was effectively a few months behind in terms of receiving focused supervision on his project. Further, because Shankar needed to learn the expectations of scholarship in the West in addition to expectations for the PhD within his discipline and his institution, a substantial portion of his supervisions consisted of discussions around the requirements of a research proposal for Transfer of Status.

Supervision was therefore a central part of Shankar's learning and development as he crafted his research proposal, and he was fortunate to have frequent supervisions during the winter term. However, Shankar also received important support from his peers, which he viewed as equally valuable in advancing his research. Shankar perceived his work as the cumulative product of support from his family, friends, and the safe environment provided by the university, upon which more specific support, such as supervision, built. He was extremely reflective and thought critically about various aspects of his research, which sometimes meant he had difficulty focusing in on the necessary elements of his project.

Shankar initially sat the Transfer viva in late June 2019 and was asked to revise and resubmit following a pilot study. This revision process proved crucial in Shankar's understanding of research and writing expectations within his program. The remaining sections focus on the major factors that influenced Shankar's experience of creating the research proposal during his first year of the PhD program: his goals for and views of the PhD, supervisor feedback, peer feedback, his understanding of the genre system, and the Transfer viva, followed by a brief discussion on his participation in this research. See Figure 12 below for an overview of Shankar's progress.

Figure 12

Timeline of Shankar's First Year



8.2 Goals for the PhD

Shankar began the PhD with enthusiasm and a somewhat idealistic, or at least uninformed, view of doctoral education, which was due to his lack of experience in education in Western contexts and manifested in how he approached his research proposal and understood supervisor feedback. He possessed a range of ideas for his thesis and a particular interest in philosophy. Shankar hoped the PhD, and the Oxford name, would enable him to launch a career as a teacher educator in India, and he viewed the doctorate as an opportunity to investigate a topic he was passionate about and that was inspired by his personal experience working as a teacher in India.

The key way in which Shankar's idealistic, optimistic orientation towards doctoral study appeared was in how he responded to feedback on his research proposal; though he tried to follow his supervisors' recommendations, he also believed that he had a substantial amount of space to resist the structure that is the research proposal and its function within the Transfer system. For instance, much of Shankar's first the year was characterized by a struggle to pare down the breadth of his project, which he initially conceived of as connecting to various large concepts and disciplines; and later, he played with the form of the proposal, hoping that the document could be written in a way that also reflected his values . His determination to sit the Transfer viva early in the season—May or June—was also evidence of an idealistic understanding of the PhD, particularly given the change in supervisors. The following sections examine these issues in greater depth, revealing how Shankar's overall view of the PhD was reflected in the choices he made in constructing his proposal for Transfer of Status.

8.3 Supervisor feedback: Compliance and resistance

Shankar respected his supervisors—his new and original supervisors—as experts in the topic of his thesis, trusting that they would guide him through the process of creating a successful research proposal. Shankar thus tried to comply with the majority of recommendations from his supervisors but also spent significant time in supervisions explaining his thinking and negotiating aspects of his research proposal. As Shankar received and responded to feedback, choosing what and how to incorporate comments into his proposal document, his decision-making reflected an orientation towards the practical evaluation element of agency, as he made revisions in relationship to the changing context of his proposal, the feedback he received, and his intentions for the project. These decisions to comply, resist/negotiate supervisor feedback were particularly evident as Shankar worked through key challenges of his project.

One central challenge for Shankar was sufficiently narrowing the scope of his thesis. This challenge was apparent from the beginning of the academic year, when Shankar was working with his original supervisors D and S, who initially described his research ideas as encompassing "three or four theses" (Supervisor S, October 2018, Supervision). Though Shankar only met with D and S twice before they realized his research interests had moved beyond their expertise, they were critical in helping Shankar to articulate his interests as involving teacher education, values, and "difference

across…education models or syllab[i]" (October 2018, Supervision), as well as setting up his expectations for the supervision process:

> **Supervisor S:** I do see this process as like an apprenticeship… where you move from being a novice, to an expert. Because at the end of the three years, [D] and I will be here to more guide you rather than supervise you, because you're going to be the expert…so it's this process of moving you, moving you along. (October 2018, Supervision).

Both supervisors suggested that Shankar needed to determine what he was passionate about and then increasingly narrow that topic until he could come up with feasible research questions. That said, his supervisors also made clear that while they were there to guide him through the process he still maintained the agency to shape his own project: "it's quite important not to feel like you're having to listen to us, without any will at all" (Supervisor D, October, 2018, Supervision). Despite having a short time with Shankar, S and D left an impression, and perhaps most important to Shankar, S and D took a "pastoral" approach to supervision that made him feel supported even as he transitioned to a new pair of supervisors, providing feedback on his revised research proposal so that he would not feel "abandoned."

When Shankar began meeting with his new supervisors, N and D, in January 2019, he continued to work on defining research questions in accordance with supervisor feedback. During January and February Shankar met his supervisors nearly every week. Initially, much of the feedback he received was oral, taking the shape of critical discussions around his research ideas in attempt to narrow them down:

> **Supervisor N:** I mean the, the analogy [is], imagine you're…driving up the M-1 from London or from Oxford, up to Edinburgh. Now, you will go past Sheffield. You don't have to go into Sheffield. What you've got to do is, say look, there's all that debate over there, that's sort of on the way, but actually I'm not gonna take you on a circular tour of Sheffield because we've got somewhere else to go…So you've got to work out, what are the sort of tangential things that, the rabbit holes that you could get swept up in…You've got to kind of just cut through all that, and say, my decision is, you know, there is all that debate, it's all very interesting, but actually [I'm doing this]. (January 2019, Supervision).

Shankar took this analogy to heart, and it proved central to his ability to eventually refine his research project alongside ongoing discussions with his supervisors; he acknowledged that at times he eyed several "Sheffields" including a "very intense neuroscience...rabbit hole" (March 2019, Supervision), but was able to recognize these instances and refocus. Over the course of several supervisions Shankar presented new versions of his research

questions and discussed them with N and D, explaining his reasoning, moving from an initial topic—"an investigation into the fragmentation of the teacher's sense of self - where their 'teacher identity' is different from their 'real self,' and how this translates into the classroom relationship and culture through the selective presentation of knowledge" (January 2019, Draft)—to "How does Teacher education in India shape the 'ideal teacher'?" (March 2019, Draft). However, though Shankar worked with his supervisors to narrow his questions, the one aspect of their feedback that he tended to resist and negotiate was related to terminology. A recurrent discussion in supervisions throughout the spring and early summer was that of the distinction between 'teacher' and 'teacher educator,' and what Shankar meant when he wrote about the "ideal teacher,"—a term central to his final research questions and overall project.

> **Supervisor D:** …a key thing they have to think about is, what sort of teacher they need to prepare. At the end of the program.
>
> **Shankar:** Right.
>
> **Supervisor D**: Which I think is what you're meaning by ideal teacher. But again, you have to clarify that. That's how I'm interpreting what you're saying. It's the, the sort of teacher they want to graduate. So, in our terms we would talk about, um the qualities, the knowledge, the practices, the skills, that we would want our graduates to have at the end of the teacher education program. So if that's what the documents say, that they outline these sorts of things, and you're going to call [that] the ideal teacher, you need to be really explicit that that's how you're using that term…then you go on to as N-- said, saying okay, well then as a result, we need to understand the education system…there's some sort of logic of argument, that needs to start with teacher education. What's driving it? And therefore, what's coming next, what you're investigating, what you're looking at in the literature, et cetera.
>
> […]
>
> **Shankar:** Krishnamurti uses the word ideal, which is…
>
> **Supervisor N:** But does he talk about ideal teacher?...Or teacher educator?
>
> **Shankar:** So here's the thing. No, he doesn't specifically say…the ideal teacher must do this. His…concept…is based on the philosophy of, if there is an ideal… that is a separation from what is. And therefore, we shouldn't try to ascribe, but you look at the situation as it is. And then you, act in this moment as is appropriate…And so, the tension that, if I were to speculate, the tension for example that I'm framing the literature between neoliberal and holistic at the personal level, could be framed in Krishnamurti's parlance as, the ideal teacher is this. But the teacher is actually, not that…and there's this constant tension

> between who they are and who they have to be. And that was kind of the original, when I said the ideal…that's kind of the premise from where I was getting it.
>
> **Supervisor D:** …Look…that could be appropriate too….my point is, if you're going to use that term, you're gonna have to have a good rationale and found it in some sort of literature. To inform what you're doing.
>
> **Shankar:** So are you saying, and forgive me for being reductionist, that I have to find, some research already that's looked at the specific phraseology ideal teacher?
>
> **Supervisor D:** No…[but] when you're using some sort of terminology, there has to be an argument. Now an easy way is just to say…I'm using so and so's term….If you want to use Krishnamurti's idea of ideal, and say…I'm going to use this to mean, what in the document the teacher education is described as…the total teacher, or…you know. So, just, it it's about explaining it and justifying it as you go through. (May 2019, Supervision)

As shown in the excerpt above, Shankar's supervisors tried to convey the importance of argument and clarity in defining terms and in structuring the proposal overall. Part of this involved being explicit about how terms were being used and why, supported by appropriate literature. Shankar's commitment to particular terms, for example, "ideal teacher," was linked to his cultural background and interest in philosophy, reflecting the way personal experience shaped his thinking and the choices he made in relation to his research. Part of those choices involved explaining to his supervisors the history of the terms he wanted to use and how he intended to define them. Such supervisory discussions thus reveal exchanges of feedback and Shankar's attempts to negotiate feedback to align with his goals for his research, a pattern that was consistent throughout all supervisions.

In reflecting upon supervisions and supervisor feedback, Shankar mused, "I do need to... finish this thesis in three years….And so, I wonder...how much of the… feedback I accept as...validation into what I feel [versus] lines of reasoning that, might be the quickest route, to the legitimization of this research" (April 2019, Interview). Shankar recognized the practical constraints of his research—time and money—and how those considerations might affect his responses to feedback. He suggested that to some degree, his adoption of supervisor feedback might be motivated by the fact that he needed to complete the PhD within three years, and therefore needed the "quickest route" forward. Yet, while Shankar tried to comply with supervisor feedback, he did so through negotiation, trying to find middle ground between supervisor recommendations and his personal goals, reflecting a tension between what he viewed as the standards of Western academia and education in his home country. As a result, though Shankar believed he

was complying with feedback, in practice, there were elements of his proposal that were not entirely aligned with the genre. Further, despite several discussions with his supervisors about how the proposal fit within the Transfer system, post-Transfer viva interviews suggested that Shankar had been unclear about the nature of Transfer of Status. These issues on the genre system and the Transfer viva will be elaborated upon in the forthcoming sections.

8.4 Peer feedback

In addition to supervision, Shankar received peer feedback, both formally in his research training seminar and informally in discussions with his colleagues. Peer feedback was particularly valuable during the first months of his PhD as he was rewriting his research ideas and transitioning to a new pair of supervisors. Informal peer discussion allowed Shankar to verbalize his thoughts and learn to explain his research to people who did not necessarily have similar expertise, which highlighted gaps in logic, need for clarification, and definition of terms: "I think [being] able to articulate [my research focus] every time….and then receive comments on it, changes the way you articulate it...The kinds of questions people ask force you to recapture certain details more clearly or more concisely…" (November 2018, Interview). Much of Shankar's early learning was therefore tied to his ability to communicate his research topic, and speaking to his classmates brought to attention the various ideas and assumptions he had taken for granted in thinking about his research. Such discussions were similar to what he would need to do in his research proposal—explain and define terms, constructing a clear argument for the value of the project.

In addition to informal peer discussion, Shankar had a particular friend and classmate with whom he often worked and exchanged feedback. Because they lived near each other, they often met at local coffee shops to write and to discuss their research. Feedback was primarily oral, but sometimes written as well. This steady source of support was particularly important to Shankar during the first six months of the PhD as he worked towards clarifying his research questions and methodology. Shankar also made it clear that he valued feedback from his peers and from his supervisors equally, believing that all the discussions contributed to his overall development and the subsequent growth of his research project and proposal. He noted that both supervisors and friend tended to comment on similar aspects of his proposal—and that "the level of

attention to detail" (April 2019, Interview) he received from his friend might exceed that of his supervisors due to the amount of time they spent together.

In reflecting upon the revisions he made to his proposal drafts over time, Shankar did not seem to believe that the changes he made to the document were directly traceable to a single source, further suggesting his reluctance to privilege one source of feedback over another: "in terms of actual, impact of their feedback on…the writing per se, like I said, specific things like signposting, you could trace [to supervision] but…not necessarily content or strand" (April 2019, Interview). Shankar thus took a holistic view of the development of his research proposal. He acknowledged that his supervisors provided valuable insight as to additional readings or lines of argument emerging in his proposal, but again, the friend with whom he could discuss different aspects of his project at length had a significant effect on Shankar's thinking and the development of the document.

8.5 Learning the research proposal as genre system

Much of what Shankar learned about the purpose of and expectations around the research proposal came from his supervisors. Having come from a different educational context, a challenge for Shankar was becoming accustomed to the rhetorical writing conventions and the way knowledge is built upon and utilized, as well as other institutional processes such as ethical clearance and risk assessment—additional pieces of the genre system.

The majority of the supervisor feedback Shankar received focused on the research questions and scope of his project (27 segments), the literature review (16 segments), methods (17 segments), and ethics (5 segments). Consistent with the structure of a research proposal, the majority of discussion around scope and research questions occurred between January and March, while feedback on literature review appeared primarily in April and May, and methods and ethics were discussed during May and June. Shankar also received feedback that performed a range of functions, from exploring ideas related to his research during the refining phases, and comments focused on providing information about research and writing expectations for the proposal, to more specific document-focused comments on organization, clarification of statements, and use of references.

As previously discussed, there was significant discussion around argument in relation to the use of terminology, the purpose of the research questions, the nature of a literature review, and construction of research design; both supervisors repeatedly

emphasized the role of each section of the research proposal, speaking to the requirements of the genre. For instance, they explained that the literature review needs to "show[..] that you understand that academic field" (February 2019, Supervision), and is "about building the case of what you're wanting to study, and what new knowledge is going to add," while the methodology section "is where you really make the argument about the approaches that you then choose to investigate" (March 2019, Supervision). Shankar absorbed these comments and requested verification that he was on the right track— *"*Is there anything, in the literature review that at this point, [that] seems like [it] doesn't fit as part of my argument?" (March 2019, Supervision)—also asking follow-up questions to clarify his understanding: *"*as I understand it there's, the methodology section which is...'why this method'.... What is the...proportion between [that section] and features like .... tools of data collection and analysis...?" (March 2019, Supervision).

It thus appeared as though Shankar was making progress and beginning to understand how each part of the proposal was meant to fit together. Nevertheless, the repetition and extent of these discussions over several months (January-May) suggests that internalizing the information and applying it to his document remained challenging; Shankar only completed his literature review and began working on the methodology in April 2019, roughly two months before submitting his proposal for Transfer of Status.

In addition to learning how to craft the content of the research proposal, certain aspects of scholarly writing emerged as a challenge for Shankar—signposting and appropriate referencing were common topics of supervisor feedback ("you lead the reader. In this section, 'I'm going to say'...'I'm going to explore'...you have all these signposts for the reader" (February 2019, Supervision)), though both supervisors agreed that Shankar was a skilled writer and did not need to be overly concerned about his writing—"style's really good actually...very strong" (February 2019, Supervision). As with feedback on terminology, Shankar tried to negotiate these comments and incorporate aspects of the feedback towards the goal of finding his own writing style. He acknowledged that his writing was a "little bit of this, little bit of that," an "amalgam of the kind of quality of writing which would be appreciated in India*"* that included anecdotal evidence (April 2019, Interview). One way in which he tried to compromise the *"*clinical*"* and *"*jargonistic*"* signposting that his supervisors desired was to create "a metaphorical signposting*"* (April 2019, Interview) in which he drew on the metaphor of a tree to frame the parts of the research proposal, including headings such as *"*the seeds*"* above the introduction, and *"*the roots*"* above the literature review. As discussed above,

Shankar was reluctant to fully adopt the conventions of what he viewed as "Oxfordian" academia, instead finding ways to negotiate the expectations with his interests and goals. He thus appeared to employ certain aspects of the proposal genre but not all—a choice that proved risky in the Transfer viva.

8.6 The Transfer viva

Shankar's Transfer viva took place at the end of June. He had hoped to clear the viva early in the summer so that he could begin fieldwork when the Indian school year began. Shankar had expected to pass with minor corrections but was asked to resubmit a revised proposal in the fall, after completing a pilot study. Shankar was initially disappointed but quickly reframed the viva into a positive experience: "I thought it was great…I think that [the examiners] created a supportive…environment" (June 2019, Interview). For Shankar, the Transfer viva was a significant experience that altered how he approached the thesis and prompted reflection on his writing and research practices.

Prior to the Transfer viva Shankar believed he would be asked questions about the literature, the contribution, and the relationship between his methodology and theoretical framework. Though the examiners did raise issues related to his literature review and theoretical framework—as well as his definition of "ideal teacher"—Shankar was particularly surprised by the examiners' detailed interrogation of the method, as they inquired about translation difficulties and the purpose of document analysis, among other things. In the examiner report, significant changes were requested:

- A stronger review of the literature that includes:
  - Deeper exploration of the concepts being discussed
  - Wider reference to the international literature
- A stronger theoretical framework, including more extensive discussion of themes such as decolonization
- A stronger rationale for the methodological decisions taken, including a more detailed critique of the methods of enquiry
- A pilot study
- An account of the decisions that you subsequently take as a result of such critique and pilot
- A revised timetable for the research (June 2019, Examiner Report)

Shankar felt there was a dissonance between what his supervisors had emphasized and what the examiners wanted, particularly in regards to the pilot study; he had been led to believe in previous supervisions that a pilot was not necessary or could be very brief, while the examiners viewed a pilot as essential. The majority of Shankar's supervisions

had focused on research questions and the literature review with less time devoted to methods, but this may be due in part to the fact that Shankar only began meeting N and D in January and therefore did not have sufficient time to flesh out the methods by June—when Shankar made clear he wanted to do Transfer. In reflecting on the viva, Shankar said:

> …it seemed like a lot of it was around methodology, and…I feel, partly that perhaps they had determined by virtue of just reading the document that, it wasn't going to clear because it didn't have a pilot…possibly tempered by if I could talk about my methodology in a certain way then it would clear….the questions they asked were hypothetical, [and] if I answered with certainty then it would be well what about this and what about that? And so I feel like perhaps presenting a range of options…might have come out as uncertainty

> …it seems to me that the, what this whole program is about, or at least my experience of it…it's a particular way of…relating to knowledge. It's a particular way of…looking at it and interpreting it and presenting it….so for example…a lot of the confusion has…come with this issue of the ideal teacher and the good teacher and the total teacher. And it's because…these words are … already…loaded with so much meaning that, in the literature, that I can't reframe it, now I [can't] say the ideal teacher means this and I'm going to use it. Because, it's already loaded with meaning…and I don't have any agency in putting meaning to that. …it's a very particular way of…relating to knowledge. (June 2019, Interview).

Shankar sensed that his examiners wanted "certainty," which may have been problematic as he was trying to present himself as flexible and able to react to different scenarios, suggesting a misunderstanding of the purpose of Transfer—to convince the examiners he was capable of carrying out the doctoral project. Shankar further attributed part of the issue as stemming from different ways of *"*relating to knowledge." Like his supervisors, Shankar's examiners had difficulty understanding his conceptualization of "ideal teacher." In reflecting upon the viva, Shankar explained that the term's embeddedness in the existing literature was such that he "didn't have any agency" in redefining it; he was constrained by the literature in his discipline. But more important perhaps was Shankar's recognition of how knowledge is presented and understood differently in Western or "Oxfordian" academia than it is in India. While Shankar had noticed such differences throughout the year, as in the writing style and use of references, until the Transfer viva he believed he could still find a compromise that would satisfy institutional and disciplinary norms. However, following the viva it became apparent that for the sake of passing the Transfer milestone he needed to fully embrace the characteristics of writing,

research, and knowledge construction that were typical of the proposal and the larger genre system in order to achieve his greater goal of completing the PhD.

Shankar viewed the experience of composing the research proposal and going through the Transfer viva as "learning a new skill": "it's like me having learned to play a sport on the street and now being brought into some [formal training]" (June 2019, Interview). Shankar described learning to conduct and present research in accordance with institutional requirements as putting on "clothes in a wardrobe," something separate from a decision to personally "subscribe [to] or adopt" the underlying values or beliefs. He thus viewed the Transfer viva as a valuable learning experience that provided insight into what was expected of him as a doctoral student at the institution. In this way, the Transfer viva was a central experience that inspired a change in the way he approached the doctorate. Shankar decided to comply with examiner and supervisor feedback, and on a greater scale, the practices of the discipline and the institution, towards the purpose of completing the PhD.

Following the Transfer viva, Shankar returned to India and began piloting his methods. He occasionally communicated with his supervisors via email and Skype, but primarily worked independently. As he began the pilot, Shankar encountered several difficulties including access issues and the inability to record several interviews, but the experience of being embedded in his fieldwork site also prompted Shankar to further reflect upon his thinking and research practices. He noted, for instance, that in India the focus was on reproducing knowledge rather than being critical, and that his original literature review similarly focused on presenting literature rather than interrogating it.

Shankar began to draft his new proposal in October and sent it to his supervisors for feedback via email. One of the most obvious revisions was to his research questions, which were substantially more concrete and specific. He abandoned "ideal teacher" as the central concept in his project and omitted the "metaphorical signposting." Shankar also began to add comments to himself in red text, noting where the argument needed strengthening and where he needed to insert additional references. He also substantially expanded his methods section with details on the fieldwork site, method of analysis, and findings from the pilot. Shankar eventually passed his second Transfer viva in the spring of 2020.[10]

[10] Due to a family emergency Shankar suspended his PhD in December and we thus decided to end his participation in his research. He did, however, graciously offer feedback on his case summary via online chat in February 2020, and let me know when he successfully completed Transfer in April.

8.7 Participation in the research

Throughout this project, Shankar reflected on his participation in the research, in part because he was thinking through how he would navigate the process of data collection and manage participant relationships when he began his own fieldwork. Upon being asked what influence—if any—participation had on his research thinking or experiences over the past year, he responded that the project "created a presence for me to talk about [my research]," though participation itself did not necessarily affect the way he approached the proposal:

> Has it affected the way that I write? Not particularly. Because...I articulated to you about things that more often or not I articulated to myself…so in that sense participating in the research has not…changed the way I would write this proposal. [But] in the talking about it, I've been able to sometimes see how individual threads of what I have been feeling...weave together within a wider curtain...that's been extremely beneficial. (February 2020, Interview)

Shankar's participation thus encouraged reflection on his research, providing a venue for him to articulate his thoughts, facilitating at times his ability to make connections between various aspects of his experience.

8.8 Conclusion

Shankar began the PhD with a number of broad ideas for his thesis based in personal experience as a teacher in India and his interest in philosophy. However, due to his inexperience in Western academia, Shankar had a somewhat idealistic view of the PhD that was reflected in the way he negotiated feedback and crafted his research proposal. Many of his choices in crafting the proposal were thus influenced by a combination of the practical evaluation and projective elements of agency, as he worked towards the goal of producing a thesis that was meaningful to him but also took into account the supervisor feedback he received over time, assessing and incorporating it in relation to his ongoing understanding of what the research proposal entailed. His experience with the Transfer viva, however, caused him to re-evaluate his practices and adopt the conventions of "Oxfordian" academia for the sake of passing Transfer of Status.

Chapter 9: Ethan

(Male, Late 20s, British)

> "There's been varying points this year where I thought, am I doing the right thing? Would I be better off doing other research?... I think it's the first time where, I'm very cognizant of this is all mine [so] that's been quite a big defining feature of it. The independence." (November 2019, Interview).

9.1 Overview

Ethan was a first-year doctoral student in Education. His research was an ethnographic study on standardization in primary schools, a project that built upon both his personal experiences and his Master's research. Ethan described himself as enjoying all types of writing and noted that he was a "bit of a perfectionist," meaning that he tended to "labor over a piece of writing for maybe longer than is necessary" (November 2018, Interview).

When Ethan joined this study, he was three weeks into his PhD program, and was reading the literature on his topic as well as participating in his department's required course, the research training seminar, which required students to present their ongoing projects. Ethan chose to pursue doctoral work because he enjoyed his Master's and missed reading, writing, and learning. He initially decided to do the Master's because he had been working as a primary school teacher and did not like how the education system was working in England. Following the PhD, Ethan hoped to go into academia or alternatively work at a think tank or NGO.

Ethan embraced critical feedback so long as it was constructive and believed that his responses to criticism were related to the nature of the supervisory relationship. For instance, he had a good relationship with his Master's supervisor who "valued the good bits" of his work but would also "happily tear a piece of work to shreds" (November 2018, Interview). The balance in feedback was important to Ethan. When writing, he liked to make outlines using subheadings or in bullet-point form. He also liked to create separate documents organized by theme and topic in which he collected relevant quotations from his readings. Later, he would later integrate the quotes into his writing.

Ethan had two supervisors. One supervisor was unavailable during his first term, and so did not begin supervising until January. Ethan usually met both supervisors together, but occasionally would meet just one if there was a scheduling conflict. He met

his supervisors roughly once per month during term time. These supervisions typically lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. Ethan often took notes during supervisions and sometimes brought specific questions to his supervisors.

For Ethan, an important source of motivation that also shaped the direction of his research was his prior experience as a primary school teacher. This was evident in his supervisions where he often referred to his teaching experience or the research he did in the Master's, which he viewed as a pilot for the PhD project because of the similar methodology. Ethan also made clear that he had ownership over the project and therefore needed to focus on a topic he felt strongly about.

During the first term, reading was a central source of learning that advanced Ethan's research thinking. Beyond the cursory literature review required for his research training seminar, Ethan did little writing, focusing instead on identifying and examining the literature relevant to his field. This reading had the important effect of causing a change in Ethan's research focus over the winter break, which he discussed and confirmed with his supervisors in January 2019.

Beyond reading, supervisor feedback was the most important and consistent source of learning and support. Ethan viewed his supervisors as experts and therefore valued their input above all others. Throughout the year his supervisors provided valuable information about PhD and research proposal expectations, suggesting resources and both guiding and supporting his research thinking. In addition to supervisor feedback, Ethan found peer feedback helpful in advancing his research, particularly during the first six months of his PhD.

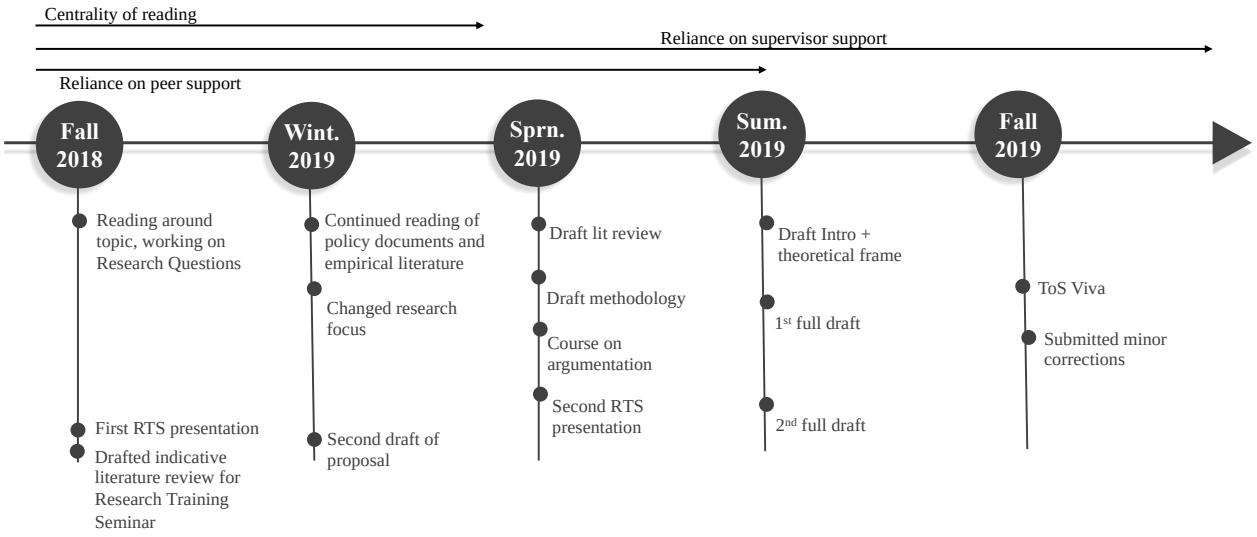
In Education, Transfer of Status requires a 10,000-word research proposal that should include a literature review, research questions, and methods. Students are also required to submit work ethics and risk assessment forms, a timetable for the research that shows the feasibility of the project, references, evidence of presentation of the project at a seminar or conference, a skills review and training analysis, and the official university application form for Transfer of Status. Education students are expected to submit and sit the Transfer viva within one year of starting the PhD. Proposals must be submitted at least two weeks before the viva. Ethan had originally hoped to do his viva in the summer of 2019, but ultimately submitted at the beginning of October and sat the Transfer viva shortly thereafter. He passed with minor corrections.

The remaining sections focus on the key aspects of Ethan's learning and development as he wrote and revised his research proposal: 1) goals for the PhD, 2)

supervisor feedback, 3) peer feedback, 4) learning the genre system, 5) and the Transfer viva. See Figure 13 below for an overview of Ethan's progress.

Figure 13

Timeline of Ethan's First Year



9.2 Goals for the PhD

Ethan viewed the PhD as an opportunity to investigate a topic he was passionate about while developing research skills and broadening his career opportunities. Because his research stemmed from his prior experiences as a primary school teacher Ethan was personally invested in the work, which to some extent reflected his political perspectives and views on education. However, despite Ethan's desire to craft a project that would have impact, he was also mindful of the practicalities of the thesis and the research proposal, willing to compromise in response to supervisor feedback in service of the larger goal of passing Transfer of Status.

Ethan's goals for the PhD thesis were evident in many of the decisions he made in constructing his research proposal. For instance, after generating an initial research focus and research questions in the fall, he spent the winter break reading and came back in January with an idea for a shift in focus: "The literature seems to [support] what I'm saying but they seem to have already done it…But I'd noticed that, what I was interested in really is standardization. And identity…And how, kids aren't, allowed to be themselves anymore" (February 2019, Interview). It was important to Ethan to have a topic he felt

strongly about, in part because his "level of motivation" was linked to his interest in the work. His weeks of reading the policy and research literature led him to realize that his initial plan to study primary students' reading was actually a "proxy" for his deeper interest in standardization, resulting in a new set of research questions. In this way, Ethan actively shaped the direction of his research, driven by a projective orientation towards the thesis in which he imagined the different directions his thesis might take and then chose to pursue the questions that he believed would best stimulate him intellectually and facilitate a sufficient level of motivation throughout the doctorate. However, having decided to alter his research questions, Ethan was cognizant of the role his supervisors played in shaping the research and was concerned that they approve his change in thinking before he proceeded: "I just really need that kind of, reassurance, like yes, this is fine, off you go" (February 2019, Interview). Thus, while Ethan was passionate about the change in focus, he was also aware that he needed supervisor support in order to progress effectively, indicating his willingness to compromise for the sake of completing a successful PhD. In describing his view of the PhD at the end of his first year, Ethan put it succinctly: "it's an interesting mix...of independence and collaboration" (November 2019, Interview).

9.3 Supervisor feedback: Compliance and resistance

Consistent with his approach to the PhD, Ethan was primarily compliant with supervisor feedback throughout the process of constructing his research proposal, positioning his supervisors as experts with whom he shared common interests and experiences. In responding to supervisor feedback, Ethan tended to draw on both the practical evaluation and iterational elements of agency, assessing feedback within the context of each draft and adopting feedback because he understood that following supervisor suggestions would assist him in creating a successful research proposal.

Ethan was proactive in bringing questions to his supervisions, often directing the type of feedback he wanted—evidence of his sense of ownership over the work. Supervisor feedback performed the following functions: providing information about expectations or conventions related to the PhD, Transfer of Status, and writing, suggesting resources, confirming his ideas, and offering guidance or suggestions for improvement: "I think you should be thinking, not in terms of the picture books as intervention but as a methodological tool" (February 2019, Supervision). Ethan also had opportunities in supervisions to explain and justify his ideas and methodological thinking.

Ethan described his supervisions as falling into two categories: sessions when he received feedback on drafts and sessions focused on a specific issue, such as the ethics forms, in which he often had an agenda comprised of practical questions he wanted to work through. Overall, Ethan viewed his supervisors as both providing a general level of support and as "steering" him through the research proposal process:

> I think I've used the sort of steering metaphor before...In the sense that I'm liable to, go down rabbit holes. [For instance, my supervisors told] me to be more explicit with the methodology. That steering occasionally. And I'm quite good at working independently, and get a lot done. But it would be often that I'll come to a supervision and I'll have worked on a theory thing and they'll say but ...how is this going to translate? (October 2019, Interview).

Ethan was aware of the central role his supervisors played in keeping his research focused. Again, his tendency to comply with their feedback may therefore have been linked in part to his positioning of his supervisors as experts in both his research topic and *the research and institutional processes*. Further, in reflecting upon supervisions over the first year of his doctorate Ethan noted that he neither encountered any instances in which he did not understand feedback, nor did he disagree with any supervisor feedback; rather, the feedback "seem[ed] very reasonable" and supported his goals of improving the proposal document and passing Transfer of Status.

Apart from Ethan's overall practice of adopting supervisor feedback, the one area of feedback he struggled with was related to his writing style. Ethan described his writing as "flowery," and his supervisors made similar comments on various drafts of his proposal, referring to his writing as journalistic and "rhetorically beautiful" but not appropriate for the proposal genre. For instance: "In my pilot study, I also lamented the lack of attention given to children's social, emotional and moral development in schools, arguing that standardised tests had ridden roughshod over these aspects of the curriculum" (June 2019, Draft). In this respect, Ethan's writing style was largely reflective of the iterational element of agency, in which he relied on prior patterns of behavior in composing his document.

Similarly, much of Ethan's time was devoted to producing a well-written and cohesive document. In describing his revision process, Ethan emphasized an attention to language, reflecting his self-ascribed perfectionistic tendencies—"I'm really… a stickler for making sure it flows nicely when it reads" (June 2019, Interview). Good writing was therefore of personal value to Ethan, and though he acknowledged his supervisors'

concerns about his writing style, he initially hoped to reach a compromise and find "the line" defining the extent to which he could write descriptively—though, he acknowledged, "[my supervisors and I] may or may not agree where that line is" (June 2019, Interview). For Ethan, writing became a matter of "trial and error" (June 2019, Interview) in which he continually refined his style over the course of a number of drafts, a process that was later facilitated by the exercise of pruning down his document in August and September 2019. Thus, Ethan's description of his own writing, confirmed by supervisor feedback, suggested that he was aware of the need to change his approach to research writing. However, because of Ethan's initial hesitation and resistance, this change took time and multiple supervisions to take concrete effect: "I think it's taken time to break out of old habits" (November 2019, Interview). Yet, Ethan did not view his issues with writing as problematic; instead, he positioned supervisor feedback as constructive, and the evolution of his writing became the most significant evidence of growth he observed in himself over the year: "my writing has...gotten to be a lot more focused" (November 2019, Interview).

Ethan thus respected and relied on his supervisors for guidance while also expressing his own goals for the research and bringing questions to supervisions that reflected his concerns. Aside from his struggle to write concisely, Ethan always complied with supervisor feedback, agreeing with supervisor recommendations as his proposal evolved.

9.4 Peer feedback

In addition to supervisor feedback Ethan received feedback from his peers in formal and informal settings, including his research training seminar. Peer feedback was most useful during the first six months of the PhD, as it allowed Ethan to practice articulating his research interests and engage with people from different backgrounds who contributed various perspectives to his research. In explaining the value of peer feedback, Ethan described it as a "perspective thing," saying, "you could have been thinking about something one way in your head for so long and speak to someone else and…the penny will drop….it helps you not to get stuck in a sort of blinkered line of thought" (December 2018, Interview). Further, peer discussions and mandatory presentations in the research training seminar helped Ethan to identify areas where he needed "to make things a bit more concrete," while the very process of preparing the presentations was useful in filtering out the key points of his research and how it might be structured.

Ethan also received a significant amount of peer feedback from a friend and classmate with whom he studied. They often discussed their research ideas and sometimes exchanged copies of their proposal drafts for oral and written feedback. Ethan explained, "it's helpful to have someone who…can read something with a fresh pair of eyes and just be like, this doesn't make sense, or I know what you mean here" (February 2019, Interview). Again, peer feedback was helpful in highlighting gaps in logic and was particularly useful in the first months of the PhD as Ethan was still figuring out his research focus and methodology. However, he ultimately prioritized supervisor feedback because "[the supervisors] are the authority [and] they know what they're talking about" (May 2019, Interview). Once Ethan began to draft his proposal, he drew on peer feedback less and less, reflecting the increasingly focused nature of the project.

9.5 Learning the research proposal as genre system

Because Ethan's supervisors were his primary source of support in writing the proposal document, it was also through his supervisors that he learned the requirements of the proposal genre and its place and function within the larger Transfer and thesis genre systems. Ethan was fortunate to have a combination of supervisors with overlapping expertise in his topic and slightly different supervision styles that left him well-prepared for Transfer. One supervisor, with an interest in theory, engaged Ethan in discussion on his theoretical framework, which was useful as Ethan was also well-versed in theory and one of his Transfer examiners would probably focus on the theory aspect of the proposal. His other supervisor took a pragmatic approach to supervision, focusing on the purpose of Transfer of Status and how to create a document that fulfilled requirements and would thus be likely to pass. Both supervisors were former English teachers and had knowledge of the school context. Major aspects of the research proposal that his supervisors commented on included research questions (13 segments), theoretical framework (14 segments), literature review (19 segments), methods (16 segments), referencing (5 segments), and ethics (2 segments).

Although Ethan's initial supervisions during the first two months of his PhD involved exploring ideas and readings around his research topic, as a whole, his supervisions centered on the research proposal document and on the expectations for Transfer of Status; supervisory conversations that explored ideas were often double-coded with a specific aspect of the research proposal, for instance, research questions or methods, rather than being stand-alone discussions of ideas. Many of these supervisory

discussions were also linked to Ethan's experiences as a teacher and as a Master's researcher, showing how his prior work continually influenced the ideas he brought to the PhD and his attempts to use that experience to inform the PhD research.

Ethan's supervisions also reflected a clear progression through the different stages of the research project and proposal. Discussion of research questions appeared almost exclusively in first term, when Ethan and his supervisor discussed the purpose and phrasing of the questions. Discussions of the literature review and theoretical framework appeared towards the end of the first term (late fall) and into the second term (winter). Finally, discussion of methods and ethics were most prevalent in the spring and summer as Ethan moved closer to Transfer of Status. Ethan's supervisors also paid particular attention to argument and writing, and such comments often overlapped with either the conceptual framework or methods. For example:

> **Supervisor A:** So it feels to me that…you're…getting your head round, ideas, round research design…but what you're not doing is being punchy… 'cause, it will be about how, how do you justify the methods? Why this and not something else? What is it, what did you use, how does that help you get your data? (July 2019, Supervision)

Ethan's supervisors consistently emphasized the necessity of explaining his choices in order to construct an argument for how the theoretical framework and methodology linked to the research questions, justifying why he picked certain concepts or methods over others. Similarly, in writing his proposal, the revisions he made that were not feedback-driven but rather self-initiated, also tended to focus on the logic of the argument and the language of the document—which for Ethan, appeared to be interrelated: "[I] make sure that there's an argument... and that each one of these subheadings is almost like a proposition that will lead to the conclusion" (May 2019, Interview). He worked on incorporating concrete evidence that supported the basis for his project, and also enrolled in a six-week online course on critical reasoning in the spring, in an effort to improve his argumentation skills, which he found helpful in thinking through the logic of his proposal.

Finally, Ethan's supervisors devoted significant time to discussing the purpose and nature of the Transfer viva, again emphasizing the necessity of a clear argument and the role language plays in communicating the purpose of and plan for the project:

> **Supervisor B:** I mean, there are a variety of things you need to do. For Transfer, and this paper…. And one of them is you need to show that you have, completely

> explicit understanding of exactly what you want to do, and why you're going to do it…. backed up with literature. And one of the things you need to do is demonstrate that you are writing at the right level.… There is no doubt you're writing at the right level but you're not doing the other stuff….So they'll go, 'this is beautiful...What are you actually doing?' (July 2019, Supervision)

Ethan and his supervisors also discussed the examiners and what he could expect from the Transfer viva; one of the examiners was an expert in the theory Ethan had chosen, and thus both supervisors advised him to be clear on how the theory worked and how it was to be used. In contrast, the second examiner had more methodological expertise and extensive experience working with children, and therefore would be likely to comment on his research design and offer suggestions. Through supervisory discussions Ethan learned the necessity clearly communicating his decisions, as well as what he might expect from his Transfer viva examiners. This demonstrates a strategic approach on the part of Ethan's supervisors, trying to prepare him specifically for the Transfer viva towards the purpose of creating a passing document, acknowledging the examiners' roles as gatekeepers and the relationship between the Transfer viva the research proposal within the genre system.

9.6 The Transfer viva

Ethan passed his Transfer viva with minor corrections in October 2019. For Ethan, the viva made him more "confident in the process"; he felt the Transfer viva was "very rigorous" and he was appreciative that the examiners provided feedback on aspects of his proposal document that ultimately served to strengthen the project. At the same time, Ethan remained aware that Transfer of Status was just one step towards a successful thesis and having passed Transfer, he had begun to look forward to data collection, which he believed would be the greater challenge.

Ethan's examiners requested an addendum to the proposal, which Ethan submitted two weeks after receiving his examiner report. Specifically, they requested "a clear model of description, how this connects to the research questions and theoretical orientation, specification of the data that will be collected, and how these data will throw light on the research questions" (October 2019, Examiner Report). Ethan agreed with all the feedback he received and believed his examiners' comments to be consistent with issues his supervisors had raised, such as "being more explicit" (November 2019, Interview). He acknowledged that he anticipated that methodology might generate the most the criticism. Overall, Ethan was "just really impressed" with the level of detail at

which the examiners had read and assessed his document and noticed that they raised issues he “hadn't thought about”: “I thought [that] one of the examiners coming from a more sociological position, and [the other coming from] a more psychological position was really helpful...’cause I got the whole spectrum. They picked up on different things” (November 2019, Interview). Completing the revisions increased Ethan’s confidence in his proposal and his project, and his successful navigation of the Transfer process appeared to strengthen his trust in his examiners and his supervisors, confirming his progress towards a successful thesis.

9.7 Participation in the research

For Ethan, one of the most important aspects of participating in this research was recording supervisions, which he said he never would have done had he not been a participant. Ethan self-recorded his supervisions and kept copies for himself to review—a practice he intended to continue.

> There's so many readings and things that I'd missed had I not record[ed] and obviously you can sit in the supervision, writing things down but not fully engaged...so that's been amazing. It's just encouraged a lot more reflection. That's been really good. (November 2019, Interview)

Thus, Ethan viewed his participation in this study as an opportunity to reflect upon the process while learning practices that could be useful beyond the Transfer stage of his thesis.

9.8 Conclusion

Ethan began the PhD with a desire to craft a project he was passionate about that also built upon his former teaching experience and work as a Master’s student. Although Ethan’s research was personally motivated and sometimes reflected his political concerns regarding primary education, he was also aware that he needed to learn and adhere to the standards of the PhD and the institution. Ethan’s overall approach to the doctorate was thus one of compromise. In composing his research proposal, this approach manifested largely in compliance with his supervisors’ feedback, as he viewed them as experts in the field and in the research process. He believed their recommendations to be reasonable and in service of bettering his project. Thus, compliance with supervisor suggestions also reflected an agentive engagement with feedback. Further, Ethan was not afraid to express his goals and interests, a reflection of his sense of ownership over the work. Successfully

navigating the Transfer process gave Ethan more confidence in the research and in his ability to execute it.

Chapter 10. Patterns Across Cases

10.1 Introduction

In the previous five chapters, the within-case analyses for each of the participants were presented to address the research questions. These results offered detailed portraits of the participants' experiences of composing the research proposal and navigating the process of Transfer of Status. This chapter undertakes the same task but by looking across all five cases. The participants exercised agency in the decisions they made to further their research proposals, though in different ways. The drivers underlying each participant's temporal orientation toward agency were influenced by their prior understandings of academic research and writing, changing supervisory and research contexts, as well as their goals for the thesis and in some cases, goals for their post-PhD careers, showing how individuals navigate the Transfer system in relation to their unique circumstances and experiences over time. Although a number of threads of inquiry emerged from the data, four themes surfaced as most salient across cases: 1) overarching approach to the PhD thesis, 2) discovering the genre system, 3) perceived expertise of supervisors and compliance and resistance over time, and 4) the Transfer viva as a critical and potentially transformative experience. In this chapter, each of these themes is discussed in relation to the research questions guiding this study, drawing on examples from the participants to show variation and commonalities across cases.

10.2 Overarching RQ: *How do first-year doctoral students in the social sciences shape and negotiate a successful research proposal over time?*

The participants brought specific approaches to the PhD and the doctoral thesis, which were conveyed in the strategies they used to construct their research proposals. Here, 'approach' is understood as "a way of considering or handling something, [especially] a problem" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020). Across the five participants, three approaches emerged: pragmatic/strategic (Ben and Charlie), idealistic (Shankar and Natalie), and realistic/compromising (Ethan). The approach adopted by each participant appeared to be influenced by the extent of prior research experience, goals for or conceptions of the thesis, and in one case (Shankar) cultural context. These elements of influence were not discrete units but interacted with and affected each other. Thus, the actions taken in relationship to the thesis approach—particularly assessment and use of

feedback—reflected orientations towards both the iterative and projective elements of agency, which were open to variation over time and in some cases (Shankar and Natalie) reflected changes in approach to the PhD.

Pragmatic/Strategic

The pragmatic/strategic approach, adopted by Ben and Charlie, was characterized by an orientation toward the feasibility or practicality of the research in relation to the PhD in terms of time to completion, financial constraints, or whatever would most facilitate quick and effective success: the *PhD as a means to an end*. As a result, the projective element of agency was particularly prevalent in decision-making. Both Ben and Charlie expressed their pragmatic/strategic approach in three key ways: 1) their plans for the PhD in relation to career objectives, 2) their research development informed by broadly seeking information or opportunities, and 3) their assessment and use of feedback.

Ben made clear from the beginning of the PhD that the doctorate would help him to develop research skills that would enhance his employability and allow him to secure work in an international policy organization. As a result, Ben framed the thesis as a vehicle for obtaining the degree and advancing his career, and while he wanted to produce a quality thesis, he was not emotionally attached to the work and noted, unlike some of his op-eds and reports, the thesis would not be read by a wide audience. Further, because he was only partially funded, Ben was determined to finish within three years. Like Ben, Charlie initially viewed the PhD as furthering his career opportunities. However, while Ben had a specific vision for that career, Charlie was uncertain about his future and hoped the PhD would allow him to explore possibilities. Charlie was also self-funding his doctorate and therefore was aware of the need to complete his degree on time, and applied for various scholarships and internships while simultaneously doiing his PhD work.

Both Ben and Charlie were active in finding ways to develop themselves as researchers beyond the scope of the PhD, choices that spoke primarily to the projective element of agency in which the participants acted in furtherance of a larger goal, predicting that their actions would facilitate success. For Ben, this manifested in decisions to attend conferences that were related to his research topic but also provided a platform for networking. Ben reached out to different organizations and wrote op-eds as a way of keeping engaged with the policy community within which he hoped his thesis would be of interest. In contrast, Charlie focused on gathering information about doctoral

expectations and social science research more broadly in order to facilitate his understanding of the PhD.

Assessment of supervisor feedback also reflected a pragmatic/strategic approach to the PhD, though how Ben and Charlie assessed feedback differed significantly. For Ben, who had a background in social science and policy research and had a strong sense of ownership over his project, feedback was evaluated and adopted based on what Ben believed would best improve his research—comments regarding clarity, strengthening the argument, and methodology were largely accepted, while suggestions that questioned the scope of his research or tried to expand the document beyond what Ben believed he could include within the word limit were discarded. Charlie, however, who was less confident about qualitative social science research, relied on supervisor feedback to guide both the conception of his research project and the form and structure of the proposal document, a strategy linked to his pragmatic/strategic approach to the PhD; given his lack of experience, relying on supervisors was the clearest way towards a successful project. Thus, although Ben and Charlie used feedback in divergent ways, each participant's choices reflected a strategy in furtherance of a larger pragmatic/strategic approach to efficiently and successfully creating a passing Transfer document, which would allow them to move on to the next phase of the doctorate.

Idealistic

This approach was characterized by a *romanticized, highly optimistic framing of the research process*, including a preoccupation with 'big' ideas and the desire to create a deeply impactful or meaningful project, closely tied to personal passions or philosophies. Shankar and Natalie, who adopted an idealistic approach, expressed this orientation through 1) the discussions they had with their supervisors, 2) their ideas about research, and 3) the way they constructed their research proposals.

Both Shankar's and Natalie's research projects grew from personal experiences, and it was apparent in supervisions and interviews that they were passionate and intellectually engaged with their topics to the extent that narrowing the scope of their interests to a feasible doctorate was a significant challenge—both participants had a tendency to think and talk about their projects in broad ways, highlighting connections and avenues of inquiry connecting elements of history, philosophy, language, and politics.

Shankar and Natalie also began the PhD by framing research in idealistic ways, which later led to a sense of disillusionment—in Natalie's case—or for Shankar, the need to adapt to a research culture very different from that of his home context. For instance, Shankar initially wanted to use a particular term that was to be a central concept in his work; this term, however, was challenged repeatedly in supervision and in the Transfer viva because of its connotations and potential for ambiguity. Similarly, Natalie, who had described her research topic as foreseeably her *"life's work,"* later concluded that while she remained interested in the research topic, she no longer wanted to stay in academia full-time due to the politics and lifestyle. Both Shankar and Natalie had begun the PhD not realizing the ways in which they would be asked to negotiate their research ideas and plans, and initially made research and writing decisions that supported their goals for the research. Thus, in their optimistic framing of research there was a projective element to the decisions both Shankar and Natalie made in approaching their theses, as they imagined how their PhD journeys would play out. Additionally, both Shankar and Natalie believed they could successfully complete Transfer early. This suggests that Shankar and Natalie were unclear about what to expect of the Transfer viva or were not fully aware of the particular assessment standards, providing additional evidence of their idealistic approach to the PhD and PhD thesis.

The ways in which Shankar and Natalie chose to structure their research proposals also reflected the idealistic approach underlying their PhDs. Unlike the other participants, who chose 'traditional' structures for the research proposal—introduction, literature review/conceptual framework, methods—Shankar and Natalie resisted this framing and instead tried to create documents more reflective of their personal beliefs and preferences, believing they had more leeway for creativity in their writing. Natalie, for instance, did not have specific sections demarcating her literature review, conceptual framework, and context, but rather combined them under larger thematic sections. Likewise, Shankar nested sections of the document using his "metaphorical signposting," in addition to integrating the anecdotal writing he was accustomed to in India with reference-heavy writing, which he identified as characteristic of Western academia.

Realistic

The realistic approach lay somewhere between the pragmatic/strategic and idealistic approaches, characterized by *compromise and accommodation*: passion for the topic and desire for it to be impactful on a larger scale, while also being cognizant of institutional

expectations and willing to shape the project accordingly. Ethan adopted the realistic approach, which was evident in 1) supervisory discussions, and 2) his assessment and use of feedback.

Ethan worked to strike a balance between creating a project he was passionate about and crafting a document that satisfied his supervisors, which may be linked to the fact that he had previously done a Master's dissertation in Education and was therefore familiar with the research process and the necessity of supervisor feedback in success. Indeed, though Shankar and Natalie had completed Master's dissertations in their fields, both described the experience as having little supervisory contact. One of the things Ethan appreciated about his supervisors was their shared interest in school policy and their shared experiences as teachers, which allowed him to speak openly about his concerns about primary education and engage in critical discussion. In such supervisory discussions—and in early drafts of his proposal—Ethan expressed political views that were tied to his teaching experience and the inception of his thesis, revealing Ethan's desire for impact and change. Even so, he acknowledged the "authority" of his supervisors and was willing to incorporate their feedback, demonstrating a balanced and realistic view of the doctoral process as one of negotiation between the desire to shape a large and important study and the need to meet institutional standards through a feasible project. Further, both of Ethan's supervisors were careful in explaining the reasoning behind feedback and being explicit about examiner expectations, which may also have contributed to his willingness to compromise.

Changes in Approach Over Time

It is important to note that the approaches discussed above were not always clear-cut categories—rather each given approach speaks to the general overarching way in which the participants structured their actions and communicated their thinking about their research, writing, and the PhD. Additionally, participant approaches were not always static; while Ben, Charlie, and Ethan remained relatively consistent throughout the project, Natalie and Shankar changed their framing of the PhD and the proposal following their unsuccessful attempts at Transfer. Natalie, for instance, remarked that she had been "naïve" about doctoral work and following the Transfer viva began to view the PhD as a "box-ticking exercise" she needed to work through in order to pass (pragmatic approach). While Shankar maintained his thinking about the PhD as a holistic process, the Transfer viva highlighted the gaps between his former schooling and the expectations

of the university, leading him to alter the structure of his proposal in accordance with examiner feedback and move towards a realistic approach. In contrast, for Charlie passing the Transfer viva reinforced his faith in his supervisors and his reliance upon them as guides and role models. This suggests that the Transfer viva was a *critical structuring event* capable of transforming how students understood doctoral expectations and showing how evolving temporal-relational contexts, in this case the institutional context, may affect agentive decision-making in relation to the proposal.

The participants' framing of the PhD in relation to their broader lives may also speak to change (or lack of change) in approach over time. For instance, Natalie viewed her central identities as those of mother and writer, making it easier to reframe the doctorate and her research proposal through a pragmatic/strategic approach in order to obtain the degree. For Shankar, however, the PhD was both a central step towards a career in academia and focused on topics that he hoped to continue to build upon in future research with the hope of making an impact in his home country. Further, Shankar's prior educational context, which was influential in shaping his understanding of research, writing, and knowledge construction, meant he had to adjust to a new way of thinking. In contrast, Ben, who integrated feedback from examiners following Transfer despite a few doubts, did not alter his view of the PhD, as complying with examiner feedback aligned with his already pragmatic/strategic approach focused on successfully achieving the doctorate. Changes in context and circumstances, from the result of the Transfer viva to participants' growing understanding of their research and evolving supervisory relationships, may therefore alter how participants perceive the PhD and determine the most effective means of negotiating a successful path forward.

10.3 Sub-Question 1: *What sources of influence are most crucial to students' changing understandings of research and doctoral writing over time?*

Though it is important to acknowledge that the participants' understandings of the Transfer system were influenced by a combination of feedback from peers, other academics, reading, and research training courses, supervisors were the central sources of genre and research support across participants—with the possible exception of Ben. For instance, while peer feedback was useful in the early stages of the PhD for providing a sense of community support (Charlie) and for discussing and developing research ideas (Shankar and Ethan), supervisor feedback was generally identified as most valued and most influential throughout the study.

The extent to which participants were successful in navigating the genre system—creating a passing research proposal—was linked to both their overall approach to the PhD, and in most cases, the extent to which they complied with and resisted supervisor feedback (I will return to this later). However, the relationship between compliance and success was also mediated by the supervisor and the extent to which the supervisor passed on information or guidance about the genre and genre system. In this way, the supervisory context was an important evolving temporal-relational context and key representation/conveyor of structure.

As shown in Table 7 (below), how each participant's supervisor(s) explained key features of the research proposal varied from explicit step-by-step guidance by Charlie's supervisors on how to structure his literature review and who to cite, to the feedback provided by Natalie's supervisor who suggested that she write a literature review to explain the key themes guiding her thesis. Yet, despite being in different departments, certain commonalities appeared in supervisor feedback across participants: identifying a contribution, constructing an argument through the literature review, clear research questions, detailed methods—all central features of research writing. The a priori coding also revealed that in terms of rhetorical features, all supervisors emphasized signposting and referencing, and in some cases, identifying the gap in the literature and defining terms as essential features of the proposal genre. However, the majority of supervisory comments tended to point towards a broad understanding of how one presents research successfully rather than about success specifically in relation to Transfer of Status, suggesting a difference between research support and genre support. However, one aspect of Transfer that all supervisors and department handbooks also identified was the importance of ethics. In supervision, ethics were discussed primarily in terms of the CUREC procedure, how to complete and submit the form to meet institutional scrutiny, which indicated a practical approach aimed at securing ethical approval in order to facilitate the research. The focus on CUREC reflected attention to the Transfer system, as ethical approval provides further evidence of the study's viability and the student's plan to carry out their methods.

Table 7

Supervisor Feedback Across Participants

	Charlie	Ethan	Natalie	Shankar	Ben
Transfer Process	So [my supervisor] said…I don't know what question you will get. But… don't… accept anything they say to you. Because… you know…your research [best]….so keep a balance between accepting what they say, accepting …suggestions… Because they are not doing research, you are the person who does the research. …And he said…if you feel a question is very difficult… that's their job…so…don't feel it to be personal. …It's nothing…just keep calm, and then think, and answer. Answer the best you can.	I'm just thinking of your examiners, and I know exactly what they'll say... Why, why are you calling [your concept] this and not [that]?...So it's those justifications, you need to be really tight on... Because, that will be picked up [and you need] a very argued reason...and that will be the true thing, even more true, of the methodology.	[It's] worth making clear upfront in your [research proposal] ...that this [document] explores ... a number of different research directions and that's done very deliberately because you've got, in here, multiple possible directions which will be firmed up precisely by the ethnography...I think that's extremely common in a DPhil....there's lots of different kinds of [research proposals] but if I had to pull out two different types, one is the sort of very focused. [And the other has] plan A to D, mapped out...And I think that's absolutely fine...as long as we're [being] explicit about it.	...if you think about what [Transfer is] for...it's a quality control process. For someone other than your supervisors to... validate where you're up to. [It's] the green light to yes, you can carry on and do [your research]...It's in two bits. It's in a literature review [which] shows that you've got a topic which is researchable and that you know the field...And then, the methodology is that you've got a grasp of the methodology but also I think it's about the kind of project management of it...[if it's] feasible.	However, the way [the research] is currently framed may mean we have a limited pool of assessors, certainly within the department of education... the broad point is that for Transfer, you've got [to] basically remember that…the people who read this will know nothing about the topic. So it has to be very clear.

Contribution	…at the beginning of the term, my supervisor said to me…you're in [the] Sociology Department, so you need to think, about the theoretical contribution…But after, I talked to my supervisor, [about my proposal] he said… empirical contribution is also good….And in your case, you should emphasize the empirical contribution rather than theoretical contribution.	___	___	I mean as a researcher it's kind of what particular field you're contributing to…rather than, what's the problem on the ground…They're kind of related, but it's balancing that. Now your contribution is to, an understanding of teacher education in India.	I think a better way of building in the novelty of your study is to better define the referents e.g. disciplinary bounds, and audience, modes of empirical studies and state what your study will ADD (building on previous works as opposed to saying there are none), of which yes your country setting…vs. US based ones can be one contribution.
Purpose of Lit Review	More specifically, in the literature review part [Charlie] should critically review the existing literature on the large puzzle – how do people cooperate in difficult situation? The structure of the literature review should follow: - Demonstrate the sociological puzzle in cooperation – how do people cooperate in difficult	…the danger in…doing the literature review is that you do what a few of my students have done—and they're, very good students—is you sort of jump from, one thing to another….And it's best to draw it back and think, actually, look at my questions…What literature is going to help me to and…what do I need to get out…what literature is imperative for me to do it.	I mean I think, altogether, you've packed a lot into this paper already…And I think that's good. And very well justified, with the sort of, these are all the possible avenues… and we can't pursue them all….But I think we're going to have to decide on, perhaps one overarching theme, and try develop that, almost in terms of sort of a literature review type thing…And I'm	It's more than just reporting what the literature said. It's interrogating it. Either through the lens of, context, or through the lens of other bodies of literature. So somehow, your literature review has to build to those questions and to the sub-questions…And, in, it's using literature, to provide a rationale for what's the best way	…you need something to show there is a real problem. Um, the people can see that there's a problem and then, what am I doing about it? And then, um, then you get this idea about [the topic], and you can say, well in thinking about researching their effectiveness we need to, do that in the context of a broader research literature

	situation?...Lead to the discussion in criminal cooperation. …Emphasize that existing literature may not apply to China, and there is lack of exploratory research to generate hypotheses. Cite [scholar] and other cybercrime research…End with a research question…		thinking, they need a little bit of explaining, in terms of, where did…the term natureculture come from…so that we have a sense of the path that that idea has taken.	to investigate, these questions.	about, skills competitions.
Specific/ Clear Research Questions	You could start thinking about what your chapter breakdown might be, as this could help you organize your ideas. The key thing is that all the chapters link together under one key concept/RQ. In this case it looks like you have chosen a cooperation RQ, which is a valid approach.	I mean, what I'd suggest you do, is go back, go back to your research questions. Say, okay, are they things that will generate data?...To answer this question, what data will be generated?	I do like your little flow chart things with big question[s] and then sort of sub-questions. It works quite nicely as a way of sort of organizing your thinking	You want something [which], any reader, can look at broadly, go, I understand what that overall question is and I understand what the research questions are. They may have words in them that are, slightly technical and which require a lot of unpacking, like identity or agency, but … a reasonably educated, person, who you met on the bus, and they said what are you researching, you go I'm doing, becoming a teacher in India.	Is it, the focus of your PhD too narrow?...the research question might have been a little bit too narrow

Rationale for Research Design	___	I think you probably need more, discussion about…methodological choices and then work your way into that. …my comments were a lot to do with [explaining] why…because you need to be very explicit what you think this data, how you think it's gonna help you to answer your research questions.	___	It's, if you look your questions…you could do quite a large quantitative survey… you could do a sample of 1000 [teacher educators]… Photographs of students… multivariate analysis of the answers that you've got….you've got to show why, ethnography's the best…	I'd probe the long-term hypotheses/questions/ objectives a little. What are the possible research methodologies, and why is this one chosen? Does it yield largely descriptive results – an understanding of what is happening – or does it also make predictions about how to make competitions 'better' (and what does 'better' mean? that's somewhat addressed, but might be sharper).
Practical Methods	Method needs to have more detail. Three things need to be addressed: - Location selection - Coercion - Detail break-down process, emphasis the data collection process will evolve during the fieldwork…	…you need to think about, how many [interviews] you're going to do, and you're going to need to justify the design of the schedules and that kind of thing. So in some ways this is where the CUREC kind of aspects of it…are important… And you need to think about, what am I asking permission for…what do I actually want? And that, you need to be really clear about what that's gonna be.	So…methodology… perhaps a little bit more on the participation aspect. Perhaps, also, you could make something of the, quite varied observational techniques that you've talked about sketching…in the past. [T]here are other ways of …seeing, other than through, interviews and … mapping of, boundaries around plots. I think there are lots of interesting reasons.	…I mean part of it is, it's about…how you're answering the questions [and] it's also about project management of it….In the sense of, if I'm looking at it from the outside…does this person know their stuff, is this is a coherent argument [can they] get this project done, have they got the contacts in place?	Methodology section is too long at the moment, and too general. It should not read like a lesson on DID or counterfactual design... Your plan to interview 70 people alongside the DiD analysis strikes me as an unrealistic amount of analysis…

Ethics	In order to get ethical approval, maybe it is better for [Charlie] to say he is going to do his first trip in…his hometown where many headquarters of cybersecurity companies domiciled. He will say he will only interview the security employees, and law enforcement …and at the same time try to find out the possibility of interviewing prisoners. He will first submit the CUREC for the first trip, and say he will submit another CUREC form afterward.	…here, I just wanted to know that you've acknowledged the actual problems with ethics…. And, you're not just thinking in terms of the procedures of the CUREC, you're thinking, I need to behave ethically… As an ethnographer, I'm going to be in there, I need to think about, how I'm going to collect the data [and work with] the children…	Now you're a bit, short on your ethics…what you could do, is you could… put in there, I've got my ethical clearance…due to, constraint on [word] limit…I append, my CUREC form to this…document….then you can sort of say, you've already obtained ethical clearance and if, one of your you know examiners interested to look at that they can, just [look at] the appendix…	For the form, you need to be clear about who is agreeing to which elements of data collection you identify, e.g. getting documents, or videoing lessons. The principal needs to give signed consent to allow you in for the participant observation, documents etc. Videoing lessons would require the students' consent too. Observation might not, if you explain that you are focusing on the teacher educator.	Don't use that word [coerce] in the CUREC… Encourage. Incentivize… The key thing is to, try and get CUREC filled in…it's incredibly time consuming. And tiresome. But it's the modern way, so you just gotta do it. But… what's the minimum age of these people?... [If] you don't go below 16 I think you're fine.

Comparing supervisor feedback for the participants who passed Transfer with minor corrections and those who had to resubmit suggests a relationship between feedback on the Transfer system and student success. For instance, Charlie and Ethan had supervisors who appeared to take a pragmatic approach to supervision and were cognizant of both the research idea and the need to pass institutional requirements. As previously discussed, Charlie's supervisors guided him through the research proposal in detail and told him what to expect of the viva, including the need to defend his research decisions. Similarly, Ethan's supervisors spent time explaining the purpose of the different components of the research proposal genre while also preparing him for the types of questions he might receive from Transfer examiners given their individual specialties. This attention to the relationship between the research proposal itself, its purpose, and its link to the viva, provided students with knowledge of the genre system—how the two key genres (the proposal and the Transfer viva) interact.

The type of feedback supplied by Charlie's and Ethan's supervisors stands in contrast with the feedback provided by Natalie's supervisor, who offered minimal comments on both the genre system and on the proposal genre itself. Natalie's supervisor who, while nurturing, tended to devote the majority of supervisions to exploring ideas that grew out of Natalie's document, rather than on practical issues such as the purpose and structure of a literature review or the need for clear research questions. While Natalie's supervisor did provide certain pieces of instrumental feedback, like the importance of setting the context for the project, creating an argument for the ethnographic approach, and clarifying particular sections of the text, the majority of feedback was idea-focused. Comparing Natalie's experience with the examples above (Charlie and Ethan) highlights the centrality of the supervisor in the student's understanding of the proposal genre and genre system—even though Natalie complied with supervisor feedback, she may not have been provided with enough specific information about institutional expectations and her proposal was initially unsuccessful.

Interestingly, in Shankar's case, his supervisors did spend substantial time explaining and discussing both the proposal genre and the Transfer system. However, Shankar's resistance towards certain aspects of feedback and the fact that he was pushing to complete Transfer of Status may have contributed to his unsuccessful result. In Ben's case, his supervisors gave him little feedback until two months preceding the Transfer viva. The key comment his supervisors brought up repeatedly, that the scope of his research questions was too narrow, Ben resisted. Consequently, broadening the research

questions was a major revision requested by his examiners. These two cases show the tension between what feedback supervisors offer them and what feedback students accept and adopt. Even so, it should be acknowledged that given the examiners' apparent confusion about possible Transfer outcomes, Ben might have qualified for minor corrections instead of a referral.

The results across cases suggest two things. First, that institutional knowledge of the proposal genre is important. Second, understanding the Transfer system, the wider purpose of Transfer of Status in relation to the thesis and how to navigate the viva is also necessary—and perhaps sometimes overlooked by supervisors. This implies a complicated relationship between the types of feedback supervisors provide, and the extent to which students comply with or reject feedback in relation to their purposes for and approach to the PhD. It also raises questions about how supervisors think about the thesis, the role of the research proposal/Transfer of Status, and their feedback practices. Additionally, while the supervisor-student relationship remained consistently central for all students as evidenced by the institutionalized pattern of draft - supervisor feedback - draft common across participants, there was great variation in the other resources and strategies students engaged with in crafting their proposals. Ben, for instance, had extensive feedback from colleagues and instructors; Ethan and Shankar's genre systems included informal and formal peer feedback on portions of the proposal; Natalie presented her work and collected feedback from conferences; Charlie had his proposal edited for grammar and spelling. The nature of the genre system as characterized by the types of documents and actors involved may thus express something about students' needs and approaches to doctoral writing. In other words, the composition of each student's genre system reflected the sources of influence consulted via the extent to which they looked for feedback from different sources (and what expertise they were looking for), as well as the amount of supervision received and in some cases, the student's drafting process (outlines, self-comments, questions).

The final aspect of the Transfer system, the Transfer viva, played a critical part in the participants' understanding of the Transfer system and the PhD. As previously highlighted, the viva was a significant event for most participants, prompting them to change their approach to the proposal and the PhD (Shankar and Natalie), or providing confidence in the research (Charlie and Ethan). Please see Table 8 (below) for a comparison of excerpts from examiner reports from the students' first attempts at the Transfer viva.

Table 8

*Examiner Feedback**

	Ben	**Natalie**	**Shankar**	**Ethan**
Contribution	The assessors believe that there is not enough material here for a D.Phil....the contribution of the thesis would be too thin.	Or to put it differently: to which specific literature will the thesis contribute? What contribution does she intend to make to the field of anthropological thinking?	—	The research promises to add to our understanding of effects of assessments and regulatory regimes on children's sense of self.
Focus/RQs	—	...lacks a clear, sustained analytical focus...compounded by the fact that the research questions outlined on pp. 59-60 can potentially take the project in many different directions. The themes are very evocative, but they remain to be operationalized into specific research/ ethnographic questions that the fieldwork can directly and empirically illuminate.	—	—
Literature	An expanded section, starting from the current literature review, analyzing more thoroughly where the problems lie. ...The essential point is that he will then have put his contribution in a much more convincing context.	—	A stronger review of the literature that includes: deeper exploration of the concepts being discussed, wider reference to the international literature	—

Methods	The analysis uses DiD, but there are no parallel trends. Not much can be done about this...it is recommended that more thought is put into how the candidate could convince readers that there is a valid counterfactual.	Furthermore, considering the intensity of the fieldwork that is being proposed – weekly participation in three allotment sites in [city]– we also missed a more detailed workplan – a plan outlining which specific questions will be pursued in each of the three sites, on the basis of its unique ecological and socio-economic characteristics.	The key thing is to think through in greater depth the methods that are likely to work in this particular data collection context, where both societal and institutional factors, which are currently unacknowledged, may play a role in the effectiveness of the data collection	The sampling is purposive and there is a clear rationale for each level of decision making... The document however requires a higher level of focus... there is little by way of a link between the theorization that is presented and the specification of data that will be required and means by which those data will be gathered.

*I was unable to get a copy of Charlie's report, as he received it very late and had already departed for fieldwork

It is evident from Table 8 that methods received the most focus in examiner reports. As the examiners tended to comment only on the aspects of the research proposal that could be improved, it appears that method was a challenge for most participants. Examiners looked for detailed explanations of the research design, instruments, and sampling, as well as clear arguments for the selection of specific methodologies. For Ben, examiners also served the useful function of providing feedback on the quantitative portion of his research design, which he failed to get from his supervisors. Similarly, Ethan and Charlie indicated that a benefit of examiner feedback was receiving different perspectives on their projects that made them rethink or reflect upon parts of their methods (Ethan) and assumptions related to certain concepts (Charlie).

For Shankar and Natalie, the Transfer examiners were also effective in communicating what their supervisors were not able to get across; in retrospect, both Shankar and Natalie realized they had not been critically engaging with the literature or been clear about their methods or the feasibility of their research designs. For Ben and Shankar, examiners picked up on specific issues that supervisors had previously highlighted. Ben's examiners again pointed out the limited scope of the project and Shankar's examiners expressed concern about his use of terminology. One vital function of the examiners may thus be to reiterate or call attention to issues that students had previously ignored in supervision, a way of 'driving home' the point. Examiners thus

acted as enforcers of structure whose power to pass or fail elevated them to a status of authority perhaps higher than the supervisor in terms of student success, demonstrating the complexity of relationships between key actors in the genre system.

But perhaps most interesting in the Transfer viva was the notion of "defense," the need to argue for the methodological decisions made in each stage of the project and support claims with clear evidence. Interestingly, the unsuccessful participants seemed to anticipate that they would need to display content knowledge. Natalie, for instance, was "socially unprepared" for the argumentation experienced in the Transfer viva and in retrospect wished she had been able to defend herself. Similarly, Shankar, though willing to discuss his project in depth, did not recognize the "certainty" expected by examiners and instead provided multiple responses to questions about methods, which he believed was conveyed as "uncertainty." Charlie, however, who exhibited the least confidence throughout the project was in fact the most confident about his Transfer viva, having received advice from colleagues and supervisors who reminded him that "you are the person who does the research" (July 2019, Interview). Thus, while success of the proposal as a document may be linked to success in the viva, the viva also provides a final opportunity for students to be challenged and articulate their research choices to convince the examiners that they are capable of carrying out the research. This is an apparently overlooked or misunderstood aspect of the genre system by the students, which may in some cases be due to lack of supervisor emphasis.

10.4 Sub-Question 2: *How do temporal-relational contexts affect how doctoral students make decisions in creating their research proposals?*

As described in the sections above, the participants' temporal-relational contexts were continually changing due to new feedback, new knowledge, and new experiences. However, the area in which change was most apparent and most linked to shifts in decision-making was in the participants' compliance and resistance to supervisor feedback. Although students generally complied with supervisor feedback, supervisor feedback was not a one-way transaction. Rather, the participants assessed and responded to feedback in different ways over time, negotiating the boundaries of the research proposal and the genre system as they learned what worked and what did not. While assessment of feedback was reflective of the participants' larger approaches to the PhD, assessment of feedback was also linked to how the participants viewed their supervisors'

types of expertise, and in turn, the extent to which they complied with or resisted feedback over time.

Despite clear differences in compliance and resistance of specific pieces of feedback across cases, closer examination suggested that compliance and resistance represented a spectrum of reasoning underlying each participant's responses to supervisor feedback: compliance (reliance), compliance (privilege/respect), resistance (rejection), and resistance (timing, lack of feedback). Three participants—Charlie, Ethan, and Natalie—positioned their supervisors as "experts" throughout the project, and therefore complied with supervisor feedback, believing their supervisors were best positioned to help them successfully navigate the research proposal and consistent with how they had engaged with supervisors and feedback in the past. Yet, there were several nuanced differences between the nature of Charlie's compliance and Ethan's and Natalie's compliance. Charlie, for instance, reiterated his own lack of knowledge within the field of sociology and also within the practices of his department. He thus *relied* on his supervisors to shape his project and came to see them as representing what he aspired to in an academic career. For Ethan, who had prior experience in education research and personal experience in the topic he wished to investigate, supervisors were viewed as experts with whom he shared common interests, and he thus *privileged* their feedback beyond other sources. Ethan therefore largely complied with his supervisors' feedback throughout the process of writing his research proposal; the only aspect of feedback that he struggled with was his writing style as Ethan valued beautiful language.

In addition to inspiring changes in approach to the PhD, the Transfer viva facilitated changes in how students assessed and valued feedback. For instance, Natalie viewed her supervisor as an expert in the field and thus complied with and *privileged* her supervisor's feedback for most of the year. Following the Transfer viva, however, Natalie became hyperaware of institutional requirements and examiners' power in enforcing those requirements, therefore shifting her focus from her supervisor (for whom she maintained great respect) to her examiners. She became entirely compliant with and *reliant* upon examiner feedback. Similarly, Shankar seemed to view his supervisors as having expertise in the subject matter and the research process, but recognized his own expertise in the Indian context, and exhibited a combination of compliance and resistance in response to supervisor feedback in an effort to preserve some of his personal beliefs. However, like Natalie, Shankar began to shift towards compliance after the Transfer viva, privileging his examiners' feedback for the purpose of achieving Transfer of Status.

Unlike the other participants, Ben viewed his supervisors as having less knowledge of his research topic and research design, which necessitated feedback from additional sources. Given Ben's assessment of his supervisors' expertise he was the most likely of the participants to resist feedback. Ben's strong sense of ownership over the project, which stemmed from his prior work in policy and extensive experience eliciting and evaluating feedback, also made him unlikely to change his practice. Indeed, if anything, his Transfer viva experience reinforced his belief that he needed to rely on himself to make sound judgments on the quality and direction of his research. Further, in comparison to the other participants, Ben had little supervision and therefore relied upon other feedback-seeking strategies to advance his proposal. The last-minute nature of his supervisor feedback made him even more resistant to substantial revisions.

Like changes in approach to the PhD, changes in compliance and resistance to feedback over time were linked to prior experiences that informed participants' sense of expertise and relative assessment of supervisory or examiner expertise. Ownership over the thesis—from Ben's clear sense that the project was a reflection of him, to Shankar's determination to integrate Indian and Western academic practices and Charlie's decision to learn through supervisor guidance—also influenced patterns in compliance and resistance. This suggests that resisting supervisor feedback can be an expression of independence, a way of testing or negotiating supervisor advice.

Interestingly, none of the participants described issues with misunderstanding or misinterpreting supervisor comments. Even Charlie, who tried but failed to execute the theoretical framing his supervisors initially expected, attributed his confusion to the literature rather than unclear supervisor feedback. Further, though Shankar did not describe any confusion regarding supervisor feedback, his supervision transcripts and interviews suggest some degree of misunderstanding. It is possible that his apparent resistance to feedback was a result of not fully understanding the institutional context in which he was expected to work. Following his first Transfer viva, Shankar reflected that there was a disconnect between what he believed the examiners were looking for and what had actually happened, and he questioned why his supervisors did not better prepare him, again suggesting misunderstanding between supervisors and student.

In order to be successful at the Transfer level, the participants had to negotiate their prior expectations and experiences and future goals with the pragmatic requirements of the institution, the scope of the PhD, and disciplinary conventions. In other words, part of learning and navigating the genre system meant being strategic, which often required

compromise, adapting academic requirements to fit their own needs. In fact, the PhD might be viewed as a license that must be obtained through meeting requirements before one can go on to conduct research with more freedom—though it is important to acknowledge that restrictions remain throughout research careers, such as through grant applications. But being able to navigate these restrictions is what is important. Finally, all participants seemed to focus on the subject knowledge of their supervisors, downplaying or in some cases overlooking their supervisors' genre knowledge, apparently not recognizing the importance of understanding the shape and purpose of the research proposal until the Transfer viva.

10.5 Conclusion

This chapter has responded to the research questions guiding this study by presenting the results of the cross-case analysis. The results suggest that navigating the Transfer system is a complex process that is shaped by participants' framing of and approach to the PhD, the types of feedback supervisors provide, assessment of supervisory expertise, and degree of compliance or resistance to supervisor feedback—all of which are situated within the participants' temporal-relational contexts. As these temporal-relational contexts—particularly the institutional and supervisory contexts—evolved, participants exercised agency in evaluating and choosing what feedback to use. At the same time, their expressions of agency were also constrained or facilitated by structural elements, such as the supervisor. Crafting a successful proposal document was thus a nonlinear process in which doctoral students negotiated their preconceived goals for the research with the expectations of the genre, changing their practices when necessary in order to fulfill the proposal—and Transfer system's—purpose: to convince the examiners that they are able to carry out PhD-level work.

In the following chapter, the results discussed above will be contextualized within the conceptual and empirical literature in order to examine how approaches to the PhD, compliance and resistance to feedback, and negotiation of the genre system may be affected by supervisor purposes, cultural context, and other factors.

Chapter 11: Discussion

11.1 Introduction

This thesis, which covered the beginning of the doctoral program through successful Transfer of Status, has examined how five PhD students exercised agency as reflected in their writing and revision decisions towards crafting a successful proposal document, influenced by prior experiences, future goals, and the evolving present context in which the proposal was created. The previous six chapters presented the results of this study, showing how the individual contexts of each participant's circumstances and goals affected the ways in which they understood and approached the PhD, used supervisor feedback, and engaged with the thesis and Transfer system. Chapter 10 described several key patterns across cases, identifying the Transfer viva as a critical experience, which had the effect of forcing students to question their understanding of the PhD as well as their writing, research, and feedback practices, often catalyzing a change in how the thesis was framed and approached. Chapter 10 also highlighted the ways in which supervisor feedback was negotiated in relation to how students assessed their own expertise, their supervisors' expertise, and their goals for the thesis, as well as the role supervisors played in conveying the purpose of the research proposal within the larger Transfer and thesis genre systems. This chapter situates those results within the conceptual framework underpinning this study as well as the empirical literature.

One of the contributions of this thesis is a detailed portrait of the complexity of the Transfer system itself and the multiple and varied ways in which students sought out, drew on, and engaged with different forms of feedback. Prior literature has described aspects of the thesis genre system: types of supervisor feedback (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014; Kumar & Stracke, 2007), the viva voce (Jackson & Tinkler, 2001; Share, 2016; Tinkler & Jackson, 2002), doctoral writing and revision processes (Castello, Inesta, & Corcelles, 2013; Cotterall, 2011; Kim, 2018). Other work that characterized the PhD thesis as a genre by identifying common rhetorical features (Swales, 2004), has yet to frame the thesis as a genre system. To my knowledge no other research has a) collected and documented the range of evidence that comprise the Transfer system, and b) shown not only the breadth of documents and feedback that students create and interact with in working towards the research proposal, but also c) the variation in individual student's expressions of agency within the genre system. This thesis thus offers both empirical and

methodological contributions. Perhaps more important, it offers a conceptual framing which combines the genre system with a conceptualization of agency that allows for a nuanced examination of the relationships between individual student, the other key actors (supervisors, examiners) involved in the Transfer system, and the evolving document(s) at the center of the process.

This chapter begins by briefly returning to a portrait of the Transfer system before situating key results within Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) agency framework, showing how the participants navigated the Transfer system by exercising different forms of agency to construct their proposals and engage with feedback. I also draw upon empirical work to further illuminate the findings on how students respond to supervisor feedback. I then examine the roles of two additional central actors in the genre system that influenced students' learning and decision-making: the supervisors and the Transfer examiners. This chapter draws on the literature on supervision and thesis examination to explore the complex relationships between students, supervisors, and examiners in facilitating students' understanding and successful navigating of the genre system. Finally, I conclude by exploring the methodological contribution of this thesis.

11.2 Student agency in navigating the genre system

A contribution of this thesis is *the integration of agency into the genre system*. Focusing on the research proposal, or rather, the Transfer system of which the proposal is a part, rhetorical genre theory understands the Transfer system as encompassing key documents (drafts, feedback, forms), people (the student, supervisors, examiners), and the Transfer viva. In turn, the Transfer system is part of a larger doctoral thesis genre system that includes institutional milestones—Transfer of Status, Confirmation of Status, and the final thesis viva—as well as the numerous drafts, sources of feedback, ethics and risk assessment forms, and other documents that are included in the doctoral thesis process.

Yet, while rhetorical genre theory and the concept of genre system have provided a largely comprehensive way of examining the process of preparing a research proposal for Transfer of Status, *the genre system framework does not account for the role of student agency in navigating that system.* Thus, this thesis sought to frame its inquiry as focusing on the actions people take in relation to the research proposal genre system, with doctoral students positioned at the center of this process. A key concern was incorporating the temporal context (see Araujo, 2005) since how the student navigates the thesis genre system and sub-systems is influenced by the temporal context in which the

PhD takes place in relation to the student's larger life goals and experiences. Thus, I drew on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conceptualization of agency—the chordal triad—to understand how past experience, goals for the future, and present evolving contexts influenced how first-year doctoral students negotiated the genre system in preparing their research proposals.

Further, the application of Emirbayer and Miche's (1998) chordal triad model to instances of agency on a micro-scale was a contribution in itself. Prior studies drawing on Emirbayer and Mische have been located primarily in organizational or life-course research, in which agency is examined in terms of larger life decisions or overall patterns in approach to aspects of life such as child-rearing, migration, and career choices (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). In contrast, most agentive actions examined in this thesis included revision decisions, assessment of feedback, and changes in writing style—small choices working within a specific context defined by the Transfer system. Though arguably, even these micro-level decisions were ultimately furthering a larger life goal, such as the completion of the PhD or career plans.

Emirbayer and Mische's framing of agency understands agency as action, which fails to account for decisions *not* to act. As shown in the results (see Charlie) lack of action can also be intentional, an expression of agency linked to participants recognition of their lack of knowledge or need for feedback. Another contribution of this thesis is therefore the addition of *rejection of iteration* and *inability to move forward* as sub-categories of iteration and practical evaluation respectively, in an effort to capture other evidence of agency. Future work may elaborate upon this framework to further characterize forms of agency not captured here.

Broadly, the results of this thesis suggest that a projective (future) orientation drives students forward toward larger PhD and post-PhD goals, contributing to how they initially conceptualize the PhD and approach their theses. Concurrently, the iterative (past) element provides the underlying writing, feedback, and research practices they draw upon to do the work; and practical evaluation (the present) reflects ongoing assessment of information, feedback, and goals within the changing temporal-relational contexts wherein the capacity for learning and change is located. In thinking about the specific structures or contexts that influence change, feedback from supervisors, examiners, and others, as well as evolving goals or research interests inspired by readings were most central, acting as catalysts for shifts in behavior. Guided by this conceptual understanding of agency in relation to the genre system, the remainder of this chapter

discusses particular patterns of agency—the major empirical findings of this thesis—within the existing literature, while also examining the extent to which the relevant findings from the empirical literature contribute to this framework.

Iteration: Maintaining and adjusting writing practices

Iteration, the element of agency representing the past and characterized by repetitive reflexive action, was most apparent in the participants' writing practices. Iteration is the "stabilizing influence" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 976) that allows people to recognize similar recurring circumstances and then to respond appropriately. As suggested in the results (Chapters 5-10), the participants tended to draw on their prior writing and educational experiences to inform their doctoral writing, using the same practices that they were familiar with and had worked for them in the past. However, some participants learned that their writing practices needed to change in response to the expectations for doctoral writing: Natalie and Shankar struggled to critically engage with the literature and pick up academic citation practices. This is not a unique challenge; summarizing rather than critically analyzing in the literature review is a common issue for graduate students (Badenhorst, 2018; Boote & Beile, 2005; de Magalhaes, Cotterall, & Mideros, 2019), and citation practices—using literature to support and give authority to arguments—have been identified as evidence of criticality (Badenhorst, 2018; Shi, Fazel, & Kowkabi, 2018).

Shankar's case, in which he largely attributed his challenges with learning citation and writing practices and critical engagement with the literature to his education background, is similar to findings by Xu and Grant (2017) and Wu and Hu (2018). Both studies described difficulties with criticality encountered by Chinese doctoral students in Australian PhD programs, most of which were due to differences in their previous educational contexts. Academic research cultures are not accessed equally by all doctoral students (Deem & Brehony, 2000), even though doctoral training does not always explicitly address research culture as an additional challenge for PhD students entering programs from different contexts. Thus, the results suggest that while new doctoral students bring a range of experience and generally some level of writing skill, one of the ways in which doctoral students can expect to transform is in their research writing in relation to the genre(s) they must produce. Thinking about doctoral writing in terms of genre and genre systems may expand the both student and supervisor focus from subject expertise.

Projectivity: Goal-driven approaches to the PhD

Projectivity, the future-oriented element of agency, was most evident in the participants' approaches to the PhD, as how the participants' imagined their PhD journeys and the goals they worked towards influenced much of their decision-making—at least in the beginning. Described as a means of "reconfigur[ing] received schemas by generating alternative possible responses to the problematic situations they confront in their lives" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 984), projectivity also contributed to participants' engagement with feedback and writing practices in that how students viewed the PhD and what they wanted to do with their theses appeared to affect the extent to which they felt able to negotiate the standards of the genre and resist feedback.

Approaches to the PhD, described in Chapter 10 as *ways of considering or handling a problem* and typified as practical/strategic, idealistic, and realistic/compromising, represented overall frameworks shaped by beliefs about the PhD and goals for the doctorate and post-PhD careers (projectivity). Prior interview-based studies have generated similar frameworks for describing doctoral students' motivations for pursuing PhDs (Brailsford, 2010; Gill & Hoppe, 2009; Guerin et al, 2015; Leonard, Becker, & Coate, 2005; Skakni, 2018), their conceptions of research (Stubb, Pyhälto, & Lonka, 2014), and understandings of what it means to be a research professional (Taylor (2007) in relation to EdD students). The three approaches to the PhD identified in this thesis overlap with the findings in the aforementioned studies to the extent that some doctoral students take a more pragmatic career-oriented view of the doctorate, while others are more concerned with intellectual or personal fulfillment. The implication of those studies is similar to the claim made in this thesis, that doctoral students' larger goals influence how they experience the PhD and what sources of support are more or less influential in their learning of doctoral writing and the genre system.

What makes the findings emerging from this thesis valuable is an empirical account of how both goals (projectivity), prior experience (iteration), and the present situation (practical evaluation) contribute to how students view the PhD and subsequently tackle the thesis, respond to feedback, and employ strategies in relation to their overarching purposes and perceptions of the doctorate. Prior frameworks have not considered how students' purposes and approaches may shift over time. It is no secret that the PhD is a journey in which students undergo intellectual and personal growth, and so change in understanding of research and motivations is to be expected (see Kandiko &

Kinchin, 2013; Haas, 1994). Thus, another contribution of this thesis lies in the longitudinal method used to explore doctoral experience, which allowed for examination of development over time as it occurred, rather than through retrospective interviews upon which previous typologies of doctoral motivation and understanding of research are based. I return to this point later.

Practical evaluation: Assessing and responding to feedback

Practical evaluation, the element of agency representing the present, was perhaps the most complex but important aspect of agency captured in the participants' decision-making. Given the nature of the PhD as an ongoing process fraught with information particularly during the first year, students were continually assessing their research goals and practices in relation to the new knowledge and feedback they received from texts, instructors, and supervisors—"the demands and contingencies of the present" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 994). Practical evaluation commonly co-occurred with iteration and projectivity as dominant temporal elements of agency, which made sense as the evaluation of each situation was related to decisions to either rely on previous patterns of action or act (possibly differently) in furtherance of a goal (improvement of the proposal). For instance, assessment of supervisor and other feedback was often a combination of practical evaluation and projectivity as students assessed comments in relation to the changing supervisory context and chose to accept or reject changes in relation to what they believed would lead to the best outcome. At the same time, practical evaluation and iteration co-occurred as students assessed feedback and their own writing and chose to continue accepting supervisor comments or write in a certain way (iteration). In this way, practical evaluation (and iteration) often manifested in micro-level decision making such as whether to incorporate additional sentences, add or delete figures, or reorganize paragraphs, while projectivity was evident in larger patterns of action like feedback-seeking and document structuring.

One of the key findings of this thesis lies in the relationship between how doctoral students assessed supervisor expertise in relation to their own experiences, which subsequently affected the extent to which they chose to comply with or resist feedback. Few existing studies have focused on the negotiation of supervisor and student expertise. Instead, the literature on supervision has been concerned with issues including negotiating critical feedback (Li & Seale, 2007) and mismatches between student and supervisor expectations (Kandiko & Kinchin, 2013; Pyhalto, Vekkaila & Keskinen, 2015). Further,

while the results align with prior work showing the supervisor is a particularly central source of influence and learning during the first year of study (Anderson, Day, & McLaughlin, 2008; McAlpine & McKinnon, 2012; Sidhu, Kaur, & Fook, 2016), literature on how doctoral students respond to and apply feedback in practice is rare. The few studies by Xu (2017) and Vehviläinen (2009) suggest that resistance to supervisor feedback is due either to students' desires to maintain their own agendas or to their beliefs that their proposals did not need to be altered. Similarly, here, compliance and resistance were most often framed in terms of the extent to which comments aligned with students' goals for the thesis. Xu (2017) suggested that resistance was occasionally the result of ambiguous wordings or confusion about comments, though surprisingly, in this study none of the participants claimed to have issues with misunderstanding. Students' prior experiences within the discipline also influenced how they responded to supervisor feedback; less knowledge of the discipline meant greater reliance on and compliance with feedback (see Charlie and Natalie). This result aligns with work by Odena and Burgess (2017), who found "subtle leading into the expectations of the new discipline by supervisors" (p. 579) was needed for students who had backgrounds in other fields. At the same time, the extent of students' experiences within the discipline underscores the role prior contexts played in students' decision-making. Nevertheless, prior work has generally described why students make revisions without drawing links to the larger context in which the writing takes place. The influence of supervisor relationships, student assessments of supervisor expertise, and the temporal situatedness of the feedback and revisions are rarely discussed. Thus, the integration of a temporal student-centered agency perspective, which allows for analysis of how students respond to feedback over time in relation to evolving understandings of the genre system.

Overall, the literature contributes to the findings on how students assess supervisor feedback in relation to their goals, prior knowledge, and evolving contexts; supervisor expertise and relationships, content and delivery of feedback, students' interpretations of feedback, and students' motivations or agendas are all factors that may influence decisions about whether to comply with or resist feedback. Yet, a key aspect of practical evaluation and Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) framework for agency that has yet to be addressed by the literature is the notion of changes in temporal-relational contexts (individual and/or external factors) over time, and how that evolution in circumstances influences responses to feedback. Again, the influence of context and change over time was a focus and contribution of this thesis, a central site of inquiry into

the relationship between past experience, goals for the future, and navigation of the doctoral research proposal.

Finally, though not as influential as supervisor feedback for most participants, peer and other feedback contributed another source of learning particularly during the early stages of their doctoral programs, as peer feedback provided a space to explore different perspectives, articulate ideas, and garner support. Prior literature on peer doctoral writing groups reveals similar findings in which the process of engaging with peer feedback encouraged critical reflection and allowed students to experiment with writing styles and voice (Cahusac de Caux et al., 2017; Maher et al., 2008; Wegener, Meier, & Ingerslev, 2014). Despite the usefulness of peer feedback, four participants made clear that supervisor feedback was prioritized as the research proposal developed due to the supervisors' expertise and institutional role. Aitchison (2014)'s examination of how doctoral students prioritized multiple sources of feedback yielded similar results, showing that the supervisor was usually held in a place of privilege and that the usefulness of other feedback was often gauged in relation to the feedback-giver's level of experience, similar to how Ben assessed supervisor and other feedback.

Practical evaluation was also key in facilitating changes in agency. One of the advantages of using Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) chordal triad framework is that it provides for examination of the various contexts that enable and constrain shifts in agency orientations—allowing for insight into the different situations that affect the person's temporal-relational contexts and journey forward through practical evaluation. Thus, more than iteration or projectivity, practical evaluation accounts for reflection upon past actions and paths forward with a given situation, giving rise to decisions that ultimately may alter the context. In this study, structure was subsumed by temporal-relational contexts, represented by the institutional genre system and mediated by the discipline; it was reflected in department guidelines, enforced by the examiners, and communicated by most supervisors. This structure stood alongside personal histories and understandings of doctoral research and the purpose of the PhD. As students crafted their research proposals they had small but numerous opportunities to alter their supervisory contexts in revising their writing by complying with or resisting feedback and play with form and content in order to learn the boundaries of what was acceptable. This ability to make decisions and experiment in furtherance of personal goals was also either constrained or facilitated by the supervisory relationship, another structural element.

As conveyed in the results of this thesis, for the students who received referrals and experienced stronger negative emotional responses, the Transfer viva was a key structural event that significantly altered their contexts, leading Natalie and Shankar to evaluate and change their approaches to the thesis/research proposal; the Transfer context appeared most conducive to significant changes in agency. This finding supports Biesta and Tedder's (2006) argument that structure can facilitate the insight that inspires changes in learning and therefore agency. Receiving a referral for the Transfer viva made it evident that something in the student's research and/or writing strategies and thinking was not working, and thus changes were needed in order to further the goal of achieving a PhD. This change in approach, from an idealistic orientation to either a realistic or pragmatic one, was linked to privileging examiner feedback as the source of authority during the revision process, trumping even supervisor comments.

- Unsuccessful Transfer viva → assessment (practical evaluation) of past approaches to thesis and compliance /resistance of feedback → change in approach (idealistic to realistic or strategic/pragmatic) (Shankar and Natalie)
- Successful Transfer viva → reinforces confidence in prior decision-making (iteration) and the doctoral process (Charlie and Ethan) and increases confidence in supervisors (Charlie)

Thus, the chordal triad conception of agency described by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) contributes to the Transfer and larger PhD genre systems because it sheds light on the past, present, and future influences and intentions underlying students' actions, while also providing a way of examining how patterns of action may change over time within temporal-relational contexts.[11] In other words, the students' agency and temporal orientations adapted over time, as the 'past' experiences they drew upon were continually changing with new feedback, developing relationships, and other factors.

11.3 Other actors in the genre system: Supervisors and examiners

So far, this chapter has touched upon how supervisor and examiner feedback represent and communicate disciplinary and institutional structural parameters that influence students' decision-making and exercise of agency in crafting their research proposals. Specifically, I have discussed feedback in terms of the agency of students and their use of

[11] It is important to emphasize that while I discussed each temporal element of agency separately for clarity of presentation, as pointed out by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) in every act of agency there are inherently all three elements in play.

supervisor and examiner feedback. This section, however, deals with supervisors and examiners as actors in their own right. In other words, this section explores how supervisors and examiners, two key actors in the proposal genre system, affected doctoral students' learning and understanding of the purpose of the proposal, the nature of the genre system, and how to navigate it, arguing for future inquiry into the complex relationships between supervisors, students, and examiners, and PhD students' paths to success. A key point here is that despite the way the literature tends to characterize supervisors as most central to learning, the results of this thesis make clear that for some students, the Transfer result and examiner feedback were equally if not more important in influencing changes in students' approaches to the PhD, their agentive actions, and understanding of the larger genre system. Thus, another contribution of this thesis is a broad portrait of the central actors within the research proposal/Transfer system, the roles they play, and the ways in which they interact with and affect each other. Although the focus of this thesis is on the students' individual experiences of creating a passing research proposal and navigating the genre system, the findings have made clear that success is also mitigated by supervisors and examiners as representatives and implicit teachers of institutional and disciplinary structure.

As described in Chapter 10, supervisors represented institutional and disciplinary structure, and student success was largely linked to what genre-specific information supervisors conveyed—though whether or not students ignored (Shankar), internalized (Charlie) or privileged (Natalie) that information was another issue. For the most part, the types of feedback provided by supervisors in this study was consistent with prior research (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014; Can & Walker, 2014; Xu, 2017). Feedback tended to focus on argument (contribution, gap in the literature, golden thread) and rhetorical conventions (referencing, signposting) suggesting a common understanding of the qualities of research writing. Likewise, the form in which feedback was provided aligned with analyses by Basturkmen, East, and Bitchener (2014), Kumar and Stracke (2007), and Xu (2017), as providing information, confirming student thinking, offering guidance or suggestions, and in some cases direct instruction—as in correcting spelling or grammatical errors or requests to delete or add information. Prior work on supervisor feedback has shown that supervisors can also be important in encouraging critical thinking, independence (Anderson, Day, & McLaughlin, 2008), and confidence, and facilitate membership into the disciplinary discourse community (Cotterall, 2011). This supports the findings on the types and forms of feedback described above, as supervisors

devoted the majority of their time to helping students develop the arguments underlying their research ideas, reflecting the nature and purpose of supervisor feedback, which is ultimately to facilitate critical thinking and initiate students into the thesis—or in this case, Transfer—genre systems.

The above discussion raises a number of questions, based on the discrepancy between the assumption that supervisors represent an aspect of institutional structure, meant to communicate the institutional aspects of genre and genre system, and the finding that supervisor feedback differed across participants based on the extent to which the genre system was addressed. Natalie's supervisor, for instance, approved of her broad research questions and open-ended research design, apparently in contrast to others in the department. Thus, *do supervisors recognize the genre system? Do supervisors sometimes resist the genre system? Do they recognize their expertise in the system and their need to 'teach' it? Do they see it as an institutional practice as well as disciplinary one?* The findings suggest that supervisors bring different areas of expertise to supervision—expertise on the literature, on theory, on methods, and on the institution, which may naturally influence their pedagogical practices.

Prior research on supervision has suggested a range of supervisory approaches (Murphy, Bain, & Conrad, 2007; Wright, Murray, Geale, 2007) and that mismatches between how students and supervisors perceive the role of supervision is not uncommon (Kandiko & Kinchin, 2013; Pyhalto, Vekkaila, & Keskinen, 2015). How supervisors approach supervision may be influenced by their experiences as students and the amount of experience they have as supervisors (Kandiko & Kinchin, 2013). Likewise, how supervisors understand the purpose of the PhD can affect their pedagogical practices (Akerlind & McAlpine, 2017). Because supervisors are key actors in the genre system who both guide students through the doctoral process, how supervision is approached and what feedback is provided can have a significant influence on students' understanding of that genre system.[12]

What is interesting is that prior literature on supervisor feedback has revealed little about features specific to the genre of the doctoral thesis, highlighting instead the broader qualities of skillful research writing. Other work from applied linguistics, referenced in

[12] It should also be noted that while research suggests that co-supervision can be problematic especially when supervisors provide conflicting feedback, none of the participants noted this as a problem. However, consistent with Odena & Burgess 2017, "supervisors working in teams would often take up different roles when providing feedback, depending on personal style and practicalities" (p. 579).

Chapter 2, has identified specific rhetorical features of doctoral writing (e.g. Swales, 2004), but there remains limited understanding about what characteristics of the thesis genre supervisors comment upon, and how students actually learn these features that are specific and unique to doctoral writing. A contribution of this thesis is an analysis of the genre-specific comments supervisors offered to prepare their students specifically for the institutional Transfer of Status milestone. Chapter 10, for instance, identified common features of success (and failure) based on the participants' Transfer examiner reports, highlighting what examiners perceived to be the necessary aspects of the proposal genre—similar to the requirements of the final thesis as assessed by the viva (Holbrook, Bourke, Fairbain, & Lovat, 2014; Tinkler & Jackson, 2002). Additionally, with the exception of Ben's examiners and their confusion regarding Transfer outcomes, there appeared to be less variation in the foci of examiner feedback in comparison to supervisor feedback, suggesting both clearer understanding of the objectives of Transfer of Status and reflecting the examiners' role as representing and enforcing institutional standards; although supervisors should also be aware of these requirements and assist their students in meeting them, it is likely that faculty view their roles as supervisors and examiners differently, and therefore provide feedback in different ways.

As discussed in the results chapters, while supervisors were instrumental, the Transfer viva and examiner feedback emerged as the most significant structuring elements, in some cases resulting in powerful changes in how students approached the thesis. This reflects the students' recognition of examiners' role as gatekeepers and enforcers of the genre system; while supervisors tried to convey the purpose and elements of the Transfer system it is the examiners who officially decide whether or not a student is successful. So far, few studies have examined the earlier doctoral milestones, such as the research proposal defense. Fisher et al. (2019) and Creely and Laletas (2019) highlighted the tensions experienced by early stage PhD students as they prepared for comprehensive exams and the proposal defense respectively, noting the challenges involved in learning the expectations of doctoral research and the discipline (which were also evident in the findings of this thesis), but failing to explore the roles and expectations of the examiners and supervisors. As evidenced in the results of this thesis, the dynamics between students and supervisors can significantly affect how students understand and prepare for milestones like Transfer of Status, while examiners may be particularly influential in how students subsequently view the doctorate.

Existing literature on the viva voce suggests that the purpose of the thesis viva is to authenticate the work, assess the candidate's knowledge, and provide formative feedback (Jackson & Tinkler, 2001; Share, 2016)—a function that is likely even more pronounced at the Transfer of Status stage after which the research is expected to continue to evolve. As with the thesis viva, the results here suggest variability of the Transfer viva in terms of conduct (tone) and content depending on examiner agendas and initial assessment of thesis (Tinkler & Jackson 2002), despite having departmental regulations. Just as supervisors' approaches and practices may affect doctoral student comprehension of the proposal genre system, examiners' approaches to the viva have a concrete effect on the students' experience of the Transfer viva and ultimately, the outcome. Ben's case provided an important example of examiner roles in shaping the result; because both examiners were unclear about the characteristics and procedures of minor corrections versus referral, Ben received a referral which necessitated a resubmission and second viva. Thus, selection of examiners is a key strategic decision. Supervisors tend to select examiners they are familiar with, perhaps former colleagues, so as to anticipate their evaluations (Tinkler & Jackson, 2002), again pointing to the importance of both supervisors and examiners in facilitating doctoral students' success within the thesis genre system. Here, the two participants who were successful on their first attempts at Transfer, Charlie and Ethan, discussed their examiner selection with their supervisors at length, and Ethan in particular was informed that one of his examiners would present a challenging theoretical inquiry. Hence, examiner selection may sometimes be used to test particular aspects of the student's research, particularly during early milestones like Transfer of Status.

While the emphasis in doctoral study tends to be placed on documents, whether the research proposal or final thesis, the oral examinations of these documents may be a critical part of the process; in "borderline" cases when the written document is questionable (where the examiners have doubts or need clarification on certain portions) the viva may be the deciding factor (Jackson & Tinkler, 2001). Because this thesis did not capture interviews with Transfer examiners, I cannot say to what extent the students' performance in the Transfer viva affected the final result—though interviews with Transfer examiners would be essential in future research seeking to illuminate this still occluded genre. Nevertheless, several students perceived that their performance in the Transfer viva played a role in the examiners' decision.

Together, the findings suggest that a successful Transfer of Status application involves a combination of content knowledge, research knowledge, communication and rhetorical skill, which add up to convey something about the competence of the person (their thinking and research plans)—as reflected in both the document itself and the student's oral argumentation. These findings are reminiscent of Pole's (2000) typology of knowledge/skill developed during doctoral study; the proposal document primarily conveys substantive knowledge about the discipline as well as the technical skills and craft knowledge related to the doing of research. In turn, personal/social skills are evident in the need for students to communicate their knowledge and defend their research proposal choices in the Transfer viva. As suggested at the start of this thesis, the purpose of the research proposal as a genre is to convince the examiners of the student's potential to successfully execute a PhD-level research project, and the findings of this study may provide more detailed empirical guidelines for doctoral students preparing for Transfer of Status. But perhaps more importantly, the relationships between students, supervisors, and examiners must be further explored as this thesis has made clear that success at the Transfer milestone is not only about knowledge and communication but also about the student's access to information about the genre system through the supervisor, and subsequently ways in which supervisors (and examiners) understand their roles within that genre system.

11.4 Methodological contribution

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, a final contribution of this thesis is methodological as to 1) the application of a longitudinal design to study doctoral writing, and 2) the depth and variety of data collected. This study was designed to capture the key elements of the Transfer system, collecting drafts of the research proposal, oral and written (handwritten, electronic, and emailed) supervisor feedback, and in some cases students' notes from supervision, written peer feedback, ethics forms, and research training PowerPoint presentations. The range of data offered the ability to triangulate findings from participant interviews with supervision recordings and copies of proposal drafts, as well as the opportunity to trace development of supervisory relationships, participant perspective, and the document itself. Although prior work on doctoral writing has relied upon similar data sources—multiple drafts of a paper (Castello, Inesta, & Corcelles, 2013), interviews (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000), supervisor and/or peer feedback (Kumar & Stracke, 2007)—this is to my knowledge the only study to have collected this range of data over

an extended period of time: the length of the Transfer system from start to finish. This longitudinal design allowed for capture of change over time, which is essential in studies seeking to examine how students learn and negotiate the many and often micro-level challenges encountered during the doctorate. While retrospective studies can be useful (e.g. Skakni & McAlpine, 2017; Taylor, Vitale, Tapoler, & Whaley, 2018), they are not necessarily a replacement for longitudinal data that provides snapshots of experience in (relatively) present time, nor do they provide the triangulation of different data sources as presented in this study.

The complexity of the research design in terms of multiple data sources and forms of analysis also meant attending to different literatures since each was pertinent to a different aspect of the Transfer system. For instance, this thesis drew upon the empirical literature on doctoral writing, supervision, and students' linguistic and cultural contexts, from a variety of disciplines, as well as conceptual literature on agency and rhetorical genre theory. This had the advantage of bringing different perspectives together to examine a complex process, emphasizing the fact that doctoral writing, perhaps even doctoral education, is in many ways an individual and multi-layered experience that may be best examined through an in-depth micro-level analysis.

11.5 Conclusion

This chapter returned to the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 2, situating the key findings in relation to the Transfer system and the three temporal orientations of agency, drawing upon the empirical literature to further contextualize those results. Overall, writing practices and, for some, compliance with feedback, were largely driven by iteration, as the participants drew upon their experiences in the relevant discipline to compose the research proposal. Approaches to the PhD, how the participants imagined their doctoral trajectories and future careers, were initially influenced by the projective tone of agency, while practical evaluation was most evident in assessment of feedback and changes in approach to the PhD following Transfer of Status. This chapter further highlighted the roles of supervisors and examiners as actors and conveyors of institutional and disciplinary structure that shape the temporal-relational contexts in which doctoral students develop their research proposals.

The following chapter re-states the major contributions of the thesis and offers suggestions for future research and implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 12: Conclusions, Future Research, and Implications

This research was guided by the overarching research question, *How do first-year doctoral students in the social sciences shape and negotiate a successful research proposal over time?* This thesis, which examined the ways in which students created their research proposals while navigating the Transfer system in relation to personal, institutional, and disciplinary contexts, opened with a discussion of the state of doctoral education in the UK, identifying the research proposal and Transfer of Status as a central and under-researched milestone in PhD education. The review of empirical literature in Chapter 3 explored the complexity of factors that influence doctoral writing, showing that feedback, typically from supervisors, is often the key source of learning as doctoral students craft their theses and negotiate their prior experiences and motivations for PhD study. This thesis has added to this body of work by addressing a gap in the literature that has yet to explore connections between elements of the thesis genre system (supervision, revision, viva) and examine in-depth the early stages of doctoral education. By offering detailed cases of how five first-year doctoral students crafted their research proposals in preparation for Transfer of Status, this thesis has provided four major contributions:

1) This thesis has combined a theory of agency with the genre system in order to provide nuanced description of the complexity of the first milestone of the thesis genre system, and in turn the relationships between students, supervisors, and examiners. Subsequently, the findings also extend the literature on supervision, showing how the relationships between students and supervisors influence the student's success at Transfer of Status depending on what aspects of the genre system are conveyed or overlooked.
2) This thesis has provided evidence for how students' different approaches to the doctorate influence assessments of supervisors' expertise and responses to feedback, showing how students' agency changes over time in relation to ongoing learning and experiences (temporal-relational contexts).
3) This thesis has shed light on experiences of the Transfer of Status viva—a largely occluded genre with much in common with the final viva but has yet to be examined in-depth despite its formative nature and critical function in doctoral status progression.

4) This thesis has offered methodological implications for how future studies might approach complex problems in doctoral writing and doctoral education focused on individual learning and development by combining a longitudinal design with multiple data sources and methods of analysis.

12.1 Directions for future research

The results of this thesis give rise to various avenues of future inquiry. Additional in-depth studies that privilege student agency within the other PhD genre systems—for instance, Confirmation of Status at Oxford or the final thesis submission and viva at other institutions—are needed in order to understand the complete doctoral thesis system. Similarly, detailed longitudinal studies examining a cohort of students over the entire course of the PhD would enhance the findings of this study by examining how agency, student knowledge, and approach to the thesis change during the course of a PhD program. Such research might also provide insight into evolving supervisory relationships and doctoral students' exercise of agency in relation to critical events during the PhD. Additionally, while not highlighted in the cross-case chapter of this thesis,[13] research on the role of reading in shaping temporal-relational contexts and students' evolving knowledge of the discipline and the institution may be useful.

Further longitudinal studies across disciplines, for instance, English (humanities) and chemistry (natural sciences) to examine differences in disciplinary genre systems would also be useful in enhancing our knowledge of the relationships between disciplinary cultures and supervision and examination processes and expectations. Comparison across disciplines might also contribute to further understandings of expressions of agency in relation to disciplinary and institutional structures—for instance, *how does the lab system/hierarchy in natural sciences contribute to how doctoral students exercise agency?* Studying different disciplines may also provide insight into whether knowledge of the genre system is equally valuable across disciplines, and whether there are differences in the key actors participating in disciplinary thesis genre systems (e.g., the role of other lab members, the centrality of the supervisor).

Studies involving interviews with supervisors and examiners would also be useful in order to garner a better understanding of the extent of supervisor and examiner

[13] Reading did appear in several within-case chapters (e.g. Ethan) as important in influencing research thinking, and has been generally under-researched in the literature. However, because it was not a major theme across cases I did not address it in Chapter 10.

knowledge of the genre system and how they make decisions in advising students and assessing research proposals in Transfer of Status or institutional equivalents. Additional research examining the agendas supervisors bring to their supervision practices may also illuminate the dynamics between students, supervisors, and feedback, and the extent to which supervisors' own goals for the thesis and conceptual orientations influence how their students view the PhD. Because supervisors are positioned as representing and providing both disciplinary and institutional knowledge/structure, research examining what feedback students pick up on and why would be helpful—as noted in this thesis, participants generally focused on the disciplinary/subject expertise of their supervisors, rather than viewing their supervisors as experts in the institutional conventions of the PhD as well. Another implication for future research is an exploration of how success or failure at an early stage of the doctoral program affects supervisory relationships (how students assess supervisor expertise) and the way supervisors approach their supervision of the remainder of the thesis, particularly in preparation for Confirmation of Status (at Oxford) and the final viva.

This thesis also suggests that studies on doctoral students with particular characteristics are needed. For instance, research on similarities and differences in how doctoral students with non-academic career goals view and navigate the PhD in comparison to those striving for positions in academia may offer implications for doctoral training and supervision.

Further, research on students coming from non-western backgrounds may be useful in understanding how these students engage with their perceptions of Western ideologies and academic systems over time, and how they negotiate their prior conceptions, experiences, and ideologies within the doctoral context. Such studies may have implications for supervision—whether specialist supervision is required that attends to helping students navigate new academic contexts—or raise further questions about whether we need to decolonialize the Western academic system.

12.2 Implications for policy and practice

In addition to implications for future research, the results of this thesis may have wider implications for what a PhD can or should be. The findings suggest that the Transfer system both speaks to the expectations for doctoral thesis research and writing, and conveys the nature of an oral defense and its purpose and relationship to the written submission. Essentially, the process of preparing and defending a research proposal is a

modeling of the milestones ahead in doctoral study in which students learn to navigate institutional processes and begin to understand the standards against which they will be assessed. At Oxford, it is a modeling for Confirmation of Status, and at most other institutions within and beyond the UK, it may be viewed as practice for the final submission of the thesis and the viva voce.

The results have shown that genre is important, and knowledge of the genre system should be conveyed to both students and supervisors[14]; it is useful for students to consider what expertise supervisors bring beyond subject knowledge, and students generally pay most attention to supervisor feedback beyond all other sources. Helping supervisors and students think of Transfer of Status as embedded within the thesis genre system may be a useful framing, as Transfer is the first-time students (in most programs) will experience the examination system. This begs the question: *Do we need to redefine what supervisors are supposed to be doing in terms of guidance?* Currently, universities are investing significant resources in doctoral training with a focus on research methods. However, it may be that training and supervision should include explicit training on the Transfer and larger thesis genre systems. For instance, students might be familiarized with the Transfer process and its requirements and purpose early on in the doctorate so that they understand what the examiners will be assessing. Relatedly, the results suggest that students with a pragmatic/strategic (or realistic) approach to the PhD may be more successful in navigating the genre system, as their projective orientation toward agency is focused upon strategically passing milestones rather than on creating a life-changing thesis. Although the sample here was small, it may be worth working with students to approach the doctoral thesis and Transfer of Status pragmatically; the PhD might be viewed as a 'license' which, once obtained, provides more freedom to expand one's area of research.

A striking result of this thesis was that three of the five participants (two from Education) did not pass Transfer of Status on their first attempt, generally consistent with the statistics presented at the beginning of this thesis that showed 92.66% of first-year doctoral students in Anthropology passed Transfer on their first attempt, in contrast with 69.92% of Education students and 71.83% of Sociology students. In other words, a

[14] At least, this appears true in social sciences. It is possible that the genre system is not as critical in other disciplines, such as the natural sciences, where subject and methodological knowledge (lab work, experimental design, etc.) may be the major factors. But again, this may vary across institutions and departments depending on policy.

significant number of doctoral students in Education and Sociology are initially unsuccessful. There could be several reasons for this: first, that the Transfer milestone is a rigorous process taken seriously by examiners so as to prevent problems in the future. This is consistent with the purpose of Transfer of Status, and data indicating the percentage of students who fail at Confirmation of Status or the final viva would be useful in assessing that claim. Another possibility is that the student pushes for doing Transfer of Status early, as was the case with Shankar. In those situations, not passing Transfer may also enforce previously overlooked or ignored supervisor feedback. Even so, as the results showed, not all examiners and supervisors are well-versed in Transfer of Status outcomes and assessment, nor do they agree on what is acceptable, suggesting that explicit training on the Transfer examination could be useful in establishing greater consistency. As such, new members to the departments should be given the appropriate resources outlining Transfer of Status procedures and purposes and perhaps be paired with an experienced examiner when they first examine a Transfer application. Likewise, as policies related to Transfer of Status and other milestones change, training should be offered to existing faculty.

Finally, rethinking the results of this thesis within the wider context of UK doctoral education offers additional policy implications. Much national policy over the past several decades has focused on researcher training, adding structure to doctoral programs and providing additional support. At the same time, institutions have increasingly recognized the diversification of post-PhD careers outside of academia. As such, career services have expanded within higher education institutions in an effort to better prepare graduates for a range of work, which is particularly pertinent as the majority of PhD holders will eventually hold posts outside of academia (Vitae, 2016). Here, this trend towards PhD holders in professional careers was best reflected in Ben's case. The findings thus hold implications for supervision. If the nature of post-PhD careers is changing, and doctoral students are beginning to look for training for non-academic jobs or pursuing doctorates specifically for work outside academia, which is also influencing the way they view and approach the PhD, supervision practices may also need to change with the diversification of the student body. Supervisors—and institutions—therefore need to be aware of alternative career paths and their students' goals in order to better prepare them not only for a successful thesis but for post-PhD work, which may mean helping them to develop additional skills, network, and market their skills to employers.

12.3 Decisions and Consequences

In designing this study, I aimed to produce a tightly structured thesis, influenced by my research training and understanding of the doctoral thesis as a genre. However, my approach represents just one of many possibilities. In this section, I thus reflect upon the key choices that shaped the scope of the research and the nature of data collection.

Central to this study was the longitudinal research design and my efforts to keep clear boundaries between researcher and participants. Unlike in other longitudinal studies attrition was not an issue here, and the question of how I 'kept' my participants inherently raises the issue of power. Perhaps participants felt the research was a useful reflective tool for examining their own practices, as indicated in their interviews, or they experienced a sense of obligation as fellow doctoral students to support the completion of my project. As a senior doctoral student studying PhD education and PhD writing, harboring the position of part insider part outsider (Paechter, 2012), I naturally occupied a position of power in relation to the participants. That said, the nature of power dynamics varied across participants due to the particulars of my relationship with each person. With Shankar, for instance, I often felt like an equal in that he made clear that part of his participation was inspired by an interest in thinking about how he would conduct his own research, and at times it felt as though he was scrutinizing me. In contrast, Charlie clearly positioned me as senior, evidenced by the way he solicited advice and reassurance. Ben, in turn, explicitly acknowledged what he framed as the necessity of research-participant distance, noting in our final interview that he could not ask me to fulfill a mentorship role while he was participating in the study, but perhaps would more openly seek advice from me in the future. In this research, my intention to sustain boundaries between researcher and participant while also recognizing the co-construction of knowledge was influenced in part by my supervisors and the research methods courses I had taken. However, it is important to acknowledge that other research traditions such as ethnography and practitioner research seek to actively involve participants in the creation of the research (see Thomson & Gunter, 2007), and had I chosen this approach, the foci of this study may have been different.

Similarly, my choice of Emirbayer and Mische's chordal triad model of agency had implications for the scope of my research sub-questions and in turn, the scope of the thesis. The benefit of using Emirbayer and Mische's model was that the chordal triad provided a clear framework for identifying examples of agency, which could be applied to the empirical data in a relatively straightforward way. That said, their framework remains limited in its

discussion of the relationship between agency and structure, specifically how structure facilitates and constrains agency (see Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Chu & Robey, 2008) and how agency is developed within one's broader personal trajectories. As such, the results of this thesis have not been discussed within the wider context of students' lives, since the focus was on broadening our understanding of the complexity of the genre system. Because the sub-research questions focused on the data and were in direct service of the conceptual framework, the research questions themselves may have narrowed the scope of the research alongside the focus on the Transfer genre system. For instance, the question, "What sources of influence are most crucial to students' changing understandings of research and doctoral writing over time?" set aside a deeper discussion of other, less obvious factors shaping the participants' experiences. Thus, a disadvantage was that the many additional strands of interest emerging from the data, including personal events, conference presentations, and other relationships, received minimal attention, as they did not appear significant sources of influence on the research proposal. Future research might benefit from the use of other actor-centered theories of agency. For instance, Archer's work on critical realism and analytical dualism (2000) or Holland's figured worlds (see Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) could provide different theoretically robust ways of thinking about agency in relation to various structures and how agency is tied to personal development.

Finally, to revisit the second half of Emirbayer and Mische's definition of agency, agency "both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (1998, p. 970). As shown in the results, Natalie's and Shankar's desires to create research proposals that did not strictly conform to typical proposal structure, and Shankar's attempt to draw on Krishnamurti's work to redefine the term "ideal teacher" were ultimately unsuccessful in transforming the structure of Transfer of Status; their examiners failed to recognize their initial documents as fulfilling Transfer requirements. Thus, while the participants used agency to develop their research proposals in different ways, ultimately, they *reproduced* the proposal genre for Transfer of Status *to the degree* necessary for success. This raises the question: is it possible that an alternative conceptualization of agency would have enabled me to explore in greater detail the complex relationships between the transformation/reproduction aspect of this research alongside temporal changes in agency over time? Thus, this section has highlighted both the ways in which my research has been shaped by methodological and conceptual choices, and signposted alternative approaches that may further illuminate doctoral students' experiences of the Transfer system.

12.4 Conclusion

This thesis has been about what it means to manage the first milestone of the PhD, in this context referred to as Transfer of Status. The research has rested on the assumption that the goal of doctoral education is to support students as they become independent scholars and experts in their fields, as reflected through their doctoral theses. In turn, the Transfer of Status milestone is important in the process of learning how to navigate the thesis genre system as well as developing the thinking processes that underpin the conduct of research. What this thesis has offered is a nuanced understanding of how students' individual contexts and goals contribute to the decisions they make as they navigate the first, transitory year of the PhD. It has provided detailed longitudinal portraits of how changing temporal-relational contexts influence learning and give rise to changes in expressions of agency over time, particularly in response to feedback and accumulation of knowledge about the discipline, scholarly writing, and institutional milestones.

As described in greater detail in Chapter 4, this thesis is not without limitations. Most notably, I was unable to capture the full range of data comprising the genre system, and dealt with limitations generated by my own learning process as I struggled to navigate the line between roles as researcher and colleague, at times allowing my perspectives and biases to slip through in interviews. Further, as a multiple case study with five participants, findings from this research cannot be generalized to larger populations—though its aim, of course, was to examine individual differences and gain a detailed understanding of the complexity of the genre system and how students traverse it.

This thesis also shaped my understanding of the doctorate as I participated in the PhD myself, sharpening my awareness of how I interacted with my supervisors and strategically approached the research, fueled by the need for ongoing reflexivity as I navigated relationships with my participants and peers. Although doctoral theses on doctoral education are becoming more common, most colleagues outside of my field reacted to my topic surprise; several months ago I read an International Doctoral Education Research Network (IDERN) thread on whether doctoral students should be allowed to research other doctoral students at all, debating whether we are capable of handling with a subject so close to us. However, all research involves drawing lines and managing positionality, and for me, studying doctoral writing has provided invaluable lessons on what it means to be a scholar and what it means to be a doctoral student, expanding my empathy and increasing my respect for the range of students navigating

similar challenges. Likewise, as I look forward and aspire to a career in academia, this study has given me insight into what it means to be a supervisor, forcing me to think about how I might manage that responsibility if and when the time comes. But above all, this research has been most rewarding as I developed relationships with my participants and received their feedback on the ways in which this study has positively impacted their doctoral experience, even if only in small ways.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear Student,

Dr._____, the Director of Graduate Studies for the Department of _____, has agreed to send this email request on my behalf. I do not have any personal information about who ___ is sending this email to, but I hope you will consider participating in my research.

My name is Kelsey Inouye, a DPhil student at the University of Oxford, Department of Education. My research examines how doctoral students use feedback in developing and revising their Transfer of status papers. This research will be a multi-case study of four to six first-year doctoral students, and will consist of semi-structured interviews, journey plots, and analysis of drafts of the Transfer of status paper and related writings, supervisor feedback, supervision notes, and brief sentence-completion exercises. Supervisions will also be audio recorded, and I may request copies of additional thesis-related feedback received in courses, writing groups, at conferences, etc. Interviews will take place every two months, spanning from October 2018 through May 2019, or through completion of Transfer of status. Participants will be incoming DPhils, as the focus of this study is on developing ideas and thinking about research and the writing process.

Participating will provide the opportunity to examine how you use feedback to refine your writing, and promote self-reflection on your development as a researcher and plans for your thesis. You may also have access to copies of your recorded supervision sessions (and other data).

If you are interested in participating or would like additional information, please contact me, Kelsey Inouye, at kelsey.inouye@education.ox.ac.uk or 07961 694595.

Thank you for considering this research opportunity.

Kelsey Inouye

Appendix B: Participant Information Form

Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY

Lynn McAlpine
lynn.mcalpine@learning.ox.ac.uk
Kelsey Inouye, DPhil
Oxford telephone number: 07961 694595
Oxford email address: kelsey.inouye@education.ox.ac.uk

Becoming a Scholar: Feedback, Writing, and the Research Proposal

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics Approval Reference: ED-CIA-18-223

1. ***What is the purpose of this study?***

This study seeks to examine how first year doctoral students at the University of Oxford use feedback to write their research proposals and develop scholarly identities in the process. Focusing specifically on students in the Social Sciences Division, this multi-case study aims to contribute to the body of work on thesis writing and identity development.

2. ***Why have I been invited to take part?***

You have been invited because you are an incoming or first year DPhil student in the Social Sciences Division, or the supervisor of a willing participant.

3. ***Do I have to take part?***

No. You can ask questions about the study before deciding whether or not to participate. If you do agree to participate, you may withdraw yourself [and your data] from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without penalty, by advising the researchers of this decision. If you decide to withdraw, please inform the researcher as soon as possible.

4. ***What will happen to me if I take part in the study?***

If you are a student and are happy to take part in the study:
You will be asked to participate in interviews (every two months) and visual activities tracing the course of your thesis development over the course of 8 months (October 2018 to May 2019) or until you complete Transfer. Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes. You will also be asked to email the researcher drafts of your Transfer paper and related writing, supervision notes, and copies of written supervisor feedback. Additionally, you will

be asked to allow the researcher to either a) sit in on and audio-record supervision sessions, or b) to audio record supervision sessions yourself using a researcher-supplied device (or your own device) over the course of 8 months (October 2018 to May 2019). Following each supervision, you will be asked to complete a 5-item sentence completion exercise, which will be sent to the researcher via email. Finally, you may asked to provide copies of additional thesis-related feedback you receive, including feedback from courses, writing groups, conferences, friends and family. You may also be asked to participate in a follow-up interview in the fall of 2019 after completing Transfer to discuss your experiences of Transfer of status and get your feedback on participation in this study.

If you are a supervisor and are happy to take part in the study:
You will be asked to allow the researcher to either a) sit in on and audio-record supervision sessions with the student participant, or b) ask the participant to audio record supervision sessions over the course of 8 months (October 2018 to May 2019) or until your student completes Transfer. You will also be asked to send the researcher copies of your supervision notes and any shared notes or relevant email correspondence you create with the student participant. You may also be asked to participate in a follow-up interview in the fall of 2019 after completing Transfer to discuss your experience and provide feedback on your participation in this study.

Interviews will take place at mutually convenient times and dates, or via Skype.

Interviews and supervision sessions will be audio recorded and transcribed.

5. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

The following risks are involved in taking part:

The first risk has to do with anonymity. Given the size of the DPhil and Department population, it is possible that readers of this research may be able to identify you based on the topic of your research. A second risk is that you may at some point become uncomfortable sharing information with me, particularly information having to do with research difficulties or other challenges, or my presence at supervision sessions.

In order to mitigate any potential risks, the researcher will be sure to assign you a pseudonym that will be used on all raw data and in any write-ups of the data. The researcher will also redact the name of the place where you plan to conduct your fieldwork if relevant. Further, if at any time you become uncomfortable about sharing information with, please contact the researcher and we can discuss it. The researcher also wants to assure you that she is not making any judgments about you or your work, but rather is focused on the research process and your experiences of it.

6. Are there any benefits in taking part?

The benefit of taking part is an opportunity to reflect upon your experiences and how you have used supervisor feedback and other resources to progress through your research.

7. ***What happens to the data provided?*** [15]

The **research data** will be stored confidentially on the Nexus Sharepoint site.

Your responses will be anonymised by assigning you a pseudonym and redacting the name of the place in which you conducted your fieldwork.

Personal / sensitive data will be stored confidentially via the Nexus Sharepoint site.

The researcher and her supervisor will have access to personal/sensitive data / research data.

All research data and records will be stored for a minimum retention period of 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.

The BERA Guidelines have been consulted and will be adhered to.

8. ***Will the research be published?***

The research will be part of a DPhil thesis, and may be presented at conferences and/or published in journals.

9. ***Who is organising and funding the research?***

This research is being organized through the Department of Education and is not funded.

10. ***Who has reviewed this study?***

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: ED-CIA-18-223).

11. ***Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?***

a) For studies reviewed by a University research ethics committee only:

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to the relevant researcher [07961 694595] or their supervisor [01865 274029], who will do their best to answer your query. The researcher should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how they intend to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the relevant chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter in a reasonably expeditious manner:

Chair, **Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee**; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

[15] Please refer to CUREC's Best Practice Guidance on Data Collection and Management (BPG 09)

12. Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

Kelsey Inouye
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
Tel: 07961 694595
Email: kelsey.inouye@linacre.ox.ac.uk

Lynn McAlpine
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
Tel: 01865 274029
Email: lynn.mcalpine@learning.ox.ac.uk

Appendix C: Written Consent Form

Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY



Lynn McAlpine
lynn.mcalpine@learning.ox.ac.uk
Kelsey Inouye, DPhil
Oxford telephone number: 07961 694595
Oxford email address: kelsey.inouye@education.ox.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

CUREC Approval Reference: ED-CIA-18-223

Becoming a Scholar: Feedback, Writing, and the Research Proposal

Purpose of Study:
This study seeks to examine how first year doctoral students at the University of Oxford use feedback to write their research proposals and develop scholarly identities in the process. Focusing specifically on students in the Social Sciences Division, this multi-case study aims to contribute to the body of work on thesis writing and identity development.

		Please initial each box
1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or academic penalty.	☐
3	I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by designated individuals from the University of Oxford, such as my supervisor, where it is relevant to my taking part in this study. I give permission for these individuals to access my data.	☐
4	I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.	☐
5	I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	☐
6	I understand how this research will be written up and published.	☐
7	I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	☐
8	I consent to being audio recorded	☐

11	I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs	☐
12	I give permission to be quoted directly in the research publication	☐
13	I agree to take part in the study	☐
14	I agree for my personal data to be kept in a secure database for the purpose of contacting me about future studies.	☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

Appendix D: CUREC Application

CENTRAL UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (CUREC)

Form CUREC 1A Checklist for the Social Sciences and Humanities

The University of Oxford places a high value on the knowledge, expertise, and integrity of its members and their ability to conduct research to high standards of scholarship and ethics. The research ethics clearance procedures have been established to ensure that the University is meeting its obligations as a responsible institution.

They start from the presumption that all members of the University will take their responsibilities and obligations seriously and will ensure that their research involving human participants is conducted according to the established principles and good practice in their fields and in accordance, where appropriate, with legal requirements. Since the requirements of research ethics review will vary from field to field and from project to project, the University accepts that different guidelines and procedures will be appropriate.

- Please check "Where and how to apply for ethical review" and the CUREC flowchart first to see if you need ethics approval.
- Please complete this form using a word processor and email it, together with your supporting documents, to your Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) (**if applicable**). If you don't have a DREC please email this form to ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk using your official **ox.ac.uk email** address. **Only emailed applications will be accepted.**

WHAT THIS CHECKLIST IS DESIGNED FOR

This **CUREC 1A checklist** is designed largely for research that falls within the Divisions of Social Sciences and Humanities where ethical issues are relatively few and straightforward. Interviews, field work and oral history are also included in the CUREC process.

The **full CUREC 2 application** is only required where certain project characteristics (e.g. type of participants, or procedures) result in a more complex set of ethical issues. It is expected that only in a limited number of cases will it be necessary for researchers to complete a CUREC 2 application. The checklist below will direct you to a CUREC 2 application if needed.

WHAT THIS CHECKLIST WILL NOT ASSESS

This checklist does not cover research governance, satisfactory methodology, or compliance with the requirements of publishers when administering their tests or questionnaires. As **principal researcher (i.e. principal investigator)**, it is your responsibility to ensure that requirements in these areas are met.

CUREC does not review studies classed as **audit** (see Glossary and Decision Flowchart for CUREC on our website).

If your study involves **NHS patients, NHS staff / data / facilities, or human tissue**, please check the Decision Flowchart for NHS approval and contact the Clinical Trials and Research Governance (CTRG) team in the first instance.

Further information on the University's research ethics procedures is available from the CUREC website.

SECTION A: Filter for CUREC2 application

This section determines whether your study raises more complex issues which require the completion of a full application for ethical review, known as the CUREC 2 application.

(Please mark 'X' in the Yes/No column as appropriate to indicate your response.)

1. Are research participants classed as people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question? (This may include those under 18 (though see "competent youths"), prisoners, or adults "at risk".) Your attention is drawn to the University's Safeguarding Code of Practice and its implications for researchers involving children or adults at risk, including the need for the work to be risk assessed and for researchers to undertake related training. (**Note**: If any of your participants are aged 16 or under, please answer 'Yes' here **and** also answer question 5 below.)	Yes	No X
2. By taking part in the research, will participants be at serious risk of criminal prosecution (e.g. by providing information on drug abuse or child abuse)?	Yes	No X
3. Does the research involve the deception of participants?	Yes	No X
4. Does your research raise issues relevant to the **Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (**the Prevent duty**)**, which seeks to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism? Please see advice on this on our Best Practice Guidance web page.	Yes	No X
If you have answered 'No' to all of the questions above please go to **Section B**. If you have answered 'Yes' to any question above continue to question 5 below.		
5. Is your project covered by a CUREC approved procedure (formerly known as "CUREC Protocols")?	Yes	No
If yes, please give research procedure number(s):		
If you answered '**Yes'** to **ANY** of questions **1-4**, **and** answered '**No'** to question **5**, **please stop completing this checklist and do not submit it for ethical review**. Instead, please complete the CUREC 2 application form from the CUREC website. Then submit the CUREC 2 form for ethical review. If you answered 'Yes' to ANY of questions 1-3, **and** answered 'Yes' to question 5, please go on to **Section B**.		

SECTION B: Contact details and project description (NB: must be typed not handwritten)	
Contact details:	
1. **Principal investigator /** supervisor (if student research (title and full name):	Dr. Lynn McAlpine
2. Name of student (if student research):	Kelsey Inouye
3. Degree programme, e.g. DPhil, BA, MPhil, BSc, MSc (if student research):	DPhil
4. Department or Institute name:	Education
5. Address for correspondence (if different from above):	
6. University e-mail (**not** private email) and telephone:	kelsey.inouye@education.ox.ac.uk
7. Name and status of others taking part in the project, e.g. third year undergraduate; postdoctoral research assistant:	

SECTION B continued	
Project description:	
8. Title of research project:	Becoming a Scholar: Feedback, Writing, and the Research Proposal
9. List of location(s) where project will be conducted:	University of Oxford, online platforms (Skype, email)
10. If your research involves overseas travel or fieldwork and your department requires a travel risk assessment, will you have completed and returned a risk assessment form beforehand? (This has to be approved by your department	Yes No Not required in this instance X

before you travel. If you are travelling overseas, you are strongly advised to take out University travel insurance.)	
11. Anticipated duration of research project overall:	18 months or years (maximum 5)
12. Anticipated start and end dates of the research project involving human participants:	From: (01/02/18) To: (31/12/19) Please note that you will need ethics approval **before** you start your research. CUREC 1As may take up to 30 days to process.
13. External organisation funding the research (if applicable):	
14. Title and very brief and simple lay description of research (about 150 words), plus description (about 200 words) of the nature of participants.	
a) Title, brief description of research (150 words) in lay language. When describing the research, please include your methodology, how you are applying professional guidelines, and the use to which results/data will be put. **Please also declare any conflicts of interest here.**	

Working Title: Becoming a Scholar: Feedback, Writing, and the Research Proposal

This study seeks to examine how first year doctoral students at UK Universities use feedback to write their research proposals and develop scholarly identity in the process. Focusing specifically on students in the Social Sciences Division, this study aims to contribute to the body of work on thesis writing and identity development. This will be a multiple case study of first-year PhD students spanning from October 2018 to December 2019. Data will consist of semi-structured interviews and journey plots, drafts of writings related to the research proposal, written supervisor feedback, student notes, and sentence-completion exercises to be filled out following supervisions. Interviews will be conducted every two months. I will also sit-in and/or audio record and observe supervision sessions, and ask for copies of supervisory note summaries and/or emails pertaining to feedback on the thesis. Students will be given the option to either have me sit-in on sessions, or to record the sessions themselves via their own devices or a recording device that I will supply before each meeting and collect directly afterward. I may also do a follow-up interview in the fall of 2019 after participants have completed Transfer to get a sense of their experiences of Transfer of status and their reflections on participating in this project. Finally, participants may be asked to provide copies of additional thesis-related feedback received, including feedback from courses, writing groups, conferences, friends and family. The data will be narratively analyzed, and pseudonyms will be assigned. Interviews will be constructed in compliance with BERA Guidelines paragraphs 10-11, and data will be stored on my password-protected computer and on the secured sharepoint site, which I and my supervisor may access.

Please see Appendix D for the interview protocol.

SECTION B continued

b) Description of participants and obtaining informed consent (200 words). When describing participants, please include

- criteria for inclusion/exclusion
- method of recruitment
- processes for consent to participate

Please ensure you attach as separate documents (if applicable, in English translation):

- your recruitment and advertisement material e.g. a poster or brief invitation letter/ email
- information for participants to read (or hear) before they agree to take part e.g. written information sheets or (only if applicable) oral information scripts.
- a document to record informed consent. Templates for written consent forms and/or oral information scripts (in case of an oral consent process) are available from the CUREC website
- a guide to interview questions (this may be a list of questions to be asked, or a preliminary scope of questions), or a sample of other instruments (such as a sample questionnaire)
- (if relevant) debriefing document after participants have taken part

The partcipants will be first-year PhD students in Social Sciences at the UK Universities.

Students will likely be recruited through the Director of Graduate Studies (or equivalent) of the Department. After receiving ethics approval, I wll contact the Directors of Graduate Studies of the relevant departments and seek his/her advice about the best way to recruit students. If recruitment takes place via email, I will send the director an email in late September or early October 2018, and ask that it is forwarded to incoming DPhil students. I may also ask the DGS to make a verbal announcement to first-year students during induction week or once term has started. The email (Appendix C) will include an overview of the study and invite interested students to contact me via email. Upon contact, I will set up meetings at mutually convenient times and places, where I will present the participant information form (Appendix A) and consent form (Appendix B), and invite prospective participants to ask any questions they may have and discuss any concerns. If the student consents and signs the form, I will then contact the relevant supervisor(s) and present them with the information and consent forms, as I plan to observe and/or record their supervisory sessions, as well as request access to supervision notes/session summaries and email correspondence with the student on thesis matters. The participant information and consent forms are designed in accordance with the BERA Guidelines, paragraphs 14-15, 25.

Prior to this recruitment, I may pilot instruments, the journey-plot and sentence-completion exercise (Appendix E) in spring 2018. For this pilot, I will follow a similar protocol—contact the Director of Graduate Studies of the relevant department, ask for my recruitment email to be forwarded to first-year PhD students, and then meet with interested participants to share the participant information form, answer questions, and receive consent. The pilot will involve several instances of filling out the sentence completion form following supervision, and invite participant feedback.

15. What are the ethical issues connected with your research and what steps have you taken to address them? Please do not answer 'none'. The committee needs to see evidence that you have identified potential ethical issues with respect to your research and have taken steps to address them. These issues could relate to:

- your own physical and psychological safety as a researcher (please see the University's and Social Science Division's Safety in Fieldwork guidance
- participant burdens and/or risks, and
- data protection/ confidentiality (please also see section 18).

For more guidance on ethical issues, please see
http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources

One key ethical issue is that of anonymity. Because of the relatively small size of the Departments and the PhD population, it is possible that readers may be able to identify the participants by the kind of research they are engaged in. I will acknowledge this possibility with each participant, and assure them that I will try to minimize the risk by assigning pseudonyms, redacting the name of the countries in which they plan to do fieldwork, as well as any other specific sensitive information that may contribute to identification. This issue also appears in the consent form in accordance with BERA Guidelines paragraph 25.

A second possible issue is that the participants may at some point be uncomfortable sharing experiences with me, particularly if they encounter difficulties with their supervisors or receive critical feedback. Likewise, supervisors may feel uncomfortable inviting me into their supervision meetings and providing access to their notes and feedback, and my presence may affect how they supervise. I will discuss this possibility with the participants in our initial meetings, and invite them to raise concerns at any time.

Section B continued

16. Will you obtain informed consent according to CUREC guidelines and good practice in your discipline before participation?	Yes X	No

If you have marked '**No**', please give a brief explanation and justification for this decision here:

17. Will your research involve discussing sensitive issues? This could be information relating to race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, physical/mental health, trade union membership, sexual life or criminal activities.	Yes	No X

If you have marked '**Yes**', please make sure that you have included some **supporting information** (as directed in question 14 of this section) showing the range of questions covering these issues.

18. **Management and handling of personal and other research data**

Your management and handling of personal data and special category data of human participants, either directly or via a third party, will need to comply with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the new Data Protection Act, as set out in the University's Guidance on Data Protection and Research. In answering the questions below, please also consider the points raised in the Data Protection Checklist. For advice on research data management and security, please consult with the University's Research Data Team (researchdata@ox.ac.uk) and/or your local IT department and the University's web pages on research data management.

a) Will your research involve the collection of **records of consent** (e.g. written forms, audio-recorded, or other recorded consent)? **If 'Yes', these will be classed as fully identifiable personal data (directly linked to an individual).**	Yes X	No

b) Will your research involve the collection of **other** personal data**?** **If 'Yes**', specify in what form(s) this will be stored: • Fully identifiable (directly linked to an individual) • Pseudonymised (potentially identifiable as data may be attributed to an individual if linkage information can be accessed elsewhere by researchers) • Fully anonymised (i.e. cannot be linked to an individual)	Yes X Yes Yes X Yes	No No No No
c) Will your research involve the collection of special category data? **If 'Yes',** in what form(s) will this be stored: • Fully identifiable (directly linked to an individual) • Pseudonymised (potentially identifiable as data may be attributed to an individual if linkage information can be accessed elsewhere by researchers) • Fully anonymised (i.e. cannot be linked to an individual)	Yes Yes Yes Yes	No X No No No
d) How will any personally identifiable data be collected, Transferred and backed up? Please describe the arrangements for any physical Transfer of personal data (including paper records and data captured electronically via portable media) from where it is collected to local storage.		
I will only use my university email account for communication with the participants. The signed consent forms (if hard copy) will be stored in a locked cabinet in my supervisor's locked office. All consent forms will be also stored on an Oxford Sharepoint site (hard copies will be scanned.) I will record the audio interviews and supervision sessions via a recording device, and transcribe them and compose written summaries. As received or created, these will be stored on Sharepoint, with anonymized data also stored on my password-protected laptop as back-up. Or, if the participant chooses to self-record supervisions on a researcher-provided device, the participant will be provided with a recording device and instructed on how to use it. I will give the participant the device before supervisions and collect it directly afterwards, again uploading the audio to Sharepoint. If the participant chooses to self-record on their own devices, I will ask them to email me the mp4 files to my university email, and then upload the file to Sharepoint. I will also collect drafts of the research proposal and other related writings, such as literature reviews, copies of various forms of written supervisor feedback, the sentence completion exercises, student notes, supervisor notes and relevant email correspondence. These items may be sent to me via email, to my university account, or if feedback or notes are handwritten, I may ask students to take photos and then send them via email. Again, all data as received will be stored on Sharepoint, and all anonymized data will also be stored on my password-protected laptop as back-up.		
e) Where, and for how long, will participants' personally identifiable data be stored during and after the study? (Please outline the procedures for ensuring confidentiality, eg security arrangements, anonymisation or pseudonymisation of such data. Please distinguish between records of consent and other forms of personally identifiable data stored)		
Interview data (audio, transcription), electronic drafts, feedback, sentence completion exercises, and notes will be stored on the Sharepoint site, with copies on my password-protected laptop in compliance with ethical guidelines until the end of the project. All data will be anonymized before I save it onto my laptop. Any hard copies of data, such as notes and journey plots will be stored in a file in a locked drawer in a locked room. Data will be stored for a minimum retention period of 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.		
f) If storing pseudonymised data, please confirm that identifiers will be held separately from the research data and linked through a unique study number. Specify how and at what point the pseudonymisation will occur, how the linkage information will be stored and state whether or not (and when) the linkage will be destroyed.		
Identifiers will be held separately from the research data (in different files) and linked through a unique study number. Pseudonymisation will take place as soon as participants sign the consent forms; in fact, they will be encouraged to choose their pseudonym. And linkage information will be stored in an Excel document saved on the Sharepoint site, and will be destroyed at the end of this project (3 years).		
g) Who will have access to the personally identifiable data? If personally identifiable data is to be shared with another organisation, how will it be Transferred/disclosed securely?		

In addition to myself, my supervisors Lynn McAlpine and Victoria Elliott will have access to personally identifiable data via the sharepoint site.
h) When and how will personally identifiable data be destroyed? (NB. Personally identifiable data should be destroyed when no longer required.)
Personally identifiable data will be destroyed at the end of the study by permanently deleting electronic copies of consent and other forms, and by shredding any hard copies.
i) How, where and for how long will other research data be stored after the study has finished? For more information about University and research funder retention policies, please see the University's web pages on research data management.
Any other research data will also be stored on Sharepoint or for hard copies, in a locked drawer in a locked room. This data will be retained for up to 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.

SECTION C: Methods and procedures to be used	
Method used: Please ensure you have addressed any potential ethical issues related to these methods in Section 14 and in your Participant Information Sheet	**Please mark 'X'**
1. Analysis of existing records	X
2. Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)	
3. Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters	
4. Participant observation	
5. Covert observation	
6. Observation of specific organisational practices	X
7. Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy	
8. Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task	X
9. Using social media	
10. Participant performs paper and pencil task	X
11. Participant performs verbal or aural task (e.g. for linguistic study)	
12. Focus group	
13. Interview	X
14. Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	X
15. Video recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	
16. Photography of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	
17. Others (please specify):	

SECTION D: Professional guidelines and training		
In this section, please mark 'X' against at least one of the following professional guidelines you aim to adhere to. You should use the principles listed in your chosen guideline(s) in conducting your own research. **Note**: this is not an exhaustive list.		**Please mark 'X'**
Research specialism/ methodology	**Association and guidance document**	
Anthropology	Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth	
Criminology	http://www.britsoccrim.org/ethics/	
Education	British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research	X
Geography	Association of American Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics	
History	Oral History Society of the UK Ethical Guidelines	
Internet-based Research	British Psychological Society: Conducting Research on the Internet Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Guide Also see our Best Practice Guidance on internet-based research	
Law (Socio-Legal)	Socio-Legal Studies Association: Statement of Principles of Ethical Research	
Management	Academy of Management's Professional Code of Ethics	
Political Science	American Political Science Association (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science	
Politics	Political Studies Association. Guidelines for Good Professional Conduct	
Psychology	British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct	
Social Research	Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines	
Sociology	The British Sociological Association: Statement of Ethical Practice	
Visual Research	ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper: Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research	
Other professional guidelines. Please specify the other guidelines used here*:*		

Please indicate what training in research ethics the researchers involved with this study have received, e.g. the title of the course and date completed (online training available at http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/support/training/ethics). If no formal training has been undertaken, please indicate any discussions of research methodology between researchers and supervisors here.

SECTION E: Signatures (The SSH IDREC Secretariat accepts either option below. If you have a DREC, check which signature option it prefers.)

- **Option 1:** 'Electronic signatures', i.e. email confirmations from a University of Oxford email address, can be accepted. Separate emails should come from each of the relevant signatories as outlined below, indicating acceptance of the relevant responsibilities. **Pasted images of signatures cannot be accepted in the sections below.**
- **Option 2:** Handwritten (wet-ink) signatures. Please scan them and the rest of the checklist pages to create a single PDF document and email through.

Please ensure this checklist is signed by:

For staff research:	**For student research**:
1. Principal investigator	1. Principal investigator **(project supervisor)**
2. **Head of Department (or nominee)**	2. **Head of Department (or nominee)**
	3. **Student researcher**

1. **Principal investigator signature/supervisor signature (if student research)**

I understand my responsibilities as principal investigator as outlined in the CUREC glossary and guidance on the CUREC website.

I declare that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed, and that a new checklist will be submitted should the research design change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of CUREC 2 (involving full scrutiny by an IDREC). I will inform the relevant IDREC if I cease to be the principal investigator on this project and supply the name and contact details of my successor if appropriate.

Signature: ……..

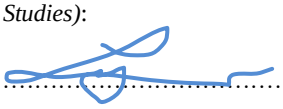
Print name (block capitals): …….. **Date**: ……...

2. **Departmental endorsement signature**

I have read the research project application named above. On the basis of the information available to me, I:

(i) consider the principal investigator to be aware of her/his ethical responsibilities in regard to this research;
(ii) consider that any ethical issues raised have been satisfactorily resolved or are covered by relevant professional guidelines and/or CUREC approved procedures, and that it is appropriate for the research to proceed (noting the principal investigator's obligation to report should the design of the research change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of a CUREC 2 full application);
(iii) am satisfied that: the proposed project design and scientific methodology is sound; the project has been/will be subject to appropriate peer review; and is likely to contribute to existing knowledge and/or to the education and training of the researcher(s) and that it is in the public interest.

Signed by Head of Department or nominee *(example nominees for student research include the Director of Graduate Studies/ Director of Undergraduate Studies)*:

Signature: 

Print name (block capitals): …LYNN MCALPINE……..... **Date**: …Oct. 25, 2018……

3. **Student signature (if student research)**

I understand the questions and answers that have been entered above describing the research, and I will ensure that my practice in this research complies with these answers, subject to any modifications made by the principal investigator properly authorised by the CUREC system.

Signed by student: …/s/Kelsey Inouye……

Date: …Oct. 25, 2018……

Print name (block capitals): …KELSEY INOUYE…….....

SECTION F: SUBMITTING THE COMPLETED CHECKLIST	Please mark 'X'
1. Check you have completed all sections (A-E)	X
2. Ensure your application is signed by you, your supervisor (if student) and department	X
3. **Please attach all supporting documents (see section B, question 14b for details).** If the appropriate supporting documentation is not included with your application, you will then be asked to provide this separately. **This may well delay the ethical review process, and thus the start of your research.**	X
4. Ensure you have declared conflicts of interest (if any) in Section B, question 14a.	X
5. If your department has a Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC), submit this checklist and supporting information to the appropriate departmental officer.	X
6. If your department does not have a DREC, submit the checklist and supporting information to the SSH IDREC (email ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk).	
7. Applications must be sent by email from your official ox.ac.uk email account. Please do not send applications by post.	

Appendix E: Demographic Information Form

Personal information:

a) How old are you? ☐25/under ☐26-30 ☐31-35 ☐36-40 ☐41-45 ☐46-50 ☐51-55 ☐56-60 ☐61/older

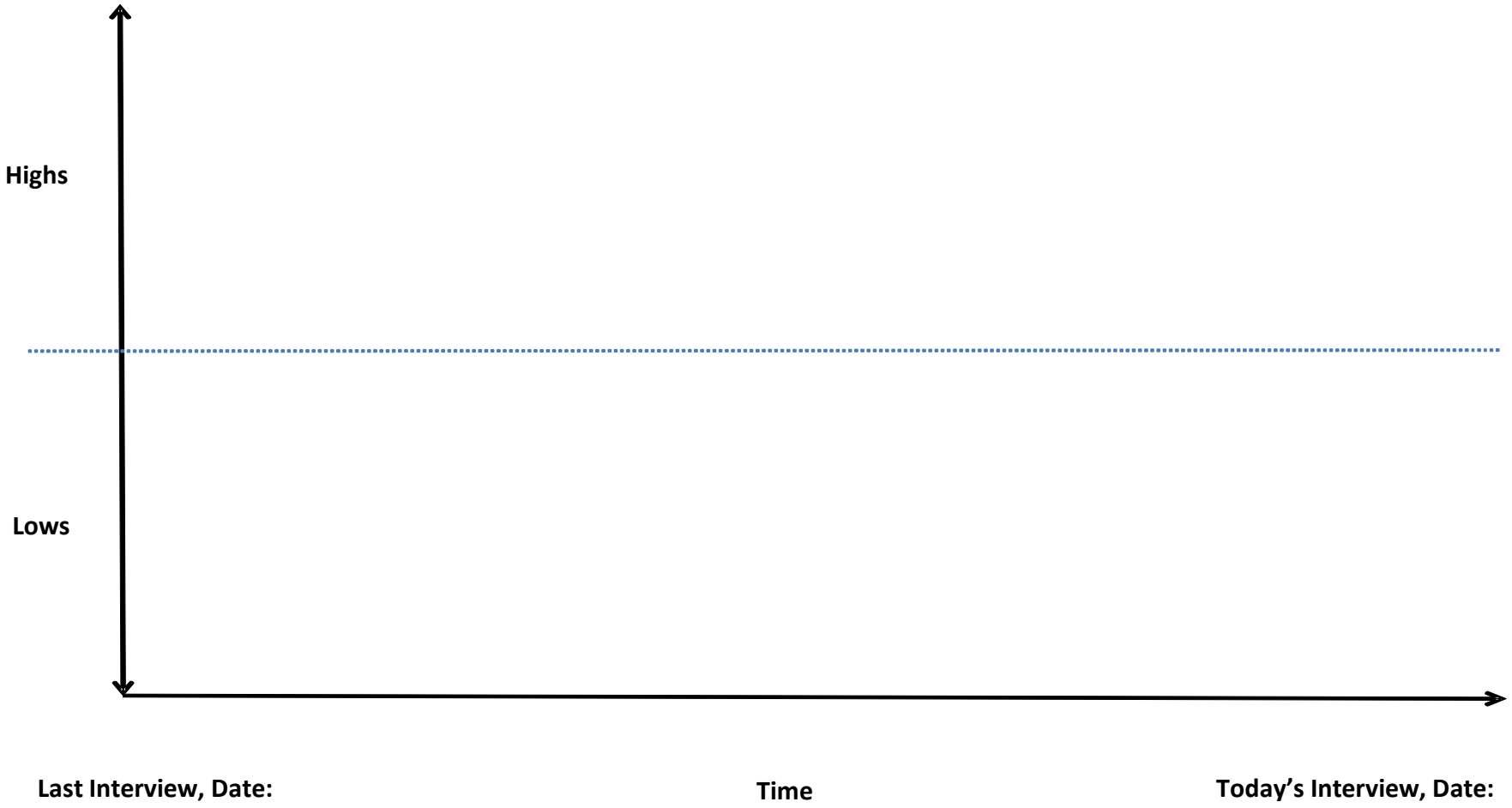
b) What is your first language? ☐English ☐Other (please specify): _____

c) What is your gender? ☐Male ☐Female

Appendix F: Journey Plot Template

Diagram 1: Journey Plot

Please draw the highs and lows of your experience as a DPhil over the past two months, since you last met with the researcher. Please label the high and low points and insert any relevant dates.



Appendix G: Sentence-Completion Exercises

Sentence Completion: Feedback Impressions

The purpose of this exercise is to get a sense of your impressions of the feedback you received directly following a supervision session. It will help me in preparing for our next interviews and also help me see how the feedback relates to your research plans.

Instructions:
Please complete the following sentences after each meeting with your supervisor.

Date:

1. The most valuable feedback I received from my supervisor is:
2. The feedback I did not understand is:
3. The feedback I disagree with is:
4. My plan going forward is:
5. I feel _____ about my research progress.

Appendix H: Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol

This study involves three types of interviews: 1) an interview at the beginning of the study to get a sense of the participant's prior writing and research experiences and their aims in pursuing a DPhil, 2) interviews scheduled regularly during the study to get a sense of the participant's research and writing progress, and their perceptions and use of feedback, and 3) a final interview to discuss the participant's plans going forward, and their experiences of Transfer of status, and how they felt about participating in this research.

Interview 1: Biographical Information (beginning of study)

The purpose of this interview is to get: a) a history of the student's reading and writing experience, b) discussion of the research project and research goals, and c) what the student sees as work to be done going forward. At the beginning of this interview participants were also asked to fill out a brief form to capture relevant demographic information.

Questions:

Part a: History

- What are your past experiences with writing, academic or otherwise? Do you enjoy it?
- What is your writing process?
- Please describe an instance where you received really useful feedback from a teacher or professor.
- How do you feel when you receive critical feedback? Positive feedback?
- Overall, how would you characterize your prior experiences with feedback?
- Do you have a background in social science research? Explain.
- Is English your first language? If not, how do you feel about writing and reading in English?

Part b: Initial research plans

- Why did you decide to do the DPhil program?
- What is the focus of your research?
- What do you plan to do after the DPhil?
- At this point, what activities are you doing in relation to your thesis? (Readings, writing, etc.)

Interview 2: Proposal Process Interviews (every two months)

Objective: Interviews will take place once every two months (December, February, April, June). Each interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes, will begin by asking students to elaborate on the journey plot exercises they will complete at the start of each interview session in order to get a sense of their research experiences and what events beyond the

supervisor affect their progress. The focus will thus be on the role of personal and historical contexts, academic events and conferences, and other experiences that may contribute to their evolving research thinking/writing progress. The remainder of the interview will be guided largely by the texts—drafts of the Transfer of status paper or related writings, supervision notes, and supervisor comments, relevant emails, and portions of the supervision transcripts. The goal the interview is to understand how the student perceives and reacts to the supervisor feedback, how supervisor feedback contributes to their evolving research thinking, and how the student makes decisions about what suggestions to take up and why. Thus, the interviews will largely involve looking at specific comments and asking the student how he/she feels about it and what change, if any, will be made as a result.

Part a: Journey Plot

- Please spend a few minutes completing the Journey Plot exercise. Essentially, I would like you to plot significant experiences representing the emotional "highs" and "lows" of the past two month's work on your thesis using the diagram. These experiences can be anything—personal or social events, academic experiences, etc.—so long as they had some impact on your work. (Provide a few examples.) Once you are finished, please let me know, and we can discuss what you've drawn.
- First, could you explain what experiences you chose as the most significant highs and lows, and why those events were important. What effects did they have on your thesis/research progress?
- Are there any other events that you'd like to add, that you haven't put on your journey plot?
- Would you like to keep a copy of your journey plot? If so, I will scan and email you a copy.

Part b: Drafts and Feedback

- Updates since last interview:
    - Have your research ideas changed since we last met? If so, how?
- Revisions
    - Can you find for me one place where you have made revisions in the text and tell me about it: what did you specifically change and why? Did you consider other possibilities? Did making this change make you think of others you wanted to make elsewhere? (repeat 2-3 times)
    - What things do you think about or look for in reading/revising your work?
- Supervisor Feedback
    - What were the most interesting/useful things that came out of your last supervisions? Why?
    - Which of these comments did you find most useful or interesting? (referring to written comments from supervisors) Why? How did you use them?
    - Is there any feedback you wanted but didn't get?
    - Is there any feedback that you chose to ignore? Why?
- Additional sources of feedback:

    - Did you receive feedback from anyone besides your supervisor? If so, from who, and what kind of feedback did you receive?
        - Why did you seek feedback from these sources?
        - Did it conflict or align with supervisor feedback, and if so why/why did you choose to go one way or the other? (gets at prioritizing feedback sources)
- Additional participant-specific questions
    - These will be based on things that come up in the supervision recordings, previous interviews, etc.
- Self-reflection:
    - Where do you see strengths and weaknesses in your writing and your research plan? Can you give me examples from your writing?
    - How are you learning about academic writing? How do you view/assess your own writing?

Part d: Plans for revision

- Can you describe the revisions you plan on making in your next draft? I.E. next steps in research

<u>Interview 3: Post-Transfer (end of study)</u>

Objective: To follow-up with students about their experiences of Transfer of Status, their research plans going into data collection, and their reflections/feedback on participating in this study.

Part a) Transfer

- What was the result of the Transfer viva? Were you surprised? Why/why not?
- What were your overall impressions of the Transfer process? The Transfer viva?
- What feedback did you receive from your examiners?
    - To what extent was it consistent with what your supervisor had been saying?
        - Did the feedback you received from Transfer change your thinking about your project in any way? If so, how?
- Did you come across any difficulties/challenges during the Transfer process? What were they?
- What have you done since Transfer?
- What are your plans going forward?

Part b) Reflection

- What role did you supervisor play in the Transfer process: before, during, and after? i.e. what role do you see your supervisors as playing in your DPhil research thus far?
- What has been the more important source of influence on your research work? Has it changed/shifted over time?
- How do you view your progress from the beginning of the year to now? Do you see yourself differently? Explain.
- How have you made choices about theoretical and methodological approaches? Why did you choose what you chose?

- What has been the most challenging part of this first year? What has been the most challenging part of creating your Transfer document?
- How has your research changed since your initial proposal sent in with the application, to now?
- Do you think your writing has changed since you began participating in this study? How? Why do you think these changes occurred?
- Has your view of research writing changed over this year? Have your writing practices changed?
- Do you think this writing experience of the research proposal is different from previous experiences with academic writing (like the Master's dissertation)? If so, in what ways? Why do you think that is?
- Has your view of /approach to using feedback changed? (How?)
- Has your view of academia/what it means to be an academic researcher changed? How?
- What do you think it means to be a PhD student?
- Have your goals for the PhD changed since October?

Part c) Participation in the study

- Do you have any thoughts about your participation in this study? (e.g. Suggestions for improvement, any impact the study had on your own research experience, etc.?

Appendix I: A Priori Codes and Definitions

A Priori Codes: Divisional Handbook

CODES	DEFINITION
DIVISIONAL HANDBOOK	A priori codes based on Transfer outcomes/expectations described in the Divisional Handbook
LANGUAGE COMPENTENCY	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to demonstrating appropriate command of English language
FOCUSED/REALISTIC	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to identifying focused and realistic aims for the research
KNOWLEDGE OF LIT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to demonstrating wide reading/knowledge of the relevant literature in relation to the research topic
APPROPRIATE/PRACTICAL METHOD	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to argument/evidence showing that the method is congruent with the research questions and conceptual/theoretical framework; discussion around the practicality/feasibility of chosen method given constraints of PhD projects
LIMITATIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to identifying and addressing the limitations of the research
TIMETABLE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to producing a realistic and detailed timetable for the research
ARGUMENT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to construction of rationale for research questions, theoretical framework, method, etc. such that each component of the research project is purposive and forms a coherent whole argument; 'golden thread'
ETHICS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to discussion of CUREC form and/or potential ethical issues arising from research project
CAPABILITY	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to evidence that the student is capable of carrying out the research

A Priori Codes: Education Handbook

CODE	DEFINITION
ED GRAD HANDBOOK	A Priori Codes based on Transfer requirements described in the relevant Graduate Handbook (Education)
LIT REVIEW	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the literature review (i.e. situating the research within the relevant literature)
CONCEPTUAL FRAME	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the theoretical/conceptual framework (i.e. situating the research within a theoretical perspective)
RQS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to research questions
RD RATIONALE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to explanation for choice of methodological approach and specific methods
METHODS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the methods or methodology
ETHICS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to ethical issues or ethics approval (the CUREC)
TIMELINE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the research timeline
REFERENCES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to referencing
PRESENTATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the presentation requirement for Transfer
RISK ASSESSMENT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the risk assessment
SKILLS REVIEW	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the skills training review

A Priori Codes: Anthropology Handbook

CODE	DEFINITION
GRAD HANDBOOK	A Priori Codes based on Transfer requirements described in the relevant Graduate Handbook (Anthropology)
LIT REVIEW	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the literature review (i.e. situating the research within the relevant literature)
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the theoretical framework (i.e. situating the research within a theoretical perspective)
METHODS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the methods or methodology
RESEARCH MODULES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the required research modules, such as the Probationer Research Seminar or Research Training Seminar
CUREC	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to ethics approval (the CUREC)

A Priori Codes: Sociology Handbook

CODE	DEFINITION
SOC GRAD HANDBOOK	A Priori Codes based on Transfer requirements described in the relevant Graduate Handbook (Sociology)
PROPOSAL	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to the proposal component of the Transfer application
• RQ	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to research questions
• LIT REVIEW	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to the literature review
• RESEARCH DESIGN/METHODS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to discussion of research design/methods
• THESIS FORMAT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to justification for thesis format (monograph or series of papers)
COURSEWORK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to evidence of relevant coursework
ETHICS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to discussion of ethics/ethical approval (CUREC)
TIMELINE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to timeline to completion of PhD
RISK ASSESSMENT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to institutional risk assessment forms
FIRST CHAPTER	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to the Transfer requirement of one chapter of thesis (up to 7000 words)
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Portions of supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to bibliography of sources

A Priori Codes: Rhetorical Features

CODE	DEFINITION
RHETORICAL FEATURES	A priori codes based on relevant literature that identifies common rhetorical features of doctoral writing
DEFINING TERMS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining to explicitly defining terminology
ESTABLISHING NICHE/GAP	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining setting and stating the "gap" in literature the research will address
SETTING PARAMETERS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining setting the focus of the research (context, etc.)
OUTLINING STRUCTURE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining outlining structure of document
TACIT KNOWLEDGE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining referring to commonly known concepts, people, etc. that indicates the writer is familiar with the relevant disciplinary literature
HEDGING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining use of mitigating words, syntax to make statements less direct
SIGNPOSTING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining using words, phrases to guide reader through the document
REFERENCING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining use of appropriate referencing style and use of references as expected in disciplinary context
TECHNICAL LANGUAGE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews pertaining use of terminology/language common to disciplinary community

Appendix J: Emergent Codes and Definitions

Emergent Codes: Ben

CODES	DEFINITION
ADD. STRUCTURAL CODES	Additional parts of the research proposal raised in supervisions that are not explicitly mentioned in the relevant Graduate Handbook
• ABSTRACT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the abstract
• HYPOTHESIS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the hypothesis
• INTRODUCTION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the introduction
• SCOPE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the contribution of the research
• CONTEXT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the context of the research
SELF-DEVELOPMENT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews on discussion related to the participant's development as a researcher
ASSESSMENT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to instances where the participant engages in an assessment/evaluation of feedback, his research or writing skills, or his location as a PhD researcher situated within multiple departments
MINI PROJECTS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews on discussion related to the participant's summer mini-projects
EXPLANATION/ JUSTIFICATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to instances where the participant explains or justifies his research or decision-making
WRITING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews on discussion related to writing, including challenges and process
READING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews on discussion of the participant's reading practices
RTS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews on discussion related to the Research Training Seminar

OTHER SUPPORT/FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to instances where the participant seeks and / or receives feedback from sources other than his supervisors
• OTHER ACADEMICS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from academics other than the supervisors (e.g. professors, course instructors, post-docs, etc.)
o RAISING QUESTIONS /ISSUES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from other academics that raises questions or other issues for the participant to address
o CLARIFICATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from other academics that asks for clarification
o ORGANIZATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from other academics that suggests organizational revisions
• PEER FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from peers/classmates
• GIRLFRIEND	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from participant's girlfriend
SUPERVISOR FEEDBACK	Supervisor comments, or notes or discussion of supervisor comments
• TOS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisory discussion on Transfer of status, including selection of examiners
• DIRECTIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments that instruct the participant to do something—a clear direction.
• DOCUMENT-SPECIFIC	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments based on the proposal document
o ORGANIZATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments related to the organization of the document
o EXPAND/ CLARIFY	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments asking to further explain or clarify

• EXPLORING IDEAS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisory discussion exploring possible avenues of research or issues related to the thesis topic (e.g. policy discussion)
• SUGGESTING RESOURCES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments suggesting readings, people, or other resources that may further the proposal/thesis
• PROVIDING INFORMATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments providing information about either the nature of research in the discipline or department
• SUGGESTIONS/ GUIDANCE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments suggesting changes to the research, or offering guidance in terms of next steps
• CONFIRMATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments that confirm the participant's thinking, writing, or other actions; indicates the participant is on the right track
REVISIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews on discussion related to textual changes in the research proposal
• SELF-INITIATED	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on participant's self-assessment of the document
• READING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on readings the participant engaged with
• FEEDBACK-DRIVEN	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on feedback
STRATEGIES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to strategies used by the participant to advance the research proposal, research thinking, or progress in the PhD more generally
• COMMENTS TO SELF	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to participant's written comments inserted in drafts of the proposal that indicate research thinking
• NETWORKING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to meeting and engaging with people of similar research backgrounds/with similar research interests in order to build a community/gain support
TRANSFER VIVA	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews on discussion related to the Transfer viva
EXAMINER FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to Transfer examiner feedback

Emergent Codes: Charlie

CODE	DEFINTION
ADDTIONAL STRCUTURAL CODES	Additional parts of the research proposal raised in supervisions that are not explicitly mentioned in the relevant Graduate Handbook
• INTRO	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to introduction to the research proposal
• THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to theoretical/conceptual framework underpinning study
• LIMITATIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to potential limitations of study
FIELDWORK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the participant's future fieldwork
DATA SET	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the data set found by participant in initial research
EMOTION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion of emotional experiences
• NEGATIVE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to negative emotional experiences
• POSITIVE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to positive emotional experiences
PERCEIVED CHALLENGES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to various challenges/obstacles the participant describes or anticipates
• OTHER	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to other challenges/difficult experiences
• WRITING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to challenges/difficult experiences related to writing
• PROGRESS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to challenges/difficult experiences related to progress on the research proposal, thesis, or PhD overall
• CONTRIBUTION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to challenges/difficult experiences related to contribution of the research

• THEORY	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to challenging/difficult experiences related to theory/theoretical framework
LEARNING THE PHD	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to learning what it means to be a PhD student or what the PhD entails
• DISCIPLINARY WRITING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to what it means to write appropriately within Sociology or within social science
• PHD EXPECTATIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the expectations of PhD students
• TRANSFER PROCESS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to expectations and experiences of the Transfer process (including viva)
SUPERVISOR FEEDBACK	Supervisor comments, or notes or discussion of supervisor comments
• SUGGESTING RESOURCES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments suggesting readings, people, or other resources that may further the proposal/thesis
• PROVIDING INFORMATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments providing information about either the nature of research in the discipline or department
• GUIDANCE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments providing guidance for the next steps in the research
• CONFIRMATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments that confirm the participant's thinking, writing, or other actions; indicates the participant is on the right track
• EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	Evidence of emotional or psychological support provided by supervisor(s)
REVISIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related changes in the research proposal over time
• SELF-INITIATED	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on participant's self-assessment of the document

• READING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on readings the participant engaged with
• FEEDBACK-DRIVEN	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on feedback
STRATEGIES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to strategies used by the participant to advance the research proposal, research thinking, or progress in the PhD more generally
• COURSES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to enrollment in courses with the intent to gain content knowledge, research skills, etc.
• NETWORKING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to meeting and engaging with people of similar research backgrounds/with similar research interests in order to build a community/gain support
• READING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to seeking and engaging in reading to further knowledge or topic, research process, etc.
• SEEKING SUPPORT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to actively seeking support (mental, emotional, or other)
○ SUPERVISORS	From supervisors
○ PEERS	From peers
QUESTIONING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to constructing and asking questions in order to articulate confusion, clarify understanding, or confirm ideas/plans
OTHER	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to other strategies not listed above
TRANSFER VIVA	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to any discussion related to the Transfer viva, including selection of examiners and how to prepare
EXAMINER FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to Transfer examiner feedback

Emergent Codes: Natalie

CODE	DEFINITION
ADDITIONAL STRUCTURAL CODES	Additional parts of the research proposal raised in supervisions that are not explicitly mentioned in the relevant Graduate Handbook
• INTRODUCTION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to introduction to the research proposal
• RESEARCH QUESTIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the research questions
• CONTRIBUTION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the contribution of the research
SUPERVISOR FEEDBACK	Supervisor comments, or notes or discussion of supervisor comments
• AFFIRMATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments that affirm student's choices
• EXPLORING IDEAS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments or questions intended to further explore ideas related to the student's research
• SUGGESTING RESOURCES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments that suggest resources for the student to consult
• PROVIDING INFORMATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments that provide further information
• RETHINKING ARGUMENT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments or questions that probe or critique the student's argument within the Transfer document
• DOCUMENT-SPECIFIC	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments or questions related specifically to the text of the Transfer document
o CLARIFICATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments or questions asking for clarification
o EXPANDING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments or questions asking for further information or analysis

○ ORGANIZATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments or questions regarding the organization or format of the Transfer document
OTHER FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from sources other than the supervisor
• OTHERS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from unclassified others
• PARTICIPANTS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from research participants
• CLASSMATES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from classmates
• PRS TUTORS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from PRS tutors
EXPLANATION/JUSTIFICATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments by participant that explain or justify her decision making, either in terms of writing and revision, or in fieldwork, networking, extracurricular activities, etc.
REVISIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to textual changes in the Transfer document drafts over time
• SELF-INITIATED	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to revisions/additions that were the result of self-assessment
• READING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to revisions/additions that were based on readings
• FEEDBACK-DRIVEN	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to revisions/additions that were based on feedback
STRATEGIES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to strategies used by participant to further research or writing activities
• COMMUNICATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to instances where participant communicated her questions and thinking to her supervisor
• NETWORKING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to instances where participant reached out to others to establish connections and get support or ideas related to her research

• OTHER	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to instances where participant used other strategies not described above
SELF-REFLECTION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to instances where the participant reflects on her practices and decision-making
FIELDWORK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments, questions, etc. related to the participant's fieldwork
TRANSFER VIVA	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments, questions, etc. related to the Transfer viva
EXAMINER FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to Transfer examiner feedback

Emergent Codes: Shankar

CODE	
ADD STRUCTURAL CODES	Additional parts of the research proposal raised in supervisions that are not explicitly mentioned in the relevant Graduate Handbook
• INTRODUCTION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to introductory section of the research proposal
• RATIONALE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to
• CONTRIBUTION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the contribution of the research and its formulation in the text
• CONTEXT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the section of the proposal devoted to describing the research context
PEER FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from peers/classmates
• REFLECTION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to self-reflection on process, prior experience, etc.
• EXPLANATION/ JUSTIFICATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to instances where the participant explains or justifies his research or decision-making
• WRITING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to any aspect of writing, including challenges, process, etc.
• READING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the participant's reading
• RTS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the Research Training Seminar
SUPERVISOR FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments, or notes or discussion of supervisor comments
• CLARIFICATION	Feedback/comments asking participant to clarify or elaborate on his ideas or argument

• SCOPE	Feedback, comments, discussion aimed at focusing the scope of the project
• TOS	Feedback, comments, discussion related to the Transfer process, including selection of examiners, the process of submission, etc.
• DIRECTIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments that instruct the participant to do something—a clear direction.
• DOCUMENT-SPECIFIC	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments based on the proposal document
o ORGANIZATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments related to the organization of the document
o EXPAND/CLARIFY	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments asking to further explain or clarify
• EXPLORING IDEAS	Feedback, comments, discussion that explores ideas related to the research or, in the early phases of research, possible areas of focus
• SUGGESTING RESOURCES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments suggesting readings, people, or other resources that may further the proposal/thesis
• PROVIDING INFORMATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments providing information about either the nature of research in the discipline or department
• SUGGESTIONS/ GUIDANCE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments suggesting changes to the research, or offering guidance in terms of next steps
• CONFIRMATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments or discussion that confirms the participant's choices, validates his argument, generally shows that he is on the right track in developing the proposal
REVISIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews on discussion related to textual changes in the research proposal
• SELF-INITIATED	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on participant's self-assessment of the document

• READING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on readings the participant engaged with
• FEEDBACK-DRIVEN	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on feedback
STRATEGIES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to strategies used by the participant to advance the research proposal, research thinking, or progress in the PhD more generally
• READING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to seeking and engaging in reading to further knowledge or topic, research process, etc.
• QUESTIONING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to constructing and asking questions in order to articulate confusion, clarify understanding, or confirm ideas/plans
• OTHER	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to other strategies not listed above
TRANSFER VIVA	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to any discussion related to the Transfer viva, including selection of examiners and how to prepare
EXAMINER FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to Transfer examiner feedback

Emergent Codes: Ethan

CODE	DEFINITION
ADD STRUCTURAL CODES	Additional parts of the research proposal raised in supervisions that are not explicitly mentioned in the relevant Graduate Handbook
• INTRODUCTION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to introductory section of the research proposal
• PURPOSE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the purpose/aim of the research and its formulation in the text
• CONTRIBUTION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the contribution of the research and its formulation in the text
• CONTEXT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to the section of the proposal devoted to describing the research context
PILOT	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the participant's Master's research, which was viewed as essentially a pilot for the PhD
EXPLANATION/JUSTIFICATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to instances where the participant explains or justifies his research thinking and/or choices in writing the proposal
WRITING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to any aspect of writing, including challenges, process, etc.
READING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the participant's reading
RTS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the Research Training Seminar
PEER FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback from peers

• CLARIFICATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback focusing on clarification of ideas, terms, etc.
• NEW PERSPECTIVES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback that offers a different perspective on some aspect of the research
• AFFIRMATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to feedback that affirms or supports the value of the research
SUPERVISOR FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments, or notes or discussion of supervisor comments
• DIRECTIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments offering specific instructions that the participant is expected to follow (i.e. not a suggestion)
• TOS STRATEGY	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments/discussion around preparing for Transfer
• DOCUMENT-SPECIFIC	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments based on the proposal document
o EXPAND/ CLARIFY	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments asking for further explanation or clarification
o WRITING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments focusing specifically on the writing style
• EXPLORING IDEAS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion exploring possible avenues of research or issues related to the thesis topic (e.g. policy discussion)
• SUGGESTING RESOURCES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments suggesting readings, people, or other resources that may further the proposal/thesis
• PROVIDING INFORMATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments providing information about either the nature of research in the discipline or department

• SUGGESTIONS/GUIDANCE	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to comments suggesting changes to the research, or offering guidance in terms of next steps
• CONFIRMATION	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to supervisor comments that confirm the participant's thinking, writing, or other actions; indicates the participant is on the right track
REVISIONS	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related changes in the research proposal over time
• SELF-INITIATED	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on participant's self-assessment of the document
• READING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on readings the participant engaged with
• FEEDBACK-DRIVEN	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to changes made based on feedback
STRATEGIES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to strategies used by the participant to advance the research proposal, research thinking, or progress in the PhD more generally
• COURSES	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to enrollment in courses with the intent to gain content knowledge, research skills, etc.
• FEEDBACK-SEEKING	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to evidence of participant actively seeking specific feedback from supervisors, peers, or others
• OTHER	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to other strategies not listed above
TRANSFER VIVA	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to discussion related to the Transfer viva
EXAMINER FEEDBACK	Portions of feedback, supervision recordings, notes, interviews that pertain to Transfer examiner feedback

Appendix K: Challenges to Positionality

Challenges to Positionality

Date	Description	Excerpt	Reflection
Dec. 4, 2018	Post-interview conversation with Charlie, who was anxious and seeking support/reassurance from me as a second-year DPhil	"Charlie is currently very stressed about his research, mostly due to confusion about his theoretical framework. He is very aware of the need to contribute to his field empirically and theoretically (which is apparently necessary in sociology) but does not know how to use theory or create a framework—his supervisor suggested using the framework that he developed, but Charlie then worries about he will make his own theoretical contribution. Charlie been worrying about this for several weeks, and also had a poor experience with a lit review for his RTS class—he feels like everyone else is doing fine while he is doubting everything about his research. He mentioned that this morning he woke up very depressed knowing that he was going to speak to me today because he didn't know how to articulate all the problems he's having—indeed he explained that part of the problem is that he doesn't know exactly what he's confused about and therefore can't really ask his supervisors for help. After the interview, he stayed a bit longer and asked me questions about my experience in the first year of the DPhil—how I dealt with setbacks, with confusion about theory, and Transfer. I told him that he's not alone—I think many students are where he is and everyone's research is different so not to worry. I don't want to talk too much about my experiences or others', but at the same time I feel some obligation to speak to him when he asks for help/reassurance. He is meeting with his supervisors on Friday and will hopefully get some clarity/support." [Dec. 4, 2018, Research Diary]	This incident was reflective of several moments in my relationship with Charlie. Charlie had initially decided to participate in my project because he wanted to see what it was like to be on the participant side of research, and I had the sense that he was also looking for more information about what it meant to be a doctoral student. Because his first few months were challenging, I had the sense he was seeking support from me as a second year DPhil, and wanted to be reassured that he was okay. Although I understand the need to maintain a certain amount of distance from participants, I also felt the obligation to speak with and respond to Charlie because I empathized with his insecurities and ultimately, the issues he was concerned about did not overlap greatly with my study's focus on learning the proposal genre and developing the PhD research project. Instead, I listened and offered general comments about the nature of the PhD and the fact that many students are anxious and confused, particularly in the beginning, reassuring him that things would work out.
Feb. 8, 2019	Interview with Shankar; an incident where I revealed too much of my own position on academic writing in an	Shankar: Would you say that y- um, I mean the idea that they're looking at, academic writing, and how that's led to identity that you all, that there's an ontological theoretical, foundation or grounding already that, people write in different ways from they speak or two people's writing says something very different about them?	In my immediate post-interview reflection I wrote, "S asked me specific questions about academic writing, which I responded to, thought immediately wondered if I should have—bracketing issues? I feel the boundaries are often unclear. I asked about the role he was writing play in research, which turned into a discussion on writing and identity on a

	interview with Shankar.	Kelsey: Yes. I would say so. Um, and it's just sort of based in, a lot of the readings I've done. There's a lot of research about how writing is very much a reflection of self, but also constrained in certain ways depending on, I guess the purpose of your writing. And so... Shankar: It's interesting it ties into this, this, like Bernsteinian idea of the voice being the sort of the circumscribed of all of the things that you can say, and then the message being your agency of where you position yourself. Kelsey: Mhm. Yeah that's. Yeah exactly. Because, I mean there are you know, expectations sort of, in terms of the academic discourse community, depending on which discipline you're in. There's certain things that just sort of, are expected in order for your writing to be perceived as academic. But of course within that, there's a lot of agency and a lot of variation for people to, I guess try to bring their true voices or whatever Shankar: Are they, are they, and you don't have to answer this question, are they, are they is there anything that, on a broad stroke difference between general supervision dynamics or anything you notice between departments or between themes or between subjects or is it all just, personal, or is there an overarching circumscription of, say a science versus humanities or specific subjects or? Kelsey: Um. I mean I'd say there's definitely differences especially between like natural and social sciences.	philosophical level—must be sure to phrase questions very carefully in the future." This incident is the one time over the course of the project that I clearly made the mistake of sharing too much with the participant, potentially jeopardizing the 'truthfulness' of the participant's learning experience by revealing my own research positionality. As shown in my post-interview reflection, I immediately regretted my response. I struggled immensely with maintaining a clear researcher-participant distance during the first few months of this project, particularly with Shankar. Shankar was very inquisitive and reflective by nature, and often asked me questions about what I thought and what my interests were. For the most part I gave general, safe, answers, but in this case I made a mistake—because we were colleagues—I was only one year ahead of him in the DPhil in the same department—it was sometimes difficult to bracket myself off and not think of him as a peer, particularly when we had mutual friends. Thus, in considering Shankar's data I have been mindful of the fact that I allowed him to know more than was appropriate, and therefore that is a limitation of the trustworthiness of his case. That said, it is not readily apparent that his exchange in fact affected his perspective—Shankar had a clear perspective on research and writing throughout the study, and it seems as though most changes in his perspective were due more to his experience of the academic culture in the department and the Transfer viva.
May 7, 2019	The Social Science Division 'How to Write Your Methodology Chapter' workshop, which Ben and I both happened to attend.	N/A	Ben and I happened to both attend the same 'How to Write Your Methodology Chapter' workshop put on by the Social Sciences Division. I arrived early, and when Ben arrived he came and sat next to me. Because the workshop was interactive and required substantial partner discussion about our methodologies, I told Ben that it would be better if I was not his partner. He understood.

June 7, 2019	Following one of Shankar's supervisions we had a conversation in which Shankar asked a number of questions about our relationship, my research questions, and theoretical framework.	"After his supervision S asked me a number of hard questions: will we be friends after this project? What are my research questions and theoretical framework? I said that yes, I imagine we'd be friends and I hope he keeps in touch, but I can't answer about what my RQs and framework are. This led to a discussion about trust and the relationship—what if a participant asks me these questions and in saying I can answer, they trust me less? I said yes, I see his point and that he asks good and difficult questions. I explained that my supervisors have warned me about revealing too much, that by sharing my views it could influence the participant's views and there'd be an issue of bias. We talked about how I decided to initiate or initiate relationship with my participants and he said that being part of my study has been a highlight of his year. I thanked him and told him that in the last interview I hope to discuss these issues and questions further and that after it's done I can talk to him more freely about the research and my perspective." [June 7, 2019, Research Diary]	This was another example of Shankar challenging my positionality as a researcher. However, I believe I handled this situation well, explaining that I could not tell him my research questions and theoretical framework for the sake of my research data, while also promising that we could talk about these issues in the future when he was no longer a participant. His questions about our relationship and the issue of trust between researcher and participant were difficult, but I answered them honestly without giving anything away that would affect his perspective on the research proposal or his development. My feeling was more that these were issues he was struggling with in regards to his own research project and was curious how others approached researcher-participant relationships.