

**Using focused ethnography
to understand brokering practices
among international students**

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Academic challenges of EAL students



Differing educational expectations

Inadequate English proficiency

Isolated from host community

Academic learning beyond the classroom?



A close-up photograph of a white puzzle with one piece missing, revealing a black background. The puzzle pieces are interlocking and have a slightly textured surface. The missing piece is in the upper center of the frame.

Brokering

informal

academic

learning

Brokering in an economy



Assisting the transfer of valued resources such as services, information, opportunities & knowledge

Stovel, Golub, & Milgrom 2011

Brokering across cultures



Interpreting and translating without special training

Tse 1996

**Explaining the underlying meaning and implications
of particular texts and social practices**

Perry 2009

MIND THE GAP

Brokering practices among EAL students



Informal help-seeking interactions that bridge gaps in knowledge and understanding of new academic practices

Research context

International EAL students in their initial semester of study at a NZ university

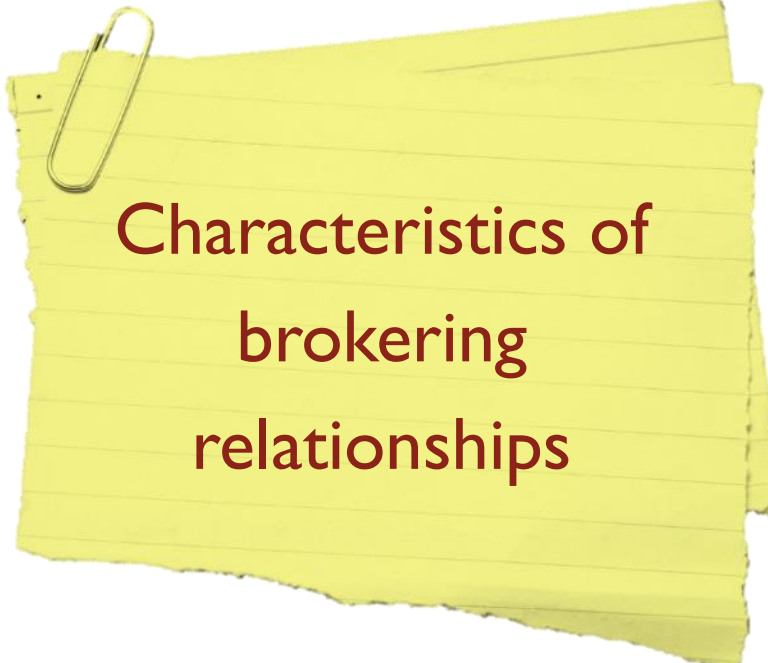


Research questions

Examine how students get help outside formal curriculum channels to address their academic needs



Reasons for brokering



Characteristics of brokering relationships



Dynamics of brokering interactions

Researching brokering practices is like ...



The background of the slide is an abstract painting by Jackson Pollock titled 'Blue Poles'. It features a dense, chaotic composition of dark, swirling lines and splatters in shades of black, brown, and grey, interspersed with vibrant patches of yellow, orange, and red. The overall effect is one of intense energy and complex, layered textures.

Brokering as informal learning

Implicit, unintended, opportunistic and unstructured

Largely invisible and learner is usually unaware

Eraut 2004

Blue Poles by Jackson Pollock



Brokering through digital means

Widespread and routine use of devices and apps

Everyday communication is taken for granted

Pink et al 2015

Focused ethnography

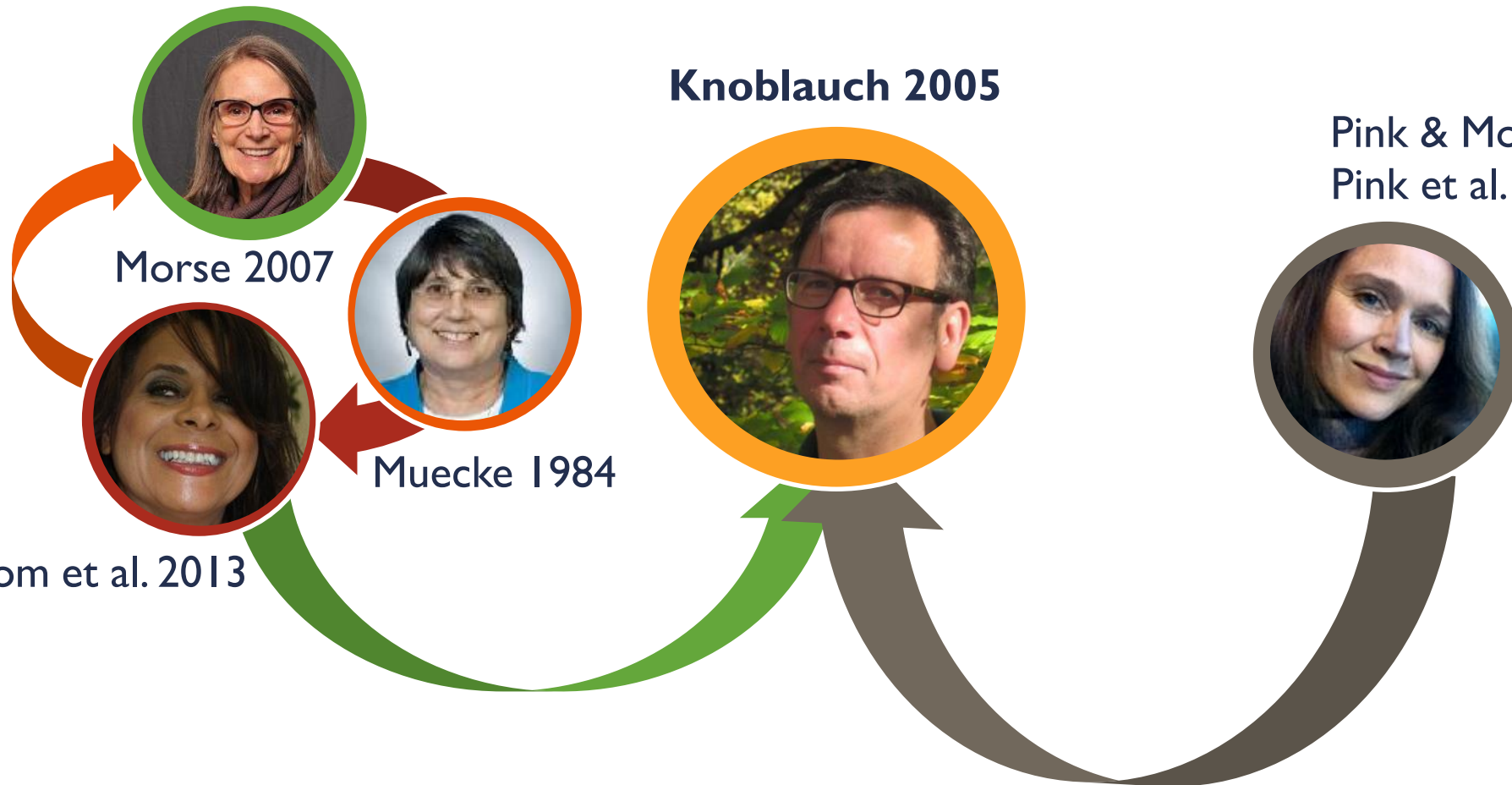
Nursing and health research

Sociology of knowledge

Digital ethnography

Knoblauch 2005

Pink & Morgan 2013
Pink et al. 2015



Morse 2007

Muecke 1984

Higginbottom et al. 2013

Focused ethnography

Examine one particular aspect of community or phenomenon

Particular research context

Brief engagement

Shorter field visits

Fewer observations

Adapting conventional ethnography

Audiovisual recordings

Data intensity



Focused ethnography in practice

Ten participants, 15 weeks

Mostly ethnic Chinese

7 female, 3 male

Brokering
practices
during the
semester



Screenshots
of text
messages



Shorter
interviews,
fewer
observations



Relational
intensity

Data
intensity

Unpredictable

Intrusive

Opportunistic

Research constraints



Evidence of brokering practices



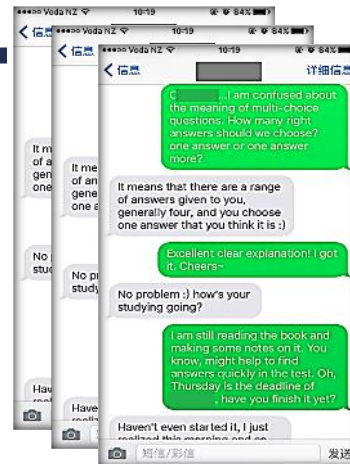
Self-reports of brokering interactions from participants and some of their brokers

Data intensity

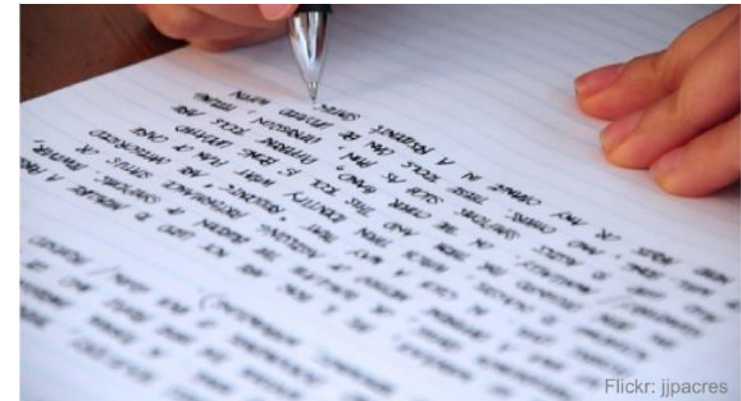
Audio-recorded observations

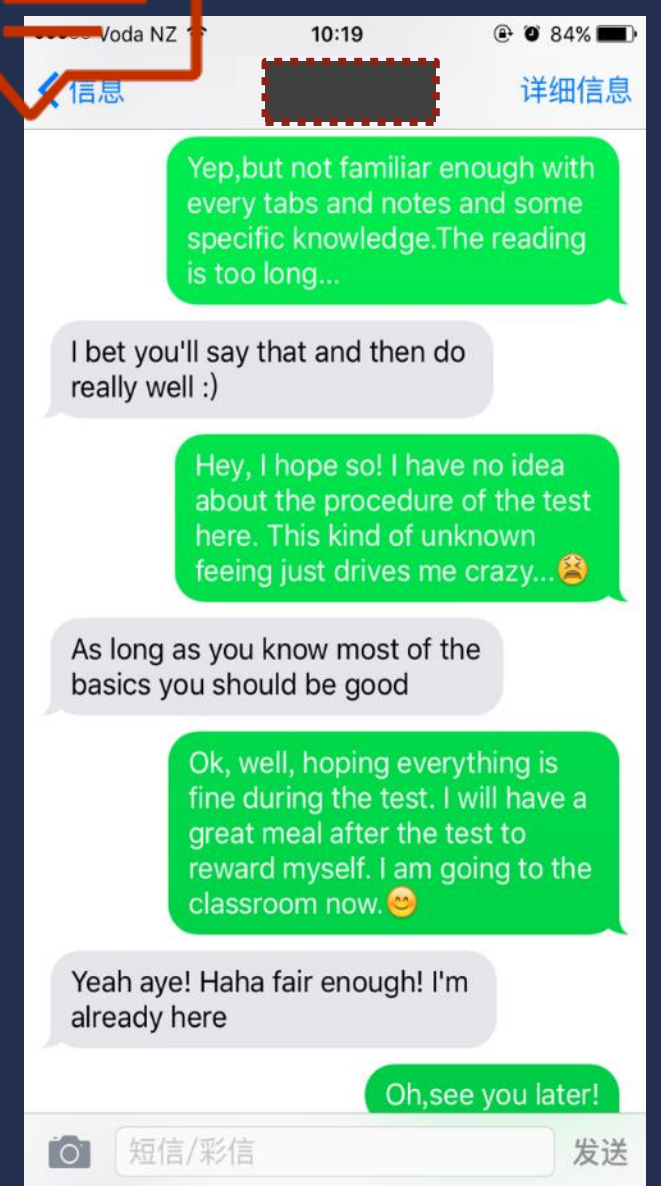
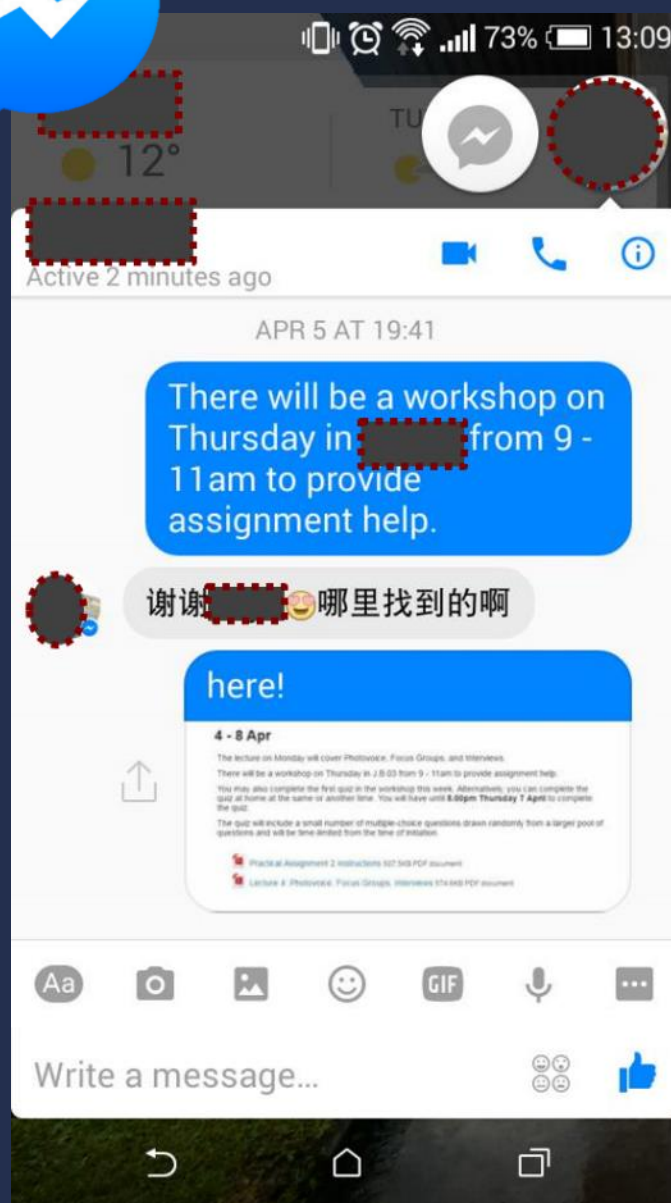
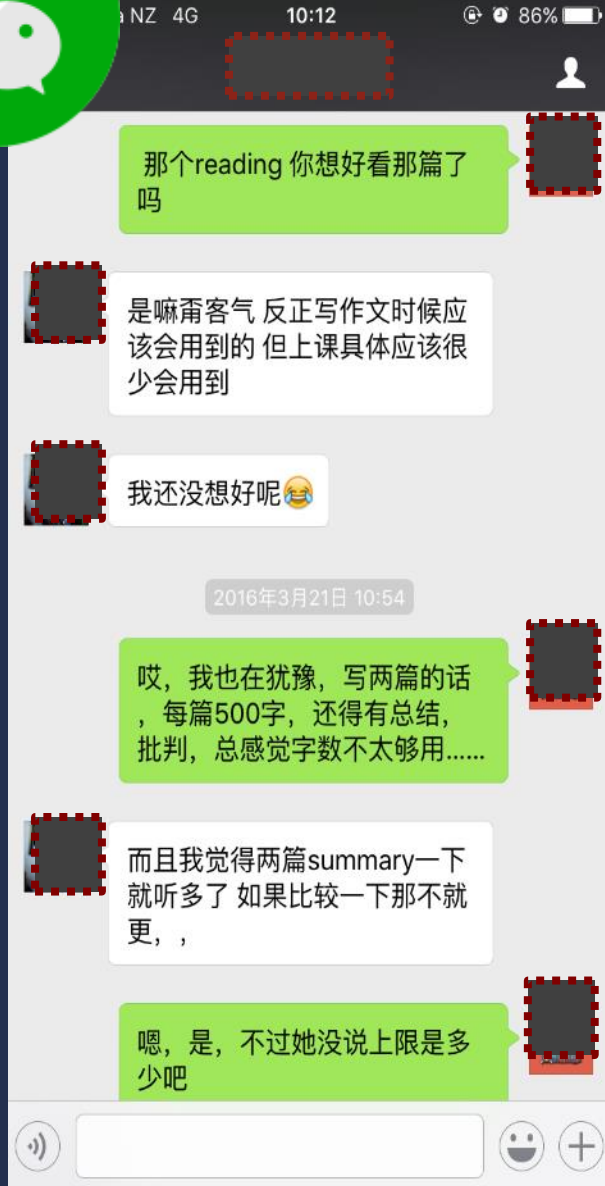


Screenshots of text exchanges



Copies of draft essays with feedback





**Data
Intensity**

Knoblauch 2005

**Relational
Intensity**

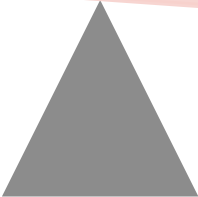
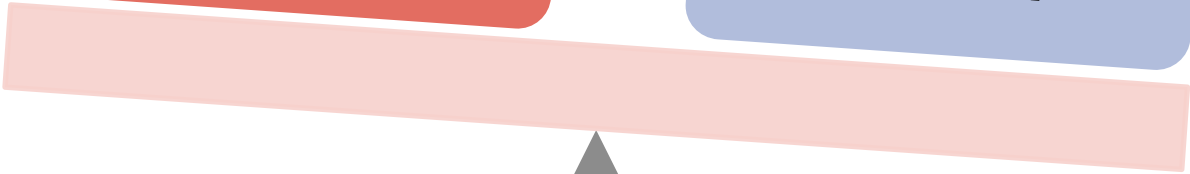
Reciprocity

Verbatim

Responsibility

Quantity

Quality



Reciprocity

Corbin & Morse 2003

**You scratch my back
and I'll scratch yours.**

Researcher gets data

Participants get therapy



... involves difficult conversations



**I'm not your
broker!**

**Participants want help
Researcher provides
guarded response**



**It's none of
your business!**

**Researcher wants data
Participants provide
guarded response**

Responsibility

Tracy 2010

An ethical self-consciousness in which researchers are mindful of their character, actions, and consequences on others.



Responsibility

Informed consent

- Participant agreed?
- Broker agreed?
- Other group members?

Confidentiality

- Pseudonyms?
- Generic description?
- Remove other clues?
- Discretion in social interactions?



In conclusion ...

Intensity

**Constraints result in
data and relational
forms of intensity**



Focused ethnography
**Useful for investigating
everyday practices within
'constraining' contexts**

Ethics

**Self-conscious awareness of
researcher's responsibility
towards participants**

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