Title of Project:
An argument-based validity inquiry into empirically-derived
descriptor-based diagnostic (EDD) assessment in ESL
academic writing

Researcher:
Youn-Hee Kim,
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of
Toronto (OISE/UT)

Research Supervisor: Youn-Hee Kim
Dr. Eunice Jang

Abstract:

The purposes of this doctoral research are (a) to develop a theoretically sound and pedagogically useful diagnostic assessment scheme called the Empirically-derived Descriptor-based Diagnostic (EDD) checklist to assess English as a Second Language (ESL) academic writing skills and (b) to validate its score-based interpretations and uses. Dissatisfied with traditional assessments, researchers and educators have recognized the need to use test information for instructional practice and student learning. There have been, however, few attempts to systematically link a diagnostic approach to ESL writing instruction and assessment. In response, I propose a diagnostic assessment scheme that integrates the writing skills and strategies that ESL teachers consider to be diagnosed into a unified mechanism.
Using a multi-phase, complementary, mixed-methods research design, I will first empirically identify the evaluation criteria that make up the EDD checklist. These criteria will be based on the thinking processes reported by ESL teachers while they are in the process of providing diagnostic feedback on ESL essays. The teachers will then use the EDD checklist to assess ESL essays, and I will interview them to discuss the checklist's usefulness and their experience using it in greater detail. The psychometric quality of the EDD checklist will be modeled using the Reduced Reparameterized Unified Model (Hartz, Roussos, & Stout, 2002). This modeling process will determine the diagnostic power of the checklist, and will produce fine-grained writing skill profiles for individual ESL students. The diagnostic assessment approach proposed in this study will make major contributions to theories of second language (L2) writing assessment and will have direct implications for instructional practices.