A case study of international student participation in an undergraduate module in Management in a UK Business School using the lens of Activity Theory

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Abstract

This case study of international student participation in an undergraduate module in Management in a UK Business School arose from concerns that international students do not always meet institutional expectations of full participation. In the literature, the issues of language and culture have dominated discussion, while education theory has not been prominent. Using a post-Vygotskian framework (Activity Theory), the study set out to understand international student participation from the students' perspective, taking account of the different elements of activity. It offers a holistic approach, placing the dominant themes in a broader context.

The research was undertaken in two phases over a 12-month period using focus groups as the research instrument. Classroom observation, impromptu and planned interviews and correspondence with lecturers, as well as module documentation, contributed to a broader understanding of the context. The focus groups included both international and home students. Phase 1 enabled the conceptual framework to be assessed and refined for use as a coding frame. Following initial coding in Phase 2, the research focus was redefined as participants' understandings of object-motive, and an in-depth analysis of this element was undertaken.

Four module objects were identified: collaboration in diverse groups, task, academic study, and professional practice. In addition, participants identified some more personal objects. The impact of English language level and cultural background were quite extensively discussed, but not to the exclusion of other factors. The analysis indicated that focus group members' experiences and understanding of participation in international classrooms were shaped by the objects they held in view. Thus, while the study identified the factors which participants understood as impacting on international students' participation, the analysis of object-motive offered an explanatory framework for understanding the importance they assigned to these.

The study highlights the prominence of task-based group work in the module, and questions the extent students were prepared for this type of pedagogy. It notes that home students in particular might benefit from opportunities to increase their intercultural awareness. Participants' apparent concern for the language and academic levels of some international students may reflect the English language and academic

levels of international students at entry into the institution, and serve as a reminder of the importance of well-considered entry decisions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In my practice context, the provision of insessional English language support for international students at a university in southern England (hereafter, Southtown University), there is a common perception among teaching staff that international students often do not get the most out of their university studies, and that this can be put down to a combination of English language competence and cultural difference. The dominance of these two themes, however, may eclipse other factors of importance and lead to discussions which are ill-informed and reductive. Thus, I saw a need for a more nuanced understanding, one which took account of the student voice. This case study had this as its starting point: a wish for a holistic understanding of international student participation in mainstream university classes.

The possibility of undertaking such a study arose while establishing an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) support programme for first year undergraduates in Southtown's Business School. This provided an opportunity to pursue a Doctor in Education (EdD) project of my choice, while conducting research of relevance to an area of my practice. It gave me access to the Business School's Head of Student Learning, who passed on a question from a Business School lecturer: "Why don't international students ask questions in class?" Directed at the language team, the question seemed to accord with a perception I share with EAP colleagues, that UK academics principally view the challenges facing international students as language-related. In response to this perception, EAP practitioners have urged academics to take more account of the cultural backgrounds of international students, and how the expectations of the Western academy may differ from their home universities; in sum, that not all international students' difficulties can be put down to language. Yet the tone in the EAP community has often swung the other way, with protests about the cultural stereotyping of international students (Gillet, 2012, July 24th). I reflect this unease, subscribing to the importance of cultural considerations on the one hand, but seeing dangers in cultural reductionism on the other.

I commenced this study at a time of great change at Southtown University. In line with many UK universities in the early post-millennium, Southtown had

embarked on an accelerated process of internationalisation. Ambitious plans were laid in the first International Strategy (2006) to increase the international student population fourfold over the following decade to reach 25% of the student population. While the percentage of international postgraduates showed a modest increase over the first five years of the strategy, international undergraduate numbers exceeded the projection, increasing from under five hundred in the middle of the decade to over 2,000 by the end (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2006, 2010). The growth was most noticeable in those Schools where international students were concentrated, principally the Business School. An Accounting lecturer would comment (Field Notes, Phase 1) that whereas previously 25% of students came from abroad, with the remainder home students, now it was the other way round; while the joke in the Business School was that formerly students came from the four corners of Surrey, but now came from the four corners of the world. Teaching multilingual/multinational undergraduate classes was a new departure at Southtown University, and largely uncharted territory. There was little targeted in-house training for lecturers; lecturers were being thrown in at the deep end, and so too were students, both international and home.

1.1   The term 'international student'

During the course of this dissertation, it will be apparent that the term 'international student' has a wide currency across Southtown University as a meaningful way of identifying a group within the student population who are seen to share characteristics and challenges. Institutionally, however, the term designates a fee category which includes students from Western countries who are native English speakers (NES), while excluding non-UK European students, who are typically non-native English speakers (NNES) and may have more in common with many international students who are themselves NNES. Equally British (home) students who are NNES, and who may have cultural origins outside of the UK, are excluded.

More appropriate understandings for pedagogy are provided in the literature. In the early work, much of it Australian, international students were largely associated with S. E. Asia and seen to share a common Confucian heritage. This led to the equation of international students with students from Confucian

Heritage Cultures (CHCs) (e.g. Biggs, 1999). Marlina (2009) uses the term 'NESB ISA' (= non-native English-speaking background international students from Asian countries) and provides the following gloss: NESB ISA are 'non-Anglo-Celtic background East Asian and South-East Asian students who speak their own national language and English as an additional language or dialect and who cross a national border to further their education' (p. 235). In the UK literature, Ryan and Carroll (2005, p. 3) define international students as 'students who have chosen to travel to another country for tertiary study', adding that most of their previous educational experience will have been in another educational system and cultural context, and commonly in a different language from the one in which they now study. In contrast, home students are those who have chosen to pursue tertiary education in the country of their secondary education.

A shared assumption of many definitions is to view NNES status as an essential characteristic. In Summers and Volet (2008), language status becomes proxy for international student, with the terms 'multilingualism' and 'monolingualism' replacing 'international' and 'home'. In this study I have adopted this approach, foregrounding language status. This reflects both my understanding of the literature and the prominence of the language issue at the outset of this research. I will keep the terms international and home students, but operationalize them in terms of English language status. Thus international students will largely be seen to share NNES status, and home students assumed NES, unless it is apparent that they are not.

1.2 My background

My interest in international students is professional, but also derives from personal biography. Likewise, my unease with culturally reductive explanations partly derives from personal experience.

I am middle class, beyond the midpoint in my career, white and British, but have always considered myself a bit 'foreign'. My grandfather came from the Black Sea port of Odessa, spoke Russian (but was not a Russian) and heavily accented English. In Britain he was very much a foreigner. In my gap year between school and university, I travelled to the Pacific island state of Vanuatu as a volunteer. Geographically and culturally, Vanuatu was about as far as you

could get from the British Isles. It was my first experience of going native. When I returned, I proudly showed my photographs of Melanesia, of kids picking plum apples and playing in the sea, of men spear fishing from dugout canoes, of women dressed in colourful Mother Hubbards, grating coconuts and preparing lap-lap pudding, but during my university years I destroyed them all. How invasive that camera now seemed! On graduating (in Sociology), I found myself teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in a north London comprehensive to refugees from the Cyprus civil war. For 20 years, I divided my time between teaching ESL in London and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) abroad; it was a restless period and it seemed I would never settle. Following my marriage to a South American, we left for Colombia for good, but after four years returned to the UK. I had always imagined being at home abroad, but have ended up living abroad at home.

In travelling, I sought to escape from a home culture which I felt was oppressive, but increasingly found it catching up with me. Abroad I was the Englishman. In Colombia, I experienced what it was like to be labelled. Among family members and at work I was, simply, 'English'. I had become in others' eyes what I had spent my life denying. In my current professional role, I remind myself how uncomfortable I felt when assumptions about me were based purely on my nationality.

Labelling others helps us feel better in ourselves. They become the 'other' (Said, 1978), a projection of one's own imaginings. All the same, assigning to cultural categories can lead to shared understanding (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). In labelling myself as 'middle class', I am assuming my reader will share something of my understanding of the values and behaviours I am alluding to. 'Middle class' is a useful descriptive term in the context. The danger lies when labels pass from being useful descriptions to taking on a life of their own. They become reifications, and too easily lead to stereotyping, commonly with negative associations. This is my fear when we speak of the national origins of international students.

1.3 The study

To engage in a holistic enquiry into international student participation I sought a theoretical framework which could focus on participation in educative contexts. I

understood the term 'holistic' in the hermeneutic sense which recognises the inseparability of actions from the network of interrelationships in which they are embedded (Packer, 1985). During the course of the taught modules for the EdD programme, I was introduced to Activity Theory as a post-Vygotskian perspective which could be used for understanding participation as a complex web of interactions rather than in causal terms, which necessarily involved simplifications and exclusions. I was familiar with some aspects of sociocultural theory from my master's study, but not with Activity Theory. I chose to adopt this approach to shape the research design and data analysis following initial reading (Fisher, 2007). In Fisher's study of classroom talk, the children's participation is understood in terms of the mix of expectations, some proper to the contexts, some brought to the context by participants. By adopting what seemed a novel approach, in addition to the general aim (below), I hoped to make a methodological contribution to the field.

The general aim of the study is to achieve a holistic understanding of international student participation in multilingual, multicultural university classes in the practice context, in terms of students' experiences of participation, their understandings of issues, and their engagement, with the overall purpose of informing practice. For this study, the practice context is defined as first year undergraduate students taking modules in the Business School at Southtown University. Given the holistic intentions, the inclusion of the home student perspective was an early decision. As the study arose primarily from a need I identified in my practice, rather than more conventionally as a result of the literature review, I was able to formulate research questions at the outset. Thus, to achieve of the research aim, the study will address the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences and understandings of participants (both international and home students) on a first year undergraduate programme at a UK Business School in working together in multilingual, multinational university classes?

1.1 How do these experiences and understandings contribute to understanding international students' participation in terms of meeting the institution's expectations of full, active participation?

2. How useful is the lens of Activity Theory for understanding the experiences and understandings of non-native English speaking international students in UK university classes?

2.1 What insights does it enable regarding how we might better understand international students' experiences of participation in terms of their understandings of their experiences and those of other stakeholders?

3. What might we learn from this enquiry to better enable international students to meet institutional expectations of active participation?

This dissertation will be organised as follows:

Chapter 2, **Literature Review**, reviews the literature on international student participation, focussing on the dominant themes of English language competence and culture of origin, and makes the case for an activity-theoretical approach;

Chapter 3, **Methodology**, locates the research in the context of research paradigms, discusses the research design and procedures, including the procedures for data collection and analysis, and the questions of ethics and trustworthiness;

Chapter 4, **Findings**, describes the process of analysis and the key findings of the study, with citations to the data, and gives pointers towards issues for discussion;

Chapter 5, **Discussion**, summarises the findings in terms of how they address the research questions, and considers the study's contribution to the substantive literature and theory;

Chapter 6, **Conclusion**, considers the challenges the study faced and the extent they were met, how the findings might have a relevance for practice, policy, and future research, and reflects on the project's value as professional development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A growing body of literature over the past two decades has sought to address the issue of international student participation in Western-style English medium university education. It is predicated on concerns that international students may not participate on an equal basis with home students, or meet institutional expectations of full participation.

The literature has taken a number of forms, including:

- research studies which have sought to understand the obstacles to participation;
- essays on national cultures and their impact on the participation of international students;
- review articles;
- critical studies challenging assumptions and questioning policy and practice;
- studies of local contexts, including practitioner and action research, aimed at improving practice;
- contributions to teacher education which advise on good practice in the teaching of international students;
- contribution to higher education policy;
- practitioner reflections on personal experiences of working in the field and their implications for practice;

These map to Wallace and Poulson's (2003) typology of intellectual projects in social science research, summarised in Table 2.1.

In the literature reviewed for this study the dominant themes have been international students' English language competence (e.g. Carroll, 2005a; Mclean & Ransom, 2005; Rastall, 2006) and culture of origin (e.g. Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Biggs, 1987, 1999; Louie, 2005; Ryan & Louie, 2007). Regarding the former, a number of studies have highlighted the relevance of linguistic, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors (e.g. Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Lee, 2007); yet there is also evidence that even when language is not an issue (participants are native or near native speakers), their behaviour as classroom participants remains a concern (Volet, Renshaw, & Tietzel, 1994),

while linguistic factors have themselves often been reduced to their cultural essence (J. Jones, 1999). Regarding the latter, the literature has focussed largely on students from S.E. Asia, engendering a lengthy debate in the course of which the polarised early positions (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Biggs, 1987) have led to more nuanced understandings (Louie, 2005; Ryan & Louie, 2007), allowing greater consideration of the part played by factors other than culture (e.g. Gu, 2009; Gu & Maley, 2008). The post-millennial literature has moved towards a relativist stance, incorporating the perspective of interculturalism (e.g. Brown & Jones, 2007; De Vita, 2007). This approach is sensitive to the issues of reification, stereotyping and cultural imperialism which beset the early literature, although these concerns have never been entirely set aside.

Intellectual Project	Intention
Knowledge-for-understanding	To develop theoretical and research knowledge from a disinterested standpoint
Knowledge-for-critical evaluation	To develop theoretical and research knowledge for critiquing policy and practice
Knowledge-for-action	To develop theoretical and research knowledge for improving practice.
Instrumentalism	To impart practice knowledge and skills for the purpose of improving practice.
Reflexive action	To develop and share practitioners' practice knowledge for the purpose of improving practice

Table 2.1 Five intellectual projects for researching the social world
(Wallace & Poulson, 2003).

From the methodological perspective, much of the literature has sought to arrive at generalised understandings using quantitative methods (e.g. Biggs, 1987; De Vita, 2007; Shi, 2006; Tsui, 1996; Volet et al., 1994), sometimes including testable hypotheses (e.g. Lee, 2007). More contemporary literature has tended towards qualitative understandings of localised context using interviews, narrative and reflective accounts, focus groups and mixed methods (e.g. Gu, 2009; Gu & Maley, 2008; Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Hsieh, 2007; Morita, 2004; Osmond & Roed, 2010; Thom, 2010; Trahar, 2010).

This chapter will review the literature taking a critical perspective. It will begin with a commentary on what is understood by the term 'participation'. (Section 2.1). Sections 2.2 and 2.3 will trace the main narrative, focussing on the central

debates of language and culture as outlined above. A major claim will be that the centrality of these discourses have worked against more holistic perspectives, and may have obscured other factors of importance. A critique of methodology will be integrated into this discussion. The chapter will argue that this is a young field, disparate in nature and under-theorised, with education theory, in particular, often marginal (2.4). The proposed study will be positioned as a contribution to the emerging interpretive literature, which does aspire to a more holistic approach, and prioritises local understanding above generalized claims. It will be argued that a strong theoretical grounding in post-Vygtoskian theory, specifically Activity Theory, will serve as a counterweight to the dominant discourses. Further, as post-Vygtoskian theory views learning as a social process, this approach will enable a theorised understanding of participation in educative contexts (2.5).

2.1 Use and understanding of 'participation'

The term 'participation' is widely used in the post-millennial literature, with the question of international student participation the focus of research. Marlina (2009) notes that participation is strongly associated with learning and viewed as the ideal. Ryan & Hellmundt (2005), for instance, speak of international students' 'right' to participate so that they can learn effectively. However, the relationship between participation and learning is more often assumed than theorised or evidence-based; Morita (2004), using situated learning theory, employs the terms 'peripheral' and 'full participation', with an understanding of their relationship to learning, but this level of theorisation is unusual.

Participation is largely understood in terms of language, specifically spoken language. This is explicit in some of the literature (Hsieh, 2007; J. Jones, 1999; Lee, 2007; Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999; Thom, 2010; Trahar, 2010). Lee's (2007, p. 37) 8-points questionnaire seeks to measure participation using such items as 'I express my opinions in class' and 'I speak out without being called on in class'; all items relate to spoken language. Some writers emphasise listening (Thom, 2010; Trahar, 2010). Silence is commonly seen to characterise non-participation (Hsieh, 2007; Ramsay et al., 1999), with J. Jones (1999) exhorting lecturers to help international students 'out of silence into talk' (p. 248). Others argue that silence can be participatory (Morita, 2004). Mclean and Ransom (2005) note that silence may mean 'engagement in thought, not lack of

ideas' (p. 50). Broader understandings are also present. Marlina (2009) notes the students in her study considered the reading and thinking they did in preparation for classes a form of participation, whereas as Carroll (2005b), in her discussion of multicultural group work, identifies the ability 'to crunch the data' (p. 90) and generate PowerPoint slides as non-verbal participation. Mclean and Ransom (2005) see the loutish behaviour of local students (putting their feet on the table) as a form of participation.

While these understandings share in common a view of participation as active involvement, much of the literature takes a more passive view, with the focus on 'being there' rather than 'joining in'. For instance, Robertson, Line, Jones, and Thomas (2000) provide answers to the perceived lack of participation of international students in terms of the experiences of international students *as* international students (e.g. feelings of isolation), or their confidence or competences (e.g. in English language and thinking skills); in other words, in their states of being rather than in their experiences of engagement. In contrast, Hsieh (2007), while she does emphasise the obstacle her subject encounters (the oppressive host culture), does not overlook her subject's more agentive behaviour. In this study, participation is understood in the latter, active sense.

As Marlina (2009) notes, in the early literature the focus tended to be on learning style rather than participation. For example, Biggs' Study Process Questionnaire (SPQ) was widely used in studies involving S.E. Asian students to gauge the extent they conformed to the deep learning styles seen to be associated with the Western, participatory style of learning (e.g. Biggs, 1987, 1996; Kember, 2000; Volet et al., 1994) (see 2.3.1).

2.2 Language

There are two principal strands to the literature which has language as the main focus. The first has sought to assess the importance of language in class participation, with several studies affirming competence in the language of instruction (English) as the dominant issue for non-native English speaking international students (e.g. Barron, 2006; Morita, 2004; Ramsay et al., 1999). However, the main thrust of this literature has been to bring into focus the relationship between language and culture in an attempt to assess the relative

importance of each (e.g. Gu, 2009; J. Jones, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Lee, 2007).

2.2.1 English language competence

In the pedagogic literature the importance of language has often been foregrounded (e.g. Carroll, 2005a; Mclean & Ransom, 2005; Rastall, 2006) Carroll (2005a) considers it not surprising that language is often viewed as the main cause of international students' difficulties, given the challenging language demands, and the probability that most are not native English speakers and may not have studied previously through the medium of English. Mclean and Ransom (2005) suggest that the linguistic challenges of international students go beyond the familiar or obvious. Citing the literature on contrastive rhetoric, they note that even the structure of academic texts is language-dependent. Thus English academic writing is 'linear', Chinese 'circular', Romance languages 'digressive', and Middle East languages, Russian and German 'parallel' (p. 55).

2.2.1.1 The perspectives of home and international students

Several studies which have considered the experiences and understandings of international and home students of studying in multicultural classrooms have emphasised language, including Barron (2006), Harrison and Peacock (2010), Jackson and Huddart (2010), Morita (2004), Osmond and Roed (2010) and Ramsay et al. (1999).

International students are often self-critical of their English language level and of home students and lecturers for not accommodating to them. Morita (2004), in her year-long ethnographic study into the socialisation of six female Japanese students into a Canadian postgraduate programme, notes that Rie (one of her subjects) puts her feelings that both her classmates and the instructor were ignoring her down to her language level. This leads her to ask classmates to speak more slowly and the instructor to adjust her teaching style and language. Ramsay et al. (1999) considered the cultural adjustment of home and international first year undergraduate students on Business programmes at an Australian university using a psychological model of cross-cultural adjustment. For international students, lectures were the main negative experience. They had difficulties in understanding the content, relating this to

the speed of the lecturer's delivery and choice of vocabulary, and their own language level.

Considering studies which have taken account of the perspectives of both international and home students, Barron's (2006) questionnaire-based study of Australian university students concludes that for both groups the language level of international students created problems, including communication breakdown, pressure on home students to edit international students' work, and language fatigue. Jackson and Huddart (2010), Harrison and Peacock (2010) and Osmond and Roed (2010) focus primarily on the perspective of home students. Jackson and Huddart's (2010) UK study of home students' attitudes towards internationalisation suggests that language is the main reason for home students' preference for working in monocultural groups (see 2.3.5.2.2). They note that home students slowed their speech, moderated their accents and avoided humour and slang when communicating with international students, concluding it was hardly surprising the two groups had difficulty assimilating.

Harrison and Peacock (2010) collected data from both home and international students through focus groups and semi-structured interviews in two mid-ranking universities in S. W. England, focussing on the anxieties students experienced, of which language was the principal. Language was often perceived as a barrier to interaction and learning; ensuring that meaning was shared made the group work dynamics slower and more fraught, with home students moderating their speech to accommodate international students. One home student admitted there were people she did not want to work with because of their language skills. There was fear of a negative impact on the academic outcome of group work. Home students admitted editing (or rewriting) international students' work. Some students conflated 'language ability' with 'ability', with home students characterised as 'experts' and international students as 'deficient'. Home students reported sitting with international students to make sure they understood tasks and to help them with their English.

Osmond and Roed (2010), in a study in a university in the West Midlands, collected focus group data of international and home student participation. Language was an issue for both groups of students, with home students

discussing it extensively. They considered it a source of misunderstanding and time wasting, leading to frustration and frayed tempers, including a report of aggressive behaviour. In some cases home students sought to exclude international students from work groups. They were afraid of offending international students, and described their relationship as 'walking on eggshells' (p. 118). There were workload issues, as some home students corrected or rewrote international students' written contributions to group work assignments. Language was additionally seen as a barrier to assessing international students' other skills. International students were critical of their own level of English. They experienced rejection by home students, with one student admitting to feeling 'very stupid' when working with British students (p.115).

Harrison and Peacock (2010) observe that the students in their study found it easy to talk about language as a marker of difference. They comment that this enabled difference to be publicly discussed, but may have masked other differences and not always been the issue. In particular, they note the reticence of students to discuss culture.

2.2.2 The language vs. culture debate

Many studies have tried to assess whether language or culture is the more important. The debate divides into texts which argue that cultural explanations have been overstated at the expense of language (e.g. Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Lee, 2007) (2.2.2.1) and those claiming that you cannot separate language from culture (e.g. Gu, 2009; J. Jones, 1999) (2.2.2.2).

2.2.2.1 Argument 1: Culture is overstated

Some of the strongest claims that language is the dominant factor affecting the classroom participation of non-native English speakers occur in the TESOL literature. Kumaravadivelu (2003), in particular, takes this stand, citing Tsui's (1996) review of 38 studies in Hong Kong Action Learning Project. These concur in the view that teachers' low linguistic competence and accompanying anxieties are the reasons for poor participation in English language classes, with not a single mention of culture. Further, referring to Cortazzi and Jin (1996) and Cheng (2002), studies of English learners who share the same cultural background, Kumaravadivelu notes that in the former the low levels of classroom participation are put down to cultural reticence; yet Cheng's students

are co-operative and interactive. The difference, as Kumaravadivelu (2003) notes, is that Cheng's students are English majors; thus, he argues that their participation reflects their higher level of English, concluding the cultural explanation is 'woefully inadequate' (p. 715).

One attempt to scientifically settle the issue is Lee (2007). Working in a psychological research paradigm, this questionnaire-based study of 131 East Asian students in an American university set out to test whether language or culture was the more important in shaping the participation of international students in Western university classes. Lee designed measures for participation, culture and linguistic factors, formulating five hypotheses: two relating to culture and three to language. The cultural measures adopted scales from Hofstede's (1984) descriptive model of national cultures, allowing American university classrooms to be characterised as individualistic (a competitive atmosphere) with minimal power distance, and East Asian classrooms as collectivist and hierarchical. This provided the rationale for hypothesising that East Asian students' reticence in class may be influenced by collectivistic values and vertical tendencies. The linguistic factors consisted of perceptions of language competence and two psycholinguistic constructs, language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. There were no statistically significant relationships between the cultural factors and participation; however, the relationship between language and participation was statistically significant for both language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Lee (2007) suggests that these aspects of the participants' linguistic behaviour reflect relatively enduring personality traits, rather than non-enduring state traits, which she regards as characteristic of cultural behaviours. The implication is that culture is worn more lightly than personality and therefore has a less lasting impact.

Kumaravadivelu's (2003) critique of Cortazzi and Jin (1996) and Cheng (2002) and Lee's (2007) study raises questions of methodology. In identifying context as explanatory of contradictory findings, Kumaravadivelu (2003) exposes the danger of seeking to generalise from data which may only have contextual relevance, while Lee's (2007) findings, for all their statistical procedures, may be best seen as reflecting the cohort she studied at the mid-western university. Similar points will be made elsewhere in this review, building a case for prioritising interpretive research in this field.

The understanding that language not culture is the issue raises what for Kumaravadivelu (2003) is the main question: why TESOL professionals should so readily seek explanations for classroom behaviour of second language speakers in terms of culture. Here Kumaravadivelu (2003) is unforgiving in his judgement, finding answers in the socio-psychological theories of aversive racism (the justification of racial prejudice in some determinant other than race), and social identity theory (the stereotyping of others in order to view one's own group in a more positive light). However, Kumaravadivelu's (2003) main explanation lies in Said's (1978) thesis of orientialism; he concludes language teachers' stereotypical constructions of international students contribute to a 'discursive field' that 'shape[s] and structure[s] Western understanding and management of colonised cultures and peoples' (p.716). While rarely put with such conviction, Kumaravadivelu's concern has coloured much of the debate about culture and its influence on international student participation.

Robertson et al. (2000) also report an over-readiness to reach for cultural explanations. Their study of both academic staff and international student perceptions of the challenges facing international students at an Australian university used the Delphi technique, an iterative process designed to refine survey items in response to qualitative feedback. They argue that academics held to their core belief that international students' reluctance to participate resulted from a culturally related disposition regarding learning, despite the contrary evidence which indicated that both academics and students viewed language comprehension and competence as the main issue. Robertson et al. (2000) conclude that academics overlooked 'the fact that the cause of poor participation may well be language competence rather than cultural reticence' (p. 99).

2.2.2.2 Argument 2: You cannot separate language from culture

The main point in this argument is that it is not possible to separate language from culture as misunderstandings in communication may be cultural in origin and dispositions towards language culturally related. J. Jones (1999), for instance, argues that rather than overstating the importance of culture, the role of culture in communication has tended to be understated.

J. Jones (1999) asserts that in their dealings with international students lecturers may fail to analyse what constitutes competence in a language. He notes that discussion about the English language levels of international students has focussed on linguistic competence, overlooking other language competences and their cultural derivations. For instance, students lacking sociolinguistic competence may be unaware of the communicative conventions of the target language situation, transferring norms appropriate to their home educational context to the new context. Thus, they may be unaware of the appropriate linguistic conventions regarding politeness, taboos, social distance, and silence. Both excessive deference and over-volubility may result in communication breakdown. J. Jones (1999) concludes that cultural background is 'equal and possibly more important' (p.257) than language proficiency for understanding NNES students' participation in English-medium university classes.

Psycholinguistic constructs associated with learner subjectivities may also be perceived as culturally related. What is unexplored in Lee (2007) is the relationship between the psycholinguistic constructs of 'language anxiety' and 'fear of negative evaluation' and culture. This is perhaps surprising given the claims elsewhere in the literature that language behaviour associated with the loss of face is characteristic of CHCs, given their collectivist value systems. For instance, Wen and Clément (2003) argue that in Confucian thinking the self does not exist as a separate entity but is defined in relation to others. This leads to acute sensitivity to evaluation by significant others (see 2.3.2.1). The proximity of the terms 'language shock' and 'culture shock' (Gu, 2009; Gu & Maley, 2008) further point towards an understanding of language as a dimension of culture. For Gu (2009), language shock is the principal component of culture shock insofar as it relates to international students. Gu (2009) see the struggles of Chinese students to remain true to themselves while being seen by others in a more favourable light through the lens of Hoffman's (1998) image of her self as divided by her languages. Thus, the intercultural journey of Gu's (2009) subjects (2.3.5.1) is largely a linguistic one.

2.3 Culture

Discussion which centres on the impact of national cultures on the participation of international students has dominated the literature (e.g. Ballard & Clanchy,

1991; De Vita, 2005, 2007; Greenholtz, 2003; Gu, 2009; Hsieh, 2007; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Louie, 2005; Ryan & Carroll, 2005; Ryan & Louie, 2007; Shi, 2006; Trahar, 2010; Wen & Clément, 2003). Much of this concerns CHC students, and while this is illustrative of how research in this field has developed, the relative absence of discussion of students with other cultural origins is surprising. The contrast with Western cultures is always implicit and sometimes explicit. Some early literature focussed on deficit views (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991), while subsequent literature made counter claims (e.g. Biggs, 1999). There were various responses to this early debate: firstly, attempts to provide more nuanced understanding of national cultures (e.g. Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Louie, 2005; Shi, 2006); secondly, responses to the underlying concern about stereotyping and hegemony, both emotive responses (e.g. Greenholtz, 2003; Hsieh, 2007; Trahar, 2010) and studies which sought to put the culture construct on firmer footing (e.g. Lee, 2007); thirdly, studies which considered other factors, either as a direct challenge to culture as the central construct (the context studies) (e.g. A. Jones, 2005; Volet & Renshaw, 1995; Wong, 2004), or as complementary (e.g. Gu, 2009; Gu & Maley, 2008). In the post-millennium, the culture debate coalesced again, but this time around the relative discourse of interculturalism (e.g. De Vita, 2005; Gu & Maley, 2008; Ryan & Hellmundt, 2005; Trahar, 2010). In the following sub-sections (2.3.1-2.3.5) these strands will be reviewed.

2.3.1 The cultural deficit debate

As an early contribution to the literature, Ballard and Clanchy (1991) articulated the concerns of academic staff in Australian universities regarding the participation of students from CHC countries. It offered a cultural understanding of the origins of their difficulties and guidance as to how they could best be supported, identifying appropriate forms of remediation. Drawing on their own understandings and experience, Ballard and Clancy provided what would be perceived as a stereotypical representation of S. E. Asian students. In their view, S. E. Asian students were:

- silent in class, passive in learning style, and rote learners for whom learning was reproductive, concerned with the conservation of knowledge, uncritical of knowledge claims, and teacher dependent;

- embarrassed by the brashness of local students and chose to remain with their own kind;
- lacking in oral and written skills of analysis and reflection;
- unaware of plagiarism, and had scant knowledge of the genres of academic writing.

Ballard and Clanchy (1991) viewed these characteristics as deriving from students' Confucian heritage, finding support for these views in the neo-Confucian thinking familiar to the Western academy in the 1980s and 90s (Ryan and Louie, 2007). They spoke of a 'clash' of educational cultures. Challenges to this stereotypical view are associated with Biggs among others in a series of writings (Biggs, 1987, 1996, 1999). Biggs (1987) questioned whether the observed behaviours of S. E. Asian students could so readily be associated with a particular learning style. Using the Study Process Questionnaire (SPQ), which measures learning styles across three dimensions, Deep, Surface and Achieving, Biggs surveyed large samples of CHC and Western students (>4,000) in two comparable universities, one in Hong Kong, the other in Australia. He found that Hong Kong students had a similar Deep mean to Australian students, challenging the perception of Asian students as surface learners. In contrast to Ballard and Clancy (1991), Biggs (1996) argued that the deep approach to learning of S. E. Asian students could be traced to their Confucian heritage (see also 2.3.2.1).

Biggs (1999) makes it clear that he does not deny cultural differences, rather is critical of Western pedagogues who have sought to aggrandise them. To put 'culture' in perspective (always in scare quotes), he draws attention to the similarities in the difficulties of international students moving to a Western university to local students moving from school to university; in other words, Biggs views the challenges as generic rather than specific. A similar point is made by Ryan and Carroll (2005, p.9), captured in their powerful metaphor of international students as 'canaries in the coalmine' (2.3.5). Biggs' (1999) main argument is that stereotyping invites a deficit approach, characterising educational problems as belonging to particular groups of students, to be dealt with through remediation. He advocates a contextual approach, focussing attention on how well these difficulties are addressed (2.3.4.1). His answer lay

in accommodating the institution to the students, rather than the students to the institution.

2.3.2 More nuanced understandings of cultural background

While Biggs' challenge came in the form of reverse stereotypes, subsequent literature has sought more sophisticated or nuanced understandings. Some contributions emphasise interpretation of the traditional expression of CHCs (e.g. Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Wen and Clément, 2003), others the changing nature of culture and diversity within culture (e.g. Louie, 2005; Ryan and Louie, 2007; Wu, 2000). In these discussions a clear-cut distinction between Confucian and Socratic education, with the latter seen to characterise Western universities, is questioned.

2.3.2.1 Interpretations of traditional culture

This review will refer to Wen and Clément (2003), Jin and Cortazzi (2006), Shi (2006), Louie (2005), and Ryan and Louie (2007). Wen and Clément (2003) and Jin and Cortazzi (2006) offer different understandings of these traditions, while Shi (2006) and Louie (2005) consider how these might arise. Ryan and Louie (2007) reflect on the relevance of this debate for understanding CHC students' participation as international students.

Wen and Clément (2003) offer a classical explanation for what they perceive as Chinese students' unwillingness to communicate in English. They relate this to two aspects of personal relationships: an other-directed self and a submissive way of learning. They view the former as rooted in Confucian philosophy regarding the social nature of the self and as giving rise to public behaviour aimed at saving face, and the latter as an extension into the modern day of the traditional teaching of Confucian classics: veneration of the teacher as the source of knowledge; rote learning, and unquestioned acceptance of passed-on interpretations of texts. Jin and Cortazzi (2006) introduce the contrasting perspective of CHC students as reflective learners. They find evidence for these qualities in the Analects (a collection of sayings attributed to Confucius) and the model of learning advanced by the 12th Century educational philosopher Zhu Xi, whose five steps to learning from texts include 'question its meaning', 'ponder it with full vigilance', and 'scrutinize its distinctions with clarity of vision' (Jin and

Cortazzi (2006, p.13). Commenting on this model, they state, 'it is a deeply reflective, enquiry-based, experiential way of learning' (p.13).

How these diverse understandings of CHCs are possible is addressed in Shi (2006), Louie (2005), and Ryan and Louie (2007). For Shi (2006), Confucianism is a 'multi-dimensional concept' (p.124) arising from diverse (and partial) understandings of the Analects and proverbs. Shi views the Analects as a complex text which can be used to contradict many of the key assertions of Confucianism. Using Hu (2002) work as illustration, Shi provides a detailed analysis showing how each of Hu's six claims regarding the nature of the Confucian view of education can be countered by statements from the Analects. Louie (2005) and Ryan and Louie (2007) note that a variety of interpretations is inherent in the nature of world systems of thought which span millennia and extend across huge regions. Like Christianity or Muslimism, Confucianism 'could be twisted to suit all times and needs' (Louie (2005, p.21). Louie (2005) notes how the neo-Confucianists who came to prominence in the 1980s and 90s argued that Confucian values of perseverance, respect for status and thrift were those which gave rise to the Asian economic miracle, whereas a generation earlier Confucian values were blamed for holding development back. In making these points, these authors seek to question setting too much store on one or other interpretation, cautioning against both deficit and surplus views which have as educational consequences confused practitioners and untaught students (Ryan and Louie, 2007).

2.3.2.2 Transition and diversity

Several contributions to the literature on cultural traditions have emphasised the changing nature of non-Western cultures and educational traditions, while pointing out that non-monolithic cultures are not confined to the West (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Louie, 2005; Ryan and Louie, 2007; Shi, 2006). Other studies have commented on changes in the Western educational culture (S. Harris, 2008; Ryan & Louie, 2007; Wu, 2002).

In Jin and Cortazzi (2006), the changes to the Chinese culture of learning are exemplified through reference to English language teaching. They note that since the 2001 educational reforms the university English curriculum has focused on many aspects of learning seen to characterise Western higher

education, with parallel changes taking place in other curricular areas and educational levels. Shi's (2006) study of the learning preferences and attitudes of middle school students in a Shanghai suburb, for instance, offers evidence of change in another sector. In contrast to an earlier study which it replicated (Hu, 2002), students indicated a preference for equality with the teacher over a hierarchical relationship; were prepared to challenge teachers, texts and the learning environment; were self-critical, and preferred teachers who were light-hearted and used a variety of learning activities. Shi (2006) argues that the rapid political, social and economic change over the course of a single decade may account for the preponderance of new findings in the study. Indeed, Louie (2005) describes the speed of change in East Asia as 'breath-taking' and highly visible, with the physical landscape changing 'beyond recognition' leaving 'citizens feeling lost and dazed in new landscapes' (p. 21).

Regarding diversity within cultures, Louie (2005) observes how Westerners tend to view non-Western cultures monolithically, with the distinction between elite and popular cultures, readily accepted in the West, unacknowledged in others. He argues that the Confucian belief in educability and perfectability translates in the West to the view that all East Asians have a high regard for education. He observes that while some East Asians clearly do, others do not.

Wu (2002), Ryan and Louie (2007) and S. Harris (2008) emphasise diversity and change in the Western educational system. Wu (2002) provides a contrasting account of postgraduate study at two British universities, one traditional, one new. As an international student from Taiwan, Wu commenced his doctoral study at an 'ancient' English university where supervisors were often unaware of the date or time they were supposed to meet, or unavailable without explanation at the appointed time. He accepts this as Socratic pedagogy, where the job is 'to light the fire' (p. 390), and as characteristic of Western education. The surprise occurs with a move to another British university, an ex-polytechnic. In place of one hands-off supervisor, Wu now has four, each eager to help. Here the approach is to provide the 'right' level of support which does not leave students to sink or swim. Wu (2002) notes that not only each nation, but also each institution may have a different ethos of learning and teaching.

Ryan and Louie (2007) paint a less favourable view of change in Western higher education in their effort to provide a context for what they regard as the persistent negative stereotyping in the literature on international students and faculty chat. They describe the context as one of massification, diversification, globalisation, and commercialisation. Speaking of Australian universities, they refer to the *per capita* fall in government funding, increasing professional workloads, large classes and diminished funding for research, and staff who lack training for teaching students from different cultural backgrounds.

These descriptions of different types of institutions conform to S. Harris' (2008) three-fold characterisation of Western universities as 'traditional' (Wu's ancient university); 'progressive' (Wu's new university), and 'neo-liberal' (Ryan and Louie's depiction of Australia's emerging higher education sector). S. Harris views neo-liberal universities, characterised by an economic rather than cultural imperative, as least supportive of internationalisation. Her comments echo the wider debate regarding the future direction of Western universities in what Barnett (2008, p. 190) has described as 'an age of supercomplexity'.

The discussion in this section suggests that CHC culture may not only be too complex to arrive at useful generalisations, but that the accelerated pace of change in both West and East makes it hard to speak with any certainty about what typifies national educative cultures. The review now turns to the second response to the early debate: direct responses to concerns of cultural hegemony.

2.3.3 Cultural hegemony

As Kumaravadivelu's (2003) comments (see 2.2.2.1) illustrate, the debate about culture has been politicised with critics of cultural deficit or culturally reductive approaches often imputing imperialist or hegemonic tendencies to those who profess such views. Responses to the issue have included self-criticism (e.g. Greenholtz, 2003; Trahar, 2010) and bullish assertions of the hegemonic nature of Western higher education (e.g. Hsieh, 2007) (2.3.3.1), and recourse to theorised cultural constructs in an attempt to offer a more neutral approach (e.g. Lee, 2007; Marlina, 2009) (2.3.3.2).

2.3.3.1 Emotive responses

Greenholtz's (2003) essay on the role and responsibilities of educators on cross-cultural exchange programmes focuses on Japanese exchange students at a Canadian university. Greenholtz asks what we wish to accomplish by exposing students to notions of education which differ significantly from their own and how this squares with the purpose of education of preparing the young for taking their place in society. He fears that the expectations of international students may be so different that 'they may not recognise what is happening in a Socratic classroom as legitimate pedagogy' (Greenholtz, 2003, p. 123), and reaches the painful conclusion that Western educators' commitment to Socratic pedagogy 'smacks of intellectual imperialism' (p. 123). Trahar's (2010) hurried encounter with the issue comes with her recognition that her critical pedagogy might itself be perceived as culturally biased, leading to accusations of imperialism. She asks whether we should be asking this 'uncomfortable question', and opening all higher education practices to scrutiny for their unacknowledged cultural entrenchment (Trahar, 2010, p.152), with the implication that we should. Trahar is also aware of the tension between hegemonic leanings and her commitment to inclusive pedagogy (2.3.5.2.1; 2.3.5.2.2).

In Hsieh (2007), a critical view of Western academia as intellectually imperialist provides the analytical frame for her study into the silence of a Chinese international student at an American university. Hsieh recalls that similar studies have focussed on students themselves, often seeking explanations in terms of their cultural origins. She agrees that culture of origin does have a part to play, however argues that this overlooks the disempowering nature of Western higher education settings. Central to her view is the power differential between international (Chinese) and local (American) students due to the less-than-standard oral English proficiency of the former and the dominance of American culture. Hsieh (2007) argues that the perception of America as a nation of cultural diversity belies an 'ideology of cultural homogeneity' (p. 379), which supposes the superiority of Eurocentric cultures. As the dominant American culture, this sets the values against which all others are judged. Hsieh (2007) concludes that in American university classes, international students, and

others who do not live up to the expectations of the dominant culture, are attributed a deficit identity.

2.3.3.2 Resort to theorised constructs of culture

Some writers have looked for ways to describe national cultures which do not so readily result in cultural stereotyping or carry implications of imperialism. Hofstede's (1984) framework, which categorises cultures in terms of four dimensions ('power-distance'; 'individualism-collectivism'; 'masculinity-femininity'; 'uncertainty avoidance'), has been quite widely referred to (e.g. Gu and Maley, 2008; Lee, 2007; Louie, 2005). The original framework, however, was itself regarded as biased towards Western cultures; this led to the inclusion of a fifth dimension, 'Confucian work dynamic', in later versions (Hofstede, 1990; Louie, 2005).

Holliday (1999) has proposed moving away from 'large culture' approaches, where culture is associated with national groups or ethnicities and is subject to reification, to 'small culture' approaches, where cultures are seen to emerge whenever people meet and interact, cohere and conflict. Holliday sees culture as 'stretch[ing] seamlessly' (p.260), but argues that it is legitimate in research to select a small segment for study, and 'small culture' becomes a useful way of describing institutional culture, or the culture which emerges in the classroom. Nonetheless, Holliday (1999) reminds us that no discourse is ideologically free (Fairclough, 2001) and relationships between large cultures or within small cultures are both characterised by power struggles. Holliday's construct of 'small culture' has been used in the literature (e.g. Clark & Gieve, 2006; Marlina, 2009); however, his claim that 'large culture' is the default notion has endured.

2.3.4 The importance of culture vs. other factors

The third response to the early debate has taken the form of challenges to culture of origin as the dominant construct or sought to complement it. The literature reviewed in this section comprises the contributions of those who have advanced the 'context hypothesis' (Volet & Renshaw, 1995), emphasising the importance of both present (e.g. Volet et al., 1994) and prior (e.g. Volet & Renshaw, 1995) educational contexts, and contributions which foreground circumstance and personal characteristics as a complement to culture (e.g. Gu, 2009; Gu & Maley, 2008; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006).

2.3.4.1 The context studies

Wong (2004), Volet et al. (1994), Kember (2000), and A. Jones (2005) all emphasise the importance of the present educational context. Volet and Renshaw (1995) qualify this by also emphasising prior educational context. Wong (2004) echoes Biggs' (1999) view that putting culture at the centre of the debate on international students leads to an understanding that there are deeply embedded constraints on adaptation, whereas adopting a contextual perspective recognises obstacles but does not see them as insuperable.

 Evidence for the importance of context was first provided by Volet et al. (1994) in a quantitative study which measured the overall study approach of two groups of first year undergraduates at an Australian university, one local, the other S.E. Asian, over a period of one semester. They found that all students changed in similar ways, suggesting that study approaches were influenced by perceptions of course requirements. Kember (2000) found counter-evidence to claims that Chinese learners are resistant to innovations in pedagogy in his review of the Hong Kong Action Learning Project, arguing that this collection of studies showed students engaged with, and adapted to, deep-end pedagogies over the duration of their courses.   Kember (2000) concludes that initial resistance is an aspect of all change scenarios, and has been misinterpreted as a durable characteristic of Asian learners. Wong's (2004) research (in-depth interviews of nine international students at various stages of 4-year undergraduate programmes) found students appreciated and understood the differences of the new system, were willing to adapt, and were able to provide evidence of adaptation.

A. Jones (2005) provides evidence that Chinese and Australian learners are equal when it comes to acquiring critical thinking skills, despite the fact that being critical had not featured in the Chinese students' pre-university education. Chinese international students and local students were invited to comment on their understandings of the purpose of two tasks, an essay and a critical commentary. The responses of the two groups were indistinguishable, with perceptions of tasks strongly shaped by task guidelines. A. Jones (2005) concludes that context is of 'paramount importance' in students' perceptions of learning tasks (p.340).

Volet and Renshaw (1995), in a longitudinal study which surveyed matched groups of S.E. Asian and local (Australian) first-year undergraduates at the beginning and end of a semester, offered mixed results, providing evidence that both present and prior educational contexts are influential, but not to the exclusion of cultural factors. With learning goals as the central construct, the study sought to compare students' personal goals and perceptions of different study settings for achieving goals. There were differences and similarities between the groups, but the differences diminished over the course of the semester, indicating the influence of the present context. Many of the early differences (and some of the similarities) are put down to prior educational experience, with students seen to be employing learning strategies they know have worked in the past. Cultural factors, however, were also seen as influential. For example, the authors suggest that the importance given by local students to studying alone may derive from a culturally entrenched view of study as an individual act.

2.3.4.2 Personal characteristics and circumstance

Personal characteristics mediated by circumstance are emphasised in a series of articles by Gu and associates (Gu, 2009; Gu & Maley, 2008; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006) which focus on the subjective experiences of Chinese learners on their intercultural journeys at UK universities (2.3.5.1). These are seen to complement culture, not to offer an alternative explanation.

How to account for the success or otherwise of the students' sojourn is the focus of discussion. While cultural background is seen to play a part, the argument here is that situational factors (circumstance) and personal qualities (personality traits), such as motivation, agency and determination to thrive, need to be taken into account. There is an initial phase characterised by 'learning shock' when culture shapes experience (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006); thereafter, the other factors work to transcend culture, determining whether students' intercultural journeys are personally and academically successful or end 'in frustrations and failures' (Gu, 2009, p.47).

Assertions about the importance of personality traits and the role they play in helping international students transcend the constraints of culture are made in each of the articles. The authors acknowledge that while personal qualities may

have cultural underpinnings, for instance, 'perseverance' is recognised as a Chinese cultural trait (Gu, 2009), they, nonetheless, 'vary greatly even within a monocultural group' (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006, p.87). The role of circumstance is emphasised in Gu and Schweisfurth (2006). This study compares the intercultural experiences of Chinese English language teachers taking part in a British Council development project in China with Chinese international students at a UK university. The findings indicate that the students were more flexible in terms of making cultural adjustments, which the authors put down to the higher stakes involved: their educational success was dependent on successful adaptation.

The final strand to review in this section concerns interculturalism. In this literature, cultural origin re-emerges as the dominant construct of relevance recast in a relativist discourse (2.3.5).

2.3.5 Interculturalism

This literature has repositioned the cultural debate within the discourse of interculturalism (e.g. De Vita, 2007; Gu, 2009; Ryan and Carroll, 2005; Trahar, 2010). It has allowed culture to be viewed in more relativist terms, and has been helpful in moving the debate forward from arguments which inclined too readily towards deficit conceptions. It projects a positive conception of cultural differences, emphasising the capacity for mutual understanding; in so doing, it aspires to transcend the negativity often associated with the debate about the impact of culture on international students' experiences. Yet at the same time it has marked an emphatic reaffirmation of the early position that cultural origin is the defining factor shaping the experiences of international students. De Vita (2007), for instance, in his comprehensive review, argues that the supposed stereotypes of CHC students are not misconceptions, asserting, 'It is not by denying their existence that we can have an impact' (p.156). A complementary - and integral - aspect has been the call for a culturally inclusive pedagogy, described by De Vita (2007, p. 155) as a 'critical issue' which has been neglected. Thus, with the old has come the new in the form of a pedagogy which combines a cultural understanding of the challenges facing international students with the insights of the contexts theorists. Ryan and Carroll (2005) have set this within the broader context of widening participation, with their

metaphor 'canaries in the coalmine' (p.9) conveying the view that a pedagogy of benefit to international students will benefit a broad range of learners.

While some of the literature in this strand does focus directly on international students' experiences of interculturalism, much is pedagogic in intent, seeking to develop in students and practitioners intercultural competence through a mix of research findings, reflections and teacherly advice. Using a variety of synonymous or related terms, this latter literature emphasises the impact of intercultural competence on international student participation, and for this reason will be briefly reviewed. I identify two threads for this sub-section: contributions which have viewed international students as being on intercultural journeys (e.g. Gu and Maley, 2008) (2.3.5.1), and pedagogic literature which has as its main purpose the development of intercultural competence (e.g. Carroll & Ryan, 2005; E. Jones & Brown, 2007) (2.3.5.2).

2.3.5.1 Intercultural journeys

Gu and Schweisfurth (2006), Gu and Maley (2008) and Gu (2009) exemplify the literature which views students as intercultural voyagers and sojourners. Culture, and assumptions of cultural difference, are key; however, it is the presence of other factors - personality, circumstance - which shape students' individual intercultural journeys (2.3.4.2).

Using questionnaire and interview data, Gu and Maley (2008) and Gu (2009) provide empathetic accounts of the ups and downs of Chinese international students at UK universities. They describe their experiences in an unfamiliar educational environment and in personal lives which are often isolated and lonely (Gu, 2009). At university, they struggle to push aside years of teacher-centred education and spoon-feeding; outside class the challenge is to become independent after overprotective upbringings in one-child households (Gu and Maley, 2008). Their journeys lead to changes at the 'deepest level' (identity change) (Gu, 2009, p. 47); they are at the same time journeys of self-development and personal growth. Gu (2009) argues that background culture is never fully transcended, with some cultural boundaries never crossed. Students are at pains to construct an identity in which they remain true to themselves while allowing them to be seen in a more favourable light by their new peers. New identities are 'fractured selves' (Gu, 2009, p. 47) with students

claiming to have two sets of values, one for China and one for the UK, so that they do not feel foreigners either at home or abroad.

2.3.5.2 Intercultural competence

In this thread the intercultural competence of university staff and students is seen to have a direct bearing on international student participation. The literature has focused on developing intercultural competence and challenges to development. Firstly, this sub-section will review contributions which have focussed on staff development (e.g. Mclean and Ransom, 2005; Trahar, 2010) (2.3.5.2.1). The literature which has focussed on students will then be considered, including research which has identified challenges (e.g. Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Summers & Volet, 2008; Trahar, 2010) and literature which has addressed how they might be met (e.g. Carroll, 2005b; De Vita, 2005). These later contributions all relate to multicultural group work (2.3.5.2.2).

2.3.5.2.1 The intercultural competence of university teachers

Mclean and Ransom (2005), Trahar (2010), Louie (2005), and Leask (2007) emphasise the development of intercultural awareness among teachers. Mclean and Ransom (2005) observe that university teachers tend to see the cultural assumptions inherent in their disciplinary discourses as self-evident. To make her point, Trahar (2010) refers to a lecturer who does make a cultural adjustment, pausing in her discussion of Karl Popper's 'black swan story' to ask whether everybody has seen a swan. This raises a titter from the largely home audience. Trahar uses the anecdote to illustrate how questioning shared knowledge, while uncomfortable for those in the know, is a necessary component of intercultural competence, observing that the familiarity of swans may belie their unfamiliarity to some international students. Mclean and Ransom (2005) note that a consequence of assuming shared knowledge is that expectations are rarely made explicit.

Trahar (2010) invites teachers to question their own assumptions about shared knowledge as part of a two-way process where an understanding of the perspectives of others requires awareness of one's own. This is set within a broader critical pedagogy in which students are urged to make explicit their cultural understandings and to be critical of them; likewise, lecturers need to question even 'inviolable' Western academic traditions, for instance those

relating to criticality and plagiarism (p.151), which can lead to uncomfortable questions (2.3.3.1). Louie (2005) is critical of what he sees as common practice in international education contexts: teachers' attempts to understand the experiences of their students by collecting cultural snippets about their background. As an alternative, he urges teachers to develop 'meta-cultural sensitivity', characterised as the ability to view both our home cultures and the new cultures we encounter from the perspective of an outsider, arguing this leads to an empathetic understanding of cultural differences. Louie (2005) suggests this develops in teachers who spend long periods abroad, but can also be developed at home. Internationalisation at Home, as a policy for inclusion and diversity, is a recognised term in the literature, with the practice widely advocated (Crowther et al., 2000). Leask (2007) characterises teachers in international contexts as 'intercultural learners', proposing a competency framework.

These contributions highlight how teachers' dispositions towards interculturalism may impact on international students' participation.

2.3.5.2.2 Multicultural group work

The principal focus of the literature on the development of intercultural awareness among students has concerned multicultural group work. The contributions in Carroll and Ryan (2005) and E. Jones and Brown (2007) all assert the importance of multicultural group work in internationalising universities. De Vita (2005) notes it is 'the ideal vehicle for activating the social, behavioural and emotional learning processes that are required to develop an internationalised culture' (p. 82). Ryan and Hellmundt (2005) theorise the educative virtues of multicultural group work in terms of constructivism (Piaget) and cultural capital (Bourdieu). The positions of these authors set high, and rarely challenged, expectations for multicultural group work, an exception being Jackson and Huddart (2010) whose study at Newcastle University concludes that it is insufficient to concentrate solely on multicultural group work to bring about internationalisation. A second understanding broadly held is that multicultural group work is unpopular with students (e.g. Volet & Ang, 1998), although findings differ regarding whether antipathy is mainly due to international students' preference for working with their own kind (Volet & Ang, 1998) or home students' fear of lower grades (De Vita, 2002; Ledwith, Lee,

Manfredi, & Wildish, 1998). The contrasting positions of pedagogues and students, the former staunchly pro and the latter largely opposed to multicultural group work, give rise to the two elements of the contributions to this thread in the literature: those which focus on students' understandings and experiences of multicultural group work and pedagogic literature which addresses how the challenges to multicultural group work might be met. These are reviewed briefly in the following.

Regarding the first, the following studies are considered: Summers and Volet (2008), which considered the perspective of both home and international students, Harrison and Peacock (2010), which focussed primarily on home students, and Trahar (2010), which concerned only international students. Using questionnaire data, Summers and Volet (2008) sought to clarify the relative dispositions of home and international students at an Australian university towards multicultural group work, and how attitudes changed during their three years of study. The authors conclude that multilingual students with a previous experience of intercultural contexts were the most disposed to multicultural group work, but that all groups became more negative in their attitude following group work experience. Harrison and Peacock (2010) also report negative experiences, with the fear of lower grades a major concern. Home students avoided contact with international students ('passive xenophobia'); were prone to 'stereotype suppression' (international students are 'just like us'); 'response amplification' (international students are 'really, really clever'), and 'subconscious stereotyping' (failure to individualise international students). They expressed fear of misunderstandings and saying the wrong thing, and concerns about being viewed as racist.

The findings of Summers and Volet, 2008 and Harrison and Peacock, 2010 are consistent with the view that students are antithetical to multicultural group work. Studies which report more positive experiences include De Vita (2002), a statistically-based study, which found that both international and home students got better marks when they worked in multicultural groups than they did in their individual assignments. Trahar (2010) also provides a more optimistic view in a study which took as subjects her own international masters students on a MEd programme. Her data, the research reports which students submitted as assignments, provide reflective accounts of students' attempts to

cross cultural boundaries. Gender was a major concern, with one participant, Yuan, a mature student from Taiwan, reporting how she took a stand against the characteristic submissiveness expected of Taiwanese women and the dominance of men in the group 'from cultures where it seemed that whatever a man says is considered to be important' (Yuan quoted in Trahar, 2010, p. 148). Yet overall, Yuan reports favourably on her experience of multicultural group work, while Trahar notes how the students in her group even began socialising together.

As interpretive studies, the contradictory findings of Harrison and Peacock (2010) and Trahar (2010) are acceptable, reflecting local conditions. What is missing, however, is a form of analysis which offers a theorised understanding of their differences.

Considering the second aspect, how lecturers might address the challenges of multicultural group work, Trahar (2010) emphasises the importance of scaffolding, seeing the success of group work as related to how academics position themselves with regard to international students, whether they have a deficit conception of international students or adopt an inclusive approach. The contributions in Carroll and Ryan (2005) and E. Jones and Brown (2007) provide constructive advice on how the challenges to multicultural group work can be overcome, predicated on the understanding that properly conducted it can be a positive experience. This includes advice on task design and the group formation process (e.g. De Vita, 2005), awareness raising of the pedagogic rationale for multicultural group work and how this can be squared with other objectives (e.g. Carroll, 2005b), and guidance in managing groups and dealing with conflict (e.g. Carroll, 2005b). Some contributors highlight the specific issues of multicultural groups. De Vita (2005), for instance, sees linguistic and cultural differences as translating into power differentials, which results in dominance by local, native English-speaking students. Others emphasise the generic nature of group work (Carroll, 2005b), arguing that many problems put down to cultural diversity are in fact generic, with culturally reductive explanations obscuring underlying causes stemming from the method itself. In making these points, De Vita and Carroll reflect different perspectives on international student participation; on the one hand, emphasising what distinguishes them, on the other, what they share in common with other students.

The intercultural literature reviewed in this sub-section provides a snapshot of the contemporary state of the culture debate. While it has enabled practice to move forward, facilitating international student participation through inclusive pedagogy, what is less clear is the extent the relativist discourse does free the debate from hegemonic overtones. Moreover, while the bipolarity of inter-constructs broadens the perspective, it still precludes a holistic view of international student participation.

2.4 The case for the current study

Sections 2.1-2.3 of this chapter offer a review of the literature on international student participation in Western universities, seeking to clarify understanding of participation (2.1) and explore key themes. One has concerned the relative importance of language and culture (2.2), but more prominent is the debate about culture itself which has sought to understand its impact on international student participation, focussing largely on students from S. E. Asia (2.3). On the basis of this review, I would make the following observations:

The field is eclectic. In common with much educational research, the field consists of a range of literature, reflecting the different intellectual projects of authors (Table 2.1), and their different disciplinary approaches (education, linguistics, cultural studies, psychology) and methodologies. Research has been driven by the research field (international student participation) with the theoretical constructs drawn on in analysis taken from a variety of disciplines

The place of education theory. Education theory is lacking in prominence in both research design and data analysis. One exception is Morita (2004), whose ethnographic study of six female Japanese postgraduates adopts the theory of situated practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The omission of explicit (education) theoretical frameworks has meant that at times there seems little to counteract the dominant discourses (see also below). For instance, the lack of theoretical framing in some contemporary interpretist studies (e.g. Harrison and Peacock, 2010; Osmond and Roed, 2010) may undermine holistic intentions. In such instances, it becomes difficult to decide whether dominant themes emerge from the data or impose on it.

Understanding of participation. A further consequence of the lack of prominence of education theory has been the under-theorisation of the relationship between participation and learning. Attempts at theorised understandings are uncommon in the literature, with exceptions in Morita (2004) and Ryan and Hellmundt (2005). In general, the expectation of full participation is understood as a given in the context (Western universities), and its association with learning assumed. Moreover, with the accent widely placed on state (being international) rather than action (participation), much literature obscures the fundamental nature of participation, which is involvement in activity.

The question of methodology. While both quantitative and qualitative studies are found in this literature, a positivist ethos seems to prevail, with a quest for generalizable claims. The literature demonstrates areas of agreement but also a great variety in findings. This should not be surprising considering the different research contexts. Moreover, as Trahar (2010) reminds us, international students are no more homogeneous than other groups. Yet it does also beg the question of the relevance of positivistic approaches in this field. What is necessary at this stage is not the quest for generalisable understandings and causal explanations for international student participation, but rather to seek local and situated understandings and to develop a methodology to facilitate this. Although such an approach is interpretist, it need not preclude having some explanatory potential. While it is to be expected that research subjects express divergent views within and between studies, it would be helpful to adopt an approach which offered a theorised understanding of differences.

Focus on CHC students. Sections of this review have focussed almost entirely on S. E. Asian students regarding the cultural difference between East and West. This emphasis reflects the literature; there is no comparable body of literature for other regional groups. While these contributions primarily relate to students from S. E. Asia, it is also clear that some observations apply more broadly, although it is not always evident when this is intended.

The field is dominated by the themes of culture and language. The emphasis on cultural difference, with East and West as the parameters, characterises how the issue of international student participation has principally

been pursued in the literature; however, it raises the question of whether an exploration of cultural difference should be the central concern. While several contributions do offer more nuanced understandings of culture, leading to better informed discussion, the contemporary debate around interculturalism does not successfully exclude the dangers of reification, stereotyping and hegemony. Discussion of culture has resulted in a frustrating and circular debate. There are instances when writers rise above cultural issues to locate them in a context, for instance Trahar's (2010) questioning of how academics position themselves with respect to their expectations of international students (2.3.5.2.2), yet this does not often seem to be approached in a theorised way. The question of whether language should also be so central should likewise be raised. These two themes have dominated the literature, closing the field to more holistic understandings of the participation, and bringing the danger of overlooking other factors of importance. Within the debate these are often construed as secondary or dependent factors, subject to the reductive nature of cultural and linguistic arguments.

In the next section (2.5) I will argue that adopting a post-Vygotskian perspective and engaging in theory-driven research may offer a way to address some of these issues. The proposed case study will be seen as a contribution to the emerging interpretist literature, with the theoretical framework (Activity Theory) naturally inclined towards interpretist research. As an intellectual project it will accord to knowledge-for-action (Table 2.1).

2.5 Post-Vygotskian theory

Central to post-Vygotskian perspectives is an understanding of learning as a social process. This sets them apart from constructivist understandings where learning is viewed as taking place in the individual's mind. It marks a departure from Piaget's view where learning is seen as regulated by the biological development of the human mind. As a psychologist, Vygotsky's principal contribution was to the field of psychology; however, as Bernstein (1993, p. xv) notes, Vygotsky's cultural-historical view of human development offered a ready-made theory of education.

Vygotsky emphasised that the study of psychology should be directed towards the understanding of human consciousness (Burgess, 1993). He saw this in

terms of the development of higher mental powers, those peculiarly human (Vygotsky, 1978). While individuals acquire these, they are developed out there in the social world. Vygotsky understood this in terms of cultural development which is ongoing and historical. In particular, Vygotsky sought to address defects in the stimulus-response view of behaviourism, arguing that human actions are not simply brought about by stimuli, but are mediated by artefacts which prompt or control actions, replacing the binary model of behaviourism with a triangular representation (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 79) (Appendix 13). While behaviourism presupposes an automatic relationship between stimulus and response, Vygotsky sees artefacts as imbued with meaning, as semiotic in nature, making mediation a conscious process. He uses the example of tying a knot as a mnemonic device to illustrate the semiotic nature of artefacts (Luria & Vygotsky, 1992). Theorising the artefact became the main focus of Vygotsky's endeavour, with the semiotic nature of artefacts leading to his interest in language. Through their use and development of artefacts, humans participate in the historical process of cultural development.

Vygotsky's understanding of human consciousness as social in origin originates in Marx, who took an anti-Cartesian position rejecting the separation of mind and body or individual and society. In this sense, he was the inheritor of the German idealist thinking of Hegel and Fichte, famously standing them on their heads. As Lektorsky (2009) notes, Marx accepts that all phenomena are constructed through cognitive activity, but overcomes the subjectivity of the idealist position by starting not from individual consciousness but the concrete, collective human activity which changes the world. From this perspective, human consciousness begins in engagement with the natural world. Vygotsky inherits this view, arguing that there was no inner world, only an outer. Citing Vygotsky, Engeström (1999) notes humans do not control their behaviour from the inside, but rather external stimuli enable them 'to control their behaviour from the outside' (p. 29). The deterministic nature of this position, and its implication for the construct of free will, have been subjects for discussion in the literature.

In the following sub-sections I will consider how post-Vygotskian perspectives, broadly construed as sociocultural theory, enable the theorisation of the relationship between participation and learning, and how Activity Theory

(Leontiev, 1978), as a development within sociocultural theory, might offer a framework for studying participation in educative contexts.

2.5.1 Theorising participation

In sociocultural theory, where humans' participation in culture and cultural development is itself viewed an educative process, two approaches to understanding the relationship between participation and learning occur. In situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), participation is learning, with learning construed as a social process akin to socialisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Situated learning theory offers an understanding of how individuals become members of a practice community. As an explanation of learning, it fits the apprenticeship context Lave and Wenger (1991) studied; in contexts of formal learning, however, where subject knowledge is prioritised and knowledge is not necessarily for immediate use, the conceptualisation of knowledge communities as 'communities of practice' does not perhaps provide a sufficient understanding. In these contexts Wertsch's (1991) and Bruner's (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) exploration of sociocultural theory have more commonly been resorted to. Here the mediating nature of participation as a process involving interaction with more experienced others, with learning the outcome, is highlighted, emphasising the relationship between learning and (oral) participation.

Wertsch (1991), following Vygotsky, foregrounds the semiotic nature of mediation. As John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) remind us, Vygotsky lists many semiotic means, while according human language special status. Oral language, as language in its most authentic form, takes precedence, with Vygotsky's 'inner speech', the silent, scaffolded enactment of social speech, the child's first thinking tool (Bruner, 1983). As educational theory, these understandings explain the emphasis given to oral language and scaffolding in learning and teaching, with educationalists repeatedly asserting the importance of classroom talk (e.g. Mercer & Hodkinson, 2008). While early claims regarding classroom oracy (e.g. Barnes' construct of 'exploratory talk') were theorised in terms of Piaget's constructivism (Barnes, 1973), later work offered a sociocultural explanation for the educative value of talk (Barnes, 2008), with exploratory talk shifting from being seen as a psychological tool for the individual to try out ideas to a cultural tool for 'thinking together' (Mercer &

Dawes, 2008, p. 66). The importance accorded to oral participation in educative contexts has an extensive literature, much devoted to the exchange structure of classroom discourse (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), and which forms are most conducive to learning. This has led to educative interventions promoting more open forms of classroom dialogue (Mercer & Dawes, 2008).

2.5.2 Activity Theory

Activity Theory has as its origins the Russian intellectual tradition which has sought to establish activity as a philosophical concept which could underpin psychology. In developing Vygotsky's mediated understanding of the relationship between subject and object, Leontiev (1979) introduced the notion of activity, perceiving that psychology should not be viewed in terms of how individuals adapt (or fail to) to society, but rather how 'society produces the activity of the individuals it forms' (p. 48). It was through understanding the structure of activity that this question could be answered. As Bakhurst (2009) observes, however, Activity Theory is now more commonly associated with the contemporary Western concern for a research instrument which is practice-oriented and of use in understanding complex social interactions.

2.5.2.1 The structure of activity and the understanding of object

Bakhurst (2009) locates the origins of Activity Theory in an historical moment, arguing the changing political climate of the Soviet Union called for a more materialist and collectivist approach, leading Vygotsky and his followers to rebuild the general Vygotskian framework around the notion of 'object-oriented activity' (p. 202).

For the purposes of psychology, Leontiev defines activity as:

> In a narrower sense … the unit of life that is mediated by mental reflection. The real function of this unit is to orient the subject in the world of objects. In other words, activity is not a reaction or aggregate of reactions, but a system with its own structure, its own internal transformations, and its own development. (1981, p. 46)

Leontiev (1978) construes the basic structure of activity as consisting of the levels of activity, actions, and operations. To exemplify, Leontiev (1981) considers a hunting party in a primitive society as a collective and institutionalised activity developed in response to societal need. Activities are governed by motives, with the object of the activity (food) corresponding to the

motive (the hunter's need to feed his family). Actions are governed by goals; while individuals participating in activity share the same object and motive, their own actions (e.g. as beaters) may not immediately achieve the object, but rather corresponded to an intermediary goal (e.g. scaring the game). Thus in human activity, goal and motive come apart. Operations are governed by conditions (e.g. the weather or the terrain); they are habituated behaviours that no longer require means-end thinking, becoming automatic. The purposeful nature of subject participation is highlighted, with participation understood as goal-oriented interaction. However, while actions are undertaken by individuals or groups to achieve goals, activity is undertaken by the community, requiring resources (artefacts/tools), a division of labour and regulation (rules). In 'division of labour' the echoes of Marx are clear; however, Leontiev's use conforms more to Marx's understanding of division of labour as a technical necessity rather than a form of social control. Thus the move to object-oriented activity shifted the emphasis from Vygotsky's concern with the actions of individuals and artefacts/tools to collective activity and the object.

As a fundamental understanding, activity is construed as object-oriented or object-related (Leontiev, 1978). Already it is clear that the intended meaning of object is not the first understanding of object in English, as something   which stands on its own, unrelated to subjects, but rather in the second sense of its use, as that to which human activity is directed. Leontiev asserts that, 'The expression "objectless activity" is divorced of meaning' (1978, p. 52). In this second sense Leontiev's understood the object of activity as 'twofold':

> first, in its independent existence as subordinating to itself and transforming the activity of the subject; second, as an image of the object, as a product of its property or psychological reflection that is realised as an activity of the subject and cannot exist otherwise (p. 52).

As Kaptelinin (2005) notes, this understanding of the object of activity has repercussions equally for our understanding of both subject and object; it 'changes one's perspective on both the mind and the world' (p. 5). He observes:

> Instead of being a collection of "mental processes," the human mind emerges as biased, striving for meaning and value … . On the other hand, the world is no longer just a collection of physical bodies, organizational structures, and so forth, but a place full of meaning and value … . (p. 5)

The above understanding of object explicates the proximity of the terms object and motive in Leontiev's thinking as illustrated in his description of the hunting party. Elsewhere he notes 'the object of activity is its true motive' (1978, p. 62). Commenting on the affinity of these terms, Stetsenko and Arievitch (2004) observe that Leontiev introduced:

> the notion of object-motive … to convey the idea that human activities are always driven by something objectively existing in the world, rather than by some events and occurrences in the hidden realm of mental processes or human soul (p. 486).

In construing object as object-motive Stetsenko and Arievitch (2004) identify object-motive as a thing. In this study I will use the term object-motive in preference to object where it seems useful to emphasise the indivisibility of the terms object and motive in Activity theory.

2.5.2.2 Activity Theory as a research heuristic

Sociocultural theory in the tradition of Wertsch (1991) and Bruner (e.g. Wood et al., 1976) has in the field of education provided a direction for learner-centred pedagogic interventions, but has been less helpful in offering an understanding of what might be obstacles to effective tool use. Referring to work in this tradition (e.g. Mercer, Wegerif, & Dawes, 1999), in the context of the development of oracy among primary school students, Fisher (2007, p. 6) notes, 'Such initiatives seek to change behaviour but do not address participants' underlying intentions within the interaction'. In this context, contemporary models of Activity Theory can be useful as they offer a way of looking backwards at what went wrong rather than forward to the means to put things right. Such models builds on Leontiev's ideas, shifting the focus from the actions of individuals to activity by taking into account its collective nature. Edwards and Daniels (2004, p. 107) see sociocultural theory in both traditions as 'a unified set of concepts', yet offering complementary perspectives.

As an approach to understanding complex social contexts, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) see Activity Theory, as offering 'a more holistic, concrete and less idealised approach' (p. 143) than the causal and empirical methodologies common to psychology, which involves looking for what is unique and different' (p. 143) rather what is common to distinct cases. They see this as rooted in the Vygotskian tradition, quoting Luria in his intellectual biography as defending

romantics in science who 'wish to preserve the wealth of living reality and …
aspire to a science that retains this richness' (Luria, 1979; cited in Lantolf and
Pavlenko, 2001 p.143). The hermeneutic underpinnings of Luria's thinking is
clear. Citing Heidegger (1962), Packer (1985) asserts that 'practical activity has
a holistic character: Understanding a particular act is not possible without
understanding the context in which it occurs' (p. 1086). Bakhurst (2009) sees
the perception of Activity Theory as an approach to studying complex social
reality as the second strand of Activity Theory, and the reason for its attraction
to interpretist researchers. He notes:

> I suspect that many who are drawn to activity theory find themselves in
> the following position. They want to look at a particular phenomenon … .
> They recognise that the phenomenon is not easy to capture using the
> standard techniques of standard social science. This is in part because
> the phenomenon is part of a complex system and in part because it
> involves a rich human texture. So what is needed is the right kind of
> qualitative research. But this has to be done properly, so what is required
> is an appropriate theoretical framework that will reveal the structure of
> the phenomenon and enable the researcher to generate and interpret
> data. This is what the second strand of activity theory – activity theory as
> a method for analysing activity systems – provides. (p. 206)

In reading these words, I recognised myself.

For the purposes of formulating a theoretical framework for this study,   I will
briefly review two contemporary approaches to modelling activity, Engeström's
contributions (1987, 2001) and Hedegaard's (2001) model of learning through
action which emphasises the interrelationship between individuals, institutions
and society.

(Engeström, 2001) provides an account of the development of Activity Theory
over three generations. The 1st Generation model refers to Vygotsky's work in
his triangular representation of mediation, commonly presented as the triad of
subject, object, and mediating artefact (Appendix 13). Engeström notes that
while the unit of analysis remained individually based, the mediating artefacts
were cultural   products,   emphasising the importance of this for the
development of the theory in that it 'overcame the split between the Cartesian
individual and the untouchable societal structure' (p. 134). Leontiev's expansion
of the social dimension, which introduced the distinction between individual
actions and collective activity, constituted 2nd Generation Activity Theory.
Engeström (1987) configured this graphically as an extended triangle and in so

doing moved from Leontiev's analysis of the structure of activity to providing a model of an activity system. In Engeström (2001, p. 134), he notes 'Leont'ev never graphically expanded Vygotsky's original model into a model of a collective activity system. Such a modeling is depicted in Figure 2.' The figure, his 1987 model, is included in Appendix 13 and described below. Third Generation Activity Theory met the need for a conceptual tool for understanding networks of interacting Activity Systems, with two interacting activity systems as the minimal model for the 3rd Generation theory (Appendix 13). In this study Engeström's (1987) model of a single activity system will mainly be referred to with the activity to be analysed (students' participation in learning events) conceived as a single activity system (see section 3.2.1.2).

Engeström's (1987) model of the activity system provides a meso-level model bridging individual actions with institutional practice. It is represented as a triangular formation adding a lower level to the core triangular representation of mediation to incorporate the social dimension of community, rules, and division of labour. The subject is constituted as a plural (collective) subject and outcomes are projected from the object. The model can be applied to concrete subject matter, with the terms 'subject', 'tool', 'object' etc. given specific interpretations according to the case under scrutiny. The dynamics of the system can be understood in terms of the contradictions between its elements.

In Engeström's modelling of activity, the different components of activity, constituted as elements within the activity system, are seen to work together to achieve objects - or work against each other. It is the tensions between and within elements and levels which offer an understanding of how obstacles to achieving objects might be understood. Engeström (2001) sets out what Leadbetter (2008) describes as his Activity Theory manifesto: five principles, the fourth of which summarises the role of contradictions, which is elaborated elsewhere (Center for Activity Development research [CADR], n.d.) in a four-level figure. While Engeström's 1987 model   will provide much of the conceptual framework for this study, his theory of contradictions will be fundamental to the interpretation of findings (see Discussion).

Hedegaard (2001) addresses what she regards as the overlooking of cultural context in the modelling of learning within the post-Vygotskian tradition. Citing

situated learning theory, she notes that context has a restricted reach, not extending beyond the institution, and argues that a fuller account needs to be taken of variations in institutions and individuals as these will impact on learning. The result is a representation of learning which sees the tensions within activity as resulting from tensions between the levels of individual, institution and society (Hedegaard, 2001). Hedegaard (2001) argues that context can be viewed from two complementary perspectives: Cole's (1996) 'that which surrounds' and 'that which weaves together'. Institutional practice plays a role in both. In the former, it shapes and interprets societal needs, resulting in the formation of cultural fields (Hedegaard, 2001, citing Bourdieu), which in turn shape institutional practices. (Hedegaard reverses Bourdieu's direction of flow, arguing that institutions are 'concrete' and cultural fields 'constructs'; hence, the priority she gives to institutional practice.) In aligning themselves with cultural fields, individuals are bestowed with cultural 'capital', with their stake in a cultural field (their capital), together with their participation in other cultural fields, having a bearing on how they interpret and participate in institutional activities. Regarding context as weaving together, institutional practices shape an individual's experiences directly, with different institutional contexts constructing the same individuals quite differently. A child who struggles in class may be viewed as competent in the after school club (Hedegaard, 2001, p. 23, citing McDermott, 1980).

In formulating the conceptual framework for this study (Chapter 3), Engeström's (1987) model of the activity system will be the main source. I share Bakhurst's (2009) view that this is a useful model for looking at activities in institutional contexts where subjects, objects and outcomes are reasonably clear and there is a good sense of what might counts as tools. However, Hedegaard's (2001) concept of institutional practice will also be included as it offers an understanding of the institutional role in generating context and shaping individual experience, and in determining activity. It provides the link between the individual and society, keeping in mind Leontiev's (1978) understanding of societal needs as giving rise to the objects around which activities form.

I do not entirely share Hedegaard's (2001) criticism that post-Vygotskian theory has overlooked a broader understanding of context, at least with regard to Engeström's (1987) work. The social dimension, represented in the bottom tier

of his triangle, is expansive with subjects' understandings of community (and, therefore, rules and division of labour) related to their interpretation of object. For instance, Twiselton (2004) who uses Engeström's model of a single activity system (cited to Cole and Engeström, 2003) in her study of initial teacher training, illustrates how trainee teachers may have a restricted understanding of community (the classroom) or expansive (the subject community) depending on how they view their purpose as teachers (object), e.g. 'a busy, orderly classroom' (p. 160). Glossed as 'who matters to the subjects', community can also embrace the other communities or cultural contexts which subjects participate in. They bring these experiences and understandings to the context of the activity, adding to the 'mix' (Fisher, 2007, p. 18). Activity viewed at the meso-level can be seen as a culturally generative process, contributing to the development of local cultures at institutional or sub-institutional levels. This cultural-historical view of culture as dynamic and characterised by tension contrasts to the view of culture, common in the literature on international students, as static, prescriptive and reified. The distinction compares to Holliday's (1999) distinction between large and small culture (see 2.3.3.2).

In the design and procedures of the proposed study (Chapter 3), the understanding of participation inherent to sociocultural theory and the conceptual framework furnished by Activity Theory will play central roles. Activity Theory will be seen to work naturally with the interpretive paradigm and the practice-based orientation of educational research, itself falling into a research tradition of knowledge-for-action. It will contribute to decisions concerning methodology and method. While the proposed conceptual framework for this study will draw from Engeström's (1987) model, the triangular figure associated with his work (see Appendix 13) will not be used in analysis, nor will the analysis be a form of intervention, as it is for Engeström (see, for instance Sannino, Daniels and Gutiérrez, 2009). Rather, my intention will be to build a conceptual framework which can translate to an analytic framework for use in data analysis.

2.6 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on international student participation in Western universities. It begins by considering how the term 'participation' is used (what it means; how it relates to learning; how central it is to the literature)

(2.1). The main body of the chapter explores the two dominant themes: the relative importance of English language competence and national culture in shaping international student experiences (2.2); and the nature and extent of the influence of background culture (2.3). In 2.4, the literature is critiqued as (i) eclectic in terms of purpose and methodology; (ii) under-theorised, with education theory commonly absent; (iii) not always providing an adequate understanding of the relationship between participation and learning; (iv) inclined to prioritise generalisable findings over local understandings; (v) focussed on CHC students to the exclusion of others, and (vi) dominated by the themes of language and culture to the extent that other factors of importance may be overlooked.

The present study, introduced in 2.5, is seen as a contribution to the emerging interpretist literature. It is aligned to the intellectual project of knowledge-for-action (Table 2.1) and will adopt a case study approach. The case is made for adopting post-Vygotskian education theory (in the form of Activity Theory) in the research design and procedures, with the argument made that the model adopted (a combination of Engeström's (1987) model and Hedegaard's model of learning through action) offers a holistic approach, a theorised understanding of participation, and has some explanatory potential.

The research questions are recalled in the Methodology (3).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Adopting an interpretist approach and a case study methodology, this study uses Activity Theory in order to provide a holistic view of international student participation in the research context. This chapter and the following (the Findings) concern the study I conducted in response to the research questions (below) in terms of how I went about it (Chapter 3) and the results (Chapter 4). In Chapter 5 (the Discussion), the research questions will be considered in the light of the findings.

To recall, the research questions the study seeks to address are as follows:

1. What are the experiences and understandings of participants (both international and home students) on a first year undergraduate programme at a UK Business School in working together in multilingual, multinational university classes?

1.1 How do these experiences and understandings contribute to understanding international students' participation in terms of meeting the institution's expectations of full, active participation?

2. How useful is the lens of Activity Theory for understanding the experiences and understandings of non-native English speaking international students in UK university classes?

2.1 What insights does it enable regarding how we might better understand international students' experiences of participation in terms of their understandings of their experiences and those of other stakeholders?

3. What might we learn from this enquiry to better enable international students to meet institutional expectations of active participation?

This chapter will be divided into six principal subsections. The first will consider research paradigms (3.1); the second, the methodological approach (3.2); the third, the method of data collection and the complementary contextual enquiry (3.3); the fourth, data analysis (3.4). The final sections will concern research ethics (3.5) and trustworthiness (3.6).

3.1 Research paradigm

In this section I will offer a rationale for adopting an interpretist approach based on a consideration of ontology and epistemology (3.1.1). I will then consider the appropriacy of interpretism in educational research (3.1.2) and how Activity Theory configures with interpretism (3.1.3).

3.1.1 Epistemology and ontology

The distinction between the two principal research paradigms adopted in educational research, positivism and interpretism, is made in terms of ontology and epistemology. These give rise to distinct methodological approaches and debates about their utility. Positivists prioritise quantitative approaches on the understanding that phenomena can be objectively observed and measured. These can be pursued through methods which can be subjected to the criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity, and facilitate meaningful (causal) claims. Interpretists incline towards qualitative approaches which struggle to meet the criteria of positivism - a topic pursued in 3.6 - and offer little in terms of findings which can be predictive, yet can provide in-depth understandings of context.

In social science research, choice of methodology and method often seems guided by the research project in view, with quantitative and qualitative approaches viewed as complementary. From the perspective of the philosophy of science, however, positivism and interpretism are more often seen as opposing views based on fundamentally different understandings of what can be known. For interpretists, the idea that knowledge can be objective is fundamentally flawed, as knowing is experienced in the mind. This perspective suggests that the fundamental distinction between positivism and interpretism relates to what can be known (epistemology) rather than what is (ontology). Crotty (1998), who holds this view, argues that the contrasting epistemological perspectives need not presuppose a different understanding of ontology, asserting that both may entail a realist view in the sense of there being an external world pre-existing our consciousness of it.

Nevertheless, within the social sciences the debate is complicated by interpretists' arguments that meanings and understandings have no existence other than those constructed through social interaction, that there is there is no external reality. It no longer becomes possible to separate what is from what is

known by social actors, and as this is likely to give rise to multiple understandings, a realist view of ontology becomes difficult to sustain. From this perspective, the shortcomings of traditional positivist methods become apparent. For instance, positivism's exclusive reliance on observation denied access to just those social actors who were in a position to know, as illustrated by the behaviourist (positivist) perspective in psychology. Ayer (cited in Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 88) illustrates this, noting that the raising of a wine glass may have several meanings, none of which are evident solely from observation of the action itself (and, therefore, available to behaviourists).

What makes social science different to physical science is that behaviour is meaningful. Recognising this, interpretists try to understand these meanings through capturing the experiences and understandings of social actors themselves, what Hargreaves refers to as the 'appreciative capacity' (Hargreaves, 1978; cited in Hammersley, 2000), while accounting as far as possible for their own biases. This position took perhaps its most influential form in symbolic interactionalism, as formulated by Mead (Crotty, 1998). Symbolic interactionalism adopted the ethnographic methods of anthropology, which had a tradition of combining observation with informants' views. My own background, both personal and academic (Chapter 1), led me to strongly empathise with this understanding of social scientific research. As will be explained below, however, this study adopts the related methodology of the case study.

3.1.2 Interpretism in educational research

The appropriacy of interpretism for educational studies has been defended in a critical and politicised climate which has called for the 'medical model' (positivist) of evidenced-based research (Biesta, 2007). Yet, among those who share opposition to positivism there has also been criticism on the grounds that interpretism does not go far enough. Carr (1995), for instance, argues that educational research should be *for* education not *about* education. The former position emphasises the practiced-based nature of educational studies, arguing that the purpose is not to build theory (applied science), but to bring educational change. This approach casts educational research proper within the critical paradigm as construed by Habermas (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), where research is itself the act of changing practice. Action research is seen to best fit this

approach. I cannot accept the argument that interpretism is an impoverished approach for education on the grounds that it does not bring change, believing that that findings of an interpretist study can deepen stakeholders' understandings, feed directly into practice or become the basis for recommendations for change in practice and policy. I accept Carr's (1995) argument that educational studies should be *for* education, but argue that this applies equally to interpretism.

A second criticism concerns the status of what social actors know, with advocates of the critical paradigm arguing that interpretists overlook false consciousness by assuming that the choices of social actors are conscious, and by excluding external factors from their account. I see this as an important reminder to interpretists to ask critical questions. In defence of interpretism, Bloomer (1999) argues that it does not overlook the 'habitualisation' of choice (citation to Berger & Luckman, 1967), nor ignore external factors, but rather seeks to understand them in terms of how they are experienced by people.

3.1.3 Configuring Activity Theory with interpretism

Firstly, regarding the traditional understanding of ontology within Activity Theory, it must be argued that from the perspective of the founding troika (Vygotsky, Luria, Leontiev) ontology was unquestionably realist given the basis of Vygotsky's psychology in Marx's materialism. As noted above, however, realism in ontology is not *necessarily* incompatible with interpretism.

Secondly, Activity Theory research in its original form adopted an interpretist approach rather than a traditional experimental approach (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). As noted (2.5.5.2), citing Luria's intellectual biography, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) see him as identifying as a romantic in science in the hermeneutic tradition. Bakhurst (2009 p. 206) makes a similar claim for contemporary Activity Theory, noting its attraction to qualitative researchers (see 2.5.5.2).

Thirdly, regarding the *for* and *about* debate, in both the early and modern tradition Activity Theory has been strongly associated with local contexts and practice. There has been an emphasis on the practical considerations of improving people's lives rather than developing abstract knowledge. The troika

were foremost practitioners rather than academics. Engeström's contemporary work, represented in the Change Laboratory, inherits this tradition (Engeström, Virkkunen, Helle, Pihlaja, & Poikela, 1996), and has some resonance with action research.

Fourthly, I would regard as a strength of Activity Theory the expectation that it can take us a step beyond understanding towards explanation. This is controversial within interpretism which is often seen to be rooted in the distinction between *verstehen* (understanding) and *erklären* (explanation) attributed to Weber (1949), with the latter understood as relating to the causal explanations of the natural (positivist) sciences. Crotty (1998), however, maintains that this is a misunderstanding of Weber, arguing that Weber did not separate understanding from explanation, but rather viewed understanding for the purpose of explanation. It should also be noted that explanation need not necessarily take a causal form. As Bakhurst (2009) notes, Activity Theory does not lend itself to causal explanations.

Regarding the approciacy of Activity Theory to educational research, the argument has already been made (Chapter 2) that Activity Theory, given its origins in sociocultural theory, constitutes a theory of learning.

3.2 Methodological approach

The opportunity to research international students' experiences of participation in an undergraduate module within the Business School at Southtown University presented a ready-made case study. However, in the research process a case study approach was not the only consideration. Here I provide my rationale for adopting this methodology. In the sub-sections I explore two key components of this approach: identifying the case (3.2.1) and theoretical underpinnings (3.2.2). Finally, I outline the structure of the study (3.2.3).

My starting point was the wish to gain a better understanding of why international students in my practice context might not always meet their own and institutional expectations of participation. One possibility was to conduct a survey of all international students in the institution; however, I felt the exploratory nature of the enquiry did not suit a methodology which presupposed quite specific prior understandings; moreover, from the outset I was strongly

inclined towards interpretive research (see above), which I understood as ideally qualitative in nature. My wish to work with Activity Theory further inclined me towards the interpretive paradigm. Despite my own inclination towards ethnography, I reached the view that this was not appropriate for this study. The hallmarks of ethnography, a long period of immersion in the field, participant-observation as the primary research method, researcher assimilation into or close identification with the subjects' community, and the researcher having little by way of theoretical framework to direct enquiry (White, Drew, & Hay, 2009), did not apply in this study. My contact was limited, participant-observation was important but its role complementary (see below), I did not seek to assimilate, and theory directed enquiry.

Yin (2003, p. 13) describes case study as 'a comprehensive research strategy'. He outlines three conditions that a project should meet if researchers are to consider it an option. The first relates to the nature of research questions which Yin classifies as exploratory, seeking enumerated responses, and seeking explanation. I saw my key research question (1) as exploratory and the remainder as seeking explanation. Yin argues that exploratory questions can be addressed by all research strategies, while case study is suitable for explanatory questions. Yin's (2003) second and third conditions suppose the enquiry investigates a contemporary phenomenon and considers multiple variables. Both these conditions applied to this research. As a further characteristic, Yin affirms that case studies are often directed by theory, as this helps in managing multiple variables; this corresponded to my expectations of theory in the research design. Overall, a consideration of Yin's conditions was helpful in orienting me towards case study as the methodological approach.

3.2.1 The case

Circumstances played a role in determining the case. It emerged as a result of a process which began with access to the research site; this led to the identification of modules I was able to research and, ultimately, to the case which would be the object of study. Thus, while the unit of analysis (below) reflects my general research aim, the particular form it took arose as a result of the preliminary research procedure.

3.2.1.1 Access to the research site

The choice of the Business School as the site of the research resulted from my professional contact with the Business School and our shared concern with the participation of international students. In the formation of my research questions, I saw undergraduate modules as an appropriate focus for my study. The Language Centre was embarking on a project aimed at providing specific language support for Business School undergraduates. I was involved in this in a managerial capacity, but would have no direct contact with students. I saw an opportunity to engage in research in an area relevant to my practice while maintaining separate my professional and research roles (see 3.5).

My point of entry was a Senior Teaching Fellow with responsibility for Learning and Teaching. Her position gave her right of approval, and facilitated access to teaching fellows/lecturers (Appendix 1a). The condition that I report my finding to the School at some future date did not compromise my independence as a researcher. In another sense, however, I did allow my research to be steered, accepting the logic that Management - as a discursive field - offered more scope for a study of participation than number-based subjects (Field note - Initial contacts, 11/09). The pedagogy of Management, with its emphasis on group work, would have a defining influence on my study.

The modules I was able to research during Phase 1, two Level 1 (first year) Management modules, one in the Department of Accountancy (module DEA), the other in the Department of Management (module DEM), resulted from meetings with teaching fellows (Field notes – initial contacts, 12/09). In Phase 2, I observed a single module (TPM) in the Department of Management. TPM was the successor to DEM, and involved cooperation with the same lecturer. The phase structure of the study is summarised in Table 3.2.

3.2.1.2 The unit of analysis

The modules I researched were of interest to me only insofar as international students were among the participants. My interest in home students' experiences of multilingual, multinational classes arose from my belief that these would inform international students' experiences. Thus, the case(s) to be studied concerned the international students taking the module(s). Their understandings and experiences of participation in learning events in

international class settings was the unit of analysis. I saw some conflict between this understanding and that supposed by Activity Theory. Engeström's (1987) model of the activity system (the model largely adopted in this study) perceives activity as a meso (or institutional) level phenomenon with the activity system itself understood as the minimal unit of analysis. In this study the modules constituted activity systems with the subject element consisting of students and tutors/lecturers. However, one component of the subject (international students) constitutes the unit of analysis in this study. How can this be justified?

While there appears to be a theoretical minimum to the unit of analysis, there seems to be no maximum as the logic of Activity Theory is expansive, enabling an increasingly broader understanding of context. Theorists present different models of how this might be configured. Hedegaard (2001), for instance, emphasises the embeddedness of activity in institutions and society, while Engeström (2001) sees activity as situated in webs of interrelated activity systems (3rd Generation Activity Theory). There would seem to be no theoretical delimitation to the extent of activity systems, hence to the unit of analysis. A closer reading of Engeström, however, suggests that theory is not the only consideration. In Engeström (1999), for example, what constitutes the unit of analysis is not so much defined by theory as what is manageable. He observes that if the unit of analysis relates to the individual, analysis is reduced to biography, whereas if it relates to society, analysis becomes too general or too detailed, leading to the conclusion that the collective activity system is of 'manageable size' (p.26).

If the criteria relate to what is manageable, this should not exclude an element of the activity system being taken as the unit of analysis, so long as the relations between activity system elements (or activity systems) illuminate the unit. This study does not promise an analysis of modules as activity systems, rather to use Activity Theory to provide insights into an aspect of the subject. In fact, this is not unusual in studies using Activity Theory. The subject element is commonly the focus of the researcher's interest, with the unit of analysis sometimes a sub-component of the subject (e.g. Twiselton, 2004).

3.2.2 The theoretical framework

The study was theory-driven, with theory playing an important role in the choice of research approach and methodology (3.1; 3.2), choice and employment of method (3.3), and data analysis (3.4). For the purpose of data analysis, I sought to derive from the theory a theoretical framework for the study, to consist of categories representing key elements in theoretical models of activity systems (Table 3.1). These derive primarily from Engeström's (1987) model of the activity system with the addition of institutional practice (Hedegaard, 2001). The term object-motive derives from Setsenko and Arievitch (2004).

Community	Activity theoretical constructs deriving from Engeström's (1987) model of the Activity System.
Division of labour	
Object-motive	Deriving from Setsenko and Arievitch (2004).
Rules	Activity theoretical constructs deriving from Engeström's (1987) model of the Activity System.
Subject(s)	
Tool Mediation	
Institutional practice	Deriving from Hedegaard's (2001) Cultural-Historical Model of Activity as Learning through Action

Table 3.1 Framework elements: theoretical origins

In Engeström's (1987) model of the activity system, the interactive elements consist of the core triangular representation of mediation - subject, tool, object - and a social dimension captured in the notions of community, rules and division of labour. It is also important to conceptualise activity systems as embedded in broader societal contexts, as activity itself derives from societal need (Fisher, 2007, citing Leontiev, 1978). In Hedegaard's (2001) model, institutional practice is the element that bridges activity at the institutional level with society. In Engeström's work the model is represented figuratively as a triangle consisting of a core figure and a second, lower level. Interconnecting lines describe the complexity of activity. Because my purpose was to derive a framework which could be developed as a coding frame, I did not find it useful to adopt this mode of representation. The need to assess the viability of this framework for data analysis led to the phase structure of the study.

3.2.3 The structure of the study

Following initial contacts, the research was planned in two phases as summarised in Table 3.2. Phase 1 served to test the viability of the theoretical

framework as a coding frame for subsequent data analysis (Phase 2). Phase 1 data analysis involved matching coded data to the framework categories (3.4.1). Phase 2 constituted the main research (3.4.2), resulting in the study's findings.

Phase	Purpose	Duration	Key research activities
Phase 1	To collect and analyse data for the purpose of testing the viability of the theoretical framework as a coding frame for subsequent data analysis. Contextual enquiry	January 2010-September 2010	**Data collection** (see 3.3.1 & 3.3.2): Focus Groups (FG01 & FG02) **Contextual enquiry** (3.3.3): Observation of weekly classes (tutorials) (approx.30 students each) & lectures of two management modules (DEA & DEM)
Phase 2	To collect and analyse data for the purpose of arriving at findings. Contextual enquiry	October 2010-June 2013 (completion of analysis)	**Data collection** (see 3.3.1 & 3.3.2): Focus Groups (FG03 - FG10) **Contextual enquiry** (3.3.3): Observation of weekly classes (tutorials) & lectures of TPM

Table 3.2 The phase structure of the study

Data collection and contextual enquiry lasted 12 months (January- December 2010), with the analysis of Phase 2 data extending for a further 24 months. Table 3.3 summarises data collection in terms of the description of items, instrument, form, storage, duration and time, and nature and number of participants. Data collection used focus groups as the research instrument (3.3), with two taking place at the end of Phase 1 and eight in Phase 2. The Phase 2 focus groups constitute the data set for the main study. A small survey of focus group participants provided information on their language use and knowledge (Appendix 2). This enabled me to tag participants in the Phase 2 data set and identify them as native (NES) or non-native English speakers (NNES). Otherwise the results of this survey do not form part of the data. The contextual enquiry employed a variety of methods. These results were not analysed and do not form part of the data set of this study; however, they will at times be referred to in the findings. The principal sources of contextual enquiry are explicated in Appendix 3.

Research phase	Descriptor	Instrument	Form	Location	Date	Duration/mins.	No. of participants	No. NNES	No. NES
Phase 1	FG01	Focus Group	Audio and video files	Private PC	Mar-10	69	5	4	1
	FG02	Focus Group	Audio and video files	Private PC	Mar-10	63	5	1	4
	Language background	Questionnaire	Excel file	Private PC	Mar-10		10	5	5
Phase 2	FG03	Focus Group	Audio and video files	Private PC	Dec-10	51	4	4	0
	FG04	Focus Group	Audio and video files	Private PC	Dec-10	45	3	3	0
	FG05	Focus Group	Audio and video files	Private PC	Dec-10	54	6	6	0
	FG06	Focus Group	Audio and video files	Private PC	Dec-10	62	11	5	6
	FG07	Focus Group	Audio and video files	Private PC	Dec-10	49	9	7	2
	FG08	Focus Group	Audio and video files	Private PC	Dec-10	58	7	5	2
	FG09	Focus Group	Audio and video files	Private PC	Dec-10	42	3	2	1
	FG10	Focus Group	Audio and video files	Private PC	Dec-10	61	8	6	2
	Language background	Questionnaire	Excel file	Private PC	Dec-10		61	43	18

NNES: non-native English speaker **NES:** native English speaker

Table 3.3 Data sources

3.3 Method

Yin (2003) argues that to manage data collection involving multiple variables, case studies characteristically employ several methods of data collection. This did not occur in this study which relies on a single method - focus group. While others sources contributed to the enquiry, it was a pragmatic decision to exclude them from the data set; nonetheless, they did contribute to triangulation (see 3.6). This section considers the advantages and disadvantages of focus groups (3.3.1), the design and use of the focus group prompt (3.3.1.1), the data collection procedure (3.3.2), and the complementary contextual enquiry (3.3.3).

3.3.1 Focus groups: advantages and disadvantages

Focus groups have a history of use in Marketing research. Flick (1998) prefers the terms group discussion or group interview when the purpose is to provide a forum for discussion and reflection. This accorded with my interest in this method; however, I became accustomed to using the more familiar term.

As a research method, interviews (individual and group) can provide excellent opportunities for researchers to appreciate the views and experiences of subjects – to walk in their shoes (Spradley, 1979 p. 34). In this research, focus groups seemed preferable to individual interviews in terms of addressing the research questions and the study's theoretical orientation. In addition to enabling participants to express their individual experiences and understanding of the modules, I hoped that the interactive nature of focus groups would allow participants to compare and contrast their experiences of interaction in module activities, bringing into play elements which could be analysed in terms of the model of the activity system. As Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) note, what distinguishes focus groups from individual interviews is that participants interact with each other rather than with the interviewer.

While the main strengths of focus groups is to enable dynamic discussion of topics leading to the co-construction of meaning, there are also some drawbacks to the approach as identified by Flick (1998):

- groups may succumb to group think;
- conversation may dry up;
- dominant participants may suppress less forthcoming members;
- if groups are homogenous or participants already know each other, they may assume too much shared understanding.

Flick (1998) also notes the difficulties in recording and processing focus group data resulting from the number of participants. A particular concern of mine was ensuring attendance; as is reported in some of the literature (V. Harris et al., 2007), poor attendance could blight a study.

3.3.1.1 The Prompt

As an interview schedule I used a main prompt and a series of sub-prompts. I did not question the need to initiate or prompt discussion and understood this as standard procedure in interview research (Flick, 1998). The main prompt took the form of a prompt card which would initiate and orient discussion. The prompt (Phase 2) is reproduced in Figure 3.1. In the wording, I sought to:

- steer discussion towards talking about participation;
- integrate Activity Theory;
- match the understanding of participation to the modules' pedagogic intentions;
- avoid flagging up language and culture.

I drew on the activity-theoretical understanding of participation as goal-oriented interaction; however, as goals presuppose object(s), ultimately participation draws its motive from the object-motive. I understood expectations of full participation as a given in the (institutional) context, with specific, localised understandings of its nature deriving from the module activities as manifest in course documentation (Module Handbooks). I reflected these understandings in the wording of the prompt and sub-prompts. It is against these understandings that participants' experiences and understandings of participation must be viewed.

The prompt and sub-prompts took shape during Phase 1 with refinements in Phase 2 (Appendix 5a, 5b & 5c). In particular, I referred to the Module Description (Appendix 4) of the Department of Management module (DEM) to match the prompt to the expectations of the module. I emphasised participation by highlighting the terms 'collaboration' and 'engagement'. The prompt oriented participants towards viewing learning as collective activity, mediated in ways which could be described in terms of the elements of the activity system. In Phase 2, I added the words 'Your groups and sub-groups will be diverse, with participants coming from different countries and regions', to remind participants that my interest lay in international students (Figure 3.1). This was a difficult decision brought about by discussion in

FG01 (Phase 1) where the dominant speaker spoke off-topic for long periods, dwelling on her experiences with a mature student. In one sense I considered this a finding; however, I did not wish to risk this happening in Phase 2.

The module specifications for this module require you to work positively and collaboratively in groups, managing any conflict arising. Your groups and sub-groups will be diverse, with participants coming from different countries and regions. You are asked to use case study materials in order to produce effective and convincing presentations which you will deliver, or will have delivered, to an audience of peers and tutors. You will be participating as an audience in your classmates presentations, engaging in discussion and asking questions. You will also be preparing a written report which requires a contribution from everyone in the group.
Bearing in mind the diversity of your groups, please discuss your expectations and experience of these activities. Do discuss the aspects that are of importance to you but consider in particular: **Collaboration** (including managing conflict) **Engagement** as audience, in discussion and in asking questions
You should choose one person in your group to chair your discussion. The chair should encourage everyone to contribute and also contribute him or herself. To end the discussion, recall the main topics you discussed and summarise the principal points. Approximate discussion time: 45 minutes. Thank you for participating.

Figure 3.1 Prompt for focus group discussion: Module TPM (Phase 2)
(Appendix 5b**)**

While the prompt was intended to capitalise on the strength of focus group as a minimally structured instrument, I developed the sub-prompts for use if discussion faltered. They were principally intended as ways to explore the main prompt, explicating module-specific understandings of participation, as illustrated in Figure 3.2. They drew from module documents and my growing understanding of the pedagogy acquired through the contextual enquiry; however, their purpose was not to introduce new topics. Their use is described in 3.3.2.

The sub-prompt critical incidents (Figure 3.3), which derived from the work of Brookfield (1995), was a reminder to the participants to reflect. The full list of sub-prompts is given in Appendix 5c.

> **Managing group work**
> How have you set about planning and organizing the group work?
> What difficulties have you encountered and how have you resolved these?
> Why do you think these difficulties arose?
>
> **Collaboration**
> In your groups, have you worked in a collaborative way or more as individuals?
> Can you give some examples?
> Why did you choose to work in the way you did?

Figure 3.2 Sub-prompts (illustration)

> **Critical incidents**
> Have there been any critical moments or incidents occurring during the module
> which have changed the way you see things?
> Please describe what happened.

Figure 3.3 Sub-prompt: critical incidents

3.3.2 Data collection: procedure and initial processing

In this sub-section I deal with sample size and selection, the focus group procedure, and the initial processing of the data (transcription). Cohen et al. (2000) note that one focus group is too few, whereas Kvale (1996) argues that believing large quantity means better is a positivist notion. I sought a balance, recording nine hours of data overall, consisting of two focus groups in Phase 1 and eight in Phase 2. Although the time limit had been set for 45 minutes, I allowed discussion to reach its natural end. Regarding group size, Cohen et al. (2000) see the optimum focus group size as 4-12 participants. In this study, the number of participants varied between three and eleven. The composition and duration of the focus groups is summarised in Table 3.4.

I undertook the focus groups in the final week of the module teaching periods. The invitation to participate was extended equally to international and home students, and while the former formed the majority, the latter had a significant presence (Table 3.4). While participation in focus groups was entirely voluntary, to encourage participation I adopted the following strategy:

- sought permission to announce the focus groups during lectures and tutorials;
- outlined what students might gain from the experience (the chance to discuss and reflect) and pointed to the virtues of the research for future students;

- had students sign for focus groups during the lecture/tutorial sessions and used their contact details to remind them of focus group times and locations;
- promised chocolates and the chance to win a book token to participants.

I did not see the rewards as 'bribery', rather as a modest gesture of appreciation (see 3.5). For each focus group, I bought a tin a chocolates to share (value: £5) and a book token to raffle (value: £10). It was inevitable that there were clashes with other activities, but overall I was satisfied with attendance (Table 3.4). There were limitations to the selection procedure. It favoured proactive students, who were more likely to volunteer to attend, and those prepared to share their views in a public forum. Thus, other voices may not have been heard.

	No. of non-native English speaker (NNES)	No. of native English speakers (NES)	Length of FGs/minutes	Date of FGs
Phase 1				March, 2010
FG01	4	1	69	
FG02	1	4	63	
Phase 2				December, 2010
FG03	4	-	51	
FG04	3	-	45	
FG05	6	-	54	
FG06	5	6	62	
FG07	7	2	49	
FG08	5	2	58	
FG09	2	1	42	
FG10	6	2	61	

Table 3.4 Focus Groups (Phase 1 & 2): composition and duration

In focus group procedure, Flick (1998) distinguishes three level of researcher moderation: 1) 'formal direction' (setting the agenda and initiating/ending the discussion); 2) 'topic steering' (introducing new questions to deepen and extend discussion); 3) 'steering the dynamic' (asking provocative questions and calling on reserved speakers). I aspired to level 1 moderation, but more often performed at level 2. In the actual conduct of the focus groups, I adopted the following procedure with all groups:

1. welcomed participants and tried to put them at ease;
2. requested that they complete a short questionnaire about their language background (Appendix 6) and the official consent form (Appendix 1b);
3. provided the focus group instructions in the form of the research prompt;

4. reminded participants to appoint a participating Chair;
5. switched on the recording devices (see below), and requested they briefly introduced themselves;
6. signalled the commencement of their discussion;
7. introduced sub-prompts by displaying these on a screen when I judged this appropriate;
8. switched off recording devices, thanked participants for attending, distributed chocolates, and drew the raffle.

I saw the use of sub-prompts as a problematic aspect, if the study's interpretive claims were to be respected. I avoided their routine use, only introducing them when discussion faltered or ceased. In Phase 2, the maximum number used in any one focus group was seven (FG03), the minimum one (FG09), with an average of three. No sub-prompts were introduced until the second half of the discussions, and in some instances not until the final quarter (FG07, FG09 and FG10). This mirrored Flick's (1998) recommended practice for semi-structured interviews. I sought to balance the principle of minimum intervention with the practical task of enabling talk. While my preferred sub-prompt was critical incidents (Figure 3.3), used in seven of eight Phase 2 focus groups, otherwise I selected sub-prompts which developed or built on current discussion within the focus group – literally as prompts.

I recorded the focus groups using a video recorder and two audio devices. The recordings of all ten focus groups were fully transcribed with some assistance from Microsoft voice recognition software (see transcript sample, Appendix 7). I used standard conventions (Stubbs, Robinson, & Twite, 1979) for indicating inaudible or uncertain elements, pauses, incomplete utterances, and interjections. Some para-linguistic features were also indicated when it seemed useful, e.g. laughter. Punctuation marks were employed to represent spoken utterances as written text. The quality of transcription was determined by purpose. I did not aspire to the accuracy required by some linguistic research; however, I sought to faithfully reproduce participants' utterances, including their hesitations, repetitions, and re-starts, to provide a naturalistic rendering. In particular, I did not seek to amend or correct non-native speaker language. The multiple recordings were extremely helpful in clarifying understandings. I relied on the video recording for identifying speakers in larger groups, particularly difficult in the 'dog fight' of group interviews (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 107).

3.3.3 Furnishing a rich context

The contextual enquiry consisted of field notes containing my observations of tutorials and lectures, and write-ups of meetings with tutors/lecturers. I also kept e-mail correspondence with teaching fellows and other documentation relevant to the modules under study, such as Module Handbooks (see Appendix 3).

During both research phases I attended the tutorial classes regularly, becoming a familiar presence. As an observer, I focussed on interaction. My approach was naturalistic rather than structured (Cohen et al., 2000), with the object of providing 'thick description' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 260). I took detailed notes *in situ*, recording insights, and adding reflective comments following classes. I communicated regularly with the class teachers (teaching fellows), with conversations following classes. These were collegiate exchanges where my role was more participatory. I also arranged formal meetings with teaching fellows (interviews); again I took notes rather than recorded these encounters, writing them up immediately. We built relationships based on mutual respect, trust, and shared interests, with topics often followed up by e-mail. I felt privileged to be included in these discussions, and respected their confidentiality (see 3.5). Throughout this process, I felt myself being drawn in, and my original attempt to position myself as a researcher who was detached from the research became more difficult. By Phase 2, my own interests and biases began to leave a noticeable mark on the research site and stakeholders. I moved gradually from the detached role of observing-participant towards the more involved participant-observer (Roth, 2009).

Given my empathy towards symbolic interactionalism, I took the contextual enquiry very seriously with the decision to exclude even the field notes from the data set not taken until the late in the research process. I understood there was a practice in interpretive research to use field notes unanalysed (Supervisory meeting, 16, 09/12), but opted against this on the grounds that my approach to observation had been less systematically embedded in the theoretical framework of Activity Theory than the focus groups. Thus the field notes, correspondence and other documentation furnished a rich context for understanding the research data rather than serving as data in their own right.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures are described in this section; firstly, the Phase 1 'pilot' (3.4.1) and secondly, the analysis of Phase 2 data, which constituted the study proper.

3.4.1 Phase 1

The analysis of Phase 1 focus groups (FG01 & FG02) was intended to: (i) test the fitness for purpose of the theoretical framework as a coding frame for the analysis of the Phase 2 focus groups; (ii) provide early warning of problems which might arise through its use, and (iii) help towards elaborating explanations of codes and guidelines for their use. Rather than test the framework in the manner of its intended use (i.e. as a coding frame), I undertook a thematic analysis of FG01 and FG02 and matched the themes to the framework categories. If the framework could capture the themes I would feel more confident that the Phase 2 data would lend itself to analysis in the way the theory supposed.

To analyse FG01 and FG02, I adopted a phenomenological approach, as this allows focus on essential meanings as a means to identify themes (Kvale, 1996). I used Hycner (1985) guidelines; these emphasise bracketing, describing a staged process leading to the clustering of units of meaning into thematic categories (Appendix 8a; 8b). The process was bottom up and inductive, resulting in a progressive reduction of data. To match the thematic categories to the framework categories I also referred to the cluster categories as the thematic categories were often too general. The approach enabled me to identify the main framework categories to which themes related, but also secondary ones (Appendix 8c). I learnt quickly that the framework offered strong categories for classifying the data; however, in no case did a single framework category match all the cluster headings within a theme cluster, and cluster headings themselves could sometimes be classified in multiple categories. I envisaged that using the framework as a coding frame would lead to multiple coding of the data excerpts. In an attempt to limit this, I refined the coding frame to provide clear explanations of codes and guidance for use (Figure 3.4).

Construct	Explanation/Coding directions
Subject (Subject as agent)	Focuses on the participants as individuals or groups. Relates to their subjective experiences, understandings and actions which may contribute to or frustrate the achievement of the object(s) of activity.
Tool (Artefacts as tools)	Relates to the cultural artefacts participants engage with when they participate in activity, and which serve as the tools whereby the object(s) of activity can be achieved.
Object-motive (Object as object and motive)	Relates to the object(s) of activity, in other words what the activity seeks to achieve as a collective venture, and equally to the (collective) motive for activity (the 'pull' of the object), as object-motive constitutes both object and motive.
Rules (Activity as regulated behaviour)	Refer to the rules or norms which operate within the setting in which the activity takes places and which delimit what is acceptable or expected with respect to the behaviour of participants.
Community (Community as who matters to participants)	Relates not only to the institutional setting but also to the other communities present in the mix. In this sense it refers to the traditions, understandings and values brought to the setting by participants by virtue of being members, or former members, of other cultural groups or communities.
Division of labour (Tasks and roles as elements of activity)	Relates to the way activities are divided into component tasks and to the roles and responsibilities individual participants are assigned or assume.
Institutional practice (Institution as agent)	Relates to the part played by an institution in translating societal needs into the objects of activities and into the activities whereby objects can be achieved.

Figure 3.4 Coding frame: explanation of categories

3.4.2 Phase 2

There were two stages to the Phase 2 analysis (FG03-FG10), an initial phase of deductive coding to the seven activity theoretical categories, and subsequent inductive coding of object-motive. How I came to narrow the study's focus to object-motive is described below (3.4.2.1).

Both the initial deductive coding and subsequent inductive coding involved a top-down procedure. As anticipated, multiple coding was the norm; however, this was facilitated by using NVIVO 10 as the coding instrument. Unlike the Phase 1 analysis where transcripts were coded on the basis of units of meaning, in the Phase 2 procedure coding units tended to be larger, with the explanation of codes (Figure 3.4) guiding what should and could be coded at particular codes. In deciding how much to code at a time, I was guided by the notions of 'exchange' and 'turn' (Sinclair

& Coulthard, 1975). An exchange consists of an initiating move and responses, with minimal exchanges limited to two turns. Exchanges are not coterminous with topics, rather topics may extend over several exchanges. Applying this principle enabled long discussion on a single topic to be divided into exchanges, each coded separately. Longer turns (monologic speech) were coded as single items or divided into several codings where topic barriers were crossed. Typically codings ran from 50-200 words at upper levels (stage 1; stage 2/level1). The coding of object-motive at stage 1 is illustrated in Appendix 9. This offers a rationale for coding of excerpts to object-motive and indicates the other categories to which the excerpt was coded. It also shows how participants were identified by tags giving focus group number (03-10); participant number (01-11); gender (M/F), and whether they were native (1) or non-native speakers of English (2). In the Findings (Chapter 4), proxy names were added (see Appendix 2). These were selected randomly using lists of popular girls' and boys' names from an internet site (www.babycentre.co.uk) to ensure that naming was neutral.

The completion of the initial coding to the seven framework categories brought me to a turning point in the research. As a preliminary finding, my expectation that the coding framework would result in multiple coding was confirmed. On one level, this excited me as it drew my attention to the nature of activity: I was discovering how interrelated and inseparable the elements were to the extent that data excerpts could rarely be coded exclusively to one or other category; on another level, it worried me, as the analysis was increasing the scale of the data rather than reducing it, and from a practical point of view I needed a way of making the analysis more manageable. This led me to narrow my focus in the second stage of Phase 2, subjecting only object-motive to further analysis.

3.4.2.1 The analysis of object-motive

There is a precedent in both the theoretical and research literature for focussing on object. While Vygotsky's original model focussed on tool mediation, in Leontiev's reformulation attention shifted to object, with his main contribution explicating the object: its relation to motive and to activity; the intermediate constructs of goal, action and operation; the notions of leading activity and the good life. In the research literature, likewise, there has also been a tendency to give precedent to object. For instance, Fisher's (2007) analysis of classroom talk focusses on orientation to the

object, leading to the conclusion that interventions into classroom practice need to work on participants' objects for engaging in activity.

The analysis of object-motive involved an inductive procedure with the categories emerging from the data. I coded up to nine levels, as illustrated in Appendix 10, with the number of excerpts coded at categories falling to single digits at the lower levels. An early realisation was that the module did not have a single object, but several.

The idea that activity systems may have multiple objects may seem in conflict with the notion of object-motive as a unitary form presupposed in the understanding of activity as object-oriented; yet it is a feature of Engeström's understanding, as is evident in his theory of contradictions (CADR, n.d.). This indicates the complex nature of each element of the system, and while his 3rd Generation model (Appendix 13), which involves multiple activity systems, explicitly allows for multiple objects, it is also clear that tensions occur within elements within a single system, between tools, or rules, or roles, or interpretations of the object. Fisher's (2007) analysis of classroom talk, likewise, presupposes the complexity of object, with the object (learning) given different interpretations. In her study she argues that 'Teachers and children's actions are taken with an object in mind' (p. 17), with misunderstandings arising as a result of different interpretations. Hiruma, Wells, and Ball (2007) use the similar term object in view in their discussion of the role of discoursing in activity, noting that this 'nearly always takes place in the context of 'some larger "object in view," such as reaching a decision for action, constructing a theoretical explanation, or establishing/maintaining social relationships (p. 97). In coding participants' reflections and accounts of their experiences, particularly when coding at the upper levels, I found it useful to keep reminding myself of the question 'What object does the speaker have in view?' Indeed, this notion emerged as the guiding principle for the in-depth analysis of object-motive.

At level 2 (Appendix 10) I identified the main module objects for TPM as: 'collaboration in diverse groups', 'task', 'academic study', and 'professional practice'; these were the objects in view. It was apparent that at any one moment speakers often held more than one object in view, and multiple coding remained a feature of the analysis. At lower levels multiple coding persisted, as references resisted discrete categorisation; they could often be viewed from more than one perspective.

While I identified the categories of object in the data, they had echoes in the Module Handbook and the modules' Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) (Appendix 4).

How the main module objects were manifest in the data is illustrated in Figure 3.5 and Appendix 11. In (A) the except is shown as coded to the object-motive category 'collaboration in diverse groups' but also appears in the analysis as coded to the category of 'academic study'. NVIVO indicates this using coloured coding stripes. (B) shows how the same excerpt appears in the data in the coding category of 'academic study'.

Collaboration in diverse groups	Also coded at
1004M2 What we found in our group particularly - I was in a group with E_ and R_ - what we found in particular, one of the aspects, the hardiest, to sort, um, make happen, so to speak, is time management, obviously because everyone has different schedules and, um, they're available at different times, that was one of the things that was very hard to get everyone to come to meetings at the same time, and give everyone in the discussion some work. I don't know if anyone else found that in their groups or ... **1007F2** Yes we had the same problem. Ended up using a lot of technology instead of seeing each other **1004M2** Yeah	**Academic study**

(A)

Academic study	Also coded at
1004M2 What we found in our group particularly - I was in a group with E_ and R_ - what we found in particular, one of the aspects, the hardiest, to sort, um, make happen, so to speak, is time management, obviously because everyone has different schedules and, um, they're available at different times, that was one of the things that was very hard to get everyone to come to meetings at the same time, and give everyone in the discussion some work. I don't know if anyone else found that in their groups or ... **1007F2** Yes we had the same problem. Ended up using a lot of technology instead of seeing each other **1004M2** Yeah	**Collaboration in diverse groups**

(B)

Figure 3.5 Coding to object-motive at Level Two (Phase 2/Stage 2)

Considering version (A), to arrive at this analysis I would have perceived that the participants were discussing the difficulties in meeting as a group as a result of their different schedules. Here collaboration appears an object in view, affirming participations' identification of collaboration as a module object and leading the excerpt to be coded at the object-motive category 'collaboration in diverse groups'. Since as part of this discussion the participants refer to time management and the

use of technology, both of which relate to study practices, another module object, academic study, is identified or bought into view. Thus the excerpt has also been coded to the object-motive category of 'academic study'. The description of this procedure shows how the construct 'object in view' assisted coding to the principal object-motive categories at level 2 of the inductive analysis of object-motive and in identifying those categories in the data. At lower levels (3-9), by keeping in mind the object in views they served as lens for the ongoing analysis. Appendix 11 provides more extensive illustration of the coding procedure at level 2.

In line with Engeström's theory of contradictions (CADR, n.d.), I expected the codings to reflect the different sociocultural expectations of participants. Emphasising institutional practice, Fisher (2007) makes the additional point that not only do individuals bring expectations and motives to the setting, but settings themselves suppose cultural historical assumptions which create expectations of behaviours. In such complex contexts mismatched expectations are to be expected.

Kvale (1996) affirms categorising as a qualitative procedure intended to lead to an understanding of essential character. I saw this as a sorting process of putting like items together. In coding to object-motive, I expected the breakdown into categories across and between levels to manifest ordered semantic relationships. This was not the case, and rather than impose a system I allowed categories to emerge naturally from the data, adopting what Webb (1999) describes as her 'osmosis method'. I was aware, however, that this procedure made replicability more questionable (but see 3.6).

The nine-level break down (Appendix 10) was not the final stage in the analysis of object-motive. A further stage was necessary in order provide a representation of the analysis which could guide the writing up of findings. To achieve this, I was guided by the need to both simplify and make the analysis more meaningful. This led to the representation included as Figure 4.1, which resulted from the reconfiguration or conflation of some categories and the exclusion of others. Some of the decisions I took are described in Chapter 4 insofar as they relate to deciding which findings were most important to report. This procedure was necessary and inevitable as strict compliance with the original analysis would have led to much repetition, largely a consequence of the multiple coding of data.

While categorisation is a qualitative procedure, Kvale (1996) also notes how it lends itself to quantification. It was clear from my analysis that certain topics were much more frequently discussed than others and it seemed useful to represent this visually. In Figure 4.1, I use the Wordle principle where font size represents frequency. My purpose in using this device is not to assign importance to categories *per se*, rather to provide a starting point for doing so. Thus, frequency of reference needs to be viewed critically; it may overstate or understate, reflect participants' understanding of the purpose of focus groups, or oversights themselves may be significant in the wider context.

3.5 Ethical considerations

In my ethical consideration I was guided by the BERA ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2011) and the Graduate School of Education (GSE), University of Exeter, Ethics Policy (GSE, 2014). Both documents emphasise the responsibilities of researchers towards their research participants and other stakeholders. The underlying principles of respect for the autonomy of participants, minimising harm, and the right to privacy manifest in these documents were reflected in the ethical code I included as part of the 'Certificate of ethical research approval', which was granted this research project for the period December 2010-January 2011 (Appendix 12). In respect to this I can make the following assurances:

All who took part in the research did so willingly, without coercion or obligation. Participants in the data collection (focus groups) were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research and signed a consent form, copies of which were retained by participants and myself (Appendix 1b).

All interactions with those involved in the research were conducted in a dignified and respectful way. Those who participated as research subjects were put at ease through ice-breaking and debriefing sessions built into the focus group format. I expressed my gratitude sincerely and warmly, with the gifts (chocolates and book tokens) no more than gentle persuasion to participate and as genuine expressions of thanks. As Elliot (1991) observes, there can be a conflict between professional ethics and research interests where research is conducted within the researcher's own field of practice. While there was some overlap in my professional and research roles, I ensured this was at a minimum by conducting the research with modules I

had no direct involvement with, and where none of the participants were known to me in any other capacity than their involvement in the research. I was careful not to use in my research confidences which might come to me in consideration of my professional role.

The anonymity of all stakeholders has been respected throughout, including the true names of the institution and its representatives and all those involved in the research in whatever category. All raw data and other documentation has been kept securely by myself on my personal computer or in paper files, with no data or documentation available to others, including supervisors, without names or other means of identification being removed or changed.

 One grey area involved observation of tutorial groups. In these, students did not sign consent forms as this would have been impractical. In the event, I did not use the field notes as part of the research data; nonetheless, classroom observation did contribute towards furnishing a rich context. It was an illustration that the ethical code could not always be easily applied.

In distinguishing ethical principles from ethical codes, Pring (2000) argues that as the former are open to interpretation they offer a better basis for making decisions in the conduct of research. This may involve balancing the conflicting interests of stakeholders where respect for one could lead to harm to another. Malin (2003) instances this in her discussion of classroom research where she speaks of the potential for conflict when attempting to respect the interests of both teachers and students. She opts for the 'lesser … evil' (p. 29), which benefitted the students at the expense of teachers. I also encountered moments where the interests of students and teachers did not coincide, with the latter seeming quite exposed. The anonymity which I could accord them did not always seem a sufficient disguise. As a situated study the institution could not be entirely context-free, but this left open the possibility that prominent individuals might still be recognised.

A second dimension of the researcher's responsibility to others foregrounded in some literature (e.g. Malin, 2003) concerns the principle that research in the social sciences should promote social justice and be seen to have a direct benefit to those studied. This recalls Carr's (1995) insistence that educational research should be *for* education, a position I largely subscribe to (3.1.2).

The above comments point towards the central ethical consideration in social science research which, as Cohen et al. (2000) remind us, involves balancing the pursuit of knowledge with respect for human dignity. Pring (2000) and Hammersley and Traianou (2012) instance scholars who insist that the former must take priority, despite the tenor of the contemporary debate. For Pring it is the 'overriding principle' (p. 145) while Hammersley and Traianou identify it as the 'intrinsic value' (p. 134) of the occupation of research. In marked contrast to the tone of institutional ethical guidance, Hammersley and Traianou (2012) do not believe that researchers should necessarily aspire to the highest moral standards, but rather argue that to do their job properly may require a degree of moral licence. They are critical of the moralism which has construed moral purposes for research and research conduct, arguing that the goal of research is not to bring about social justice or protect participants. In sum, they view moral purpose as a secondary consideration, serving as an albeit necessary constraint on researchers in their pursuit of the knowledge. They offer a timely reminder of the horns of the dilemma, for while there are dangers to their Machiavellian perspective (of ends justifying means), which led to prioritising research ethics, there are also dangers in swinging too far the other way.

A further aspect of the ethical debate within the field of education has concerned the call for a 'democratic' (Pring, 2000) research culture, one which respects academic freedom. This has come at a time when the educational research community has felt under pressure from political and/or bureaucratic agendas which have sought to shape research, leading some to characterise research ethics as largely a defensive practice designed to withstand political pressure (Simons, 1995; cited in Pring, 2000). BERA see it as the responsibility of researchers to draw the attention of sponsors to their guidelines (BERA, 2011), while the literature emphasises the importance of 'negotiation' during the crucial period of gaining access to the research site (McDonald, 1974; cited in Pring, 2000). Although my own research was not sponsored, I was beholden to the Business School at Southtown University which granted my right of access. In my initial meeting, the School's interests were briefly sketched, and I was conscious of the power differential. There were minimal expectations made of me, yet in some sense a contract had been established; indeed, the legitimising of my research could itself be construed as a restriction on my freedom.

3.6 Trustworthiness

The issue of assuring and assessing research quality in non-positivist research has been addressed by Guba and Lincoln in a number of writings (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). One approach, which groups criteria under the umbrella term of 'trustworthiness', is given prominence and in this study has been used to guide methodological procedures and enable discussion of the issue of research quality.

In establishing trustworthiness, Guba and Lincoln (1989) sought to offer parallel criteria to those used in positivist research while keeping as close to their conceptual meanings as possible. In exchange for the positivist terms internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, they proposed credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba, 1981). It should be noted that the new terms arose in an interpretist paradigm (constructivism) that rejected both the positivist ontology (realism) and epistemology (objectivism) (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Thus, Guba and Lincoln argue that internal and external validity, and reliability cannot apply in constructivism since 'realities' have no realist form but only exist as mental constructions: there is no external reality that can be measured (internal validity) nor, therefore, form the basis for generalisations (external validity), and since phenomena are by their nature changing it makes little sense to use stasis as a criteria for goodness (reliability). The final positivist criteria of objectivity assumes an epistemology which allows for a separation of subject and object. Just as the old terms were grounded in the foundational assumptions of the positivist paradigm, so the constructivist criteria were derived from the ontological and epistemological understandings of constructivism.

Credibility concerns the similarity between the researcher's constructions and those of respondents. The key understanding is that the researcher's constructions will mature during the research process, moving towards the constructions of respondents. The techniques for assuring credibility which Guba and Lincoln propose, all deriving from ethnography, constitute the processes whereby ideas and hypotheses are refined or rejected. Transferability relates to checking the similarity between the context of the study and those contexts where the study's finding may be seen to apply. The onus falls on the receiving context to assess the transferability of findings, but this is facilitated by the ample description which is characteristic of

constructivist studies ('thick description'). Dependability is the process whereby the maturing constructions as the hallmark of credibility are systematically tracked and logged. Finally, confirmability is concerned to assure that the researcher's constructions are rooted in the constructions of the respondents and are not just the researcher's imaginings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

In the following, the methodology of this study will be reviewed with these criteria in mind, with a focus on credibility, dependability and confirmability. (Transferability will be referred to again in the Discussion.) Regarding credibility, I found it useful to look beyond Guba and Lincoln for techniques more appropriate for case study research and the focus group method (Shenton, 2004; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). While these authors assert the importance of triangulation as a process whereby understandings can be verified though a consideration of multiple perspectives, Guba and Lincoln (1989) consider triangulation of limited value given the assumption of change in constructivism; they see it as a positivist construct. Stake (1995) emphasises member checking, a technique prioritised by Guba and Lincoln (1985), while Shenton (2004) suggests a variety of other procedures.

Yin (2003) equates triangulation to the use of multiple forms of data collection, which as noted (3.3) was not a feature of this research design. Nonetheless, the richness of the contextual enquiry did offer a degree of triangulation. As Stake (1995) notes, however, triangulation can take a variety of forms, including multiple perspectives derived from the same research instrument. In this study, the focus group design offered a wide variety of perspectives on similar issues, with their similarities and contrasts contributing to the emerging understanding. In this context Shenton (2004) speaks of 'range' as an aspect of triangulation, referring to diversity of informants or documentation. While it is hard to say how diverse my participants were, I was encouraged by the numbers of students who took part in Phase 1 and 2 focus groups (61), comprising 19 different mother tongues, and including 18 native English speakers (Appendix 2). While I appreciate that qualitative research is not a numbers game (Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 1995), I did feel that my participants provided a rich picture of attitudes, needs and behaviours, although I cannot claim that they were necessarily representative of the population (see 6.1 for further discussion). Indeed, range might be construed as a parallel term to positivist notion of 'randomisation'.

Member checking involves cross-checking with respondents that the research findings accurately reflect their views. I considered this procedure impractical in this research. Advocates (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Stake, 1995) note the poor response even when prioritised in research design. Yet the co-construction of meaning implicit to focus groups itself offered a form of member checking, with the focus group participants very often seeking the same clarification as the researcher might; as noted (3.3.1) this is a clear strength of this method. Other means mentioned by Shenton (2004) to strengthen credibility (the adoption of appropriate and well recognised research methods; the development of early familiarity with the culture of participating organisations; the use of tactics to help ensure honesty of informants, and the description of the background, qualifications and experience of the researcher) were clear features of the research design and reporting.

While Guba and Lincoln (1989) emphasise auditing as the process for ensuring dependability, Shenton (2004) proposes a 'prototype model' (p. 71) whereby procedures are made explicit, covering the three areas of strategic planning (research design), the minutiae of decision-making in the field, and reflective appraisal. In this chapter I have sought to provide a clear and detailed account of what I did, the reasons for my decisions, including the considerations I took into account, and the criteria I devised to make research procedures more systematic. As is evident from this account, the direction the research took was shaped by my developing understandings (constructions).

Confirmability raises the issue of researcher bias, a subject mentioned above (3.1.1). In the interpretist tradition, the literature shares an understanding that researcher bias is inevitable. I see positions on a cline: at one end is Giddens' (1976) construct of the 'double hermeneutic', which sees the researcher as interpreting research subjects' interpretations. Research in this tradition is likely to be accompanied by an explicit statement of the researcher's biases and clear attempts in the research design and procedures to minimise them. At the other end, there is the full embrace of the philosophical proposition of Hermeneutic Phenomenology, which asserts the impossibility of separating the researcher's experience from those of subjects (Laverty, 2003). Rather than seeking ways to neutralise researcher bias, studies may make a virtue of it, for instance, by celebrating the empathy between researcher and subjects. The researcher becomes included in the subject of research and

participates in the construction of meaning (Bennetts, 2004). Much contemporary literature has emphasised that researchers occupy positions which are political and ethical, or reflect their emic status. Plummer (2005, p. 361), for instance, questions '[W]hy would one bother to do research were it not for some wider concern or value?' At both ends of the interpretist spectrum researchers may be mindful of the critical perspective, which encourages them to expose and challenge the assumptions which shape their understandings through critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995; Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

I felt my intellectual position was closer to Gidden's (1976). I have been open about my personal and professional interests (Chapter 1), and in the conduct of data collection tried not to steer more than seemed necessary (3.3.2). I sought to avoid co-constructing meaning with participants, aspiring to level 1moderation. Despite Laverty's (2003) critique of Husserl's phenomenology, I found keeping bracketing in mind helped me remain alert to my biases, and my felt need to minimise them.

3.7 Summary and conclusion

This chapter starts by recalling the research questions. It makes the case for interpretism as a research paradigm within the social sciences and in educational studies in particular, and how interpretism aligns with Activity Theory (3.1). The use of case study as a methodology is justified, with key features of the study's design, including the theoretical framework and the phase structure of the study, outlined (3.2). The research method, focus group, is then introduced and discussed, including the procedure for its use, followed by mention of the complementary contextual enquiry (3.3). The analysis of data is then addressed, considering both Phase 1 and Phase 2 (3.4), before turning to the issues of research ethics (3.5) and trustworthiness (3.6). Figure 3.6 provides a summary of the research procedure thus far.

Formulation of research aims and research questions	Literature review on international students and introduction to Activity Theory
Recall of research questions	Data collection Phase 1
Activity-theoretical analysis of FG03-FG08 using coding frame	Data collection Phase 2
Refinement of coding frame	Phenomenological analysis of FG01 & FG02
Refinement of focus to object-motive

Redefinition of data set | Inductive analysis of FG 03-FG08 of object-motive to 9 levels (Appendix 10) |
| Refinement of figurative representation of inductive analysis of object-motive (Fig. 4.1) | |

Key

	Introduction
	Literature review
	Methodology

Figure 3.6 Stages in the research process

Chapter 4: Findings

After briefly introducing Figure 4.1, I will report the findings resulting from the analysis of object-motive for the module TPM. First, however, I recall the research aims.

The study aims to achieve a holistic understanding of international student participation in multilingual, multicultural university classes in the practice context in terms of their experiences of participation, their understandings of issues, and their engagement, with the overall purpose of informing practice. To achieve this, I identified the following priorities: (i) to take account of the views of home as well as international students on the understanding that international students' experiences might be understood in the light of these, and (ii) to adopt an approach which did not lead too readily to causal explanations in terms of English language competence or national culture. The study adopted an interpretist approach, with Activity Theory furnishing the theoretical framework for research design and data analysis. This gave rise to the supplementary aim of exploring the extent to which this theoretical model might deepen understanding. Subsequently, the focus was narrowed to object-motive on the grounds that the research aims could be addressed from this perspective.

As described in the Methodology chapter, in the analysis of object-motive the notion of an object in view (Hiruma et al., 2007) became the guiding principle for identifying categories of object and classifying references. This construct presupposes that when individuals speak of their participation in activity they do so with an object in view. It emerged as practical tool, but on another level was also a finding, helping to bridge meso- and macro-level perspectives (see Discussion).

I worked inductively in my identification of categories, starting with the larger and progressing to the smaller. The subsequent analysis resulted in a detailed breakdown of object-motive at a number of levels (Appendix 10). As a further stage in the analysis, the original table of findings was simplified and re-worked to provide a more meaningful and manageable framework for representing the findings (Figure 4.1). Wordle features were introduced as a starting point for understanding the importance of categories.

Collaboration in diverse groups	Dealing with linguistic diversity	The nature of English language difficulties (competence and confidence)
		Assumptions about and expectations of native/expert English speakers
		Speaking languages other than English
	Dealing with cultural diversity	Prior intercultural experience
		Perception of self and others as cultural actors
		Participants' evaluation of working in culturally diverse groups
	Understanding & Managing interpersonal relations	Cohesive relationships (Friendship & altruism)
		Behaviour not conducive to collaboration (Laziness, individualism & bossiness)
		Levels of engagement (Engagement acknowledged; Engagement questioned)
Task	Group content based task (Report; Presentation)	Workload: amount and distribution
		Language level as an issue
		Academic level as an issue
	Group reflective tasks (Peer review; Participation report)	
	Individual tasks (Skill development report; Examination)	
Academic study	Subject-specific knowledge (Extent and Nature of subject knowledge)	
	Generic skills and study practices	Developing skills and skill use (English language skills; study skills; technical skills
		Learning how to manage the learning environment (personal and group workloads; responsibilities for learning at the student/tutor interface)
Professional practice		

Wordle Key: Font size/Number of references					
Lest than 15	15-49	50-99	100-499	500-999	1000-2000

Figure 4.1 The coding scheme for object-motive for the module TPM

Figure 4.1 indicates the principal codes I used to categorise participants' understandings of object-motive for the module TPM. In the left-hand column the categories are at their most general.   When focus group participants discussed their experiences as students participating in the module, they would

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principally have one of four objects in view: collaboration in diverse groups, task, academic study or professional practice. Moving towards the right of the figure, the columns show how I analysed what focus group participants said about objects in increasingly more specific terms.

While the Wordle feature shows the frequency topics were discussed by participants, frequency of mention is not viewed uncritically, but rather as a starting point for critical assessment. Citations from the data will be used throughout this chapter to support the account, providing examples of participants' experiences, understandings and insights. Where participants are mentioned tags will be used, including the descriptors NNS and NS (non-native and native English speaker). These are meaningful to the extent that they locate participants within the data set broadly as international or home students (1.1). However, careful consideration is necessary regarding when utterances can be seen to represent collective voices. Further details of the composition of focus groups can be found in Appendix 2.

The main body of the chapter will be divided into the four categories of object, Collaboration in diverse groups (4.1), Task (4.2), Academic study (4.3), and Professional practice (4.4), with sub-sections corresponding to the sub-categories identified in the figure.

4.1 Collaboration in diverse groups

In my analysis of object-motive, collaboration in diverse groups emerged as the largest category, giving the impression that this was the participants' main object. The assumption that diversity related to the presence of international students was common; Ethan (FG06NNS), for instance, makes explicit an understanding of diversity as synonymous with international students. Comparing two experiences of group work, one with international students, the other with English students, he states:

> I'm a member of two groups and they are fantastic, even if it's a diverse group full of international students or an English one … .

While collaboration and diversity were undoubtedly principal topics of discussion, collaboration sometimes seemed taken for granted, and a requirement of the group work. Thus, while collaboration was clearly an object, I

was not so convinced it was commonly viewed as a motive. For instance, I labelled one sub-category 'getting the job done' as the references all related to the way participants collaborated in order to achieve particular ends. Here collaboration was not so much the object-motive but the means to achieve it. In the end I removed this category from collaboration (see 4.2). References which explicitly identified collaboration as object with the complementary sense of motive were comparatively rare. Henry (FG10NNS), however, reminds his focus group that there are different objects which may involve trade-off. He exemplifies this by challenging the idea that achieving the best grade possible is the principal object, suggesting that in TPM the main object is 'working in the group' (collaboration); given this constraint, other goals could only be achieved 'as good as possible':

> It depends … how we see the things … . To get … the written report and the presentation done as good as possible, or just like get the highest grade possible… . [W]e discussed about our different backgrounds, English levels … and stuff; you can't change this in one term. So, most important thing in the Management module, I think, was … working in the group, accepting the fact that we are different and, like, achieve our goals as good as possible.

In identifying collaboration as 'the most important thing', Henry constructs the object in the full sense of being both object and motive.

Once 'getting the job done' was removed, I was left with two principal sub-categories: 'dealing with diversity' and 'understanding and managing interpersonal relationships'. These brought into focus the two dimensions of this object: diversity and collaboration. With diversity so central to the module and to my interests, I was receptive to indications from the data that this might serve as a major sub-code. Here the focus was on perceptions of external badges of difference, of their impact on collaboration, and on how they could be bridged. In contrast, with interpersonal relations the focus turned towards subjective qualities, including personality characteristics and individual dispositions and understandings. There was considerable double coding of items in the analysis, necessitating further filtering to avoid excessive repetition in this report of findings.

Participants spoke of diversity primarily in terms of being speakers of different languages and of cultural differences arising from their countries of origin. This led me to divide 'dealing with diversity' into two separate sub-categories,

'dealing with linguistic diversity' (4.1.1) and 'dealing with cultural diversity' (4.1.2). I describe 'managing interpersonal relations' in section 4.1.3.

4.1.1 Dealing with linguistic diversity

Being speakers of different languages was commonly reduced to the binary of being non-native and native speakers of English. These terms were not used simply descriptively, rather typically carried assumptions of disadvantage and advantage. Imogen (FG07NNS), for instance, puts forward as an explanation for the difficulty she experienced in the presentation the fact that her first language is not English:

> Because I'm an international student, I'm from China so my first language is not English, when we do some …. presentation thing … I feel quite challenged… .

Alfie (FG06NS), on the other hand, suggests that being a home student brings with it an assumption of being able to work at a higher level than international students, making clear that this assumption relates to language:

> Probably as a home student, when you've got foreign students in your group, you presume that you're going to be able to the work at a higher level. … It's not saying that they can't do, it's just if they do have a language barrier … .

Alfie's use of the term language barrier was widespread (FG06, FG09, FG10), serving to problematize non-native speaker English and leading to the common perception that the English levels of some international students was an obstacle to collaboration. Molly (FG10NS), for instance, comments:

> I think it's very difficult for people whose English is very good to work with people whose English isn't so good … .

Assumptions of advantage and disadvantage could take complex forms, which could tend towards polarising international and home students. Rebecca (FG05NNS), for example, characterises the native speakers in her group as viewing international students as weak linguistically, using this to rationalise what she perceives as their reluctance to allow international students to participate fully:

> The home students, they always, like, have this assumption that international students cannot speak English… . [T]hey will always say, like, okay for the big part we'll give to the UK students.

The belief that native speakers might sometimes use language as a way to exclude international students was also aired. Phoebe (FG09NS), for instance,

describes how in the early meetings of her group the two English students spoke together in low voices. She describes this as rude as the international students were excluded from the conversation. Her emphasis on her own competence in English makes it clear that she does not see non-native speaker competence as the explanation for the communication breakdown:

> The three first times we met for the teamwork, they would be talking, the two English people between them… in very low voice … without … articulating at all . … I speak Norwegian, which is quite close to English, but I just couldn't understand what they were doing … . [T]hat was one thing that I found quite rude.

There were many other references which suggested that international students at times felt excluded from group work, but often these tended to be understood in terms of cultural differences (see 4.1.2).

With collaboration as the object in view, I coded references to linguistic diversity to two main sub-codes, one which focussed on the nature of international students' language difficulties (4.1.1.1), the other, references relating to the construction of some classmates as language experts (4.1.1.2). A further sub-category enabled me to code references where the use of other languages was mentioned (4.1.1.3).

4.1.1.1 The nature of language difficulties

I divided items relating to the language difficulties of international students into references to competence and confidence. At competence, they related to a wide range of linguistic skills, sub-skills and knowledge. The following exemplify areas mentioned by non-native English speakers regarding their own difficulties or those they reported in their class mates: how to address a lecturer (Chloe, FG03); reading long texts (Katie, FG03); asking and answering questions in presentations (Hannah, FG06; Jasmine FG07); understanding the task brief (Daisy, FG07); using 'proper language' in speech (William, FG08); writing fluently (Maisie, FG08);   constructing syntactically correct sentences; using diverse vocabulary (Phoebe FG09); understanding texts; writing coherently (Max, FG10), and using formal academic language and academic vocabulary (Henry, FG10). Native English speakers also mentioned areas which could be seen as leading to communication breakdown, including understanding spoken language; writing coherently; using correct grammar (Layla, FG08); oral expression, and not understanding text messages and e-mail communications

(Oscar, FG09).

Lack of confidence was sometimes viewed as an additional factor. Daisy (FG07NNS), for instance, suggests that the lack of confidence in his language ability of a member of her group made him reluctant to seek help. She uses the term 'doubling up' to describe how this compounded his academic difficulties, seeing him as hiding behind the language barrier:

> You shouldn't hide as an international student behind the language barrier. We also had one group member … he's international and I think he's not that confident in speaking English. … I think he had double problems, like it doubled up just because he didn't want really to ask what to do… .

Some participants sought to rationalise the imbalance in contributions brought about by differences in English competence or confidence by referring to other skills members brought to group work. Anna (FG10NNS), for instance, suggests her group successfully achieved a balance, with two students providing expertise in PowerPoint, while she and an English student focussed more on language.

4.1.1.2 Expectations of expert speakers

The linguistic expertise of native speakers seemed to be taken for granted by many non-native speakers. Jasmine (FG07NNS) makes this explicit when she describes her group's dismay when the only native English speaker in their group fell sick before the presentation:

> The day before we presentation, our only native speaker he was ill, and we were so shocked, we didn't know what to do … . [Y]ou became really stressed when the only guy who can speak this language properly, he was ill. So like for international students it was so hopeless.

Native speakers (or other expert users) were commonly looked on as people you could ask for help with language. Katie (FG04NNS) speaks of the advantages of having British group mates, highlighting that she could get help from them in her writing:

> In my group, besides me all others are British … . Somehow I can ask them to help me to proofread my composition.

For some international students there seemed to be an expectation that help with language would be forthcoming and, indeed, at times it seemed this was viewed as indispensable, as Jasmine's (FG07NNS) indicates:

> It's really good … we have … native speakers … if you write something, right, they can correct your language. It's really important 'cos for us it's like writing something in another language is like killing us.

Expert speakers sometimes seemed happy to provide help. Layla (FG08NS), for instance, speaks of how her group supported an international student who had difficulties in her spoken language and written work:

> Often when we're having a conversation she can look a bit lost, and I tried to slow the conversation down and explain things that she doesn't understand, and … we look through the work as a group, so, if there is any language, grammar mistakes, we'll happily correct it … .

There were, however, also tensions around being cast as an English expert, with the altruism expressed by Layla (see also 4.1.3.1) sometimes tempered by a sense of frustration resulting from the extra work involved, while the additional responsibility might be perceived as having a negative impact on group relations. Molly (FG10NS), for instance, acknowledges the value of language help to non-native speakers and indicates that she does not share the view that having weaker students in the group leads to poorer work, a concern of some (see 4.2), rather emphasises the extra work involved in providing support (see 4.2.1.1) and the change in relationships. She does not seem comfortable with taking on a role which she characterises as the responsibility of a teacher:

> They are benefiting … but they are also not so much dragging you down, but you have to work so much harder to drag them up … like, go over their work, check it like you're the teacher …. .

This frustration might be compounded by a feeling that the help provided was not always acknowledged. Scarlett (FG10NS), for instance, describes a group mate's response when she and another group member were correcting her work during a meeting:

> When we were re-reading the report altogether today, I was correcting it with a friend … and a girl who had actually written that part wasn't even like paying that much attention. I was like, 'Could you help us here?' … So that gets quite frustrating.

International students, however, could be fulsome in their appreciation of the help they received. Matilda (FG07NNS), for instance, speaks of the kindness of British students, who took pains to be understood by international students:

> We have British people in our group which … always really tried to help the international students … [T]hey really talk slowly in order to be

understood by me and the other international student. [W]hen we don't understand something, they explain us in really better way.

4.1.1.3 Speaking languages other than English

Direct references to languages other than English did not usually go beyond participants identifying their own first language or those of members of their work groups. There were some references to the propensity of students to mix or bond with those with whom they shared a language. This might be viewed as counter-productive to improving English (William, FG08NNS) or occur in contexts where language choice was seen as excluding others. Lucy (FG06NS), for instance, reports how two members of her own work group persisted in talking in their own language. She describes this as setting up a language barrier and as being counter-productive to collaboration:

> In my group … there's two guys from Russia and … they often speak together in their own language, and that leaves … the rest of us obviously not understanding what they're saying … [I]t really does make … collaboration within the group harder obviously because there is that language barrier… .

The way language could be seen to be deliberately used to exclude others could trigger quite extreme responses when compounded by other factors. Oscar (FG09NS), for instance, relates encountering groups of international students on campus, describing how they do not give way to others, which he experiences as threatening:

> Quite a few of the international students … walk around in massive blocks together … speaking in their native language … . [I]t's actually quite frightening 'cos they don't move out of the way; you have to suddenly jump out of the way … .

4.1.2 Dealing with cultural diversity

The participants seemed at ease in talking about culture in broad terms which equated culture to national groups. They seemed to accept this as a meaningful way to characterise their differences and relevant to the challenges collaboration presented. They did not seek to refine categories or complicate them with other constructs (e.g. class; gender), rather inclined towards still broader cultural groupings defined by region. Thus Benjamin (FG10NNS) distinguishes between Europe and North America, on the one hand, and Asia on the other (4.1.2.2). At 'dealing with cultural diversity' I coded references into

those where participants spoke of their prior experiences of cultural diversity (4.1.2.1); those relating to participants' perception of themselves and others as cultural actors (4.1.2.2), and those where participants evaluated their experience of collaborating with others across cultural divides (4.1.2.3).

4.1.2.1 Prior intercultural experience

Many international students mentioned studying at an international school, or having undertaken a preparatory year on a foundation programme for international students. Max (FG10NNS), for instance, assumes that many participants in his focus group had studied 'in a western, American-style high school' , an assumption affirmed by several group mates. While in these instances students could be considered to have had prior experiences of international educative contexts, this was unlikely to have included contact with UK students, as mentioned by Nicole (FG06NNS). Some international students, however, did mention having studied previously at a UK university. Charlie (FG03NNS) describes the year he spent at another UK university as 'kind of similar' to the current experience.

Home students who participated in the focus groups did not mention comparable experiences, although native English speaking international students may have shared this background (e.g. Maya FG10NS). Nor did home students speak of experiencing local contexts which were multicultural in nature. Indeed, my overall impression was that the home students who participated in the focus groups had had little prior experience of intercultural contexts. For instance, Jacob (FG06NS) comments:

> I haven't really worked with international students before, just English students at my school.

Molly (FG10NS) reports her experience at an English boarding school, describing the minority of international students as isolating themselves from the English majority:

> There was about six Chinese girls in my year, and they just separated themselves off completely, did their own thing.

Some home students, however, did mention broader experiences. Alexander (FG08NS), for instance, describes having lived in France and Spain and being fluent in both French and Spanish.

4.1.2.2 Perceptions of self and others as cultural actors

The main theme here was the extent membership of cultural groups was a barrier to collaboration. Many focus group participants expressed the view that students gravitated towards those they were most akin to culturally. Chloe (FG03NNS) notes, '… the first day I just found that British people hang out with the British people …', while Maya (FG10NS) observes, 'my buddy … she's Chinese and she just hangs out with Chinese people; just one Russian friend and they just hang out with Russian people …'. This was perceived to go beyond sticking within a language group. Alexander (FG08NS), for instance, notes:

> My house mate is from Hong Kong, so his first language is English [sic], and he spends all of his time with his friends from the Hong Kong Society.

While these observations seemed to have general applicability, most references related to two nationalities: the English (British) and the Chinese.

The perception of the English as reluctant to mix with others was implicit in many comments made by international students, with explicit comments not unusual. Maisie (FG08NNS), for instance, notes:

> I really tried to talk with English people … and they were saying, ' Hi, hi', that's it. Even in the class usually, 'Hi, hi'… . They don't want to talk to you … .

William (FG08NNS) observes: 'Collaboration is more difficult with English students'.

Some international students apparently sought to understand why home students might be reluctant to mix. Phoebe (FG09NS), for instance, uses the term 'culture shock' to capture her understanding of the home student experience of finding themselves in an international classroom. She notes:

> I understand it can be a cultural shock for some to see so many new people… .

In describing his own experience, Oscar (FG09NS) conveys how this could be perceived by the unprepared home student:

> Sometimes we are a bit wary of international students. We think, 'Well I've now been made to work with these people, who, never been subjected to it before … .' I was quite shocked having to work with such a wide, culturally diverse group, I wasn't expecting it.

British students showed awareness of the perception of them as reluctant to collaborate. Alexander (FG08NS), for instance, responds ironically to William's (NNS) comments about a group member who rarely attended meetings, asking 'Is he British?'. More commonly, however, the home students who participated in the focus groups tended to construct themselves as proactive group members, with a mission to support international students. Lucy (FG06NS), for instance, describes how she rose to the challenge of working with international students, taking a leading role:

> At home I never, sort of, like a leader … whereas now I feel here I have taken more of a leading role … encouraging engagement from the … international students. I think it just helps if you, sort of, get them involved more, rather than expect them to make themselves involved.

Equally, there were references by international students to the support they received from home students.

Just as home students were seen to have a language advantage they were also perceived as advantaged by virtue of being home students, resulting in particularly high expectations of them. At times, some international students did not seem aware that this could be an issue as is illustrated in an exchange between Charlie (FG03NNS) and Chloe (NNS). Following Charlie's confession that in his group a home student did much of the work, Chloe asks whether he felt this was fair. Charlie's response suggests that he does not see this as problematic:

> **Charlie:** Actually, … he does almost everything.
> **Chloe:** But … does he care at all?
> **Charlie:** Not really. …
> **Chloe:** Did you say something to him or not? … Did you find, like, it fair that he's actually doing [everything] ?
> **Charlie:** Actually, I asked him … to give us some more work, but he just said, 'It's OK.' And so I have nothing more to say. Pretty good guy.

The perception of Chinese students as reluctant mixers was commonly voiced by British and some international students. They were often characterised as silent and non-participative in group work. Chloe (FG03NNS), for instance, describes a Chinese student in her group as never speaking at meetings and choosing to communicate by e-mail:

> There's this girl from China who is a like really, really shy, so she never speaks … [S]he always sends me like these massive e-mails … to say, 'Like, I'm really sorry I never talk '.

Anna (FG10NNS) expresses frustration at the Chinese girls in her group, characterising them as too willing to accept the ideas of others:

> The Chinese girls, like, if I would say something … they would never challenge me, or say if they thought what I said was wrong … . They were basically, like, 'Yeah, okay.'

Her focus group companions interpret this in cultural terms, relating it to freedom of speech. Thus Molly (FG10NS) comments, 'They're punished in their culture if they speak against the law'.

The view of Chinese students as reluctant to collaborate was sometimes broadened to include other Asian students. Participants in FG10, predominantly from Europe and North America, seemed to agree that there was a bigger cultural divide between the UK and Asia, on the one hand, and the UK and Europe/North America, on the other:

> **Benjamin** (FG10NNS): For people from mainland Europe and probably America as well, it's probably not as much as a cultural difference, but if you come from the Asian countries I think it's a very big cultural difference and it's a very big change that you have to face.

Jasmine (FG07NNS), herself Chinese, put forward an alternative view of why Chinese students might be perceived as non-communicative. Speaking of her own background, she explains that as a talkative child she was exhorted by her parents to talk less and do more. She sees talking little as reflecting a culture which respects actions more than words. Yet, this explanation is rejected by Imogen (FG07NNS), who denies that this is 'real Chinese culture', adding 'my parents … never say that to me'. Imogen puts students' behaviour down to their own individual temperaments (see 4.1.3.3).

4.1.2.3 Evaluating working in culturally diverse groups

I coded to this category participants' evaluation of working in culturally diverse groups. When compared to friendship groups, where individual preferences governed membership, they were viewed favourably. Friendship groups were often seen as more conducive to socialising than study. Emma (FG06NS), for instance, contrasts a friendship group with her TPM group, noting:

> The other module you could choose your own group, so obviously everyone has naturally gone with friendships groups, which is great because you're friends … but meetings aren't that productive because … you're chatting … .

However, when it came to specifying the benefits of diverse groups, participants seemed less certain, weighing the pros and cons. Jessica (FG04NNS), for instance, at first mention, responds negatively, noting that conflict arose when individuals refused to give way to others:

> I find working as a group quite difficult because people are from different backgrounds … [T]he way we think and our culture is very different and … it does sometimes lead to conflicts because some might think they are right and they do not accept that they are wrong.

Later she argues that the differences between members enabled their group to produce high quality work, highlighting the importance of disagreement in this process. Jessica's change of view indicates her switch in focus from collaboration to the outcome of group work.

The question whether conflict could be beneficial underlay other discussions, as illustrated in an exchange between Daisy (FG07NNS) and Abigail (NNS). Daisy describes encouraging a shy international student to participate, supporting him and expressing acceptance of his ideas. She justifies this on the grounds that it was conducive to harmony. Abigail challenges Daisy, arguing that this exemplifies groupthink, arguing that acquiescing to one point of view is not the purpose of group work:

> **Daisy:** We tried to get him into the group, like 'How do you feel?, and 'What do you think about that?', and 'That's OK, that's fine, yeah, I agree' … .
> **Abigail:** Yeah, but what you describe is just what we shouldn't do, like group thinking. I think we discovered you shouldn't do it, like you shouldn't agree with everything.

Other participants saw the benefits of working in diverse groups in terms of complementing each other's knowledge and skills. Benjamin (FG10NNS), for instance, emphasises the increased resources available to groups:

> We are different people from different cultures that think in a different way … and then maybe bring new ideas to the table.

Dylan (FG10NNS) evokes an idealistic image of diverse groups as forming harmonious relationships where members pooled their assets:

> I think groups should be, like, different people … it should be, like, from countries, from different countries, from different cultures, because … they have things that can help another, like their team mates.

The benefits of learning about other cultures was also mentioned. Lucas, for instance, (FG09NNS), uses the term 'enriching' to capture the sense that this cultural knowledge added value to the module. These instances illustrate that in formulating the advantages of collaboration in diverse groups, collaboration rarely seemed the only object in view.

In groups where there were students who were weak linguistically or academically, participants might question whether diversity was a price was worth paying; here again there was evident tension between collaboration and other objects. Max (FG10NNS) puts this starkly when he challenges his group to state the advantages of working in an international group:

> **Max:** Did anybody get any advantage from having an international group?
> **Maya** (NS): Yeah. We had a lot of fun with the video.
> **Max:** No, no, I mean … academically, not like we had fun.

Max juxtaposes the ideal of collaboration to the problematic reality, as he sees it, of groups made up of students who are not at the same level:

> There's a lot of … optimism within the thing, but I think it causes some major imbalances between students.

Throughout these exchanges, Max presses his focus groups to question the virtue of imposed diversity. In so doing, he pushes his focus group mates to acknowledge their objects.

4.1.3 Understanding and managing interpersonal relations

This category brought to the fore subjective qualities, consisting principally of two sub-categories dealing with personality characteristics. The first related to dispositions toward others which were conducive to cohesive relationships, the second to personality characteristics which tended to be viewed as divisive. The first category was sometimes expressed through metaphors such as 'bonding' and 'gel' (verb). Erin (FG06NS), for instance, notes:

> We had a really successful initial presentation and we got on really well. We … kind of gelled … .

In this category, the majority of references related either to enjoying each other's company (Friendship) or the encouragement and support they offered each other (Altruism). I describe these in sub-section 4.1.3.1. In the second category, the main sub-categories I identified were laziness, individualism and bossiness (sub-section 4.1.3.2). I also identified a third sub-category where

references seemed to refer not so much to the qualities of individuals, rather to the nature of their engagement (4.1.3.3).

4.1.3.1 Cohesive relationships

Participants distinguished between emerging friendships and pre-existing ones. They seem to identify TPM as a module where friendships could develop. Nicole (FG06NNS) puts this in context by comparing her experience in Politics to her experience in Management:

> In Politics, I don't really know anybody in my tutorial … in our [Management] tutorial group, on the first day I knew everyone's name.

Friendships, however, did not necessarily emerge instantly, as Daisy (FG07NNS) notes:

> *In the end it* was a good group; now we're friends and we are smiling when we see each other. (emphasis added)

Some participants mentioned ice-breaking activities which helped their group bond. Amelia (FG04NNS) describes how her work group made cookies together to distribute to classmates as part of their introductory presentation. She links cooking together with forming a good group, noting it was something they could all participate in:

> **Jessica** (FG04NNS): Were you the group with cookies?
> **Grace** (NNS): It was shown you were … well prepared ... it was fantastic.
> **Amelia** (NNS): Yeah … because we cooked together … I think it really helped us form a good group. Like everyone was in it together … .

Enjoyment of each other's company was the quality most usually associated with friendship. Participants reported how it made working together fun and the work enjoyable and more effective. Jessica (FG04NNS), for instance, links the importance of enjoying each other's company to working well as a group and being productive:

> Having a good relationship you enjoy the work you were doing, because you are doing it with people you actually like to be around, and I think that could also result in … a good outcome.

Developing friendship was related to identifying what group members shared in common. Nicole (FG06NNS), for instance, notes:

It really helped … find the things we had in common. I mean even if we worked very differently … no matter what we've always had so much fun working together.

Sharing a sense of humour was quite often mentioned as a way differences were bridged. Speaking of his group of several different nationalities, Jacob (FG06NS) emphasises how a sense of humour could be instrumental in breaking down barriers and enabling productive collaboration:

Our group sense of humour was one of the things which destroyed all the barriers, because we spent half our meetings … taking the mick out of Thomas [NNS]. I think that's why we were so productive.

Friendships which formed in groups might also extend beyond the working context, with beneficial consequences for study. Ethan (FG06NNS), for instance, describes how going out with group mates increased his confidence in speaking English. Yet, Ethan's experience cannot be viewed as the norm, with many students reporting very little social contact outside the classroom. Indeed, some participants seemed to regard the separation of academic and social life as characteristic of the institution's culture. In an exchange between Maisie (FG08NNS) and Layla (NS), this perception of the British university is contrasted to Russian university life:

Maisie: You work in a group with this person and do you want to convene with her … out of the group, out of the academic life?
 …
Layla: We don't tend to have a social life as a group; I mean we're very happy to meet up and work.
…
Maisie: I'm asking this 'cos in Russia are we have different system. For example, if you need to make it group project, all the group goes to someone's house, eating there like informally.

Moreover, the international students in FG08 seemed to concur in the view that English students tended to be unfriendly (see 4.1.2.2). Thus friendship might sometimes be viewed in culturally reductive terms.

As mentioned (4.1.1.2), participants quite frequently reported altruistic behaviour. This quite commonly related to the support given by home students to international students, in particular to the sense of 'mission' some home students might feel towards international students; however, it was more often international students themselves who showed greater empathy towards other

international students, often describing how they had helped group mates or making the case for support. Phoebe, for instance, notes:

> I actually know what it is to come from a completely different country and just come here, cut the links with everything and just start a new life. It's quite hard and even more for them who are very far away from their home country … I think we really should understand the challenges they also face.

Some native English speakers also empathised with international students, with Maya (FG10) perhaps showing most understanding. She observes how coming into this environment could erode international students' confidence. But Maya was herself an international student (from Canada) and identified as one, describing herself repeatedly as 'foreign'. In expressing her own altruism, she suggests that altruism could itself be a motive, bringing its own rewards:

> Today we handed in our report. It felt amazing that I had contributed so much to this, and that I helped from the first day we met with the assignment.

4.1.3.2 Behaviour not conducive to collaboration

I group the references in this section under the categories of laziness, individualism and bossiness.

In general, participants seemed cautious in their use of pejoratives to describe work group members. Of these, laziness was perhaps the most negative, with some individuals seen as not doing their fair share for no good reason, often with the added implication that others had to work harder (see 4.1.3.3). Laziness might be alluded to without use of the term or softened in some way. Abigail (FG07NNS), for instance, describes a member of her group as not coming to group meetings 'because he was sleepy', while Maya (FG10NS) adds a qualification ('they're clever but they're lazy'). In other instances its use was self-deprecatory. Rebecca (FG05NNS) describes herself as 'lazy to participate', while Jacob (FG06NS) and Alexander (FG08NS) make references to their own kind - the English - as lazy.

While comments which might tend towards branding other nationalities as lazy were absent, this type of discourse did seem at times just under the surface, as reflected in some defensive responses. Nicole (FG06NNS), appealing for greater tolerance towards international students, for instance, notes, 'sometimes you can mistake that when people are shy that's laziness', while

Max (FG10 NNS) challenges Molly (NS) for her readiness to explain the behaviour of the weak international students as laziness:

> **Max:** There is an abyss between people who have read chapters and people who haven't … .
> **Molly:** People who are lazy and people who aren't, basically.
> **Max:** Not necessarily … [Y]ou couldn't … think about it as laziness.

Laziness was also discussed in other ways. For instance, a quite commonly expressed view was that collaboration was itself an antidote for laziness. William (FG08NNS), for instance, notes, 'you stop to be lazy and you try to interact with other people'.

Individualism was referred to in various ways, however always in the context of providing an explanation for why collaboration might be or had been problematic. Poppy (FG07NNS), for instance, describes the individualistic behaviour of one member of their peer feedback group, who she depicts as so unwilling to collaborate with his own work group that he went to the lengths of duplicating work:

> He's really individual … . [W]e got two feedbacks; we got feedback from the group except for him [laughter] and then we got his feedback, him on his own, signed by his name.

Being critical of the work of group mates seemed a defining characteristic of individualistic students. For instance, a principal concern for Max (FG10NNS) appeared to be fear that weaker students in his group would lower his grade (4.2), whereas Charlie (FG03NNS) notes that 'for some topics … if I do everything by myself … maybe becomes better'.

Individualism might be seen as rooted in prior learning experience. Charlie (FG03NNS) refers to his previous university experience, which did not involve group work; Oscar (FG09NS) to his 'background'. There was also awareness that individualism might be counter-productive; for instance, Oscar sees his individualism as something he needs to address, a rationalisation which has in view the distant object of the workplace (4.4):

> I'm used to … working as an individual, so group work … is completely different for me. I don't enjoy it … but it's a core life skill, because … when you're going to be thrown into the real world … we are going to be subjected to that … .

Participants did not often relate individualism to national culture, although William (FG08NNS) suggests that British students 'prefer to write and work on their own'. Freya (FG06NS) suggests that the TPM culture itself was competitive, contrasting this to her own department (Modern Languages); she alludes to the cultural distance which could exist within the institution:

> It's very much every man for himself … . I'm doing languages, and everyone is just so friendly and so wants to work together … and that difference between Management and my actual course was just completely shocking at the beginning.

Some participants related individualism to unsociability. Rebecca (FG05NNS), for instance, states, 'I don't really like group work … because you have to meet with people'.

Participants used the term 'bossy', or referred to behaviour which could be seen to manifest bossiness, to draw attention to leadership styles which were in danger of becoming counterproductive for collaboration. Bossy types showed awareness of the difficulty of getting the right balance; Chloe (FG03NNS), for instance, in describing how she tried 'to get people together' notes, 'sometimes I feel like I am the bossy one', whereas Nicole (FG06NNS) seems to be excusing her own bossiness by making a joke about it:

> I think in the end he was just very scared of me. [laughter] …. I might have threatened him a couple of times. No, joking.

Participants with bossy tendencies often construed themselves as highly motivated. Chloe (FG03NNS) says 'if I have a goal I'd just go for it', whereas Nicole (F06NNS) observes, 'I know where I want to be in this life'.

There was some discussion about how far you should go with group members who seemed reluctant to collaborate, taking into account the trade-off between group harmony and fair distribution of work. Abigail (FG07NNS), for instance, describes what happened when her group decided not to confront a group member:

> We were thinking of talking to the person …., like seriously talk to him, but then we decided not to, just because we didn't want to make any problems … [We] just put up with him. Just, if he doesn't come, 'okay, we'll do the work'.

Abigail points out how difficult it is to achieve a balance between sympathy and admonishment, noting:

> I really didn't know when to be sympathetic and when to be like, 'You didn't do your work'.

Taking on leadership reluctantly was sometimes associated with bossiness, division and group dysfunction. Oscar (FG09NS), for instance, emphasises his group's need for a leader and describes how he reluctantly took the role. He reports how his group verged on the dysfunctional as a result of conflict between himself and another member. In his own narration, his leadership style does seem heavy-handed:

> I was acting as leader, but … [student named] said something completely different … . [T]he two messages conflicted …. [I]t shows there was a … leadership clash … . [I]t actually really made me … angry. [T]hey [other group members] were threatening not to work … anymore … . I did say to them, 'if you guys don't sharpen up … then I can only help us so much … . I can't do everything.'

In response, Phoebe (FG09NNS) draws attention to the tensions in group work between collaboration and task accomplishment. She notes:

> You shouldn't really have one leader. That's the problem. It's a group work.

4.1.3.3 Levels of engagement

The varying levels of engagement sometimes seemed one of the most prominent aspects of participants' accounts of their group work. As is evidenced throughout this chapter, there were many references to the behaviour of proactive group members, with some of the more vocal participants in the focus groups giving the impression of being proactive members of their work groups, even to the point that the disengagement of some spurred further proactivity in others. Molly (FG10NS), for instance, notes:

> When people don't bother coming with the work … it made me want to do it even more, 'cos I don't want to be like that, you know, like, when people don't really bother coming, don't bother doing things, and are just lazy.

However, there was a parallel discourse which emphasised the collective nature of group work, with the underlying assumption seemingly that group work was predicated on equality, with this quality something to celebrate. Charlotte

(FG05NNS), for instance, states: 'I really like my group 'cos we are equal'. This principle was shared equally by proactive group members, albeit with evident tensions (4.2.1.1). For instance, Molly (FG10NS), while critical of others' engagement, idealises group work as consisting of individuals with different strengths, enabling them to work in different areas, and preventing the emergence of a single leader. Molly emphasises the importance of the first meeting as the time when the group could get a sense of what each could offer and provide a basis for organising the work.

In several work groups a collective leadership did seem to emerge, with participants' accounts giving the impression of collaborative engagement and the sharing of responsibilities and work. Some representatives of such work groups attended a focus group together. For instance, when Benjamin (FG10NNS) talks about his experience in scheduling meetings, it is clear from his use of 'we' that he saw this management task as a collective responsibility, to include Molly (NS) and Maya (NS):

> I was in a group with Maya and Molly. [W]hat we found … the hardiest … was … to get everyone to come to meetings at the same time … .

Participants who had been in successful groups quite commonly reported parity of engagement across the group, apparently allowing for individual differences and differences in roles. In FG06, Nicole (NNS), Jacob (NS) and Thomas (NNS) were from the same work group. Nicole was a dominant personality, Jacob the only home student, and Thomas struggled to make himself understood in English; yet, they seemed to agree that all members of the group had engaged well and played their part. Thomas sums up, noting, 'We was sharing information. Success!'

Nonetheless, this ideal was certainly not always met, with various explanations put forward for variable engagement relating both to attitudes to the module itself and the competing demands on students' time, including academic work, socialising and personal lives.

While grades were put forward as highly motivating for some students (see 4.2), this was questioned by others. Discussing different levels of engagement, Imogen (FG07NNS), for instance, observes:

One girl is, like, very optimistic and work hard. They say, like, gave herself very high standard for studying, and she tried to get first class, and another British boy is like … 'I pass is OK'… . So maybe different people get different ideas for own standard. Some people want to get higher level grades and some people just want to pass.

Competition with other modules exacerbated workload pressures (see 4.2.1.1; 4.3.2.2), but also raised questions about the degree you were able to engage. Jasmine (FG07NNS), for instance, notes:

We shouldn't have to spend so much time on this particular module because I've got so many modules to do.

Managing workload was particularly an issue around assessment times. Daisy (FG07NNS) states it was 'nearly not possible' to meet deadlines. She describes the complex time management necessary to revise for their Accountancy exam while preparing the presentation, with the peer review becoming the casualty. She notes, we '… didn't even start reviewing, just because I'm still doing the group work.'

Sociability might also mitigate against engagement. As mentioned, working with friends was not perceived as conducive to productive work (4.1.2.3), while Maisie (FG08NNS) points out that a similar attitude might prevail when working with members of your own nationality, noting: 'If I had a meeting with Russian guys I won't be very responsible'. Participants also reflected on the conflicting demands of academic life and their personal and social lives. Chloe (FG03NNS), for instance, describes the difficulty of the transition from Freshers' week to the academic routine:

Then you get to work, you do whatever you have to do, like assignments and stuff, but you don't actually do reading, you don't actually sit down and study … . [I]t seemed to us it was the first days, and it wasn't … .

She describes students getting 'lost' and 'far behind', noting 'it will be difficult for them to actually catch up'.

Other participants gave the impression that personal interests could take precedence over academic work. In a discussion on motivation in FG05, James (NNS) admits to 'messing around' rather than stretching himself academically:

James: I'm not that motivated. I go to class, that's all. … I don't do any extra work.
Joshua (NNS): What do you do then?

James: I do other things.
Charlotte (NNS): Chilling out.
Eleanor (NNS): Messing around.
James: Messing around.

Personal schedules did also at times seem to conflict with arrangements for group meetings. There were multiple accounts of students being absent from meetings because they had other plans. In her description of how one of her group missed an important meeting, Abigail (FG10NNS) first expresses an understanding that it would have been hard for the student to change her plans, before affirming that she herself would have acted differently:

> A girl in our group she just left for like Thursday to Monday before we were going to have a presentation. … [S]he couldn't help it because she'd already booked the trip but … personally I wouldn't have done that.

Another participant mentioned an (international) group mate who could never attend weekend meetings as she reserved these for visiting her boyfriend (Rebecca, FG05NNS). These served as reminders that students had other lives (see Discussion).

What these references to engagement seemed to share were questions about what object was in view. In them, participants often showed awareness that group mates had different or conflicting priorities, which impacted on their engagement or perceptions of their engagement, and as a consequence on collaboration. Abigail (FG10NNS) makes this point when she observes:

> Everyone is, like, different and you prioritise differently, but … you feel like you don't walk the same distance … you don't have the same commitment.

In her analysis, Abigail recognises that group members have different objects in view.

4.2 Task

I coded to task those items where participants seemed to have module tasks as their object in view. I understood task in a pragmatic sense of activities of a specified nature where there was an expectation that they would be accomplished; they were things you had to do. Indeed, when focus group participants spoke about 'doing', it was in contexts where they had a module task in view. Speaking of the report, Jessica (FG04NNS) notes:

> We did manage to come together, sit down and talk about what needs to be *done* … and the work that comes out after a lot of editing and lot of reading through, we actually, in my opinion, got a decent report *done.* (emphasis added)

Participants also took the further step of associating task to obligation, and for some this appeared conducive to motivation. For instance, for Chloe (FG03NNS), necessity seems to translate to motivation; she notes, 'If I have to do something, I get really involved'. For others, this link was absent. Eleanor (FG05NNS) and Rebecca (NNS) co-constructed the principal tasks as 'boring'. Obligation was not put forward as a motivating factor; they looked elsewhere for motivation:

> **Eleanor**: The case study, it was
> **Rebecca**: boring.
> **Eleanor:** There was too much information to summarise all of it, to filter. So I can't say it was very interesting case study topic … .
> **Joshua** (NNS): What do you hope to achieve?
> **Eleanor:** What can motivate you?

Grades were quite commonly mentioned as the motivation for undertaking module tasks, with the notion of a 'first', in particular, seeming meaningful. Participants spoke of this in terms of personal attributes (Abigail, FG07NNS: 'Does he strike you like a first?'); as something to be achieved only through hard work (Poppy, FG07NNS: 'you have loads of work to do for this to be a first'), but above all as something to aspire to, as exemplified in the following exchange:

> **Charlie** (FG03NNS): Does it really motivate you the idea of the first class?
> **Chloe** (NNS): Yeah, definitely.

There was fear that weak group members would pull grades down. Speaking of weak international students in his group, Max (FG10NNS) notes:

> It was just ridiculous because you can't … get a first, and … have people in your group who are plagiarising.

I counted thirteen references in the data to achieving first class, only one made by a home student. The ambition of international students was sometimes associated with cost of study and parental pressure. For instance, following a mention of international student fees, Nicole (FG06NNS) notes:

> My parents aren't sending me to uni. for jokes. I can't just not do well. I can't; it's not a possibility.

I was conscious how the pull of this object affected participants' view of other elements. For example, Katie seems to regard the priority of task accomplishment as justifying her expectations for resources – in this case clearer guidelines:

> I would love … guidelines. If there are clear guidelines of what I need to do I will just … focus it …. . Just, I need guidelines.

Katie seems to see knowledge of how to undertake the task as something you should be provided with if expectations are to be met; she does not in this excerpt see learning how to do the task as inherent to the task (4.3.2.2).

The emphasis on doing had led me to double code many references to the sub-category 'getting the job done' (see 4.1), now reclassified under task. This remained a troublesome category because the means to achieve tasks were brought into view, prioritising other elements within the activity system (tool; division of labour). Because the focus switched to mediation, I will not be referring to this category further in this chapter.

The data suggested that participants saw the module in terms of a series of discrete tasks. Participants identified four tasks done in work groups: the report, the presentation, the peer review, and the participation report. Although they tended to speak of them as separate, the Module Handbook emphasised their interrelatedness. The presentation was based on the written report which consisted of a case study involving library research, while the peer review was a process engaged in with a partner group which required each to provide and respond to written feedback on their partners' report and presentation. The participation report was a collective account of individual contributions to the group effort. I saw the first two tasks (the report and presentation) as largely focussed on the academic content of the module, while the peer review and the participation report required students to reflect on their academic work, performance and modes of collaboration.

Other tasks were done individually. A large component of the assessment was an unseen exam (50%) (Module Handbook). I was uncertain whether this was a task in the same sense as the group tasks; however, participants spoke about it similarly, emphasising exam preparation and practice, and this led me to code references to the exam to the category of individual tasks. I also coded

reference to the skill development report to this category; while this formed part of the reflective component, it was something students did alone.

In the write-up of this sub-section, the main categories of task identified in the analysis, group content-based tasks, group reflective tasks and individual tasks, are used as the principal sub-headings.

4.2.1 Group content-based tasks

A large number of references were coded to the sub-categories of 'report' and 'presentation', reflecting their prominence in the focus group discussions. The emphasis varied, reflecting the different nature of these tasks, with the former more concerned with the groundwork of research and writing up and the latter prioritising performance. When speaking of task outcome, participants tended to refer favourably to the report. Thus Oscar (FG09NS), whose group seemed so problematic that it verged on the dysfunctional (4.1.3.2), is nonetheless able to comment:

> When we came to write the report, actually everyone did their part …. [I]t wasn't bad, it was to a good standard … . [T]he group reviewing us said the report was quite good.

Regarding the presentation, views tended to be more reserved. Thus Eleanor (FG05NNS) observes:

> I had my presentation just this morning and it was … OK actually, but not too good.

When participants discussed the report they tended to view it in terms of three phases: an initial phase, typically the first meeting, when decisions were made concerning how the group would go about the task and who would do what, a central phase when the bulk of the research and writing was undertaken, and the final editing. Discussion about the presentation focussed on how they prepared for the talk itself and reflections on their own and others' performances. Participants did speak about practices which worked; however, discussion of the report and presentation illustrated that when task was the object in view, what tended to be brought into focus were obstacles to task accomplishment. I identified three main areas of concern: workload and the distribution of work (4.2.1.1); the English language level of some international

students (4.2.1.2), and academic level (4.2.1.3). Very often participants saw these as interrelated, sometimes causally.

4.2.1.1 Workload: amount and distribution

There was a common perception that the report and presentation involved considerable work. Joshua (FG04NNS), for instance, notes:

> It was a little bit tough because we had a huge case study to read and lots of research to do.

Daisy (FG07NNS) and Jasmine (NNS) puts this in the context of all the different module tasks which had to be accomplished:

> **Daisy:** We have to hand in so many papers. It's not just the report and presentations.
> **Jasmine**: Yah, so many papers.

The main issue, however, seemed to be the perception that workloads were unequal and that this was unfair. Although different practices were discussed, participants commonly reported dividing the work in the first meeting more-or-less equally and bringing it together at a later stage as the sections of the report (e.g. Chloe, FG03NNS). However, participants often reported that work was not done to the agreed timescale or to a satisfactory standard. Max (FG10NNS) notes:

> The moral of this story is we end up dividing it, but it just ended up being still a big workload.

Some focus group members had taken on the extra work of managing tasks, making judgements on quality, and redoing or improving work which did not meet standards. While a number did seem to rise to the challenge of being doers or leaders, often those who took on these roles experienced tension with the underlying understanding that group work was predicated on equality (4.1.3.3). Layla (FG08NS), for instance, conveys disillusion when her stated early expectations of her group as constituting collaborative individuals, each making an equal effort, are not apparently met. In taking on both doer and leader roles, she is subject to the contradictory pulls of wanting to get the job done well and the injustice of having to take on extra work:

> I'm the one who's often sending out e-mails, being like … we need to get this done. … [A]t the beginning of the module I thought everyone was contributing. It's like, 'this is good, this is good'. But now I found that often I've got to sit down and write like a basic version … but nobody else has said, 'Oh, I'll do this with you'.

Participants did also make the finer distinction between the injustice of having to do extra work and the equality principle itself. Molly (FG10NS), for instance, draws attention to the increased workload, while affirming the deeper point that it conflicted with her understanding of group work. Scarlett (FG10NNS) helps her in co-constructing this meaning, leading Molly to clarify that it is not just having to do another's work, but also the resulting inequality:

> **Molly:** Yeah, instead of … one person's workload, you ended up doing three, four people's workload, you know what I mean?
> **Scarlett:** Because you're correcting …
> **Molly:** Because it's unbalanced.

Thus, the principle of equality on which collaboration was predicated seemed in conflict with the imperative of task accomplishment.

The question of unequal workload seemed to come to a head in the peer review (4.2.2). The issue of work quality largely related to the questions of language and academic level.

4.2.1.2 Language level as an issue

Perceptions of English language level as issue applied as much to accomplishing tasks as collaboration, however this object highlighted the problematic aspects. Comments like the following were commonplace: 'there are a couple of people who are finding it really difficult to actually do things in English' (Jessica, FG03NNS); 'going through a 3,000 word document … you can tell that not everyone's level of English is the same standard' (Alexander, FG08NS). Yet there was a shared understanding among many that the institution's English language entry requirement was high and there appeared to be genuine puzzlement that not all students seemed to have the required language level, as in the following observation:

> **Samuel** (FG08NNS): But it's so strange how all these people get an offer to university because it's ... a pretty high standard for IELTS.

There was some speculation about how this might arise. Alexander (FG08NS) suggests that high scores in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) could be put down to coaching:

> I used to work as an English teacher and I have coached people through exams. You can do intensive coaching to teach someone how to pass the exam, and it means that people get the grades that they shouldn't.

Max (FG10NNS) and Maya (NS) impute a financial motive, implying an understanding that the financial benefits of international students to universities might play a part in entry decisions. Adopting the institution's perspective, Maya shows an understanding that universities might prioritise increasing international student numbers; Max is more direct:

> **Maya**: From the university perspective … it's just that every university wants to, like, raise their quota of international students; it's a big thing that attracts, you know.
> **Max**: They pay more.

The disparities in English language level seemed most apparent in editing the report. Participants seemed unprepared for this, yet those who undertook the extra work did not seem to question its need. Phoebe (FG09NNS) reflects this position well, expressing surprise at the amount of work she has unwittingly taken on:

> Just before coming here I was … correcting the students' reports … and I thought it would be really easy, I mean I would do it in 20 minutes, but when you have to turn around all the sentences   and try to find out a bit more diverse vocabulary … it does take some time.

As noted (4.1.1.2), international students who expressed concern about their own language levels sometimes quite openly expressed their need for help and their reliance on other group members who were more competent linguistically.

Much of the discussion relating to the presentation concerned the challenge that oral performance posed non-native English speakers, emphasising how language was viewed instrumentally when task was in view. This seemed particularly manifest in the question-and-answer sessions. While participation in the talk part of presentation was reported as relatively equal, when it came to answering questions, participants quite often stated that these tended to dominated by the more linguistically competent. Oscar (FG09NS) recalls the feedback his group received from their peer review group, noting the criticism of the unequal participation in the Q&A session:

> They said the questions were dominated by myself and … our Austrian friend, and whilst the others contributed … they were possibly slightly shy in answering or didn't feel confident enough with their language ability.

Jasmine's (FG07NNS) panic about the presentation when her native speaker group mate fell ill (4.1.1.2) related mainly to the Q&A session. She notes, 'We … really worry about the question session'.

The oracy challenges international students identified were various, and related both to understanding and delivery. There were questions of accent, with some British and some non-native accents deemed difficult to understand (Charlotte, FG05NNS; Eleanor, FG05NNS); speed of delivery, with native speakers seen as speaking too fast (William, FG05NNS), and meaning. Eleanor (FG05NNS) notes how this might be compounded when the other speaker was also a non-native:

> Especially when people start to ask a question and then … 'I mean der, der, der', and then finish the question. So what is the question actually? [laughter] And especially when it is an international student.

International students also described the demanding nature of composing and responding to questions in a second language. Jasmine (FG07NNS) expresses the frustration of having good ideas but not being able to explain them properly, or to do so in an appropriate register:

> A lot of us, right, we really have good ideas about something, we can't express. I notice that when we were asking questions 'cos … like my group member … she really has lots of good ideas, but it's just hard to just transform them into, like, really, actual academic English.

Jessica (FG04NNS), reflecting on her own difficulties, identifies the cognitive demands of 'thinking on the spot' required to comprehend a question and formulate a response, and its impact on her participation:

> I personally find answering the questions during the discussion session quite difficult because … I can't really interpret the question well and I can't really think on the spot, so I think that the fact that I'm not really that fluent in English … makes it quite difficult for me to, like, actually participate in that discussion group.

Some focus group participants suggested that students' questions were sometimes deliberately complicated with reports of both British (Charlotte, FG05NNS) and international students (Eva, FG07NNS) asking these types of questions. Eva asserts that a student asked 'really hard questions on purpose', while participants in FG05 speculated that some students asked hard questions out of spite, or in the hope of catching the lecturer's attention and being rewarded with a higher individual mark. As students were required to identify themselves by name before putting their question, this had some credibility:

> **Rebecca** (NNS): It's like some groups they really want to ask, like, really killer question. I'd guess they want, like, really make people look, like, mad, something like that.
> **Eleanor** (NNS): To get a point.

> **Rebecca:** It's kind of bad actually.
> **Charlotte** (NNS): Yes 'cos they say their names for teacher like, 'Oh my name's _____ and I'm asking this difficult question'.

Students were strategic in dealing with Q&A sessions. A practice discussed by international students in the FG04 appeared to have developed in some tutorial groups where the presenting group would distribute a set of questions prior to the presentation so that questions were not unexpected:

> **James** (NNS): In my tutorial group what we did is … the group … who is going to present distribute a set of questions to the other groups so the questions actually quality control, like, they already know the answers, so they won't look stupid in front of everyone, everybody; so like is, is like a mutual agreement, like every group will do like that. So we won't get, like, any out of the box … questions.

Mari (FG04NNS) justifies this practice, narrating her own experience. Some of the work groups within her tutorial group apparently pre-distributed questions whereas others did not. She compares the outcomes, arguing in favour of the practice of pre-distribution as a form of collaboration which prevented the Q&A session being taken over by dominant speakers:

> **Mari**: In my tutor group also the question was sent beforehand, so the presentation group know the answer before they do the presentation. … I think it is good to collaborate. In my [work] group there are … unexpected questions, and … only one person can answer such questions, so only one person dominate in my group.

By resorting to a different object (collaboration), Mari presents a principled case for this practice, while the lengths students were prepared to go to in order to perform well underlined the imperative of task accomplishment.

4.2.1.3 Academic level as an issue

The academic level of some students was quite often discussed in the context of the difficulties groups faced in accomplishing tasks. Participants referred both to academic subject knowledge and academic skills (see 4.3.1 & 4.3.2); however, concern for the latter was more prominent with task in view. Max (FG10NNS) observes that with international students it was not always easy to say whether the cause of difficulty was language or academic level. He describes a feedback session his group held in week four, mentioning one international student:

> It was just really hard to evaluate on the feedback, 'cos it was really, really hard to understand to what extent she did what she could, and to what extent her language actually limited her.

It seemed that academic level was largely viewed as an issue which concerned international students.

The use of sources appeared to be an area where there were variable levels of understanding. Megan (FG07NS), for instance, expresses incredulity at the lack of awareness of one member of her group that referencing was necessary in academic writing:

> One of the guys in my group … came in with what he had written, and I said, 'Oh, would you be able to reference it?' And he said, 'Reference? And I was just, 'Are you kidding?'

The concern for the use of sources was highlighted by the three separate occasions when focus group participants exchanged advice on what was expected (FG03; FG07; FG08). Alexander (FG08NS), for example, offers a 'simple hand-out' on the Harvard referencing system to Maisie (NNS) affirming, 'I can give you something which is two pages and I promise you will understand'. There were other occasions when the participants used the focus groups as a forum for giving advice, but they were uncommon.

4.2.2 Group reflective tasks

I classified three tasks as reflective tasks, two of which were done collaboratively and will be discussed in this section: the peer review and the participation report.

I found it difficult to formulate a clear view of participants' understandings of the peer review as there were sharp contrasts. Some participants showed an appreciation of peer reflection; rather more found the peer review problematic, suggesting that for some this was one task too many. As I engaged in the analysis, I became aware that the tension related to the object: when task was in view, the problematic aspects seemed foregrounded, while an understanding that the essence of this task lay in engaging in reflection required a realignment of object, bringing learning into the frame (4.3).

Problems of workload and collaboration within and between groups seemed to come to a head in the peer review. For some, including participants who spoke positively of collaboration, this seemed to lead to disillusion with group work. The tensions regarding workload outlined above (4.2.1.1) were present here. Participants describe struggling to get group mates to participate, and unequal

and unfair distribution of work. Alexander (FG08NS), for instance, narrates how preparing the peer review report for their peer group had fallen to himself and one other group mate. This led him to reassess how he viewed his group:

> With the peer review, nobody was doing it … . [M]e and another girl had sent out e-mails to the group saying we need to do the peer review … and in the end it just involved me and the other girl … . And that … affected the way that I perceived my group and things because I suddenly thought that not everyone was really engaged.

The experience of the peer review also seemed to exacerbate feelings of exclusion from participation by more dominant group members. Exclusion was commonly presented in the context of the relationship between home and international students (4.1.1; 4.1.2.2), as it is in George's (FG08NNS) account of the peer review. He describes how the two British students in his group went ahead with the peer review without consulting the international students. They not only presented this as a fait accompli, but also failed to invite other group members to review the work. George presents this as reaffirmation of his apparent understanding that British students do not want to collaborate with international students, and leads him to an uncharacteristically negative position:

> **George:** The two English guys in our group did the peer review …. . [W]hen we met they just came and said they had done the peer review. …
> **Alexander** (NS): They didn't even ask you … to check it?
> **George:** Oh, why would they ask us to? … [I]n our group they're two English students and the rest of them are international students. I doubt if they'd had said, 'Do you want to check it?'

There were also tensions between work groups and their peer groups as they were dependent on each other to complete the review process. The final stage of responding to the peer review could not be accomplished until groups had received the review of their work. Good communication between groups and timely action were both necessary. Megan (FG07NS) explains how her group delayed in sending their report to their peer group. She describes feeling 'bad' as the report could not be forwarded to the peer group in a timely manner with the consequence that 'you couldn't carry on.'

Dealing with failure to receive the peer review report is discussed by Anna (FG10NNS), Molly (NS), Maya (NS), Scarlett (NNS), and Max (NNS). Anna

expresses the view that, having e-mailed the report more than once, there was 'nothing more you can do'. Molly appears of the opinion that 'it's their [the peer group's] fault if they don't get it done'. Maya advocates direct confrontation with the peer group:

> **Maya:** Could you not like go to them in tutorial …. and be like, 'This is not affecting my grade; this is affecting yours. Like, get your act together.'
> **Scarlett:** 'It is supposed to be helping you as well'.
> **Maya:** 'I'm saving your butt.'

Max's concern appears to be where responsibility lay; his concern is for rules. He questions whether, 'you were technically supposed to enforce the fact that they should have done that for you'.

The participation report was rarely mentioned and references to it formed a minor category in the data. Yet, it appeared important as it offered a means of recording actual contributions of individuals to the group effort. Nonetheless, it seemed off radar for a lot of students (along with the skill development report). Participants indicated that they did not understand it well; Max (FG10NNS), for instance, with task in view, expresses concern that even with individual marking there was no guarantee that marks were fair, leading Molly (NS) to remind him of the participation report and its function to make the marking system fairer. She explains how her group noted each individual's contributions in their weekly records:

> It all comes into the records of group meetings …. [We] made it very obvious by putting everybody's names …, how many hours they contributed that day and what they'd done.

She adds:

> I think that it's very necessary to write, make it very obvious how much time and effort you've put into it compared to other people.

4.2.3 Individual tasks

The two tasks I coded to individual tasks, the skill development report and the exam, were very different, having in common only that they were done on an individual basis.

The skill development report seemed to be confused with other reflective components. Max (FG10NNS), for instance, feels a need to remind his focus groups that it is 'a separate thing' to the participation report. He shares his

understanding of its importance within the module pedagogy, questioning what he seems to believe is the assumption of others in his focus group that the module was principally about working in groups. He makes the case that individual skill development was also a priority for the lecturer:

> It's not only group development, it's also personal development. You're supposed to write two pages on that kind of stuff … the whole process of improvement is worth 50% [sic] … so that kind of shows that TPM is a lot in skills development.

In his account of the skill development report, Max shows awareness of its purpose (4.3.2). For many others this task seemed largely overlooked, with mention only in FG07 and FG10.

When the exam was referred to it seemed for some too far into the future for immediate concern, indeed there was some confusion about its timing. Charlie (FG03NNS), for instance, refers to it as taking place at the end of the academic year, when in fact it was scheduled for January (Module Handbook). Barely on the horizon, it did not exert a strong motive pull, as Charlie observes:

> We have only one big exam at the end of the year, so it not really make you want to study during the module.

There was discussion about the mock exam which some had already experienced. The view seemed to be that this was not something to worry about or need to revise much for. Chloe (FG03NNS), for instance, notes:

> I didn't read much, but it's quite easy though. It's, like, multiple choice questions and … there is an essay, but you just have to, like, plan it.

Participants also discussed the challenge of taking exams in a second language. Alexander (FG08NS) invites consideration of special provisions for international students 'like extra time, or be able to use a dictionary'. The international students in the focus group do not respond affirmatively. Samuel (FG08NNS) observes:

> It's not the English exam, not, nobody do not punish you if you make some spelling error.

Layla (FG08NS) asks whether writing in English under time pressure was challenging for international students. George (FG08NNS) considers his own educational background had provided adequate practice in doing exams in English:

> I studied in an English school before and I did the international baccalaureate, so, like, I'd say writing is OK … I think writing English in time constraint will be OK for me.

Nicole (FG06NNS) takes issue with the assumption that students who are weak linguistically necessarily perform badly in exams, citing her own experience on a Foundation programme where students considered linguistically weak out-performed others:

> There were only Asians, which means mainly Chinese people, basically, and their English level isn't as high .. but … they somehow got, like, nineties, and others, like people that spoke English fluently, were stuck with sixties.

In her view success in exams had more to do with 'work pattern' than language level. These views suggested that home and international students might have different understandings of the challenges of exams in English for international students.

To conclude this sub-section, task was certainly a dominant object, perhaps exceeding its Wordle representation. Unlike collaboration, which was often viewed instrumentally, when tasks were discussed task accomplishment was always an object in view. What it repeatedly brought to the fore were the obstacles to task accomplishment.

4.3 Academic study

I coded appreciably fewer references to academic study than to collaboration or task. This may have in part reflected the understanding of the purpose of the focus groups (see Discussion). Nevertheless, I formed the impression that this object seemed taken for granted; indeed, sometimes focus group participants appeared to seek indirect ways to remind each other that you came to university to study. Anna (FG10NNS) instances this when she reports a conversation with housemates, Geography students, who she characterises as having a relaxed approach to study. Anna equates knowing what study is with working hard. As a Management student she did not need reminding of the purpose of university:

> Everyone where I live, they do Geography, and they were like, 'Why are you in the library all the time? Why? Do you even have to study?' And I was like … 'What is studying?'; 'Writing some essays, you know.' I'm like, 'Yeah, we know'. Like we had three tests this term, like a lot of group work. It's been, like, a lot of work to do.

Despite this perception, academic study remained an important object with several aspects less visible from the perspectives of other objects brought into

view. These emphasised the challenges of study, how they were met, domains of ownership, and the extent students seemed prepared to take responsibility for their learning.

One recurring theme was the difficulty of study, and underlying this the complex debate around home student advantage. International students commonly expressed the view that studying was easier for home students; Charlie (FG03NNS), for instance, commenting on the British student who did most of the work in his group (4.1.2.2), notes, 'It seems a bit easy for him'. Others were more circumspect; Katie (FG03NNS) supposes that home students may presume to know (explanation for why they do not seek support), while home students occasionally reversed the argument. For instance, speaking of the presentation, Freya (FG06NS) contrasts her personal challenge with the observation that international students seemed to find it easy:

> And there are people who obviously don't have English as their first language, they're fine with it. They're, like, reeling off stuff, and I'm like, 'Wow, I'm impressed.'

With academic study in view, at times participants emphasised subject knowledge (4.3.1), at others the skills and know-how which were instrumentally related to subject knowledge (4.3.2). The former brought into view participants' feelings regarding ownership of subject knowledge and their insecurities, how challenges were met or pragmatically resolved, and their understanding of its nature. Regarding the latter, participants emphasised the extent they seemed prepared to take responsibility for their learning, and where they appeared to consider the institution's responsibilities lay, disclosing tensions between objects (e.g. academic study versus task) and with other elements of activity (e.g. institutional practice).

4.3.1 Subject-specific knowledge

The subject content of Management did at times seem forgotten. There were questions around the importance given to subject knowledge in the module - the lecturer had told me of her differences with her subject group (Field notes 26/03/2010) - all the same, the academic study of Management surely remained the module's foremost raison d'être. Yet, conscious awareness of this sometimes seemed more in evidence when interest was lacking. Thus Rebecca

(FG5NNS), in describing the material for the case study as 'boring', effectively reminds her focus group companions that the subject matter should be the focus of interest. Only Eleanor (FG05NNS) seems to make explicit what was surely universal to all students when she says, '**…** as [for] the subject … Management, I hope to learn something new … .' I saw the references in this category as dividing into those which related to the extent of individuals' subject knowledge (4.3.1.1) and those to their understanding its nature (4.3.1.2).

4.3.1.1 The extent of subject knowledge

Some students apparently had prior knowledge of Management. Rebecca (FG05NNS), for instance, claimed to have already studied 'the level' and found it 'quite easy'. Others seemed to assume that everyone was studying Management 'for the first time' (Max, FG10NNS). There were expressions of concern about not knowing enough, and this was particularly apparent in discussion about Q&A sessions. Participants reassured each other that they could seek help from other group members. Ruby FG06NS, for instance, notes:

> Don't be worried about it, because a lot of the time there is someone in your group who will know the answer straight off.

Some international students constructed home students as subject experts. Charlotte (FG05NNS), for instance, describes how a British student in her group came to her rescue when she struggled to answer a question:

> There was one really difficult question … and I really didn't know the answer … fortunately, my British team mate, like, he saved the situation and answered properly… .

The context is a discussion of the linguistic challenges facing international students in presentations, and Charlotte seems to seamlessly extend the notion of home student linguistic expertise to subject knowledge.

Other references focussed more on what had been learned. Nicole (FG06NNS), for instance, suggests that students should not worry about taking questions, as by virtue of having done the case study they were the experts. She notes:

> You know your case study better than the people asking you the questions.

There was also an understanding that group work presupposed acquiring limited and specialist knowledge:

Anna (FG10NNS): You had to divide up, instead of everyone trying to learn everything … you inform each other what you found, but you still had your main area of research.

4.3.1.2 The nature of subject knowledge

In quantitative terms there was little discussion of participants' understanding of the nature of subject knowledge. Nevertheless, this was an aspect of academic study which, when brought into view, did lead participants to raise some important issues, including the place of theory, personal opinion, and the experience and knowledge students brought to the study context. Often these references showed how understandings developed through group interaction.

Regarding theory, Chloe (FG03NNS) describes how her group changed from an historical approach following their conscious realisation that they were expected to make links to theory, using theoretical models:

> At first we divided the whole history and then … when we got together we are all like, 'We shouldn't do this 'cos we shouldn't follow like a time line'. So, basically, what we're doing now is each of us have, like, a certain theory to relate to the case study … . [T]hat turned out to be a much better idea because you actually have to include a lot of theory.

Thus, Chloe's work group arrived at an understanding that the application of theoretical models was important within the field of Management. For Abigail (FG07NNS), agreement that they should focus on theory seemed a milestone in her learning:

> I was just studying in my room not knowing … whether to focus on theory or on history … and I was, like, all night … blank … . But when I went to the meeting the next day … they helped me direct my work… . I don't know what I could do without them.

Grace (FG04NNS) recalls how her group discussed the role of personal opinion. She narrates a disagreement with a group member who had argued that they were required to include personal opinion alongside the theoretical content:

> I thought that … this content it should be used in my project by my group mate; he disagreed; he said, 'No, … you should put in … your personal opinion.'   It should be considered because there were not just theories.

The group seemed to be developing an awareness of the role of personal judgment in Management.

Charlotte (FG05NNS) raises the issue of using personal knowledge. Speaking of the Q&A session, she expresses the view that the knowledge she brought to the context by virtue of being an international student improved her group's response to questions while increasing her personal stake:

> We also gave examples from real life, for example from my country about WTO and globalization stuff, so it was really interesting.

4.3.2 Generic skills and study practices

The references I coded to this category placed at the fore the generic skills and study practices necessary to acquire subject knowledge. Participants seemed to recognise that learning involved changes not only in subject knowledge, but also in what they could do, or felt confident in doing - or, indeed, felt they were allowed to do. In particular, this was apparent when they spoke of international students' experiences. For instance, Scarlett (FG10NNS) reports claims which she attributes to a Chinese peer:

> A friend of mine's Chinese and she goes on about, 'I can do this now, I couldn't to do this before' and 'I'm allowed to do this'.

Participants' understandings of reflective tasks also evidenced their awareness of learning how to learn. Thus, Max (FG10NNS) indicates his understanding of the importance placed on skill development (see 4.2.3), while in their discussions of the peer review (4.2.2) some participants expressed their understanding of how this process complemented teacher-directed learning, encouraged learner independence, made study more interactive (and, therefore, more meaningful), and helped students reflect on their study practices. Nicole (FG06NNS) mentions several of these points:

> I think it's also really good that we get peer review, that it's not only us presenting and nobody really cares … and we're writing a 3000-word report that's then marked by a tutor, but that actually another group has to suffer with us. [laughter] … [Y]ou can actually see what people … at your level think about the things you do, and what they would maybe do differently.

In the analysis I sub-divided this category into developing skills (4.3.2.1) and learning how to manage the learning environment (4.3.2.2). In both the data illustrates how participants appeared to map what they considered areas of their own responsibility, including how this related to the skills they felt should be in

place, and what they seemed to understand as the institution's responsibilities, evidencing tensions between objects and other activity system elements.

4.3.2.1 Developing skills

Whereas elsewhere in this chapter the focus has been on skills as missing or deficient, or on supporting each other, the references I coded to this category brought into focus skill acquisition and development. I grouped the references into language skills, study skills, and technical skills.

Despite the many references to language level as an issue, explicit recognition of the need to improve English language skills, how that need might be met and with what outcome, were less common. Max's (FG10NNS) work group was unusual in conducting a skills audit (4.2.1.3), and in what would seem to have been a frank discussion, group members had apparently informed others of the need to improve their English:

> We did that feedback session on the fourth week, and people got from other four members, they got a criticism: 'needs to improve English'.

Max himself recognises it as a sensitive subject, describing the reticence of some group members to take part:

> People were reluctant to do this because they felt it was going to harm their relationship within the group, but yet people did it.

As Maya (FG10NS) suggests there could be a stigma attached to admitting one's language level was not adequate (below).

In terms of their own language skills, some participants expressed not only concern (4.1.1.1), but also the need to do something. Rebecca (FG05NNS), for instance, notes how she needs to work on her listening skills. William (FG08NNS), an Erasmus exchange student, went furthest, stating that his main purpose in coming to the UK to study was to improve his English 'of course', implying that this was something to be taken for granted. Some students who took active steps to improve their English attended classes provided by the institution's Language Centre (e.g. George, FG08NNS); others expressed the belief that they could improve their English through peer communication. William (FG08NNS) observes, 'I can just cover my English classes talking with people'. Maisie (FG08NNS) was one of several who mentioned the advantage of living with native English speaking flat mates, while Ethan (FG06NNS) mentions socialising with British peers (4.1.3.1).

That there might be a stigma attached to taking English classes is raised by Maya (FG10NS), who argues that even to enter the Language Centre is to lose face:

> If you're coming straight over from Russia, from China, you don't want to admit that you're falling behind, that your language level is lower. If you walk through these doors, you're always already showing you're weaker than someone else who's English or something.

Participants did report on their progress in English; for instance, George (FG08NNS) speaks of the language teacher helping him with his grammar, but progress also came through realisations that their language skills were better than they thought. Jasmine's (FG07NNS) describes how her native-speaking group mate's absence 'really pushed you to work.' She describes the situation beforehand and the favourable outcome:

> Before that we tried to rely on him … . [W]e just worry about … whether we could actually understand the questions, that would be really bad. But at the end it comes out that we actually understand the questions. So it's good.

Regarding study skills, like language the default position seemed to be the assumption that having the skills in place was expected. In an exchange between Maya (FG10NS) and Max (NNS), Maya expresses sympathy with international students; yet in conjecturing that some may not 'know where to start' she characterises their condition as abnormal:

> And if you just don't know where to start, what happened to that? … Like, for instance, a Chinese person can't, doesn't understand how to research something 'cos they haven't had the tools of the past experience to do it.

Max challenges the assumption, asserting that the condition is the norm:

> I think it was the same situation that the Chinese students and everyone else had, actually.

Max has study as the object in view. He proposes that the acquisition of necessary study skills is a personal challenge that all students face, illustrating this through reference to his own experience:

> I was just as disadvantaged as everybody else at the beginning, but when it came to research, if you spend hours looking around and doing stuff, you do it. It's not a matter of how smart you are, it's a matter of how much time you give to it.

He forcefully makes the case that students should be proactive in developing their skills (4.3.2.2).

The discussions of information technology illustrated that in this domain focus group participants did not seem to question their responsibility for developing their skills. The module leader for TPM was passionate about developing the use of technology in teaching and learning (Field notes w/c 09/12/09), and technology was integrated into the module in several ways. Participants indicated their awareness of this emphasis; Max (FG10NNS), for instance, observes, 'she [the lecturer] pays particular focus to use of technology', while both George (FG08NNS) and Alexander (FG08NS) state that they were the video champions for their tutorial groups.

One technology participants referred to frequently was Google docs, which enabled shared on-line editing of documents. Lucas (FG09NNS) describes it as a 'great tool', arguing that it was particularly valuable for international students who might otherwise feel excluded in face-to-face meetings, allowing time to express themselves and an opportunity for their voices to be heard. Other participants placed more emphasis on the disadvantages of face-to-face meetings, with technologically-mediated communication advanced as the solution:

> **Jessica** (FG04NNS): Face to face, people have excuses like, 'Oh sorry, I couldn't make it because I'm still home', 'because the bus is late' … .
> **Grace** (NNS) … communication is easy … by sending e-mails, or texts, or conference, or Google.

Maya (FG10NS) notes how anarchic their face-to-face meetings could be ('two people would leave and another person would come, and your head was just going everywhere'). She observes, 'I reckon we should've used Google docs',

Discussion of this technology was quite commonly accompanied by explanations of how groups learned its use, with learning from peers apparently typical. Lucas (FG09NNS) notes that 'the American guy [a group member] showed us how it worked', while Scarlett (FG10NNS) mentions how her group learned together through experimentation, 'click[ing] on buttons and discover[ing] what happens'. Yet even successful groups commonly mentioned resistance; for instance, Lucas (FG09NNS) explains that to use Google docs you had to open a g-mail account, which some of the group 'didn't really want to do'. In this domain, being international was not perceived as a disadvantage – this appeared a level playing field. Yet, it was not uncommon for nationality to be mentioned when referring to competence in this area. Anna (FG10NNS), for

instance, mentions learning to use spread sheets from an Indian student, while explaining her own lack of competence simply as, 'Me and Excel, we don't work at all'.

Learning as an object seemed more clearly in view in discussions of technology than it did when it related more specifically to the skill areas perhaps seen as more integral to academic study (language or academic study skills). Here deficit notions might prevail, manifesting tensions with other objects, particularly task (above and below).

4.3.2.2 Managing the learning environment

Coding to academic study also brought to the fore references where participants emphasised the meta skills necessary to manage learning. Others references coded to the sub-category of managing the learning environment focussed on whose responsibility it was to manage learning or facilitate access to resources.

Many of the former referred to time management, both in terms of personal workloads and group tasks. Some participants reported success in becoming better at managing personal time. Chloe (FG03NNS), for instance, describes the moment when it 'clicked' and she ceased to procrastinate. Others reported less success; Katie (FG03NNS), for instance, mentions difficulties in keeping up with the reading:

> Sometimes, I try to read the book, but I just can't finish it … . I've got a whole pile of books to read at the moment, and I think I really need to find the weekend to read it some, to read it all, to finish it.

While Katie views this is as a question of time management, it seems unlikely that this was the only issue.

Participants suggested that their difficulties in time management related to: (i) the transition from school to university; (ii) balancing study with other interests; (iii) heavy academic workloads, and (iv) being an international student. Chloe (FG03NNS), for instance, describes the transition from high school to university as 'massive'. She also notes the difficulties of juggling study and other interests:

> Starting a course in uni., [it's] not actually easy to see how to be up to date, and it takes you a lot of time; and if you actually want to have, like,

> a social life, and actually practice some sport or something, it's like, OK, your day just is over.

Others suggested that the problem lay in the competing demands of study, which Daisy (FG07NNS) proposes as the reason her group encountered difficulties in meeting deadlines (4.1.3.3 & below). Jasmine (FG07NNS), however, asserts that international students were sometimes not even aware of deadlines. She offers contrasting views of home students and students from her own country (China), suggesting the former were more successful because they achieved a better balance between study and relaxation, while Chinese students were mentally active all the time, making them dysfunctional:

> I noticed something very good about English people, it's like, you're relaxed, but when you started do something you're really focused, that's why you produce something good. But in my country it's like … our brains are functioning all the time … and you couldn't do anything.

The idea that cultural background had an impact on time management was also raised by other participants. Benjamin (FG10NNS), for instance, notes:

> For some cultures … if you say … three o'clock then being 15 minutes later is not a problem.

Quite often group work challenges were related to time management. Max (FG10NNS) observes, 'in our group the time constraints ended up being quite a problem'; and time limitations were also put forward as explanation for why tasks were divided. Anna (FG10NNS), for instance, notes:

> We kind of had to divide it up to be able to learn everything in a week, with the result that our presentation became … divided.

The imminence of deadlines did seem to encourage some participants to more conscious attempts to manage time, as Daisy's (FG07NNS) account of how her group managed to revise for their accountancy exam and prepare their presentation illustrates (4.1.3.3). She comments, 'without the time limits, I think we couldn't have made it …'. For others, pressing deadlines resulted mainly in the increased length and frequency of meetings. Scarlett (FG10NNS) notes, 'we got to it on the second week, and then we were, like, meeting every day', while Joshua (FG05NNS) describes how his group started their presentation and report 'quite late' and ended up meeting 'ten hours a day during the weekend'.

A second topic mentioned was organising meetings. Megan (FG07NS) refers to business practice in organising meetings; she reflects on her group's

experience, indicating she learned that they could have worked more productively if they had adopted the procedures common to management meetings:

> If you were in a business … you'd have minutes, you would know exactly what you're doing, and you'd kind of get some outcomes, and I think one thing I've learnt … [is] that we would have worked a lot better if at the beginning we'd set some targets and aims.

Regarding the extent students took responsibility for their learning, the point has been made that it was not uncommon for linguistically weak international students to assume that more competent students would come to their aid (4.1.1.2). To recall, Max (FG10NNS) challenges this position, arguing that students have a duty to take charge of their learning, and not only to themselves but also to others:

> I'm saying, not improving your own skills, which are an obstacle to the group's performance, is ignoring four other people's needs.

Further, there was not always agreement among participants where they seemed to regard student responsibility as ending and what was more properly the responsibility of the institution, with perceptions of the limits of students' responsibilities manifesting tensions between objects, in particular task and academic study. For instance, with task in view, workload seemed commonly viewed as considerable, even excessive (4.2.1.1), sometimes with the implication that monitoring workload was an institutional responsibility. Speaking of the report, Benjamin (FG10NNS) notes: 'There was too much information … for too little time and too little words.'

Calls for greater clarity regarding the tutor's expectations were also not unusual (e.g. Katie, FG03NNS; 4.2). Indeed, some students even suggested that the guidance was unhelpful. Jasmine (FG07NNS), for instance, claims that the explanations lacked clarity and were even contradictory:

> I've asked her so many times, and … I think she didn't actually make it clear to me. It's, like, … 'We want something individual', and she mentions, like, 'I want all the reports should be in this way and that way', just so contradiction.

Jasmine goes on to question whether the tutor 'knows what she wants'. However, for others this same lack of clarity might be perceived as a learning challenge (e.g. Megan, FG07NS). Thus the academic expectations of the

module might be viewed as being 'too much' (an institutional matter) (task in view) or 'a lot' (the students' responsibility) (academic study in view).

In other areas there was more agreement concerning what participants considered the institution's responsibility. For instance, while participants tended to regard the use of technology as a challenge (4.3.2.1), some also seemed to feel that group work was hampered by task designs which did not take proper account of technology, or the limited technological resources provided by the institution. In an exchange between Layla (FG08NS) and Alexander (NS), both these views are manifested:

> **Layla:** You can't have six people around a computer … it just doesn't work … .
> **Alexander:** And we don't have the technology to support us to work on it altogether but on the separate workstations. …. I don't feel that the university supports collaborative work very well with the technology they have here.

There were also other occasions where the institution was criticised for not doing enough. Max (FG10NNS), for instance, argues that information on English language classes needed to be more widespread and more timely. By referring to the responsibility of the institution, participants brought institutional practice into the frame, illustrating both tension between elements (the institution's responsibility to facilitate resources versus the student's responsibility for their own learning), but also their complementarity.

To conclude, with academic study as the object in view, participants explored their understanding of learning as personal development but also the competencies necessary for effective group work. They discussed their expectations of themselves and others, and what they understood as the institution's expectations and responsibilities for student learning.

4.4 Professional practice

As evidenced in the contextual documentation, there was a history regarding the use of the term 'practice' in the module title. It was absent in the version of the module which I observed in the pilot phase, and its inclusion in TPM (P = practice) I understood as the culmination of a struggle between the lecturer and her subject group (see 4.3.1) to achieve acceptance of her strongly-held view

that the module should have a significant practice element (Field notes, w/c 22/03/10).

That students should role play being managers also seemed implicit in the module pedagogy. Students were encouraged to think of themselves as teams in amicable competition and focussed on performance. In an early class, groups were required to give introductory presentations making the case for why their team was the best. They were instructed to have high expectations of each other and could 'fire' those who underperformed (Field notes w/c 11/10/10 & 18/10/10). I noted '[lecturer's name] runs this class like the reality TV show, the Apprentice' (Field notes, w/c 01/02/10). Some participants in the focus group acknowledged this emphasis. Samuel (FG08NNS), for instance, notes, 'the idea of these groups is that actually you operate like managers'. George (FG08NNS) seems to appreciate this, noting:

> It's a really good experience …. like we act as managers … It's a really different perspective [to] the rest of the modules.

Yet, despite the prominence given to professional practice by the lecturer, what surprised me was the scarcity of references with this object in view.

Observations about the value of the module to professional practice all seemed to relate to the experience of group work. Oscar (FG09NS), for instance, describes the ability to work in a group as a 'core life skill' for the 'real world' (see 4.1.3.2). The two aspects of group work which participants highlighted were the experience of diversity and dealing with problems of group interaction.

In week 1, participants were invited to make connections between working in diverse groups and being managers in the world of international business (Field notes, w/c 11/10/10). Focus group participants did make this connection; Emma (FG06NNS), for instance, recognises that the lecturer's rationale in forming culturally diverse groups was in part to provide students with valuable work place experience:

> **Nicole** (FG06NNS): With TPM … you meet new people and learn about new cultures.
> **Emma:** … the great thing about that is when you actually go to get a job, you're going to have to do that anyway. So I think she really picked that this was … a key skill that you're going to have to learn.

However, most participants who mentioned the value of group work to professional practice did not seem to share the lecturer's emphasis. Rather, they seemed to view management as primarily a trouble-shooting activity, and valued most of all the experience of dealing with problematic situations. Focus group participants referred to the quality of participants in work groups, with some individuals judged 'less good' (Alfie, FG06NS). While participants did see inconsistent behaviour as an aspect of group diversity, diversity in contexts where professional practice was in view could not be assumed to imply cultural diversity; indeed, the link to cultural diversity might be down-played or challenged. Alfie (FG06NS), for instance, clearly puts the emphasis on dealing with problems whatever their origin. Commenting on the value of working in diverse groups to professional practice, he notes:

> It's probably quite good practice for … when you leave and you have a job. There's always going to be someone who's less good, whether they are from a different country or not, so you kind of need to learn to deal with problems.

Amelia (FG04NNS) reconfigures diversity to emphasise personality differences. She sees the experience gained from dealing with this type of diversity of value for the world of work:

> I think that meeting many different people can help you a lot … . They're different personalities. You can then use that experience in the future and while working.

Grace (FG04NNS) seems to view mixed groups of whatever nature as inherently problematic. She suggests that the groups you encounter in real life as neighbours or colleagues are mixed in a similar way to the TPM work groups; in both cases you have to co-exist with people you have not chosen and who may not be 'good people'. She suggests that what you learn in the TPM work groups (the need to be flexible) applies equally to the real life situations:

> You cannot choose your neighbour. Maybe your neighbour is not a good person … . [I]t's exactly the same now with group members in TPM … . [W]e can't change the group, because we should be flexible with them … . [I]n … the workplace … we can't choose colleagues that we would like … so we should be flexible with them, even if we have conflict or argument.

Grace argues that it is the experience of learning 'how to behave with these people' which is of value to their future as managers. Grace invites her focus

group participants to imagine what it might be like to manage large staff teams in corporations, given the difficulties they have experienced in their work groups.

Anna (FG10NNS) theorises group conflict not in terms of personality differences, but rather makes an explicit association with group members' different conceptions of object. She describes the experience of working with people who have different expectations of the activity, constructing this as a valuable life experience on the basis that group conflict is something they will encounter throughout their lives:

> It's pretty useful though, because this is … the way it's going to be for life … . [Y]ou're always going to end up with groups of people, just, like, you have another goal, like you have something else you want to get out of this work, and they have some other, like, expectations of how you they want the group to be.

Anna's frustrating experience of working in groups where there is conflict is given a positive twist through her identification of professional practice as the object in view.

4.5 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has presented the main findings of the research resulting from the analysis of object-motive. These indicate that participants did not see the module in terms of a single unitary object, rather perceived the module as having multiple objects, with their experiences and understandings coloured by the objects they held in view. In the following chapter the implications of these two findings for understanding international student participation and for theory will be discussed. The chapter will begin with a summary of the main findings, bearing in mind the research questions. It will consider the study's contribution to the substantive literature, and how it might contribute to a repositioning of the central discourses of language and culture. The implications for theory will then be considered.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The current and following chapter (Conclusion) will address how the study answers the research questions. These are provided in the Methodology (p.57) and are not repeated here. Questions 1 and 1.1 primarily relate to the study's substantive findings. They will be the focus of the first part of the chapter where the findings will be summarised and a comparisons drawn with the literature (5.1). Questions 2 and 2.1 focus more specifically on the contribution of theory, and will be the focus of the second half of the chapter (5.2). While this distinction will help organise the chapter, the study's substantive findings are themselves the product of a theoretical approach. Thus, theory cannot be excluded from the picture in part 1. Question 3 relates to practice and policy; this question will be addressed in the following chapter.

5.1 The contribution to the substantive literature

As a case study, the substantive findings of this study relate to the case studied and do not constitute generalisable findings. However, this does not preclude their interest beyond immediate stakeholders, with findings transferable insofar as they are deemed relevant to readers with respect to their own contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

At the outset, the assumption behind this study, and fundamental to the literature, that international students do not meet institutional expectations of participation, needs consideration. There is certainly evidence in the data of international students who, for a variety of reasons, are not getting the most out of their university experience, but what is perhaps more striking is the extent of others' participation. The focus groups did not lack for feisty, determined international students from a range of countries, many of whom were leaders in their work groups. While this difference to some of the literature (e.g. Gu, 2009; Morita, 2004; Trahar, 2010), which has focussed on perhaps less forthcoming students, may reflect the study design (only relatively confident students are likely to have volunteered to take part in focus groups), it remains the case that the study questions the view of international students as routinely failing to meeting expectations of full participation.

In arguing that understanding participation should foreground participants' motives for engaging in activity, this study switches the focus from the body of

literature which has looked first for underlying causes: language competence, culture, personal qualities, institutional practices, and so forth. Those factors remain in the mix – indeed will configure as activity system elements – but are seen in terms of how they mediate between subject and object; or participants and the ends they pursue. As reported both in the Methodology and Findings, the notion of object in view (Hiruma et al., 2007) evolved during the process of identifying sub-categories of object, and served to guide the subsequent analysis. In so doing, it shaped and ordered the substantive findings, while at the same time enabling (and forming part of) what would emerge as the main theoretical contribution of the study (5.2.2).

As reported in the Findings, the analysis led to the identification of four educational objects for module TPM perceived by focus group participants. In the following sub-sections (5.1.1-5.1.4) the principal findings will be summarised and discussed using these categories as sub-headings. The categories and sub-categories which mapped the findings were presented in Figure 4.1 (p. 90). The figure incorporated the Wordle feature as an initial approximation of the importance participants assigned to categories.

5.1.1 Collaboration in diverse groups

Collaboration in diverse groups was seen as object but not necessarily as motive. Despite its prominence in focus groups discussions, it did not appear the most important module object; indeed it often seemed instrumental to other objects, e.g. task. Collaboration was divided into two principal sub-categories of linguistic and cultural diversity, and interpersonal relations and engagement.

5.1.1.1 Linguistic and cultural diversity

Linguistic diversity highlighted the language divide between native and non-native English speakers, with both groups characterising non-natives as disadvantaged. Native speakers made frequent references to a language barrier, while some non-natives spoke of exclusion by native speakers because of their English skills. In the literature, the construct language barrier has wide currency. As in this study, it seems most often used by native speakers as explanation and justification for their difficulties in communicating with speakers of other languages, with the term itself unquestioned. That it should be is signalled by Morita (2004), where its use by the instructor is seen in terms of

negotiating roles, status and power. Thus, the term language barrier is shown to be functional with respect to the instructor's pursuit of her object in view.

In the study, non-natives constructed natives as language experts, with many international students apparently assuming that native speakers could be relied on for help. Although some natives affirmed their willingness to help, there was acknowledgment that this could bring tensions, and while some non-natives expressed their appreciation, this was not always the case. Other studies which have considered the interrelationship of home and international students in group work (e.g. Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Osmond & Roed, 2010) report similar tensions around language, and raises the question as to whether international students in the UK higher education context are adequately prepared for the linguistic demands of this type of pedagogy.

The focus group participants seemed to find it meaningful to discuss culture in relation to nation and region. There was a common perception that both international and home students preferred to mix with their own kind, a finding widely reported (e.g. Volet & Ang, 1998); however, this was particularly noted with regard to British and Chinese students. British students seemed aware that they were viewed as reluctant to participate with international students and some professed that there was some truth to it (see also 5.1.1.2). However, they also constructed themselves as proactive group members, with reports of rising to the challenge of leading multi-cultural groups, even when it was contrary to their self-image (Lucy, FG06NS), while international students often seemed to perceive home students as the natural leaders, combining linguistic and cultural advantage, and did not always appear aware that their expectations of home students could be an issue. The role of home students as 'cultural hosts' (Cathcart, Dixon-Dawson, & Hall, 2006) is commonly alluded to in the literature, however this is more usually exemplified in one-to-one support relationships, rather than in home students taking leadership roles.

International students commonly reported having international backgrounds, specifying attendance at international schools; in contrast, home students rarely mentioned comparable intercultural experiences; indeed, in several cases they reported very limited contact with people from other countries. That British students appeared to lack intercultural experience might seems surprising given

the widely-assumed multicultural nature of UK society; however, it does concur with the findings of comparable studies. Harrison & Peacock (2010) note how home students seem challenged when asked to speak about their experiences of studying with international students. One home student in the current study, however, did have the courage to share his fear of international students (Oscar, FG09). Contextual information (Appendix 2) also tended to affirm the lack of intercultural experience of the home students.

Summers and Volet (2008) also found international students more experienced interculturally, manifest in their relative predisposition to multicultural group work. However, their subsequent experiences led them to the view that home students did not wish to participate with them, with both international and home students developing more negative attitudes to multicultural group work during their time at university. There were elements of this in this study, with international students quite often expressing strongly negative views of their experience of working with home students (e.g. George, FG08; Rebecca, FG05). The extreme tensions reported in some similar studies (e.g. Osmond & Roed, 2010) were not apparent in this study; nonetheless, the findings suggest that one of the challenges facing Southtown University is in developing the intercultural awareness of home students.

Among international students, Chinese students did seem to be accorded special attention by both home and international students. Indeed, international student as a deficit construct at times appeared synonymous with Chinese student. Partly, this might be accounted for by the number of Chinese students on campus, a surprise for many who came to study at Southtown. Yet despite the volume of literature which has dwelt on the contrast between the Socratic West and the Confucian East, this was not a feature of the focus group discussions. Both home and international students did express the view that Chinese students were the least forthcoming in group work; however, this was put down to the contemporary Chinese political context, characterised by restrictions in freedom of speech (Molly, FG10NS), not Confucianism. This view, however, was also challenged, with Chinese students arguing that silence among Chinese students could be explained by a culture which valued action more than words (Jasmine, FG07NNS) or, simply, by personal differences (Imogen, FG07NNS).

While participants in the focus groups expressed the view that cultural differences could lead to tension within groups, they also noted that conflict and differences could lead to higher quality work. Some mentioned the value of the complementary abilities of team members in diverse groups, emphasising that people from different cultures think in different ways; others argued that agreement constituted groupthink and was the antithesis of group work. Thus, there was an understanding that while conflict might be opposed to the collaborative ethos, it could be conducive to other objects, e.g. task accomplishment.

Although there are references to culture throughout the data, most discussion occurs when collaboration in diverse groups is the object in view. Certainly, focus group participants assigned importance to cultural background, including reaching for culturally reductive explanations for behaviours, yet there was not an overall sense that cultural background was in many cases a significant obstacle to participation. Thus, the findings of this study seem largely supportive of the view expressed throughout this dissertation that this issue has been unduly emphasised in the literature. The direction of the debate was rather more towards seeing cultural differences as a constraint to integration outside the classroom, in socialising between home and international students and integrating in the community beyond the campus (c.f. Gu, 2009; Gu & Maley, 2008). While universities exist within mainstream culture, their institutional culture may set them apart. Moreover, for the most part, they are predominantly temporary communities; in this sense the depiction of international students as sojourners (Gu & Maley, 2008) is a fair one – but so, too, are all students. As argued in the literature review, prioritising cultural (and linguistic) background encourages the view that the field should focus on international students themselves, their nature rather than their participation. When the focus moves to participation, more factors are bought into the mix.

5.1.1.2 Interpersonal relationships and engagement

The subjectivities of participants, insofar as they mediated between subjects and the object of collaboration, were evidenced in the category of interpersonal relationships. These contributed to the wider understanding of international student participation the approach facilitated, bringing to the fore aspects not commonly evident in the literature unless they were reduced to cultural traits.

Participants spoke of friendship and altruism. Friendships were seen as something to be worked on, with the pay-back of making learning encounters more enjoyable and productive. A shared sense of humour was considered conducive to friendship, and as important in bridging cultural gaps. Friendships made in work groups rarely seemed to extend beyond the classroom; indeed, some international students argued that the separation of academic and social life set their UK university experience apart from their home experience. With exceptions, the international students who participated in the focus groups broadly determined British students as unfriendly (5.1.1.1). In the literature this point is often made in uncompromising terms; Russell (2005), for example, reports international students as characterising UK students as 'cold, uncaring, unfriendly, rude and closed to different cultures' (p.71). The findings of this study were more qualified. There were many reports of home students behaving altruistically towards international students, albeit international students themselves appeared to manifest the greatest empathy towards other international students.

Regarding divisive behaviours, focus group participants seemed hesitant to use pejoratives. The term laziness was used, but usually hedged, or occurred in self-deprecatory contexts. Nonetheless, the discourse that constructs international students as lazy was manifest in self-defensive comments such as the suggestion that other behaviour (shyness) might be misunderstood for laziness (Nicole, FG06NNS). In contrast to this study, the construction of international students as lazy is explicit in some literature. Harrison and Peacock (2010), for instance, classify home students' perceptions of international students as lazy as a high risk factor with respect to how they balance the risk entailed in multicultural group work. Contrasting views are also present in their data with international students constructed as hardworking.

Some participants perceived themselves and others as individualistic, believing that they could accomplish things better on their own. Individualism was associated with prior learning experience, national and disciplinary cultures. However, the strong association with national culture presupposed in Hofstede's model (e.g. Hofstede, 1984), where individualism is seen to strongly characterise Western societies, was not manifest in the views participants expressed. One participant (Oscar, FG09) was self-critical of his individualism,

seeing it as contrary to the team ethos of management, thus alluding to the object of professional practice. Bossiness was perceived negatively in the sense that it could lead to group dysfunction; however, students who regarded themselves as bossy shared in common high motivation and commitment, and were as likely to be international as home students.

The category of engagement brought to the fore that for many participants group work was predicated on an expectation of equal engagement. Degrees of engagement seemed to relate to tensions with and within module objects, including the importance given to grades, with objects in other modules, and with personal life (external objects). The holistic nature of the approach, which allowed these several factors into the mix, is further discussed below (5.2.1).

5.1.2 Task

The dominance of this object became apparent as I worked at the analysis. Participants primarily saw the module in terms of a series of tasks to be accomplished, with tensions resulting from the volume of work and the way their own or other group members' understandings and competences frustrated task accomplishment. In this sense, task served to instrumentalise aspects which, from the perspective of other objects, might be viewed as integral to the object. For instance, with task as the object in view, ready access to resources was a priority; this contrasted with the emphasis on the acquisition of skills and knowledge when academic study was perceived as the object; thus, there were tensions between these objects.

Task was truly an object-motive in the sense that it served both as the object of activity and the motive for engaging in activity. As a defining characteristic, participants recognised tasks as things which had to be done, and for some obligation itself seemed a motivating factor (Chloe, FG09NNS). Grades, however, were commonly put forward as motivation by international students, with the tension between academic achievement, as represented by grades, and other objects, e.g. collaboration, noted (e.g. Max FG10NNS). In the literature concern for grades is quite commonly viewed as a cultural characteristic associated with South East Asian students (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Mclean & Ransom, 2005; Volet et al., 1994). In this study, however, international students emphasised the economic aspects. Parents were paying

for their studies, which was why they could not afford to fail (Nicole, FG06NNS). A prime concern of the literature is whether multicultural group work brings home students' grades down (e.g. De Vita, 2002), with international students' own preoccupation with high grades seemingly overlooked. In this study, it seemed as likely for international students as home students to fear their grades would be brought down by weaker group members (e.g. Max, FG10NNS).

Task was subdivided into the categories of group and individual tasks; however, the latter formed a minor category. Regarding group tasks, participants seemed more satisfied with the outcome of the report than the presentation, with even those in weak groups speaking favourably of the former. I saw this as a reflection on the nature of the presentation; although these were done by groups, each individual's contribution was discrete and public, and international students in particular were often self-critical of their performance. As affirmed in the literature (e.g.Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Hsieh, 2007), the language demands of presenting were the issue here, with participants in this study suggesting the question and answer sessions were the main challenge. They expressed frustration at not being able to understand questions or formulate adequate responses, and fears that some questions were deliberately difficult. They also discussed the ingenious strategy of trading questions prior to the presentation so that they were not unexpected, with one student justifying this on the grounds that it enabled international students to participate more equally in Q&A sessions; thus, it was conducive to more collaborative group work, with collaboration as the object brought into view.

With the report, workload appeared the major concern. Participants spoke of the competing demands of other modules in addition to the additional work entailed in editing and correcting the work of linguistically weaker group members. Participants emphasised that it was at the editing stage that problems of language level were most apparent. There was open admission by some international students that they expected help from native speakers, potential for misunderstanding between international and home students regarding what the former might expect of the latter, and ambiguity regarding home students' own feelings about giving support which exposed tensions between the principle of equality presupposed by group work and the ethos of altruism (see

5.1.1.2). This suggests that Carroll's (2005b) emphasis on the generic challenges of multicultural group work might need to be qualified. In addition, with task as the object in view, there was tension between the desire to accomplish the task to the right standard and all that was implied by taking on extra work. While native speakers often seemed the ones to take on the extra work, a finding shared with Harrison and Peacock (2010) and Osmond and Roed (2010), in this study more linguistically competent international students appeared equally likely to take on editing tasks, and sometimes it seemed with less 'baggage'.

Thus, the findings suggested that the English language level of some international students was as much an obstacle to task accomplishment as to collaboration, with the added qualification that language skills at an appropriate level for undergraduate study, together with other core academic skills, were expected to be in place. Indeed, some participants expressed what seemed genuine surprise that language should be an issue, given the institution's English language entry level (Samuel, FG08NNS), and similar concerns were expressed regarding academic study skills (e.g. Megan, FG07NS). Speculations as to why this might be the case showed participants' awareness both of the broader higher education debate concerning the economic benefits of internationalisation (Maya, FG10NS) and the 'cramming' industry which has developed to prepare international students for key English language entry tests (Alexander, FG08NS). The first touches on the central issue for internationalisation, with core literature (e.g. E. Jones & Brown, 2007) emphasising the need for international strategies to reverse the perception that UK higher education primarily regards international students as 'cash cows'. Concern for language test preparation also has echoes in the literature; for instance, Clark and Gieve (2006) question the adequacy of the China-based English language classes, seeing them as narrowly focussed on achieving IELTS scores.

The participants' experiences of reflective tasks (both group and individual) affirmed that when participants could not clearly see the point in tasks, tensions were exacerbated. The experience of the peer review seemed dependent on which object was in view. When task was in view, peer review seemed one task too many, bringing workload issues and tensions between home and

international students to a critical point, while also disclosing tensions across groups. There appeared to be poor understanding of the participation report and particularly how this could mitigate some of the concerns about grade devaluation, recalling Carroll's (2005b) observations that lack of understanding of group work procedures helps explain some students' negative view of this pedagogy. Regarding the individual reflective task, the skill development report appeared off radar for many participants, with discussion serving to clarify how it related to tutor's concern for individual skill development (5.1.3).

5.1.3 Academic Study

At times academic study seemed taken for granted, with participants having to remind each other that the purpose of coming to university was to study. An underlying debate concerned the difficulty of study, with international students quite commonly expressing the belief that study was easy for home students. Occasionally, home students would reverse this, celebrating international students. Harrison and Peacock (2010) observe a similar occurrence, using the term 'response amplification' (p. 136), which they characterise as an attempt to establish a sympathetic or egalitarian position with the intention of reducing tension and casting themselves (home students) in a more favourable light. Academic study sub-divided into references to subject knowledge, and the language and study skills necessary to acquire subject knowledge. Participants also discussed the responsibility of students with respect to their learning, and where they considered the institution's responsibilities lay.

International students expressed concerns about not knowing enough subject content, and this was paralleled by their construction of home students as subject experts. How subject knowledge developed through the module led to mention of a growing understanding of the place of theory, personal opinion and personal knowledge. One international student noted how they could complement the literature using examples from their own countries (FG05NNS). While she values this, it also questions the scope of the literature of the subject field, or at least the focus of the module's case studies.

Regarding study skills, international students in particular seemed to recognise that they were acquiring new skills, affirming their understanding of the importance given to skill development (Max, FG10NNS), and the value of

reflective tasks like peer review (Nicole, FG06NNS). There was no sense in the data that reflection was a cultural attribute, despite the preoccupation with this issue in the literature from the earliest contributions (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Biggs, 1987). Participants spoke about the need to develop skills, with improving English language a priority for some international students to the extent of it almost becoming an object in itself (see 5.2.2.1). They mentioned ways they sought to improve their English, including support classes and socialising, and how support from (native speaking) group mates helped build their confidence; yet, there seemed an acceptance that this could be a sensitive area, with stigma perhaps attached to seeking help with English (Maya, FG10NS). As with core academic skills, the default position of participants seemed more commonly that such skills at an adequate level should be in place at entry. It took strength of character to assert the opposite (Max, FG10NNS), that academic study at university was about being proactive in seeking help and accessing resources to address gaps in knowledge. The association of stigma with core skills was not mentioned in the literature I reviewed; however, it has been explored in the literature on secondary education (e.g. Lieu et al., 2004; Talmy, 2009). Lieu et al. (2004, p. 9) speak of the 'formidable stigma' attached to basic skills or ESL classes in Californian community colleges.

Technological skills seemed less commonly associated with deficit and participants more readily took responsibility for their acquisition. Work groups were divided between those prepared to embrace technology and those resistant, with a shared view that failure to embrace technology (Google docs) was a reason for disappointing group work. As a co-authoring software, Google docs helped overcome the seemingly insuperable problem of scheduling meetings, and in one student's view (Lucas, FG09NNS) assisted international student participation. There was a sense that this was an area where international students could participate on an equal basis with home students.

Time management was frequently discussed in the context of managing the learning environment. Different cultural views of time were mentioned (FG10); however, other factors leading to difficulties in this area were emphasised, including the transition from school to university, balancing study with other interests, and heavy academic workloads. Some participants' difficulties seemed compounded by other factors; for instance, what Katie (FG03NNS)

characterises as a time management issue (keeping abreast of her reading) was perhaps a way of masking that she found it hard to accept she had a language difficulty. Organising meetings was another topic discussed, with learning from their subject field (Management) seen of practical relevance.

Where students' responsibilities for learning ended and the institution's began was an underlying concern. The availability of resources (e.g. learning resources, including IT hard and software), as the institution's responsibility, was not contested, but such aspects as workload and guidance did give rise to differences of view. An insight of this study has been that students' expectations of the institution/tutor tended to be higher when their orientation was to task accomplishment. Nonetheless, confusion and differences of opinion regarding what was or could be expected of and by tutors were also apparent even when academic study was the principal object in view. This was reflected, for example, in the need sometimes expressed by international students for greater explication than home students (Katie, FG03NNS). In other words, resort to object in view did not always seem an adequate explanation.

As discussed in the literature review, the early literature made much of how unprepared international students appeared to be with regard to understanding the expectations of the Western academy, and while much of the subsequent literature sought to challenge or modify deficit views of international students, some key understandings became part of the orthodoxy of teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Macrae (1997, p. 147), for instance, juxtaposes the expectations of international students and Western supervisors in terms clearly redolent of Ballard and Clanchy (1991). In later EAP texts this would develop into the more general pedagogic principle of making the implicit (and presumed known) explicit (e.g. Swales & Feak, 2004). In the EAP scholarly literature, the expectations of the Western academy have been viewed as a series of conventions assumed rational and transparent, though rarely made explicit (Harwood & Hadley, 2004), while Casanave (2002) sees the expectations of lecturers' as subject to their own idiosyncratic interpretations, with (international) students only finding out what is required through trial and error. Certainly in this study international students more commonly expressed a need for greater direction, although both home and international students showed a willingness to find things out for themselves; yet the underlying message was that there

was confusion in many quarters. Thus, while some international students, given their prior learning experience, may lack familiarity with the academic conventions of UK higher education, as the literature affirms (e.g. Ryan & Carroll, 2005) they are not alone in this respect. As noted (2.3.5.2.1), the call to make the implicit explicit is highlighted in the pedagogic literature which emphasises the development of intercultural competence (Mclean & Ransom, 2005).

An expectation of this study has been that Activity Theory would provide a language of description helpful in understanding such mismatches as these. To work through the example of an international student who does not understand what is required of her, e.g. Katie (above), the guidance she needs (tool) can be seen in terms of the tensions between her current understanding as her interpretation of the understandings of those who matter to her (community) and the expectations of the new context (institutional practices) which constitute a series of conventions (rules), the understanding of which can be negotiated by students and teacher (division of labour) as participants in an activity which has an agreed purpose (object).

In highlighting in this way how the range of elements in the activity system might contribute to understanding the experiences of the student, the question is raised regarding the extent to which this study, which has focussed on object-motive, can claim to be holistic, a topic pursued below (5.2.1).

5.1.4 Professional Practice

There was awareness of professional practice as a module object, with the main value seemingly relating to dealing with the problems which arose in groups of diverse individuals, with focus group participants careful to note that diversity in this context related as much to character or personal commitment as cultural difference. They saw the experience as hands-on practice in managing difficult teams.

Fewer participants spoke of the value of the multicultural experience to their future careers, but when they did so they echoed the tutor's priorities (see 5.2.1.1) and those of the literature where internationalisation of UK higher education is rationalised as a response to globalisation, with the benefit to

students primarily articulated in terms of the transferable skills they will acquire (E. Jones & Brown, 2007). In the study, international students were, if anything, more likely than home students to recognise these benefits, a finding which concurs with Osmond and Roed (2010); yet, this may be at odds with the employability agenda in UK higher education where concern about the domestic economy and home student employability are uppermost (Peggs, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac, & Lawton, 2012). In this sense international students may feel they are receiving less than their due.

5.2 The contribution of theory

This section will address research questions 2 and 2.1, both relating to the contribution of Activity Theory.

A challenge has been to offer a theorised approach to the study of international student participation which is holistic in scope and able to explain contradictions in the data. The expectation has been that the data analysis will reflect multiple positions, and while it has been possible to make some general claims, it is this complexity that the study has sought to manifest and explain. It has aspired to a theorised understanding of why participants position themselves as they do, and how contradictions in the data, including contradictions in participants' own positionings, might be understood. Applied more broadly to the literature, the same understandings might serve to explain differences in findings which cannot obviously be reduced to research context or design. As a response to both issues, Activity Theory was used in the research design and data analysis. Firstly, this promised a rounded perspective. By focussing on participation, it takes into account a range of elements seen to mediate activity, with the framework adopted deriving from Engeström's (1987) model of activity with the addition of institutional practice (Hedegaard, 2001). Secondly, it promises an understanding of activity in terms of the contradictions within and between these elements. The extent these expectations were met are explored in the following sub-sections (5.2.1; 5.2.2).

5.2.1 A holistic approach

The decision was taken to limit the in-depth analysis of Phase 2 data to object-motive. Moreover, a restricted view of the subject (to international students) was a feature of the research. Both these aspects need to be explored in the context

of assessing the claim that the approach was holistic in the hermeneutic sense of understanding participation in terms of a complex web of interactions (Packer, 1985).

5.2.1.1 Restriction to object-motive

In the first stage of the analysis of the Phase 2 focus groups deductive coding was undertaken using the activity theoretical framework as a coding frame. The intention was to proceed with an in-depth analysis of each element; however, the decision was taken to restrict further analysis to the single element of object-motive. While the decision is justified in the Methodology, the question is raised as to whether the approach taken can continue to be viewed as holistic.

In defence, it needs to be understood that in the coding of data to the different elements which constituted the framework the data was not simply being categorised and segmented. Rather the multiple coding of most data excerpts indicated that the analysis was providing different views of activity representing the different perspectives as defined by the different elements, with each offering a view of the whole and differing only in what constituted the more visible foreground and the less visible background. Nonetheless, in the filtering process which translated the in-depth analysis of object-motive into manageable findings, much of the background detail, where the interaction with and between other elements may have been more evident, may have been lost. These other views would have been facilitated from in-depth analysis of the other elements. The initial analysis of the Phase 2 focus group data into the framework elements could still lead to further analysis of other elements, leading to new findings, and provides work for the future.

At times the lack of the complementary perspective of the other elements was apparent. One example of how a broader view might augment understanding is given above (5.1.3). The following account illustrates how an exploration of institutional practice (and an amplified view of the subject) would have been helpful in understanding why, despite its dominance in discussion, the object collaboration in diverse groups did not always seem the most important to focus groups participants, and might also help explain why task appeared to be the dominant object.

Group work focussing on accomplishing tasks predominated in each of the management modules I observed (Field notes, Phase 1/2). This is also evidenced in the Module Handbook (TPM) which highlights the prominence of group work and task-based learning in the Business School pedagogy, and identifies collaboration as an Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) (Appendix 4). In TPM this went further, with groups engineered to be as culturally diverse as possible and practice emphasised, indicating how the tutor was imbedding in her teaching her own commitment to diversity and strong views about the relevance of transferable, work-related skills, an area where she did not always see eye-to-eye with her academic subject group (Field notes, w/c 22/03/10). The first TPM tutorial began with an ice-breaking activity in which students were required to introduce themselves to others as different from themselves as possible. This led to the formation of culturally diverse groups, the work groups for the module's duration. Throughout the process the tutor maintained a commentary on the global and culturally-diverse nature of business (Field notes, w/c 11/10/10). Thus the tutor articulated and moulded institutional practices, making explicit the module's values.

In the focus groups, participants commented on the group formation procedure, showing an awareness of its purpose and how it might be of benefit. For instance, Nicole (FG06NNS) and Emma (NS) co-construct an understanding that diverse groups were unlikely to have arisen naturally, and note how they enabled students to experience cultural diversity. In sum, focus groups participants may not necessarily have shared the tutor's enthusiasm for group work and diversity, or strongly held this as an object, but they understood these as values of the module – as aspects of institutional practice.

While other factors might also have led students to prioritise discussion around diversity, including the focus group prompt (tweaked in Phase 2 to focus attention on the diverse origins of group members) and participants' awareness of my own institutional role and research interests, the importance given in the module to working in diverse groups was explicit. Equally, the focus on task-based learning was so evident it is unsurprising that participants often held an instrumental view of collaboration, with task emerging as the dominant object.

An understanding of the Business School's group work pedagogy was itself an

important initial finding in Phase 1 of the study, contributing to the research design and leading to an unexpected refinement in the study's focus (see 6.2). In my practice field (EAP), we are familiar with the disciplinary distinctiveness of discourses (e.g. Hyland, 2006; Swales, 1990), but less so with the specificity of pedagogies.

Thus an exploration from the perspective of institutional practice would have offered rich insights, with the similar arguments possible for other elements. The focus on object-motive, however, became the defining characteristic of the study, leading to the main theoretical contribution, as discussed below (5.2.2). Firstly, however, how the view of the subject might also question the holistic claim of the study is addressed (5.2.1.2).

5.2.1.2 The view of subject

In my practice, my professional concern is with the experience of international students in mainstream university education. This has defined my research focus as manifest in the research questions. As discussed in the Methodology (3.2.1.2), the unit of analysis in this research was identified as international students. Further comment is necessary, however, regarding the extent this restricted view of the subject compromised the holistic aspirations of the study. Other questions are also raised; firstly, and fundamentally, the appropriacy of Activity Theory for a study where the subject is given predominance and, secondly, how helpful it is to construct international students as subject, given the study's challenge to reified understandings of international students. These latter questions are considered first.

In the Russian tradition, Activity Theory has been seen to grant little importance to the subject and in extreme cases is dispensed with entirely (e.g. Shchedrovitsky, 1995; cited Lektorsky, 2009); yet, as an approach within the Social Sciences within the Western academy, an interest in the people who participate in activity is presupposed. In Engeström's research the unit of analysis is   activity: in the institutional work contexts where his studies are located, research interest lies wholly with practice (Engeström, 1993); where Activity Theory has been used in educational research, however, interest in practice may arise from an understanding of its relationship to learning, and in such studies the subject is brought into the frame. For instance, in Fisher (2007)

we understand some of the obstacles the children encountered in their learning through her enquiry into classroom participation. When Fisher speaks of mismatched expectations, she is referring to the expectations of subjects. Such studies suggest that Activity Theory can be used when research interest rests with the subject.

A common aim of some Activity Theory research in education has been to explore the subject's complexity. The subject components are typically distinguished in terms of other elements in the system. For instance, in Fisher (2007) the primary distinction between subjects (teacher and students) is their roles in the classroom activity of learning and teaching (division of labour), whereas Twiselton (2004) defines subjects (trainee teachers) in terms of their understandings of object. In this study, the primary distinction between international and home students relates to the perception of community (cultural background) and/or tool (competence in English). Yet, while in Fisher (2007) and Twiselton (2004) the subjects (or subject components) can be viewed as groups defined in terms of the roles they play within the activity (teachers or students), the same cannot be said in this study. As has been noted, the construct international students has wide currency in the literature and the context; yet it is arguably problematic to use it in an approach which encourages a view that they form a group in an activity system, given one of the main arguments has been to challenge any such reification.

Roth's work (e.g. Roth, 2009; 2013) offers further help with both these issues. For Roth, there does not seem to be a problem with viewing the subject as the unit of analysis nor an assumption that it is collective. In sharp contrast to Engeström, Roth uses Activity Theory specifically to illuminate subjects. In this he is closer to Leontiev's view (see 5.2.2). In his study of fish hatching, Roth (2009) explores activity from the perspectives of the subjects themselves, including case studies of individual participants, emphasising the emotional and ethical dimensions. Regarding the composition of the subject element, he reminds us of the duality of object, which acts both as the collective object of activity and the motive for individuals' engagement in activity, highlighting that our interest may lie ultimately with the experience of individual participants (Roth, 2013). In his work, Roth consistently uses the term object/motive (in preference to object) to accentuate the dialectic between object and motive.

Roth's approach allows us to see international students not as a group but as a collection of individuals.

Turning to the main point, the restriction of interest to international students may seem at odds with the holistic presumption of Activity Theory, given international students do not constitute the totality of classroom participants. While international students were identified as the focus of interest, the context of the study was the module TPM. Viewed as an activity system, the subject element constituted the students and the tutor. With familiarity, it was apparent that group work formed TPM's core activity (5.2.1.1), and the focus group prompt was worded with this in mind. In the context of group work, the subject primarily consists of the students, with the tutor more marginal. Nonetheless, the exclusion of the tutor's voice from the data set (the focus groups) instances the first way the subject was restricted. There is a precedent for restricting interest to a component of the subject in Activity Theory research; for instance, Twisleton (2004) restricts her subject to the trainees; the students are excluded. In this study, however, the subject is further restricted because my own interest was partial with home students' behaviours towards, and perceptions of, international students mainly of concern insofar as they contributed to an understanding of international student participation. This was the second sense in which the subject was restricted.

Nevertheless, while the subject was restricted, the emphasis on participation did encourage a more holistic perception of those factors which influenced the subjects' behaviours. This contrasts with much of the literature where concern with language and culture has been encouraged by the tendency to focus on international students themselves, what defines them, rather than their participation. Activity Theory ensures that participation is brought into the frame with the result that interest in the subjects (international students) switches from what defines them as international students to their purposeful joining-in in activity. This allows for a broader sweep beyond the scope of many studies. For instance, individual inclinations and personal interests, overlooked in much of the literature, may be no less relevant to international students than to home students. James (FG05NNS), for example, admits to preferring 'chilling out' to academic work, while Rebecca (FG05NNS) speaks of another international student in her group who missed every meeting because she left town each

weekend to visit her boyfriend (4.1.3.3). Focussing on their foreignness gives the impression that other factors do not apply and constructs international students as 'flat' characters (c.f. Trahar, 2010). Further, alternative explanations may be offered for behaviours which might otherwise be reduced to cultural characteristics. As Nicole (FG06NNS) observes, the industriousness of some international students may be due as much to the high fees they are charged, and which their parents are paying, as a culturally inscribed work ethic. As this research shows, language and culture do not cease to be issues, but rather they are seen in a broader context where many other factors are brought into the mix. Through the exploration of contradictions (5.2.2) the virtues of this broader sweep, as facilitated by Activity Theory, become more apparent.

5.2.2 Exploring contradictions with the object in view

The main contribution of theory to this study relates to the construct object in view. How it complements the understanding of international student participation discussed above is explored in this section. In the following sub-section (5.2.2.1), some suggestions regarding how Engeström's theory of contradiction (CADR, n.d.) might lead to further exploration of the object are briefly considered.

The main theoretical contribution of this study relates to the construct object in view. How it contributes to the understanding of international student participation is explored in this section. In the following sub-section (5.2.2.1), some suggestions regarding how Engeström's theory of contradiction (CADR, n.d.) might lead to further exploration of the object are briefly considered.

In the end I preferred the term object in view (Hiruma et al., 2007) to object in mind (Fisher, 2007) (3.4.2.1), as it emphasised the external, real-world nature of objects without losing the complementary understanding of object as motive. As a finding (4), it marked a departure from the notion of object-motive, which in the grand theory relates not to local and contextualised objects, but societal need. Although at times participants did seem to be referring to object-motive in this more remote sense, I did not find it helpful for the in-depth analysis of object-motive as participants spoke overwhelmingly of matters more immediate; object in view, in contrast, helped identify these more immediate concerns,

guiding the sub-categorisation of object-motive into the module objects and the ongoing analysis (Appendix 10). In turn, it has facilitated this discussion of the findings, while paving the way towards the principal claim regarding the theoretical contribution of this study (below). It led me to realise that the unitary object-motive could translate into a variety of objects at the level of activity, with subjects' understandings shaped by the objects they perceive as important.

Leontiev (1981) allows for multiplicity of *objectives* in his distinction between object-motive and goal. A goal is an intermediate representation of the object which enables the collective object of the activity to be achieved; it is an acknowledgment that activity involves a division of labour with individuals or sub-groups making distinctive contributions in the form of achieving (intermediary) goals, while sharing a stake in the collective activity. The motive resides in the object not in the goal. However, the sub-categories of object identified in this study were not goals in Leontiev's sense but objects in themselves.

A multiplicity of objects at the meso-level, however, is consistent with Engeström's understanding of the object of activity, which Kaptelinin (2005) asserts differs from Leontiev's in ways which are often overlooked. Representing this graphically (Kaptelinin, 2005, p. 11), he sees Engeström as moving the perspective on the object of activity from the individual to the collective and from the domain of psychology to that of organisational change. He argues that for Leontiev, while activities are social, the emphasis is the individual's participation; in contrast Engeström's focus is the collective and the domain is institutional. By focussing on the collective and the meso-level, Engeström's view leans more readily towards multiple interpretations of object of activity. In his meso-level modelling of activity, multiplicity of objects forms a dimension of the contradictions which occur in activity systems by virtue of their being complex and open (CADR, n.d.).

Engeström (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999) emphasises that contradictions lie at the heart of human activity with understanding of contradictions forming the explanatory basis of his model. Engeström (CADR, n.d.) identifies four levels of contradictions in activity systems: primary (between the exchange value and the use value within each element of the

activity system); secondary (between the elements within the system caused by the entry of new elements); tertiary (between existing objects and culturally more advanced objects introduced into the activity), and quartenary (between the central activities of neighbouring activity systems). In the context of this study, it is the secondary contradictions within instances of objects and between objects and other elements which are disclosed through the analysis and reported in the findings.

In sum, I argue that, as complex, open systems, activity systems may have multiple objects and multiple understandings of objects. Firstly, although objects derive from societal need, the forms they take in activity systems reflect institutional practices and subjects' own understandings, and what are seen to constitute objects may depend on which subjects' perspectives are considered. Secondly, as activity systems develop, new objects emerge. Thirdly, the configuration of objects in a complex system presupposes multiple forms of mediation, to include mediation by subjects themselves in addition to the other elements in the system: tool, community, rules, division of labour and institutional practice. The multiplicity of objects and understandings of objects provide ample scope for contradictions manifest in subjects' mismatched expectations. In the following, some of these as they appeared in this study are illustrated.

When **collaboration in diverse groups** was the object in view, there was greater tolerance of issues related to language and academic level (tools), with difficulties tending to be viewed more as challenges. There was emphasis on how members of work groups supported each other (division of labour) and attention paid to participants' subjectivities (subject). The constructs 'collaboration' and 'diversity' could be in tension, as culture (community) was seen as an impediment to collaboration (object). Collaboration in diverse groups (weak object) was often seen instrumentally (tool) in the context of task accomplishment (dominant object) and academic study (object). The potential for element shift illustrated is a characteristic of activity systems (5.2.2.1).

When **task** was the object in view, language and academic level (tools), resources for study (e.g. IT facilities) (tools), and the absence of clear guidelines (rules/tool) tended to be seen problematically, as obstacles to task

accomplishment (object). The extra workload taken on by agentive group members (subjects), and accompanying change in roles and distribution of work (division of labour), could lead to conflicts between task accomplishment (object) and the equality principle upon which group work was predicated (rules). Diversity (community) was often viewed favourably, as the different knowledge and skill sets of participants (tools) were viewed as complementary and facilitative of task accomplishment (object).

When **academic study** was the object in view, participants were more likely to embrace the challenges posed by the acquisition of knowledge, skills and know-how (tools). They tended towards agentive behaviour and individualism, and had high expectations of themselves and others (subjects), which could lead to conflicts with collaboration and task accomplishments (objects). They were accepting of personal responsibility (division of labour), and might see the absence of clear guidelines as a challenge (rules/tool); yet at the same time they expected access to resources (tools). Collaboration (tool) was valued to the extent that diversity (community) was seen to engender different viewpoints which could enhance academic understandings (object).

When **professional practice** was the object in view, the experience of diversity (community) was viewed positively, as it mirrored expectations of the workplace (object). Further, the conflicts inherent in diverse groups, however 'diversity' was construed, were viewed as a challenge, providing valuable hands-on experience of management (object).

The above commentaries are illustrative of the complexity of secondary contradictions. By grouping them according to object in view, in consideration of objects as motives, it is apparent that objects have a bearing on whether issues are viewed problematically, as challenges, or as facilitative in achieving objects. Where the analysis is helpful, therefore, is in throwing some light on complex matters by offering a theorised understanding of the relationship of motives to subjects' expectations. It leads from the question 'What are the issues?' (which might produce as one answer 'the level of English of some international students') to 'Why do subjects view issues in the ways they do?' (which may bring the response 'because they are mainly focussed on task accomplishment'). While objects command, they do not exist in isolation, rather

as multiple, localised forms presuppose activity configured as a complex meso-level system which links subjects to objects. Thus, the conceptual framework describing the activity system, with priority given to object in view, offers a way of putting motives and expectations into a context. As an approach to understanding the participation of international students, this is the contribution of this study.

Although the study has considered the perspectives of students, the questions regarding issues and the importance in which they are viewed are equally relevant to other stakeholders, including tutors and those involved in academic governance. Equally, the lens the study offers may be relevant for viewing the findings of other studies (c.f. Edwards & Mutton, 2007). In this sense a higher degree of transferability is claimed for the study's methodological contribution, given its theoretical basis, than its substantive contribution (Yin, 2003).

5.2.2.1 Extending the analysis of object

In the following discussion some further consideration is given to Engeström's hierarchy of contradictions and how it might contribute to extend the analysis of object-motive. His understanding of primary contradictions is an application of Marx's theory of commodity which distinguishes use and exchange value. Engeström's argues that this contradiction is inherent to all elements (CADR, n.d.). This notion has been applied in educational research (e.g. Matsuchita, 2001; Yamazumi, 2001), notably with reference to grades (Yamazumi, 2001).

In the current study, when task was the object in view, the exchange value of the object was often foremost with considerable discussion of grades, in particular their importance for international students. When academic study was in view, the tensions between exchange and use value were more evident, with focus groups participants manifesting both anxiety about achieving measurable recognition of their learning and awareness of the value of education to enhance their understanding of their field and develop their skills. With collaboration in diverse groups and professional practice as objects in view, use value was foremost; however, the tension between use and exchange value was still present. For instance, while participants mainly saw conflicts in groups in terms of their impact on the quality of their assignments (use value), they also

saw collaboration as something they were graded on (exchange value), and was an additional source of concern.

There were other occasions when the tension between use and exchange value was evident; for instance, in FG10 there was a lengthy digression on university league tables and the relative positions of Business Schools (exchange value). Equally, the institution's position regarding international students' entry levels was seen in terms of the contradictory pull of financial interest (exchange value) and education (making the right entry decision) (use value), which compares closely to Engeström's illustration of medical practitioners balancing profit and patient care (CADR, n.d.).

In commodity terms, use value relates to potential rather than actual use. When the use value of an object is actual, it may seem more a case of instrumentalisation. For instance, in this study the immediate use of collaboration in terms of the pursuit of other objects, notably task accomplishment, may seem to shift its status from object to tool. As described, this led to the reclassification of the category 'getting the job done' (4.2). The shifting of elements between nodes is a feature of the disturbance in activity systems. An aspect Engeström (2004) explores is object substitution which occurs when some other element in the system, typically a tool, appears to replace the object. In the current study, substitute object is helpful to characterise the tendency among some international students to view English language competence as an object rather than a tool. William (FG08NNS), for instance, makes it clear that his main purpose for coming to the UK to study was to improve his English (4.3.2.1), while the assumption of some international students that they could take for granted that home students would help them with their English suggests they also perceived improving English as an object; yet there was the stigma attached to seeking help with English (perception that it was a tool). The question of whether language should be viewed as a tool or an object is a central debate within EAP. Turner (2004), for instance, argues that language in the academy should be viewed as constitutive of learning, therefore an object of study.

Quartenary contradictions, those which occur between the central activities of neighbouring activity systems, have been explored through 3rd Generation

Activity Theory (Engeström, 1999; 2001), with emphasis on the notion of boundary object (Engeström, 2001, 2004). Edwards and Mutton (2007) note that even when collaboration across activity systems does not manifest tensions, the potential to create new, shared objects may still be overlooked. The current study did not adopt 3rd Generation theory; however, it did highlight tensions with objects in other modules participants were taking, with the language support service, and with what I have described as external objects. Third Generation theory might enable fruitful exploration of these areas, mindful of the potential of boundary objects as productive and creative.

5.3 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings in the context of the research questions 1/1.1 and 2/2.1. In the first part, with a mind to what object they have in view, the experiences and understandings of both home and international students of working in multicultural work groups have been summarised. While comparisons with the literature have been drawn, the point has been made that, as a case study, the findings are transferable insofar as readers see them as relevant to their contexts. In the second part, the theoretical contribution has been discussed, arguing that, despite its limitations, the approach taken did lead to a more holistic enquiry than is general in the literature, while the main theoretical claim has been that a consideration of object in view is helpful in understanding the contradictory nature of subjects' expectations. Some indications are given regarding how the analysis of the object might be extended.

The following chapter, the Conclusion, will include further reflections on the shortcomings of this research and a consideration of its implications for future research, professional practice and policy. I will also add some comments on my own research journey in terms of personal and professional development.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

To conclude this dissertation, the final chapter offers reflections on the following areas: the challenges the project faced and the extent they were met (6.1); the implications of findings for further research, practice and policy (6.2), and the value of the project for personal and professional development (6.3).

6.1 The challenges faced and the extent they were met

In this project I faced three challenges. Firstly, to conduct a holistic enquiry of international student participation which put into perspective approaches which have prioritised language and culture. While the first aspect has already been considered (5.2.1), its impact on the second and continuing relevance merit further comment. Although the literature locates the extreme expressions of cultural reductionism in an historic context, such arguments remain persuasive, as instanced by contributions to a recent conference on internationalisation at Plymouth University (December, 2013). To facilitate a more holistic view, this case study has focused on participation using the lens of Activity Theory. The findings do indicate that language and culture were important (although participants seemed largely unfamiliar with the cultural discourse of the literature), but that they need to be set in a context where others factors entered the mix. This led to the conclusion that we should no more look at international students as 'flat' characters defined by their difference than we would home students.

Secondly, the study sought to provide a theorised approach with a measure of explanatory power in a field where educational theory seems sometimes to be lacking. It may come as no surprise that people disagree because they have different agendas, and in a sense the insight that the expectations of subjects need to be viewed in the context of their perception of the object in view reduces to this. Nonetheless, in the context of institutional practice, where subjects engage in collective activity, there is a presupposition of shared object, and it is helpful to be reminded that despite activity being a collective endeavour which is object-oriented, activity systems are complex and open, with multiple objects and compound subjects whose orientation to objects are mediated in multiple ways, and while sometimes the system elements may work in harmony, there is plenty of scope for difference in views. Engeström's approach has been

to explore the discords in activity systems in terms of different types of contradictions. While his 'theory of contradictions' is not beyond criticism (e.g. Bakhurst, 2009), I have found it useful to theorise the different understandings of subjects' experiences of participation in multicultural learning contexts, including their own ambiguities. A complex picture emerges which confounds attempts to generalise about either international or home students. For me, it has been insightful to ask questions about what objects participants have in view as a means to understand subjects' expectations and beliefs, and this goes beyond the participants in the current study to include other stakeholders in the internationalisation project in UK higher education.

Thirdly, I aspired to offer a new direction to the study of international student participation which broke free from a circular and often unproductive debate locked in old battles. I believe the project has been partly successful here. As indicated, the study enabled a more holistic approach to that common in the literature and the use of Activity Theory brought a different type of explanatory discourse. While the trend in some of the post-millennial literature in the UK has been to engage in interpretist studies, overall the mind-set in the field has tended towards positivism, with a quest for generalizable, causal understandings of international student participation. In committing to an interpretist approach, the study does not seek right answers, but rather to record and understand the experiences and understandings of the students who participated in the study. It is very different to say 'a number of participants expressed the view that the cultural background of Chinese students had a detrimental effect on their participation in group work' (an interpretist view) to 'the study indicated that the cultural background of Chinese students affected their participation in group work' (a positivist view). The first tells us something about the understandings of the participants in the research, but nothing about Chinese culture. Our interest lies in why participants might hold such a view, not with its truth or falsity, and, since participation is the matter, it lies more with predicate than the subject, i.e. the proposition itself. Here Activity Theory offers a useful approach, offering an explanatory framework for studying participation which can be applied to unique local contexts.

In other senses the study has been less successful in offering a new direction. As a novice researcher, I often took the long route, with the study at times

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cumbersome and unwieldy. It falls short of being a 'takeaway method' which others could conveniently use for researching their own practice contexts. In the following, I offer some comments on the study in terms of what with hindsight I might have done differently, including recommendations for future research of this nature (6.2).

At the outset, my contact with Activity Theory had been slight; I was attracted to the approach as it seemed appropriate for the study, but I embarked on the empirical study without a clear enough sense of how it might shape my research design. This resulted in work being undertaken which did not always justify the time and effort expended, as illustrated in the following points.

Firstly, my early inclinations towards ethnographic enquiry let me to engage in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 in considerable classroom observation, and to having many 'chats', more formal interviews and e-mail exchanges with tutors and lecturers. As I grappled with Activity Theory, I realised that a more systematic approach was necessary, with a case study methodology more appropriate and data collection requiring careful design. The field notes could still have played a role, but I chose to exclude them from the data set as analysis was no longer practical. While they remained useful in furnishing a rich context, they were largely left unexploited. An earlier decision regarding their status would have been conducive to more productive use of time.

Secondly, the Phase 1 analysis involved the hermeneutic coding of two focus groups, which I undertook on the understanding that this was an appropriate procedure for analysing interview data. Subsequently, I devised a coding frame from my understanding of Activity Theory, which was then used in the analysis of Phase 2 focus groups. The Phase 1 analysis was useful to 'test' this framework, but perhaps did not fully justify the time spent on Phase 1 data collection and analysis, which would play no further part in the research. A clearer understanding of the purpose of the Phase 1 might have led to more effective time management.

Thirdly, although the Phase 1 analysis had alerted me, I did not fully realise the extent that using the activity-theoretical coding frame would lead to data multiplication. Re-focussing the study on object-motive, and engaging in in-

depth analysis only of this element, was a necessary decision. However, it led to the discarding of some data, with the first stage of the Phase 2 analysis having no further use in the study, and to questions about the status of the research (5.2.1.1; 5.2.1.2).

My use of the model of the activity system as a coding frame was a departure from Engeström's practice. To recall, in Engeström's work (e.g. Engeström et al., 1996) the model of the activity system is not used for the purpose of data analysis but as a practical tool for understanding and resolving conflicts in institutional contexts. The triangle(s) serves as a heuristic to facilitate discussion around issues such that participants can better understand their own and others' behaviours. In research terms, the model of activity is used to collect data rather than analyse it. Adopting this procedure, for instance by using the model of activity as a way of structuring the focus group discussions, may have been a more fruitful approach. A practical consideration would have been familiarising participants with the model, and it might also have resulted in a more prescriptive approach, raising methodological questions; yet the impractical multiplication of data which the approach I took entailed might have been avoided. Even the restriction of in-depth analysis to object-motive did not entirely resolve this issue, and the multiple coding of excerpts was perhaps only manageable through use of NVIVO; indeed, it is hard to imagine how coding would have been accomplished without this technology.

There were other oversights and decisions taken which would have benefited from further reflection.

Excluding direct observation from the data set raises the question of which activity is being investigated: while the study supposes that the activity under study is students' participation in learning events (their group work), the activity analysed were the focus groups discussions, involving review and self-report, not the learning events themselves. They were a re-enactment of these events at a second remove to the pedagogical activity. While they were informative of the study's concerns, the methodological decision to remove direct observation from the data set should have been accompanied by awareness of its consequence for the activity being studied.

A change I made in the prompt for the Phase 2 focus groups was to explicitly link diversity to country of origin (3.3.1.1; 5.2.1.1). Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, the assumption that diversity related to the presence of international students was very common. The tweaking of the prompt was the result of an experience in FG02 (Phase 1) where much discussion concerned one home student's problematic experience of working with a mature student. On the one hand, this was not obviously useable data; on the other, this student's scarce mention of international students was itself a finding. Indeed, it emerged that in her work group, the one international student (dubbed H.) (Appendix 8a) had requested a transfer to another group as she felt she was being ignored (Field notes, Phase 1). In the end, however, I took the safe route, tweaking the prompt so that recurrence of excessive off-topic talk would be less likely. Given the composition of Phase 2 focus groups (mainly international students), this steerage was probably unnecessary and my approach had been compromised needlessly.

The above example also illustrates how the study could have benefited from a diversity of methods. As noted (3.3.1; 3.6; 5.1), the sample was itself skewed in the sense that the focus groups did not offer an approach conducive to hearing the voices of less forthcoming students, or those who did not want to share their views in a public forum. It was a strength of the research design that it did not just target 'interesting' cases; yet, providing in addition a more confidential channel for students to share their experiences, for instance, individual interviews, may have complemented the data collected, making it more representative. This way hearing stories such as H.'s might have been more likely.

6.2 Pointers to further research, practice and policy

The study sought to research participation in the module TPM, but unintentionally became a contribution to a sub-field which explores international student participation in group work (see 2.3.5.2.2) quite often in the context of Business programmes, reflecting in all likelihood the importance of this pedagogy in Business disciplines and the prevalence of international students in UK Business Schools. As noted (5.2.1.1), however, I had been unaware at the outset that task-based group work was the core pedagogy in the Management department of Southtown University, and in this sense it was an early finding

which fed into the research design, while also leading to the insight that pedagogies in higher education are likely to be disciplinary specific (5.2.1.1). The study might have benefited from having this narrower focus explicit at the outset; focussing broadly on participation overlooked the variety and the probable specificity of pedagogies in higher education, and how participation is related to type of pedagogy. While quite personal concerns drove this enquiry (Introduction), the onward direction indicated is more pragmatic. Future research of this nature would profit from early enquiry into the specificity of the pedagogy and offer an in-depth review of the relevant literature.

Regarding the implications of this research for practice and policy, as an intellectual project I have positioned this study in terms of Wallace and Poulson's (2003) typology as 'knowledge-for-action' (Table 2.1). Considering practice, the apparent ill-preparedness of some of students in this study for task-based group work in multicultural contexts does indicate that they may have benefited from more explicit guidance at the outset in the expectations of this pedagogy. The study involved first year students, with both international and home students indicating they had little prior experience of comparable learning contexts. These findings suggest that Southtown's Business School may not be providing sufficient support in this area. The point may extend to other areas of the institution: if pedagogies are disciplinary specific, as a general rule an emphasis on making pedagogic expectations explicit may be wise. Regarding, English language skills, from my own perspective the reluctance to take EAP support classes of some international students, despite evident need, provides food for thought.

A further implication for practice relates to intercultural understandings. The prior intercultural experience of the home students who participated in the focus groups did seem to fall short of their international peers. The focus groups themselves acted as a forum to raise and discuss intercultural issues, with some students feeding back informally that they found this beneficial. While not a finding of the study, this did seem a pointer to action, and has led to a joint collaboration between the Language Centre and the Business School at Southtown to provide workshops in intercultural communication for first year students, both home and international, during the institution's 'enrichment'

period (Term 3, post exams). This project, which is now in its second year, has been extended to all first year students.

Regarding policy at an institutional level, it should be noted that great changes have taken place at Southtown University in its approach to international students since the first international strategy in 2006. As a practitioner working with international students, I am aware of their greater visibility and the increased attention to their needs. Nonetheless, the student voices coming from the focus groups do indicate policy areas to work on, including (but not uniquely) paying more attention to entry levels, both linguistic and academic, of international students. Over the period of my research, Southtown began to monitor international students degree results, with statistics of firsts and 2.1s showing underperformance of around 30% with respect to all undergraduates; while the Mason Report (2012)[1], which focussed on the institution's own international preparatory programmes, put the finger on English language level. Discussion in the wake of Mason led to changes in the governance of the preparatory programmes including a call for evidence-based demonstration of the efficacy of the language preparation they offered, and concern has now extended to a reconsideration of the academic level of international students at entry. While there is merit to these initiatives, the discussions around policy change might also benefit from research which offers an understanding of what might be going on behind the statistics. As this research has shown, language and academic level are factors, but not the only concerns.

6.3 Personal and professional development

On a personal level, the holistic view of international student participation this study has facilitated has enabled me to become more at ease with the discourse around culture as it relates to international students. During the course of this study, I have developed professionally, gaining an understanding of how I might engage in a research project within my practice field. The study has pointed to some possible fruitful areas of enquiry and some concrete directions for improvements in practice. However, the influence on my practice has been ongoing and constant, with insights often influencing my daily work long before taking form in these pages. It has been particularly valuable to

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[1] The name has been changed.

undertake a journey which so many students I seek to support are themselves undertaking.

Appendix 1a

E-mail granting access to research site

From: ██████████████ Heading of Student Learning
To: ████████████████████████████████████ (Teaching Fellows)
Cc: Straker, John
Subject: International students/observation of tutorials

Sent:26/11/2009

Dear All

John Straker who is the Insessional Programme Manager ████████████ ███████████ is undertaking some personal research into the learning of International students. He is particularly interested in the engagement of students in tutorial groups. John would like to sit in on a few tutorials to get some insight into the issues here. Therefore he might email you to ask if this is possible. Hope this is ok. It will of course be interesting to see the outcome of his research.

Best wishes

██████

██████████████
Head of Student Learning
Senior Teaching Fellow
████████████ Business School
██████████████

Appendix 1b

Consent form for participation in Focus Groups

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

Graduate School of Education

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

................................………………..
(Signature of participant)
        (Date)

……………………
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s): …………………………………..

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

………………….………………………………………………………………………

Appendix 2

Research Phases 1 & 2 survey data (FG01-FG10)

Ref. no	Tag	M/F	Phase	FG	NES	NNES	First language	Other languages – Level				
								Near native	**Fluent**	**Functional**	**Basic**	**Non-specified**
0102F1	Isabelle	F	1	1	x		English				French	
0103F2	Sophie	F	1	1		x	Chinese					English
0104F2	Elisabeth	F	1	1		x	Chinese				English	
0101M2	Jack	M	1	1		x	Kazakh					Russian
0105M2	Harry	M	1	1		x	Chinese		English			
0201F2	Lily	F	1	2		x	Kazakh	Russian	English		French	
0202F1	Nina	F	1	2	x		English			French	German	
0203F1	Alice	F	1	2	x		English					
0204F1	Sophia	F	1	2	x		English				French, Welsh	
0205M1	Oliver	M	1	2	x		English					
0301F2	Gabriella	F	2	3		x	Italian		English, French			
0302F2	Chloe	F	2	3		x	Spanish		English		French	
0304F2	Katie	F	2	3		x	Cantonese		English	Putunghua		
0303M2	Charlie	M	2	3		x	Vietnamese		English			
0401F2	Amelia	F	2	4		x	Thai		English			
0402F2	Jessica	F	2	4		x	Thai		English	Dutch		
0403F2	Grace	F	2	4		x	Farsi	Turkish	English			
0502F2	Rebecca	F	2	5		x	Malay		English		French, Arabic	
0503F2	Charlotte	F	2	5		x	Kazakh					Russian, Turkish, English
0505F2	Sarah	F	2	5		x	Japanese					

0506F2	Eleanor	F	2	5		x	Russian		English			
0501M2	James	M	2	5		x	Malay		English		Arabic	
0504M2	Joshua	M	2	5		x	Russian			English		
0601F1	Lucy	F	2	6	x		English				French	
0602F1	Freya	F	2	6	x		English			Spanish, French		
0605F1	Ruby	F	2	6	x		English				German	
0606F2	Holly	F	2	6		x	Bulgarian	Czech	English	French	Spanish	
0608F2	Nicole	F	2	6		x	German	English, Creole		French	Italian	
0610F2	Hannah	F	2	6		x	Japanese			English		
0611F1	Emma	F	2	6	x		English			Spanish		
0603M1	Alfie	M	2	6	x		English				French, Spanish	,
0604M2	Thomas	M	2	6		x	Russian					
0607M1	Jacob	M	2	6	x		English					
0609M2	Ethan	M	2	6		x	Czech		English		German	
0701F2	Abigail	F	2	7		x	Bulgarian		English		German	
0702F1	Megan	F	2	7	x		English					
0703F2	Jasmine	F	2	7		x	Chinese	China dialects X2				
0704F2	Daisy	F	2	7		x	German	Danish	English		French	
0705F2	Matilda	F	2	7		x	Bulgarian		English	Russian, Spanish		
0706F1	Erin	F	2	7	x		English			French		
0708F2	Poppy	F	2	7		x	French		English		German	
0709F2	Imogen	F	2	7		x	Chinese				French	
0707M2	Patrick	M	2	7		x	German		English			
0804F2	Maisie	F	2	8		x	Russian		English, German	Italian		
0806F1	Layla	F	2	8	x		English					
0801M2	Daniel	M	2	8		x	Russian		English			
0802M2	George	M	2	8		x	Gujarati		English, Kiswahili, Hindi		French, Spanish	
0803M2	William	M	2	8		x	Italian		English			

0805M2	Samuel	M	2	8		x	Russian		English		Chinese	
0807M1	Alexander	M	2	8	x		English	French, Spanish				
0901F2	Phoebe	F	2	9		x	French					Spanish, Norwegian, English
0902M1	Oscar	M	2	9	x		English				French, Spanish	
0903M2	Lucas	M	2	9		x	French		English		Italian	
1001F2	Anna	F	2	10		x	Swedish		English		Spanish	
1005F1	Molly	F	2	10	x		English				French	
1006F1	Maya	F	2	10	x		English			French	Spanish	
1007F2	Scarlett	F	2	10		x	French	English		Spanish		
1002M2	Dylan	M	2	10		x	Russian					Armenian
1003M2	Max	M	2	10		x	Italian	English		Spanish	Mandarin	
1004M2	Benjamin	M	2	10		x	German		English		Spanish, French	
1008M2	Henry	M	2	10		x	Romanian	English		German	Spanish	

Appendix 3

Principal sources of contextual enquiry

Research phase	Descriptor	Instrument	Form	Location	Date	Number	Duration/ hours
Phase 1							
	DEA/classes and lectures	Observing-participant	Field notes	Private PC	Jan-Mar 2010	13	13
	DEM/classes and lectures	Observing-participant	Field notes	Private PC	Jan-Mar 2010	8	8
	DEA/tutor	Interview	Field notes	Private PC	Apr-10	1	0.5
	DEM/tutor	Interview	Field notes	Private PC	Apr-10	1	0.5
	Module Handbook/DEA	Document	Text	Private PC			
	Module Handbook/DEM	Document	Text	Private PC			
	E-mail/tutor/DEA	e-mail	Text	Personal mailbox	Dec 09-Jun 10		
	E-mail/tutor/DEA	e-mail	Text	Personal mailbox	Dec 09-May 10		
Phase 2	TPM/classes and lectures	Observing-participant/Participant-observation	Field notes	Private PC	Oct-Dec 2010	45	45
	TPM/tutor	Interview	Field notes	Private PC	Oct & Dec 2010	2	1
	Module Handbook/TPM	Document	Text	Private PC			
	E-mail/tutor/DEA	e-mail	Text	Personal mailbox	Sep 10-Dec 10		
	Mason Report	Document	Text	Private PC	April, 2012		
	In-Year Monitoring	Document	Text	Private PC	2012		

Appendix 4

Module description (DEM/TPM) (Excerpt)

Intended Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module, you should be able to

demonstrate the following through your group work, group presentations and individual examination essays.

Module Specific Skills:

1. understand different historical perspectives in management and organisation studies
2. understand the characteristics of contemporary organisations and the different approaches to organisational structure and design
3. understand the role of the manager in different organisational settings
4. understand the increasing impact of technology, innovation and sustainability issues on the manager's role.

Discipline Specific Skills:

5. critically evaluate and discuss current management concerns against the background of the body of organisation theory and historical development.

Personal and Key Skills:

6. prepare and organise work individually and in and across groups using a wide range of the available technologies to enhance the learning process.

7. work positively and collaboratively in groups, managing any conflict arising

8. prepare reports to which everyone in their group contributes and then present it succinctly

9. lead a tutorial presentation and discussion session

10. work on case study based materials, comparing different personal approaches to research and organisation, whilst developing an effective and.

Source: TPM Module Handbook p.13

Appendix 5a

FG Prompt Phase 1

You were expected in this module to work positively and collaboratively in groups, managing any conflict arising.

You were asked to use case study materials in order to produce effective and convincing presentations which you delivered to an audience of peers and tutors. These included an assessed presentation. You participated as an audience in your classmates presentations, engaged in discussion and asked questions. You also prepared a written report which everyone in the group contributed.

Please discuss your expectations and experience of these activities. Do discuss the aspects that are of importance to you but consider in particular:

Collaboration (including managing conflict)

Engagement as audience, in discussion and in asking questions

You should choose one person in your group to chair your discussion. The chair should encourage everyone to contribute (including him/herself!).

To end the discussion, recall the main topics you discussed and summarise the principal points.

Approximate discussion time: 45 minutes.

Thank you for participating.

Appendix 5b

FG Prompt Phase 2

The module specifications for this module require you to work positively and collaboratively in groups, managing any conflict arising. Your groups and sub-groups will be diverse, with participants coming from different countries and regions.

You are asked to use case study materials in order to produce effective and convincing presentations which you will deliver, or will have delivered, to an audience of peers and tutors. You will be participating as an audience in your classmates presentations, engaging in discussion and asking questions. You will also be preparing a written report which requires a contribution from everyone in the group.

Bearing in mind the diversity of your groups, please discuss your expectations and experience of these activities. Do discuss the aspects that are of importance to you but consider in particular:

Collaboration (including managing conflict)

Engagement as audience, in discussion and in asking questions

---

You should choose one person in your group to chair your discussion. The chair should encourage everyone to contribute and also contribute him or herself.

To end the discussion, recall the main topics you discussed and summarise the principal points.

Approximate discussion time: 45 minutes.

Thank you for participating.

Appendix 5c

Focus Groups, Phases 1 & 2 sub–prompts

1. Contributing to discussions (in group and class)
Have you found it easy/difficult to contribute to the discussions?

Have you felt embarrassed or reluctant to contribute?

Can you give some examples?

Why do you think you felt/acted in the way you did?

2. Understanding others
Have you found it difficult to understand what people say?

Can you give some examples?

Why do you think you have had these difficulties?

3. Presenting
Is presenting a challenge? If you have done your presentation, what were your experiences as a presenter?

What were/are the challenges and how successful do you think you were/are in meeting them?

Why did you find presenting challenging?

4. Engagement
How engaged have you felt with the module tasks?

Give examples of times when you have felt more/less engaged.

If your level of engagement has varied, why do you think this has been so?

5. Managing group work
How have you set about planning and organizing the group work?

What difficulties have you encountered and how have you resolved these?

Why do you think these difficulties arose?

6. Collaboration

In your groups, have you worked in a collaborative way or more as individuals?

Can you give some examples?

Why did you choose to work in the way you did?

7. The composition of your group

What is the composition of you group? How has this affected the way the group operated?

What challenges has this presented and how have you resolved them?

Why do you think difficulties arose?

8. Critical incidents

Have there been any critical moments or incidents occurring during the module which have changed the way you see things?

Please describe what happened.

Why do you think this moment or incident affected you in the way it did?

9. What you learned about participating with classmates

Have you had any new experiences regarding participation with classmates?

What have you learned from these?

Why were these experiences new to you?

10. Motivation

How motivated do you feel to participate in the group or clas**s** tasks?

What has affected your motivation?

What motivates you?

What do you hope to achieve?

11. Expectations

What were your expectations regarding working collaboratively with classmates?

To what extent have your expectations been met?

In what ways have your expectations not been met?

Not used

Appendix 6

Questionnaire for focus groups participants

Family name		
First name		
University e-mail address		
Programme of study		
Module		
First language		
Other languages (Please estimate level: e.g. 'basic'; 'functional'; 'fluent'; 'native speaker/near native speaker level')		
I would like to be entered for the prize draw for the £10 book tokens	Yes	No
I would be prepared to be interviewed at a later stage in this research, if requested	Yes	No

I understand that this research project into student participation in learning tasks has been approved by the University of Exeter Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee for the period January 2010- January 2011. I am aware that it will treat as data the researcher's field notes of classroom observations and interviews with participants, both individual interviews and focus groups discussions.

Please sign the 'consent form' overleaf.

Thank you

John Straker

(jos203@exeter.ac.uk)

Appendix 7

Example of transcription (9 pages of 22)

FG3 (Focus Group 1 – Phase 2 – November 18th)

0304F2 Okay, maybe we'd just tell which group we are in first? I am and in Group two.

0301F2 Me too.

0304F2 You are too doing globalization?

0302F2 I am in Group four doing IBM. Oh my god I'm not enjoying it.

0303M2 It's so long.

0302F2 It is so long - 42 pages! I mean come on. Group one and Group two, like, two have really short. Straight to the point. So you've already done it?

0301F2 Yes yesterday.

0302F2 Yesterday?

0301F2 It was very good.

0302F2 Yours was really good. I am not going to be able to do that.

0301F2 Are you in the same tutorial?

0302F2 Yes.

0304F2 Yes.

0302F2 How are you managing this one?

0303M2 Well, we meet, and some two people, two guy from our group are doing the presentation. We haven't done anything about the assignment yet. We've decided to do the presentation first.

0302F2 Basically the thing is we are all like from different parts. Nobody is British. There are a couple of people who are, like, finding it really difficult to actually do things in English, so we end up, like, sort of doing the research all separately and then getting together. Like just two actually people put the thing together. So that it's, like, I mean, is not that we mind doing it or not it's like they are not actually getting the best out of it. It's really (-).

0301F2 How many people are in your group?

0302F2 Oh, we are five people.

0301F2 All international students?

0302F2 Yeah, all international students.

0301F2 From where?

0302F2 Ah, well there's this guy from Malaysia, there's this girl from China who is a like really, really shy so she never speaks and I'm, like, she always sends me like these massive e-mails, like, I don't know, all sorts of information, a lot of things to say. Like 'I'm really sorry I never talk to', I'm like, ' You should. Please you should, you have so much to say'. And then a guy who's actually lived here for two years, which is really useful because he speaks English really well, it's really good, and, er, and there is this girl from Bulgaria; she's amazing, so.

0304F2 And for me it is a totally different case. In my group besides me, all others are British, and I think it's a really good, and they say the (-), they know their country well, and they can just contribute a lot, and we, in our group meetings. I think it's quite good. Somehow I can ask them to help me to proof read my composition. Yeah.

0302F2 Yes, I know what you mean.

0303M2 Actually, in my group there is only one guy from Britain and I think he does most of the work, you know. Nobody say anything (to get through that) but he takes all the work (…) and do it. We really, really want to help him but always do everything.

0302F2 What about you?

0301F2 In my group we are I'm from Italy,   a girl from India, and, er, another one from Kazakhstan, but she isn't attending.

0302F2 Oh, really?

0301F2 Yeah, and we have a problem in that moment. We want to know what happened, what's happened but we have to look for her every time, and ask and text and e-mail . And, er, in fact yesterday we talked, we talked about this problem with Julia and she said that she would pass. And we are two American boys and, um. Yeah. We are a good group, yeah.

0303M2 So how , I mean about, so you are from Group two, right? You've already done the presentation?

0304F2 Yes.

0301F2 Yes.

0303M2 So actually how you divide the work between people?

0304F2 Actually, we first do our research each by ourselves (then ideally) one day we come up, because according to our case it's separated different part like globalization and (compare case) also one is organisational change, then

we just separate ourselves we which topic are you going to deal, and maybe because we did the report first, and we just extract what we want to talk about in the presentation so it's, maybe I think it's much easier for us to do it.

0302F2 Yeah, we did the same I think was a good, yeah. The same, before the report, yeah because you can, you can take that you, what you, what need from the report to the presentation. It's easier.

0303M2 It's easier.

0303M2 Yeah, but, I mean in your case, the, um, case study already divided in specific (-).

0301F2 Yeah, um.

0303M2 But us, it's about more than 100 years history of IBM without dividing (-).

0302F2 No we, at first we divided the whole history and then, and we did research on different parts, so when we got together (we are all like) we shouldn't do this 'cos we, we shouldn't follow like a timeline so, basically what we're doing now is each of us have like a certain theory to relate to the case study , so we're doing research on the case study like what can we link to the theory and like the challenges of IBM. Um, and the that turned out to be like a much better idea because, you know, you actually have to include a lot of theory, I think so. So, I think should do that, I you should try that, like (-).

0303M2 We really had problem, we divided (-) so.

0302F2 Oh yes I know.

0301F2 Do you know how to watch the video on E-L-E? Yeah?

0302F2 Yeah. You just get into the E-L-E and it's like on the right hand

0301F2 On the right?

0304F2 Yes. You just press it and you can watch it.

0301F2 Ah, OK.

0304F2 But whereas I found, some sub, modules I can't find the video.

0302F2 Accounting One does not have a recording.

0304F2 I thought it had a recording, but I just can't find it.

0302F2 Like one of the modules I actually would need to go over. No but, yeah. Well, anyway.

0303M2 OK, so what about the assignment?

0304F2 Assignment?

0303M2 How can, how to do it.

0304F2 Are you? Do you mean the report?

0303M2 Well, yes, yes, I mean for your present.

0304F2 Ah. OK. As I mentioned before (-) when we are doing our presentation we first do the report first and then we'd just extract what the brief idea in our report to our presentation, so maybe. I think it's all right.

0303M2 So, we must have about 3000 words (-).

0304F2 Yes, because we have separate parts so maybe each of us do around 600 words, so that's how we make it.

0301F2 We had a lot of problems to reduce the number of words because we have to 3500, yeah. And we have to cut 500, yeah, words.

0303M2 But you know, I'd dreamed (-)..

0301F2 No, It's difficult.

0303M2 (...) how to get into the limit of 3000 words, 3000 words, how to get this, because I think if ours (-); ours is not too short. We nearly like copy paste from the present to the assignment, so we don't have enough.

0301F2 Yeah, too. I think if you want an advise you have to be, pay attention to references, yeah, because it's very important to put it in the right order and to choose the most important, yeah. And you will, will have a lot of references I think in our, in your case.

0302F2 OK.

0303M2 Oh yes.

0302F2 Sometimes.

0304F2 I think, we have some problems with referencing, so that's like we just can't find enough references, we just, every time it's 10 references and 10 extra ones we were just finding. Maybe, I don't know, not enough but, I don't know, we just tried to find some more and add it in.

0301F2 Yeah.

0302F2 Um. Are you finding it that like international students have, like, a rough time here, like, a worse time than actually English students are. Do you think they'd find it like easier, like, to be here than us?

0301F2 For English students?

0302F2 Yeah.

0301F2 Yeah, I think yeah.

0303M2 Pretty much I think.

0302F2 Like I know in lectures, like, like, most of people who will actually take part, like participate and questions and actually answer is like generally like British people, and er. Yeah it's like they, they get much more than we do, and, er.

0303M2 (...) it takes a lot of time for them to understand the same problem. Yah.

0301F2 Which is your first language?

0302F2 Spanish.

0301F2 Oh! But you are very good in English.

0302F2 Thank you. I don't think I am.

0301F2 Yeah. I think.

0302F2 Thank you very much. But, um, (no I know) I'm just like sometimes I just feel, um, I know I am really lucky because I've met a lot of English people and, like I, when I need help and I don't know anything I just like I go to them, but, I don't know, I've met a lot of international people who are not having their best time here, they're like.

0301F2 No?

0302F2 I feel really lonely, yeah, people who, like, feel really lonely, or like not getting engaged, not getting involved, like have questions but don't actually know how to address a lecturer or to, like. I don't know in their own groups, like tutorial groups, like they don't know how to get involved because they feel, like, I don't know that's just how (-).

0301F2 Ah. Which module?

0302F2 No, no like in like (...) in general, in other places, like.

0304F2 But I just (wanted) the education system in your country the same as British or?

0302F2 I did the IB, actually, International Baccalaureate. Um, just one school has it, [**0304F2** OK]and, so it's not really normal for Uruguayan people to go abroad.

0304F2 Because for Hong Kong people it's quite common for us to come to UK, because maybe basically about, the education system is quite similar, so maybe I think it's alright (-).

0302F2 Oh, okay.

0301F2 Where, where do you live? Which is your accommodation?

0303M2 Spencer.

0304F2 I'm in a Kipling House. Yeah.

0303M2 I am living in Spencer.

0301F2 Ah. OK. Which building?

0303M2 Ah, in Block A. Are you (-)? How about you?

0302F2 I'm in Harvey's Lodge, the gated one. It's a bit far away, but it's very nice. Er. But, yeah. I don't know.

0303M2 So, um. Is it true that we usually in the campus, right? [**0301F2** Yeah] So is it true that we have to get out of the campus in the second year?

0302F2 Yeah.

0303M2 Then you have to get a house?

0304F2 Not a must. Not a must, but the chance of getting accommodation on campus will be much less, much.

0303M2 So that means we have to kind of booking a house, renting a house somewhere in the city centre?

0304F2 Yes.

0303M2 Okay.

0304F2 Somehow or may be through that private accommodation that the school can offer some. [**0303M2 Yeah**] OK. Um (such of you) find any kind of difficulty in other modules? Or, it's just, it's, er, alright, you know?

0302F2 Um, er, actually in er, I am sort of up to date with everything I have to do and I'm (not). If I have had a question I just go and ask, or like, go and look for the information, I don't know like, I know I keep, at first I used to, like, leave things (…) the last minute and then it's like, it just clicked and, er, I'm like, I'm up to date with everything. And I'm not actually finding it difficult, if you are up to date, it's like you just follow, but then, but yeah I have been talking to people who are like, 'From the first day I haven't done any reading and I don't really know what I'm doing'. Um. (-) I know. How about you?

0301F2 Yeah, I'm good. Maybe Industrial Organisation is the most difficult of my, of my modules, yeah, because there are lots of, erm, demonstration, maths , er statistics. Yeah, it's very difficult. And now I have to submit an essay, and maybe I will ask because I know to, how to do some things, but there are some other concepts that, er, I don't know very well, so maybe I will ask, er, some people to meet and to do it together, maybe. Yeah, because it's very difficult.

0304F2 OK for me, maybe. (This) is my personal problem, I just sometimes, um, I try to read the book (...) but I just can't finish it, (-) just, I come later, I've got a whole piles of books to read at the moment, yeah, and I think I really need to find the weekend to read it some, to read it all, to finish it.

0302F2 I know. Yeah time management is like really complicated, it's like, I don't know the change from, of course the change from high school to uni was, like, massive, but at the same time it's like, I don't know, it's like, new country, new life, new; you know, I'm living in a new place, far away from my family, far away from my, like, actual friends, and er, I don't know, I'm just like, and, and apart from that, I feel like starting a course in uni which is not actually easy to see how to be up to date, and it takes you a lot of time, and if you actually want to have, like, a social life, and actually practise some sport or something, it's like OK your day just is over.

0301F2 Yeah, yeah. It's very difficult.

0302F2 Did you get involved in like any society, or group, or?

0304F2 Yeah, I did try to get involved in basketball training, yeah.

0303M2 OK. In our group, I don't really take part in any, because I spend most of my time to study, so. It take a lot of time so, I don't know why, but it take a lot of time.

0302F2 OK. And you?

0301F2 I, I tried to join the, erm sports society, like, body society, aerobics and (boxer) society, but I attend two lec, lessons but now I'm sometimes I go running with my friends. Yeah. And you?

0302F2 Um. Well I, I joined the dancing society, I'm, like, really into, and I was going to join a sport but then I realised I just like , couldn't manage my time to do it, so I didn't. But actually I joined this group, [Southtown] Entrepreneurs' group, and it's actually really, like, it's a new thing, it's a different thing, and it's, it brings a lot. Yeah, it actually does.

0303M2 So are you all first year? [**0302F2** Yeah] In the UK?

0302F2 (...) my first time.

0301F2 Yeah, I'm here only for one.

0304F2 Actually not first year, I did my foundation year last year, so OK (...) second year, yeah but first year in the university.

0303M2 I see. And, do you kind of have any (...) in communication between people in (...) because now in my, um. You are from Hong Kong, right?

0304F2 Yup.

0303M2 Do you know kind of (...) or something? Chinese people make use (-).

0304F2 (No, no, no) other way in, OK (...) Hong Kong Chinese sometimes.

0303M2 I know it's (…) so you don't really use.

0304F2 Yeah, yeah, yeah, I don't know about that.

0303M2 Because, er, now in my, in my (…) group there's two guys from Chinese, and, um, we laugh about that, they don't really use Facebook at all, because, um, last week we create a kind of forum in Facebook so we can chat and talk about the assignment together, and, yes, they only use the Chinese, Chinese version of Facebook.

0304F2 No, but, but, that's, that's, I think that's reasonable because in Chinese, in the mainland the Facebook is (blocked), so they can't use Facebook, so that's why (-) .

0302F2 Really?

0304F2 Yeah, yeah, yeah.

0302F2 (That's twisted.) Why?

0304F2 I don't know. Maybe it's some kind of politics, I don't know.

0301F2 Yeah, of course.

0304F2 Yeah, I just know they are, is it blocked, so it's common for them to not using Facebook. Yeah, (it's maybe) in order not show, show things. But, I don't know what's up. Yeah but. Okay maybe back to management?

0302F2 Yeah, I know.

0304F2 Um. OK.

0302F2 Well, basically you said that this English guy in your group, your Management group, basically does everything, or like most of the work. [**0303M2** He's (...)] How is he handling that? Did he say anything about it? Does he care?

0303M2 Actually, he doesn't do all of the works; he also devise some sort of work for us but it's (just) tiny bit and he does almost everything, so.

0302F2 But, does he like, did he say anything to do about, I mean, does he care at all?

0303M2 Not really. It seems a bit easy for him. I don't know why.

0301F2 Did you say something to him or not?

0303M2 Pardon?

0301F2 Did you say something to him or not?

0302F2 Did you find like it like fair that he's actually doing (...)?

0303M2 Actually, I asked, I asked him to, um, say, to give us some more work, but he just said it's OK, and so, I have nothing more to say. [**0302F2** OK] Pretty good guy.

0304F2 (...) how you guys are contact with your group mates (OK maybe for me we'd usually) just text or maybe just e-mail. Did you have any other, OK?

0302F2 (Well), basically it's like, well I basically text the group on like, 'Hey people, do you want to meet tomorrow?' , 'OK, we're meeting tomorrow'. We discuss and like, OK, well, (I dunno), 'Wednesday 3 o'clock' . So Wednesday like morning I'm like, 'Hey people, come today at 3 o'clock.' [**light laughter**]

0301F2 Like an alarm.

0302F2 Oh, yeah. This guy, like, we , we met twice, like he never showed up, and I was like, okay I really don't want to say anything, so it's like, we're giving you a last chance, like. [**0301F2** Yeah] I mean you really need to come and, er, well he showed up today, actually, to the, I mean to the actual, er, tutorial, and he was like, 'Yeah. I'm really sorry' and we are all, 'That's fine, we'll forgive you.'

0303M2 How long is your regular meeting? The one you said in the morning?

0302F2 Well, basically, well yesterday we met at like, I don't know, we met for about 3 hours.

0301F2 Wow!

<u>Transcription conventions</u>

(-)   Pause

(…)   Untranscribable/recording unclear

(dunno)   transcription uncertain

[**0302F2** OK] Interjection

[**laughter**]   description of feature

[editing]

After Stubbs et al. (1979)

NB Real names have been changed or replaced by initials

Appendix 8a

Thematic Analysis of FG01, Phase 1

Cluster of relevant meanings	Themes
• Whether participants had had experience of group work/presentations previously • Group work as a habitual practice • Hopes for the future	**Past experience and future hopes**
• Expectations of working in groups	**What were participants expectations**
• The advantages of being designated groups	**The approach to setting up groups**
• Group work vs. individual work – the question of autonomy • The co-operative nature of group work • Group work and sharing management roles • Delegation • Group leadership • Exploiting the 'not every group member has to talk in the assessed presentation' rule	**The organisational structure of groups**
• The procedure for group work • Engaging with the task: working in groups to understand the issues • The benefits of doing homework • The dangers of not doing homework • Why not doing homework affects performance • Bluffing - a poor strategy for coping with not doing the homework • The importance of a good night's sleep to class involvement • The importance of knowing what the task is about • Dividing up the task as a strategy for writing the essay • Doing the essay collaboratively • The time needed to do the essay collaboratively • Opinions about the time needed to do the task collaboratively • The benefits of doing the essay collaboratively • Combining collaborative and individual work • Opinions concerning whether doing the task individually or collaboratively is more efficient • Fears and response to fears that the teacher would note inconsistencies in writing styles when the essay task was broken into individual parts • Other purposes for making editorial revisions to essays • Procedure for revising the essay • Reasons for doing the essay in the way they did • The advantage of the individual approach: the paradoxical nature of the collaborative approach	**How groups went about the learning tasks – practices they adopted and valued**

• Making use of different ideas • Whether there were conflicts • Why conflicts did not arise • Managing differences of opinion • Why there were differences of opinion • Finding the right answer in group tasks	**Recognising and dealing with conflicts of opinion**
• Working in groups builds a sense of responsibility • Being irresponsible • Whether participants did their parts • Why participants did their parts • Acknowledgment that not everyone does their part • Managing people who don't pull their weight • The difficulty in managing slackers • A consequence of not managing slackers • The belief that big groups are more prone to having slackers • The disruptive impact of a slacker in small group	**Group work and responsibility**
• Whether there were absences • Covering absences – winging it • Identifying covering absences as a problem • Recognising the need for being prepared to cover absences	**Absences from groups**
• The value of working in groups • The value of interaction • Some advantages of group work	**The positive aspects of group work**
• The experience of giving the assessed presentations • Being unprepared for the first presentation and its consequences • Why being unprepared for the first presentation was unpleasant • The effect of the experience of being unprepared on future practice • Preparing for the final presentation • Forgetting your part	**The experience of giving presentations**
• The consequences of exceeding the time limit of presentations • What groups did to keep to the time limit • Why groups exceeded the time limit • The length of presentations • The length of practice presentations • Why shortening the presentation text was a challenge	**The time issue of presentations**
• The experience of having to ask questions	**The experience of asking questions**

• The experience of 'sprung' questions • Reflections on the experience of 'sprung' questions • Recalling the tutor's advice about fielding questions • How working in a group helps when you are on the spot • The 'silence' problem • The novelty of the silence problem • 'Loud' Australia vs. 'laid back' UK • Trying to understand why people are quiet – a deficit view • Being quiet as a form of respect • Nominating students to respond vs. open questions • The consequence of nominating students • The consequence of open discussion • The novelty of open discussion	**The experience of being asked questions**
• Practising for the presentations - learning to do without notes • Doing the trial presentations – the experience of writing notes on the board • Opinions on the decision to allow the use of PowerPoint • The advantages of using PowerPoint • The challenging nature of the conditions set for using PowerPoint	**Support in presentations – notes, visual aids - the PowerPoint issue**
• The challenge of getting people's attention • The rationale for trying to get people's attention • What you could and couldn't do to get attention • Resolution to the problem of getting attention	**Getting attention in presentations**
• The progress groups made • Getting to know each other better • Learning to work as a group • The most important things learned on the course • Learning to be more efficient • What was learnt from the experience of being unprepared for the first presentation • The benefit of practice • What was learned from doing and watching the practice presentations • Learning from ones' own and other groups' practice presentations • The value of weekly talks • Having group talks after the presentation practice • Group work as practice for the real world	**What participants learned through engaging with the learning tasks**
• Patterns of contributions in groups • The advantage of being outspoken • The wish to contribute to discussions	**Contributing in class and groups – practice and norms**

• Reluctance to contribute in class related to perceived lack of knowledge • Contributing in class related to the subject • Management – a subject which it is easy to get involved in	**Influences on contributing in class and groups – subject and subject knowledge**
• Trying to understand whys some students are reluctant to contribute in class and group work • Lacking in confidence • Being shy • Contributing in class and the class size • Saying something is wrong vs. leading to the right answer	**Influences on contributing in class and groups – being shy and lacking confidence**
• The difficulty of contributing to discussions when English is your second language • The English 'problem' in the context of multilingualism • The English problem conceptualised in terms of 'formal' and 'informal' English • The value of mixing with foreigners for helping native speakers cope with foreigner English • Acknowledging the difficulty in understanding foreigner English • Asking for repetition as a strategy to use when you can't understand • The limitations of the repetition strategy • Asking for reformulation as a strategy to use when you can't understand	**Influences on contributing in class and groups – English language as a problem and ways to deal with it**
• Empathising with non-Native English speakers' difficulties • Helping non-native English speakers express their ideas • Identifying class members for whom English was a problem • Celebrating classmates' English • Distancing the problem • Taking responsibility for finding it hard to understand foreigners' accents • Whether one's own accent is difficult to understand • Being quiet as a form of respect	**Peer support (for NNES and more generally)**
• The composition of groups – understanding what is meant by this • The nationality composition of groups • The nationality issue – whether language is the principal concern • Whether culture was an obstacle to communication • 'Loud' Australia vs. 'laid back' UK • Being quiet as a form of respect	**The nationality composition of groups and whether this had an impact on interactions**
• The composition of groups – understanding what is meant by this • The gender composition of groups • Feelings about the gender composition of groups • Opinions about the impact of the gender composition on participation	**The gender composition of groups and its impact**
• Opinions of their tutor • The importance of the enthusiasm of the tutor for motivating students • How the tutor made the classes interesting • An experience of a tutor telling a student he was wrong	**What students thought about university teachers**

24 Themes

Thematic Analysis of FG02, Phase 1

Cluster of relevant meanings	Themes
• Understanding the prompt	**Understanding the prompt**
• Being a novice at group presentations • Prior experience of group work	**Group work – prior experience**
• Expectations of group work • Early impressions of current groups	**Group work – expectations**
• Positive evaluation of experience of group work • Appraisal of teamwork • Why teamwork is beneficial • Fears of group work unrealised • Assessment of group work following the group working experience • The shortcomings of group work as a mode of learning – group work vs. individual work • The usefulness of group work to achieve academic goals • Assessment of the current groups	**Evaluation of group work**
• The ubiquity of group work • The need for meetings to be important • The special importance of group work within the field of management • The need to come to terms with group work for management students	**Group work - the importance**
• How they worked in groups – splitting up the work • Procedure for doing team work • Group work procedure – the advantages of all working together on the same task • Group work procedure – the disadvantages of all working together on the same task • Group work procedure – the advantages of working on different sections and then combining the parts • Evaluation of group work practice • Group work procedure – the disadvantages of working on different sections and then combining the parts	**Group work – procedure**
• Seeing progress and deciding when to intervene • Issues regarding increasing group size	**Group work –managing groups**
• Arranging meetings	**Group work – planning meeting**
• Late submissions – negative impact on editing - partly resolved • Late submissions – negative impact on editing - resolved • Late submissions – negative impact on editing - unsatisfactorily resolved • Group-imposed deadlines not being met • Whether deadlines were set • Responsibility for meeting deadlines • Formal vs. informal deadlines • Feeling about deadlines not being met • Responding to missed deadlines	**Group work – deadlines**

• The reasons for group imposed deadlines • Trying to get group members to meet deadlines –nagging • Liking to get things done in advance vs. last minute people • Group-imposed dead lines – meeting them • Reflection on working in a group where deadlines were respected - was it just luck	
• Reflections on response in the situation when the student didn't respond • Rationale for not taking more drastic action in the situation where the student did not respond • The case of a student who only chose to participate at the last moment - participation history • Reporting the students non-participation to the teacher • Limits to be sympathetic to people who don't want to attend meetings • Why some people are reluctant to attend meetings • How people felt about attending meetings • Issues regarding non-continuation of group membership • Issues regarding non-continuation of group membership – managing this • Issues regarding non-continuation of group membership – consequences on academic work • Withdrawal from the group: the case of H. - how it evolved	**Group work – non attendance/non participation**
• Trying to get group members to meet deadlines –nagging • Nagging – an effective strategy • Having to send out nagging e-mails • Learning from the experience of cajoling others to participate • Dealing with people's reluctance to attend meeting • Limits to be sympathetic to people who don't want to attend meetings	**Group work – persuading members to participate**
• Last moment student – sudden re-emergence • Why the last moment student wanted to contribute • How we responded to the student's request to be included • Their understanding of the last moment student's behaviour • How we felt about the student's request to be included • Why we felt the way we did • The incident when the last moment student suddenly appeared at class on the day of their presentations • The difficulty of knowing how to respond • The obligation they felt to comply with his request • Why they felt reluctant to comply • The misgiving they had about telling the teacher the way it was • Observations on why the student didn't attend that tutorial class • The worth the group assigned to the proposed contribution • Evaluation of the experience of dealing with the problem of the last moment student • Subsequent reflections on how they had dealt with the last moment student • Quandary regarding how they had dealt with the last moment student • How they might have handled the situation with the last moment student differently -speculations on what they could of done	**Group work – dealing with late request to participate (case study)**

• How they might have handled the situation with the last moment student differently – concrete suggestions	
• How different people respond when they are asked to fulfil responsibilities	**Group work - being responsible**
• Finding group members did not live up to expectations • High expectations of a group member - confusion when these were not met • Did group member meet expectations – the quality of the experience • Withdrawal protocol – what should be expected	**Expectations of group members**
• Reflection on working in a group where deadlines were respected - was it just luck • What could and could not be put down to luck	**Luck as an ingredient in successful group work**
• Being in a hardworking group • Transmitting the group work ethic to less enthusiastic members. • Taking it seriously • The consequence of taking it seriously • Feelings about the consequences of not taking it seriously -thinking of others • Feeling s about the consequences of not taking it seriously -thinking of self	**Group work – work ethic**
• The serious nature of the leader's role	**The role of the leader in group work**
• Whether having a dominant member would affect the group's mark • How having a dominant member of the group affected participation • A dominant member of the group • Being determined to stand up to a dominant group member • How acting differently at the outset might have prevented a group member becoming dominant • How others in the group responded to a dominant member • How the group might have worked if there hadn't been a dominant character • Some issues surrounding asking questions - domination	**Domination in group work**
• Dominance – the age dimension • Learning for the future about how to cope with an older group member	**Age differential as a factor in group work**
• The importance of getting off on the right foot in group work • The danger of not nipping problems in the bud • When people found their place in a group	**The early stages of group work**
• Conflict – a given in group work • When conflict is worse • Dealing with conflict • How conflict situations differ	**The role of conflict in group work**
• The importance of listening to other group members • Getting one own view across vs. listening to others – finding the balance • Listening and being a high achieving group	**The importance of listening in group work**
• The importance of team spirit • The importance of being positive in meetings	**Team spirit and being positive in group work**
• The importance of doing what you are best at/most comfortable with • Trusting those who profess knowledge in an area – how good a strategy	**The place of expertise in group work**

• Group work: how well you knew the others in your group • Group work: the advantages of working with people you knew • Group the importance of the type of friend • Group work: preferring not to work with friends • Group work: the disadvantages of working with people you knew – covering for friends • Group work: the disadvantages of working with people you knew – chat • Group work: the advantage of working with people you know less well	**Group work – working with friends or strangers**
• Editing NNES written English by NES • Feelings about editing other's work • How others felt about having their work edited • The reason for editing other students' work • The obligation to edit other student's work Having a policy regarding editing other students' work • The step from having an editing policy to putting into practice • Reaching a decision to edit another student's work • How students felt about having to edit another student's work • The result of editing another student work • Late submissions – negative impact on editing - partly resolved • E-mail circulation and editing the latest version	**Editing group members' written work**
• Whether some presentation topics were more interesting than others • Speculating on the outcome if the topic had been more interesting	**Group work – topic and task**
• Deciding what was good work - questioning the judgement of group members • Balancing encouraging higher standards with the fear of demotivating • Getting guidance on the required standards • Getting guidance on the required standards - trusting those with more experience • When you have little knowledge of the subject or the required structure, and someone is claiming that they know more, you have to trust them not 'have to' • Getting guidance on the required standards - questioning other's judgment on standards • Getting guidance on the required standards - overestimating a group members understanding of standards • Understanding standards - the benefit of experience • Evaluating the quality of the group's work –modest claims • Trusting those who profess knowledge in an area – how good a strategy this is	**Group work – standards of work**
• What students gained from doing their presentations • Whether some presentation topics were more interesting than others • Speculating on the outcome if they hadn't been the first group to present • Why students found doing the presentations useful • How much students learned from the other student' presentations – subject knowledge • The usefulness of the research students did on other groups topics • How much students learned from the other student' presentations – presentation techniques • Questioning whether doing groups presentations was an effective way of learning • Comparing present and previous experience of doing presentations	**Doing and participating in group work presentations**

• The rationale for doing presentations	
• Having to ask questions – how useful was it • Having to prepare questions prior to the class • Problems arising from pre-prepared questions • Evaluation participation questioning - a difficult task • Whether to ask simple or challenging questions – a dilemma • Reflecting on the dilemma about whether to ask difficult or challenging questions • How they felt about asking questions • Some issues surrounding asking questions - preparation • Some issues surrounding asking questions - domination • Not getting the chance to ask your question – how you feel • Resolving issues surrounding asking questions - deciding who should ask • How you might feel if you asked a challenging question which they couldn't answer • The experience of being asked questions • How they felt about answering questions	**Asking and answering questions in presentations**
• The rationale for doing presentations • The delivery of subject knowledge • The emphasis on case studies • The shortcomings of group work as a mode of learning – group work vs. individual work • The type of knowledge acquired through group work • The usefulness of group work to achieve academic goals • The need for individual work to achieve academic goals • The importance of getting a good mark • Feelings about the consequences of not taking it seriously -thinking of self • Individual work – something to be done on one's own • The value of group work vs. the value of individual work – the lecturer's perspective • Questioning whether doing groups presentations was an effective way of learning • How much students learned from the other student' presentations – presentation techniques • Why students found doing the presentations useful • How much students learned from the other student' presentations – subject knowledge	**Pedagogic goals and expectations (including marks)**
• Experience of working with people from diverse backgrounds • Possible reasons for withdrawal from groups – culture and language: case of H. • Speculating on how the H. situation could have developed differently • Evaluating the way the H. situation developed • H. case - the importance of keeping the tutor in the loop - the extent of the group's responsibility • Withdrawal protocol – what should be expected – cultural dimension • Having international students as group members • Being sensitive to criticism – a cultural trait • Having international students as group members – the part P. played • Having international students as group members – evaluation of the part P. played	**Diversity in groups – being International students (culture)**

• Having international students as group members – feelings about the part P. played • The importance of working with whom you are comfortable with – dividing groups by nationality	
• Possible reasons for withdrawal from groups – culture and language: case of H. • Speculating on how the H. situation could have developed differently • Evaluating the way the H. situation developed • H. case - the importance of keeping the tutor in the loop - the extent of the group's responsibility • Possible reasons for withdrawal from groups – culture and language: case of H.	**H. case study**
• Possible reasons for withdrawal from groups – culture and language: case of H. • Editing NNES written English by NES • Language as a barrier – understanding NNES • Language as a barrier – understanding NES • Language as a barrier – NES: physical abilities • Language as a barrier – having to repeat things • Procedures for getting people to repeat things • Procedures for getting people to repeat things - recognition of breakdown • When I still hadn't got it on the third or fourth attempt , I would just kind of go 'yeah OK' • Evaluation of breakdown in communication after requests for repetition • Appreciation of NNES's feeling s when communication breaks down • Being fortunate when there was no or minimal language barrier • Whether the presence of a language barrier makes group work harder • Language as a barrier – a concern for NES – a barrier to learning • Language as a barrier – dealing with comprehension difficulties – the virtue of patience • Difficulties in understanding each other due to language – accepting this is normal • Getting over feelings of embarrassment resulting from communication breakdown • How to get over feelings of embarrassment resulting from communication breakdown due to language • Recognising that communication breakdown can be embarrassing • Difficulties in understanding each other due to language – cause of discomfort • Dealing with communication breakdown – a mutual responsibility • Dealing with communication breakdown – being optimistic about the consequence • Language as not the only reason for communication breakdown • Assessment of international students' English • Overcoming the language barrier – familiarity with how people speak • Making language adjustments to accents & speed - a strategy for dealing with local language variation applied to internationals	**Diversity in groups – English language as an issue**
• Language as not the only reason for communication breakdown – instances of self-expression and subject knowledge • Dealing with communication breakdown in group work whatever its causes • Why it's important to tackle communication breakdown in groups • Understanding why tackling communication breakdown is difficult • The positive aspect of feeling embarrassed	**Communications groups – non-linguistic dimension**

• The importance of self confidence • Being nervous as a result worrying about communication breakdown • Evaluation of being nervous about communication breakdown • Being pragmatic about being nervous about communication breakdown	

33 Themes

Appendix 8b

Thematic Analysis of FG01 & FG02: Themes compared

FG1		FG2
Past experience and future hopes		Understanding the prompt
What were participants expectations		Group work – prior experience
The approach to setting up groups		Group work – expectations
The organisational structure of groups		Evaluation of group work
How groups went about the learning tasks – practices they adopted and valued		Group work - the importance
Recognising and dealing with conflicts of opinion		Group work – procedure
Group work and responsibility		Group work –managing groups
Absences from groups		Group work – planning meeting
The positive aspects of group work		Group work – deadlines
The experience of giving presentations		Group work – non attendance/non participation
The time issue of presentations		Group work – persuading members to participate
The experience of asking questions		Group work – dealing with late request to participate (case study)
The experience of being asked questions		Group work - being responsible
Support in presentations – notes, visual aids - the PowerPoint issue		Expectations of group members
Getting attention in presentations		Luck as an ingredient in successful group work
What participants learned through engaging with the learning tasks		Group work – work ethic
Contributing in class and groups – practice and norms		The Rules of the leader in group work
Influences on contributing in class and groups – subject and subject knowledge		Domination in group work
Influences on contributing in class and groups – being shy and lacking confidence		Age differential as a factor in group work
Influences on contributing in class and groups – English language as a problem and ways to deal with it		The early stages of group work
Peer support (for NNES and more generally)		The Rules of conflict in group work
The nationality composition of groups and whether this had an impact on interactions		The importance of listening in group work
The gender composition of groups and its impact		Team spirit and being positive in group work
What students thought about university teachers		The place of expertise in group work
		Group work – working with friends or strangers
		Editing group members' written work
		Group work – topic and task
		Group work – standards of work
		Doing and participating in group work presentations
		Asking and answering questions in presentations
		Pedagogic goals and expectations (including

		marks)
		Diversity in groups – being International students (culture)
		H. - case study
		Diversity in groups – English language as an issue
		Communications groups – non-linguistic dimension

Recurrent themes

Recurrent themes (embedded)

Themes mentioned only in one focus group

Appendix 8c

FG01 & FG02: Themes matched to framework categories

Themes	Dominant activity theoretical lenses	Secondary lenses
<mark>Recurrent themes</mark> <mark>Recurrent themes (embedded)</mark>		
Prior experience	Community	Tool Mediation
Expectations	Community	Object
Group work procedure	Division of Labour Rules	Community Object
Conflict	Community Rules	Object
Attendance/participation/responsibility	Division of Labour Rules	Community Object Subject
Language issue	Tool Mediation	Subject
International students	Community	
Peer editing	Tool Mediation Division of Labour	Subject
Giving presentations	Tool Mediation Division of Labour	Subject
Learning and teaching	Tool Mediation	Object Community
Asking/answering question in presentations	Tool Mediation	Object Community Subject
Evaluation of group work	Object	Community Subject
<mark>Themes mentioned only in one focus group</mark>		
Gender	Community	
Age	Community	Tool Mediation
Domination	Subject Rules	Division of Labour
Group organisational structure	Division of Labour Rules	Subject
Peer support	Subject Division of Labour	Object Tool Mediation
Listening	Tool Mediation	
Standard of work	Object	Community
Group formation	Division of Labour Rules	
Expertise	Tool Mediation Division of Labour	
Importance of group work	Object	Community
Presentations skills	Mediation	
Contributing in groups	Tool Mediation Division of Labour	Object Subject
Setting and enforcing deadlines	Division of Labour Rules	Subject

Opinions of University teachers	Tool Mediation Rules	Subject
Leadership	Division of Labour Rules	Subject
Team spirit	Object	
Composition of groups	Community	

Appendix 9

Coding of FG03 data excerpts at object-motive and other framework categories (Phase 2, Stage 1)

1	2	3
Data excerpts (imported from NVIVO)	**Rationale for coding at object-motive**	**Also coded at**
0302F2 I feel really lonely, yeah, people who, like, feel really lonely, or like not getting engaged, not getting involved, like have questions but don't actually know how to address a lecturer or to, like. I don't know in their own groups, like tutorial groups, like they don't know how to get involved because they feel, like, I don't know that's just how ...	Awareness of need to get involved – i.e. that the activity is purposeful; has an object-motive	Community; Subject; Tool
0303M2 Yeah OK. Um (such of you) find any kind of difficulty in other modules? Or, it's just, it's, er, alright, you know **0302F2** Um, er, actually in er, I am sort of up to date with everything I have to do and I'm (not). If I have had a question I just go and ask, or like, go and look for the information, I don't know like, I know I keep, at first I used to, like, leave things (...) the last minute and then it's like, it just clicked and, er, I'm like, I'm up to date with everything. And I'm not actually finding it difficult, if you are up to date, it's like you just follow, but then, but yeah I have been talking to people who are like, 'From the first day I haven't done any reading and I don't really know what I'm doing'. Um. (...) I know. How about you? **0301F2** Yeah, I'm good.	'click' signals awareness of 'pull' of object and how this translates into participant behaviours.	Community; Subject; Tool
0304F2 OK for me, maybe. (This) is my personal problem, I just sometimes, um, I try to read the book (...) but I just can't finish it, (...) just, I come later, I've got a whole piles of books to read at the moment, yeah, and I think I really need to find the weekend to read it some, to read it all, to finish it. **0302F2** I know. Yeah time management is like really complicated, it's like, I don't know the change from, of course the change from high school to uni was, like, massive, but at the same time it's like, I don't know, it's like, new country, new life, new; you know, I'm living in a new place, far away from my family, far away from my, like, actual friends, and er, I don't know, I'm just like, and, and apart from that, I feel like starting a course in uni which is not actually easy to see how to be up to date, and it takes you a lot of time, and if you actually want to have, like, a social life, and actually practice some sport or something, it's like OK your day just is over. **0301F2** Yeah, yeah. It's very difficult.	Participant 0304F2's concern about reading is understood by 0302F2 as a matter of time management which she relates to getting the right balance between the competing objects and motives of study and social life.	Subject; Community; Tool
0302F2 Did you get involved in like any society, or group, or? **0304F2** Yeah, I did try to get involved in basketball training, yeah. **0303M2** OK. In our group, I don't really take part in any, because I spend most of my time to study, so. It take a lot of time so, I don't know why, but it take a lot of time. **0302F2** Um. Well I, I joined the dancing society, I'm, like, really into, and I was going to join a sport but then I realised I just like , couldn't manage my time to do it, so I didn't.	Shows awareness of competing objects and motives; 0303M2 prioritises core activity (study).	Subject; Community

Appendix 10

Coding of object-motive at Levels 1-9 (Phase 2, Stage 2)

NB All Phase 2 analysis at both Stage 1 and Stage 2 is contained in NVIVO 10 files stored on the researcher's personal computer.

Framework category	Inductive coding							
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Object-motive	Academic study	Learning about learning	Academic practices	Skill development (The 'how')	Language			
					Other skills/no skill specified			
				Understanding & meeting expectations (The 'what')				
			Cultural dimension					
			Managing learning	Institutional responsibility	Guidance			
					Regulations			
					Resources			
				Student ownership	Balancing different activities			
					Task management			
		Learning about management						
	Collaborating in diverse groups	Diversity	Gender					
			Non-specified difference					
			Regional and cultural differences	Language as the focus	English	Expertise	Consultant	
							Specialist	
							Support and guidance	

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Framework category	Inductive coding							
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Object-motive	Collaborating in diverse groups	Diversity	Regional and cultural differences	Language as the focus	English	NNS deficit	Competence	
							Confidence	
							Nature unspecified	
						NS exclusivity		
						Positive view of NNS		
					Other languages			
				Prior intercultural experience				
				Reflections on current intercultural experience	Perception of others	Perceptions of home students		
						Perceptions of international students		
						Perceptions of the self and the other		
					Perception of current experience	Negatively evaluated		
						Non-evaluative		
						Positively evaluated		
		Getting the job done	Human Resources	Diversity acknowledged	Background (nationality or culture)			
					Not friend or acquaintance			

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Framework category	Inductive coding							
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Object-motive	Collaborating in diverse groups	Getting the job done	Human Resources	Diversity acknowledged	Skill			
					Unspecified			
					Work preferences – strengths and weaknesses			
				Quality identified	Knowledge and skills	Academic and study skills		
						Cultural and regional knowledge		
						Language skills	No language barrier	
							Noting deficit	Competence
							Recognising expertise	
						Skills – general		
						Subject knowledge		
						Technical skills		
					Personal qualities	Focus on self	Being silent	
							Being talkative	
							Confidence	
							Pride	
							Shyness	
							Submissiveness	
						Intelligences	Academic	Ability
								Understanding expectations
							Creative	
						Sociability	Friendliness, fun, sense of humour, sociability	

Framework category	Inductive coding							
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Object-motive	Collaborating in diverse groups	Getting the job done	Human Resources	Quality identified	Personal qualities	Sociability	Unfriendliness	
						Treatment of others	Negative assumptions about others	
							Arrogance, competiveness, personality clashes	
							Bossiness, assertiveness, discipline	
							Politeness, respect, understanding of others, patience	
							Rudeness, exclusivity, rejection, distance	
						Work ethic	Hard work, commitment, rising to a challenge	
							Laziness, other priorities, reluctance to take responsibility	
			Procedures	Group focussed	Assessing individual effort			
					Group cohesion	Cohesive		
						Divisive		
					Managing conflict			

Framework category	Inductive coding							
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Object-motive	Collaborating in diverse groups	Getting the job done	Procedures	Task focussed	Clarifying requirements			
					Planning and organising	Planning and organising meetings		
						Task assignment and scheduling		
					Undertaking the work	Working separately	Skill development	
							Task division	
						Working together	Effective collaboration	
							Problematic collaboration	
			Roles	Active and proactive roles				
					Doer of others' work	Drudge		
						Work willingly undertaken		
					Dominant or more able participant			
					Helper-supporter	Emotional		
						Knowledge and skills		
					Leader-manager	Comfortable with or neutral towards leadership		
						Leadership problematised		
				Passive and subservient roles	Less assertive or able participant			
					Loafer			
					Needy learner			

Framework category	Inductive coding							
Level 1	**Level 2**	**Level 3**	**Level 4**	**Level 5**	**Level 6**	**Level 7**	**Level 8**	**Level 9**
Object-motive	Collaborating in diverse groups	Interpersonal relations	Conditional, neutral or balanced view	Conditions for good group work not fully or not easily met	Diversity a restraint			
					Group size			
					Issues around meetings	Attendance		
						Effectiveness		
					Participation among attenders			
					Resources			
					Skills			
					Task constraints			
				Conflict worked around or avoided/ compromise				
				Group interrelations neither celebrated nor disparaged				
			Tending to the negative	Conflict divisive				
				Cultural or linguistic differences divisive	Culture emphasised			
					Language emphasised			
				Difference in academic level or approach to study				
				Managing meetings problematic				
				Personality clashes				
				Reluctance to cooperate	Reluctance to cooperate emphasised			
					Unequal workload emphasised			

Framework category	Inductive coding							
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Object-motive	Collaborating in diverse groups	Interpersonal relations	Tending to the negative	Time constraints – deadlines not met				
			Tending to the positive	Bonding and support	Making friends	Appreciating each other		
						Ice breaking		
					Seeking, receiving or offering help			
					Sympathy and encouragement			
				Challenges met				
				Conditions for good group work met	Availability or resources (human/material)			
					Value of diversity			
				Differences of views viewed positively				
				Outcomes viewed positively	Collective benefit			
					Individual reward			
				Personal development	Approach to learning			
					Knowledge and skills			
		Levels of engagement	Engagement acknowledged					
			Engagement questioned	Commitment				
				Competing interests				
				Social issues				
				Understanding of expectations				
		Tensions with individualism						
		Use of technology						

Framework category	Inductive coding							
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Object-motive	Learning to be managers							
	Tasks	Individual tasks	Examinations					
			Development report					
		Group content-based tasks	Presentation	Audience participation	Engagement with audience			
					Q&A session	Answering questions		
						Asking questions		
				PowerPoint				
				The talk	Delivery			
					Overall experience			
					Preparation			
			Report	Editing				
				Managing time and workload				
				Using sources				
				Using technology				
				Working together	Viewed negatively			
					Viewed objectively			
					Viewed positively			
		Group reflective tasks	Participation report					
			Peer review					
	Learning objects in other modules							

Appendix 11

Coding to Object in View at Level Two (FG10) (Phase 2/Stage 2)

Collaboration in diverse groups (8 of 44 references)	Also coded at
1004M2 So E_ [**1006F1** Oh, God] what you think [**1006F1** Thanks!] is the most important aspect of working together as a group? **1006F1** Ah. I reckon like it's about seeing everyone's needs and everything, but if you're going to tell someone off you have to do it in a polite way, and I'm not really that good at that. What do you think R_? **1005F1** Erm. Yeah. I think, um, it's very important to, in one of your first groups, to talk about people's strengths and weaknesses, so that then you can kind of, so no-one takes so much of a lead, everyone can have their own area. Anyone agree? **1004M2** Yeah, no I agree because, yeah, it's important to, sort of, get to know your group in the first meeting and know what everyone likes doing , how the everyone likes to work, just sort of get on the same page so it's easier. That way it's a lot easier to assign people tasks and know how they work and everything.	
1004M2 What we found in our group particularly - I was in a group with E_ and R_ - what we found in particular, one of the aspects, the hardiest, to sort, um, make happen, so to speak, is time management, obviously because everyone has different schedules and, um, they're available at different times, that was one of the things that was very hard to get everyone to come to meetings at the same time, and give everyone in the discussion some work. I don't know if anyone else found that in their groups or ... **1007F2** Yes we had the same problem. Ended up using a lot of technology instead of seeing each other **1004M2** Yeah	**Academic study**
1006F1 Yeah. I reckoned we should've used Google docs, because like you edit the, like, actual report on the page and we didn't do that; we decided to meet up instead and then someone would be there for the first 20 minutes and then like two people would leave and another person would come and your head was just going everywhere and you don't really know like what was happening, but got it done, handed it in today.	**Task**
1003M2 Er, the situation was kind of different in our group. 'Cos, A_ in my group too, but, er, well, maybe, we, the whole co-operative things and dividing, we followed a pretty anarchic structure for the, up to the fifth week, [**1004M2** OK] and then at the fifth week when, erm, just oral informal feedback [**1004M2** Okay] on how personal work regarding their subject was going showed that people were way behind two weeks or three weeks before the presentation. [**1004M2** Yeah] We changed it a little bit, and it changed more, I mean there was one person who would help lead the group or at least (sort of like) reminding people what to do, when to do, [**006F1** how] occasionally how to do it, but the biggest problem we had was just .. . We had one international student whose, it was just really hard to evaluate on the feedback, 'cos it was really, really hard to understand to what extent she did what she could, [**1004M2** yeah] and to what extent her language actually limited her, or did she actually not work at a better level, and so we ended up with a report in our hands and tried not to comment on the fact that this one person basically didn't even manage to contribute a paragraph on a section of another person.	**Task**

1006F1 So they were like the weakest link? **1003M2** Yeah, but, but, but they weren't necessarily academically, that's the thing, it was just **1004M2** It was more of a language.	
1004M2 Yeah. What about you D_? What problems with your group face? **1002M2** We didn't face any problems **1006F1** Oh, Can I (have) switch next time? (Oh, I'm) joking **1004M2** Not any problems at, or not even ....? **1002M2** Nothing. **1004M2** Time management? Nothing? **1002M2** No. Just everything (content). Everything on time. Clear. There's no conflict **1006F1** So, everyone got along? **1002M2** Huh? **1006F1** Everyone just got along? Like this [click fingers]? **1002M2** Yes. **1004M2** That's probably a problem then **1006F1** Wow! Teach me your ways, please **1004M2** Pretty impressive.	
1001F2 Yeah, it was tricky, like, one of, a girl in our group she'd just left for like Thursday to Monday before we were going to have a presentation **1004M2** Oh, that's not fair! **1001F2** Like, and, she couldn't help it help it because she'd already booked the trip, but that was also the kind of thing like I'm, personally I wouldn't have done that, and that can sometimes create some tensions in the group. But that's the kind of thing you just have to work with, everyone is, like, different and you prioritise differently, but as you said the problem, like, when you feel, like, you don't walking the same distance, you don't want, like, the best grade, or you don't have the same commitments. **1004M2** Yes. **1001F2** Can sometimes be a bit disturbing	**Task**
1004M2 Yes, I think in terms of, I think maybe smaller groups would be more helpful in terms of that, because, I think, especially in our tutorial, our group, we had a lot of groups that had six people, erm, which, I think, is a bit too much in terms of getting everyone organized and telling people what to do, it's just ... **1006F1** Chasing them (for work). **1004M2** Yeah, chasing them people around basically. It's a lot easier if you have maybe three or four people in the group and then get (docs). Well, obviously, you have to do more, but it's just more efficient I would say think.	
1003M2 In our group the time constraints ended up being quite a problem when it came to the report 'cos people, the thing is in order to work as a team, especially when you are studying management, nobody here has ever studied management, everybody's doing it for the first semester, so everybody should get the same level of skill regarding the subject. Fact is that you got to week five that there is a, there is an abyss between people who have read chapters and people who haven't read the chapters or haven't even understand them. **1004M2** Yes.	**Task Academic Study**

1005F1 People who are lazy and people who aren't, basically. **1003M2** Erm, not necessarily. **1006F1** I didn't read the chapters **1003M2** I, I, you couldn't, you couldn't, yeah you could(n't) think about it as laziness.	

Task (8 of 22 references)	**Also coded at**
1006F1 Yeah. I reckoned we should've used Google docs, because, like, you edit the, like, actual report on the page and we didn't do that. We decided to meet up instead, and then someone would be there for the first 20 minutes and then like two people would leave and another person would come and your head was just going everywhere and you don't really know like what was happening, but got it done, handed it in today.	**Collaboration in diverse groups**
1003M2 But, like, for example when it came to doing the research she showed up with a book on the topic, and had chosen some sections, which was a start, then whether she understood what it was talking about was different **1006F1** OK. **1003M2** When it was written, when she wrote a paper it was incomprehensible and it had to be taken out [**1004M2** Yes] and, so, when it comes to a big language problem or, also, for this was the same person who never debate, never argued during discussions, never, like, had anything to say. **1004M2** Yeah, so didn't bring like any of their own ideas or ... **1003M2** No.	**Collaboration in diverse groups**
1003M2 I mean w, we are meeting tomorrow with our group [**1006F1** Have fun] and yesterday we had we to, we had to remind the fact that people still hadn't done in-text references, and the references they had done aren't in Harvard referencing system, and in the final, like in the finished first draft of the report people were, 'Ah, yeah (...)' . We'd mentioned plagiarism, and during one of the last meetings, and then I was just going through the report and there were several points that were just blatantly plagiarised, they were right out of the sheet on sustainable business practice, and I read that quite thoroughly, so I was just, like, this sounds familiar, so I went to check, and it was just ridiculous because you can't, if you want to get a first, and you have people in your group who are plagiarising. **1005F1** Don't you fail?	**Collaboration in diverse groups** **Academic study**
1006F1 We tried to like write the report together, didn't we? **1005F1** Yeah **1006F1** Rather than people did chunks, because we knew the writing style would change, like, drastically, so we tried to sit down together, and say what we wanted to say, and plan it, and then write it together.	**Collaboration in diverse groups** **Academic study**
1003M2 Well, to do that you would have to have a fairly balanced cooperative group, rather than a more imbalanced group. Ah, okay, yeah, exactly. The moral of this story is we, we end up dividing it, but it just ended up being still a big workload at the end, 'cos a lot of the stuff wasn't done **1006F1** So, you had to re-edit (a lot of the stuff)? **1003M2** Well, or wasn't (intelligible).	
1006F1 What case study did you two do? **1007F2** Did group one, and we had to, kind of time problem, because it was also only group one, we didn't realise how	**Academic study**

much we had to do, so we sort of got to it on the second week, and then we were like meeting every day **1004M2** I reckon it was quite hard being the first one, not knowing, like not knowing what, like obviously being group three, erm, it was a little bit easier 'cos we saw what the other people did and so you knew what the standards were **1006F1** Take that, take that. What group were you? **1001F2** Er, group one as well. We did the Robert Owen case study. I found that it was, er, (it was OK) **1006F1** It's very small, the first two case studies, aren't they? **1001F2** Yeah it's, er .... [cross talk] **1007F2** (...) much easier than the other two. Third and fourth.	
1001F2 We kind of had to divide it up, because it was like, there was so much information about all the, like, scientific, management, and administrative and stuff, so we kind of had to divide it up to be able to learn everything in a week, erm, so then our, like, our presentation became in a sense a bit divided (...). It's easier to just talk about sustainable development and bring on to the subject all like ... . **1006F1** And so everybody was like, someone was like the master of (...) and somebody was like the (...) **1001F2** Yes, like, yeah, like, because you had to divide up instead of everyone trying to learn everything. We tried to, like, divide it up a bit, learn on, like I had Robert Owen, like, and they you inform each other, like, what you found, but you still had your main area of research. **1004M2** So, it was basically, the problem was that there was too much information and too little, the essay, since it was only 3000 words, it was too little words, (...), er, the presentation being ten to twelve minutes, too little, too much information for too little time and too little words **1001F2** Yeah, exactly.	**Collaboration in diverse groups** **Academic study**
1003M2 The advantage of being in the first group, though, is OK you have, you're the first on the presentation, so you are not sure of like, you can't really benchmark, but then on the other hand you have four weeks to do your final report [cross talk] **1007F2** Yes, had lots of time to do the report as well. **1006F1** We had, like, three days.	
1003M2 We're meeting tomorrow to do the peer review, and ... **1006F1** For them? **1003M2** Well, to do. No, no.; we've done it for them **1006F1** Okay. **1003M2** Other people. **1005F1** To do the corrections? **1003M2** Well, because you have to write a page of response, and a page of something else, and you have to talk about how you've used their feedback.	**Collaboration in diverse groups** **Academic study**

Academic Study (8 of 25 references)	Also coded at
1003M2 In our group the time constraints ended up being quite a problem when it came to the report 'cos people, the thing is in order to work as a team, especially when you are studying management. Nobody here has ever studied management, everybody's doing it for the first semester, so everybody should get the same level of skill regarding the subject. Fact is that you got to week five that there is a, there is an abyss between people who have read chapters and people who haven't read the chapters or haven't even understand them. **1004M2** Yes. **1005F1** People who are lazy and people who aren't, basically **1003M2** Erm, not necessarily. **1006F1** I didn't read the chapters **1003M2** I, I, you couldn't, you couldn't, yeah you could(n't) think about it as laziness	**Collaborating in diverse groups** **Task**
1004M2 What we found in our group particularly - I was in a group with E_ and R_ - what we found in particular, one of the aspects, the hardiest, to sort, um, make happen, so to speak, is time management, obviously because everyone has different schedules and, um, they're available at different times, that was one of the things that was very hard to get everyone to come to meetings at the same time, and give everyone in the discussion some work. I don't know if anyone else found that in their groups or ... **1007F2** Yes we had the same problem. Ended up using a lot of technology instead of seeing each other **1004M2** Yeah	**Collaborating in diverse groups**
1005F1 Do you think work, work ethics is linked to culture? **1003M2** Erm, of course it is. **1004M2** I think so as well, yeah. **1006F1** Well, (we are nicer than in other countries) but, um, what I'm trying to say is, like, er, I went to an English boarding school, there a military aspect and it's very like, there's like guidelines and rules and people don't cross them. If they do they cross them majorly, not little bit. And I'm quite flexible in my work policy; okay, I have this assignment; okay, I'll do it the next day, a day before, oh, well finally I'll get to it. (But like that) from me to you, you're very organized, and you, you jot it down, and you, if you want to do something, you're set to do something, you do it right away. So I think it is (...)	
1003M2 I mean w, we are meeting tomorrow with our group [**1006F1** Have fun] and yesterday we had we to, we had to remind the fact that people still hadn't done in-text references, and the references they had done aren't in Harvard referencing system, and in the final, like in the finished first draft of the report people were, 'Ah, yeah (...)' . We'd mentioned plagiarism, and during one of the last meetings, and then I was just going through the report and there were several points that were just blatantly plagiarised, they were right out of the sheet on sustainable business practice, and I read that quite thoroughly, so I was just, like, this sounds familiar, so I went to check, and it was just ridiculous because you can't, if you want to get a first, and you have people in your group who are plagiarising. **1005F1** Don't you fail?	**Collaborating in diverse groups** **Task**
1003M2 We're meeting tomorrow to do the peer review, and ... . **1006F1** For them? **1003M2** Well, to do. No, no; we've done it for them. **1006F1** Okay. **1003M2** Other people ...	**Collaborating in diverse groups** **Task**

1005F1 To do the corrections? **1003M2** Well, because you have to write a page of response, and a page of something else, and you have to talk about how you've used their feedback.	
1003M2 Did, did anybody get any advantage from having an international group? **1004M2** I think ... . **1006F1** Yeah. We had a lot of fun with the video. **1003M2** No, no, I mean like I mean actually academically, not like we had fun. Like academically, what's the advantage of having people from China in your group? **1005F1** Academically, don't think so.	**Collaborating in diverse groups**
1003M2 Erm. [chuckles] No, I can answer that. No problem. Yes, it feels good up to a certain extent, it I doesn't feel good when it means you have to spend several hours going over each single paragraph several times ... **1006F1** But you're, you're ... **1003M2** having to correct the fact that you have extensive parts of plagiarism in the report which you've been working 6 hours a day. **1006F1** Well, I understand frustration because we have had exactly the same problem but, at the end of the day, when you hand in, like we did today, we handed in our report, I felt amazing that I had contributed so much to this, and that I helped from the first day we met with, with the assignment, our group members had come along drastically in, like, they've improved in what they input and the contributions.	**Collaborating in diverse groups** **Task**
1001F2 Everyone where I live, they do geography, and they were like, 'Why, where are you in the library all the time? Why do you even have to study?' And I was like ... **1006F1** 'What is studying'? **1001F2** Yeah, exactly, 'What is studying?' 'Writing some essays, you know.' I'm like, 'Yeah, we know'. Like we had three tests this term, like a lot of group work. It's been like a lot of work to do **1005F1** It's hard core. Yup	**Task**

Professional Practice (1 of 1 reference)	**Also coded at**
1001F2 I think it's pretty useful though, because this is, this is the way it's going to be for life, for your entire life, you're always going to end up [Yeah] with groups of people, just, like, you have another goal, like you have something else you want to get out of this work, and they have some other, like, expectations of how you they want the group to be, and what's, what's going to be the result of your work, so I think it's, I know what you mean, it's very frustrating. Basically, I think, this is like, this is how work's going to be, you were always going to end up with people who are just going to be like, OK, you don't do your part of the work, and that is really annoying.	**Collaborating in diverse groups**

Appendix 12

Certificate of ethical approval

UNIVERSITY OF
E**X**ETER

Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS
You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level <u>research</u>
(e.g. Masters, PhD, EdD level).

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor
and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site:
http://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/category/publications/guidelines/ and view the School's statement on the
'Student Documents' web site.

<u>READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY</u> AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR
COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). DO <u>NOT</u>
COMPLETE BY HAND

Your name: John Straker

Your student no: 570033442

Return address for this certificate: 5, Chancel Lane, Pinhoe, Exeter, EX4 8PZ

Degree/Programme of Study: EdD Generic route

Project Supervisor(s): Associate Professor Ros Fisher and Dr Yongcan Liu
Your email address:

Tel: 01392262033

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my
dissertation / thesis (delete whichever is inappropriate) to respect the dignity and privacy of those
participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed:...date:...14/12/2009.................
....

*NB For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must **not be included** in your
work. It can be kept for your records.*

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
last updated: August 2009

Certificate of ethical research approval

Your student no: 570033442

Title of your project:
Why don't international students ask questions? An exploration of non-native English speaking students' contributions to classroom talk in the context of UK HE from the perspective of Activity Theory

Brief description of your research project:

The assumption underlying this research is that non-native English speaking students studying at British universities contribute less to classroom talk than their native English speaking counterparts. This is often put down to issues with English, or cultural reasons are mentioned with students seen as coming from educational cultures which do not encourage student participation. This study will seek a more nuanced and interpretive account. Focussing on a specific localised context, it will seek an understanding of classroom talk from the perspective of participants, with their contributions seen in the context of their diverse beliefs, expectations and understandings.

This study will inform my work as a English language teacher at   · in my capacity of providing insessional English language support for non-native English speaking international students studying for degrees at   . Further, it will be of benefit to University colleagues who are teaching classes of increasingly diversity.

Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

Concern expressed by a colleague in the Business School at   over the reluctance of international students to ask questions in tutorial classes provided the initial prompt for this research. The project itself will be undertaken in the Business School; it will involve undergraduate students and university teachers, focussing on one or more tutorial groups.

Within the University's teaching model tutorials provide follow up on lectures. While lectures may be directed at up to 300 students, tutorials typically involve 15-30 students. Teaching in the Business School is divided between lecturers and teaching fellows.

Give details regarding the ethical issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) a blank consent form can be downloaded from the SELL student access on-line documents:

Consent
I made early contact with a senior colleague in the Business School who immediately saw the value of the research to the School, given the School's growing numbers and international agenda. From the ethical perspective, as much as for successful data collection, I consider the support of the School essential.

In seeking consent, I will brief participants with essential details of the project, explaining that my interest is in non-native English speaking students' contributions to classroom talk, and making the case that an improved understanding of this would be of value to my institutional role. I would also suggest that there would be benefits to participants (or whom they represent in the case of students) and other stakeholders (for instance, the Business School itself). I would make it clear that participants would have a right to withdraw, mindful that this might present problems with the use of whole class data if a class member requested to be excluded from the study. In such a case,

I would hope that a reasonable and negotiated solution could be found which would not lead to the loss of too much data.

Anonymity

Because of the nature of the project, absolute anonymity cannot be guaranteed. While reasonable attempts will be made to protect anonymity, it remains possible that some higher profile participants may be recognisable by others within the practice community. Therefore, rather than seeking to always disguise participants in an attempt to safeguard anonymity, the impracticality of promising absolute anonymity will be raised in the briefing. However, neither individuals, the University nor Schools will be named in the dissertation or in any publication or conference paper arising from the research, with pseudonyms used where appropriate. Further, an increased measure of disguise may at points be a necessary (see below). The following consideration of confidentiality and trust will help put the issue of anonymity into perspective.

Confidentiality and trust

I would strive to be sensitive to what is confidential, and manifest that confidences will be respected. I am aware that in practice based research it is important to distinguish between disclosures which form part of the data and those acquired incidentally as part of professional practice. Although this research would take place outside my immediate practice community, I would seek to observe this distinction, treating as confidential disclosures made to me outside my capacity of researcher. Respecting confidences would be a necessary though not sufficient condition for gaining trust. Respecting the positions of others and openness concerning my own will also be important.

Trust will be important as much from the practical as the ethical perspective. If I am to achieve frank disclosures from participants regarding their understanding of classroom behaviour, I should be aware and open with regard to my own biases and intentions, non-judgmental with regard to those of my participants, and resistant to prior assumptions regarding their positions. Given the overlap in interests, there may be misunderstandings regarding my institutional role and my role as a research student, and it may be necessary to clarify to participants that the latter is not an extension of the former, that I embark on this research project not as the 'insessional programme manager' but as a research student undertaking an EdD. From the ethical perspective, gaining trust would be secondary to demonstrating that trust had not been misplaced. I believe that establishing a climate of trust would help reassure participants that confidences will be respected, sensitive material treated in a way that would not compromise the respondent, and that the small risk of exposure should not be matter of undue concern.

Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

The core data would involve interviews with students, either as semi-structured interviews or focus groups. An initial stage would involve informal interviews with tutors and classroom observation. Subsequent classroom observation may involve the collection of video data to be used as interview prompts. Interview data would be analysed from the perspective of Activity Theory.

As a researcher I would need to be sensitive in my dealings with tutors and students. The former might feel that requesting their cooperation and seeking to observe their classes and interview their students was intrusive. I would seek an early understanding that the benefits of the research to the practice community would outweigh the costs. It would also be important to reassure students that my research would in no way discredit them as individuals, nor negatively affect their relationship with their tutors, the School or University. I would seek to manage interviews in a manner which did not cause distress to participants. Participants would know that I alone would have access to the data, which would be kept under secure conditions (see below). I would share my data analysis with participants if they requested it.

Given the public nature of research and the possible limitations to anonymity as a feature of this project, sensitivity would also be the watchword in the discussion and presentation of findings.

Nonetheless, to be of value discussion would have to be critical and where disclosure were particularly sensitive it may be necessary to provide participants the added safeguard of disguise. Notwithstanding, I would hope an appreciation by the participants of the value of the research and its essentially benign nature would mitigate the costs incurred

The following ethical code will help guide my project:

- Reveal my identity and background
- Explain the purpose and procedures of research
- See research and ethical considerations from the point of views of the subjects and institution
- Affirm how the research benefits the subject
- Seek informed consent from all participants
- Ensure the research does not harm the subjects
- Anticipate controversial findings and treat them with sensitivity.
- Protect anonymity where disclosure could negatively affect participants
- Give subjects the option to refuse to participate; remind them that they have the right to terminate their involvement when they choose to
- Make feedback on the research available for those who wish it
- Respect dignity, privacy and the interests of participants during and following research
- Consider deception a matter of last resort and use ethically
- Discuss ethical dilemmas with fellow researchers and advisors

Adapted from Reynolds, 1979 (see Cohen *et al.*, 2000)

Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):

The data collected for this research (field notes, audio/video recording and transcripts) will be stored securely by the researcher. Digital material would be secured by password and kept as the researcher's personal documents. Other materials would be lodged in a locked store with the key kept separately. Pseudonyms will be used for the names of participants, including the University and School.

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

No exceptional factors raising particular ethical concerns are envisaged. Nonetheless, the research will be approached from a perspective of ethical awareness and responsibility, mindful that there are sensitive issues involved and that participants will be taking risks by committing themselves to the research.

Cohen, L., Lawrence, M. and Morrison, K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education, 5th edition*, London: RoutledgeFalmer

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*This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's **Research Support Office** for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.*

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
last updated: August 2009

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This **project has been approved for the period:** ~~Jan 2010~~ **until:** ~~Jan 2011~~

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): .....*Ros W S*......................date:.......*16/1/10*....

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occurs a further form is completed.
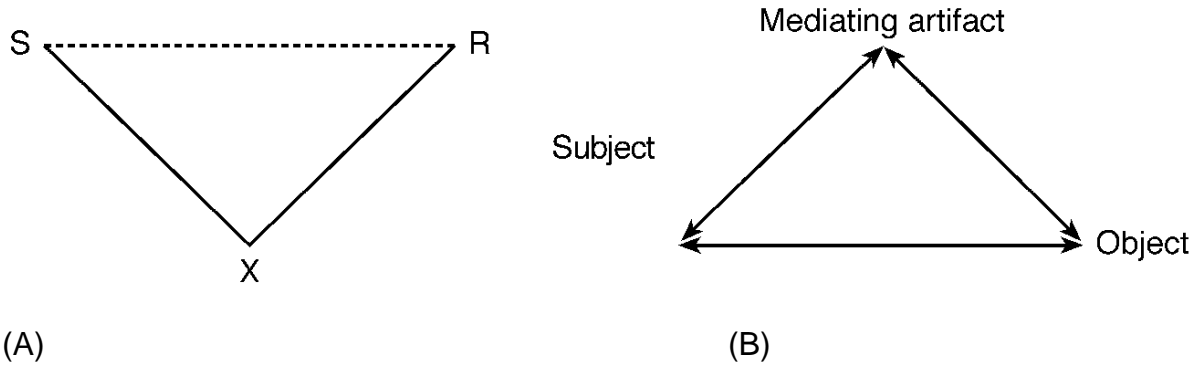
SELL unique approval reference:................*D|01|10|35*.............

Signed:..date:.......*2 19/01/ 2010*

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

This form is available from <u>http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/</u>
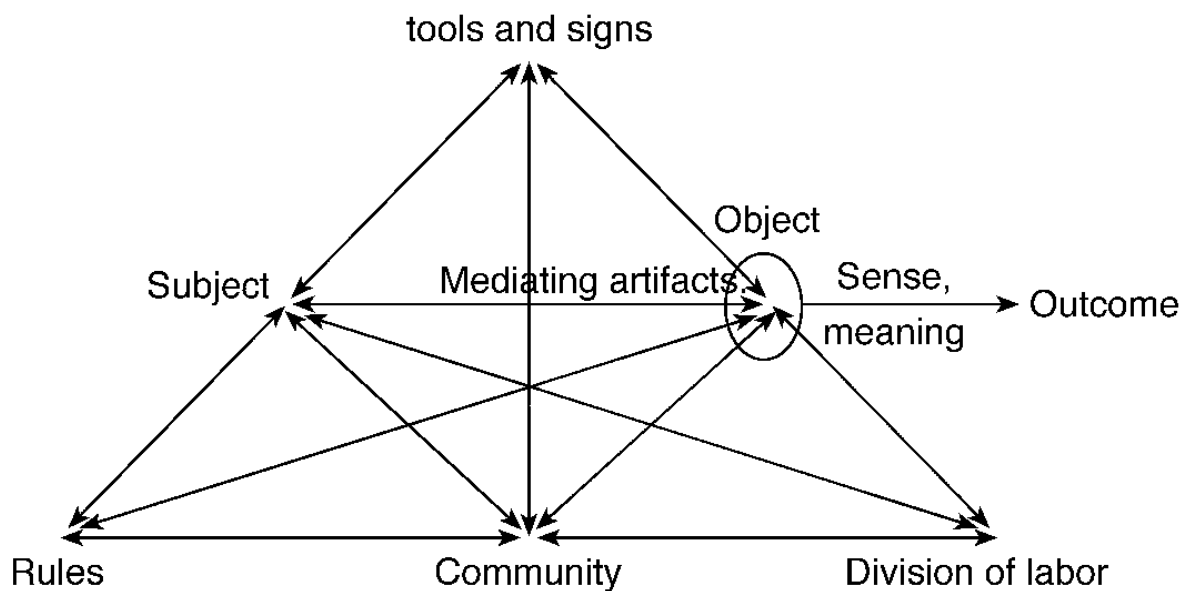
Appendix 13

The Three Generations of Activity Theory

(A)   (B)
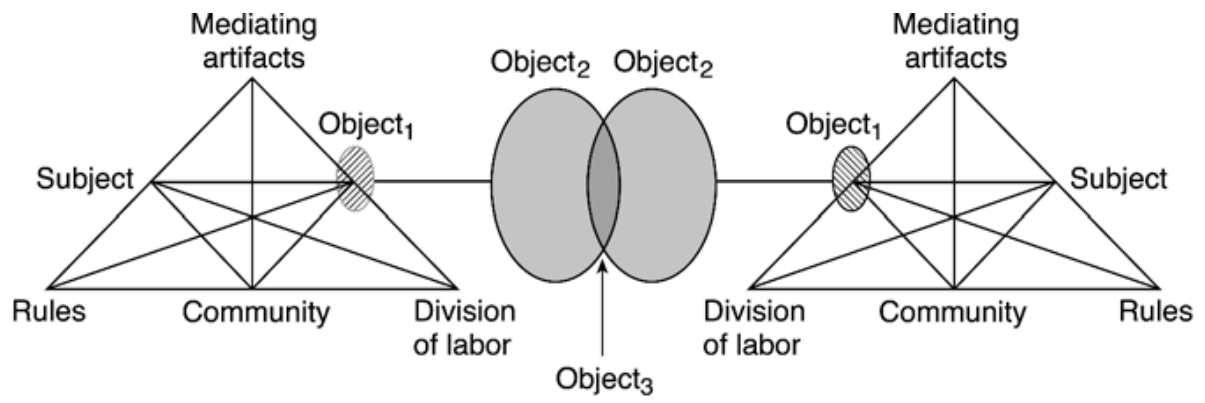
First Generation Activity Theory
(A) Vygotsky's model of mediated act and (B) its common reformulation (Engeström, 2001)

Second Generation Activity Theory
The structure of a human activity system (after Leontiev, 1981) (Engeström, 1987, p. 78).

Third Generation Activity Theory
Two interacting activity systems as minimal model for the Third Generation of Activity Theory (Engeström, 2001, p. 136)

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