



# CREATE

Canterbury Research and Theses Environment

Canterbury Christ Church University's repository of research outputs

<http://create.canterbury.ac.uk>

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder/s. The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given e.g. Grounds, P. (2007) Discovering dynamic durability: beyond sustainability in an English language curriculum project. Ph.D. thesis, University of Kent.

Contact: [create.library@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:create.library@canterbury.ac.uk)



**Discovering Dynamic Durability:  
Beyond Sustainability in an English Language  
Curriculum Project**

**Patricia E. Grounds**

**Discovering Dynamic Durability:  
Beyond Sustainability in an English Language  
Curriculum Project**

**by**

**Patricia E. Grounds**

**Canterbury Christ Church University**

**Thesis submitted to the University of Kent at Canterbury for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**30 September 2007**

## **Acknowledgements**

My deepest appreciation and thanks to Dr Victor Arredondo, currently Minister of Education for the state of Veracruz, Mexico; Dr. Huw Williams, then English Language Officer of the British Council Mexico, and Ana Maria Aramayo, Assistant Director of English, British Council Mexico, for their vision and determination in instigating the Mexican National Self-access Centres project and for having entrusted me with its co-ordination.

Heartfelt thanks and all credit are due also to my most estimable colleagues at state universities all over Mexico, who implemented the project from 1993-1997, made self-access a reality in this country and continue to make new things happen, from day to day.

A very special word of appreciation must go to the Universidad Autónoma de Queretaro, especially the directors, staff and students of the Faculty of Languages, for their patience, unconditional support and co-operation throughout this research.

Most grateful thanks to the British Council, Mexico for their generous contribution to the funding of this research project. More particularly, to Ana Maria Aramayo and all my colleagues in the English section for their practical and moral support throughout the National Self-access Project and this research.

Last, but certainly not least, my deepest appreciation, sincere thanks and recognition to Adrian Holliday, Richard Cullen and Tony Booth for their tact, forbearance and endurance as a research committee!

**α**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, father and sister.

There are no words...

To my dearest husband, Homero Adame, who has shared and valued the struggles of the last seven years, so keenly, patiently and caringly, my infinite gratitude and eternal affection.

I could not have made it without you.

To Richard and John, thanks for all your encouragement and confidence, and for being the best brothers, in the known and yet to be discovered universe!

**Ω**

“Many a researcher would like to tell the whole story, but, of course, cannot; the whole story exceeds anyone’s knowing, anyone’s telling...” (Stake 1994: 240).

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	15
<b>Chapter 1    General Introduction</b>	16
<b>Chapter 2    Whys and Wherefores: Why Study Another English Language Curriculum Development Project?</b>	23
2.1    Whys: pride and prejudice from previous experience	24
2.2    Wherefores: looking at English language teaching projects again, looking more effectively	27
2.2.1    The project manager’s role in achieving project sustainability	27
2.2.2    The roles of attitude and communication in achieving project sustainability	29
2.2.3    The roles of institutional relationships in achieving project sustainability	32
2.2.4    The roles of management styles and systems in achieving project sustainability	32
2.2.5    The role of finance in achieving project sustainability	35
2.2.6    The role of official policy in achieving project sustainability	36
<b>Chapter 3    Conceptualizing Project Sustainability</b>	38
3.1    Achieving a shared conceptualization of project sustainability	38
3.1.1    Existing views	39
3.1.2    A development view	39
3.1.3    An extended development view	44
3.2    An English language teaching view	45
3.2.1    A project management view	45
3.2.2    A collaborative view	47
3.2.3    A visionary view	48
3.2.4    A communication-based view	48

3.2.5	A “culture”-based view	50
3.2.6	An English language teaching view of issues related to “culture”	55
3.3	Further Criteria and Conditions for Project Sustainability	57
3.3.1	The project as system	57
3.3.2	Leadership and sustainability	59
3.4	Summary of concepts and criteria for project sustainability	60
3.5	Sustainability – an initial definition	61
3.6	Towards a Deeper Definition of Sustainability	64
3.7	Preliminary Assumptions	65
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Developing and Defining a Research Philosophy</b>	<b>67</b>
4.1	Finding a way: the first steps	67
4.1.1	Espoused beliefs and lingering influences	68
4.1.2	Selecting the site	69
4.1.3	A developing sequence: the data collection journey	71
4.2	A process of becoming: understanding key issues concerning researcher’s standpoint	76
4.2.1	“El camino se hace al andar”: one step leads to the next	76
4.2.2	A self-fulfilling prophecy? Understanding “intentionality” in the research process	77
4.2.3	Who’s that speaking? And on what authority?	78
4.2.4	“Claro que le ayudamos, maestra”: new awareness of roles and relationships	80
4.3	A truncated biography: situating former beliefs to integrate the new	81
4.3.1	Looking back, to look forward more clearly	81
4.3.2	Integrating new concepts and accepting new possibilities: postpositivism	83
4.3.3	Integrating new concepts and accepting new possibilities: postmodernism	84
4.3.4	Integrating new concepts and accepting new possibilities: structuralism and poststructuralism	87
4.3.5	Reconstructing views of knowledge and truth	89



4.4	Growing to understand the deeper nature of Qualitative Research	90
4.5	A wholeness in continual expansion: the compound identity of the researcher and the researched	93
4.5.1	The four selves	94
4.6	Ethnographical attributes of the study	98
4.7	Achieving validity in qualitative research	99
4.7.1	Current views	100
4.7.2	Achieving validity in this study	103
4.8	A note on research ethics	106
4.9	An arduous trek, but the view was worth it: summarizing the researcher's standpoint	109
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Implementing Research Procedures</b>	<b>111</b>
5.1	Situating the research setting	111
5.1.1	The wider Setting of education in Mexico	111
5.1.2	The significance of the national SAC project in the Mexican educational context	112
5.1.3	The strangeness of the familiar	114
5.2	Refining the research questions	116
5.3	A voyage of discovery: implementing data collection activities	116
5.3.1	Designing a questionnaire for SAC students	119
5.3.2	Designing a questionnaire for English teaching staff	121
5.3.3	Transforming a questionnaire into the basis of structured interviews	122
5.3.4	Experimenting with unstructured interviews	124
5.3.5	Perceiving a kaleidoscope of new meanings: describing the Self-access Centre	125
5.3.6	Observing behaviours and interactions inside the SAC	127
5.3.7	The eloquence of the written word: collecting and scrutinizing project documents	128
5.3.8	Is there such a thing as co-incidence? Taking advantage of chance meetings	129

5.3.9	How was it for you? Gathering opinions of colleagues from other universities	129
5.3.10	Ranking categories for sustainability with SAC colleagues	130
5.3.11	So what do the students think? A final verification activity	130
5.4	Who's who? The process of selecting informants	131
5.5	A rose by any other name... Themes and headings for the structuring of the analysis	134
5.5.1	Conditions, criteria and categories from the literature	134
5.5.2	New perceptions emerging from new data	135
5.6	Coding, arranging, reducing and presenting the data	140
5.6.1	Coding and referencing	140
5.6.1.1	SAC student questionnaires	141
5.6.1.2	SAC staff questionnaires	141
5.6.1.3	Recorded unstructured interviews with SAC staff and departmental authorities	141
5.6.1.4	Recorded structured interviews with staff	142
5.6.1.5	Physical description and interpretation from notes/sketches/photographs	143
5.6.1.6	Observation of behaviours and interactions inside the SAC	144
5.6.1.7	Documents related to the development of the Self-access Centre	144
5.6.1.8	Documentation of exchanges during chance meetings	145
5.6.1.9	Summaries of opinions of colleagues from other universities	146
5.6.1.10	Focus group and ranking activity for SAC staff	147
5.6.1.11	Semi-structured interviews with SAC students	148
5.6.1.12	Research diary	148
5.7	A final note on <i>anonymizing</i>	149
5.8	Summary of the chapter	150

<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>The Evolution of the <i>Affective environment</i> in the SAC project</b>	<b>151</b>
6.1	Within the <i>Affective environment</i> : the evolution of <i>Atmosphere</i>	151
6.1.1	The evolution of <i>Atmosphere: Integration of the project into existing activities</i> at the university	152
6.1.2	The evolution of <i>Atmosphere: Adapting the project to the local context and Respect for local culture, traditions and values</i> through design features	154
6.1.3	The evolution of <i>Atmosphere: A Feeling of collaboration and support among staff</i> enhanced by layout	157
6.1.4	The evolution of <i>Atmosphere: Promotion of independence and creativity among staff</i> through provision of equipment and facilities	160
6.1.5	The evolution of <i>Atmosphere: Work-focused environment</i> enhanced by design of staff work areas	164
6.1.6	The evolution of <i>Atmosphere: Feeling of collaboration and support among students and staff</i> enhanced by layout and uses of interiors	165
6.1.7	Summary of Section 6.1	166
6.2	Within the <i>Affective environment</i> : The evolution of <i>Attitude</i>	167
6.2.1	The evolution of <i>Attitude: Acceptance and active support by the institution and faculty</i> through design features	168
6.2.2	The evolution of <i>Attitude: Adaptation to local context and needs</i> through design features	169
6.2.3	The evolution of <i>Attitude: Belief in potential long-term benefits</i> shown by investment in and updating of equipment	172
6.2.4	The evolution of <i>Attitude: A sense of responsibility and ownership</i> enhanced by design features and facilities	173
6.2.5	Summary of Section 6.2	175
6.3	Within the <i>Affective Environment</i> : Participant perceptions of <i>Atmosphere</i> and <i>Attitude</i>	176
6.3.1	The evolution of <i>Atmosphere: Sensitivity to local context</i> (participant perceptions)	176

6.3.2	The evolution of <i>Atmosphere</i> : Integration into existing activities (participant perceptions)	178
6.3.3	The evolution of <i>Atmosphere</i> : Adaptation to local context (participant perceptions)	178
6.3.4	The evolution of <i>Attitude</i> : Acceptance and active support by the institution (participant perceptions)	180
6.3.5	The evolution of <i>Attitude</i> : Acceptance and active support by the Faculty (participant perceptions)	182
6.3.6	The evolution of <i>Attitude</i> : Acceptance and active support by students (participant perceptions)	184
6.3.7	Summary of the section	186
6.4	Within the <i>Affective Environment</i> : Further insights from the observation of behaviours and their effects on <i>Atmosphere</i>	187
6.4.1	The evolution of <i>Atmosphere</i> : Adaptation to local context and needs and Integration into existing activities expressed by behaviours	187
6.4.2	The evolution of <i>Atmosphere</i> : Promotion of independence among students expressed by behaviours	188
6.5	Within the <i>Affective Environment</i> : Training	191
6.5.1	The evolution of <i>Training</i> : <i>Atmosphere</i> and <i>Attitude</i>	191
6.6	Within Affective environment: Documentary evidence	193
6.6.1	The evolution of <i>Attitude</i> : <i>Acceptance and active support by the institution</i>	193
6.7	Summary of findings Chapter 6	195
6.7.1	First steps towards a deeper understanding of the nature of sustainability	196
6.7.2	Initial answers to research questions	200
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>The Complex Facets of the <i>Affective Environment</i></b>	<b>201</b>
7.1	A developing view of what contributes to <i>Atmosphere</i>	201
7.1.1	<i>Mood</i> as a facet of <i>Atmosphere</i>	202
7.1.2	<i>Work-focused and organized environment</i> as a facet of <i>Atmosphere</i>	209

7.1.3	<i>A Feeling of collaboration and support, as a facet of Atmosphere</i>	212
7.1.4	<i>Promotion of independence as a facet of Atmosphere</i>	216
7.2	<i>A developing view of what contributes to Attitude</i>	219
7.2.1	<i>Existence of Internal Champions as a facet of Attitude</i>	219
7.2.2	<i>Encouragement of constructive criticism within project team as a facet of Attitude</i>	221
7.2.3	<i>Willingness of staff to experiment as a facet of Attitude</i>	224
7.2.4	<i>Belief in long-term benefits</i>	225
7.3	<i>A developing view of Training, and its possible connection with Attitude and Affect</i>	226
7.3.1	<i>Appropriate knowledge and skills training as a facet of Affect</i>	226
7.4	<i>Summary of findings, Chapter 7</i>	228
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>The Emergence of Administration as a Global Concept</b>	233
8.1	<i>Policy as a facet of administration</i>	233
8.1.1	<i>Congruence with government policy as a facet of policy</i>	233
8.1.2	<i>Becoming interwoven with institutional policies as a facet of policy</i>	235
8.1.3	<i>The existence of a real need as a facet of policy</i>	240
8.1.4	<i>Collaboration with institutions engaged in similar projects as a facet of policy</i>	243
8.2	<i>Management as a facet of administration</i>	245
8.2.1	<i>Shared aims/vision and wide participation as facets of management</i>	245
8.2.2	<i>A less centralized management system as a facet of management</i>	249
8.2.3	<i>Planning for self-sufficiency as a facet of management</i>	250
8.2.4	<i>Adaptability and multipliability as a facet of management</i>	251
8.2.5	<i>Effective planning and evaluation activities as a facet</i>	252

	<i>of management</i>	
8.3	<i>Finance as a facet of administration</i>	257
8.3.1	<i>Securing initial and future government funding as a facet of management</i>	257
8.3.2	<i>Securing initial and future internal funding as a facet of management</i>	260
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Conclusions and Implications: The Deeper Nature of Project Sustainability</b>	263
9.1	Closing the circle: The end re-evokes the beginning	263
9.1.1	Original interests in studying project sustainability	263
9.1.2	So – what is the deeper nature of sustainability?	266
9.1.3	What factors have made this case specifically interesting?	270
9.2	Is “sustainability” an appropriate term for what successful projects achieve?	277
9.3	How far can insights derived from this study inform the profession and contribute towards the design of future ELT/development projects?	278
9.3.1	Relationships with other contexts	281
9.3.2	Context-specific findings	282
<b>Chapter 10</b>	<b>The Development of Methodologies for Research into Projects</b>	284
10.1	The relevance of postmodern epistemologies	284
10.1.1	Other issues affecting methodological choices in this type of research	285
10.2	Limitations of the research methodology of this study	287
10.2.1	Limitations: the importance of what did <i>not</i> happen	288
10.2.2	Limitations: towards a better beginning	288
10.2.3	Limitations: towards a better middle and ending	289
10.3	Transferability of the research methodology of this study	290
10.3.1	Square pegs and round holes: a note on the possible ethnocentrism of research methodologies	290
10.3.2	The transferable process of on-going experimentation	291

	and creative reflection	
10.3.3	The transferable process of striving for transparency	292
10.4	The search for validity	293
10.4.1	Possible justifications for implementing the process of “triangulation”	293
10.4.2	Achieving internal validity	294
10.4.3	Achieving external validity	294
10.5	Something old, something new: transferable data collection activities	296
10.5.1	New combinations of old practices	296
10.5.2	Necessity and new inventions	297
10.6	How should sustainability be studied in order to develop our understanding of this phenomenon?	298
	Concluding remarks	300

106,903 words

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1:	Initial conceptualization of necessary conditions and categories for the achievement of project sustainability on the basis of literature survey and experience	302
Appendix 2:	Student questionnaire, Version 1	305
Appendix 3:	Questionnaire for SAC students, Version 2 (amended)	311
Appendix 4:	Sample coding of student questionnaires	314
Appendix 5:	Catalogue of data types and manner of collection	318
Appendix 6:	Emergent concept and category count (sample)	325
Appendix 7:	Collation of interconnected categories and where they emerged	330

<b>Bibliography</b>		335
---------------------	--	-----

# Developing Dynamic Durability: Beyond Sustainability in an English Language Curriculum Project

## Abstract

This thesis examines the deeper nature of sustainability, through the study of an English language curriculum development project for the creation of a self-access language learning resource centre at a Mexican public university.

The research methodology follows broadly qualitative and ethnographic research principles and was influenced by post modern, heuristic and interpretative thought. The overall process has been heuristic, involving extended self-search, self-dialogue and self-discovery through on-going interaction with the context, the collaborators and other types of data. Some aspects of my own journey towards becoming a qualitative researcher are also described, since this also formed an integral part of the research process.

I aimed to create a *thick description*, through the collection and interrelation of a range of data types. During the interpretation process, numerous concepts and categories emerged as apparently having been closely interconnected during the evolution of the respective project processes, states, behaviours and artefacts. With frequent reference to the data, I will attempt to show that the deeper nature of project sustainability is perhaps more complex than existing descriptions may imply and that therefore existing definitions may be limited.

I conclude by suggesting new ways of *conceptualizing* factors involved in the achievement of project sustainability and some approaches to *implementing research* in the area. I also suggest that the term “sustainability” may need to be redefined in the discourse of development project managers. *Dynamic durability* is suggested as a possible alternative, since it includes the attribute of being able to adapt to changing circumstances (*Dynamic*) yet can still embrace concepts and categories commonly associated with sustainability (*Durability*).

The overall aims of this study are: to push forward the boundaries of existing knowledge and understanding of project sustainability, to stimulate further research and discussion among project managers and collaborators and to support more context-sensitive and *Dynamically durable* English language curriculum projects (and other development projects) in the future.



## Chapter 1

### General Introduction

*This thesis reports on my search for a deeper understanding of the nature of project sustainability, through the study of an English language learning project. The aim of this was to set up and run a multimedia language learning resource centre. This centre is generally considered to have surpassed the expectations of sustainability planned into the project by the funding bodies (Mexican Ministry of Education, British Council and Mexican state universities), participants (project staff at the university and British Council trainer/consultants), and beneficiaries (teachers and students at the universities).*

*In the general introduction, I will summarize the aims of the study and further outline the focus and setting of the research. I will also summarize the philosophical and methodological approaches and present the overall structure of the research report.*

The overarching aim of this study is to examine existing concepts related to project sustainability and to develop a new way of both *conceptualizing* and of *studying* this phenomenon. In the course of the report, I will show how, during an extended process of intensive and iterative dialoguing with, analysis and interpretation of the data, two global themes emerged, around which a range of interconnected concepts and categories seemed to feature and recur across a range of different types of data, collected in a single, bounded context, following broadly ethnographic and qualitative research principles and procedures.

The specific focus of the case study is a project which aimed to develop a multimedia self-access language learning resource centre (SAC) at a Mexican public university. (Chapter 5, Section 5.1.1, p. 111, provides an overview of the wider setting in which the case study context is embedded.) The centre was planned and inaugurated under the auspices of a major national project for Higher Education in Mexico, implemented nationwide from 1993-1997. The national project directly supported policies of the Mexican government devised to satisfy a rapidly increasing need for English language learning facilities and, simultaneously, to introduce two major innovations.

The first of these was to initiate a nationwide development programme for English teachers working in Higher Education in Mexico. This initiated a major process of change, which was to transform the traditional transmission model of education and to create a new

paradigm for syllabuses and methodology, guided by constructivist, experiential, student-centred and self-directed learning principles and practices. The second was to establish state-of-the-art multimedia language learning resource units, where such principles and practices could be implemented, experienced and evaluated by teachers and students using the latest in educational technology.

This was a flagship project for the Mexican government, and it provided a model for similar changes in teaching and learning methodology in other subject areas, and at other levels of education, over a more extended period. For example, the implementation of the secondary school curriculum reform, based on an updated psychology of learning in 2006, can be seen as a logical *sequitur* of these major events in higher education, in the nineties.

It is important to note that it was the Mexican Ministry of Education who proactively sought out the British Council and initiated the negotiations which culminated in an agreement entailing extensive academic consultancy from the British Council. The joint funding bodies (the Mexican Ministry of Education, the British Council and the 33 participating public universities) as well as both internal and external project staff, generally agree that the global aims of the project were achieved nationally. This can be affirmed because the key activities have been sustained, developed and multiplied throughout the country, and continue to flourish, though to differing degrees in each institution, at the time of writing (September 2007). Moreover, by far the majority of the centres, including the one at the case study university, have achieved what might be described as an on-going state of development, embodying qualities normally associated with sustainability, and also displaying attributes of a phenomenon which is accessible to, and capable of, continuous development, improvement and expansion. Many further resource centres have subsequently been set up in a number of states (including that of the case study centre) significantly multiplying the effects of the initial project. The extent of the impact of the self-access centre project in each of the 33 participating Mexican universities, however, depended on a broad spectrum of interrelated factors.

At the case study university, the self-access centre project development process began in 1994 and the local project is considered to have been a positive innovation and to have proven sustainable at this university by the members of staff and students who participated in this study. It has developed and grown in unforeseen ways, surpassing plans and achieving more complex results than “survival as planned”.

I prepared myself for the research process in two ways. First, I read extensively, to acquire an overview of other people's work on project sustainability, and second, I carried out an in-depth study of the history of thought underlying the respective research methodologies, to develop an appropriate methodology and research standpoint for this particular study.

I collected, reduced, coded and interpreted original data to compare existing views with interpretations derived from the different types of data, including the perceptions of the people who had participated in the case study project, recorded during interviews, informal talks, chance meetings and a focus group. Other types of data included artefacts and visual data derived from the context of the case study. The research methodology, including interpretation activities, was developed following broadly postmodern epistemologies and ontologies. The report also includes some discussion of the ethnocentrism which can determine the content of curriculum development projects as well as the methodology selected for their implementation. These are major concerns of critical applied linguistics at the present time.

Through this research, I aim to contribute to the development of knowledge concerning the criteria and conditions which positively affect the sustainability of educational development projects. Additionally, I hope to participate in the development of the theory and practice of research methodology, through the design and application of my own research techniques and procedures, partly following the lead of experts in the field and partly the result of the application of my own and other people's insights into how to do qualitative research.

In general, I intended to apply a modified ethnographic approach to what comprises a study of the social phenomenon of an apparently successful, innovative development project in language education. During the practical research period, I experimented with a number of different techniques for data collection, analysis and interpretation, and was serendipitously inspired by the eloquence of *architecture*, as a potentially expressive artefact of the case study context.

At certain stages, I occasionally implemented quantitative research strategies and instruments for data collection. However, as the process got under way, I found qualitative types of data, such as staff opinions, descriptions and observations provided more useful kinds of information, particularly when I could follow up and discuss interpretations directly with the participants themselves.

The research methodology was developed progressively as part of the reflexive process of the research. In the same way, my perceptions of how to achieve an appropriate

kind of validity for the emerging findings also evolved as part of the research process. For example, the interrelation or “triangulation” of different types of data (Janesick 1994: 214-215) rather than commitment to the collection and analysis of *large quantities* of a *single* type of data seemed likely to be most appropriate at the beginning of the study. However, later reflection led me to address the area of validity in various other ways (Chapter 4, pp. 99-103).

Although I perhaps began my research naïvely, planning to work through my planned stages in a largely linear fashion (and became extremely anxious when events in my personal, professional and academic life did not allow me to keep to this plan), this seems totally contradictory, in retrospect. In my regular work as a project manager, I have always created project plans with clear deadlines, included sequential and concurrent activities, at the same time favouring a strongly process-oriented approach. Despite this, I had used a strictly linear planning model for the PhD research project! This is interesting, because it illustrates the fact that it is not always possible to see the relevance and importance of past experience immediately, when one is placed in new and strange professional contexts. The resulting loss of confidence in one’s own ability to succeed with a research project, which I have observed in several highly experienced colleagues engaged in the PhD process, is apparently not unusual. Furthermore, the example underlines the fact that there can be a significant time lag between the intellectual grasping of new concepts and methods and the ability to implement them fluently and unselfconsciously in practice.

As the work progressed, however, I began to see something like the crystal as a much more relevant central image for the ways in which data began to cluster together and form patterns around the different global themes, which seemed to constitute the core from which sustainability could evolve. This type of conceptualization also concurs with the way in which the crystal has been used to symbolise the nature of validity in qualitative research, in the light of postmodernist insight into the pluralistic nature of realities, and the multifaceted character of truths, which cannot exist objectively, independently or as absolutes:

“I propose that the central image for ‘validity’ in postmodernist texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central image is the crystal, which combines symmetry of substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionality, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter but are not amorphous...” (Richardson 1994: 522).

Bearing this in mind, I collected different types of data simultaneously, and tried to identify any patterns in relation to phenomena emerging from and across the respective sets of data, which began as apparently “amorphous masses”. At the same time, I tried to follow the tenet that the qualitative researcher’s *standpoint* should not be predetermined or rigid, but should constitute, *per se*, a reflexive part of the process of the research. This implied reflective practice and the use of evaluative and creative reflection, first to identify unsuccessful techniques and methods and next to devise appropriate ways to amend and improve them (Evans 2002; Etherington 2004).

The precise formulation of the research questions was neither fast nor automatic. Initially, I had wide ranging interests (Chapter 2) but the focus developed and sharpened progressively with on-going interaction with, and “zooming in” on, the research context, participants and data. I experienced the impact of the view that: “You cannot decide exactly what sort of data you are going to collect before you begin” (Holliday 2006: 96). Experientially, I also learned the importance of surveying the setting and of experimentation with research techniques and procedures, and amending these, as one data collection experience both informed and suggested the next activity.

In the same way, I discovered that it is not always possible to predict exactly what sort of information data will yield, before it has been collected, arranged, reduced, analyzed and interpreted. In qualitative research, as information gradually emerges, creative analysis can influence and make modifications to the initial line of enquiry. Thus, the research questions can become better defined, as the research methodology develops.

At the earliest stages, I was deeply interested in the impact of cultural and acculturation issues on project development. More specifically, I wanted to understand perceptions regarding the “foreignness” of consultants, differences among the national and organizational cultures of the respective stakeholders, and how these might have affected the project outcomes. I also hoped to discover how far acculturation is actually a possible or desirable goal for external project managers and consultants. The evolution of new small cultures as part of the project process interested me, as well as other factors to be outlined below. However, as part of the process of “surveying the setting” (Holliday 2002: 75) I was able to reduce the research questions to allow the collection of enough data types for the creation of a thick description, without reducing them so much as to inhibit the process of enquiry. Because of this, other factors gradually seemed to emerge alongside cultural or trans-cultural issues, and to figure as possible factors in the success of the case study

project, often in ways I had not initially conceived. The guiding research questions which underpinned the study were finally expressed as follows:

- i) What is the deeper nature of sustainability?
- ii) How should sustainability be studied, in order to develop our understanding of the phenomenon?
- iii) What are the factors that have made this case particularly interesting as an example of sustainability?
- iv) To what extent can insights derived from this study inform the profession and contribute towards the design of future projects (*practice*) and/or further research into the nature of international project leaders (*principles*)?

I undertook this deconstruction and reconstruction of the concept of sustainability because while working in the field (Chapter 2, Section 2.1, p. 24) I have repeatedly observed the need for organizations, consultants and project managers to demonstrate a clearer and deeper understanding of the nature of this concept. Sustainability is a much used buzzword, part of the dominant discourse of project management. Before and during this study, I have been fascinated by its deeply complex nature. Considerable insight into the needs and idiosyncrasies of specific social, political and cultural contexts and groups, and the implementation of complex interpretation, planning, implementation and monitoring strategies are required from the outset, if sustainability is to be achieved by any project. If even more than what conventional views of sustainability entail is desired, then certain aspects of the *Affective and Administrative environments* seem to merit assiduous monitoring and nurturing from the outset.

English language teaching project managers, and also those in charge of projects in other fields, perhaps need to cross the boundaries of their disciplines and develop an awareness, knowledge, and skills of the complex of interconnected elements which result in the success of a project. Perhaps more comprehensive training programmes could subsequently reduce the pressures of learning through trial and error while projects are actually in process. Such an enhancement of the understanding of project development as a controversial area within critical applied linguistics could enrich and significantly improve the outcomes of language curriculum projects in the future.

## Map of the thesis

I have structured this thesis in the following way:

**Chapter 1** introduces the focus of the study, mentions some of the issues which arose and had to be addressed as part of the research process, presents the research questions and summarizes the structure of the current report.

**Chapter 2** situates the research project more specifically and contextualises the researcher in greater detail, by explaining the *conscious* motivations and justifications behind the study, in depth. This is included, for the sake of achieving transparency in the reporting of both the research process and the research findings, and to show how my own previous knowledge and experience of the context and phenomena informed this study (Etherington 2004) in both helpful and not so helpful ways.

**Chapter 3** begins with a survey of experts' perceptions related to the concept of sustainability and show how these helped me to further develop my own understanding of the phenomenon in the context of English Language Teaching Projects. I include a table summarizing concepts and conditions generally considered to be important, and explain how this provided a springboard and further motivation for my own research, though quite soon rejected, as part of the research process.

**Chapter 4** presents the developing *conceptual framework* of the study, showing how my understanding of the principles underlying qualitative research grew, as I studied the history of research philosophy and methodology, and put it into practice, as an on-going process of trial, analysis and improvement. I also explain how I attempted to confront validity and ethical issues.

**Chapter 5** describes the research setting in much greater detail and the various *research activities and data collection techniques* which were put into practice as the research methodology developed. After this, I explain how themes and categories seemed to emerge from the data and influenced the ways in which I continued with the research activities and

reduced and arranged the data for analysis and interpretation. Finally, I explain and exemplify the systems of coding, referencing and anonymizing, used to identify, organize and reference the various data types (Holliday 2002).

**Chapters 6, 7 and 8** comprise the data analysis chapters. Here, I illustrate and explain what I consider to be the principal findings of the research activities.

**Chapter 9** outlines what the outcomes of this study may imply for project leaders in English as a foreign language learning contexts, as well as the wider significance of the results, in relation to guiding principles for *professional practice*. I also suggest the coining of a new term, more widely encompassing, for what projects aim to achieve.

**Chapter 10** states the final conclusions and ideas regarding the importance of this study from the point of view of the *continuing development of research methodology*. I also make some recommendations for *possible further study* of the phenomenon of sustainability.

## **Summary**

In this introductory chapter, I have stated my main aims in undertaking this piece of research and I have described my motives in carrying out the study. I have also briefly described my general approach to the research and given an outline of the overall structure of the thesis. In Chapter 2, I will contextualize myself further, and explain in detail the conscious motivations and justifications underlying my decision to study a self-access resource centre development project, investigate the deeper nature of sustainability and identify possible factors in achieving it.



## Chapter 2

### Whys and Wherefores:

#### Why Study Another English Language Curriculum Development Project?

*In this chapter, I will contextualize myself as a professional, and explain how my own previous knowledge and experience of the context and phenomena to be researched both motivated and informed the study (Etherington 2004), sometimes in helpful and sometimes in not such helpful, ways. I will include my conscious rationale and justifications for undertaking to study the nature of project sustainability.*

#### **2.1 Whys: pride and prejudice from previous experience**

In the course of my work as an English teaching professional since 1976, I have continually found myself participating in change, whether as a member of staff affected by changes effected in an institution, or as a pro-active agent of change, responsible for the planning and implementing of innovation on behalf of various organizations. More recently I have been involved in projects for the provision of specialist training for English language teachers all over Mexico (COTE/ICELT, Mexico, 1990-2007; DOTE/DELTA, 1991-2007). In my capacity as Senior Projects Manager for the British Council, Mexico, I have also been asked to lead two major projects to develop standardized English language examinations for nationwide implementation in the public sector. Both of these are now included in government documents describing standardized tests with official recognition in Mexico (*SEPAInglés*, 1998-2001 and EXAVER, 2000-2007, respectively). Even more recently, I have co-ordinated a further national project to provide nationwide training for Mexican university teachers in online materials design, the major product of which is a website for learners, now managed entirely by staff from the 32 participating universities (*Inglés Virtual en tu Centro*, Mexico 2003-2006). I have also been working with the Cuban national self-access project team, developing context-sensitive Self Access Language Learning Resource Centres (SACs) for universities, technical institutes and training hospitals, and advised on the planning, implementation and monitoring of their project as well as the implementation of a participative evaluation of the process and outcomes (2003-2007).

Every new project has constituted a new learning opportunity. Apart from the new professional knowledge and specialised skills acquired through the process of sharing research and experience, each has evolved in a new context and I have been able to observe how projects – even apparently very similar projects – can develop in extremely different ways in separate contexts. The current study has further opened my eyes to the overwhelming complexity of the processes and relationships involved in developing a useful, productive and dynamic project.

I have observed at first hand how some English language curriculum development projects have quickly come to be accepted and assimilated by their respective organisations, groups and individuals, while others have turned out to be relatively short-lived (Markee 1997: 6, citing Adams and Chen). Some activities initiated by such projects continue to be implemented *ad infinitum*, others may be implemented and updated as time passes; some are not only sustained but also extended and improved upon, while yet others experience the phenomenon of “tissue rejection” (Holliday 1994: 134-137), or are unable to find a permanent home as “aliens in a host organism” (Holliday 2005: 150) and therefore are never really accepted or assimilated.

Even when organizations, and the sub-groups within them, appear to be enthusiastic about proposed changes, because of potential pedagogical, social or even financial benefits, not all such projects achieve the condition of “sustainability”, in the longer term. Enthusiasm among project leaders and participants has not proven itself to be enough to ensure the success and survival of a project (Fullen 2001: 7). The nature of sustainability would seem to be more complex than this. One salient learning point for me has been the constant need to adapt to arising circumstances, since many of the complex factors which affect the development of a project in any field are unpredictable and can make project activities difficult to implement following a strictly linear model.

“Living systems cannot be *directed* along a linear path. Unforeseen consequences are inevitable. The challenge is to *disturb* them in a manner that approximates the desired outcomes” (Fullen 2001: 45, citing Pascale *et al.*).

However, though important, adaptability to emerging phenomena endemic to a specific context is by no means the only element contributing to sustainability, as my research showed, nor could sustainability be viewed as an outcome related solely to issues surrounding cultures and acculturation, such as “organisational culture”, “large culture” and “small culture”.

As the study progressed, two highly complex and multi-faceted global concepts seemed to emerge as having been vital in the sustainability and growth of the SAC project to be described in this research. Both of these seemed to have lain at the very core of the project and to have been deeply interconnected in the process. The first I have called the “*Affective Environment*”, which seems to be closely interconnected with the *Atmosphere* created both during and by the project, with the prevailing *Attitudes* and also with *Training*. The second, I have named the *Administrative environment*, and this I perceive as very closely connected with *Policy, Management* and *Finance*.

It was impossible to draw watertight conclusions regarding which of these core concepts or main categories and their related sub-categories might have been *more* crucial to success; all seemed to have played their part, and, most important of all, there seemed to have been a highly complex relationship of interconnectivity and overlapping, operating among and across them. In Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9, I will elaborate on how these elements seemed to emerge from the data and what they seemed to suggest, in relation to the dynamic development of the project.

The insights gained during this research journey have been vital for my work, in a period when the psychological and cultural impacts of innovations are being increasingly emphasized (Fullen 1999, 2001; Holliday, 1994, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2005). Because I had previously believed that such aspects would prove to have been prior to all others in the achievement of this successful project, it was surprising and fascinating to see that informants and other types of data also signalled other elements as having been crucial.

Even more surprising was the discovery that those significant factors related to culture, cultures and acculturation which did emerge from the data might have had more to do with the acculturation of *the project itself* than with that of the *external coordinator and consultants*.

From a philosophical and methodological point of view, the research process entailed a powerful process of questioning, which involved self-questioning and also led me to question the possible underlying intentions of the bodies which had funded all the English language curriculum development projects I had ever been involved in. I began to analyze some of the more ominous forces which may be at work, under the guise of apparently altruistic training and development projects. Furthermore, I awoke to the fact of having myself harboured some very strong philosophical and academic preconceptions, or even prejudices, about projects and found the research experience

personally enriching, since it helped me to deconstruct and reconstruct many previously held perceptions and values.

## **2.2 Wherefores: looking at English language teaching projects again, looking more effectively**

English Language curriculum projects, set in differing countries and contexts, have been widely documented in recent decades (e.g. Bowers 1987; Flavell 1994; McKay and Treffgarne 2000; Rüdiger 2000).

Recent studies have seemed to suggest that sustainability in such projects may have more to do with the *processes applied* in the implementation of the change and the behaviour of specific agents of innovation, than the precise nature, “moral purpose” or educational value of the ELT innovation itself. I was interested in collecting new data concerning the processes and behaviours which had operated during the planning and implementation of the case study project, and in discovering how these may have contributed to sustainability, to inform the profession.

### **2.2.1 The project manager’s role in achieving sustainability**

Although the literature on previous experience in English language teaching projects is often descriptive, it is not always explanatory (for example, Flavell 1994; Bardi *et al.* 1999). Markee (1997: 12) expresses his view of the need for interdisciplinarity as a result of his own experience, stating that:

“My project was affected by complex cultural, ideological, historical, political, economic, administrative, institutional, technological, sociolinguistic, and language planning factors.”

This is a perception which I wholeheartedly share, though the phrase “My project” perhaps inadvertently reveals the extent to which project managers can become so personally and professionally involved with their responsibilities, that they sometimes perceive a successful innovation to have been very much their *own* achievement, rather than the result of *collaboration* among a rich complex of institutions, individuals, attitudes, responsibilities and plans, interacting in many ways beyond the external project adviser’s knowledge, experience or sphere of influence.

Initially I was very much interested in the behaviours and contributions of the external project leader and trainers, the nature of their relationship-building processes with local national and educational staff and their contexts, and the possible effects of these on the sustainability of the case study project. However, during the study I progressively perceived that an over-inflated sense of responsibility had probably exaggerated my view of the real importance of their roles in the project development process.

Markee (1997: 61-69) noted that Applied Linguistics had been “noticeably silent” on issues related to the implementation of innovative projects, and described five different models for effecting change, within British, Australian and North American educational cultures: the social-interaction model, the centre-periphery model, the research, development and diffusion model, the problem-solving model and the linkage model.

There are certain advantages and disadvantages inherent in each of these models, and the project context needs to be carefully surveyed before the selection of a particular model is made. Creativity may be limited by too rigid an adherence to any one model, particularly when such models may have been designed by experts from different professional environments, with other types of project and/or contexts in mind. Although project plans and schedules are vital for administrative, monitoring and reporting purposes, it may be wiser to allow the plans and the process to be moulded, according to local participants shared perceptions of real needs, and their context-sensitive responses to events and exigencies which may emerge as the project develops. I wanted to find out whether the linear model, initially applied and disseminated during the national SAC project and adapted to the needs of the case study project, might have contributed, if at all, to its sustainability and future development.

There does seem to be a need for a deeper interdisciplinary understanding of the professional content and tasks involved in planning and implementation of development projects in general, and a more critical stance towards the underlying aims, processes and results could lead to the development of more perceptive, sensitive and ethno-critical project leaders. An understanding of political priorities (Markee (Ibid.)) can make work more effective within the macro and micro-politics of countries and institutions. Understanding the priorities and characteristics of interacting human and professional groups can sensitise innovators to the possible effects of change on existing roles and relationships (Holliday 1994). Being able to perceive and interact with different

management styles can help project leaders to interact with teams in ways which are appropriate for local organizational cultures (Handy 1993; Storti 2001). I hoped to find out more about the surface and deep-cultural phenomena operating within, across and between the institutions engaged in the case study project (Robinson *et al.* 2000), and use these results to help project advisers to become more effective.

With regard to the English language teaching branch of Applied Linguistics, this has recently been engaged in a process of extending its traditionally ethno-centric horizons and becoming more interdisciplinary and more ethno-critical of itself (Canagarajah 1999; Pennycook 2001). We are beginning to draw on insights from a much wider knowledge base. This process must be continual if we are to keep abreast of the developing knowledge of our field and contribute to the enhancement of intercultural understanding. It is this spirit of interdisciplinary work, together with the aim of pushing forward accepted boundaries for the discipline of Critical Applied Linguistics that underpinned this study.

### **2.2.2 The roles of attitude and communication in achieving project sustainability**

As noted in Section 2.2.1, the development of an innovative<sup>1</sup> English language teaching curriculum project in a developing country is a multi-faceted task. Apart from specialist professional and other types of knowledge, such projects require extensive co-operation among local educational authorities and operational teams, as well as the external specialists. This raises a myriad of issues connected with the creation of new networks of specialist groups, able to engage with each other and communicate productively.

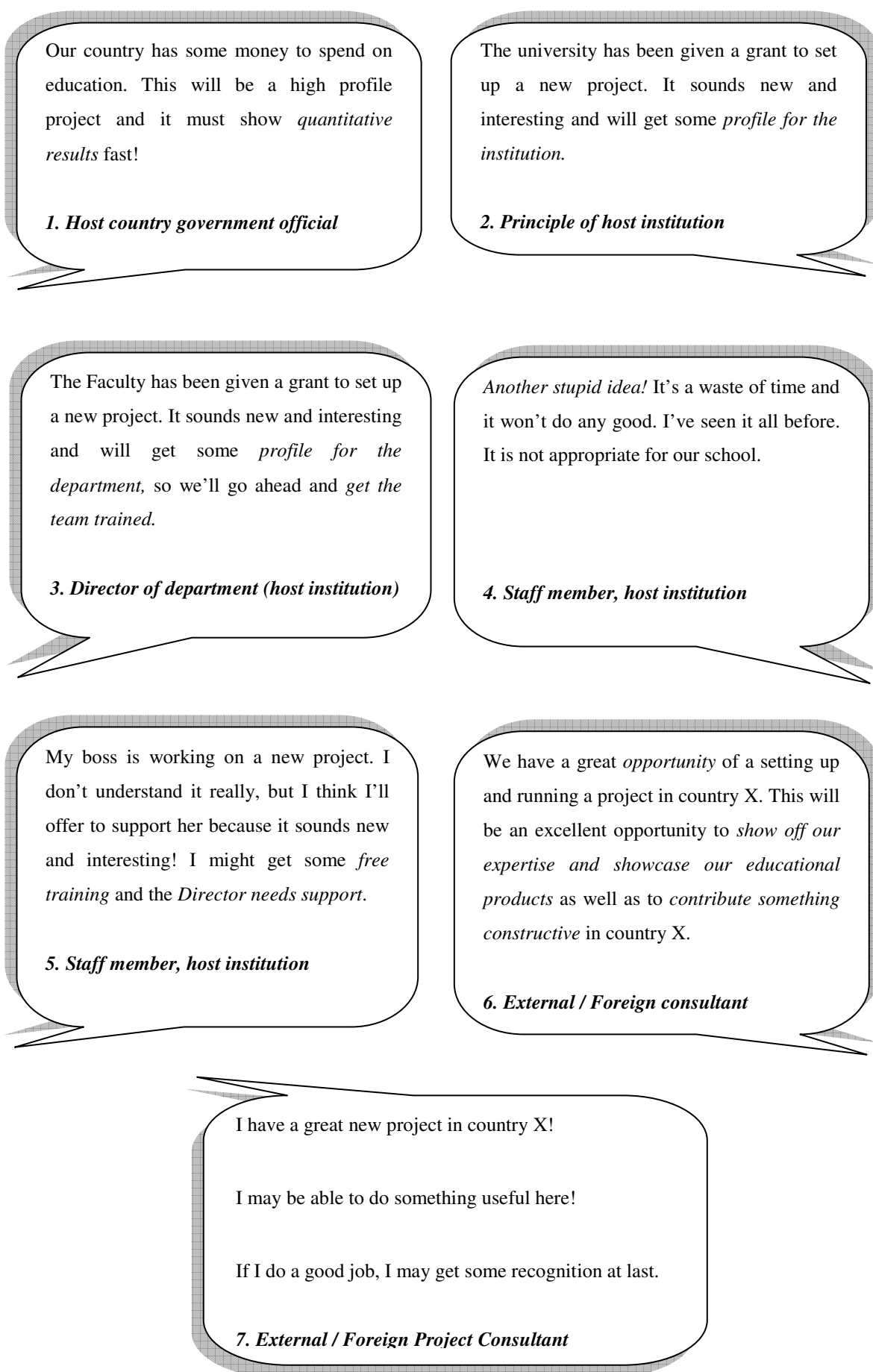
Radically differing historical, national, organisational and departmental cultures can present continual challenges to human relations and communication during the implementation of a development project, unless a common language is found to unify rather than to separate participants. Effective management has always depended much on effective communication at all levels, and this is particularly the case in a bi-national and multicultural environment where decisions relating to which language also form part of management strategy. I wanted to find out how communication had been effected during the case study project, and to analyse how it may have contributed to its sustainability.

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Innovative' here refers to adoption of behaviours involving the assimilation and application of new principles and applications by staff at English teaching institutions and English language learners.

Figure 1, below, attempts to show different attitudes which people may hold (publicly or privately) at the beginning of a project. Such attitudes can influence the ways in which communication is effected, and its results. The motivations of individuals who become involved in projects are a highly complex area, and are currently being researched in Mexico (e.g. Scholes, PhD thesis, in progress). The participants' own agendas can affect ways in which they participate in and promote the project. I hoped to understand better how different attitudes and types of motivation may have contributed to the sustainability of this project, and draw conclusions regarding how to nurture them in future projects.

**Figure 1: Perceptions at the outset of an ELT project**





### **2.2.3 The roles of institutional relationships in achieving project sustainability**

The development of an enduring working relationship among and across teams is time-consuming and strenuous (Robins and Finlay 1996). Even more so, if the underlying aim is to maintain these relationships *beyond* the scheduled project period, which is often an implicit umbrella objective of innovative EFL projects. The British Council, for example, in its statement of aim for Mexico, 2004-2005, states as its purposes “To win recognition in Mexico for the UK’s values, ideas and achievements, and nurture lasting, mutually beneficial relationships between Mexico and the UK.” Such relationships, related to diplomatic, political or commercial objectives, can thrive on a longer-term basis, if receivers are content with project results. The responsibility for creating the conditions for an enduring collaboration can thus become another ingredient of an external project consultant’s work. Moreover, the sustainability of the project and the relevance and nature of relations developed through the work often determine the likelihood of the employment of the manager and external consultants in future projects. I wondered how far the relationship developed between the British Council and the case study university had in fact become a lasting, mutually beneficial relationship, and, if so, whether this might have supported the sustainability of the project.

### **2.2.4 The roles of management styles and systems in achieving project sustainability**

Operationally speaking, development projects are frequently suggested, planned and implemented with a totally “top-down” management methodology. Gantt charts; Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) analysis; Critical Path Method (CPM); Log Frames, Time, Cost and Quality Triangles (Burke 1990); Process guided planning and Contingency theory (Morrison 1998); Problem-solving approaches (Mead 2000); Chaos Theory (Smith 1998), one or another theory or model may be espoused by the major stakeholders.

The “parents” or “highest authorities” of the innovation may be visionaries who, enjoying a position of legitimate power and influence, are well-qualified to state the institutional terms, set objectives, make the long-term plans and expect unconditional co-operation from operational staff. Mission statements can be composed, purposes defined, objectives set, values discussed and approaches described, relatively easily at the level of institution to institution (Grounds 2001). It is also common practice to publicise such activities widely as part of the diffusion of a new project. Such can be simultaneously

impressive, yet shallow, lacking in analysis of the further-reaching implications of the project for local teams and precise details regarding the processes which need to be implemented to support the changes.

The local staff, working within their own context with its established educational traditions and departmental ideologies and conventions, may need to acquire a partially new vision and perceive the possible benefits of an innovation, for it to succeed. This is difficult to achieve unless awareness-raising activities are programmed into the process of innovation (Kennedy 1988).

Even if internal operational staff can visualize such benefits, they may not automatically have the knowledge or resources at their disposal to embrace the project effectively. Training and other kinds of support can help them to deal with the processes of change, including new management structures and communication systems needed to carry the changes through. Getting to grips with new professional knowledge and practices, then adopting, assimilating, implementing and evaluating new principles and practises can lead to high levels of stress, and rejection is common among local staff at the beginning of a new project. I wanted to find out more about how training and the assumption of decision-making powers and accountability may have contributed towards sustainability in this case.

The more widely experienced and qualified the internal staff in the receiving institution(s), the more likely they are to be critical of innovations, and the less eager to jump onto the bandwagon of a new policy, even if it is supported by their authorities. If local staff perceives hidden agendas, perhaps more closely related to the image and profile of the institution than a genuine effort to enhance the quality and results of teaching and learning, the project will encounter scepticism from academic staff. I hoped to find out how human reactions to the project and project decisions may have affected project sustainability in the case study context.

If external consultants and project managers specifically adhere to a rational model of change, they can lend the project a – not always justified – sense of security, and a feeling that change can indeed be rationally planned and sequenced. A rational model can initially appear less ground-shaking and insecurity-provoking, and certainly, at the beginning of the SAC project, this was the type of model disseminated. Strategic plans were made (and indeed still are, to this day) at all levels of operation, and administrators and some staff seemed to feel that they had a reasonable vision of their responsibilities and the underlying rationale.

On-going *participatory* evaluation was also planned in, as part of the general principle of “empowerment” adopted by the external consultant organization and their sponsors (Treffgarne 1999), and now rejected in favour of the term “enablement” by some organizations. Both words, in fact, have a similarly paternalistic/maternalistic ring, implying that the consultants have a power relationship in which they somehow assist the consultees in climbing a few steps up the ladder towards increased power or ability. The terms are also questionable from the point of view of culturism or even racism, since:

“The insistence that ‘empowerment’ of the ‘local’ is the answer, is still deeply rooted in the ‘us’ and ‘them’ perception of the generalized Other, in which ‘they’ ‘don’t know the technology’ and are ‘easily dominated’” (Holliday 2005: 134).

I hoped to find out more about how participatory strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation activities might have played a role in project sustainability, in this case.

Complexity theory and chaos theory imply that “effects are not straightforward, continuous functions of causes”, “change is non-linear”, and “the universe ... is creative, emergent ... evolutionary and changing, transformative and turbulent” (Morrison 1998: 4, 14).

Furthermore,

“This new science of complexity essentially claims that the link between cause and effect is difficult to trace, that change (planned and otherwise) unfolds in non-linear ways; that paradoxes and contradictions abound and that creative solutions arise out of interaction under conditions of uncertainty, diversity and instability” (Fullen 1999: 4).

Logically, then, effective project planning should also consider the importance of allowing situations and problems to “emerge” and of allocating time for solutions to be found through collaborative discussion at all levels, as mentioned above. I wanted to observe how far strategic planning and effective problem-solving might have been a factor in the achievement of sustainability at the case study site. Problems arising along the way would presumably have tested the meshwork of the project plan and the ability of the project team to overcome the unexpected collaboratively for the project results to have endured.

Both in theory and in practice, “change concerns people more than content”, and there is a serious danger that too rigidly planned and managed change may neglect the individual and group perceptions and values of participants (Morrison 1998: 15-16). Again, participation of stakeholders and beneficiaries at all stages of a project would seem to be

vital, to foster feelings of ownership and motivation to adopt the changes and accept the mental and physical effort implied.

Nonetheless, this is often not feasible in practice, for different reasons. The external advisor may be working in a context where management and training is hegemonic and hierarchical, conforming to long-standing, often revered, cultural and educational traditions. At the early stages of the case study context, there was often a feeling that consultants had to respond to tacit “accusations” or “remonstrations” suggesting that “You are the expert, so you tell us what to do! Don’t keep giving us alternatives to choose from! You are supposed to know best!” It took time to induce people to believe in the possible benefits of a more egalitarian and collegiate way of working and a totally flat system of management may not have survived in this context. It is always important, in my view, to assess how far the consultants are expected to adjust to existing systems and structures, and how far they are required to foster essential changes in institutions.

Some writers use the term “Cargo Cult” ((Holliday 1994: 115-6, referring to the Shipman Project) to illustrate how host teams often regard what the external consultant should bring to the task: the foreign “experts” will bring the innovation with them on their “voyage” as a kind of pre-made package. They will tell everyone exactly what to do, to implement the innovation, and then get back aboard their “ship” and disappear again! I was interested to learn how far management planning and implementation methodology, including training strategies, might have played a role in the sustainability of the case study project, and whether this might have been super-ordinate or subordinate to other factors.

In the postmodern world, where we have no alternative but to accept that the world-order has become an ever-changing, unfixed scenario (Harvey 1990; Morrison 1998: 3), perhaps it is best to “marry” both an evolutionary, emergent, phenomenologicistic approach and a planned-strategy approach to project planning, implementation and evaluation and apply them simultaneously. I wanted to find out what kind of approach had *in fact* been prevalent at the case study university (regardless of what might have been suggested during training), and whether this may have contributed to sustainability.

### **2.2.5 The role of finance in achieving project sustainability**

Financial considerations, already mentioned above as vital to project sustainability in general, are a further factor to be considered in the context of an English language curriculum development project.

Project initiators often obtain a sizeable grant to initiate the process. This can then be disposed of appropriately by budget holders, according to the aims, objectives, strategies and tactics of the project plan. Acquiring funding to sustain and develop the project *ad infinitum* is often not so easy, particularly when development projects are closely tied to government periods of office. I wanted to look at ways in which the availability of funding may have affected the sustainability of the case study project.

Financial rewards for internal project staff constitute another major issue. Staff at the institution hosting the project, are often perceived as “lucky” receivers of the innovation, and are therefore expected by their employers to take on large quantities of extra work, and be “grateful for the privilege” to participate in the new project, without extra remuneration. Sometimes glossed over as “a great opportunity for free training and up-dating”, the end result is often the same – more work for the local staff, without necessarily any immediate tangible reward. Holliday (2005: 116) gives an excellent example of how external consultants sometimes not only expect people to embrace externally led projects, but even to “pay with their whole careers” for the opportunity of participating!

I wondered how the attitudes of external and internal staff had developed during the case study project and how these might have enabled the project to become sustainable.

### **2.2.6 The role of official policy in achieving project sustainability**

How far might the relationship of a project with government and institutional policies be decisive in its sustainability? If a government department proposes and procures funding and training through an external agent for an innovation, does it necessarily follow that the project will be accepted, implemented, and go on to endure? If opportunities to bid for further funding remain available beyond the project period and future awards are made in direct relation to the results achieved, will the project endure? Policy might have been another element in the sustainability of the case study project, and I hoped to find out whether it had indeed had an impact on the outcomes.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have provided further background information concerning my own professional profile and included reflections on different aspects of the subject of the study. In the interests of transparency, it was important to reveal how my own previous knowledge, experience and interests have at once motivated and informed the research. It is

fair to suppose that these may have influenced some of the outcomes of the study, since it is general knowledge that the eye often perceives what it expects to see. However, I consistently attempted to distance myself, as far as possible, and to approach data with an open mind, to “make the familiar strange”, in order to interpret and question my own interpretations of the phenomena observed.

In the next chapter, questions concerning the nature of sustainability will be further addressed, by means of an extensive survey, summary and discussion of the views of several experts.

## Chapter 3

### Conceptualizing Project Sustainability

*In this chapter, I will examine experts' views regarding the concept of sustainability and show how these helped me to further develop my own understanding of the phenomenon in the context of English Language Teaching Projects. I will also discuss some cultural issues which are believed to be important when implementing new projects in different contexts. I will end the chapter by including a table, summarizing the concepts and conditions which are generally considered to be characteristic of sustainability, and explaining how this provided an initial springboard, as well as further motivation, for my own research.*

#### **3.1 Achieving a shared conceptualization of project sustainability**

It seemed appropriate to begin with a cross-disciplinary study of existing work on project sustainability, to find out what “sustainability” means to other practitioners and to establish a minimal shared conceptualization of the term, to lay a sounder foundation for the study, rooting the concept deeply in current perceptions.

Next, I would collect and interact with my own data, to see what else might emerge from the particular case. I imagined that some of the themes, concepts and categories might coincide with some of those mentioned in Chapter 2 and in this chapter (though not necessarily with the same frequency or intensity). New themes, concepts and categories might also emerge from the data. It seemed logical to expect this, since every case is in some ways unique, and yet there are also likely to be commonalities with comparable cases.

Although the literature survey gave me a much more thorough understanding of some concepts and conditions relating to sustainability, I also found some limitations in other people's definitions. This further justified my aim to create a new way of looking at project sustainability, and perhaps even to coin a more inclusive term through this study.

At the same time, I tried to avoid the dangers of directly imposing preconceived concepts and categories derived from my own interests *and* the literature onto my own data by implementing an on-going process of critical analysis, including ratiocination and self-criticism while dialoguing with the data. As I will describe in Chapter 5, I also went back

to check my own interpretations with the informants themselves, wherever possible, before writing them up as they appear in this report, (i.e. respondent validation).

In the following sections, I will summarize and critique some current perceptions of the nature of project sustainability, criteria and conditions for its achievement and also some existing definitions. This will illustrate that a deeper understanding of the nature of project sustainability is desirable.

### **3.1.1 Existing views**

Within the social groups which might be denominated “project initiators and managers”, irrespective of specific professional fields, project sustainability is generally considered to be a desirable thing. An innovation is conceived, researched, planned, costed, implemented, and evaluated, because it is perceived to be in some way “beneficial” for a specific target community by both the donor/consultant and the receiving group(s) or organization(s). Because it is “beneficial”, the project is generally both desired and expected to be sustainable, that is, in the simplest of terms, to “acquire a life of its own” enabling it to subsist beyond the project planning and implementation period in such a way that the project activities can continue indefinitely.

Precisely what constitutes “beneficial” will of course be influenced by the socio-political, cultural and economic intentions of the stakeholders, both donors and receivers alike, the contexts from which the project content and methodology are derived and those in which the project is to be implanted. This aspect should be addressed in the initial stages of project proposal and design. With this reservation, however, it is fair to say that sustainability can be assumed to be an overarching, if not always overtly stated, objective of any type of project, and a major aim of effective project management (Burke 1990: 8-9).

### **3.1.2 A development view**

Looking at what “sustainability” means for different types of development organizations, helped me to develop a more interdisciplinary and perhaps a more widely relevant conceptualization of project sustainability. I began by studying information pertaining to The Save the Children Fund, a charity involved in development projects of different types for over 85 years.

The Save the Children Fund sees sustainability as a categorical imperative of all their activities:



*“Sustainability*

Save the Children in its partnerships must strive to achieve sustainability; **to strengthen the capacity of people** (whether in community-based organizations (CBOs), Southern NGOs (SNGOs), government or other groups) **to further their own development”** (Robinson *et al* 2000: 249, citing SCF 1994 –my emphasis).

A deconstruction of this statement shows that, in the view of this organization, appropriate training for project participants is a necessary condition for the achievement of project sustainability. Through such activities, participants can become responsible for the continuation of their own development and independently plan and implement activities to support the development process for an indefinite period in the future, after the scheduled period of project implementation has ended. This constitutes neither a definition, nor an interpretation of sustainability, but a general condition to be fulfilled, if sustainability is to be achieved.

This view would seem to be echoed by Ethne Davey, who, in a presentation on her project to provide clean potable water to rural communities in South Africa, stated at a working conference of the Royal Society of South Africa in 1998 that:

“The meaning of the word “sustainable” is debatable – to you and me, from a Western background, “sustainability” means collection of monthly tariffs and money in the bank. To indigent rural communities “sustainability” takes on other meanings. To this particular community “sustainability” meant an uninterrupted flow of water...”

By extension, in the context of the self-access centre project which I planned to study, this would imply uninterrupted access to useful and regularly updated human, material and IT resources for language learning for the students. This is, in fact what happened to the extent that a new building was constructed, new materials acquired regularly and both computers and monitors were updated in 2004, long after the end of the project in 1997. It would be true to say that the project achieved something more than sustainability, however, because developments went far beyond the original project aims.

I somewhat disagree with the suggestion that sustainability is for many from the West simply a matter of finance, as Davey suggests, since much can be achieved on limited funding where both motivation and commitment are great (Section 2.2.2, p. 29, Scholes,

PhD thesis, in process); Davey's (1998: 1) explanation of what, in her view, really brings about project sustainability is perhaps more relevant:

“People make projects sustainable. Infra-structure does not self-destruct; people make or break these structures. We soon realized that people had to grow with the project. In this “Catch 22” situation, we had to decide whether to train people in the vacuum of “sustainability” or to train them every step of the way with the focus always on sustainability...”

From my own experience with innovations in English Language Teaching in general, and with the case study project in particular, I would tend to agree with Davey, that there has to be training “every step of the way” to achieve sustainability. Appropriate types of collaborative and mutually supportive training for all project participants, of all profiles, may also be vital to success. Moreover, at the beginning of the research, I felt that in-service training should perhaps be implemented by people who lived and worked in the context of the innovation, in preference to external specialists, if sustainability were to be achieved and the innovation to evolve progressively. These views were strengthened, when I came to analyze my own data. I found repeated mentions of the ways in which participants had been trained to plan and implement the project by external consultants and peers in other institutions, as a factor that was perceived as having contributed to the overall survival and further progress of the case study project. The large, national Self Access Learning events, initiated during the project period, were embraced by the majority of the participating universities and, up until the present day (2007) there has been an annual national self-access conference, hosted by a different university on each occasion, and one biennial forum at the University of Puebla. Both events now regularly attract international speakers and participants, and have thus come to serve the purpose of on-going in-service training and updating for staff and institutions through the wide range of academic and commercial presentations offered. In Davey's sense, there is no doubt that “the people” have not only “grown with the project”, but have continued to grow *after* the project, and something much more exciting than mere sustainability or maintainability has been achieved.

From an administrative point of view, sustainability unquestionably includes the capacity of an innovation to support itself financially *ad infinitum*, after the initial project period has terminated. Danny Mangham, speaking of the Royds housing estate development programme in Bradford, England (Robinson, Hewitt and Harris, 2000: 295), said:

“...if we can't make whatever we're doing, if we can't see it paying its way when the [project fund] runs out, we shouldn't start...And that's what we're trying to do on Royds, everything we set up, we're trying to make it pay its way.”

Two self-access centre co-ordinators from the case study university, whom I will call Luisa and Alice, as well as at least four academics participating in parallel projects at different universities, all referred to the availability of funding as having constituted a major factor in the sustainability of their projects. Other case study data (interviews, strategic planning documents and reports) confirmed that may also have been a factor in the achievement of success. The existence of abundant and accessible resources was referred to repeatedly by two informants, while successful funding bids showed that financial resources had been obtained, to support the continuation and expansion of the project activities both during and after the scheduled project period.

UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), referring to the World Summit on Sustainable development, Johannesburg, 2002 (UNESCO, 2003) stated concerning the relationship between education and sustainable development that: “sustainable development is built on three ‘interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars’ – **economic development, social development and environmental protection**” (my emphasis).

Although this statement refers to development projects in general, strong parallels can be drawn between this idea and the foundations of English language curriculum development projects. In our field, the three “interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars” might be viewed as appropriate funding (“economic” aspects), orientation and training of people involved in the process of change (“sociological” aspects), and protection of the values, traditions and institutions of local educational contexts (“environmental” aspects). These conditions also seem appropriate in the light of experience, both prior to and during my research, and the ideas are informative in terms of expanding the concept of sustainability. It still does not comprise a complete definition of the term, however.

The above view is partially shared by Fullen (2001: 28), who cites Pascale *et al* (2000: 92), referring to the same three components of sustainability, though in a different sequence. In neither case is it explained whether the sequence in which the elements are mentioned actually reflects the order and degree of importance of each in the author's view.

“The theory of sustainability is that it is constituted by a trinity of *environmental soundness, social justice* and *economic viability*. If any of these three are weak or missing, the theory of sustainability says that the practice [what the organization is doing] will not prove sustainable over time” (my emphasis).

In relation to English language teaching projects, I have already suggested that the concepts of environmental protection, social development and economic development, might be translated as something like: the protection of values and traditions of local educational contexts (environmental soundness and protection), appropriate orientation and training of people involved in the process of change and direct benefits for people involved (social justice and development) and appropriate funding (economic development/viability) already mentioned above.

However, the way in which the concepts are expressed by Pascale *et al.* Ibid. begs some important questions: “environmental soundness”, according to *whose* ideologies and concepts? “Social justice”, according to *whose* traditions and wider belief systems? “Economic viability”, according to *whose* perceptions and standards of costs and benefits? Is it the donor institutions, the receiving institutions, the staff who are to implement the change, or those of the final beneficiaries, the last link in the chain who defines these issues? Which group will be most influential in the implementation and continuation of an innovation? The potential for political, cultural and methodological indoctrination through projects should not be underestimated, nor should the dangers of culturism and cultural chauvinism (Holliday 2005: 24) and these are both issues to which I will return. I tried to keep these questions in mind, as well as issues surrounding cultural continuity (Holliday 2005: 147) while analyzing my data.

Some sources refer even more specifically to the social dimensions of project sustainability. The World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission 1998) defines “sustainable development” as:

“...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”  
(Rogakos, Koulaidis and Hatzinikita 1998: 685, citing WCED 1987).

According to this definition, sustainable *development* (i.e. not sustainability *per se*) does not only concern fulfilling an immediate need, but also ensures that by satisfying that need now, possible future needs are in no way endangered. In the context of English Language

Teaching, this might imply, for example, that any significant investment in educational technology to support teachers and learners should not cause a lack of funds for training teachers and for providing new resources in the future, since these are likely to remain a continuing need. Similarly, if massive investment in technology were to threaten the survival of libraries and other learning facilities, leading to a dearth of further funding for the renewal of stocks, the creation of a SAC could not be seen as beneficial, in the long term.

In relation to the case study project, there is no doubt that the creation of a language learning resource centre had fulfilled at least two real needs simultaneously. The first was the need for flexibility in teaching and learning styles incorporating a much wider use of educational technology, which had resulted from innovations in Mexican government policy. The second was the demand for more extensive facilities and resources for English language learning in particular, as needs and expectations of achievement increased in this area. In retrospect, the fulfilment of these needs certainly does not seem to have endangered emerging new needs of the institution, but rather, laid the foundation for much further-reaching and more generalized changes to take place all over the university (Silva 2000) in line with Mexican government policy and justifications for funding.

### **3.1.3 An extended development view**

An article on enhancing social-scientific understanding of sustainability, published in UNESCO Heute 3, 1997, mentions that:

*“...substantielle, problemorientierte Beiträge der Sozialwissenschaften [sind] für ein adäquates Verständnis von Nachhaltigkeit zweifellos unabdingbar. Dies bedeutet auch, da sich die Natur – wie die Sozialwissenschaften einem lokalen, umweltbezogenen Wissen ebenso öffnen müssen wie unterschiedlichen kulturellen und geschlechtsspezifischen Erfahrung. Auf diese Weise wird das Verständnis von Nachhaltigkeit in ihren ökologischen, ökonomischen, sozialen, politischen und kulturellen Aspekten vertieft und die Vorherrschaft hegemonialer, technokratischer und ethnozentrischer Interpretationen verhindert.”<sup>2</sup>*

---

<sup>2</sup> “...there can be little doubt that substantial and problem-oriented contributions of the social sciences are indispensable for the understanding of sustainability. This means it is necessary to open both the natural and the social sciences to local environmental knowledge and different cultural and gender experience, in order to deepen the understanding of sustainability and in its environmental, economic, social, political and cultural aspects and to avoid the supremacy of hegemonic, technocratic and ethnocentric approaches.

Key concepts here include: “ecological, economic, social, political and cultural aspects”, as all contributing to sustainability; and this wider view of the connotations of the term is perhaps even more useful than the briefer descriptions referred to earlier. There, references suggested that there might be three “interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars” supporting sustainability in relation to English language curriculum projects: appropriate funding (“economic” aspects), orientation and training of people involved in the process of change (“sociological” aspects), and protection of the values, traditions and institutions of local educational contexts (“environmental” aspects). Here, though the three pillars are included, mention is also made of political and cultural issues.

My data suggests that political factors (change of educational policy and English language teaching policy championed by the Mexican government) contributed to the success of the case study project, as I will illustrate in Chapter 8, p. 233. This view can perhaps be married to the definition of Critical Applied Linguistics favoured by such specialists as Pennycook (1990a: 2001), demanding a greater emphasis on the cultural, sociological and political dimensions of language in practice. The dangers of essentialist perceptions of the contexts in which innovations are to be implemented and the potentially negative aspects of external training, including perhaps anachronistic views of “emancipating” people in other cultural contexts by bringing in new ideas and methodologies designed for other contexts, already mentioned above, should not be underestimated.

## **3.2 An English language teaching view**

I will now summarize current perceptions of project sustainability among English language teaching specialists.

### **3.2.1 A project management view**

In describing “the present British approach to (ELT) aid work in developing countries”, Flavell (1994: 11) mentions “the five stages a project will normally pass through, from its inception to completion and subsequent withdrawal.” These five stages are, according to Flavell, Identification, Preparation, Appraisal, Implementation and Evaluation. Although one might infer from this that implementation of these five stages ensures the success of a project, Flavell is, perhaps, describing rather than prescribing. The focus on the stages of the project, each seen as an entity in itself, rather than stages that participating institutions

and people implement and experience together, is interesting though, and may again suggest planning and strategy as possible ingredients of sustainability, together with other elements already discussed.

In the capacity of external project co-ordinator of the Mexican SAC project, I was able to observe how project staff from the major funding bodies, the British Council and the Mexican Ministry of Education, certainly did implement stages describable as project Identification, Preparation, Appraisal, Implementation and Evaluation. In my current capacity of researcher, however, I will equally strongly claim in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 that these were by no means the *only* factors that contributed to the survival of the project at the case study university, according to the data. There is certainly evidence of planning and evaluation activities in a number of documents related to the case study project (e.g. project plans, programmes for training in strategy planning, monitoring and evaluation at staff training events).

The literature on English language curriculum projects and innovations also mentions planned *or* problem-solving approaches to project development, emergent planning, management by matrix organization, flat and hierarchical management systems, independent project organization, venture teams, systemic models of organization development (Henry and Walker 1991; Carey and Dabor 1995; Markee 1997; Morrison 1998; Robinson *et al.* 2000, among others). However, experience has proven that, whatever management styles, organizational systems, models of planning, implementation, on-going appraisal and evaluation are planned into the project at the beginning by external consultants, these generally have to be adapted, according to the nature of the new contexts and in response to unpredictable phenomena which arise as part of the implementation process (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.4, p. 32).

The research data showed evidence of changes in management style among internal project staff, at different stages in the project. These were related to changes in internal project co-ordinators, as well as changes in roles and perceptions resulting from the withdrawal of British Council consultants at the end of programmed project activities, allowing the Faculty to take full responsibility for their self-access centre, as scheduled. At least one interviewee mentioned how staff had become much more enthusiastic about the project, once it had become completely “their own”, and this perception may have been more important to its success than any specific management style or system suggested by external consultants.

### 3.2.2 A collaborative view

Robinson *et al* (2000) mention “collaboration” as an important ingredient of successful projects. From its conception, the National SAC project was always intended to be very much a joint venture and it became even more so, after the signing of the trilateral agreement between the Mexican Ministry of Education, the British Council and 32 Mexican universities, in November 1993. There was a strong focus on encouraging key individuals at all levels in the different organisations to collaborate, in the interests of creating a shared, national vision. This vision, however, may not have always been clearly enough defined and disseminated within individual universities, as is clear from certain views expressed by some research participants, to be quoted below. On the contrary, there is clear evidence from the case (responses to questionnaires, references made by staff during structured and unstructured interviews), to show that staff there did not have a clear vision of where the project would lead, during the earlier stages of the project. Individual participants seem to have taken up the challenge of the project more because it offered a change from regular daily duties, than because of their grasp of, or empathy with, the new educational philosophies and potential for improvement that the innovation seemed to represent. A quotation from one of the series of co-ordinators at the case study university clearly illustrates what was happening at the operational level, at the beginning of their project:

“I was working at the Faculty ...er...giving English classes and...the director... was at that time...er...working on this project. Er... she explained to me about the philosophy of the self-access centres. I didn't know...she had explained to me in general terms what it was, but **none of us really understood what it was**. Er... I was made responsible for materials design...to get ready to start the project. However... **we didn't know... er... what it meant... what it meant, or where we were going, or how we had to do things**. A lot of the people who were being trained for this didn't want to go on with it, because they didn't have time, or because of payment...and those of us who were given the job ... didn't know much about the theme... **At that time, it seemed to me to be an interesting... extremely... a challenge for us. It wasn't at all...It was strange and different, but I didn't really understand...** Well, for me it was a challenge.” (Extract from unstructured interview with Alba, one of the self-access project co-ordinators, 03.04.2000 –my translation and emphasis.)



This area will be further discussed in Chapter 6. For the moment it is interesting to note that the SAC Project was nevertheless able to thrive *without* this kind of collaboration during the initial stages. This implies that other aspects must have been at least equally important, in its longer term success.

### **3.2.3 A visionary view**

Although a collaborative view is no doubt important, this must not be limited to day-to-day, operative activities, in order for a project to become sustainable, according to other experts. Morrow, writing specifically in relation to English language teaching projects, mentions a vision of the future as a vital element of sustainability:

“Sustainability involves helping project participants to set targets for the future” (Morrow 1998: 190).

This is strongly related to Samuelson and Harrity’s (1998) concern with continuation. The suggestion here is that without the incorporation of target-setting for the future as an ongoing and collaborative project activity, innovations are unlikely to be able to survive easily after the end of the project period.

An outstanding example of this occurrence in the case study project was the way in which the university procured funds for the construction of a custom-designed building for their self-access language resource centre, anticipating the inevitable increasing demand for language learning facilities which followed the formal inclusion of English in the undergraduate curriculum requirements. This kind of *vision of the future* may also have supported the development and continual improvement of the project, over the subsequent years.

### **3.2.4 A communication-based view**

So far, the literature survey has only just begun to illustrate the immense complexity of the concept of sustainability considering the range of assumptions and assertions made by experts. Yet another factor may be the early establishment of a *shared* understanding of key concepts, during the earliest stages of the project (Section 2.2.2, p. 29). Although this point may seem inveterately obvious, a recent professional experience, in 2006, made me realize how much I may have taken this for granted, in the past.

I had been asked to lead on the academic design, collation and interpretation of data and reporting for an evaluation project, which was funded by two major international

government agencies, and the respective departments within these organizations. It took upwards of *three months* of valuable project time to discuss and define *what* precisely should be evaluated, before they met together to check each party's conceptualization of *how* we might go about this! Had we not reached this consensus, however, the results of that particular evaluation project would have met the expectations of *some* of the stakeholders, and have failed completely, in the eyes of others.

The failure to establish such shared perceptions, or at the very least, the achievement of a thorough understanding of, and respect for, the *different* perceptions of the collaborating organizations regarding the underlying purposes, content and methodology for implementing a project, is a potential stumbling block in the achievement of sustainability of any "shared" project. The achievement of successful communication has much to do with intercultural issues, to be further discussed in Section 3.2.5, p. 50.

Communication was established in diverse ways during the national self-access centre project in Mexico. There were regular meetings with authorities from the major stakeholder organizations, training meetings with internal staff and regular circulation of planning documents and reports. For example, there were regular monthly meetings between the under-secretary for higher education and British Council project staff throughout the project. There were a number of national events during the first two years to launch the project, begin training and establish direct links among co-ordinators and staff from different states. Then, rectors and Faculty directors received two personal information and orientation visits per year, throughout the first two years of the project. Self-access centre co-ordinators and staff received regular training from locally employed British Council trainers during the first two years of the project and during the second two years of the project, regional events for staff in each of the geographical regions, took place every six months. These events laid the foundations for on-going peer co-operation among the different state universities and for the much larger, national self-access events, which have been held at different universities over the years, ever since.

There was also a bi-monthly printed newsletter, which was circulated among all interested parties and a project website. These facilitated the communication of plans, results, modifications, allowed description and discussion of decisions and achievements and promoted discussion. Regular progress reports were prepared by the national co-ordinator and widely circulated among authorities and staff at all universities, too. Nowadays, similar

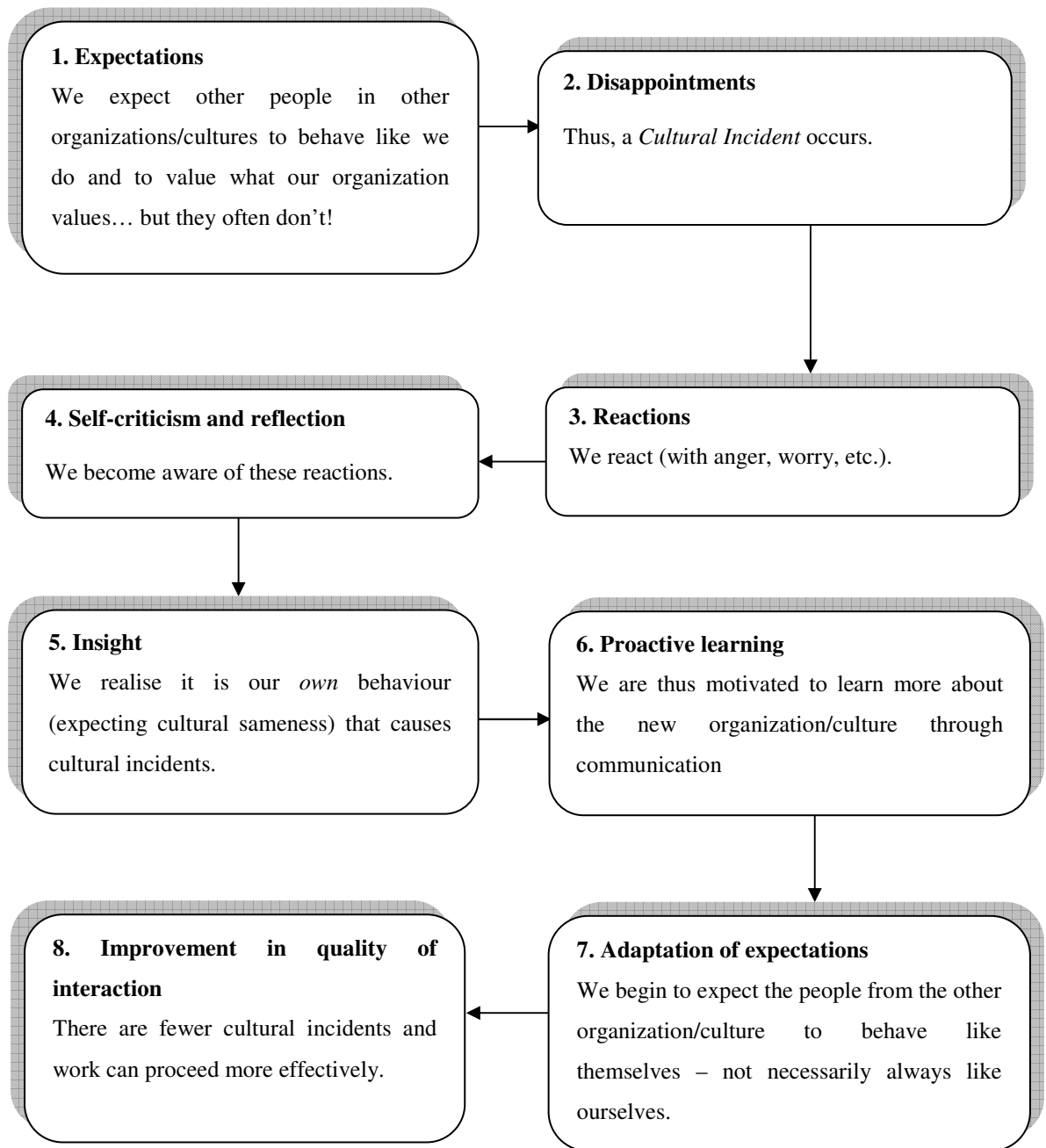
projects are benefiting from e-groups, blogs, pod-casts, chat and other IT facilities, but even at the time of the SAC project, great emphasis was laid on networking and communication. At the case study university, the data showed a generally good flow of communication from authorities to staff and vice versa, as was easily inferred from documentation (though not much mentioned in interviews or other types of data). This may also have contributed to the sustainability of the case study project, in some measure.

### **3.2.5 A “culture”-based view**

Once alone in the field, in a country which is not one’s own, a teaching context can sometimes be so unfamiliar that an external consultant may easily offend people for whom that context is the norm. Mead’s account of the Australian professor, who annoyed Thai staff and students by taking off his shoes for classes in a misguided attempt to respect local manners, is an excellent illustration of this (Mead 2000).

Neither is it uncommon for “outsiders” to encourage (usually in good faith) innovations which may not be completely appropriate for a given context. This, too, can cause “cultural incidents” (Storti 1989). Cultural incidents are often caused by external consultants who ingenuously expect receivers of new projects to believe in and react to the innovation in the exactly same ways as the consultant herself does. Figure 2, below, suggests a simple model of intercultural interaction. This model, adapted and extended from Storti (2001), suggests how communication may be improved, through heightened insight of what affects intercultural understanding and could usefully inform English language and other development project managers.

**Figure 2: A model of intercultural interaction in multicultural organizations and projects (Adapted and extended, from Craig Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, Second edition 2001, Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, Maine, USA)**



It is illogical to assume that the receivers of an innovation brought from another context will automatically share values behind and beliefs about it, having grown up and been educated in different national, educational and organizational cultures and contexts, bearing in mind current views on the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966). While maintaining a non-essentialist view of cultures and avoiding the reduction of others to preconceived stereotypes, it is equally important to allow differences to emerge and to

respect and value them when identifying, preparing and appraising the content and methodology for projects in new contexts.

Furthermore, “insiders” within a certain context may reject a project for different reasons; the aims of the project, the person leading it, the politics or wider culture from which the project stems may all play a more significant part in acceptance or rejection than the project content and potential benefits. Rejection may bear no relation at all to academic issues, but be traceable to other kinds of interpersonal and/or intercultural issues and misunderstandings.

Although I had initially assumed that culturally-based factors or cultural incidents might emerge as focal points in this study, I was somewhat surprised to find no *overt* evidence at all of such occurrences in my data. Where I did find it, however, was in my *own* reactions to certain aspects of the self-access centre. Critical reflexivity led me to realize that my reactions to certain ways in which the centre had been adapted to the local context had been preconditioned by previous professional experiences with self-access learning in other contexts, and preconceived notions of what learner autonomy entailed (Palfreyman and Smith 2003).

Almost all consultants involved in the national self-access project were either Mexican experts, or UK specialists who had been living and working in the country for at least ten years. It may be that they had become sufficiently acculturated to avoid major problems of this nature. On the other hand, perhaps the project *itself* gradually became “acculturated” in ways which strengthened its likelihood of success (Chapter 1, p. 20 and Chapter 2, Section 2.1, pp. 24, 26). The idea of the *acculturation of the project* will be extended and revisited in later chapters.

Since deeper aspects of cultures and sub-cultures can generally only be understood over an extended period of intimately sharing life within the host culture, in-country specialists, who are honestly convinced of the appropriateness of the innovation for the context on the basis of such understanding, may be more sensitive trainers than external specialists with impressive credentials from other countries. “Foreign” experts often have only a very short period of time after arrival in a host country for briefing (Coleman 1992, describing a KELT project in Indonesia) arriving, assessing needs, acting first as a consultant and leader, then as a collaborator, enabler of others, implementer and evaluator. However, if people who have lived in such a host country for long periods are still capable of (albeit often inadvertent) essentialist culturally chauvinistic attitudes and behaviour

(Holliday 2005: 18) – how much more so may consultants who are both new to the context and (whether consciously or not) propagating a potentially hegemonic influence by promoting principles and practices developed in largely western language learning and teaching contexts and not unquestionably the best for other contexts.

To expand a little more on the theme of culture, Robinson's (1997) definition, quoted in Guirdham (1999: 51), is helpful, because it provides a single definition which is equally applicable to both surface and deep levels of culture: "*a culture is a shared system of perceptions and values, or a group of people who share a certain system of perceptions and values.*"

Such "shared systems of perceptions and values" and the group(s) of people who shared them, can be identified and observed within national, organizational and departmental cultures in any organization. The "foreign expert" needs to be aware of the concepts, practices and bureaucracies shared by all the "*small cultures*" and "the composite of cohesive behaviour within any social grouping" (Holliday 1999: 247), which are likely to intervene in the evolution of sustainability during a development project. In addition, during the course of such a project, a new, shared, hybrid system of perceptions and values is likely to emerge, as participants forge a new shared vision, aims and discourse – creating a new culture of their own.

This was certainly observable during the development of the national self-access project. A new specialist community, with a shared discourse, gradually developed, and its membership was reinforced by specially focused events, correspondence and the publication of a regular newsletter (Chapter 3, Section 3.2.4, p. 48). The building of a new small culture within the community at the case study university (and among the groups in the 32 participating universities in the national project) may have been a positive factor in achieving the sustainability of the project. Once the external specialists had withdrawn, the network has been able to survive and the members to continue to support each other, through regular national meetings, nourishing the *ethos* of the new discourse community and social grouping. A negative aspect of this was that in the early stages of the project (both at the case study university and some of the other universities), a certain degree of in-group chauvinism apparently developed. This led to a schism between teachers who were directly engaged with the project and had become members of the new SAC community, and those who confined themselves to traditional teaching activities, rejecting the innovation. This phenomenon will be further discussed in the data chapters.

The influence of mainly British, Australian and North American (including Canadian), often abbreviated as “BANA” (Holliday 1994: 12), methodologies around the world over recent decades has increased, because of the perceived urgent need for people of ages and backgrounds to learn English to improve the quality of their lives. This can be directly linked to movements promoting globalization and internationalization. It is commonly justified by arguments regarding equal opportunity, inclusion, mobility and improved access to information, as global cultures develop and become increasingly accessible through technology.

The starkly negative side to the domination of certain methodologies cannot be ignored, when they are imposed indiscriminately in new contexts. There is an insidious implication that the countries of the north know what is best for the countries of the south, in terms of how to teach languages. Moreover, the promotion of mainly BANA cultures through English language teaching activities can lead to inappropriate assumptions about the value, and the values, of other cultures. All development activities, whether in teaching English or other areas, can further political and linguistic imperialism, domination by privileged societies, and, as Pennycook (2001: 4) calls this, “Emancipatory modernism”. The wider political discussion of these issues goes beyond the scope of the present inquiry, but it is, of course, highly current for any English language teaching specialist and certainly another area in which project managers need to develop insights (Holliday 2005).

The creation of new global cultures does not necessarily imply that local ethnicities, which may hold different educational and other types of values and traditions, and even value languages in different ways, should be subsumed or controlled by dominant outsider cultures. May (2001) gives numerous examples of how in different countries, languages, a major tool for the expression of ethnicity, have sometimes been systematically extinguished through the educational policies of hegemonies. The use of only *one* global language (English) or only one English language teaching – or any other type of – methodology, should not, in my view, be the aim of an innovation in a new context.

My data is replete with examples of ways in which the European inspired self-access centre models had been adapted to local educational traditions, values, needs and priorities, as will be seen in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. Having been involved with the SAC project, planned training course content and trained trainers from the beginning, I know that all trainers laid considerable emphasis on the wide range of existing systems for implementing self-access learning, and also on the importance of identifying options, which were appropriate for

project participants' particular contexts. This may have contributed to a kind of "cultural continuity" (see p. 43) which helped the innovation to prosper.

So far, this review and discussion seems to indicate that, according to current thought on development projects and ELT projects, necessary conditions for ELT project sustainability include knowledge of and sensitivity to:

- i) appropriate professional training needs of institutions and individuals to plan, implement and continue project activities beyond the life span of the project itself
- ii) national, institutional and departmental socio-cultural issues and values
- iii) national, institutional and departmental political traditions and values
- iv) strategies for the establishment, maintenance and promotion of a shared conceptualization of project aims as well as a shared vision of the future
- v) collaborative and communicative management strategies
- vi) principles and practices of effective finance management, including procurement of funds for the future
- vii) avoidance of cultural chauvinism and support of cultural continuity

I will now proceed to examine other culture-related issues in further detail, since this is where I had originally expected to find most of the answers to my questions regarding how to achieve project sustainability.

### **3.2.6 An English language teaching view of issues related to "culture"**

Having summarized and discussed various views of sustainability, and touched upon more general cultural issues, I proceeded to look more closely at what experts' views on cultural issues related specifically to English language teaching. Holliday's work on appropriate methodology and subsequent publications related to culture were particularly helpful in this (e.g. Holliday 1994, 1999, 2005).

Empirical and ethnographic evidence (e.g. Holliday 1994: 146) underlines the probability that the success or failure of ELT projects, may have much to do with mutual understanding of the different traditions and cultures involved, the ability to work with others to fit new project planning, content, management and methodology into existing constructs, systems and structures, and the overall appropriateness of the project for the context, than with anything else.

I am not here advocating any negative form of culturism (Section 3.1.2, p. 39) described as "the reducing of the foreign Other to simplistic, essentialist cultural



prescriptions” (Holliday 2003: 114), but rather to consider the need for a generally much more reflective approach concerning these issues. An “essentialist” view limits human groups by race, gender, culture, and class, and can lead to prejudice and bigotry, all detrimental to effective communication and therefore, by extension, to the successful development of innovative projects. A certain kind of “ethno-criticism”, on the other hand, can perhaps be useful, and result in the “recognition of possible differences between different cultures, while at the same time attempting to find some language that might mediate between the two” (Krupat 1996: 21).

As already mentioned (Chapter 1, p. 20; Chapter 2, Section 2.1, pp. 25-26; Chapter 3, Section 3.2.5, p. 50) I had suspected that the success of the case study project would have had been directly related to the efforts trainers and implementers had made to modify and adapt the parameters and criteria of the project to suit the context and cultures in which it was to be implanted. Holliday (1999) mentions the importance of two different paradigms of “culture” in applied linguistics. He explains that what people usually refer to as “culture” refers to generally accepted ethnic, national and international entities, and he suggests that these are best described as “large cultures”. On the other hand, what he calls the “small culture paradigm” allows the use of the word “culture” for the description of any small social grouping or activity which is characterized by identifiable types of cohesive behaviour. He then goes on to clarify how in research, ethnography gives the name of “small cultures” to settings or locations used for research activities. Studies of such “small cultures” may lead to a better description and *understanding* of certain behaviours and/or phenomena, but do not attempt to result in an *explanation* of ethnic, national or international differences.

Adaptation of the project to the local context was certainly perceived to have been important by interviewees. It was also implied by an internal rules and regulations document, observed behaviour and by some of the physical characteristics of the self-access centre building, as will be shown in Chapters 6 and 7, in particular. Respect for local institutional values was also mentioned specifically in an unstructured interview, seemed apparent from a document and from certain design features of the SAC building.

The data was surprising because *direct* references to such “cultural” issues did *not* seem to emerge by any means as frequently as I had expected they might, whereas mentions of other, more material factors, such as policy and finance, did seem to occur much *more* often than expected. The ways in which the culture of the project context was expressed in the data was not so much through what participants *said* about the project, as

what I was able to *describe* (artefact) and *observe* (behaviour). Critical reflexivity also led me to question how far an exaggerated concern with cultural aspects might, *ironically*, even be considered as, ethno-centric and essentialist too, being very much a characteristic of potential apologists from privileged countries.

My own methodological decision to separate the categories of policy and finance from culture was perhaps due to the apparent *lack* of elements highlighting cultural issues in the data. It would have been equally possible to argue that both the underlying policy and financial issues surrounding an educational development project comprise a subset of the larger *culture* of national policy on government spending, and to have interpreted these as cultural aspects. They could also have been perceived as arising from the smaller cultures of the respective institutional departments and their priorities with regard to spending on foreign language development projects. In Chapter 5, I will detail exactly how I identified and grouped categories and sub-categories under specific concepts.

In principle, it would seem to be true that a certain mindset, including the adoption of *process* management on the part of the general co-ordination/collaboration teams at the different levels may lead to success in development projects. This kind of approach can respond to the need to adapt and integrate a project into pre-existing and emergent features of the large and small cultures of the context in which it is to be implanted. This combination of adoption and adaptation of proposals and strategies during the case study project is much evidenced in the case study data, as I will show in Chapters 6 and 7.

### **3.3 Further Criteria and Conditions for Project Sustainability**

I will now discuss two wider-reaching accounts of conditions that must pre-exist or be created, and examine some further suggestions regarding what project leaders and participants should understand and do, in the interests of achieving sustainability, according to the literature.

#### **3.3.1 The project as a system**

Rogakos *et al*, cited above, set up the concept of an educational project as a *system*, with sub-categories of *organization* and *structure*, and suggest a number of criteria which can be applied, to evaluate whether a given system is likely to be sustainable or not. They then go on to use the VAEST Project, which had aimed to support and enhance the use of the new technologies in schools, and in which five different countries participated, to illustrate their

formulation of what they consider to be the necessary conditions for the sustainability of an educational development project.

The necessary conditions proposed by Rogakos *et al* are, in sum:

- self-creation (i.e. the project is created by the participating schools, without any external intervention and support);
- self-reference (i.e. the project operations specify their boundaries and the constituent parts, their relations and the whole context of operation are well-defined);
- self-(re)-production (i.e. The ability to continue if one of the participating schools/organizations withdraws);
- self-maintenance (i.e. conservation of the original project system organization to a minimum acceptable standard);
- self-regulation;
- self-configuration;
- self-steering of the project.

Although some of these criteria do seem appropriate, there may be a problem with those which seem to imply that *any* project led by external donor and/or training agencies cannot satisfy the necessary conditions for sustainability and is therefore presumably doomed to failure. The authors do not account for such views, which contradict some of my own experience. There have been numerous externally led projects, which have gone on to be *at least* sustainable (The Mexican National Self-access project, the EXAVER examinations project, *SEPAInglés*, the *Inglés Virtual* project, to cite four British Council/Mexican Ministry of education and/or university projects, which have successfully endured and developed). Projects proposed and implemented through funding and training by an external donor in response to requests for help with local needs can certainly prove to be sustainable, though they may require at least a shared conceptualization of mutual needs and short and long-term benefits, appropriate methodology and understanding of the context, as I have argued above.

Perhaps the implication of Rogakos *et al* is that, in such cases, the conditions for a feeling of ownership among the receivers and in-country implementers should ideally be created *together* with the donors from the outset, in such a way that project plans and

decisions can be *driven by the receivers* at least as much as by the donors. This would be implied by effective communication, mentioned in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, p. 28.

Lawrence and Keiser (2002: 2), provide a detailed checklist for sustainability, based on findings of research into their own curriculum development project, the Advanced Technical Education programme (ATE), at the University of West Michigan. The main categories on this checklist are: wide participation and clear, shared purpose; abundant information available and used to improve program and reward effort; abundant and needed resources, resource mobilization; knowledge and skills training; decision making/distributed power; co-ordination with current initiatives, administrative support; use of promotion and marketing/husbanded resources.

Each item on the list is described in considerable detail, and a list of sample sustainability enhancing practices is also provided, for each item.

Although I might quibble with the precise arrangement of these items and perhaps add further elements derived from reading (see Appendix 1, pp. 302-304), I feel that Lawrence and Keiser have reached a much more highly developed and helpful understanding of the range of conditions and criteria for sustainability than most. However, some other categories and sub-categories emerged in my study and might be added to such an inventory, though lists cannot explain the complexity of the interrelation of phenomena revealed by this research.

### **3.3.2 Leadership and sustainability**

This section deals with yet another proposed condition for project sustainability, described by Fullen (2001):

“What is needed for sustainable performance, then, is leadership at many levels of the organization. Pervasive leadership has a greater likelihood of occurring if leaders work on mastering the five core capacities: moral purpose, understanding of the change process, building relationships, knowledge building and coherence making” (Fullen 2001: 137 –my emphasis).

The concept of “pervasive leadership” should be dealt with reflexively, since the term perhaps encompasses desirable and less desirable aspects. A too “pervasive leadership” may even be considered dangerous, because what might constitute “sound moral purpose” for some groups, might constitute something closer to “insidious or imperialistic indoctrination in foreign concepts and values” for others. In the same way, “understanding

of psychological aspects of change” could easily be metamorphosed into “brainwashing or psychological manipulation”. Also, “knowledge building” can, in practice, become a kind of “unquestioning rejection of accepted tradition and established beliefs in favour of shiny new ones brought in by foreigners”. Pressure to adopt new ideas, simply because they are politically, rather than socially or pedagogically desirable, through the opportunistic intellectualisation of issues which are not necessarily relevant to local needs, is another danger. The complexity of the ethical issues involved in project development should never be underestimated.

Perhaps appropriate leadership styles and measures should be analysed on a case-by-case basis, in relation to specific project groups, aims and contexts. The term “pervasive leadership” could perhaps be replaced by a more explanatory phrase, such as: “informed, context-sensitive, confident, organized and communicative leadership”. The word “pervasive” is acceptable only in the sense that there need to be leadership systems operating at all organizational levels among project staff. For example, in the context of a university project, the whole university can be given a clear sense of direction by the chancellor, the Faculty by the director, the SAC staff by the co-ordinator and the students by a student representative. Moreover, since good leaders always identify individual skills and attributes among staff, leaders of specific activities can also be appointed and encouraged, at each level. This state seems to have been achieved at the case study university; the rectors and faculty directors have been strong leaders and project champions, though perhaps, at times, co-ordinators have not always been able to project messages to the more reticent staff, especially during the early stages of the project. Perhaps appropriate leadership should be analysed on a case-by-case basis, in relation to specific project groups, aims and contexts.

### **3.4 Summary of concepts and criteria for project sustainability**

The presentation and discussion of concepts related to “sustainability” comprise a selective and considered compilation of attempts at explanations of the implications of the term by researchers and writers from different fields. The diversity of views regarding the necessary conditions and criteria for sustainability is illustrative of how priorities also vary, according to the differing socio-political or institutional and professional environments in which projects are implemented. Any attempted definitions cited seem to focus on one or

another, or a very small group of the criteria or conditions for sustainability, and did not usually delve deeply enough to portray the multi-faceted nature of the concept effectively.

In this study, my aim has never been merely to validate or refute conditions and criteria proposed by other writers. This would be more characteristic of a positivistic research model. The process of investigative reading was, however, important, because it greatly enriched my own conceptualization of sustainability and extended my own reference framework particularly in relation to some related concepts and constructs, which may need to be problematized. Thanks to the reading, I was able to approach my own data on the basis of a richer knowledge base.

Appendix 1 summarizes an initial conceptualization of necessary conditions for the achievement of project sustainability derived from the literature survey, and it also includes examples from my own professional experience. The table does *not* include every concept mentioned in the survey, but those which I perceived as particularly important, before the analysis and interpretation of the new data.

The table provided a manageable list of categories and conditions, familiar across a number of disciplines and the deconstruction of these provided a useful point of departure for my own research. However, once engaged in the interpretation of my own data, predictably, many other concepts and categories emerged, contributing to my growing understanding of the deeper nature of sustainability. In Chapter 5, I will explain why the table was later rejected, but I leave it in place this chapter, as part of the *fide digna* account of how the research process developed.

Even more difficult to find than conditions and criteria for the achievement of sustainability, was a fully satisfying definition of the term. Perhaps this is because the word apparently has different connotations in different contexts and, in common with all language in use, is subject to a shifting set of referents, according to its users

### **3.5 Sustainability – an initial definition**

IUCN/UNEP/WWF (1991), cited by Rogakos *et al* (1998: 685), define sustainability as “a characteristic of a process or state that can be *maintained indefinitely*”. This definition seems inherently insufficient in the context of development management or educational development projects, for if the project activities are simply maintained or repeated *ad infinitum*, a state of inertia or even stagnation could negatively affect motivation among the

implementers and receivers. Undoubtedly, sustainability is partly about “maintainability”, but the vision of the future mentioned in Section 3.2.3, p. 48, above should perhaps include the creation of conditions for on-going, progressive development and growth for the staff and the project outcomes, rather than just self-maintenance.

With regard to the case study, had the new resource centre simply been “maintained indefinitely”, it would quickly have become obsolete, particularly since much of the activity in the centre is based on educational technology and software, a rapidly evolving area. In the same way, had the prototype SAC simply been maintained, and not replaced by the new, much larger, purpose-built centre, there would have been insufficient resources for the constantly increasing demand from students. Maintainability is therefore yet another facet which is necessary, but not sufficient in the achievement of sustainability. This view will be supported by certain data from the case study.

According to Lawrenz and Keiserl (2002: 1), “Sustainability is the ability to prolong or to supply with sustenance.” Deriving their conclusions from the requirements of the authorities involved in the ATE project, their definition may also mirror situations in other project contexts:

“The notion of sustainability of projects or their effects is not extensively described in NSF documents. There is no single definition of sustainability and those that do appear are subject to change. In other words, what is expected from ATE projects in terms of sustainability is evolving. Additionally, ATE projects funded earlier are learning about the need for sustainability retroactively.”

I suspect that it is *often* the case that precisely what authorities expect in terms of project sustainability is not properly defined at the outset. It is this lack of clarity that can lead to fuzziness in project implementation, yet the positive side is that it can also leave space for creativity among project staff. “A state of perpetual evolution” might come a little closer towards describing what projects are really trying to achieve. Certainly, a condition of perpetual evolution is closer to what I have always hoped to achieve for the projects and teams which I have led. Maintainability, when only the uncreative repetition of activities without evaluation or improvement is likely to degenerate into stagnation.

Another explanation is offered by Samuelson and Harrity (1998), who were writing specifically about sustainability in the context of English language teaching projects:

“We believe that the meaning of sustainability comprises two aspects:

- The first is **changed perceptions** in individuals, the possibility of **thinking differently**, and perhaps more positively, about the situation the project was designed to assist. This includes **an understanding or appreciation that change and development are possible**.
- The second is **the extent to which the project activities will continue after the donor’s financial support has been withdrawn** (my emphasis).

The second aspect, we maintain, is impossible without the first. In other words, **activities will almost certainly not continue without changed perceptions**” Samuelson and Harrity (1998: 190 –my emphasis).

The two elements highlighted here may both be vital to sustainability, but this definition is less inclusive than Lawrenz and Keiser’s, since it lacks the feature of evolution, and again implies that maintainability is enough.

Changes in perception are a necessary condition for the successful implementation of an English curriculum project, according to the literature, experience and my data. For such changes to take place, appropriate orientation and training must be implemented and continuing financial support must be obtained, as already discussed above. There are a number of references to this as having contributed to project sustainability in my data, as I will show below. Thus far, I agree with Samuelson and Harrity’s “definition”.

Nonetheless, what is first presented as a definition is actually another description of necessary conditions. In this sense, though over-concise, Lawrenz and Keiser’s definition is, at least, what it purports to be. Sharing the need for a more detailed definition, Lawrenz and Keiser also carried a survey of existing literature, and documented a number of suggestions related to what project sustainability really entails. These were then included in a survey to see whether their project was perceived to have included the elements identified in the literature, namely:

1. Wide Participation and Clear, Shared Purpose
2. Abundant Information Available and Used to Improve the Program and Reward Effort
3. Abundant and Needed Resources, Resource Mobilization
4. Knowledge and Skills/Training)



5. Decision Making/Distributed Power
6. Co-ordination with Current Initiatives, Administrative Support
7. Use of Promotion and Marketing/Husbanded Resources

This is another list of necessary conditions and activities which may have to be implemented in order to achieve project sustainability. What I find particularly interesting, is that the list largely replicates my own summary of the literature. Nonetheless, it is not a *definition* of the term.

I have shown that some of the “definitions” which I found in related literature tended to be either over-concise or not to be definitions at all, but often lengthy lists of conditions or criteria. In the course of my own data analysis activities, I was to conclude that any definition of project sustainability must mention the continuation of project activities after the end of the project period; it must include the ability of project participants to assume full responsibility for project activities; not least, it should encompass the *ability to continue to develop activities according to a continually developing vision of the future and emerging needs and insights*. The optimum outcome of a project cannot be *only* to do with: “the extent to which the project activities will continue after the donor’s financial support has been withdrawn.” If this is sustainability, then sustainability is not what is achieved by the best projects.

In a truly successful project, the activities will not simply be continued, but will be *both continued and developed* as new exigencies emerge within the project context itself and/or possibilities arise, allowing project activities to achieve a wider reach and impact. My data certainly confirmed this view because of the ways in which SAC has grown and improved in terms of facilities and services for students, continuing staff training opportunities (including staff attachments to SACs at UKL universities) and growing numbers of SACs in the state.

### **3.6 Towards a Deeper Definition of Sustainability**

After completing my initial literature survey, I summarized existing views concerning the definition, conditions and criteria for sustainability as follows:

1. Definition: Sustainability is a characteristic of a process or a state that can be maintained indefinitely, without harming present or future socio-economic or environmental factors.

2. Conditions which must be fulfilled and/or criteria which must be met for the achievement of such a “state that can be maintained indefinitely” (not in order of importance):
  - i) Provision of training in knowledge and skills to further independence among receivers and enable them to lead the activities in the future.
  - ii) Training/psychological support in the changing of perceptions, including a belief in the feasibility of change
  - iii) Accessibility of sufficient and continuing funding and other resources to enable future self-sufficiency
  - iv) Appropriate and sufficient administrative support to carry through project activities
  - v) Management which enables the meeting of present needs, without jeopardizing possible future needs
  - vi) Respect for social, economic and environmental needs
  - vii) Reaching targets for the present and setting of targets for the future
  - viii) Wide participation and sharing of information, purpose, decision-making
  - ix) Appropriate promotion and diffusion

As already mentioned above, some of these factors were evident in my data, but yet others emerged to lead me to devise a possible alternative term, which I will present in Chapter 9.

### **3.7 Preliminary Assumptions**

In this chapter, I have tried to show that, although considered crucial by experts in innovation, sustainability is neither a straightforward term to *define* nor a simple element which can be *planned into projects in a linear fashion*, much less “tacked on” through a series of activities in the final of the project, as I have seen occur in practice. The diversity of definitions, conditions and criteria which seem to surround sustainability is complex, and methods of ensuring its understanding and inclusion as an integral part of project planning and implementation must reflect this complexity.

The following preliminary assumptions concerning sustainability in development projects emerged and as I began to collect data, they were useful as another instrument in the reflexively questioning process. It is perhaps worth repeating that these assumptions

were not set up to be “tested” as hypotheses, in an experimental sense, but to provide further points of reference and comparison for the developing research and analysis.

- i) When conceived by a body which has a permanent existence *outside* the context of a project, the terms of reference, aims and activities of a project need to be negotiated carefully and clearly between external agents of change and the receivers. This may induce recipients (I have avoided the term “beneficiaries”, because of its relationship with the loaded term “benefactor” and their historical, social and moral connotations) to become *willing receivers of*, and *active participants in*, innovations which *they themselves perceive* to bring some *relevance and advantage to their social or professional community*. Without this, the chances of achieving sustainability may be reduced.
- ii) Recipient organization(s) must desire sustainability and wish to continue the work started by the project into the future, *for some internally valid reason*. Otherwise, it would simply be illogical to initiate the project, incur costs and affect the activities of members of the organization.
- iii) It should not be assumed that the fundamental reasons for beginning new projects are always entirely altruistic, pedagogical or solely “for the good of” *all* the receiving groups. The attainment of sustainability may not rest only on environmental soundness and social justice, for example. Economic viability and political desirability and, indeed, other properties which may be identified in the course of the study, may be equally or even more crucial.
- iv) The nature and consistency of project leadership may be a strong influence on project sustainability.

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to show how my own understanding of the nature of sustainability developed progressively through reading and motivated me to continue with the search for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. In the next chapter, I will explain how my research *philosophy* developed, as a result of study, practice and the reflexive questioning process.

## Chapter 4

### Developing and Defining a Research Philosophy

*In this chapter, I will show how, just as my grasp of the deeper nature of sustainability underwent an on-going process of development during the study, so also did my understanding of the nature of qualitative research. This was a journey entailing encounters with historical developments in epistemology and ontology, deconstruction and reconstruction of my own perceptions of truth and knowledge together with the philosophies underpinning research practice in general, and qualitative research in particular.*

*Beginning with a note on my previous research experience, I will then summarize my major data collection activities, in order to show how the sequence the maturing of a general research philosophy and researcher standpoint, as integral parts of the research process. I will summarize the major currents which influenced the development of my own research philosophy and conclude with a short explanation of how I perceived ethical issues and validity.*

#### **4.1 Finding a new way: the first steps**

The methodology of my MA research project, from 1979 to 1981, was strongly influenced by an eminent experimentalist researcher in the field of clinical psychology. I was privileged to work with Dr. Derek Rutter at UKC as a research associate on his own projects, and he proved to be an invaluable adviser in my own modest MA research into first language acquisition processes in children of nine months to three years of age.

Subsequently, I followed critiques concerning possible limitations of objectivist, positivistic and experimentalist stances to research, especially in the social sciences. This happened as part of my own on-going, self-driven professional development which included a desire to understand principles and practices of qualitative research and action research in Applied Linguistics. My various roles as ELT administrator, teacher trainer, curriculum development project manager, evaluator and textbook writer naturally demanded this, to develop projects as effectively as possible to support colleagues and

trainees with their own professional and research activities. Qualitative research principles and practices were not completely new to me and I had tried to apply some of the principles when evaluating projects, for example.

As the idea of a PhD research matured, I believed that qualitative research principles and practices would be the most appropriate tools for research into the *social phenomenon* of project sustainability in the *social context* of an English language development project. However, “it is one thing is to espouse beliefs, and another to put them into practice,” (Williams and Burden 1997: 54).

#### **4.1.1 Espoused beliefs and lingering influences**

Despite my decision to implement qualitative research theory and practice, there were sometimes discrepancies between my “espoused theories” and the ways in which I put them into practice. In retrospect, the discrepancies decreased, as my understanding of theory improved and I became more confident in experimenting with different data collection strategies. However, it is vital to remain aware of the possible influence of previous habitual thinking and practice on planning and implementing new activities and reacting to people and phenomena in the research context. Continuous reflective questioning (Williams and Burden *Ibid.*: 54, citing Schön 1983) of actions, rationales and results, helped me develop a growing congruence between the theory and practice which connected my research activities. “I must be constantly evaluating and re-evaluating my *own* realities and beliefs, as well as those outside my head!” (Research Diary Entry, RDE, 10.05.02).

The most important story in this report is that of the self-access centre project and the elements which contributed to its sustainability and further dynamic growth. However, in order to tell this story, and to tell it as transparently and veraciously as possible, without wanting to fall into the pit of solipsism, it will be useful to trace how the researcher herself has evolved, during the process. Following the advice of Scott and Usher (1999: 28), I have tried to remain aware throughout the process that one cannot necessarily *transcend* pre-understandings, but that one can indeed use them as a *starting point* and then allow them to be *modified in the light of discoveries in the process*.

In the next section, I will therefore show the *thinking* behind the selection of the research context, explaining the reasons for my choice: a combination of practicality, opportunism and an attempt at “scientific” rigour, while at the same time, an

understanding of the need to “bound the case” (Holliday 2002), according to principles derived from qualitative methodology.

#### **4.1.2 Selecting the site**

My first task in the research process was to think through how to select one specific university centre for the case study. This was not an easy decision, but I closely followed Holliday’s (2002: 38) criteria for the selection of a setting for a case study:

- i) *Setting must have a sense of boundedness – time, place, culture*

The main thrust of data collection was restricted to finding out what happened from 1994 to the present in one Mexican state university faculty (*time, culture*) and one self-access centre within that Faculty (*place*) though some further data was collected from staff working in sister institutions having similar centres, for verification purposes.

- ii) *Setting should provide a variety of relevant, interconnected data – people to watch or interview, artefacts*

This condition was satisfied through the groups of people available to interview and in some cases observe (Students who use the self-access centre, teachers and academic staff from the self-access centre, reception and support staff at the self-access centre, co-ordinators of self-access centre, directors of Faculty, the artefacts (the self-access centre itself and all the study facilities offered there, as well as documents produced during and after the period of the project).

- iii) *Setting should be sufficiently rich – different instances, facets, viewpoints – microcosm of the research topic in wider society*

This condition was certainly satisfied, apart from the richness of accessible data, since the project to set up the self-access centre and the people involved, both staff and students, constituted a microcosm of the national population of self-access centres currently operating and expanding all over Mexico.

- iv) *The setting should be sufficiently small – logistically and conceptually manageable*

The fact that most efforts at data collection were concentrated in and around one particular faculty/self-access centre would seem to satisfy this condition too.

- v) *There should be access – for researcher to take whatever role is necessary to collect the data*

I was very fortunate in experiencing no difficulties in relation to “gate-keeping” in the chosen research setting and was even privileged enough to have easy access

not only to people but also to the relevant documentation and unrestricted access to the centre itself and the people working and studying there.

Other considerations which influenced my decision, however, were the following:

- vi) Though not one of the largest universities in the country, or by any means the wealthiest, this university did already have a history of participation in international development projects for higher education. I thought this might enrich the context for observation and information gathering, perhaps because authorities and staff might have points of comparison with other projects.
- vii) The socio-economic groups at the university (administrators, staff, and undergraduates) are generally representative of those at most state universities in Mexico, though there are clearly also some case-specific features. Such features include historical, geographical and socio-cultural factors, such as the roles of city in Mexican history, its geographical location (only two hours from Mexico City), and the traditionally frequent contact of members of the university community with foreigners, whether exchange students, academics such as Fulbright professors, or tourists. This is a historical, colonial, university town, frequently visited by foreign tourists and there is also a booming internal economy, due to the establishment of new national and international industries in the area.
- viii) The organisational structure shares many common features with other state universities in Mexico, particularly in their political, economic and bureaucratic relationship with the Mexican Ministry of education, but it is also in some ways unique, because of the Mexican tradition of political autonomy of the state universities.
- ix) The Mexican National Self-access Centres Project was implemented here in such a way, that it has not *only* continued to operate in the ways that were planned during the project period. In addition, staff from the original centre have gone on to train other staff for two new centres at the various campuses of the same university and also at two sixth form colleges attached to the university. Activities have been sustained and also replicated at other sites. Nor has the original centre stagnated. Stocks of materials and equipment have been regularly increased and updated. Although no major innovation is being implemented at present, it has become routine for Directors of Faculty and SAC staff to apply for annual state awards for the further development of the SAC, and there is a continuing dynamic of self-evaluation and improvement both at the Faculty and at the SAC through attachments, courses and conferences.

- x) Not only are the initial project objectives generally considered to have been achieved here (staff were trained, a pilot SAC for language study was resourced and made operative), but a new, purpose-built construction was financed through an extension of Mexican government funding. This new centre continues to function well ten years after the conclusion of the Mexican National Self-access Project. Other, similar SACs are planned for other campuses of the same university, in other cities, as well as at two of the major sixth form colleges, administered by the university.
- xi) The further impact of the project within its own state has also been remarkable. The state training hospital, teacher training colleges and teacher resource centres, under the auspices of the Mexican Department of Education, are now planning to set up SACs in various towns across the state. Therefore, not only has the project been sustainable in itself and its institution, but an unexpected cascade effect is in progress in the wider educational context of the state.
- xii) When I mentioned the possibility of using this self-access centre as the case study centre, the Director was extremely enthusiastic, and very interested in encouraging SAC-related research.

The reasons I have given for the choice of the site show that, although aiming to follow qualitative research principles, I was still somewhat influenced by the idea that for the thesis to be *valid*, the findings would have to be as *generalizable* as possible. Such an aim is clearly more characteristic of positivistic research theory (and was a strong element of my MA research experience). Postmodern theory, however, stresses the situatedness and context-bound nature of possible findings, and recommends the utmost caution in over-generalizing, from one context to another. At the time of selecting the case, however, I was still assimilating these concepts.

I will now list the key data collection activities, and afterwards explain how these evolved as part of the simultaneous process of grasping the implications of different research philosophies, and at the same time developing my own qualitative research methodology. Chapter 5 will then provide an in-depth description of all *practical* research procedures.

#### **4.1.3 A developing sequence: the data collection journey**

From 2000 to 2005, the following research activities were designed and implemented, approximately, but not exactly, in the order listed. Generally speaking, the outcomes of one activity would suggest the next, though some were implemented simultaneously.



- i) Questionnaires focusing on student perceptions of the self-access centre itself.
- ii) Questionnaires focusing on staff perceptions of the self-access centre itself.
- iii) Recording and transcription of *unstructured* interviews with administrative staff and authorities.
- iv) Recording and transcription of *unstructured* interviews with academic staff.
- v) Recording and transcription of *structured* interviews with staff and authorities.
- vi) Physical description of the self-access centre from personal notes, sketches and photographs.
- vii) Observation of behaviours and interactions inside the SAC.
- viii) Collection of documents related to the development of the self-access centre during initial project and fully operational stages.
- ix) Documentation of exchanges during chance meetings.
- x) Summaries of opinions of colleagues from other universities, collected at conferences.
- xi) Focus group and ranking activity among SAC staff.
- xii) Semi-structured interviews with SAC users (students).

The first activities consisted of structured printed questionnaires, with spaces for written comments from respondents, Activities (i) and (ii). Although I thought I had composed questions which I thought would both encourage and allow individuals to express themselves freely, many respondents did not do this. Spaces for answers to open-ended questions were rarely used. The data, which I hoped would yield substantial information regarding the quality of student respondents' lived experience in the new learning environment, and teachers' perceptions and beliefs, was poor.

Nonetheless, the exercise was useful because it led to reflection on the limitations of questionnaires for qualitative data collection, and the conclusion that this choice of activity had been in part due to previous research experience. This shows a lingering influence of the idea that questionnaires allow researchers to gather a great deal of data quickly, and to reach initial conclusions, which are significant and valid because of the quantities of answers. Such surveys can be appropriate for other purposes, but not for the kind of research I was proposing. Not surprisingly, the answers did not allow access to any deeper meanings. Had I followed up the questionnaires with interviews, or carried them out face-to-face, I could have delved for deeper meaning from the initial answers. So I decided to experiment with interviews as a next step.

The recording and transcription of unstructured interviews with administrative staff, authorities and academic staff, Activities (iii) and (iv), yielded some very interesting data, some worthy of further exploration. However, little emerged in direct relation to the phenomenon of project sustainability! In implementing unstructured interviews, which would, in theory, allow concepts and categories to “emerge” from the data, I was certainly beginning to implement qualitative research techniques, but the unsatisfactory results of this exercise led to a new choice: whether to change the focus of the study, and delve into the phenomena which were emerging from the data, or to again adapt the technique of data collection, in order to elicit information on my areas of interest. Deciding on the latter, I next experimented with the recording, transcription and analysis of structured interviews with staff, Activity (v).

This activity did provide some data which was directly related to sustainability, and marked a moment in the methodology development process when I was examining the possibility of mixing research methods from different traditions, to achieve richer results. At the same time, other ideas arising from research seminars and my own reading also encouraged me to experiment further.

A truly serendipitous experience was that of creating and interpreting my own description of the artefact *par excellence* of the project: the self-access centre building, Activity (vi). I took numerous photographs, inside and out, drew sketches and wrote detailed descriptions of all I saw, felt and intuited on various visits to the self-access centre. A certain atmosphere seemed to prevail within and surrounding the building, and I wondered how much this might have been a cause or a product of the successful project. During the analysis and interpretation of this data, important messages seemed to me to be being projected by the gardens, the exteriors and the interiors of the self-access centre building. This moment probably best reflects the period where I was assimilating and grasping the essence of the meaning of “rich, qualitative data”, through direct experience, and beginning to perceive “deeper” meanings, lying below the surface of the concrete and less easily describable.

As a result, I became less enthusiastic about designing new activities to collect data from groups with very specific profiles (which I now perceived as a potentially dangerous and essentialist exercise). Instead, I revisited and re-assessed the quality of the data collected to date, to judge how far it had provided access to “deeper” meanings. I became particularly interested in the environment created both *during* and *as a result of* the self-

access project, and whether this environment or atmosphere had significantly contributed to its success.

During subsequent personal visits to the university I also observed activities and wrote detailed notes regarding the behaviours of, and interactions among, 27 people in the SAC, Activity (vii). The description, observation, and what people had already said about their experience of the project, and about the centre, were all crucial in helping me to analyze the project outcomes in greater depth. I began to cross reference, analyzing how far what people had said about their experiences was congruent with what they and their organization had actually done, and continued to do, with regard to their self-access centre. Thus I began to triangulate results in search of a kind of validity relevant to qualitative research. This marks the point when I began to discern elements, which may have contributed to the sustainability, and also to something further-reaching than sustainability, which is the subject of Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

As a complement to the other data-collection activities, I gradually put together a substantial collection of project-related documents, beginning with the original project agreement document and including samples of documents from the entire project period, and even the post-project period (up to 2002). First I began to look for keywords and implemented word counts, but did not find much to report from these exercises. The documents became rather more meaningful when I began to look at deeper meanings transmitted by variations in language, style, frequency and other aspects, Activity (viii). Quality, again, was proving itself to be more interesting than quantity.

Growing in confidence regarding the validity of different kinds of data collection activities, I next tried out a more opportunistic strategy. When asked to speak at professional self-access conferences, I began to record details of chance meetings with people working on parallel self-access development projects, in other universities. The notes on such exchanges and summaries of opinions of colleagues from other universities were a first attempt to find *parallel phenomena* emerging as the project had developed in *parallel institutions*. This constituted a step towards the validation and generalization of emergent findings, in ways appropriate to qualitative research, Activities (ix) and (x).

Finally, I went back to the case study university and implemented Activities (xi) and (xii), a focus group/ranking activity with SAC staff, and semi-structured interviews with SAC users (students). Activity (xi) aimed to show the original research participants what I believed I had discovered concerning the nature of sustainability, in the context of their

self-access centre project. The obvious reason for doing this, was to achieve respondent validation of my interpretations of the data. I also wanted to experiment with a new idea which had occurred to me involving the ranking of the elements which seemed to me to have contributed to the sustainability and growth of their project, according to the perception of the participants themselves. All of these activities would, I hoped, corroborate my findings and help me to make stronger assertions about the composite elements of sustainability, in my concluding chapters.

On reflection, it is hard to say how far the ranking activity was valid in the context of qualitative research. The concept of ranking phenomena in order of importance could be related to more traditional thinking about validity. Furthermore, by providing a printed list for discussion, I may have “put words into the mouths” of the participants. After the event, I asked myself how much other information may *not* have been forthcoming because of the existence of this list and also perhaps because insufficient time was available for participants to spontaneously reiterate or reformulate their views on what had created success. Driven by the aim to have participants validate what the data seemed to have expressed to *me*, I perhaps did not provide enough space for what *they* currently thought. Nonetheless, the meeting provided a unique opportunity to double check agreement on the quotations I wanted to use and my interpretations of their meanings, with most of the participants. I was also able to give complete transcripts of their interviews to those I had not yet been able to see personally.

Clearly, as I moved from one data collection and interpretation activity to the next, I had attempted to implement the practice of creative reflection, which

“...is achieved by a cycle whereby researchers analyze what they do, evaluate their output, seek a better way of doing things when they think one is needed, and then apply to their research practice as much of that better way of doing things as circumstances permit” (Evans 2002: 19).

Subject to past and new beliefs, voices from past experience, and from new sources of information, I tried to interact with and interpret reflexively what the different types of data suggested at different moments as an integral part of the study. A growing awareness of the philosophies and beliefs influencing both my own and the research participants’ views and interpretations at any given moment within the different role relationships and in relation to each of the specific texts or contexts, perhaps helped my research towards the achievement of veracity (Thompson 1996).

I will now proceed to map the ways in which my *conceptual framework* developed, and refer back to the specific activities which illustrate changes in my conceptualizations.

## **4.2 A process of becoming: understanding issues concerning the researcher's standpoint**

According to Evans (2002), the qualitative researcher's standpoint should not be predetermined or rigid, but should constitute a reflexive part of the process of the research. Reflective practice in qualitative research concerns both evaluative and creative reflection, which can help the researcher to identify appropriate remedial practice and to improve the quality of the research, as an on-going activity. It was certainly my experience that my standpoint evolved as I became aware of the types of issues which would affect my research decisions throughout the process.

### **4.2.1 “*El camino se hace al andar*”: one step leads to the next**

The brief account of research activities given the previous section shows how: “The way became clear to me while I was actually walking along it” and my researcher standpoint underwent an on-going process of development, as an integral, reflexive part of the process of research. It was continually enriched through reading and the exciting experience of data collection, analysis and interpretation, interacting with informants and artefacts and the implementation of remedial action, when the data collection activities did not produce the expected results.

After the earlier forays into data collection, I quickly began to appreciate how the experience of collecting a particular type of data could directly influence decisions regarding how to take the next step. As I implemented more data collection activities, I experienced that it was clearly not appropriate to follow a pre-planned linear sequence of activities, since each set of data suggested new alternatives for the ensuing data collection activities. Nor were vast quantities of a single type of data likely to provide me with the depth of understanding I sought, as illustrated above.

One very concrete example of this developing process was the decision to radically change the format of questionnaires for students and teachers after the pilot experience, since the formulation of the questions had restricted the quality of answers. Another example of this was the decision to use structured interviews rather than unstructured interviews, after the experience with the first set of recordings of unstructured interviews. This had shown me

that, although totally unstructured interviews could doubtless stimulate interesting responses, they would not necessarily contain any information at all relating to the phenomenon I wanted to study! A further modification of my own behaviour along the way was a decision regarding transcription, coding and referencing the data from interviews. Having initially decided to transcribe the complete interviews with participants verbatim, I afterwards found it was actually much more productive to listen to each recording very carefully several times, make rough notes on emerging details and then transcribe only those parts of the interviews which had a direct bearing on the issues of interest. So, again, one research step led to another, throughout the process. However, one should not underestimate the part which may be played by the *intentionality* of the researcher.

#### **4.2.2 A self-fulfilling prophecy? Understanding “intentionality” in the research process**

The concept of *intentionality*, inherent in all a researcher does, is essential to a grasp of the complexity of researcher roles and functions, particularly in the case of an *insider*, who is in some way already part of the research context. The deconstruction of this concept was as important to the development of my research standpoint, as insights into the deeper nature of thick description had been to the development of my data collection strategies and techniques. Understanding that intentionality comes from self-presence and fore-understanding and may underlie every interaction with the research context, informants and data, had a strong impact on my self-perception as a researcher.

Fore-understanding or anticipation, of what will be encountered, before setting out, can seriously skew the interpretation of any data (Lye 1996). The hermeneutic circle predetermines that one can only know what one is prepared to know in terms that one is prepared to know. This has obvious implications for any work of research and interpretation. It is easy to see how intentionality may be valid in research carried out for reports for employers, who may request a certain emphasis, in order to achieve a certain end. Conscious intentionality is not, however, valid, in qualitative academic research, which should as far as possible be driven by the data, not by the researcher's intentions. I strove to avoid this through critical reflexivity in relation to all aspects of the research process.

### 4.2.3 Who's that speaking? And on what authority?

Finding a single appropriate voice to weave together evidence of findings from different sources, to present, analyze, interpret and attempt to give as complete a picture as possible of the context and culture of the study was another challenge. Since I myself am necessarily a product of a certain constellation of cultural influences and experiences, and therefore subject to the limitations suggested by the hermeneutic circle (Section 4.2.2, p. 77) how could I avoid attaching meanings to the data which were more deeply rooted in my own background and values, than those of the project, the participants and the wider research context?

Even at the end of this research adventure, I have not found a complete solution to this conundrum. If it is impossible to fully divest oneself of one's background, experience and accompanying social and academic constructs, in order to become significantly "objective" in analyzing, interpreting and reporting on the context, participants and perceptions of the participants researched, how can any research ever be "valid" in a traditional sense? Indeed, precisely because of this, the identity of the researcher/interpreter, the interpreting style and rhetoric for presenting data, analysis and interpretations of any piece of research work could *themselves* become valid objects of investigation. Where do a researcher's research decisions and conclusions come from? What path has a researcher followed through life, study and research in order to reach a given series of conclusions? Can anyone know this in depth, even the researcher herself? Can she fathom how events and experiences have influenced the formation of her perceptions? Whose story will she be telling? How and where can the extreme tendencies to "Otherization" of the informants and solipsism by the researcher mingle, to create an account which will be of use to other professionals?

On the other hand, it would be irresponsible to give up trying to produce a veracious account, according to at least some agreed conceptualizations, on the facile grounds that everyone will judge the evidence differently, simply because everyone is different!

My research methodology has been influenced largely by European, more specifically, British schools of academic thought. I have previously worked in Europe, the Middle East and Latin America, but for the last 14 years most of my work has been with a UK-based organization with a very marked political agenda (not necessarily coinciding with my own in all aspects) in Mexico. This research project, however, has been implemented within a set of Mexican national and educational cultures and sub-cultures. I

continually questioned the intrinsic validity of what I was doing, but came to terms with the contradiction by accepting that this situation is inherent in situations where specialists from different countries interact in the interests of curriculum and general professional development. This interaction can create new, hybrid cultures and discourses along the way and even lead to syncretism, in some cases.

Another cause for reflection was the issue of *authority*. Does a researcher's description of another's context have the same, more, or less authority than that of the people who are providing the data for the research? Does the fact that the researcher has taken time to put together, interpret and cross-reference a variety of data from a number of sources, mean that her opinions and interpretation will become in some way more "real" or "authoritative" (Johanssen 1992) than that of any single individual who participated in the study? Is any researcher able to fully and truly represent other realities, of which they are not themselves a product? Perhaps not.

I feel I partially addressed this issue by concentrating not only on data collected from participants (what they said and wrote), but also by complementing it with the analysis of data *about* participants (their roles and functions, what I was able to observe, describe and read). Furthermore, wherever possible, I took note of what the people researched said *to* and *about* one another, how they responded to the data I had collected and to *my interpretations* of that data. Although I was not able to implement these checking activities as far as planned, due to administrative and practical constraints, I tried to apply the principles as far as possible throughout my study. For example, not only did I show the key informants my transcriptions of their own interviews, and check that their interpretations were similar to my own, as already mentioned, but I also showed them samples of project documents, and elicited what the documents said *to them* about the project. The focus groups, also mentioned above, provided another opportunity for the comparison of my findings and interpretations with what participants said to each other during their discussion. I finally put their comments and interpretations into the equation together with my own, and struggled to reach appropriate conclusions. Holliday's (2005) article was helpful in "understanding reflexivity and using personal narrative...to solve the problem of how to write a critical qualitative study... from the standpoint of a writer located in the English-speaking West."



#### 4.2.4 “Claro que le ayudamos, maestra”: new awareness of roles and relationships

Yet another element in the research equation concerned the university administrators and teachers’ previous relationships and interactions with me and what they really thought of/think of my research proposal. The situation was different with the students, with whom I had had very little previous contact, since my work had involved staff training.

This was another somewhat complex issue; all participants (except the students) had known me in the capacity of national self-access centres project co-ordinator, from 1993-1997. I had later been a tutor of some on their BA in ELT and a consultant for other internal projects, from 1997 until I began my research. I also perceived a difference in the ways in which people expressed themselves in confidence, during individual recorded interviews, from when I was chatting, even informally, with more than one teacher or administrator. I therefore focused my analysis of people’s views on confidential interviews, and even during chance meetings, tended to record what people said when they were alone. I believe that an atmosphere of trust existed between researcher and participants, enhanced by the assurance of confidentiality and by each person’s knowing that they could have access to all the data, and modify or retract from anything they had said, if they wished. Moreover, I actually encouraged interviewees to switch off the digital recorder themselves at any time if they doubted what they were saying should be recorded.

Barthes (1967), was referring to the analysis and criticism of literature, when he stated his view that to focus too much on the author’s identity, including politics, historical context, religion, ethnicity, psychology and other biographical or personal attributes was faulty. According to Barthes, to appreciate a literary text, it is preferable to *separate* it from its author, to allow greater freedom of interpretation for the reader/analyst. What for Barthes is most important is the impact of the text on the reader, and the reader’s *reactions*, rather than the author’s *intentions*. Considering that some literature may attempt to artistically represent universal truths about humanity, an attempt to detach the text from the author’s intention and individuality and leave interpretation in the domain of the reader in direct interaction with the text, may be useful and creative. Barthes may also have been right in asserting that it is, in any case, never possible to know, at least with any certainty, precisely what a writer of *fiction* may have *intended* in producing and publishing a given text.

However, in analyzing reports on research into social phenomena, describing and analyzing socially constructed realities and truths, relative though they may be, it is not advisable to attempt to separate the text from the writer, because of the phenomenon of

conscious or unconscious *intentionality*. Information on the writer/researcher is a vital tool in making judgements regarding the internal validity of what the researcher reports. It may, in fact, be impossible to detach the writer from her writing and consider texts in isolation, without *reducing* the validity of the reader's interpretation. Certainly, in the context of research, assertions made by the writer may only ever be valid in relation to specific profiles and contexts, but this does not, in my opinion, decrease their importance in relation to *those particular profiles and contexts*. It may not be possible to derive universal truths from individual case studies, but it may well be possible to glean some generalised information, as a useful contribution to improved understanding of similar contexts.

The difficulties discussed in this section constitute a philosophical challenge to any researcher, because interpretation "takes place through interpretative frames which are located within the background of all our beliefs and practices" (Scott and Usher 1999: 26).

In the next section, I will summarize my understanding and interpretation of the *historical development of thought* and its role in the development of qualitative research theory and practice. This account, which further illustrates and justifies my own developing choice of research methods comprises a short biography, a depiction of a personal journey, a coming to grips with key epistemological and ontological issues and a process of becoming and understanding as a researcher. The account further contextualizes the development of my persona as researcher through the deconstruction of my own beliefs, and will support the reader in drawing conclusions regarding possible conceptual biases, and in judging the degree of authenticity and veracity of this report.

### **4.3 A truncated biography: situating former beliefs to integrate the new**

The further autobiographical detail included in this section will further emphasize how changes in data collection activities were the result of a developing philosophy, leading to subsequent modification of practice.

#### **4.3.1 Looking back, to look forward more clearly**

Who, then, is the person writing this report? What lies behind the evolving academic and professional entity which aimed to become a qualitative researcher through this study? What social influences moulded my thought in my early education?

I grew up in an aspiring lower middle-class environment in south-east England. Our parents were fully committed to creating "an ideal home" for themselves and their children

(during a period of post-war utilitarianism and rationalism). No doubt we were all under the influence of the social constructs and values of the time, though more as a result of living and interacting in that context than as a result of conscious analysis or choice.

Harvey (1990: 36) speaks of the downside of what he calls the “High Modernism” of the post 2<sup>nd</sup> World War period, which was by no means *all* utilitarian or altruistic. He criticises:

“Its subterranean celebration of corporate bureaucratic power and rationality, under the guise of a return to surface worship of the efficient machine as a sufficient myth to embody all human aspirations.”

Harvey also mentions repeatedly the “positivistic, technocratic and rationalistic nature of high modernism.”

For those of us educated in conventional state schools and growing up in conservative aspiring lower middle-class families of the time, school life and home life were embedded within that wider context of rationalism. Scientific advances, such as the moon landing, the invention of the computer and new means of mass communication implied that science would soon find all the answers to all mankind’s questions. It was all a matter of experiment and seeking out the “truth”. A deep respect for the intellect, rational thinking, scientific knowledge and research marked my own perception of what universities should teach and what reputable research should involve, for many years.

During the course of my BA in humanities in the early seventies, I seriously grappled with philosophy for the first time. The study of Descartes and Mill provided a direct and conscious encounter with positivistic, rationalist and modernist views, and in literature, we studied nihilism and existentialism. I have already mentioned my experience with experimentalist research practices during my MA, and subsequent growing familiarity with practical qualitative research as part of my work. I have also shown how I began to *espouse* new beliefs, yet sometimes *operated* unconsciously according to previously assimilated positivistic theory and practice, in some respects.

I have described how I came to grasp the implications of quantitative and qualitative research theory and practice, reflected on the possible value of mixed methods research, which incorporates strategies and procedures from different research paradigms, as a possible middle way, Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004). I had intentionally set out to analyse a new set of concepts and discourse, to grapple with postmodern assumptions and propositions, to be in tune with main currents of our age. I was intensely affected by

the concurrence of sociologists, interpretative anthropologists and qualitative researchers in the acceptance that different “realities” may co-exist, collide and interpenetrate. I became newly aware of the “presumptive” and “conjectural” nature of all knowledge and the fact that: “To test a claim within a given theory or conceptual scheme, is to presume the truth of the vast majority of other claims within the theory” (Howe 2004: 44).

I have also related how I *started out* my PhD research with a strong personal agenda as a project manager and a mission. Research Diary Entry, 15.06.03 underlines this:

“educational specialists who live in-country are often more sensitive to the real needs of the project context than experts brought in from abroad, and that their contribution may well be the main ingredient for project success and sustainability.”

This seemed obvious to me, then because I had made assumptions concerning such people’s supposed trans-cultural understanding and acculturation and at that time wanted to “prove” this “scientifically”.

As the research proceeded, and my persona of researcher became more prominent than my habitual role of project manager, I dropped this hypothesis, and began to perceive what was emerging from the data rather than to look for confirmation of what I thought I already knew! The results and conclusions of this thesis therefore have little to do with that original hypothesis, and much less than *anticipated* (see the sections on standpoint and intentionality above) concerning cultures and acculturation in general. The conceptual “moving on”, which is theoretically and practically implied by this discovery, illustrates yet again how the process nature and the complexity of research processes impacted on my development as a researcher.

The next section comprises a brief account of epistemologies underlying qualitative research methods, and their impact on my own beliefs. Again, I include this in the interests of transparency, showing the workings behind the research decisions and activities.

#### **4.3.2 Integrating new concepts and accepting new possibilities: postpositivism**

Postpositivism, though not necessarily averse to positivist experimental research methodology, suggests in relation to truth and knowledge that what have been traditionally considered truths could be modified by new discoveries arising from further research. Positivistic methods and techniques may still be employed, though very much with the *proviso* that any resulting claims are only considered valid, pending further discoveries.

Postmodernism takes this idea much further, suggesting that all truth is historically, geographically or socio-politically situated and that, therefore, no truth can ever be absolute (Butler 2002). This implies that, no matter how conscientiously and meticulously any research project is approached, all findings will *necessarily* be open to further investigation and questioning, and are likely to be enhanced by further research. (The statement does, however, beg the question of whether it is an absolute truth that there is no absolute truth and can therefore degenerate into an impossible conundrum).

### **4.3.3 Integrating new concepts and accepting new possibilities: postmodernism**

Postmodern thinking, because of its acceptance of absolute truth as non-existent, of all truth as improvable and relative, and its conceptualization of absolute reality as equally inaccessible in any objective sense, can result in either a “positive” or “negative” outlook on life in general, and on research, in particular.

The uncertainty stemming from accepting the absence of absolutes can lead to despair, cynicism, moral indifference, wimpishness, and a kind of myopic self-centeredness, according to some experts. Other theorists, however, use postmodern ideas to fashion very positive, hopeful, and often spiritual, approaches to life (Spretnak 1991; Tarnas 1991).

My own interpretation of postmodernism inclines toward a more positive stance. The acceptance of the relative nature of truths and realities offers a real possibility of reducing bias and prejudice within and across national, religious, professional groups through more creative and multilateral and more inclusive socio-political thought. On a macro-level, this is particularly important in an age where fundamentalism of different types is experiencing a conflictive and often destructive renaissance in many contexts. In relation to this research, it is also important as a key aspect of the reflexivity of the process, which included consideration of the potentially shifting nature of the truths and realities externalized through the respective voices of participants and researcher, in relation to their shifting roles and perceptions, as explained above.

Relativism could be viewed as a negative current, if taken to its logical extreme, since it could imply a renunciation of any responsibility to continue with the quest for absolute knowledge and optimum, generalizable methodologies and processes, since these are, in any case, inaccessible. This is not an acceptable justification for giving up the search for a deeper understanding of the situated *truths* and *realities* of human groups, in the interests

of more effective and creative interaction. In this view, research activities contribute to the overall expansion of knowledge, and as such are useful, even though absolute or definitive assertions cannot be necessarily be made.

Postmodernist thinking has made it impossible for any one philosophy, research paradigm or research methodology to become a panacea; hermeneutics (Section 4.2.2, p. 77 and Section 4.2.3, p. 78-9) imply that no researcher can be totally objective, regardless of paradigm, because any interpretation has to be both foreshadowed and influenced by all the prior thoughts and experiences of the researcher. Each researcher will therefore have a unique, situated, unrepeatable and biased standpoint, which will affect any interpretations or conclusions. Such biases will be stronger where a researcher has chosen to follow more specifically defined tendencies, for example, within the Cultural Studies line of research, such as feminism, which embraces a strongly marked set of philosophical and political concepts and ideals. The possibility of bias yet again begs the question of *validity* and requires further discussion of the conceptualization of validity by postmodern research methodologies, to be further discussed in the following section.

Although it is important not to underplay the issue of the researcher's viewpoint, and the need for the researcher to be able to both detach herself from and observe the context and "become a stranger"<sup>3</sup>, at some stages of data analysis, it is also true that any researcher also assumes a new role (as researcher) within the very context being studied! This issue has been discussed, for example, by Stake (1994). Not only does a researcher take on a new role, but this, in addition to previously learned roles, also affects ways of interpreting data. What is crucial to remember is that becoming a researcher does not automatically provide access to "the truth".

Stake states that:

"Many a researcher would like to tell the whole story, but, of course, cannot; the whole story exceeds anyone's knowing, anyone's telling..."  
(Stake, *Ibid.*: 240).

I included this quotation as a preface to this report, because it usefully underlines my own awareness of issues surrounding the subjectivity inherent in researcher situatedness and the

---

<sup>3</sup> Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley, 'Ethnography and participant Observation' In Denzin and Lincoln, Ch. 15, p. 248.

difficulty of claiming absolute validity for any research findings, from a postmodern standpoint.

In their ERIC Digest, Hlynka and Yeaman (1992) outline some key features of postmodern thinking (here liberally paraphrased for the sake of brevity):

1. A commitment to plurality of perspectives, meanings, methods, values – everything!
2. A search for and appreciation of double meanings and alternative interpretations, many of them ironic and unintended.
3. A critique or distrust of Big Stories meant to explain everything. This includes grand theories of science, and myths in our religions, nations, cultures, and professions that serve to explain why things are the way they are.
4. An acknowledgment that – because there is a plurality of perspectives and ways of knowing – there are also multiple truths.

Hlynka and Yeaman suggest (with irony) “four easy steps to becoming a postmodernist”:

1. Consider concepts, ideas and objects as texts. Textual meanings are open to interpretation.
2. Look for apparent binary oppositions in those texts. Some usual oppositions are good/bad, progress/tradition, science/myth, love/hate, man/woman, and truth/fiction (presumably of the type which might be emphasized by structuralist thinkers).
3. “Deconstruct” the text by showing how the oppositions are not necessarily true.
4. Identify texts which are absent, groups who are not represented and omissions, which may or may not be deliberate, but are important (pp. 1-2).

I attempted to apply postmodern principles to the design and implementation of this study, at the same time trying to avoid what might be conceptualized as a “downward spiral of deconstruction”. This could lead to the deconstruction of all concepts *ad absurdum*, and consequently render it impossible to draw any useful conclusions to inform and improve professional knowledge and practice. As I have related, I found that, for example, one day’s practical observation notes, followed by creative reflexivity regarding the context, roles and intentions of project participants and the researcher could yield much richer and more abundant ideas concerning how and why the self-access centre project might have become

sustainable than did the analysis of 54 meticulously applied and coded student questionnaires. Though quantitative data stimulated some ideas in relation to *what* people thought, it provided little insight into *why* they might have formulated such thoughts, as mentioned above. The questionnaires could only acquire deeper meaning, if the answers were discussed with the respondents to compare and confirm interpretations (Section 4.1.3, p. 71).

#### **4.3.4 Integrating new concepts and accepting new possibilities: structuralism and poststructuralism**

Structuralism is “both a theoretical perspective and a methodological approach in contemporary social sciences [and it] combines a formal model of explanation found in math, economics, and psychology, and an analytic approach derived from semiotics” (Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994: 467).

Structuralists, drawing on Saussurian linguistics and its key concepts of “*langue*” and *parole*’ state that: “any system is made up of a set of oppositional categories embedded in language” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 15). This belief has been widely applied to research into human systems in the social sciences, particularly anthropology, and one of the major issues is that written texts are to be seen as “real and decipherable through a set of institutionally generated codes, or interpretative frames” (Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994: 467).

Structuralist techniques of research involve systematically identifying individual parts of a system, and the underlying rules that relate these parts, in order to better understand the “deeper” relationships underlying individual events or sequences of occurrences.

In this sense, structuralism represents an attempt to find a more *objective* approach to describing cultures. Phenomena can thus, it is argued, be described in terms of systems, and explained in terms of the deeper, underlying relationships among the systems and units of analysis defined. Human beings themselves, and their behaviour are, according to structuralism, subject to the systems and underlying rules of their context. Understanding cultures means observing, defining, describing and understanding these systems, rather than listening to and interpreting the words and feelings of human beings and trying to understand the subjective, cultural meanings that these may embody. Individuals and their actions are viewed as incarnations and applications of the units and rules of the social structures characteristic of the cultures within which they live and move. Language, which can also be sorted out into its own units, becomes a vehicle to express these structures and simply puts into words or symbols (encodes) the already systematically structured values.



However, the fact that language is dynamic, receptive to innovations, shifts of meaning, neologism etc., implies that language itself constitutes a constantly changing set of categories for description. If the referents or sets of categories expressed by language are themselves neither objective nor fixed, then the significance of any behaviour, texts, artefacts, described through language, cannot be fixed either, but will be dependent on when, where, how, by whom and for what purposes they are produced.

Poststructuralist views of language as an instrument to *describe* research, and research methodology itself developed as a reaction to the realization that:

“Language is an instable system of referents, so it is impossible ever to capture the meaning of an action, text, intention...” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 15).

Poststructuralism rejects the possibility of any absolute systematicity of meanings, because of the fact that a change of context is necessary and sufficient to imply a possible change in meaning. Meaning, and the systems that produce meanings, thus become transient, changeable and anything but absolute. In this sense, poststructuralism is in line with the wider current of postmodernism.

Accepting poststructuralism makes the interpretation of data more complex for the qualitative researcher, since she cannot assume that the same term, for example, used in different contexts, has the same conceptual significance even for the same speaker. It means that a constant checking of shared and personal meanings has to become an integral part of the qualitative researcher’s work, whether in dealing with research participants in the field or in writing a report which will be comprehensible to the widest possible audience.

“Our theories are like the strategy repertoires of retarded learners – of themselves they do not add up to true expertise, because they are missing the intangible, unanalyzable ingredients that go into everyday cognition and decision-making” (Wilson 1997).

The standpoint I have taken in my work throughout can be conceived as poststructuralist, since my theoretical understanding rejects the idea of the possibility of the reduction of what we observe in large and small cultures and sub-cultures to unobservable formal structures, based largely on binary oppositions, as over-restrictive.

Although there may indeed be some both culture-specific and universal elements to be observed in human groups, it is important to remain open to the *emergence* of phenomena,

rather than to start out by only looking for specific supposedly pre-existing and constant underlying structures. When I report on my conclusions regarding the deeper nature of project sustainability, I have been careful not to talk in terms of binary oppositions, or to predict rigid systems of rules underlying the process of achieving project sustainability, but rather to point out the interconnectedness of phenomena as part of a larger whole and the possibility of overlaps among categories and sub-categories.

Although these insights all seem obvious now, they deeply affected my personal philosophy, leading me to deconstruct and reconstruct my own belief systems and resulting in a liberation from some of the limitations assumed and assimilated through past education and experience.

#### **4.3.5 Reconstructing views of knowledge and truth**

My personal diachronic study of epistemology and ontology and their implications for the researcher, began in 2000. By 2002, my private research diary was replete with synopses of philosophical movements over the centuries, and with my own reactions and moments of insight, in relation to these. By May 2002, two years after my project proposal had been accepted, this survey had led me far beyond a study of the history of epistemology, ontology and research methodology, to a deconstruction of my own personal socio-cultural history and belief structures.

This helped me to understand much better the contradictions I had begun to encounter within my own research planning and implementation. At the same time as carrying out the multiple-pronged literature survey (in order to increase my understanding of other people's work on achieving project sustainability, on the one hand, and the development of research methodology itself, on the other), I had begun to collect data. Over those first two years, however, my approach to data-collection underwent radical changes, as my understanding of the true nature of qualitative research, including ethno-methodological research, was refined. By 2006, when the first complete draft of the report was finally completed, my grasp of many key concepts had changed to such a degree, that I became highly critical of my initial forays into data collection and research, and actually wanted to begin the entire study afresh!

#### 4.4 Growing to understand the deeper nature of Qualitative Research

There are some excellent diachronic surveys of how qualitative research methods have developed over time, in relation to the changing views of contemporary *philosophy*, on the one hand, and the development of *practical research* activities by sociologists and anthropologists, “Human Scientists”, on the other. (See, for example, Vidich and Lyman (1994) and Hamilton (1994). Also, see Johanssen (1992), for an excellent distinction between *applied* and *interpretative* anthropology.)

Positivist approaches to research, traditionally favoured by the “hard” sciences, can be traced back to philosophies of Ancient Greece, continuing through the thinking of the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment, represented, for example, by Descartes. According to positivistic thought, any reality is objectively describable and so it is therefore possible to follow strict, objective “scientific” methods for data collection and analysis of any subject.

According to the positivist research model or paradigm, research begins with the setting of one or more hypotheses to be tried and tested, the subjects of the research are then isolated as far as possible and variables are controlled, enabling objectively measurable, quantitative data to be collected and analysed. On the basis of the data, mathematically reliable and valid results, leading to concrete, “scientific” conclusions are produced. According to this view, the more “objective” the data collection techniques and the more controlled the variables are, the more accurate will be the measurement, and the more rational, precise and *valid* will be the interpretations. They will also be generalizable to comparable subjects and contexts. Still the traditional view of many researchers in the “hard” sciences, such as physics and chemistry (Guba and Lincoln 1994: 105-6), it was my own view, until I began to study qualitative research methodology (Chapter 1, p. 18). My first forays with questionnaires described in Section 4.1.3, p. 71 ff., were undoubtedly derived from a desire to collect large amounts of objectively codable and interpretable data and factual conclusions, rooted in prior experience with experimentalist research, based on positivist principles. (It is also true that I had the secondary objective of getting the university staff directly involved in the research and perhaps stimulating their interest in research for themselves.)

Different research traditions have been developed among the sciences themselves (Biology, for example, is now considered a “soft” science, as noted in Guba and Lincoln, *Ibid.*: 105, and therefore is felt to require an approach which deviates from strict experimental method, in some areas). At this stage in the history of research, it is hard to see how the hard

sciences can provide one single best paradigm of research across such a varied range scientific fields. Much less is it conceivable that any single best paradigm might offer a completely appropriate and transferable model for research in the social sciences. Research in this field deals with people, interacting in different groups, each with a number of roles, functions, relationships, contexts and cultures operating simultaneously. Any attempt to isolate such human subjects from their respective contexts and activities, can easily begin to create new and different – but totally artificial – “realities”. These may be interesting to describe *per se*, but will not be able to effectively recreate the subjects’ customary transactions, routines and actions in the familiar groups’ contexts of their daily lives.

I applied this idea in my data collection activities, working with participants in the everyday contexts and within the regular timetables of their regular self-access activities. I met them at moments when our talks could take place in familiar settings and became, in many cases, continuations of conversations concerning issues already recurrent in the course of our work during the project. Such conversations had sometimes begun during training seminars and courses, been left inconclusive and were then taken up again during the research interviews.

For example, the issue of whether study in the self-access centre should be obligatory or voluntary for BA students at the university was discussed repeatedly and at length during project training sessions and it has also been taken up at subsequent self-access congresses. So when it became one of the themes of an interview with Alice (1 Alice 1 / 40), it was not an unfamiliar subject for her to deal with. In the context of that particular research interview, I was trying to discover according to the interviewee’s perceptions, the obligation of students to attend the self-access centre might have actually been an element contributing to project sustainability. Although my main focus of interest had slightly changed, the topic was equally familiar to both of us.

Interpretations of data can always be skewed by elements such as the background, unconscious beliefs and purposes of the researcher, as amply discussed above. These will be influenced in turn by the state and context of thinking and attitudes to research at the particular point in history when the interpretations occur. They will be yet further influenced in relation to both the professional and wider cultural context, of which the researcher, the researched and the audience are all products.

Equally, any account of a research process and the interpretation of results will be a product and testimonial of its own moment in history and the profiles and beliefs of the

researcher and the researched, over the period in time when the research activities take place. In this sense, all results, and, indeed, all research reports, must be regarded as *situated*. Thus, “researchers must recognize their situatedness and bracket their subjectivity and explanatory frames” (Scott and Usher 1999: 28).

Some writers trace a more humanist view of research back to Kant, who in direct opposition to Cartesian objectivism, set up a model of human rationality (Hamilton 1994): “for Kant, human claims about nature cannot be independent of ‘inside-the-head processes of the knowing subject’” (Hamilton Ibid.: 63). Hamilton explains Kant’s distinction between *Theoretical knowledge* and *Practical knowledge*, and goes on to explain how, according to Kant’s view, the creation of knowledge “...must take full cognizance of the investigator. It must concede the significance of interpretation and understanding” (Hamilton Ibid.: 63). Hamilton also explains how Kant believed that all situations that require practical action have both empirical status and moral status:

“Practical reasoning – or applied social science – relates therefore to the application of moral judgements in the realm of human action. What *to do* relates not only to what *is*, but also to inseparable notions of what *ought to be*.” (Hamilton Ibid.: 63).

Interpretation, in this view, will always bring in the views of the researcher concerning what *should be*, rather than what *is*. This is perhaps because what really *is*, is inaccessible to any human observer, prejudiced and influenced as she must be by past experience, the *Zeitgeist*, cultural and professional contexts and state of knowledge in a constructivist sense.

I have admitted that at the beginning of my research activities, I had strong opinions concerning the desirable profiles of external consultants for in-country projects, and believed this factor might have been a major contributor to sustainability (Chapter 1, p. 20; Chapter 2, Section 2.2.4, p. 32-34; Chapter 3, Section 3.2.5, p. 50). However, as my studies progressed, I strove increasingly to disregard any feelings of what *ought to be*, and to focus on what the different types of data seemed to indicate *was the case*, at least in the context studied.

The position of the qualitative researcher approaching a case is complex and intricate, yet at the same time rich and varied. In the interests of rigour, she must be as honest as possible about who she is and she must then carefully *bound* her case, in order not to embark on a never-ending quest. She must develop and describe her instruments and techniques, collect data, code, analyse and interpret with all the transparency of the “hard” scientist. Yet she must be ever alert, reflexive and flexible enough to decide at what points

in the interpretation process to *attempt* to let the facts/data “speak” to the reader directly and for themselves, and at what point to “impose” her own interpretation. The interpretation itself will be derived from a combination of her own and/others’ views and experiences, since this is “the best she can do” in order to get at a shared reality, expressed in terms of shared conceptualizations of theory, practice and individual experience (Holliday 2000).

If this interpretation process is not conscientiously carried out, it may not be possible to draw reliable or useful conclusions regarding specific issues or contexts. Without this, accounts of research studies can turn into simple chronicles, narratives or anecdotes, which, though valuable as examples of their own *genres*, could not really be regarded as “serious academic investigation”. Academic research requires the careful explanation and definition of terms (e.g. my attempt to deconstruct and define the concepts and categories described in project sustainability literature in Chapter 3). It also requires detailed scrutiny of data, interpretation and reflexive questioning of both the methods of collection and possible meanings, notwithstanding the implications of multiplicity of meaning, which is inevitable, the drawing of conclusions and the making of concrete suggestions and recommendations. Narrative enquiry, as a particular field of Qualitative research, values the individual narrative, but also sees individual narratives as *pieces in a mosaic* which can depict a certain era or group. It is still the researcher, who has to analyse, interpret and collate accounts in order to reconstruct the whole mosaic.

Finding the right voices to portray meanings at different points of the report is another challenge for the researcher, and I touched upon this subject in Section 4.2.3, p.78. It is, however, of such importance in qualitative research, that I would like to explain and illustrate further facets of issues related to voice in the next section.

#### **4.5 A wholeness in continual expansion: the compound identity of the researcher and the researched**

“Our identities are defined and expressed through the ways we position ourselves vis-à-vis others along the several dimensions that constitute our networks of relationships” (Mischler 1999: 16, citing Etherington 2004: 76).

A progressive awareness of my *compound identity* as a researcher was reflected in a growing ability to recognize the feature of being able to think, speak and write in different ways, at different moments in the research process. The *compound identity of the*

*researcher* is now a more satisfying conceptualization than that of a researcher composed of multiple or split personae or personalities. A conscientious researcher achieves a kind of *wholeness in continual expansion*, and the ability to weave the constituent parts into one. There is evidence of my evolving identity as a researcher in my research diaries, which contain strikingly different types of entries. These include key quotes from the literature, on philosophy, research methodology and project sustainability; very personal, emphatic, sometimes ecstatic, sometimes disappointed reactions to these insights; field notes, interpretations, notes on initial interpretations after periods of “think time”, and so on. I also often noted how my role changed during different research activities, and affected the discourse of the interaction, just as I wrote in different ways when writing up different experiences. In the next section, I attempt to describe some of these different components of the compound identity of the researcher.

#### **4.5.1 The four selves**

My compound identity as a researcher seemed to include at least four discernible selves, who expressed themselves in different styles and discourses:

- i) “The naked self”: This was the voice of the researcher’s *own* ideas, thoughts and moments of insight, and was sometimes expressed in the style of a “stream of consciousness”, in which academic or professional concepts or terminology were not necessarily used (unless to work out verbally how to relate these directly to her own thought, life and work). There are many examples of this in my private research diaries, evidencing moments of intense personal and professional deliberation and insight. The professional and personal are often linked in these insights, illustrating interpretations in often reciprocal and commutative ways.

“I am a product of the cultures within which I have developed as an individual and as a member of groups, and as such am subject to the concepts, perceptions and confusions which reign in each of these groups...my knowledge of the world and my knowledge of my field and my understanding of groups, relations, intentions, causality and even chaos are in an on-going state of construction, as I try to interpret phenomena on my way...And above all, having deconstructed positivist, modernist and postmodernist epistemology and ontology, I have reconstructed my own

systems of beliefs about the nature of reality...” (Research diary entry, RDE, 15.06.03).

When this voice emerged in the report, I often felt the need to suppress it, because it seemed “too personal” and “not scientific enough” in style and content. Yet, when I do write in this way, I feel I am at my most honest and direct, if sometimes academically naïve or reactive rather than reflective.

- ii) “The PhD student and developing researcher”: This was the voice of the *student*, who was struggling with concepts, terms, processes, models derived from the literature and/or input from and discussions with other academics and, simultaneously, trying to plan and implement her own piece of original research.

She first described the ideas which she read about, then tried to relate them to her own past experience and/or to what she was going to try to achieve with the research. Her style developed gradually and became more confident, as her ideas became better defined. She first began the work of weaving together the different sections of the report, and worked gradually towards a more “*academically correct*”, coherent whole. This striving to be “*academically correct*” could sometimes create a straitjacket, and hinder her creativity. Imposing the perceptions of previous researchers, through her own insecurity was sometimes much less informative than looking directly into the data and looking forward, to develop a new kind of methodology for this type of research. She quoted the experts like this:

“The interactive model of the components of Data Analysis (data collection, data reduction, data display and conclusion-drawing/verification) suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984) and reported in Chapter 27 of Denzin and Lincoln (1994), will be taken as a point of departure for data analysis. Clearly, the type of data collection inevitably demands interpretation of staff and students’ opinions and perceptions, by the researcher. (Draft for thesis, September 2002.)

This voice attempts to mesh what was learned from the experts with what she planned to do in her research, and express it in the appropriate academic style:

“This, in turn, begs the question of objectivity, particularly since the researcher herself occupied a countrywide project co-ordinating position from 1994 to 1997, and still occupies a minor consultancy role in another area of the Faculty’s work.”

She needed time to develop confidence and use her own style and language for the final report.



iii) “The person who has experience in her profession”: This voice was clear and confident about certain aspects of her past professional experience, and what she wanted to confirm through her research work. She was also aware of some mistakes that she and her respective project teams may have committed, in the past, but she was also aware of a degree of inevitability in this, since she is convinced that learning is a never-ending process, and that a process approach to implementing innovation is a good idea. Along the way she had perceived ever more clearly that we are all subject to personal, cultural, material, and organizational constraints and prejudices, resulting from background and circumstance. It was she who started the research project with the mission to enhance professional understanding of the complexity of project sustainability and to win recognition for the roles of locally employed expert consultants. She genuinely hoped to help others to avoid errors of judgement of previous projects through the documentation and analysis of the process and results of one successful project. She considered herself to have acquired some authority in professional matters, after over 30 years of experience in different countries, contexts and of learning with and from others. She sometimes felt frustrated and restricted by the discipline of the preparation, collection, documentation, arrangement, reduction and interpretation of data and conventions for reporting on research. She wanted to “cut off” more discursive and reflective parts of the writing, because she wanted to “get down to work”, “get to the point”, “get to the results” and “draw some useful conclusions” – and get on with the next project! Indeed, she sometimes questioned whether there was any point in doing the research at all, as she felt she already knew quite a lot of the answers! Clearly, she also had to undergo a different kind of maturation process, open up to emergent truths, and allow her previous perceptions to be modified by the findings!

“The motivation for this study comes from the accumulated concerns of twenty-five years of practical work in English language teaching, teacher training and administration, in different countries and types of organizations. Since 1976, I have been involved in numerous innovations in English language teaching, in different countries” (Draft for thesis, May 2002).

As the research process developed, she became increasingly aware of deeper level factors working within the research context, and of the limiting nature of essentialism and over-generalization, thanks to the work of her “colleague”, the PhD student and developing researcher. Reading and discussion with her thesis supervisor, committee and peers all opened her eyes to many new complexities

inherent in contexts she thought were familiar, and she became humbler, and perhaps a little wiser.

- iv) “The critical companion”: She would try to read and correct writing, as though it had been written by one of her own students. She was at times forgiving of imprecision, vagueness and convolution, because she herself could see that the personal views of the researcher with regard to many concepts and processes were still being worked out as part of the process. At other times she was intensely critical, deleting whole paragraphs and pages. She was very demotivating at times! It is she who insisted upon re-reading paragraphs, pages and chapters, editing, deleting, altering, and rewriting successive versions of the report. I owe her a lot.

The ability to identify different voices or *personae* in my thoughts and style of writing was an important insight for a nascent qualitative researcher. It is worth documenting as part of the overall research experience, since when I was working on the data collection and analysis, it actually kept me keenly alert to similar phenomena operating among the research participants. This is clearly because all that people say and how it may be interpreted will have partly to do with at least the following:

- a) the roles in which they see *themselves* and in which the researcher *perceives* them to be operating, at a given time, which may not concur;
- b) the role in which they perceive the researcher to be operating, and the role in which the researcher sees herself, at any given moment, which again, may not concur.

At the case study university, some participants in the research seem to have considered me first as “Teacher Trainer” others as “Confidante” or “A woman friend” and yet others as “Official Representative of the British Council Authorities”, according to what they told me. As the study progressed, I hoped they would come to recognise me as “Researcher”, and yet it was hard to assess the extent to which this change really occurred. There were moments when it seemed to be perceivable, as when we discussed the results of the initial questionnaires and possible action to be taken, in a collaborative and collegiate spirit, but it was often hard to tell and I have tried to allow for this discrepancy in my interpretations.

Several informants perceivably switched between a more “professional” and a more informal and confidential type of discourse, at different points in a single interview, as sometimes noted in my research diary. This could reflect a corresponding shift in the nature of the “truths” being expressed at such different moments. More than one research participant asked me to keep certain comments “off the record”, and I have always

respected that wish. I could not, of course, exemplify this completely, without including something which was intended to be “off the record”.

In sum, the identification of different voices in the researcher and the research participants is part and parcel of the development of reflexive questioning and to report the phenomenon as a lived experience supports transparency in the workings and validity of this report.

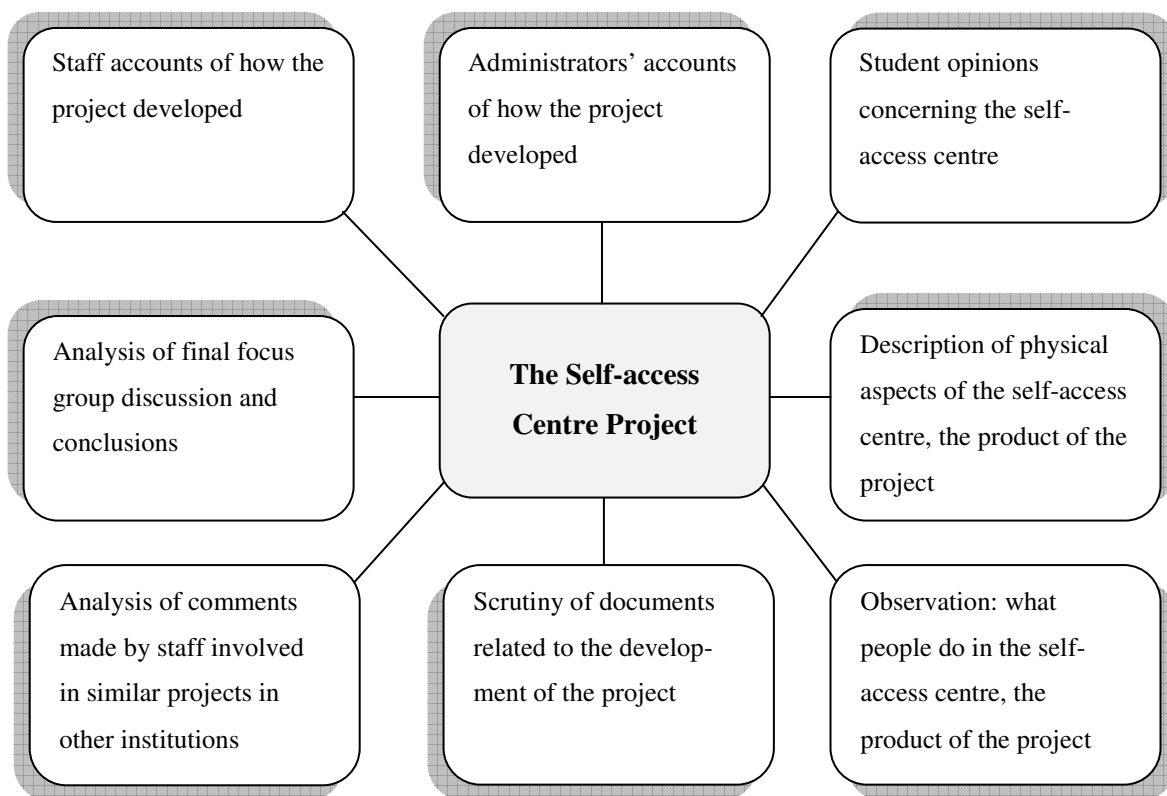
#### **4.6 Ethnographical attributes of the study**

This may also be considered an ethnographical study, in as far as it explores “the nature of a specific social phenomenon” (the nature of project sustainability in a specific educational context), “through a range of data types, involving the interpretation of the meanings and functions, and participant observation” (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994: 248). It attempts to go beyond traditional naturalist, postmodernist qualitative research, as stated above, borrowing ideas and procedures from both phenomenology and grounded theory, seeing reality as socially constructed (as opposed to a structuralist anthropological paradigm), and starting from the premise that that researchers themselves constitute part of their overall research setting. I have explained how I accept the idea that research should be implemented in an environment of constant reflexive and self-critical dialogue (Holliday 2002: 18) and in this sense, my research is postmodern.

However, the story I want to tell concerning the researcher and the whole research process and findings may be more important than precise definitions of the nature of the methodology. As Janesick (1994: 210) says, it is important not to be ensnared and limited by *methodolatry*, which, she explains, means placing more importance on the methodology than on the findings! Certainly, I have also attempted to incorporate creativity in my choice of methods and procedures, as can be seen from the sequence of activities described at the beginning of this chapter. I have clearly not adhered slavishly to one particular set of techniques or practices and I have sometimes deviated from my purpose as a result of past experience and previously learned practice.

Figure 3, below, summarizes the different types of data I collected in order to create a thick description of the case study context, on which to base my analysis and interpretation of the deeper nature of sustainability.

**Figure 3: Building a picture of a self-access centre project (after Holliday 2002: 78)**



Thus far, I have prepared for the creation of this thick description by stating the initial and developing intentions behind the study and the questions to be asked, describing the selection of the case study context, the researcher’s own profile and developing standpoint and the development of the researcher’s *thinking* behind the research methodology. A further note on the achievement of validity in this kind of research would be appropriate, before moving on to ethics and then the practical aspects of the research plan and procedures in the next chapter.

#### **4.7 Achieving validity in qualitative research**

The issue of validity has become a recurring motif in this report. In Chapter 1, p. 19, I described my own evolving understanding of the nature of validity in relation to triangulation. In this chapter, Section 4.1.3, pp. 71-75, I mentioned validity in relation to a number of activities involving data, in Section 4.3.3, p. 84, in relation to the appropriateness of my research theory and practice for the context, in Section 4.3.3, p. 84 in connection with the reader’s interpretation and in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3, pp. 85, in connection with postmodernism. Since I claim to have based my study on principles and

practices characteristic of postmodern qualitative research, it is important to show how I deconstructed the concept of validity and then applied my conclusions to this research.

#### **4.7.1 Some current views**

The concept of validity in qualitative research has been much debated (see, for example, Quinn Patton 1987; Guba and Lincoln 1994; Janesick 1994; Reason 1994; Brause 2000; Silverman 2000; Holliday 2002; Etherington 2004).

From a constructivist standpoint “trustworthiness” and “authenticity” are primordial; critical theorists stress the importance of “action”, “praxis” and the understanding of the “historical situatedness” of the results and conclusions. They also emphasize the functions of research as an instrument of innovation and improvement Green (1994); a Feminist view of validity would commit the researcher to a number of other issues, such as degree and quality of emotionality, caring, subjective understanding, representative dialogic texts, the growth of long-term, trusting relationships with the human group being studied (Green Ibid.) – all of this very much in direct contrast with the “objective” approach to informants and to data analysis, favoured in quantitative research within a positivistic framework.

If a postmodernist viewpoint implies that objective validity is unachievable and represents a contradiction *per se* in the context of qualitative research, other alternatives may need to be identified and ratified. It has been suggested that the researcher might simply base all work on narrative accounts, and, similarly, provide a narrative of the research procedures followed in the process of data collection and interpretation (Narrative Analysis, Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994: 464). However, this does not solve the issue that the narrator herself will have a background and viewpoint which will encapsulate and tinge the report, affecting the selection of what to include, the organization of the narrative, sequencing and highlighting of information. Issues involving intentionality and the limitations imposed by hermeneutics have been touched upon in this chapter, Section 4.2.2, p. 77, Section 4.2.3, p. 78 and Section 4.3.3, p. 84. There is also a risk of creating an over-individualized, solipsistic and subjective account, which could justifiably be accused of lacking in rigour or usefulness, as also explained above. Indeed, working alone, at a distance without any interlocutors, it is extremely easy to fall into this trap. Reflexive dialogue with oneself concerning data and interpretation inherently implies a kind of solipsism. However, this kind of subjectivism is also very much a part of the world we

inhabit, and an inescapable feature of reporting on research and I have tried to offset it through interaction with the informants.

Reflexive ethnography seeks a new view of validity, with which I found I could identify. In this view, validity is seen as something which is not a *product* of research, but rather, *part of the process*. I have already shown how my conceptualization of the phenomenon of sustainability developed during the process of the literature survey, in Chapter 3, and I will show how it developed further in later chapters. In Chapter 4, I have been illustrating how my understanding of qualitative research grew as part of the process of implementing data collection activities and reflecting upon results. In Chapter 5, I will describe in detail exactly how I collected data and exposing exactly what I did, and the ways in which I processed the data for interpretation. This, I believed was particularly important in cases where I experimented or detected inappropriate thinking behind certain decisions, in the interests of transparency.

If the achievement of validity of the research design and findings is also seen as a developing process, the degree and nature of validity of a piece of research will also increase as the study proceeds. As diverse elements such as culture, gender, ideology, language, relevance of the study to the researcher, the researched and the professions become clearer, the reader can begin to draw conclusions regarding the transparency and validity of the research. Then, the final interpretations and conclusions of the study, to be presented from Chapter 6 on, can be assessed in relation to the *fide digna* report of the process.

Other forms of validity, which have been suggested for the evaluation of qualitative studies include: ironic validity, neo-pragmatic validity, rhizomatic validity, and situated validity (Lincoln and Denzin 1994: 585). Just as there is no single correct way to approach and carry out qualitative data collection and interpretation, from a postmodernist standpoint, likewise it seems that there can be no single correct way to assure that conclusions are “valid” in anything like absolute terms. There may apparently be no totally correct, or totally incorrect, judgement or evaluation, in a relativist view; even though some instances of triangulation may be noted, total, watertight triangulation and unquestionable conclusions will never be possible, since there are simply too many parameters and uncontrollable variables to be perceived and documented at both surface and deep levels of action in any socio-cultural group or context.

This idea is both liberating and chastening for the researcher, since the onus to produce a definitive study and contribute original, unquestionable, objective and universal truths to

the profession is removed, yet the importance of rigour in every aspect of a study is undoubtedly magnified.

What becomes essential to the struggle for insight is that the both researcher and reader be constantly alert to possible prejudices, biases and limitations derived from any of their previous roles and experiences that could impinge upon the research, report, or the interpretation of the report. Also, although the researcher must create opportunities for new insights to emerge from the bounded case study, she must also be prepared to admit that these insights may be particular, rather than general, and important to the individual case, as in an intrinsic case study, rather than to the generality.

If there are no universal truths in the postmodern world, it follows that no researcher will be able to uncover anything more than *situated* or *relative* truths. This is because, as individuals and within groups, all are engaged in an on-going and dynamic process – either conscious or otherwise – of constructing, accommodating, assimilating and reconstructing their own truths, in the light of every new experience and piece of knowledge that they encounter.

Experts in English language teaching have already demonstrated this, in direct relation to their professional contexts. Williams and Burden (1997) explain how social constructivism sees English Language teachers as each imbued with their own, individual knowledge bases and beliefs about learning. They describe how teachers are inevitably and unavoidably constantly projecting their own (changing) values in their every interaction with colleagues and students, whether in the teaching materials they produce for their students, the ways in which they interact with students, in meetings and other activities with colleagues, within their respective specific socio-cultural environments, EFL sub-cultures, individual school and class cultures.

In such a view, objective reality becomes a chimera, an ever-changing phenomenon, only acknowledged and shared in as far as specific socio-cultural and discourse groups agree, for as long as it is convenient for the interests of that group or its leaders to do so.

What alternatives remain? Is it appropriate to “dispense with the quest for validity” and strive to achieve “*verisimilitude*”, which “seeks to examine critically, instead, a text’s verisimilitude or ability to reproduce (simulate) and map the real.”? (Lincoln and Denzin 1994: 579).

Many of the problems inherent in creating a *bona fide* description and interpretation have already been touched upon above. If we see verisimilitude as “the mask a text

assumes as it convinces the reader it has conformed to the laws of its genre” (Lincoln and Denzin 1994: 580), the use of the word “mask” seems to imply an attempt to hide the true face of the researcher, through play-acting rather than authenticity. The first definition of verisimilitude is partly satisfying, and yet impossible to achieve, because of the relative nature of “the real” already discussed. The second is not satisfying, because of the imagery of the mask and its innuendo of concealment. Even so, “verisimilitude” may constitute a more relevant description of what qualitative research hopes to achieve, than “validity”, which bears with it connotations which are inseparable from the positivist paradigm.

To conclude this discussion, it seems that the major challenge of the postmodernist researcher in pursuit of validity is, first and foremost, to offer a feasible and useful research *model*, which other qualitative researchers might find useful to follow in the future. During the entire research process, it is necessary to be as *rigorous* as possible in *collecting* a range of different types of text and in interpreting the data through a continuous process of critical reflection and rigorous self-questioning data, in a well-reasoned and self-critical manner. These are the general principles I have tried to apply in my research, and the next section attempts to explain how I did this.

#### **4.7.2 Achieving validity in this study**

In this research, I have first attempted to display *internal validity*, which is to say, that this is a study which does, in fact, research what it always set out to research (factors which contribute to an understanding of the deeper nature of sustainability in an English language teaching project). The developing *philosophical principles* underlying the research have been explained in considerable detail in Chapter 4, and ways in which the *practical methodology* also developed as part of the research process and described in considerable detail in Chapter 5, reflects those principles. The data analysis and interpretation, Chapters 6, 7 and 8 will show as faithfully as possible the insights achieved by following and applying the *principles* and *procedures* described.

I also aimed to achieve a kind of *external validity*, in the hope that this study will hold water when viewed from a totally external, critical standpoint. As part of the research process, I have rigorously refined my research questions, defined my underlying philosophical and methodological principles. I have also been rigorous in describing data-collection, storage, reduction and analysis procedures. In my interpretation of results and conclusions, I have tried to be sufficiently objective to bear questioning, even though some



subjectivity issues may simply not be possible to resolve, being intrinsic to this kind of qualitative research, as already discussed at length above.

I exercised rigour by setting up a sufficiently wide variety of data collection techniques, while striving to remain constantly aware of the dangers of drawing superficial conclusions from limited or forced triangulations, or over-generalizing from one case to all cases. I tried to allow each step of the data collection process to inform the next, and to plan justifiable ways to proceed. I aimed for the following types of validity:

- i) Triangulation: Though initially it had seemed obvious to me that the cross-referencing and interrelation of a range of different types of data rather than working with larger quantities of a single type of data would yield richer and deeper insights (Chapter 1, p. 19). Though there may be an element of this, I learned in this research that attempting to triangulate must be carried out with great care. First, it is possible to inadvertently force apparent coincidences in themes, concepts or categories due to the decision/need to demonstrate the validity of claims. Second, as I found during my study, *different types of data* may yield very *different types of information*. This means that though the theory behind triangulation as an instrument of validation is sound, in practice it may not work. Third, the more types of data a researcher tries to collect, the more superficial each data set may become, thus *reducing* rather than *enhancing* the validity of any claims. Furthermore, different types of data may not always be able to yield the same categories of information and therefore cannot always conveniently facilitate the neatly validated conclusions that triangulation theory suggests. On the other hand, constant questioning of the results of any apparent positive triangulation can help in the search for validity, by a refusal to accept any interpretation at face value.
- ii) Crystallization: As I continued with the simultaneous activities of reading, data collection and writing, Richardson's (1994: 522) concept of *crystallization* (Chapter 1, p. 19) increasingly appealed to me because it is a more widely embracing and multi-dimensional concept than *triangulation*. The idea of the entire corpus of data for interpretation as an evolving crystal, each type of data constituting one more section or facet of that crystal and reflecting sometimes similar and some times different types of "light" (in this case, "concepts" or "themes"), seems to me to be better able to account for what happens in the course of interpreting and interrelating the respective types of data. Different concepts or themes may emerge as having relationships with more than one phenomenon, and such relationships may not be unilateral or linear. Such overlaps

can be masked by neat lists of concepts, categories and sub-categories, but such lists may also ignore more complex and multi-faceted realities.

- iii) Ironic validity: I collected a number of accounts from different people who had different roles in the case study institution and interpreted their various views of the “reality” of the self-access centre at the UAQ and the reasons for its survival, *looking specifically for any contradictions that seemed to emerge.*
- iv) Neo-pragmatic validity: I have explained how I have related to the case study institution and staff in different roles since the development of the self-access centre and now as a researcher. I therefore needed to question my interpretations and reach conclusions carefully, avoiding skewed interpretations due to specific role(s). Likewise, I needed to constantly question the participants’ perceptions of their own roles and their possible bearings on interpretations of the “reality” of the SAC and the factors contributing to its survival, according to their past and present roles with the project and with myself.

Thus, triangulation – using “...multiple perceptions to clarify a meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation...” (Janesick 1994: 241) initially helped to underpin the interpretation process, but other principles related to verisimilitude, transparency, crystallization, ironic and rhizomatic further enriched my perceptions.

I aimed to avoid excessive subjectivity throughout, by following principles and practices derived from ethnographical research: the boundaries of the case were set up, beginning with wide ranging areas of personal and more general professional interest (derived from the literature), more specific analytic concepts and categories emerged from the data, driving the research forward. The collection and analysis of different types of data became part of the on-going work of the study. The analysis and interpretation did not constitute the final stage of the work, since, as each type of data was collected and analyzed, it was able to inform the research as to where further data might to be sought. The reliability and external validity of any final conclusions drawn were, in my view, enhanced by this dynamic, process approach to the collection and interpretation of data and the validation of claims.

A major change in the theory underpinning my methodology which reflects a developing view of validity and reliability was that I came to see advantages in drawing on what people already knew and could share about my area of research. At first, I had been evasive about exactly what I wanted to study (the deeper nature of project sustainability), because of my previous experimental research at MA level and as a full-time research

associate at the University of Kent in the early eighties. By 2002, I was explaining more about the research and no longer leaving the subject of data-collection to chance. From an ethical point of view, this shows I had also understood the disadvantages of being intentionally deceptive with those who had volunteered to help with the study.

Just as postmodernist views on the researcher, the research process and the researched progressively influenced my stance, values related to pluralism and diversity affected the ways in which I approached participants and tried to analyze their contributions in their own terms, avoiding essentialist and simplistic perceptions of, for example, “Mexicans”, or “Language teachers”, or “Mexican language teachers and students”.

Since language shapes our thoughts, and in the case of self-access, a whole new terminology and way of describing learning activities has evolved, it also seemed important to transcend current self-access discourse in this study, to create more widely accessible descriptions and narratives. Also, since the researched would necessarily give different versions of the “reality” of the project, I would then try to weave a summary of these perceptions and create a *reliable* description, without claiming access to absolute or universal truths (Butler 2002).

Because of my growing identification with postmodern thought, I realized that the findings of my research might only be, to some extent, valid and reliable in the context of the case study university or in very similar settings in Mexico. Even though this small contribution to the pushing forward of boundaries of the knowledge of our profession could only comprise *situated* truths and *contextualised* meanings, I still hoped it might derive insights relevant to development project management in other contexts.

“Since understanding is always an interpretation, there can be no standardized method or algorithm or theory of meaning which can function as criteria that produce a uniquely correct interpretation” (Scott and Usher, 1999: 26).

Or again, that “only partially objective accounts of research can be given, because **all methods are flawed**” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 15 –my emphasis). In Chapter 10, I will to show how far the aims regarding validity were achieved.

#### **4.8 A note on research ethics**

Trying to collect data and write a description and interpretation of other people’s realities obviously constitutes an intervention in those realities and because of this, raises ethical

issues concerning the rights of the researcher to pursue her studies and the rights of the researched to co-operate or not, as they prefer (Johanssen 1992).

I have mentioned a number of motives underlying this research. One of these, was to demonstrate how a better understanding of the deep action (Holliday 1994), in host, provider and project cultures, could enhance the degree of sustainability of such bi- or multicultural projects in general. As a result, I hoped to stimulate action in the profession, mainly to inspire more thorough and thoughtful training of UK-based external consultants and project managers in the deeper subtleties of project development.

Sincere and well-intentioned though these motives may have been, their very existence and any sense of “mission” behind the work could seriously have skewed every aspect of data collection, had it not been for the development of reflexivity and critical analysis of procedures and interpretations. Faced with realizations regarding the relativity of truths and the possibility of situated and emerging truths, suggested by readings and summarised in this chapter, I embraced the research project as a process incorporating on-going assessment and redefinition of my relationship with the research project, the case study, the data and the human relationships to be developed along the way.

Perhaps the easiest step to take was first to commit to the collection of a range of types of data, polyphonous data, and let the data “speak for themselves” as far as possible. This would be useful for my own interpretation, research participants’ interpretations, and readers’ own interpretations, too. A deeply-rooted humanistic (and in some aspects, feminist) system of ethics meant that I intended to promote collaboration, trust and mutual support among participants, throughout the case study.

In practice, for example, I encouraged colleagues at the SAC to participate in data collection and to analyse the data for their own purposes, before passing it on to me for the purposes of my study. Since most of the participants have known me for a number of years in a different capacity, as mentioned above, some strong professional ties had already been forged and strong empathy and emotionality were inevitable with certain individuals, at certain stages and at certain moments. This was an advantage in terms of thickness of description but it could also have resulted over-subjectivity in my own interpretations, had I not forced myself to be constantly aware of this during interpretation.

In the event, I am convinced that this kind of participative collaboration helped to uncover more of interest during the research than the voyeuristic strategies of the traditional, experimentalist “Deception Model” favoured by earlier research paradigms

could have done. While working as a research associate I had had direct experience of this, collecting data in an “underhand” way, from unsuspecting “subjects” who had been told we were researching “X” when we were actually examining something else.

The emphasis on collaboration again reflects my own socio-cultural and professional provenance – non-militant feminist, humanist, eclecticist, relativist, postmodernist – all important factors in determining my stance as a researcher and perhaps as unavoidable as my gender. The attributes of my gender, social history, professional trajectory, multicultural influences experienced and ideologies themselves have perhaps served to enrich the interpretations in some ways, too.

Thus, I tried to implement all data collection activities in a spirit of mutual respect and valuing, without coercion; all decisions regarding research techniques, strategies and interpretations were morally and ethically considered in depth, and in some cases discussed with the participants. As far as possible, the wider context of study, the specific context of the moment and the relationships existing with collaborators were taken into account and any emerging problems of an ethical nature were generally discussed and solved directly with collaborating informants themselves. I requested permission from participants to include quotations from their contributions and was also careful to show the collaborators what I meant to include, to enable them to check for veracity and accuracy in my interpretations of what they had intended to express or imply. Informants were encouraged to participate, to give their opinions, and at the same time, I kept my promise of anonymity to protect their interests, by changing all names, masking chronological sequence of posts and even changing gender where including it would have revealed the identity of the collaborator.

In this way, I hoped that the *emic* values (those of the observed) would combine with my own, *etic* values (those of the observer), and enrich mutual understanding through “contextualised and consequentialist study and interpretation of the data”. (See Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 21, for a full explanation of this term, based on “the four ethical principles of mutual respect, non-coercion and non-manipulation, the support of democratic values and institutions, and the belief that every research act implies moral and ethical decisions that are contextual”.)

An integrationist stance to the process seemed likely to increase the likelihood of access to deep action phenomena (psycho-cultural phenomena, micro-politics, informal orders), within the case study context (Holliday 1994: 129).

#### **4.9 An arduous trek, but the view was worth it: Summarizing the researcher's standpoint**

A study of literature on historical developments in philosophy, their impact on research paradigms and the applications in research in the social sciences has been crucial to the development of my own standpoint as a researcher. At the initial stages of this research project, I was still very much influenced by positivist and experimentalist tenets of the quantitative research tradition, assimilated during my MA studies (Chapter 4, Section 4.1.2, p. 69).

Subsequently, I have been influenced by writers on Action Research for Teaching English as a Foreign Language activities and contexts (e.g. Brown 1988; Nunan 1992). Stimulated by the urgent practical need to find relevant and useful research projects for teacher trainees in Mexico, I had begun to find out more about qualitative research paradigms and came to the conclusion that I wanted to plan and implement a piece of qualitative research for my PhD thesis.

I can now describe my standpoint in relation to this study as postmodernist, influenced by poststructuralist rather than structuralist and progressivist rather than positivist or postpositivist, naturalistic thought (Holliday 2002, 2006). I hoped to achieve an enhanced understanding of the “larger cultural, historical and organizational contexts within which the observations [of the research] are made” (Altheide and Johnson 1994: 489), by adopting such a standpoint.

I have already referred to the importance of understanding the relationships among the observer and the observed and the setting of the project. I have discussed issues related to points of view and perspective of the researcher and the volunteer participants in the research and how they may influence interpretations of data. I have tried to contextualize myself as a researcher, to speak directly to the reader, and show what I have read, what I have thought and what I have experienced in the process of the research project, as far as realistically possible.

My study has also been guided by a modified ethnographic approach, and I experimented with different techniques for data collection, analysis and interpretation along the way, as my understanding of underlying principles of research increased. I also implemented some research strategies and instruments focusing on quantitative aspects for the collection of certain types of data, but then went on to combine them with more

qualitative types of data, such as staff opinions, in order to provide an overall richer and thicker description.

In this chapter, I have summarized the main data collection activities and then shown in detail the *ideas and issues* that influenced the research process. This illustrated how my research *philosophy* developed and affected the types of data collection activities and my approach to interpretation. I included a brief discussion of ethical issues and how I dealt with them in this study. I concluded by summarizing my own position in relation to my work as a researcher (researcher's standpoint). The relationship between the evolution of my own research philosophy and methodology has been vital to my development as a researcher.

In Chapter 5, I will situate the case study in its wider context and describe the *practical aspects of the implementation* of the research procedures.

## Chapter 5

### Implementing the Research Procedures

*In this chapter, I will describe the wider setting in which the research context is embedded and include some information on the people who collaborated in the study. I will also provide a detailed catalogue of research activities and describe data collection experiences, relating the research strategies to ideas mentioned in Chapter 4. After this, I will explain how I began to perceive certain themes and categories and used these to lend structure and clarity to the data analysis process. I will then explain the systems of coding, referencing and anonymizing which I used to organize the data (Holliday, 2002).*

#### **5.1 Situating the research setting**

In Chapter 4, Section 4.1.2, p. 69 ff., I explained how I selected the case study at the multimedia language learning resource centre, or self-access centre (SAC), at one Mexican state university, following qualitative research *principles*. I also listed the various data collection activities, explained how the design of these activities reflected my developing research *philosophy* and gave a detailed account of the development of my standpoint as a researcher. In this section, I will situate the case study university more precisely within the wider context of higher education in Mexico before going on to describe the practical aspects of the research.

##### **5.1.1 The Wider Setting of Education in Mexico**

The concept of “autonomy” and its implications, not in relation to learning and teaching principles and practices, but rather in the sense of institutional self-government, are vital to the *ethos* of state universities in Mexico. Because of their legal status as autonomous entities, university authorities are, in theory, at liberty to reject development proposals both from their own Ministry of Education (SEP) as well as from any of the Ministry’s external advisers, such as the British Council. On the other hand, although each university enjoys the *legal* right to its own constitution and self-government, the federal government provides much of the funding for university activities. Such funding often depends upon the recommendations of the government’s own recently instated *Instituto Nacional de*



*Evaluación Educativa*, the function of which is to evaluate the overall performance of tertiary level, particularly including ways in which their internal policies reflect and consolidate the national government's own priorities. This has obvious implications.

Higher education did not become universally subject to central government until 1992 (Ornelas 1996). From this date on, the state began to progressively exercise more control of all levels of public education. In the year 2000, there was a major shift of power from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (which had been governing for over 70 years) to a new, Conservative administration. Since then, controversy and conflict among corporatist, neo-liberalist and social liberalist views of education has continued. The current discourse of the new government of Felipe Calderon (December 2006), however, strongly proposes a move towards a more decentralized system, and very much includes the encouragement of private finance initiatives in education. Further discussion continues surrounding unresolved issues such as the provision of appropriate bilingual education for minority ethnic groups, the status of the languages of indigenous groups, and the consolidation of national identity and values through the curriculum, and the complex issues related to globalization. In many of these respects, Mexico shares concerns with many other countries.

At primary and secondary school levels, there are national curricula and preferred methodologies for all subject areas. The National Secondary School Curriculum includes the prescription of Communicative Methodology for the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. Many language teachers, however, have not yet been properly trained in the communicative approach. In September 2006, a completely new national curriculum for secondary schools, based on principles drawn from constructivism and experiential learning, was introduced. It is much too early to be able to report on any results of this initiative, though the results may not be overwhelmingly positive if teachers are not properly trained in the principles and practices which underpin the reform.

### **5.1.2 The significance of the national SAC project in the Mexican educational context**

It is into this context of "autonomous" universities largely dependent on federal funding, developed very much according to policies determined by the state, that the National Self-access Project was introduced, in 1993.

The initiator of the SAC project was Dr. Victor Arredondo, the Director of Higher Education for Mexico at the time and currently Secretary of Education for the State of

Veracruz. Until this time, government and management styles at the state universities had traditionally been hierarchical and directors of faculties and teachers had generally been seen as figures of unquestionable authority in the eyes of the students. Students had been educated according to a traditional transmission model until the 1990's – and the SAC project, underpinned by a new philosophy of autonomous learning, constituted a very radical innovation to be implanted in this context, among teaching staff who had grown up and been trained in pre-1993 educational traditions (Grounds 2004).

The training in the new technologies for Higher Education language teaching staff and students and the creation of top-quality, hi-tech English language learning facilities throughout the country (Chapter 1, p. 16) was generally viewed as a good thing by university authorities, though anticipated with some trepidation by teachers, as I clearly recall. The justifications for the investment were various: globalization, the North American Free Trade Agreement and the possibility of increased professional and academic mobility across Canada, the USA and Mexico, steadily increasing numbers of undergraduate students due to demographic explosions and the developing ideology of inclusion, for example

Dr. Arredondo personally approached the British Council, Mexico, in his capacity of Director of Higher Education, requesting advice and training in the planning and implementation of a national SAC project, which had already been initiated by externally contracted consultants in three states. The magnitude of the mega-project (32 states) was attractive to the British Council, who saw it as an opportunity to bring the best of their training and materials to Mexico, in support of a Mexican government initiative, and a clear opportunity to improve relations between the governments through the exchange of academic experience and expertise, in the medium to long term.

Once funds had been approved and resources assessed and awarded, a national in-country project manager was needed. I was employed by the British Council in September 1993 and immediately seconded to the Ministry of Education, to plan and implement the setting up and running of the centres. The brief included identifying appropriate local and external trainers, planning and implementing training the trainers sessions where necessary, co-ordinating a series of national and state orientation and training activities for university authorities, administrators and teachers, over a period of four years. In fact, I also instigated the creation of a SAC project website and a bi-monthly printed bulletin together. I made numerous personal visits to centres as they developed, in order to lead discussion and self-

evaluation sessions on both academic and administrative project issues with Chancellors, Directors, co-ordinators and teachers.

Regular reporting for, and meetings with, the British Council and the SEP authorities were also a vital part of the project. Dr Victor Arredondo, Dr Huw Williams (British Council English Language Officer) and Ana Maria Aramayo (English Language Assistant) at that time all showed intense interest in the project and were always available for consultation and support in relation to key project decisions. Project assistants Renate Thummler and Maria Williams also both provided invaluable support. The Regional Trainers, Anita Niemeyer, Maria Cardeña, Toni de Silva, Jean Pender, Chris Morris, Simon Harris were vital to the project which required training and consultancy sessions at 34 universities in 33 different states. Their professional knowledge, in-country experience and outstanding delivery were unquestionably vital in the 4-year project implementation period.

It was an exciting and dynamic four years, which involved constant travelling the length and breadth of the country, regular communication with Mexican Ministry of Education and British Council authorities, daily contact with authorities and staff at the universities and BC trainers, both face-to-face, by telephone and fax. I had to adopt many different roles in the course of the work – administrator, teacher trainer, colleague, motivator, evaluator and sometimes confidante and friend, according to the different people, posts, roles and often critical moments at which interactions and transactions took place.

The original project goals were achieved and surpassed by the project as a whole, and in many individual states, according to my perceptions and more formal external evaluations. By the time of writing (July 2007), only one of the original centres has closed down, many have multiplied (the record is held by the Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon, where there is a SAC in each Faculty and sixth form college, making a grand total of 57 centres), and only very few have continued to exist without any noteworthy subsequent innovations.

### **5.1.3 The strangeness of the familiar**

The selection of the Mexican National Self-access Project had been an easy choice for the global setting of the research, because it was already familiar and I was confident that I would experience relatively easy access to informants and information. Attractive as I initially found the idea, I rejected the possibility of a collective case study (Stake 1994: 237) of the 32 participant institutions as not feasible, due to financial and other practical

constraints, not least: “The more settings studied, the less time can be spent in each” (Holliday, 2002: 42, citing Atkinson and Hammersley).

In Chapter 4, Section 4.1.2, p. 69, I gave a detailed account of the *thinking* behind my selection of the case study university, following Holliday’s (2002: 38) criteria. Any of the national project SACs would have provided a potentially rich context for research into the deeper nature of project sustainability. Each could perhaps have illustrated some common and generalizable truths and practices involved in the planning, implementation and operation of self-access centres at Mexican universities. By the same token, any single centre would probably have revealed interesting idiosyncratic data, and have constituted a useful individual intrinsic case study (Stake 1994: 237).

The brief description of the wider setting of education in Mexico in Section 5.1.1, p. 111, above, and the account of the selection of the precise setting for the case study on which this research is based (Chapter 4), show that the wider and specific contexts were already familiar to me. Over an extended period, I had acquired historical and contemporary knowledge derived from literature on education in Mexico, experiential knowledge gained through previous official and professional roles as a professional here and also as a British Council project manager and trainer, and more intimate knowledge of the feelings and perceptions expressed by Mexican SAC project staff, including “off-the-record” conversations.

Critical reflexivity regarding the aims of the research and the appropriate types of data collection activities (Chapter 4, 4.2.1, p. 76) with constant self-reminders that the aim of the research was not to ratify what I already “knew” about the SAC project, but to find appropriate ways of challenging, complementing and extending that previous knowledge became a key aspect of my methodological *practice*. This implied actively creating a new relationship with myself, in the new role of qualitative researcher, through the deconstruction and reconstruction of my past and habitual professional. Equally vital were my efforts to induce colleagues at the university to identify and collaborate with me, in this new role of enquirer.

Finally, I approached the *practice* of data collection with an open mind and learned to reflect, interpret and make new procedural decisions, on the basis of *what the data suggested*, never on what my previous knowledge and experience seemed to imply. One aspect of this new role was letting go of many of the numerous aspects of projects which I

found interesting as a professional and refining them into questions which could be effectively researched following qualitative research principles and practices.

## 5.2 Refining the research questions

In Chapter 2 I revealed various areas of my own professional interest in relation to project sustainability, including management styles and models, interactions among groups, surface and deep-cultural phenomena operating among and across groups, attitudes, the developing of enduring professional relationships, reactions to change, finance and policy. I have explained how these wide-ranging questions had been gradually reduced to the four research questions (first presented in Chapter 1, p. 21, and reproduced below, for the sake of convenience):

1. What is the deeper nature of sustainability?
2. How should sustainability be studied in order to develop our understanding of this phenomenon?
3. What are the factors that have made this case particularly interesting as an example of sustainability?
4. To what extent can insights derived from this study inform the profession and – contribute towards the design of future projects and/or further research into the nature of international project leaders?

The reduction of the scope of the study and the formulation and nature of these questions was vital in the development of my research *ethos*. The formulation of these questions helped me to radically reduce the degree of researcher-driven-ness by which the early research had been influenced and diametrically changed the focus from what *I wanted to know* to *what the data seemed to reveal* and affected the ways in which I went about collecting and handling data.

## 5.3 A voyage of discovery: implementing data collection activities

I started on this voyage of discovery with a rather general idea of the types of data which I thought would be:

- a) **Accessible**, in an opportunistic sense
- b) **Analysable**, in a practical sense
- c) **Generative of themes or concepts**, in an interpretative sense.

In my research proposal I had stated that I would:

- design and implement questionnaires focusing on (i) project management procedures and practices and (ii) communication strategies and results during the project period and after the withdrawal of the external consultants, with a specific focus on involvement in decision-making, adaptation or adoption of proposals made by external consultants.
- record and transcribe unstructured interviews with different categories of informants
- observe and document current procedures and practices for running the self-access centre.

The data collection activities which I *in fact* designed and implemented have been listed in Chapter 4, Section 4.1.3, p. 71, and the list is reproduced here, for the sake of convenience:

- i) Questionnaires focusing on *student* perceptions of the self-access centre itself.
- ii) Questionnaires focusing on *staff* perceptions of the self-access centre itself.
- iii) Recording and transcription of *unstructured* interviews with *administrative staff and authorities*.
- iv) Recording and transcription of *unstructured* interviews with *academic staff*.
- v) Recording, transcription and analysis of *structured* interviews with staff.
- vi) Physical description of the self-access centre from personal notes, sketches and photographs.
- vii) Observation of behaviours and interactions inside the SAC.
- viii) Collection of documents related to the development of the self-access centre during initial project and fully operational stages.
- ix) Documentation of exchanges during chance meetings.
- x) Summaries of opinions of colleagues from other universities, collected at conferences.
- xi) Focus group and ranking activity among SAC staff.
- xii) Semi-structured interviews with SAC users (students).

I spent far less time in the design and implementation of questionnaires than I had initially envisaged. This was due to the somewhat superficial nature of the data derived from my initial attempts with these. The decision to collect such a large number of different types of data had been rather ambitious, and I have explained how I had been influenced by the concepts of *triangulation*, making an initial assumption that it would be possible to identify certain “fixed points” or “objects” that could be triangulated, across the data sets (Janesick 1994: 214-215) and later by *crystallization* (Richardson 1994: 522). *Multiple sources* of

perceptions would comprise richer data and help me to deal more effectively with any ontological issues arising, such as possible contradictions among people's perceptions (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 99).

Although I had originally *planned* to gather very large numbers of individual informants' perceptions of the SAC project, through a wide range of data collection activity types (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 99), *in practice*, I drastically reduced the numbers of informants and data types, as I grew to appreciate the potential richness of each respective data set, and the possibilities for interpretation it might offer. In retrospect, this study is very much characterised by its experimentation with a wide range of data types, rather than concentrating on a larger number of samples of fewer types of data. Had I *not* experimented with so many different types, I believe I would not have learned so much about the potential richness of the information which can be derived from each of the different types of data.

The part-time nature of my research activities, and the always very limited time available, due to the pressures of new professional projects for the British Council and for my own development, meant that the process of data collection and analysis frequently had to be modified to accommodate the unexpected. For example, on one visit to the SAC, when I had planned to interview certain members of staff, I found that they were not available, due to an emergency meeting. To take advantage of the trip (which had implied two and a half hours driving each way), I took advantage of the visit to make drawings and write descriptions for the physical description, instead.

Another example of adaptation to circumstance, or opportunism, was my decision to interview staff from other universities who had set up SACs in their own universities, at self-access conferences, in the interests of making possible *generalisations*. Although this meant that I would not be able to talk to these people in the context of their own SACs, it was more practical than attempting to visit individual SACs all over the country, which would have been very expensive and time-consuming. This decision allowed me to talk to several people on the same day and in the same place, saving considerable time and expense. I am nonetheless aware that if I had been with the informants in their own contexts, the nature of the data would probably have been more detailed data and richer.

At all times, however, I aimed to be flexible and open to opportunity, because it would not always be possible to carry out activities precisely as I originally planned. In this sense,

the study was certainly opportunistic. I was, I now see, sometimes unrealistic and over-ambitious about how much data it was desirable to collect, too.

In much the same way as the actual collection of data had to be flexible, the arrangement, reduction and interpretation of data from the case also required a flexible approach, which I developed after several attempts.

I had initially planned to collect data by following a linear planning model: first, the questionnaires, then the unstructured interviews, then the physical description, etc. I did not, at first, begin to analyse each type of data as soon as I collected it, for more than one reason. Lack of experience with this type of research led me to think that it would be best to “analyse all the data once I had collected it all”, in order to cross-reference simultaneously. I was thus following Huberman and Miles’ (1994: 429) suggested sequence (collection, display, reduction and conclusion drawing and verification) but rather too literally. Fortunately, as the data collection activities progressed, together with study of theory, I learned as part of the research process, that in qualitative study, including ethno-methodological attributes, it is actually more appropriate to analyse each type of data *as it is being collected*. This is because the analysis of one data set can often suggest where further data might best be sought. Adhering unswervingly to a strictly linear plan could blind any researcher to possible new lines and/or methods of enquiry which may emerge as part of the process, and thereby impoverishing the research experience and the research findings. In the next sub-section, I will describe, as faithfully as possible, how I actually implemented each of the data collection activities.

### **5.3.1 Designing a questionnaire for SAC students**

First of all, I reflected that very tightly controlled, closed answer questionnaires would limit the richness of the data, perhaps precluding the possibility of the emergence of unexpected phenomena. I also felt it was also important to find a way to involve my future informants in the study, in such a way that they would feel that they could share the role of researcher and benefit directly from at least some of the findings.

It was for this reason that I first designed what was intended to be a detailed, “multi-purpose” questionnaire for language students who used the SAC. The document consisted of 33 questions, most of which were dichotomous, though all included the added option of open answers (Appendix 2, p.305-310). At this early stage of the research, it is also true that I had not fully grasped that: “material traces of behaviour give an important and



different insight from that provided by any number of questionnaires” (Hodder 1994: 394), but was still rather under the impression that having a large *quantity* of opinions would be a key factor, as a result of previous experience of quantitative research described in Chapter 3, where I explained how at the beginning of the PhD process I readily espoused new beliefs – but often continued to *operate* unconsciously according to previously learned and experienced positivistic theory and practice.

Once at the university, I had a meeting with a group of willing SAC staff and teachers who seemed interested in administering the questionnaire with their students and getting involved in research. This would, I hoped, both enable and encourage research more generally within the SAC, and also help teachers, SAC staff and students to feel relaxed about the idea of having a researcher coming to visit and collect data in their “territory”. I also hoped that they would really be able to use the results of the questionnaire to inform the decision making processes and all activities in the SAC, before forwarding the answered scripts to me, for my own purposes. It seemed, on the face of things, to be a good way of initiating collaborative and participatory research.

During the event, 54 students answered the questionnaires, but the questionnaires proved to have been far too long and complex to engage students’ attention. Many questionnaires were left incomplete and few volunteered useful comments or suggestions in the spaces provided for their contributions. However, the exercise itself was useful because it yielded concrete information on the:

- a) Length and type of questions appropriate for undergraduates who use the SAC.
- b) Types of information likely to be obtained from this type of instrument.
- c) Ways in which students’ perceptions about the SAC revealed in these questionnaires could later be related to the perceptions of staff revealed in similar questionnaires, and researchers’ perceptions derived from the analysis of physical description of the SAC, observations of behaviour and other types of data.
- d) How to design a more manageable questionnaire for students (Appendix 3, p. 303-305, amended questionnaire for students).

I completed this activity by coding the scripts (see coding system, 5.6.1.1, p. 141); then I made a table of results and attempted a minimal interpretation, which will be referred to in following chapters.

### 5.3.2 Designing a questionnaire for English teaching staff

The results of the first staff questionnaire were similar to those described in 5.3.1. One classroom teacher and nine SAC counsellors or tutors, from different language areas, volunteered to answer. Some questions had not been designed in such a way as to elicit the types of information sought: the meanings were not always as obvious to the respondent as to the writer!

The answers of one older teacher, known among the staff for his negative attitude towards the idea of self-access learning, were aggressive. He wrote that he knew nothing about the SAC, had no wish too, and, at first reading, it seemed he had used the questionnaire simply as an instrument to express his anger, missing an opportunity to express constructive criticism and make concrete suggestions. On reflection, it may well have been that he was using his anger as a face-saving instrument, possibly to hide the fact that a professional weakness had been revealed by the instrument, since he was simply not *able* to answer many of the questions. This response was important, because, although very much in the minority, it did show that self-access learning principles and practices had still not been taken on board unanimously by the time of the study. Nonetheless, other factors had enabled the SAC to endure.

The exercise confirmed again the suspicion that questionnaires alone cannot really render rich information of a qualitative type and are rarely helpful in revealing deeper level phenomena.

Because of this, I decided not to ask teachers and SAC staff to answer any more written questionnaires, but began to organize face-to-face interviews instead. I wanted to be able to clarify my understanding of what participants were implying, to probe further, deal immediately with any unexpected reactions or opinions during the interactions. This simply cannot be achieved by applying an anonymous questionnaire. I thus saw my conclusions regarding the usefulness of questionnaires as positive outcomes, and even adapted some of the items from the questionnaire to form the basis of eight questions for SAC academic staff and other teachers, to be used in subsequent interviews.

- What did you find most difficult at the beginning of the SAC project?
- How far did people (authorities, staff and students) accept the SAC at the beginning? What are the reasons for this, in your opinion?
- What did the British Council advisers contribute to your SAC project, in your opinion?

- How far has the SAC been accepted by the Faculty and the rest of the university by August 2002? What are the reasons for this, in your opinion?
- What kinds of problems and solutions did you have while implementing the project?
- Do staff and students like the building? Why?
- Do staff and students like the services that are offered by the SAC? Why?
- In your opinion, has the SAC project been successful? Why?

While analyzing the data from the staff and student questionnaires, I realised that these too could have resulted in much richer data, if I had gone back to the SAC and talked to the participants immediately. This would have allowed me to share and confirm my own interpretations with them, and to ask for further explanation and exemplification. By the time I began the analysis, however, many of the staff and students had changed. The first option was no longer feasible, but I opted for the alternative of returning to talk to participants with *similar* profiles, rather than following up with the *same* individuals. This idea was implemented much later on, when I was able to go back to the SAC and interview several students, at random (Section 5.3.11, p. 130).

This option allowed me to involve a greater number of participants in the study, though the obvious disadvantage was that their opinions may not have been the same as those of the original group would have been, creating a potential validity issue. However, given that even the *same* participants might have given *different answers* once some time had elapsed after filling in the questionnaires, I concluded that it was justifiable to interview students with similar profiles since the original respondents were no longer accessible.

### **5.3.3 Transforming a questionnaire into the basis of structured interviews**

As a direct result of the experience with the initial questionnaires for students and academic staff, I opted to plan and implement a set of recorded interviews, rather than questionnaires, with middle and upper management. Initially, I had intended all such interviews to be unstructured. However, after the results of my first set of unstructured interviews yielded such sparse information on what might have contributed to the sustainability of the SAC project, it seemed advisable to write some guiding questions. These consisted of ten focus statements, and included some of the ideas concerning conditions for sustainability I had recorded from the literature survey (see Chapter 3), and my own experience. The categories I included were:

- Financial support for the project had been available
- English language was and still figures among the major national policies of the Mexican Ministry of Education
- English language was and continues to be a major internal policy issue for the case study university
- The quality of training/consultancy
- The administrative systems of the university/Faculty/SAC are good
- The external consultants knew the context and university's needs well
- The SAC has been integrated systematically into the curriculum of university community
- The students like studying English in the SAC
- The objectives of the SAC are in line with the culture and educational philosophy of the faculty and university
- By means of the SAC, a valuable new learning culture has been created at the case study university

The volunteers were asked to complete the questionnaire before the interview and to rank each item according to whether they considered it to be “very important”, “important”, “not very important” or “irrelevant” in relation to their self-access centre project. They were also asked to consider any other factors they considered to have been important in the life of the SAC project and to report on them during the interview.

In 2002, having previously forwarded the questions by email, I implemented interviews with “Alice”, one of the series of SAC co-ordinators from 1994 to the present, and with “Luisa”, the then Director of Faculty and “Evelina”, the co-ordinator of a new SAC-to-be at another campus of the university.

These interviews turned out to be much more useful. The informants' received me warmly as always, and we met privately in the respective offices of the interviewees. The interviews were quite focused on the general area of research by the guiding questions, though not so tightly that interviewees were forced into a rigid formula. The results were certainly richer than those of the questionnaires, and also more focused and directly relevant than those collected during unstructured interviews. It was a useful combination of techniques, since there was time for interviewees to expand on answers and to add their comments on their own experiences and opinions, during the interviews, to be kept “on” or “off the record”, as they themselves preferred. The fact that the ranking activity was followed up by a live discussion allowed freedom of expression and yielded a great deal of relevant data.

### **5.3.4 Experimenting with unstructured interviews**

I conducted unstructured interviews with a total of four key staff. I always used a private space for interviews, in the case of directors and co-ordinators, the venue would be their own offices. For support staff I used either the small, comfortable sound-proofed office, normally used by technical support staff, but freely accessible to all staff, or a corner of the large screen video room, if not being used by students. It proved to be appropriate to hold these conversations in private, as some delicate points came up, which may not have been convenient to air publicly. I had promised all research participants that I would preserve their anonymity, but the fact that they expressed both positive and negative views about their own colleagues to me suggests that what they said to me was sincere (even if situated at a specific moment in time and space, and all that this implies). The fact that interviewees felt able to express criticism and complaints seemed to show that they trusted my discretion.

At the beginning of each interview, we would first chat informally, and this provided an opportunity to check what the interviewees remembered anything about my research project from the initial orientation meeting and the student and staff questionnaires, and also to intuit whether they really felt comfortable about being interviewed.

On most occasions, it then felt right to proceed, though during one interview with a member of the support staff, the atmosphere was initially rather tense. I soon realized that this was because she had been controlling her emotions because she needed to talk about a specific work situation, which had been bothering her. As soon as she felt able to do this, the conversation flowed. I would always ask each individual's permission to record them, citing the need to collect complete data and also to support my aging memory. (This always provoked a smile!) I also promised complete anonymity, through changing the identities of the interviewees, and made the commitment to show them the transcripts of the interviews and to email any quotations I might later decide to include in the research report, for their approval.

I made sure that everyone was also aware that I had also promised the university access to the final report, since the director had expressed a particular interest in reading it. This made me particularly conscientious about concealing the identities of individual participants, to protect their integrity. Since staff are preponderantly female, and since there had been only one male co-ordinator during the entire history of the project, I chose to conceal his identity through a change of gender, since quotes attributed to a male name, would have been immediately recognizable as his. I was of course aware of possible gender

issues which could affect the quality of the data, but I also felt that these could be bracketed in the case of a single subject in a much larger group. The fact that the majority of informants were female also truly reflects the situation among language teaching staff in Mexican universities, since only about 20% are male at the present time.

The first experiment with unstructured interviewing in Spanish, the informant's mother tongue, led to the production of a very long transcript, which I meticulously translated, word for word. A great deal of what was said seemed to be incidental and did not really help to answer the research questions as I had hoped. The process of transcribing the interview was useful, because it allowed me to develop my own coding system, which I will exemplify later in this chapter.

I then adapted my plan for data collection and began to use structured interviews as well as unstructured interviews. This was mainly because I found that some informants seemed to be at a loss for words, when I asked completely open questions. This echoed my previous experience with open questions in the two initial questionnaires. Perhaps the spaces had been left blank because respondents had simply been at a loss with regard to what to say. Also, they had perhaps not been as enthusiastic about the issues as I myself had been.

Since I often had to use "back-up questions", to encourage colleagues to expand their answers, I decided always to have list of questions at hand, and switch to more structured interviewing, if this seemed more comfortable for the interviewee and productive for me, in terms of data. This may not be considered best standard practice, but I found this hybrid approach to be the most effective strategy with my informants in Mexico.

### **5.3.5 Perceiving a kaleidoscope of new meanings: describing the self-access centre**

I decided to scrutinize and describe the SAC building in detail because it could be considered the major artefact of the project. The distinctive features of the building might in some way reveal something of the university's values, ideologies, philosophies, policies and its attitudes toward the project itself in the way artefacts have been used to exemplify such aspects in countless anthropological studies in the past. Following this line of thought, they might perhaps project the kind of atmosphere the institution aimed to evoke around the SAC building and the activities to be implemented there. The choice and arrangement of objects in the interior might project something of the attitudes of the staff. Ideas concerning the importance of need to protecting values and traditions when implementing

projects in new contexts, and the importance of matching the cultural context and educational needs in the project environment went through my mind, as I sketched, took photographs and made detailed notes on different visits. On one of these visits, I was accompanied by my supervisor, and his reactions were particularly inspiring, confirming some of the perceptions which I had not wanted to convey to him before seeing his spontaneous reaction to the unusual SAC building.

The differences between the innovative SAC building and the other, standard, rectangular brick classroom buildings was enormous, and seemed to make tangible a strong will to innovate and create a new learning context for a new learning philosophy on the part of the university authorities. The deeper nature of these observations will be taken up and extended in Chapter 6.

I included sketches and photographs in my description, in the manner of documentary Visual Sociology (Harper 1994: 405). My aim in this case, however, was not to expose social *problems*, but rather to use a technique derived from sociological research practices to illustrate possible congruence or contradictions between policy and concrete manifestation of that policy, as expressed by the authorities.

I should note that I had previously requested permission to take photographs of the building from the self-access centre co-ordinator, and, in order not to be intrusive, I took most of the photographs during student vacations. I did not ask any people to be part of photographs, as I question the validity of posed photographs. These may say more about what subjects *would like* researchers to interpret, or perhaps worse, what they think *researchers would like to register*, about the context than what the context is really like for those who normally inhabit it. The situated reality must be wider and deeper than that of the moment when the photo is posed. In general, I share Holliday's (2006) view that "photographs and drawings do not unambiguously and transparently record reality", when they record people posing. Even if the researcher can "bracket" her normal view of the world while examining photographic data, and cultivate the highest possible degree of critical awareness and reflexivity, the researcher cannot arrive at all possible interpretations, though this is equally true of the interpretation of any type of data, as already discussed.

The full description, including photographs and sketches, was derived from notes and drawings made during three, day-long, visits to the centre, and data was coded, as will be shown below.

### 5.3.6 Observing behaviours and interactions inside the SAC

I also decided to observe behaviours of staff and users in the SAC. These visits were usually prearranged for practical reasons. Since each visit meant a long drive, I did not want to arrive and find the SAC closed for a university event or official holiday! There are disadvantages to making appointments for visits, but I was careful not to specify *exact* times of my arrival and departure, and usually also said it would be on one of two or three different days (using the demands of my regular employment to justify the need for flexibility). I thought this would considerably lessen any chance of the SAC being “set up” with people, as I have heard of such cases. I wanted to observe the activities which are carried out in the SAC on an average working day, feel the atmosphere in the SAC and the attitudes of the people, as they interacted. There might, I felt, be some relationship between these and the apparent success of the innovation.

Since colleagues had told me, on previous visits, that the SAC was often quite full on a Saturday morning, this seemed to be a good option for an observation visit, especially as it would not interfere with my own regular work commitments, being at the weekend.

I had always been careful to stress that there was no need for any special arrangements or attention during such visits, since I simply planned to sit in the different areas of the SAC for a while, observe what was happening and take notes. I particularly remember one Saturday morning, when I was feeling quite relaxed myself. I drove down to the university, dressed casually but neatly in slacks and a shirt and wearing no make up. (When visiting universities on official business, I dress more formally, in tailored suits, and wear a little make up, as is culturally appropriate among female professionals in Mexico. I note the difference in dress code, because it was a concrete expression of my own perception of the change in my role, when visiting the university as a researcher, not a consultant.)

I had decided, in principle, not to talk directly to any students on this occasion, but to try and be a “fly on the wall”. On arrival, I greeted staff and checked that they were comfortable about my visit. If any student were to approach me, I planned to tell the truth, and say I was visiting the SAC, observing and making notes of what people do there, for my PhD studies. I was aware that during observation activities, as in all other data collection and interpretation activities, my own self would be present at all stages of the enquiry. However, since

“it is precisely the individual qualities of the human inquiry that are valued as indispensable to meaning construction” (Greene 1994: 539).



I felt that it was going to be a very useful exercise. The way in which I coded the data from such visits will be explained below (5.6.1.5, p. 143) and interpretations will be included in later chapters.

### **5.3.7 The eloquence of the written word: collecting and scrutinizing project documents**

The collection of project documents became an on-going activity and the collection swelled gradually, mainly during the first two years of the research. I managed to gather fax correspondence, including circulars, from various authorities and members of staff involved in the project. I also collected more official project documents from the Mexican Ministry of Education, the British Council, and from internal co-ordinators of the SAC project at the case study university. These were useful in recalling the original aims, progress made from year to year and major events in the life of the project. These documents are not attached in appendices, as most would have to be individually scanned and many are faxes, which have become somewhat faded and hard to read. They are available for scrutiny on demand.

I scrutinized each document, looking first for new categories of information related to language used (English or Spanish), degrees of formality and informality, evidence of the existence of hierarchies, and then looking for the categories which had emerged in other types of data. I now see that the data would have been much richer if I could have arranged a number of meetings with staff to look at documents together, and share interpretations but practical constraints precluded this option. I classified and coded the documents as will be shown below, and made my own interpretations of the content and modes of the documents. The idea of involving project participants themselves in the interpretation of documents as part of the research is suggested for future research projects.

The following list summarizes the types and numbers of documents to which I acquired access, and is interesting as it characterizes the different genres which can become vehicles for communication during a project of this nature:

- Original trilateral agreement, 1993
- 25 letters/faxes 1994
- 8 letters/faxes 1995
- 19 letters/faxes 1996
- 18 letters/faxes 1997
- 5 letters/faxes from 1998 (after end of project)
- Strategic plan 1995-1996

- Strategic plan 1996-1997
- Strategic plan 1998
- BC annual progress report 1993-1994
- BC progress report 1994-1995
- Progress report 1996

The coding system I used is presented in 5.6.1.7, below.

### **5.3.8 Is there such a thing as co-incidence? Taking advantage of chance meetings**

At a major English Language Teaching event in the north of Mexico in July 2002, I was able to take note of opportunistic exchanges which took place with “Carola”, SAC co-ordinator from another university which participated in the Mexican National SAC Project and “Glenna”, Faculty Director during the same period.

As part of general conversation, I asked both individually what they felt were the main reasons for the survival and improvement of the SAC at their own university (N.B. Not the case study university). Once they had agreed to give me their opinions, I asked if they would have any objection to my using their views as part of my research project, promising anonymity. They agreed, and I duly recorded, transcribed and reduced their opinions to a number of key points.

I did this because I felt it was highly relevant to find out more about views regarding the national project of people from other universities, apart from the case study university. It would be interesting to look for coincidences and contradictions. Once I had finished recording, I double-checked carefully that Carola and Glenna were in agreement with my using their views to verify perceptions which had emerged in other research activities, and promised to send them transcripts of our exchanges by email for their approval. Coding conventions developed for these meetings are shown in 5.6.1.8, p. 145.

### **5.3.9 How was it for you? Gathering opinions of colleagues from other universities**

Two major SAC events were held in August and September 2003. The first was the biennial SAC forum held at the Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla (later coded as PEV). Here, a total of 20 informants, all of whom had had four years or more experience of working in a SAC, agreed to answer this open question, in Spanish:

“In your personal opinion, what are the elements which have most contributed to the fact that your SAC has endured as a learning resource until the present time?”

The second event was the annual SAC conference for Mexican universities, held on this occasion at the Universidad Autonoma de San Luis Potosi (later coded as SLPEV), UASLP, September 2003. On this occasion, 13 informants answered the same question. On both occasions, I told informants that I was looking into what had contributed to the long and developing lives of the SACs, and I asked them for permission to use their responses in my research report, as evidence of data collected for verification activities. I was always careful to emphasize that their anonymity would be respected. I carefully noted, reduced and coded these, for the purposes of interpretation, as will be shown in 5.6.1.9, p. 146.

#### **5.3.10 Ranking categories for sustainability with SAC colleagues**

This activity, originally conceived as a further attempt at verification of some of my conclusions and at the same time as further input to a possible “Index for sustainability”, after Booth and Black-Hawkins, 2001, was implemented at the case study university faculty in February 2004.

First of all, I told the five participants (all of whom had participated in other data-collection activities and were familiar with my general area of interest), about the kinds of categories that had emerged from the different kinds of data. I then asked them to rank these categories, from 1 to 5, in order of importance, according to their own opinions, for the success of a project. A score of 5 represented “Extremely important” and 1 represented “Of little importance”.

I first coded each script, and then averaged the totals, because I was curious to see whether overall figures for each category might reveal something about the relative importance of each category to the group as a whole. Since the categories themselves had been the result of extensive qualitative research activities, I felt confident of their validity, and felt this last activity helped me to rank and prioritize the importance of each one for future purposes. Coding is detailed in 5.6.1.10, p. 147.

#### **5.3.11 So what do the students think? A final verification activity**

The final verification activity consisted of six semi-structured interviews, carried out in February 2004, aiming to at find out more about students’ opinions of the SAC and their ideas on what had made it last. I viewed this as a verification activity, which might help me to ratify findings from the original student questionnaires as well as perhaps those derived from other data.

I approached students at random, in different areas of the SAC and addressed them in Spanish. It was easiest to approach people in the reading section, where one did not have to interrupt and ask them to remove headphones, as in the audio-visual study areas.

In each case, I first told the student that I was myself a postgraduate student at a UK university, studying what happens in a SAC as part of my research. I then asked her/him if she/he would be willing to talk to me about her/his own experience and use her/his account as part of my research, promising complete anonymity.

All the students agreed to participate, and each gave me their name (which I subsequently changed, respecting their anonymity, as with all informants, though not changing gender as there was a good mix), and their foreign language level. I then asked them these questions, in Spanish, allowing sufficient time for students to expand each answer, if they wished.

- How has the SAC affected the way you study a foreign language?
- What do you do in the SAC?
- How do you feel in the SAC?
- Why do you think the SAC has endured?
- Would you like to make any suggestions for improving the SAC?

As students spoke, I made notes of their responses in my notebook, later summarized and categorized points, looking for concurrences with what had emerged in other data but at the same time trying to be alert to possible new insights. Coding conventions used for these interviews are detailed in 5.6.1.11, p. 148.

In sum, twelve types of data collection activities were implemented in this study, and these have been briefly listed in Chapter 4, section 4.1.3, p. 71. A more complete catalogue of data collection activities, including the dates when they were implemented, is attached (Appendix 4, pp. 314-317). In section 5.4, I will provide further information about the people who participated in the data collection activities and also motivated me, through their enthusiastic collaboration.

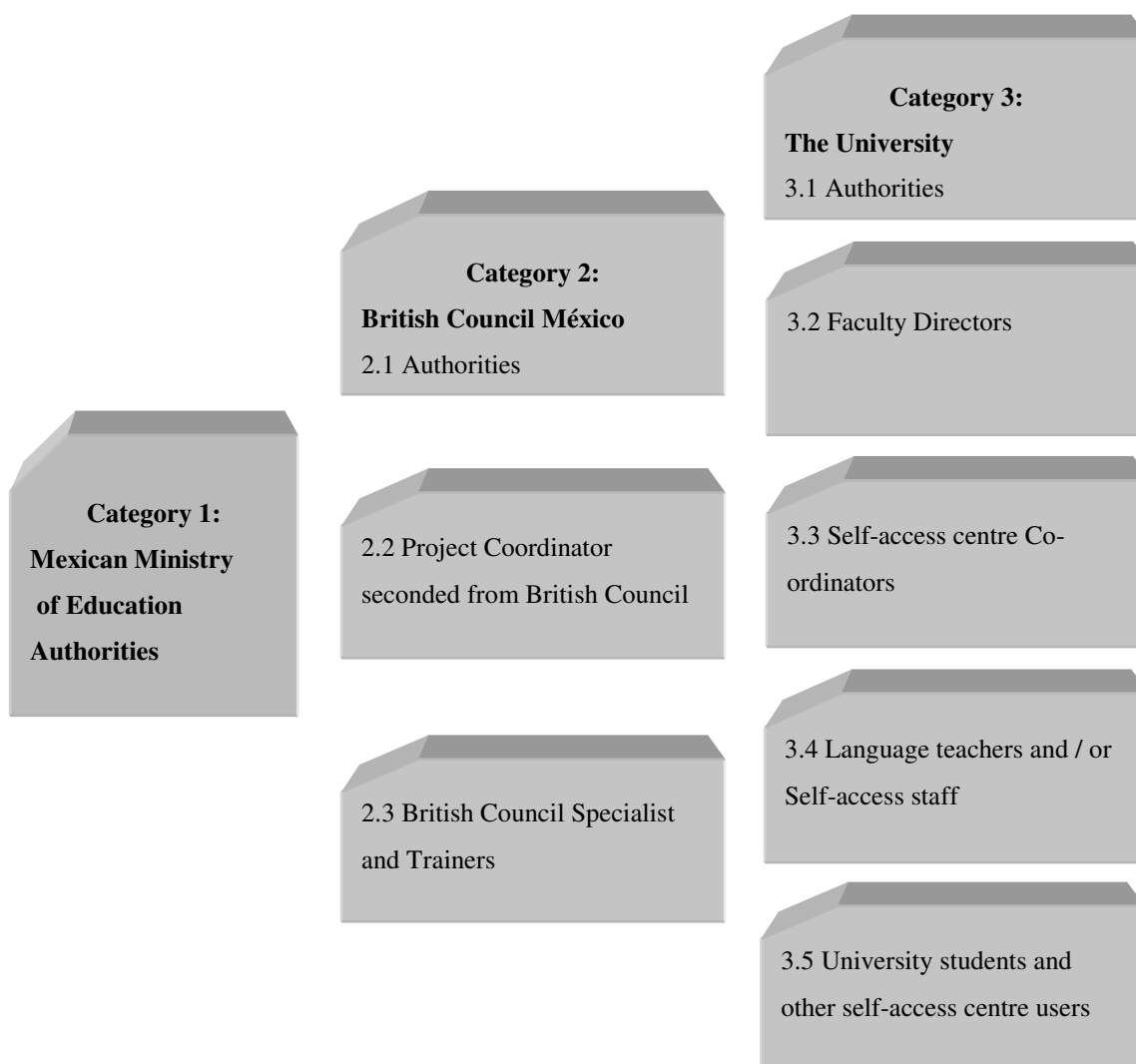
#### **5.4 Who's who? The process of selecting informants**

In the project proposal, I had stated that the informants would be:

- project managers appointed by the respective collaborating organisations
- external consultants and trainers
- internal operative staff, including self-access centres counsellors

The potential groups, from which these might have been drawn, can be better visualised in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Potential groups of participants for data collection activities**



Although the groups included in the diagram provided me with a point of departure for planning the research, when I adapted this plan during implementation due to scope and scale, availability and access. It was much more practical to focus mainly on informants who were all physically based at the case study institution, though working at different institutional levels.

However, physical location was not everything. I was also interested in working with representatives of the different segments, who had had direct contact with the case study project, and often unbroken contact with the development of the project over the years. Since external consultants and trainers would only have been able to provide information on their activities during the first four years of the project, their vision would have been limited by this fact. Thus, the informant groups finally consisted of:

- Authorities at the case study university
- Academic and support staff at the case study university

- SAC users (students) at the case study university
- Authorities and academic staff who had worked on the *same* project at *different* universities

I spent most of my time with the current and former Faculty directors, SAC co-ordinators and current staff and language learners at the case study site. The Directors had been the implementers of university funding policies. The SAC co-ordinators and staff had been most deeply involved in and affected by the innovations implied by the planning, installation and day-to-day operation of the self-access centre, which had had a strong and lasting impact on their working lives. It was also important to talk to students about their perceptions of their language learning resource centre. Their daily learning activities had also been radically affected by the inclusion of SAC activities into the wider language curriculum as a course requirement, and their response, through attendance or otherwise, could be a key indicator of the real success of the project at this university.

These groups, however, again comprised quite large numbers of individuals, and I therefore further reduced the scope, by selecting sample groups, which would enable me to collect sufficient data to perhaps allow some generalizations regarding shared perceptions, as well as to draw specific conclusions from individual contributions.

Selections were made very simply by asking for volunteers from each of the respective groups and by directly approaching the current and previous Faculty Directors. A possible disadvantage to working with volunteers is that they may tend to be positively disposed to the subject about which they have volunteered to talk. In the early stages of data collection, I tried to overcome this by being somewhat vague about my purposes, telling informants I was generally “looking at what is happening in self-access centres”. However, as already reported in relation to the ways in which I changed tactics, according to what happened during the research implementation process, I failed to gather much information on the specific area of interest of the study through this approach and subsequently opted to use guiding questions during interviews, after the initial experiments with questionnaires and unstructured interviews.

Nonetheless, I concluded that it was better to work with volunteer informants (though, incidentally, one director offered to oblige teachers to help!) since having the authorities oblige people to participate could equally have resulted in unreliable data. Under such circumstances, people might also over-react, either answering anything at all to “get the thing over with”, or answering whatever they think the researcher and/or authorities want

to hear, to please the authorities. Answers could also become exaggeratedly negative, through resentment at being obliged to participate in an activity of no intrinsic interest or advantage for the participants.

At the same time as remaining alert to the potential problems of employing volunteer participants, I also tried to apply my own foreknowledge of the project, the context and the professional roles of individuals in collecting and interacting with the data in positive ways. Part of my interpretation task was thus to try to discriminate between “official views” and personal views, and show how both could present different types of “realities”, which all together comprised the context of the project.

## **5.5 A rose by any other name... Themes and headings for the structuring of the analysis**

In the following paragraphs, I will show how the themes and headings for the structuring of the analysis arose through in depth interaction and repeated dialoguing with the data.

### **5.5.1 Conditions, criteria and categories derived from the literature**

I have already reported on my survey of existing literature on development projects in general and also more specifically on English language teaching projects, which aimed to learn more about other people’s perceptions of the deeper nature of project sustainability. I discussed, summarized and tabulated some experts’ views, in Chapter 3. This exercise was very important as a point of departure, and an attempt to establish a shared conceptualization of what the term is generally considered to denote, and the apparent shortcomings of some existing definitions.

The activity resulted in a neat table of concepts, keywords and categories, which would be familiar to researchers across a number of disciplines, and I had also thought it might help me to focus, when approaching my own data. At the same time, however, I hoped that new concepts would emerge to complement, enrich and possibly even replace some of the findings of the literature survey. Thus, my research would build upon and complement current views of sustainability, provide some new insights and push forward the boundaries of knowledge in relation to the deeper nature of project sustainability, and how best to implement research in this area. The next section will report on what happened, in practice.

### 5.5.2 New perceptions emerging from new data

My on-going dialogue with the data and reflexive dialogue with myself in the role of interpreter yielded some interesting results. I was conscientious in my effort to remain ever aware of the complexity of the hermeneutics of the situation (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2, p. 77; Section 4.2.3, p. 78; Section 4.3.3, p. 84). I constantly checked with myself, and whenever possible with informants, that I was not forcing elements in my data to fit neatly into conditions, criteria and categories derived from other researchers' work and my own experience (a silk purse?), and equally not being over-subjective in creating large numbers of attractive-sounding new ones, for the sake of originality (a sow's ear, perhaps?).

As I proceeded with the analysis and interpretation of the different types of data, I found that, not surprisingly, my attempted summary of concepts and categories (Appendix 1, pp. 302-304) though having been useful as a point of departure, was in some ways very inappropriate because, the contents could never account for all that I was seeing in this new context, nor allow the new data to properly "speak for itself". Predictably, my own data did not evidence all that I had included in the summary of other people's views. In the interests of transparency, I continue to consider it important to include this first step towards the conceptualization of sustainability, as illustrative of a stage in the development of my study. My data, in fact, suggested new ways of arranging some of the categories used by other experts with new elements, and apparent new interrelationships and connections began to emerge naturally. This was achieved in the following ways.

After reducing and coding the data, I repeatedly scrutinized the different sets. I first attempted to identify individual concepts and categories by means of a key word/phrase search (see Appendix 6, pp. 325-329 for a summary of the results). This exercise told me about the *frequency* of occurrences across the data sets, but it was not in any way *explanatory* and did not effectively describe the relationships which might exist between and among the concepts and categories identified.

I revisited the original list of themes and categories on numerous occasions, attempting to discern possible super-ordinate and subordinate categories by means of a series of different grouping activities. These included making new lists of possibly related themes, drawing mind maps and tree diagrams, as part of the continuous process of searching for patterns. Gradually, this process of detailed analysis and critical reflexivity led me to perceive that the elements were apparently not related in terms of super-ordinate and subordinate categories, or in terms of cause and effect.

I thus began to group these phenomena and produce new lists, as documented in Appendix 7 (pp. 330-334). This table, 'Collation of interconnected categories and where they



emerged in the data', summarizes related concepts and categories, as I began to perceive them, in the context of the new study. These lists, however, were not sufficiently satisfying since they did not express the ways in which the various phenomena seemed to me to *cluster around* "larger" concepts or themes. I needed to find a better way to explain this.

I then identified and named the more inclusive, global concepts, around which the larger categories seemed to cluster. Repeated study of the data and self-questioning led me to certain conclusions concerning the nature of the respective interrelationships, which continued to appear much more complex than those of direct causality or simple linearity. Once perceived, it was a challenge to find a means of describing what seemed to be a dynamic process of interconnectivity among groups of phenomena which clustered around nuclear themes in a relationship something akin to that of the continual and dynamic formation of a crystal. Chapter 9 includes a more detailed explanation of this and Figures 5 – 8 on pp. 272 – 276 are simple graphic representations of what I seemed to have discovered. Each step of this analytical process was vital and informative and demonstrates not only how new categories can emerge from the data, as suggested by principles and practices of qualitative research, but also how already familiar categories can occur in new relationships, "tessellations", or some other kind of interrelation.

Though not without complexities and overlaps themselves, the two global concepts around which the larger categories appeared to me to cluster were: *Affect* and *Administration*. These exist below the surface, at the heart of all other elements (categories and sub-categories) related to either what I then decided to call the *Affective Environment* (emotional reactions, feelings, beliefs and points of view) or *Administrative environment* (related to administrative, organizational and operational issues) aspects. These terms seem appropriate, because any kind of development project, in any context, will inevitably upset the existing "ecological chains" in both of these *environments* in some ways and require an adaptation of activities and roles by all who customarily operate and interact within them.

The image of "crystals" gradually forming and expanding as their constituent parts (related categories and sub-categories) cluster around the global concepts of *Affect* and *Administration*, was the best way I could find to represent the evolutionary nature of what I began to see. A new kind of "wholeness in continual expansion" (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5, p. 93, where this image is used to illustrate the nature of researcher experience) seemed to emerge. This image seemed to incorporate the continuously evolving nature of sustainability in this project, and account for the complexity of connections and overlaps, in a way that two-dimensional tables and lists cannot. However, conventional lists and

tables remain useful as first steps towards this new kind of conceptualization of social phenomena.

To illustrate the steps of the process of analysis, Table 1 summarizes and defines the *global* themes or concepts, and the *categories* which seemed to be interrelated with each of the concepts or themes, in conventional tabular form.

**Table 1: Global concepts and categories for dynamic durability emerging from the data**

<b>Global Concepts</b>	<b>Global Categories</b>	<b>Definition in this context</b>
1. Affect	1.1 Atmosphere	The ethos projected by the actions of institutions, groups and individual participants of a project and/or a project product
	1.2 Attitude	The ways in which project institutions, groups and individual participants express themselves regarding the project, or project product
	1.3 Training	The ways in which institutions, groups and individual participants are trained to plan and implement the project
2. Administration	2.1 Policy	The ways in which the project relates to governmental, institutional and/or departmental policies
	2.2 Management	Management aims, vision, strategies, tactics for planning and implementation of the project
	2.3 Finance	Resources available for start up and continuation of project activities

More than one conceptually complex area presented a challenge to interpretation and required problematization. Different kinds of *Training* form an integral part of the preparation, planning and implementation of a project. *Training* may address issues related to changing motivational and psychological factors, philosophical beliefs and theory and practice (methodology), as well as strategic planning, project management and evaluation. However, I finally decided to place it squarely under *Affect*, since I do not think it is possible to change anything we do professionally, without first reviewing and adapting our belief structures. This implies dealing with a range of reactions to the change, before it can

be implemented and properly assimilated. Thus, what happens *Affectively* can be seen as at the heart of *Training* and the effective implementation of whatever is learned through that *Training*. Tables 3 and 4 show how I first arranged sub-categories in relation to more general categories, following the same procedure.

**Table 2: Facets of the *Affective Environment* emerging from data**

<b>Global concept (Environment)</b>	<b>Categories (Surface elements)</b>	<b>Sub-categories (Component elements)</b>
Affective Environment	Atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitivity to socio-cultural context</li> <li>• Respect for local values</li> <li>• Adaptation to local context/needs</li> <li>• Integration into existing activities</li> <li>• Feeling of collaboration and support (across institutions)</li> <li>• Feeling of collaboration and support (within the project institution)</li> <li>• Promotion of independence</li> <li>• Work-focused environment</li> <li>• Positive mood</li> </ul>
	Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Institution)</li> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Faculty)</li> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Project staff)</li> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Students)</li> <li>• Adaptation to local context/needs</li> <li>• Belief in potential long-term benefits</li> <li>• Sense of ownership and responsibility</li> <li>• Existence of internal champions</li> <li>• Willingness of staff to experiment</li> <li>• Encouragement of constructive criticism</li> </ul>
	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate training</li> <li>• Adaptation to local context/needs</li> <li>• Facilitate creation of “Something which is very much from here”</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Facets of the *Administrative environment* emerging from data**

<b>Global concept (Environment)</b>	<b>Categories (Surface elements)</b>	<b>Sub-categories (Component elements)</b>
Administrative environment	Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congruence with government policy</li> <li>• Becoming interwoven with institutional policies</li> <li>• The existence of a real need for the project</li> <li>• Collaboration with institutions engaged in similar projects</li> </ul>
Administrative environment	Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared aims/vision and wide participation</li> <li>• Less centralized management system</li> <li>• Self-sufficiency included as a project goal</li> <li>• Multipliability</li> <li>• Forward planning</li> </ul>
	Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing initial and on-going government funding</li> <li>• Securing initial and on-going internal funding</li> </ul>

It is important to stress that while trying to find a satisfying nomenclature and order in the data, decisions on where to place specific categories or sub-categories were not automatic. A further example would be: “*Adaptation to local context*”. This may be achieved both through *Training* and through the *Attitudes* projected by trainers (through training course content), but it may also be achieved through institutional *Policy* and the *Attitudes* of authorities and/or internal staff. It may be manifest in documents, personal accounts, physical spaces or other data, but which concepts, categories and sub-categories is it more naturally a subset of?

In such cases, I tended to consult participants and also reflect on my experience of projects, as well as my own lived experience of the implementation of the case study project, and recollections of how the various participant groups had behaved and reacted at that time.

I particularly remembered how possible ways of adapting the principles and practices of self-access systems and centres to Mexican contexts had occupied a major part of the syllabus of British Council training courses for future SAC staff and were much discussed during orientation meetings with authorities, too. Institutions opted to follow many of the

principles expounded in training and to incorporate them in future policy decisions (*Integration into existing activities*) whereas they had certainly preferred to implement their own measures in other cases (*Adaptation to local context and needs*). Thus it seemed that *Training* might be viewed as a super-ordinate of *Adaptation to local context and needs*, in this case, though it might be placed elsewhere in other cases.

I carried out the reduction as systematically as possible, fully aware that this was neither the only, nor by any means the absolute way, of categorizing this data. Another researcher may well have chosen to organize it differently. However, having recourse to my own experience of the project, as well as being able to check my interpretations with participants provided me with two important tools, which may have made my interpretations something more than superficial.

It is also worth mentioning that I also I carried out a word count of the number of references, direct or indirect, to each of the sub-categories, in each of the different data types. Though at first tempted to rank the categories/sub-categories in order of the numbers of references, I quickly realized that although frequency of mentions and triangulation of data from a number of sources can be *one* useful means of verification. However, more crucial than the *number* of times an aspect is mentioned, may be the *importance* each occurrence is given, in the context of each data collection activity, by both the collaborators and the researcher.

## **5.6 Coding, arranging, reducing and presenting the data**

In order to be able to refer concisely and coherently to my data in this report, I carefully devised different reference systems for each of the data types, and this process is the subject of the following sub-section.

### **5.6.1 Coding and referencing**

Methods for classification of data included the coding and scoring of answers to questionnaires, transcription and coding of transcripts, development of a system for organizing and referring to handwritten notes for other interviews and encounters, observations and physical descriptions as well as tabulation of results of focus group discussion points. Exemplification of exactly how I created. Sections 5.6.1.1 – 5.6.1.12 provide an account of how each data set was arranged, coded and referenced to facilitate the cross-referencing and interrelation of emergent information across data sets in the following chapters.

### **5.6.1.1 SAC student questionnaires**

I first designed a grid for questionnaire results, assigning a code to the questionnaire (User questionnaire 1 = UQ1), a number to each user (U1, U2, etc.) and to each question (Q1, Q2, etc.). In the case of students, language level (INT = Intermediate, ADV = Advanced) and hours of attendance at the SAC per week was also recorded (H3, H2, etc.). Where users answered a question affirmatively, the answer was coded as (Y), where they answered negatively, as (N). Where there was no answer, the item was coded as (X) and where the answer was unclear, as (?). Total numbers answers per question, in percentages, are included for each question.

Open questions were coded as (OP). If individual user answers were to be quoted, I would reference them as follows:

UQ1/U65/Q7/OP      “I like the atmosphere in the SAC better than in other departments.”

At the end of the questionnaire totals were calculated for each question and some potentially interesting additional information was also summarized in a table (see Appendix 4, pp. 314-317).

### **5.6.1.2 SAC staff questionnaires**

Staff questionnaires were not coded in the same way, since the number of respondents was so small (five SAC counsellors and one English teacher who is not a SAC counsellor), that quantitative analysis seemed inappropriate. In this case, I felt it more suitable to make an individual analysis of each questionnaires, and to quote individual responses, where relevant, coding Staff Questionnaire as SQ1, English Counsellor 1 as EC1, French Counsellor 1 as FC1, Russian Counsellor 1 as RC1, English Teacher 1 as ET1 and Question 19 as Q19:

SQ1/EC1/Q19/OP      “I would like to suggest the following changes...”

### **5.6.1.3 Recorded unstructured interviews with SAC staff and departmental authorities**

Three initial unstructured interviews were carried out in April and July 2000 and a further one was implemented in October 2002. I first transcribed each interview verbatim. Each was then labelled with a number and an invented name assigned to the interviewee (not her real name). The next step was to carry out a thematic analysis, using a line-by-line

approach (Kim Rim Shin 2002). Each potentially interesting phrase, sentence or section was highlighted in a different colour and assigned a number. Each line of the interview was also assigned a line number. Thus, a reference to facts or opinions expressed by informants could be labelled as follows:

“I think it would have been chaos without the support of the British Council...They never imposed their views. I think they explained the possibilities clearly and then each of us had the freedom to make their own decisions” (1 Linda 6 / 131).

(1 Linda 6 / 131) Interview 1, with “Linda”, Quotation 6, Line 131 of transcript.

Potentially interesting quotations were then tabulated and matched with either categories or subcategories, as seemed most appropriate:

<b>Perception of what happened (Alba)</b> <b>(My summary/translation, approved by Alba)</b>	<b>Concept/category</b>
1. “This project was initially perceived as an interesting challenge by operative staff” (1 Alba 1 / 46).	1. <i>Acceptance by staff</i>

#### **5.6.1.4 Recorded structured interviews with staff**

A similar technique was employed for organizing data collected during recorded structured interviews in September 2002:

##### *Step 1: Transcription*

“Well I do think that (government funding for the project) was crucial so that the creation of self-access centres would be taken seriously.

##### *Step 2: Coding*

(1 Luisa 1 / 10) Interview 1, with “Luisa”, Quotation 1, Line 10 of transcript.

##### *Step 3: Analysis*

<b>Perception of what happened (Alba)</b> <b>(My summary/translation, approved by Luisa)</b>	<b>Concept/category</b>
1. “Well I do think that (government funding for the project) was crucial so that the creation of self-access centres would be taken seriously” (1 Luisa 1 / 10).	1. <i>Acceptance by staff</i>

### 5.6.1.5 Physical description and interpretation from notes/sketches/photographs

From personal notes (fieldwork notebook) made on different visits, I first wrote a single continuous physical description and interpretation of the external and internal features of the SAC building.

I then assigned line numbers to each line of the description, and made repeated studies of the description, highlighting phrases or sections which seemed to be useful for interpretation. I then tabulated the phrases/sections I considered to be relevant and allocated a concept/category to each:

“The building is very ‘Mexican’, though it was built to house a facility based on educational philosophies developed outside this country. This would seem to show a strong intention *to adapt the innovation to the local context, by housing it in a building with a strong national flavour*” (Ll. 78-81).

Category	Illustrated by
Adaptation of the innovation to the local context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exterior design of building</li> </ul> PD Lines 78-81; PH 1 (Front Façade)

Photographs were taken on different visits to the SAC. I made a selection of the most indicative of these, then labelled and numbered them as follows: (PH 1 Front Façade).

I added reference to photographs to the tabulation of information on physical description, as can be seen below:

Category	Illustrated by
Adaptation of the innovation to the local context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exterior design of building</li> </ul> PH 1 (Front Façade)

I also made a number of sketches in my fieldwork notebook. These I transferred to make computer sketches, not completely to scale, but giving a general idea of the distribution of spaces. These I numbered and labelled, as in the case of photographs, for example: (SK 1 Video and computer area).

I then looked for evidence of anything that might be considered a physical manifestation of a concept or category, whether new or already identified and tabulated the information:

Category	Illustrated by
Innovation accepted by the staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of open plan work area for academic staff</li> </ul> (SK 5 Staff work area)



### 5.6.1.6 Observation of behaviours and interactions inside the SAC

In 2002, I carried out extensive observations of behaviours and interactions on a normal day in the SAC. I first made detailed notes in my fieldwork notebook, and later transformed these into a single prose account, punctuated by noting the time at half-hourly intervals in the left-hand margin, in case there should be any evidence of patterned behaviour related to specific periods of time or times of day.

I then numbered the observation itself and each line of the account. This would allow me to refer to actions or interactions in the following way:

(OB 1/L1. 10-21) Observation 1, lines 10-21.

As with the other types of data, I then looked for relationships between what I observed and possible categories for analysis, and tabulated the results:

Category	Illustrated by
Adaptation to local traditions and integration into an existing environment	• High levels of control and security

### 5.6.1.7 Documents related to the development of the self-access centre

With regard to documents, I first divided them into two classes: Type A: Correspondence, Type 2: University and British Council project documents. These are listed in the box below:

Classification system for documents
<b>Type 1: Correspondence</b> BCR = British Council to Rectoria RBC = Rectoria to British Council PCR = Project Co-ordinator (BC) to Rectoria RPC = Rectoria to Project Co-ordinator (BC) PCD = Project Co-ordinator (BC) to Director Faculty DPC = Director Faculty to Project Co-ordinator (BC) PCC = Project Co-ordinator (BC) to Co-ordinator SAC university CPC = Co-ordinator SAC university to Project Co-ordinator BC
<b>Type 2: University and British Council project documents</b> UPIR = University Internal Report UPER = University External Report USFP = University SEP Funding Proposal

UISP = University Internal Strategic Plan
BCPA = British Council Project Agreement
BCPD = British Council Project Discussion Document
BCPR = British Council Project Reports
BCVR = British Council Visit Report
BCRE = British Council Report Event

Each example of each class of document was then numbered, glossed and catalogued, e.g.

UISP 1	Strategic Plan September 1995-September 1996	(Spanish)
UISP 2	Strategic Plan September 1996-September 1997	(Spanish)
UISP 3	Strategic Plan January 1998-July 1998	(Spanish)
BCPA 1	Initial project agreement signed by BC/SEP/Universities (1993)	(Spanish)

Once classified, each individual document was scrutinized with care, to see what elements in the document might be related to categories of analysis for dynamic durability, and information was duly tabulated, for example:

BCPR 4 (British Council Project Report 4)	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Illustrated by:</b>
On-going training and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuation of regional consultancy</li> <li>• MA in educational technology</li> </ul>
Co-ordinated work at a regional level among sister institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly regional conferences</li> </ul>
Communication among all project participants in different institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuation of the newsletter</li> </ul>

#### 5.6.1.8 Documentation of exchanges during chance meetings

Conversations ensuing from chance meetings were recorded, transcribed verbatim and scrutinized for potentially interesting data. The key points were highlighted, and each highlighted section was given a number:

(CM1 Carola 1) Chance Meeting 1, key point 1

Where mention was made of key categories, the phrase, sentence or section was isolated and the information tabulated, as shown below:

CM1 (Chance Meeting 1)	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Illustrated by</b>
Appropriate training	“Number 1, we were very well trained” (CM1 Carola 1).
Support of local institution	“We had the support of the authorities, that’s very important” (CM1 Carola 5).
Support of national government	“Also we had the support from the authorities in Mexico City and in our state” (CM Carola 35).
Acceptance by the staff	“We all feel the advantages to continue doing this work by ourselves” (CM1 Carola 18).
Carola (SAC co-ordinator, University X)	

### 5.6.1.9 Summaries of opinions of colleagues from other universities

For Verification Activity 1, at two separate self-access conferences, I asked volunteers to respond in brief notes (in Spanish or English, as they preferred) to the following question, written in Spanish:

“In your very personal opinion, what are the elements which have most contributed to the fact that your SAC has endured as a learning resource until the present time?”

Twenty informants, all with four years or more experience of working in a SAC, complied at event 1 (PEV), in August 2003, and 13 informants responded at the second event (SLPEV), in September 2003. First of all, I separated spoiled papers (where meanings were not clear) from good papers, then I numbered the informants from one to 20 in the case of (PEV) papers and from one to 13 in the case of (SLPEV) papers. I then extracted the reasons and coded them very simply:

(PEV 1) Puebla event, interviewee 1

I next tabulated the information, and labelled categories, in order to compare with those already established:

<b>Informant</b>	<b>Category (N= NEW or O=OLD)</b>
PEV 1	1. Faith (N) 2. Perseverance (N) 3. Breaking paradigms in teaching and learning (N)
PEV 3	1. The support of the authorities (O) 2. The counselling of the counsellors and technical support staff (O) 3. The participation of the students (O)

### 5.6.1.10 Focus group and ranking activity for SAC staff

For the ranking activity, I coded each individual's ranking sheet (see below):

<b>PEG</b>	<b>PROJECT RESEARCH</b>	<b>RANKING ACTIVITY</b>	
<b>Category Number</b>	<b>Category type</b>	<b>Importance for sustainability (1-5)</b>	<b>Importance for growth (1-5)</b>
1	Congruence with current institutional/ organizational policies and priorities		
2	Clear, shared aims and vision and wide participation		
3	Appropriate knowledge and skills training		
4	Abundant and accessible resources		
5	Appropriate promotion and marketing		
6	A sense of ownership and responsibility		
7	Adaptation to local context		
8	In line with government policy		
9	Initial and on-going government funding available		
10	Existence of internal champions		
11	Encouragement of constructive criticism within project team		
12	Willingness of staff to experiment		
13	Internal validity – existence of a tangible need for the innovation		
14	Project responsibilities shared – management not too centralised		
15	Acceptance by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institution</li> <li>• Staff</li> <li>• Students</li> </ul>		
16	Self-sufficiency built in as a project goal		
17	The project can be adapted/multiplied for other related contexts		
18	Respect for local institutional values		
19	Effective planning activities		
20	Collaboration with institutions with similar projects		

Once ranked, numbers awarded for each category were added and divided by the number of participants in the ranking activity, to arrive at an overall average ranking, as shown below:

<b>Category Number</b>	<b>Category type</b>	<b>Importance for sustainability (1-5)</b>	<b>Importance for growth (1-5)</b>
<b>Policy 1</b>	Congruence with current institutional/organizational policies and priorities	4.5	5

#### **5.6.1.11 Semi-structured interviews with SAC students**

I made brief notes summarizing student responses in my fieldwork notebook, and later reduced these to a list of key points for each individual. In order to respect anonymity, I did not use students' real names, but gave them new names. These new names were then abbreviated for the purposes of coding, for example:

1 SL/P 9          Interview 1, Suli, point 9

1 AM/P6          Interview 1, Moni, point 6

I then scrutinized the key points and looked for relationships with existing categories, or possible new categories, and tabulated them, as can be seen below:

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Quotation</b>
1 Suli/P 1	Acceptation by the student	The TECAAL has changed the way I learn. You become more independent. What I learn in class, I reinforce here.

#### **5.6.1.12 Research diary**

Research diary entries are recorded by date of the comment or reflection. When they refer to ideas related to theory, the date will correspond to the date the thought occurred to me. When they refer to other kinds of data, dates will sometimes coincide with the date of the data chunk, and sometimes with the date in which I drew a conclusion or questioned what that data might mean. The references to research diaries will sometimes include a precise date, in cases where an idea or a question emerged on my mind on a specific day, and others will simply be entered with a month. This means that I had been thinking this over during that month approximately, and made more than one entry on the subject, not intending to cite them all.

Reference	Category	Quotation
(RD Entry, 28.11.00)	Acceptation by the teacher	Why didn't teachers volunteer to answer the questionnaires? Do they still reject? Are they afraid of some kind of exposure? Do they think I will be judging answers according to a norm?

### 5.7 A final note on *Anonymizing*

I have already mentioned my efforts to respect anonymity in all research activities in Chapter 4, Section 4.8, p. 106 and I have detailed specific actions in this chapter, e.g. pp. 121,124, 130 and 131. I have duly changed all the names in quotes and reports, to conserve this anonymity and remove any possibility of any participant being identified.

Additional care was taken, by using the same gender for all *staff* informants. This had nothing to do with feminist ideology but rather but for ethical reasons. The number of males among Faculty/SAC staff is significantly smaller than that of females, and there has only been one male SAC co-ordinator in the history of the SAC project. Thus, even if I had changed his name to another male's, this person would still have been immediately recognizable to all concerned.

Clearly, had I been able to work with an equal number of male and female staff, I may have found different focuses emerging from male and female-generated data, but since there was only *one* male, it seemed more important to preserve his anonymity, by reporting all staff informants as female.

Great care has been taken in reporting throughout, since even the mentioning of specific posts (informants are divided into the following categories: authorities, operational staff and students) could reveal the identities of individuals, if not handled with discretion. I have not changed the data collected, only the names and, in one case only, the gender, of the participants. Dates are sometimes approximate, rather than specific, for the same reason.

I showed each informant the extracts from their transcripts, which I intended to include in this final report, and would have omitted them, had any participants not felt comfortable with their inclusion. The involvement of informants in the research report grew into an important principle underlying my methodology. Since I preferred not to include anything said, or describe anything done by specific informants without their permission, I felt I was simultaneously involving them in the process and respecting their dignity and autonomy. I also gave each interviewee a complete transcript of their respective interview(s), both for

their own reference, and because I regarded these as their property as much as or even more than my own. As a researcher, I do not feel that I have exclusive rights to anything participants may have said in an atmosphere of trust, or that I may have observed them to do during the process.

Possible ethical problems, then, were confronted proactively. Informants were already aware that I was carrying out a study into what makes some innovative English language curriculum development sustainable, in general terms, and gave their free and willing consent to participate. Since the staff informants particularly seemed to trust me, I was rigorously careful about showing them what I wished to include in the final report, and I also regularly carried out self-critical reviews of data to be presented.

The institution, represented by the Chancellor and the Director of International Relations, had no objection at all to the inclusion of the name of the institution in the report. In the event, I decided to avoid direct reference to the institution in order to further protect each and every one of my individual informants.

## **5.8 Summary of the chapter**

In Chapter 5, I have described the research setting in detail and also the identification and selection of those who collaborated as informants. I described each of the data collection activities, summarized in Appendix 5, p. 318. Next, I showed how I identified themes and categories to help me structure my analysis. I exemplified the coding and references which I used to organize the data, and explained my decisions in relation to anonymizing (Holliday 2002).

In Chapters 6, 7 and 8, I will describe what the data revealed in relation to the ways in which the self-access centre project was apparently gradually enabled to take on a life of its own at the case study university, through a process of continual evolution, thus becoming an excellent example of a project which became something even more than sustainable.

## Chapter 6

### **The Evolution of the *Affective environment* in the SAC Project**

*In this chapter, I will describe how important factors related to the global theme of Affect, began to emerge from different types of data. I will begin to argue here that composite elements of the Affective Environment and its related categories, Atmosphere, Attitude and Training seem to have interacted severally, during the implementation of the case study project and worked together to enable the project to “take on a life of its own”, that is, to achieve a rich and dynamic state of evolution, even more desirable than that of sustainability, as traditionally perceived.*

#### **6.1 Within the *Affective Environment*: the evolution of *Atmosphere***

There is strong evidence to suggest that the *Affective Environment* within which the project developed was characterized in part by a unique *Atmosphere*. This, in turn, seems to have been the result of the institution’s decision to “make the project its own” and, in turn, of the project’s “taking on a life of its own” through a process which included such elements as:

- *Integration into existing activities*
- *Adaptation to local context*
- *Sensitivity to the socio-cultural context*
- *Respect for local values and traditions*
- *Feeling of collaboration and support between the institution and the staff*
- *Feeling of collaboration and support among most of the staff themselves*
- *Promotion of independence among staff and students*
- *Work-focused environment for staff and students*

Each of these seems to have become a factor in the evolution of the appropriate conditions for the project to take on a life of its own, enabling not only future sustainability but also further development and growth.

Because many of these aspects are very strongly perceptible and often tangible in certain characteristics of the location and physical characteristics of the SAC building, I will begin with data derived mainly from research diaries, physical descriptions and observations in relation to these. However, since many were also perceived by Faculty



authorities, SAC staff and/or students, or confirmed by documents, in later sections, I will also include evidence of other types.

### **6.1.1 The evolution of *Atmosphere: Integration of the project into existing activities at the university***

In some ways, the campus on which the SAC is located is much like that of similar universities, while in others, it is strikingly different:

“The university campus is set on raised ground, in an area which appears to have been once just outside the city, but which is now very much connected to it by an urban clearway and building developments, dating back to the 1960s and 70s.

In many ways, the campus looks and feels similar to that of many other universities. The buildings stand well back from the internal tarmac road circuit and there are concrete pavements for pedestrians running beside the roads. The buildings are separated one from another by fairly well-kept lawns, edged with borders and interspersed with trees and flowerbeds, some neater than others. The buildings are also interconnected by straight, functional, concrete pedestrian walkways, some covered, some not. Most of the buildings on the campus are one-story, rectangular, functional (but by no means beautiful), brick-and-concrete units, in styles which date back as far as the 1950s. The SAC, however, is remarkably different, standing out from the other edifices, in a number of ways” (PD, Ll. 1-9).

At first glance, then, the university appears to stand in a fairly typical setting for this kind of institution. A little historical research revealed something very special about its socio-cultural setting, however. This campus occupies what is known as the “*Cerro de las Campanas*” (Mount of the Bells), which is famous for its role in Mexican History. It is the place of execution of the short-lived Habsburg Emperor of Mexico, Maximilian I, who was executed by Mexican Liberals, in 1867 (Silva 2001). This fact leads to further speculation, as reflected in my research diary,

“Would this site be seen by the community as a symbol of both the rejection of foreign intervention in Mexican politics, and the passionate, nationalist liberalism, which has been typical of Mexico for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and indeed up to the present?” (RD entry, 22.01.02).

I was unable to find reliable historical data regarding the choice of location for the university. However, I wondered whether this site, strongly linked with nationalism and the liberal *ethos*, might seem as significant to the community and to those who study and work there, as it did to me, as a researcher.

“How might the historical and cultural status of the site affect people’s attitudes to innovations based on ideas from outside their country?” (RD entry, 22.01.02).

At least a partial answer may lie in the precise *location* of the SAC building. The only approach to the SAC is through the Faculty of Modern Languages complex. This fact serves as a palpable reminder that, though in some ways a new and separate entity, in other ways the SAC project (with the SAC building as its main artefact), were intended to be *Integrated into existing activities*, supporting the existing teaching and learning activities of the Faculty, while aiming in some ways to expand and update them. The location, then, speaks clearly of *Integration into existing activities*.

The design features of the approach to the SAC building also speak eloquently of the integration of the existing and the innovative, in a single physical space. The strong contrasts in the use of materials and forms and the harmonious ways in which they have been juxtaposed seem to me to be another embodiment of the process of *Integration* which was implemented, as part of the development of the new entity.

“The approach to the SAC building consists of a singular kind of pathway which leads first to a low, inward-sloping wall, itself enclosing some striking cactus gardens. These gardens surround the SAC on all sides. Both the path and the wall itself are constructed from large, chunks of, greyish, volcanic rock, slightly smoothed down for easy passage. The type of rocks used, and way in which these are held together, by means of a paler grouting, dotted with small pieces of *tezontle* (a kind of reddish, porous stone), immediately recalls the ways in which materials were combined in the construction of the Pre-Hispanic pyramids” (PD, Ll. 11-18).

The selection of materials, the design of the walkway, and the choice of plants for the gardens seem to project “a strong sense of history, heritage and permanence, and make the building stand out from the characterless, brick-and-concrete functionality of other campus buildings” (RD entry, 14.06.02).

A photograph will perhaps help to illustrate some of these idiosyncrasies.



PH 1, Approach to the SAC building and façade

Photograph 1 (PH 1), above, shows the marked contrast between the architectural style and the materials used in the approach (the path is made of the same materials as the first wall), and those of the building itself. Both were constructed in the nineties, as part of the same project, and the building itself was officially opened in 1997 (DPC 11, 10.03.97 – invitation to inauguration).

In the next section, I will explain how the design features of the building illustrate the university's decision to *Adapt the project to the local context* and to use the building itself to make a strong statement regarding their intention to *Respect local culture, traditions and values*.

### **6.1.2 *The evolution of Atmosphere: Adapting the project to the local context and Respect for local culture, traditions and values through design features***

Any visitor to the SAC cannot fail to be impressed by the strong visual impact created by the contrast between the SAC building and all the other edifices, in the immediate vicinity:

“The SAC is remarkably different from all that surrounds it, because of its overall height, asymmetrical shape, textured concrete finish, irregular angles, façade of arches and also the decorative tetra-hedric tubing, which runs round three sides of the upper part of the exterior” (PD, Ll. 23-26).



Perhaps even more intensely than in the case of the approach to the SAC, the combined effect of the contrasting materials, and the striking design features of the building, work together to create a powerful impact on the eye.

“Distinctive design features on the front of the building include a set of three, superimposed slabs of concrete, arched at the top, each one smaller than the one behind it and each highlighted in a different shade of pale blue. A stained glass window of a Pre-Hispanic figure adorns the foremost slab” (PD, LI. 27-30).

Roman arches are a frequent feature of Spanish Colonial architecture in Mexico. There are many historical buildings featuring these in the Old Town of the colonial city where the university is located, and the ancient aqueduct, the nationally recognized symbol of this city, is also comprised of such arches.

The circular, stained glass window adorning the foremost arch, is another common shape in colonial, especially ecclesiastical, architecture (the circular or “rose” window). Here, the “rose” window portrays a clearly Pre-Colombian motif and symbol, drawn directly from the indigenous roots of the country. The motif is that of a Pre-Hispanic male figure, in traditional dress, with the pictographic symbol for speech, language or communication, emerging from his mouth.

“The façade itself, with its arches, circular window and Pre-Hispanic figure could, then, be construed as a representation of the *mestizo* culture of the country, the product of the combination Pre-Hispanic and indigenous with the Spanish Colonial, the foreign with the indigenous, in plastic form” (RD entry, 14.01.02).

In the same way, the tetra-hedric embellishments, composed of recurring pyramidal designs, which run all the way round the upper part of the building,

“...evoke, again, essentially Pre-Colombian forms, though the material is painted tubular steel, very much a material of the modern day and age”  
(RD entry, 12 April 2002).

Critical reflexivity repeatedly led me to question possible motivations behind the choice of the architectural design features, and in turn, questioning these same questions. Art (and architecture as a specific form of plastic art) have been used as tools to project socio-political messages, from the earliest known civilisations. The sculptures on the walls of the palace at Persepolis, on which the Emperor Darius had his message of peaceful collaboration with his vassals carved in relief all along the walls, may be the most sophisticated among such early examples of the political function of art (in this case sculpture) and architecture.

I do not mean to indulge in hyperbole and compare a university SAC building directly with a wonder of the ancient world! Nonetheless, what connects these two constructions is perhaps their embodiment of an underlying socio-political intention, projected through plastic art, creating a strong impact on the eye of observer and stimulating an affective response to the messages so eloquently conveyed. The SAC building was custom-designed to house an educational facility and services, founded on innovative educational philosophies, developed largely in foreign countries, with correspondingly different learning contexts (Gao 2003). The institution seemed to be projecting a dual intention through the design features of the building, namely: to communicate the university's determination to accept the innovations to be implemented through the SAC project, but at the same time to make it entirely their own, by *Adapting it to the local context*. The architectural features seemed to be projecting a strong statement that the university's decision to accept the innovation was in no way intended to undermine institutional *Respect for its own national and local values and traditions*.

Perhaps the building was also intended to project the message that, just as old and new traditions in architecture can be combined to create a new and richer whole, so could a new *educational philosophy* be embraced without rejecting the positive aspects of existing thought and practice.

So it was that I answered my earlier question: had the historical and cultural status of the site of the campus itself, affected institutional attitudes to this innovation, based on ideas rooted in cultures beyond their own frontiers? I felt the setting and the building itself constituted at least part of the answer (RD entry, 22.06.02). The building and its location

created a stimulating and comfortable *Atmosphere*, through the combination of country-specific and more globally used materials, shapes and motifs. The *Atmosphere* created by and within this very singular building suggested that the innovation had been consciously *Adapted, to the institution's own context*. It would only prevail, provided that the intrinsic *Culture and values of the institution were respected* as much as those projected by the innovation.

The “voice” of the building, as projected by the exteriors, had seemed to me to speak loudly and clearly. If it had created a similar affective response in the university community, this positive *Atmosphere* for the development of the project may have been a major factor in the longer-term success of the SAC project (RD Entry, June 2002).

As part of the process of reflexivity, I also questioned myself regarding whether I was simply trying to force meanings from the data to suit my purposes. Perhaps the SAC building was simply one architect's attempt to create an original expression of postmodernism in architectural design? During my supervisor's visit to the case study site in April 2002, we discussed my impressions extensively, and he encouraged me to pursue them. Thus I began to observe the interiors of the SAC to see if other factors relating to the developing positive *Atmosphere* and *Affective Environment* might emerge.

### **6.1.3 The evolution of *Atmosphere*: A *Feeling of collaboration and support among staff* enhanced by layout**

In this section, I will show how interpretation of certain physical aspects of the working areas of the SAC seemed to confirm my initial impressions regarding the existence of distinctive *Atmosphere* in the SAC, supporting a positive *Affective Environment*.

“To use the SAC facilities, a student would normally go into the SAC through the main, smoked-glass doors, walk straight across the lobby/exhibition space to the reception area, and show her ID card to reception staff. She would then open the interior smoked glass entrance door, to go in. Anyone wanting to speak to a member of the academic staff would turn sharp right after coming in the main entrance, and would have to open one of another pair of smoked glass doors, which lead into the academic staff area. Once inside, the academic receptionist would deal with the enquiry” (RD entry, January 2002).



Photograph 3: Entrance to the academic staff area/large screen video facility

My first reaction at seeing the separation of the staff working area from the student study area in a SAC, was that it might be inhibiting to students (RD entry, January 2002). This is because many SACs in Mexico have staff working in the SAC study area itself, as some SAC teams consider it important always to be available for “on-demand” counselling. However, subsequent observation of behaviour (OB 1, 11.04.2002) seemed to show that students don’t seem to consult tutors very often, unless by prior appointment. In such cases, they do have to check in at the staff reception area, and sometimes have to wait to be received.

On reflection, the separation of the staff working spaces does not really constitute an unusual design for academic institutions, in general. Nor is it idiosyncratic to the context of this SAC. More to the point, it again demonstrates how the innovation has been *Accepted and Adapted* to existing institutional conventions, and suggestions from external sources, including British Council publications used in training and orientation, e.g. McCall (1992), have not been slavishly followed.

“The staff reception area is divided from the space where the co-ordinator works by a high textured wall, which does not, however, reach the ceiling. Behind this wall, the co-ordinator sits at a comfortable, modern desk, equipped with a PC with Internet connection. There are two comfortable seats for visitors to sit at, facing the co-ordinator’s table. Behind the desk, there is a cupboard, a shelving unit and a filing cabinet and lining the walls on both sides of the desk there is further storage space, full of master copies of videos, cassettes and other types of material. Staff has to walk past the co-ordinators desk on their way to their own working areas” (PD, Ll. 51-56).

The open-planned nature of the co-ordinator's space gives the general impression that the co-ordinator is always on hand and at the disposal of staff and students (RD entry, 01.04.02). This in itself created a positive *Atmosphere* which co-ordinators and staff said they liked. Certainly, during visits, I often saw staff and students dropping in informally to see the co-ordinators (who changed several times over the period of the study), as well as by appointment. On all my visits, I seemed to perceive a general *Feeling of collaboration and support* among the SAC team, on the one hand, and the Faculty director and SAC co-ordinators too, because of the immediate access they seemed to have to each other, and their apparent willingness to communicate. This aspect of the positive *Atmosphere* will be taken up again in Chapter 7, Section 7.1.3, p. 212, where I will present further data to illustrate my perception of this aspect.

The open planning of the whole academic area perhaps merits further comment. According to my experience of university departments in general, it is often the case that the co-ordinator and staff members have separate individual offices. I wondered if the open-planned layout of this staff working area could imply that a less hierarchical, more collaborative system may be expected to operate in the SAC than was customary in other departments of the university. When observing or interacting in the teachers' work area I had certainly perceived that there was generally a *Feeling of collaboration and support* among the teachers.

Alba, one of the series of SAC co-ordinators, specifically mentioned in an interview: "...we normally work together a lot, or rather very much together..." (1 Alba 1/431). In the same interview, when talking about her experience as a SAC co-ordinator, Alba also mentioned her policy of chatting to SAC staff individually every day, in order to be completely *au fait* with what they were working on and to assess whether there had been any problems requiring her personal support. She also stated her view that the staff all worked together as a team *within* the SAC.

These ideas are further supported by one of the counsellors, EC 2. In the staff questionnaire, she qualified her answer to the question of whether the SAC "*felt different*" from other parts of the university, in the following way:

EC 2: "There is a lot of harmony and respect for our colleagues" work here.

Alice, another of the series of co-ordinators also stressed the *Collaborative* nature of the work, and the team spirit she had tried to encourage:



“I don’t think [being a co-ordinator] is just about being behind your desk, it’s also about being there, seeing what’s happening, so that people see that one isn’t just the figure of authority, but that one is there with a will to help, and I do help to move the boxes and clean up. I think this shows people that I am a part of the team...yes, I do have the authority, but we’re no different in the sense that we are all workmates” (2 Alice 1 / 260).

Although the new “science” of synomorphy makes strong claims regarding the possible effects of the physical environment of the workplace on the self-image and performance on the employees, I cannot prove whether the open-planning (which pre-existed Alice’s co-ordination), has *in fact* stimulated a spirit of collaboration. It was not mentioned specifically by any of the people working at the SAC. The *Collaborative atmosphere* may perhaps have had more to do with particular management styles of certain co-ordinators. Work plans for the SAC staff made available to me at different times by different co-ordinators do seem to show a generalized distribution of tasks and responsibility and a sharing of responsibility, however.

It is perhaps worth mentioning, from my own work experience, I have found that there is generally much more communication and collaboration among staff if they work in an open-planned environment, than when they are concealed behind doors in individual cubicles, once they become accustomed to it.

In the next section, I will go on to describe other perceptions triggered by certain aspects of the arrangement of the staff working areas.

#### **6.1.4 The evolution of *Atmosphere: Promotion of independence and creativity among staff through provision of equipment and facilities***

The working areas for all academic staff, other than the co-ordinator and academic reception staff, are located behind a dividing wall, which only partially separates these from the co-ordinator’s space.

“Behind the further dividing wall, there is a row of four computers, with Internet facilities, available for staff use” (PD, Ll. 57-58).

I noted that these were almost always in use when I visited the centre (with the exception of Saturdays, when there are generally very few academics on campus). The teachers thus seemed to regularly exploit the facilities at their disposal (RD Entry, 14.02.04).

“Opposite the teachers’ working area is the audio and video materials production area, equipped with TV, video recorder, audio recorders, fast copiers, laminator, digital camera, etc.” (PD, Ll. 59-60).

For the convenience of the staff, all the facilities necessary to support their materials development, tutoring sessions and other SAC-related work are very close at hand. The range and amount of technology at their exclusive disposal in the materials production area seemed significant to me. This kind of investment in equipment for multimedia materials production indicates, again, a strong commitment on the part of the university and also an apparent intention to *Promote staff independence and creativity* (see also Chapter 7, Section 7.1.4, p. 216), by making all the necessary tools readily available.

Technical support equipment and space for technical staff to work is also available inside the student’s work area of the SAC:

“There are two small, adjoining offices. The first is the technicians’ work area, full of equipment at some stage of repair: a TV, a computer, a printer, a circuit board, a chair, another TV, various cardboard boxes. All this is visible through the smoked glass windows (waist to head height). In the second cubicle, the furniture is all made of wood. There are: a desk, three chairs, a fan, and bookshelves full of videos. This room doubles as the video storage area and a counselling room” (PD, Ll. 149-154).

Having technical support staff and equipment so immediately available seemed to me to show yet again an intention to *Promote independence*, among the staff, and the fostering of creativity and self-sufficiency (RD entry, 11.01.02). This, I learned, had been the initial idea, although support staff told me that in fact technical staff was not directly employed by the SAC, but had to be called in from the university maintenance department. The initial idea to innovate, by making the SAC totally self-sufficient, had apparently been later adapted for financial reasons (RD entry, 11.01.02).

SACs I have visited in other countries in Europe and Latin America have tended to be divided into “noisy” areas and “quiet” areas. Certainly, I recalled that this suggestion had been stressed as part of the training in planning layouts for new centres in Mexico. At this site, however, it seems that the whole centre is characterized by the kind of silence customary in a library. On my early research visits, I was surprised by the quietness of this particular SAC. This was because I automatically compared it with many others which are familiar to me (both in Mexico and elsewhere) where face-to-face interaction among students is actively encouraged. The “library-type environment”, already familiar to the

university authorities, staff and students, seems to constitute another example of their having *Adapted the innovation to the local context and needs*, while showing *Respect for existing educational values* surrounding learning support facilities (RD Entry, 14.02.04).

This alternative interpretation of how to operate in a SAC made me question my own prior knowledge and previous experience, and acknowledge that the theories and practices of self-access learning that we had included in the British Council training courses, had probably been at times more than a little ethnocentric regarding the dissemination of perceptions of what SACs “usually” looked like (McCall 1992).

Holliday (2003) in an excellent article on the dangers of culturism, and even racism in ESOL, explains how concepts of autonomy and self-direction are deeply embedded in notions derived from the dominant discourse surrounding these areas, developed largely among a restricted group of language teaching professionals, mainly from very specific cultural and educational backgrounds and contexts.

As my interpretation activities progressed, I realized how some of my initial reactions of surprise at some of the ways in which the SAC project had been adapted, had doubtless been guilty of an element of culturism “reducing the foreign Other to simplistic, essentialist cultural prescriptions” (Holliday 2003:114), and that I had been indulging in the use of stereotypes of Mexican educational institutions, built up in my mind after 26 years of living and working here. These I had then put in binary opposition to the principles of autonomy and self-directed learning developed elsewhere.

It seemed to be increasingly clear that the different types of *Adaptations to local context* at the case study university had been significant in the process of “making the project their own”. This, in turn, may have contributed in a significant manner to its development and growth and I came to see them as valid features in their own right, appropriate for their context, rather than as deviations from preconceived norms.

On the other hand, the British Council training courses had also stressed that there were numerous alternatives for what a SAC might look like, how it might operate, and that it was extremely important to be sensitive to the needs of particular institutions, learning contexts and their learners. I will cite some staff below who recall these points clearly in the section on participant perceptions of the project experience. Nonetheless, it remains true that the various examples we had given during courses were based on ideas about SAC developed largely in Europe, and in relation to European perceptions of self-directed learning (e.g.

Dickinson 1987; Holec 1981; Ellis and Sinclair 1989; O'Malley and Chamot 1990; Sheerin 1991. Although still very much considered “state of the art” when the project began in 1993, these references unquestionably presented concepts and practices which formed part of the first European schools of thought on independent language learning and teaching.

The fact that I had experienced “surprise” at the silence in the SAC, shows then that I have myself been a subject of such preconceptions, though I was well aware that in this SAC, one-to-one counselling generally took place in the teachers work area, and discussion groups in the cinema room, also in the teachers’ area. Furthermore, this was a “practice centre”, in support of regular classroom courses. Since oral communication was part of the language course syllabuses, and part of classwork, why should it not, then, be quiet in the study area, where students were largely listening with headphones, reading and writing, to consolidate work done in the classroom?

This SAC represented one university’s and one Faculty’s interpretation of what a SAC should be like, and its features were perfectly valid within its own terms and criteria. Writers in Palfreyman and Smith (2003), for example, give other examples of how concepts related to autonomous learning and the practical exploitation of self-access centres can be usefully adapted to the values and needs of a wider range of contexts.

I do not wish to digress any further into a critique of the tendency to ethnocentrism in self-access theory and practice at this point, since it is not the main focus of the study. I do, however, wish to signal the importance of ethnocentrism when observing, assessing or evaluating educational development projects in general (Grounds 2007: 6). I have expressed serious concern with regard to imposing external criteria when evaluating a project in a new and different context in official reports, for example this report on a participative evaluation of the Cuban SAC project, 2002-2007:

“Because of the nature of the Cuban Higher Education context, it seems to me that we do in fact *need to look for different types of parameters and indicators when evaluating Cuban language learning resource centres*. Quantitative measures, such as numbers of workstations, computers, TV monitors, DVD players yield extremely limited results in the Cuban context, since there is a great lack of material resources, and often equipment that does exist is of poor quality, if it works at all.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that *services* for language learners are poor in Cuban SACs – indeed, from what I was able to observe, service

for students in Cuban SACs is sometimes perhaps superior to that offered by some other countries and contexts with which I am familiar. This is manifested in the numbers of hours of staff time spent with each student, the apparently very high quality of that time, as reported by students themselves, and the excellent atmosphere and co-operative relationships which seem to reign in the centres, both among the staff themselves, and between staff and students.”

Ethnocentrism should continue to be a major concern among English teaching professionals today (Palfreyman and Smith 2003; Holliday 2005) and the concept needs to be thoroughly deconstructed, understood and addressed, in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development projects by all development organizations.

To return to the staff working area of the SAC, another detail of the interior design, which may have contributed to the apparently very much *Work-focused environment*, will be described in the next section.

#### **6.1.5 The evolution of *Atmosphere: Work-focused environment* enhanced by design of staff work areas**

In most academic institutions, there is a separate room or space where staff can relax together. This is not, however, a feature of the SAC building:

“At the back of the staff work area, there are two toilets, one for male staff and the other for female staff. Coffee cups and spoons are washed and left to drain beside the washbasin in the ladies toilet. There is no formal kitchen or social area as such, though there is a small table in a corner with coffee, creamer, sugar, cups and spoons, next to the teachers’ computer area” (PD, Ll. 61-64).

This lack of a kitchen or social area added to my perception that the *Atmosphere* in this section was very much *Work-focused and organized*, and my observation visits seemed to bear this out, in general. This observation will be taken up and extended in Chapter 7, Section 7.1.2, p. 209.

I will now go on to consider how certain aspects of the *students’* study areas seemed to evoke further to the *Feeling of collaboration and support* and contribute positively to the evolving *Atmosphere* of the SAC.

### 6.1.6 The evolution of *Atmosphere: Feeling of collaboration and support among students and staff* enhanced by layout and uses of interiors

The study areas for students consist of a number of different spaces, enclosed in separate rooms, and all with distinctive features related to their respective functions. I also photographed and sketched these, during data collection activities in 2002 and 2004, and included them in the prose description often cited above. I will begin this part of the account with a description of the reception area, as seen from *within* the student study section.

“The reception area, as seen from inside the SAC, is encircled and enclosed by a waist high, textured concrete surround. This surround is not wide enough to constitute a counter, and does not invite leaning on to chat. It is simply a dividing wall, dividing the staff from the students. The upper half of the reception area, however, is not enclosed by smoked glass, but is completely open, and you can talk freely to the upper half of the seated reception staff” (PD, Ll. 156-160).



Photograph 4: Reception area seen from inside the SAC facility

Students seem to receive a warm welcome from staff, once inside the SAC, as I observed during visits. Indeed, during one particular observation visit, I noted that the major source of noise produced inside the SAC, was usually the friendly chat among staff and students, taking place in reception area! (OB 1, Ll. 306).

The formal reception area, separating staff from the public by plate glass and allowing communication through a small slit in the glass, suggests that the design of the building had been adapted to local norms for this kind of administrative space. Once inside the study section, the relationship between staff and students is more relaxed and the *Atmosphere* characterised by a more *Collaborative and supportive feeling*. I will present further

evidence in relation to how staff and students perceive the *Atmosphere* in the SAC, in comparison with other areas of the university, later in the chapter (Section 6.3, p. 176) and in Chapter 7, Section 7.1.3, p. 212, I will also further illustrate the *Feeling of collaboration and support*. For the moment, I will continue with what the description of the interiors seemed to reveal.

“There is a large, multi-purpose room, with a TV and video/DVD player, a large worktable with eight comfortable chairs, where up to eight people could work comfortably together, whether individually or as a group. There is also a small quiet area, for private study” (PD, Ll. 125-127).



Photograph 5: The multi-purpose room

Since a multi-purpose area was suggested during training, appropriate for staff meetings, training, social or cultural events and small group activities, this is perhaps an example of where the university has perhaps accepted an idea from suggestions from trainers, without any significant adaptation. On the other hand, bearing in mind the general need of the Faculty for space for cultural events, mentioned above, it may have been accepted as much to cater for existing as for new needs (Section 6.2.1, p. 168).

### **6.1.7 Summary of Section 6.1**

To sum up this section, the exteriors and the interiors of the building seemed to embody a number of interconnecting “messages”. These messages are interconnected with the evolving *Atmosphere* and seem to contribute to the generally perceptible *Affect (Affective Environment)* surrounding the project and the SAC building itself.

- i) The institution was willing to accept the innovation, but the choice of materials and design of the exteriors seemed to project the message that their acceptance

was conditional upon its being *Adapted to and integrated into the culture and context of the university, Respecting existing values* (Section 6.1.1, p. 152; Section 6.1.2, p. 154). The results seem to have contributed to a distinctive *Atmosphere* surrounding the SAC and with this may have helped to propitiate its future success.

- ii) The combination of the known and the new in the materials used in the interiors and exteriors as well as the procedures used in the SAC may have created a comfortable and stimulating *Atmosphere* in which such an innovation could develop (Section 6.1.1, p. 152; Section 6.1.2, p. 154).
- iii) Open planning within the staff work area seems to promote a *Feeling of collaboration and support among staff*, and the lack of social space seemed to imply a strong *Focus on work* (Section 6.1.3, p. 157).
- iv) The reception area, security systems, “library” type *Atmosphere* again showed *Adaptation to the needs and respect for the existing systems and values of the context* (Section 6.1.4, p. 160).
- v) The existence of abundant tools and materials for the teaching staff in their work area, and in the SAC itself would seem to show that the university hoped to *Promote staff independence and creativity* (Section 6.1.4, p. 160).
- vi) The lack of a staff relaxation area contributes to a very *Work-focused environment* (Section 6.1.5, p. 164).
- vii) The ways in which staff and students interact once inside the SAC together contributes to an *Atmosphere* involving *Collaboration and support among staff and students* (Section 6.1.6, p. 165).

## **6.2 Within the Affective environment: The evolution of Attitude**

There is strong evidence that the *Atmosphere* which evolved around the project, through *Integration into existing activities, Adaptation to the local context, Sensitivity and Respect for the local culture, traditions and values, Collaboration and support between the institution and staff and also among staff and students, Promotion of independence among staff and students* and the creation of a *Work-focused environment* (all exemplified in Section 6.1) interacted in constructive ways with the positive *Attitude* and that all these facets have simultaneously developed as part of the process.

The positive *Attitude* (clearly demonstrated by the institution, through its significant financial investment in the design and construction of the SAC building) could be characterized as one of *Acceptance and active support of the innovation*. This *Acceptance*



*and active support* had been, as I learned from different types of data, a distinctive feature at all stages of the project, and was reflected at different levels of the institutional hierarchy, even though it had not been immediate and unconditional. Further evidence of this positive attitude, manifested through different types of *Acceptance and active support* on the part of the university, faculty, staff and students will be presented in the following section.

### **6.2.1 The evolution of *Attitude: Acceptance and active support by the institution and Faculty through design features***

Photograph 6, on this page, shows the entrance to the SAC building. There is also an emergency exit, but this is accessible only from inside the building.

“The entrance to the SAC consists of a pair of metal-framed, smoked glass doors. The smoked glass would certainly protect from the often scorching sun. It might also make an observer, standing on the outside of the building, wonder whether there is any need to conceal what happens inside” (PD, Ll. 27-29).



Photograph 6: The entrance to the SAC building

“Once inside, the entrance hall is large enough to be used for small, temporary exhibitions, seasonal displays and decorations, and also as a general informal reception area or lobby” (PD, Ll. 30-31).

From past experience, I knew that exhibitions were often held here, as part of the wider programme of cultural activities run by the Faculty, in conjunction with the SAC. Such cultural activities often form part of the life of a language faculty, and they were particularly so at this university. Equally, I had seen how, during registration periods, the

area was often full of Language Faculty students waiting to register for the SAC, as part of their language course requirements, and was very much needed for this purpose.



Photograph 7: Entrance to the SAC, from the interior

Just as the institution had shown *Acceptance and active support of the innovation*, through its willingness to commit and invest, so had the Faculty, through its decision to use the SAC building to stage its regular cultural events, embraced the project, but also *adapted it to the needs of the context* of the faculty. This kind of adaptation has been mentioned in relation to *Atmosphere* which evolved around the project, in Section 6.1 above, but it could equally be interpreted as a facet of *Attitude*, since *Atmosphere* and *Attitude* interact and evolve simultaneously and can mutually affect the elements of which each is comprised.

### **6.2.2 The evolution of *Attitude: Adaptation to local context and needs through design features***

The ways in which the administrative spaces of the SAC have been adapted to fit in with similar areas in the context of the university is evident in the design of the reception area in the entrance lobby:

“Immediately opposite the entrance is the reception counter. This is completely sealed off from the public by a textured concrete (waist high) and smoked glass dividing wall. There is, however, a small, rectangular, metal-framed, slit, measuring 18” x 8” approximately, through which the public can communicate directly with reception staff. There are two

reception staff on duty at any time during working hours and their entire work area is permanently on view through the glass from the lobby, though you can only see their heads through the glass/speaking hole” (PD, Ll. 32-37).



Photograph 8: Reception area, as seen when coming into the SAC

From previous visits to Mexican universities, I know that this kind of reception area is common in similar administrative areas of this and other institutions. The function of this particular area is to provide a space for the implementation of standard SAC administrative procedures. On arrival, all students have to show an ID card at the window, for security reasons. This procedure is in line with the generally quite strict rules and regulations of the university, governing entry to laboratories, libraries and other specialized facilities.

The adoption of such procedures, not common to all the SACs I have visited in Mexico, seems to show, yet again, how the institution, the Faculty and the SAC coordination team have *adapted* both form and function, to fit in with the procedural norms and *Needs of its own context*.

“...immediately to the left of the sealed reception area, there is a metal-framed, smoked glass door, which leads into the SAC proper. On the right-hand side of reception, there is a doorway with a security system through which everyone, staff and students alike, must pass, before leaving the building. The *entrance* to the SAC area is kept closed and people have to open and close the smoked-glass door manually, to go in; the *exit* space is permanently open, though the security device takes up part of the space” (PD, Ll. 39-44).

Similar concepts and values to those apparently expressed by the external forms and materials selected for the SAC, had been put into practice inside, here in the reception area. The description of the lobby and reception area have attempted to illustrate the visual impact of these areas on the observer, and to show again how the institution and Faculty had both *Accepted* and *Adapted* the project *to the local needs and context*.

This further supports the argument that the building, inside and out, speaks of an *Attitude* which combines *Acceptance* and *Adaptation of the innovation*, and the interaction of these elements also formed part of imbuing the project with “a life of its own”, favouring its durability.

In the listening and pronunciation area, the quality of the furniture equipment is extremely high:

“...the furniture is upholstered and the effect is definitely one of comfort. Individual booths are divided by grey, Hessian-type upholstered screens and chairs are all upholstered in black woven fabric. The tables are all finished in dark grey, marbled “formica”. There are 15 small, square windows opposite the entrance, all protected by the tetra-hedric tubular metal bars on the outside of the building. As the frosted windows are small, the natural light is limited” (PD, Ll. 202-207).

British Council training seminars on design features of SACs including health and safety guidelines, stressed the need for natural light. However, these guidelines reflect norms derived from another context. In this SAC, ample artificial lighting is sunk into the ceiling, which is covered by white, textured ceiling tiles. The lack of natural lighting may go against what was recommended during training, but the lack of windows certainly favours security, a top priority in a context where equipment is frequently stolen. Again, *Adaptation to the local context and needs* took precedence over advice of external consultants.



Photograph 9: The listening and pronunciation room

“Inside the reading room, most of the bookshelves are made from standard metal horizontal and vertical supports, with a regular pattern of punched holes along their length and breadth. One bookcase is made of wood, and has been repainted many times. There are rows of reading cubicles and, except for the fact that there are fewer books, it has the physical appearance of a conventional university library” (PD, LI. 211-213).



Photograph 10: Reading room



Photograph 11: Reading room

The Faculty has taken advantage of existing bookshelves to furnish the SAC, adapting existing library resources to serve the innovation, in the same way in which they have *Adapted the innovation to the local context and needs.*

### **6.2.3 The evolution of *Attitude: Belief in potential long-term benefits* shown by investment in and updating of equipment**

The university’s belief in the long term benefits of the SAC project is perhaps first shown by the size of its investment in the building. Nonetheless, there is also further evidence to show this facet of their *Attitude* in relation to equipment.

The computing and video room, though lacking the relatively luxurious furnishings of the audio area described above, is impressive because of its up-to-date equipment.



Photograph 12: Computer area



Photograph 13: Video area

The equipment has been regularly updated and there are in fact more units now, than when these photographs were taken, according to an informal telephone conversation I had with the current co-ordinator in March 2006 (RD entry, 18.03.06). This is important to note, because it shows that the institution *regularly invests funds* to support and improve the initial innovation (see Chapter 8, Section 8.3, pp. 257) and this fact (itself an important element in the durability of the project) strongly implies a *belief in the potential long-term benefits* of the innovation. In Chapter 7, Section 7.2.4, p. 225, I will provide further illustrate the apparent *Belief in potential long-term benefits*.

#### **6.2.4 The evolution of *Attitude: A sense of ownership and responsibility* enhanced by design features and facilities**

It seems that the university encourages a *Sense of ownership and responsibility* among the students, and this kind of involvement may also have contributed to the evolution of a positive *Attitude* towards the SAC project on the part of the students, further enhancing its chances of success.

“On leaving the user’s area through the security system, there is a set of pigeon holes on the left, where students are required to leave their bags on arrival, and a large, fairly empty bookshelf opposite. On the left of the security system on the way out of the SAC, there is a table with a computer on it, for students to reserve places/register attendance/log-out” (PD, LI. 214-217).

As can be seen, students are entirely responsible for these checking out procedures. Furthermore, and perhaps even more important, students are actively involved in periodic evaluations of their SAC, which are carried out by staff helped by the involvement of students in regular participative evaluations:

“... the SAC teachers do evaluations with together with our students. It’s there, yes... we all have to do it. It’s a kind of commitment that has been made here in the centre, and yes, we do it with every one of our students, and we ask their opinions about the SAC services, about the materials, all the aspects of the SAC” (1 Alba 12 / 551).

The projection of a feeling that the students’ opinions and suggestions are of real importance to the staff, might further enhance this *Sense of ownership and responsibility* in them. This argument is yet further supported by this comment from a SAC student:

1 SL/P1: The SAC has changed my way of learning. You become more independent. What I learn in the classroom, I reinforce here and the teachers here ask us for our opinions. I like the way our SAC is organized.

This extract illustrates various aspects simultaneously. First, it seems to show that the student believes the innovation has had an impact on him, “The SAC has changed my way of learning”. Next, the promotion of independence has been successful, “You become more independent”. Then, he seems to have developed a sense of responsibility: “What I learn in the classroom, I reinforce here”. Furthermore, he likes the way the staff asks for his opinions, and he uses the personal pronoun “our” in relation to the SAC, showing a sense of ownership. In sum, this student’s views (by no means unique, but the most concise example in my data) support my argument that a positive *Attitude* on the part of the institution at one extreme and on the part of the students seems to have evolved towards the project with other phenomena.

An even more striking example of a *student* displaying a *Sense of ownership and responsibility* in the SAC occurred, during the observation of behaviours in the SAC (RD Entries, January and April 2002). Various incidents seemed to show *Attitudes*, particularly a strong *Sense of ownership and responsibility* among both staff and students in the SAC. The incident reported specifically relates to student moderation of peer behaviour:

“In the video section, User 11 repeatedly laughed out loud as she watched her film. User 15 was getting visibly more and more annoyed. His expression was definitely one of displeasure. He first turned towards the area from which the laughter was coming and said “Shh!” loudly. User 11 was by now giggling helplessly. User 15 then got up from his computer, walked a few paces towards the video and said “Shh!” again, more loudly. The giggling continued, but was more subdued. Then, the laughter burst out laughing again. User 15 got up, walked round to the laughter’s work station and asked her to be quiet, in Spanish. At the same time, User 9, still at her computer, also turned to the direction from which the laughter was proceeding and said “Shush!” loudly. The laughter could easily have been heard at reception by the reception staff, but there was no reaction at all on their part to the disturbance. The students themselves were left to be responsible for maintaining discipline in their work areas” (Observation notes, 01.06.2002).

During Focus group discussion, a *Sense of ownership and responsibility* was awarded 4.6 out of a possible 5 for sustainability and 4.6 for growth – it was considered equally important for both results.

### 6.2.5 Summary of Section 6.2

To sum up this section, the interiors of the building and the behaviours and comments of people who use them seemed to express a number of messages clustering around a general concept of *Affect or Affective environment*, interconnected with *Attitude*:

- i) The fact that the Faculty has taken over parts of the SAC building to stage its cultural events shows that it has shown *Acceptance and active support* of the innovation (Section 6.2.1, p. 168).
- ii) The design of the reception area, as seen from the lobby, and the types of glass and positioning of the windows both illustrate *Acceptance and active support* for the project as well as the will to *Adapt to local context and needs*. Both of these indicate a positive overall *Attitude*, on the part of the institution (Section 6.2.2, p. 169).
- iii) The extent of the university's investment not only in the SAC building, but also in the regular updating and renewal of technical resources imply a *Belief in the potential long-term benefits* of the innovation, stemming again from an overall positive *Attitude* (Section 6.2.3, p. 172).
- iv) A *feeling of ownership and responsibility* seems to have been encouraged not only in staff but also in students, who are in charge of their own checking out procedures, take part in activities related to the evaluation of services, become more responsible for their own behaviour and even for regulating peer behaviour in the SAC. This again demonstrates the existence of a developing positive *Attitude* among the end-users of the innovation (Section 6.2.4, p. 173).

Among these insights, some had been unexpected for me. It was of the utmost significance that I had again been led to reflect on the potential ethnocentrism of SAC theory and practice. It also caused me to reflect on and deconstruct the ethnocentrism the methodology which is often used for implementing development projects, since it may not be advisable to try to transfer project implementation methodology directly from one context to another. At the case study university, the adaptations which had been made to the innovation, in order to avoid jarring against the existing ethos and practices of the university and faculty seemed to have been highly relevant and productive.



The innovation had taken on characteristics and “a life of its own”, as can be seen from the many examples of syncretism, where the already existing became part of the new, and the new became part of what already existed, in order for both to go on to be something which has proven to be *more than just sustainable*. As a new entity, but very much part of the university, the SAC building seems to have opened the way for the activities of the project to take on a profound and lasting character.

In the following sections, I will now go on to present data from other sources, and show how some of the concepts and categories seemed to emerge recurrently, across different types of data.

### **6.3 Within the *Affective Environment*: Participant perceptions of *Atmosphere* and *Attitude***

There is considerable evidence from staff and students’ perceptions to support the interpretations of phenomena derived from the descriptions of the SAC building and the behaviours and procedures observed there, suggested in 6.1 and 6.2, above. Section 6.3 will provide evidence to show that the evolution of a positive *Atmosphere* (Sections 6.3.1, p. 176; 6.3.2, p. 178; 6.3.3, p. 178) and *Attitude* (Sections 6.3.4, p. 180; 6.3.5, p. 182; 6.3.6, p. 184) seems to have contributed to the enhancement of the *Affective Environment* of the SAC project in ways that increased the likelihood of its future survival and expansion.

#### **6.3.1 The evolution of *Atmosphere*: *Sensitivity to local context* (participant perceptions)**

In this section, I will introduce a key participant and cite her own words to illustrate how she perceived *Sensitivity to local context* as having sown the seeds of an *Atmosphere* in which the project was able to thrive.

From 1993 to the present day, the people responsible for the development of the SAC have included a series of Directors of Faculty, SAC co-ordinators and teacher/counsellors, many of whom have had occupied more than one of these different posts, since the inception of the project. Most of these people have continued to be employed at the Faculty and/or the SAC, in some capacity. The continuity of staff involvement, and their accessibility to me, despite changes of post, has been helpful in implementing this research (RD Entries, June 2000). Comments regarding its contribution to the success of the SAC would, however, be speculation, since this aspect did not emerge in the data at all.

When I first visited the university in 1993, to present the SAC project to authorities and teachers, the interim faculty director was extremely receptive to the plans, and she willingly informed the staff of the innovation through meetings and a circular (RD Entries, June 2000). Soon after, a new Director of Faculty was appointed, a mature and committed Mexican academic, loyal to institution, staff and students and keen to improve the quality of language teaching and learning. This was “Berenice”.

In my previous role as external project adviser and national co-ordinator, I had frequent formal and informal contact with Berenice. We had had numerous meetings, alone and in the presence of the Chancellor, organized and implemented workshops for internal project co-ordinators, teachers and administrative staff and had organized a further 100 hours of further training sessions led by another Mexican British Council consultant (RD Entries, July-August 2000).

When I began my research project, Berenice had retired due to ill-health, but she continued to support and to promote the university. Her book on the history of the faculty of languages, referred to above, was published in 2001. The interview was extremely long and informative, and I will cite Berenice again later in the report. Here, I will limit quotations to the thematic point of this section. Berenice was keen to participate and did not object to my citing her book (which, incidentally, means her identity is no longer concealed to those who know her).

Speaking of the early days of the SAC project (27.10.2000) Berenice said:

“... it was important to take into account the context in which it (the SAC project) was developed. Don’t you think?” (1 Berenice 13 / 349).

Berenice went on to explain that, initially, she had not thought that staff and students would be enthusiastic about the project, because the underlying principles and practices of autonomous learning were too innovative for her country and went against its existing transmission system of education. Berenice had immediately concluded that the project would have to be *Adapted to the local context* to get a positive response in any quarter. In reply to my direct question: “Why do you think the SAC has been so successful at the university?” after some consideration, Berenice replied:

“First and foremost, because the language students who are studying one foreign language are obliged to study in the SAC for 20 hours per semester, and 15 hours per semester per language, if they are studying

two languages. So even if they don't know about self-access, they have no alternative but to attend" (1 Berenice 12 / 325).

Although this might be considered contrary to basic self-access learning principles, in some of the contexts where such were first set up, Berenice felt that in her context, making attendance at the SAC obligatory in some way, i.e. *Adapting the project to local contexts and needs*, would improve the probability of success. The next section explains how the *Adaptation* was effected.

### **6.3.2 The evolution of *Atmosphere: Integration into existing activities* (participant perceptions)**

During the same interview, Berenice said she had learned during British Council training sessions that the tendency in many other contexts is for SAC study to be voluntary and self-directed by students. Nevertheless, in her own educational context, with its long tradition of transmission learning, she had felt that by *Integrating SAC study into existing teaching and learning activities* as a curricular requirement, the project might be better received. Until this day (September 2007), SAC study remains a course requirement, and new generations of students accept this as such.

Because I had had a general perception that staff and students had resented the SAC as an imposition at the beginning of the project, I went on to interview other key staff. Alba, one of the series of SAC co-ordinators from 1993 to the present day (2007) (already cited in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2, p. 47 and in Chapter 6, Sections 6.1.3, p. 157 and 6.2.4, p. 173), younger and less professionally experienced than Berenice but very in touch with students, seemed keen to talk about her experiences and have them recorded in an unstructured interview.

### **6.3.3 The evolution of *Atmosphere: Adaptation to local context* (participant perceptions)**

In this section, I will show how Alba and Patricia, a member of the support staff, and Alice, another of the series of SAC co-ordinators, perceived *Adaptation to local context* to have contributed to an *Atmosphere* in which the SAC project could flourish.

Alba began her story (03.04.2000), with an account of how she had first begun to participate in the project. She was very fluent in her personal narrative, and, after the initial question, as with Berenice, I only asked very occasional questions when she seemed to be

waiting for me to ask her something. The exact formulation of my questions depended much more on what she had just said, because I was still experimenting with unstructured interviews and wanted Alba to express what she herself had perceived as important in the project. During the interview, Alba mentioned the *Adaptation of the project to the local context*, not only at her own institution, but also in general:

“The universities themselves, or the faculty itself, made the adaptations according to their own needs, materials, staff, all this, right?” (1 Alba 6 / 202).

This, she went on to explain, had been something which had made the staff “feel good” about the project, in her context i.e. creating a positive *Atmosphere*, and had been good for the project itself.

However, one of the series of SAC receptionists, whom I shall call “Patricia”, also had very some strong views about SAC issues. In the early days of the project, she reported, she had been invited to attend all the academic training sessions, and was clearly well-informed concerning many of the academic staff’s, as well as receptionists’, responsibilities. In her own words:

“...so here, we all began to take on board what we had seen in Pachuca (another SAC at another Mexican university, which she had visited with a group of teachers) but at the same time, we adapted things to the needs of the SAC, here in the faculty...” (1 Patricia 7 / 131).

Later on in the same interview, she mentioned:

“Now, as far as the way in which we present the material, I believe it really is *something which is very much from here...*” (1 Patricia 9 / 150 – my emphasis).

The *Adaptation* of certain aspects of the project by the authorities, demonstrated by the integration of the SAC into the curriculum, is also mentioned by Alice, another of the series of SAC co-ordinators:

“At the beginning, the SAC was not part of the curriculum, it was optional. I don’t know, you remember, the SAC was optional. But afterwards the authorities decided that it should be more obligatory and it turned into part of the syllabuses of the school, of the Faculty” (1 Alice 17 / 205).

I have so far cited a Faculty director, two SAC co-ordinators and a member of the general support staff, all as having said (in private interviews, at different times) that they felt that *Adaptation* of the SAC (principles, practices and materials) to the local context and needs,

the transmission of the feeling that the SAC has become “*something which is very much from here*”, had contributed to the success of the project. The *Atmosphere* created by this ethos developing round the project, seems to have had a positive effect on people’s feelings, or *Affect*. The negative feeling expressed by Patricia, was caused by the fact that she was not allowed to be so involved as previously (due to a change of administration), and it was nothing to do with the project itself, about which she was very enthusiastic.

#### **6.3.4 The evolution of *Attitude: Acceptance and active support by the institution* (participant perceptions)**

Further evidence of how the university *Accepted* the project is provided by Silva (2001). She recounts how university authorities wholeheartedly supported the project, by approving internal funding and supporting bids for external funding as well as by lobbying for, and obtaining support from, the university’s board of trustees. Their support for the construction of a new building for the SAC, already detailed above, showed their *Acceptance and active support* of the project, as did the new academic policies and the subsequent modification of language curricula (see above).

Further comments taken from both structured and unstructured interviews, underline the *Acceptance and active support of the innovation by the institution*:

“So, well, that (the official agreement between the Ministry of Education, the British Council and the university) was signed, and there was a commitment...” (1 Berenice 2 / 112).

The commitment implied to me that here was *Acceptance*, and there would probably be further *Active support*, as indeed, there was.

“We had the problem with registrations and we bought it (the computer program) from [another university] and so the Rector got directly involved” (1 Berenice 3 / 184).

And perhaps most eloquently, speaking of the Rector again:

“He always considered the project to be a good thing. I don’t feel it was any kind of imposition. I believe it was acceptance, or even more a commitment, an enormous responsibility” (1 Berenice 5 / 229).

Luisa, cited above, also seems to have experienced the *Acceptance and active support* of the project by the university authorities as a positive thing:

“The university is undergoing a change. I think the SAC was very innovative in its time. At that time, the university had no plans to move

towards self-learning. However, in the time in which it has been working, and due to the educational policies which have been drawn up for us, it has been seen as something very positive, and somehow there has now been a turn towards self-learning and towards the question that the students should have the freedom to decide of their own free wills how to learn” (1 Luisa 17 / 249).

This means that the university not only *Accepted* the innovation as a positive change, but also went on to amend wider academic policies; this might be described as a clearly *dynamic* aspect of project sustainability, since the project activities were clearly not only sustained, but achieved goals not even conceived of in the initial project aims. This wider impact took time, if it is considered that the project began in the early nineties, and that it was only in 2002 that self-learning became part of the wider academic policy of the university:

“It is not until just now, in 2002, that it (self-learning) is being laid down as a lineament of the university itself, for the entire university” (1 Luisa 19 / 273).

However, what this does seem to demonstrate is that the level of *Acceptance and active support* by other areas of the institution has been gradually increasing over the years.

Alice, one of the co-ordinators already cited above, expressed in a structured interview that she felt that *Acceptance and active support* of the innovation by the institution was very much complete by the time of the interview. She had perceived it as the product of a process, rather than an immediate and wholehearted reaction. Alice had not been involved with the project at the very beginning, and this could explain why her perception was that *Acceptance and active support* by the authorities had not been immediate, since she is the only person interviewed who perceived this. One might question this, and also wonder whether Alice was perhaps more honest than the rest, but I found no further evidence to substantiate any answer to this question. On the other hand, there is ample evidence that institutional support was rapid, though the management style of the first project co-ordinator, who seems to have been something of a lone operator, would not have conveyed this.

Alice became involved in SAC activities after a change of administration, when all projects were scrutinized and reviewed by university and Faculty authorities, in terms of their cost/benefit in relation to budgeting for the new administration:

“Well, at the beginning, it was something new and they didn’t think it would work and, yes, they were somewhat reluctant. But once we showed them all

about the project, they felt more encouraged, and they gave us their full support (1 Alice 2 / 13).

*Acceptance and active support by authorities* was mentioned as an important element in the survival of their SACs by three teachers working at other project universities. All of these had developed one or more similar centres. I encountered these people at self-access conferences and took advantage of the meetings. Puebla Event Participant 3 (PEV 3) and Puebla Event Participant 5 (PEV 5) both mention support from the university authorities and San Luis Potosi Event Participant 13 (SLPEV 13) mentioned very specifically:

“Another important factor has been *Acceptance and active support of the SAC by the university community.*”

This presumably includes all levels, including authorities.

During conversations with a Faculty Director and SAC co-ordinator during Chance Meeting 1 and Chance Meeting 2, the importance of the support (and by implication *Acceptance and active support*) of their authorities was underlined as a key element in the survival of their centre to the present day.

The Focus group ranked the importance of *Acceptance and active support by authorities* at 4.6/5 for sustainability and 4.6/5 for further growth, beyond mere sustainability.

### **6.3.5 *The evolution of Attitude: Acceptance and active support by the Faculty (participant perceptions)***

The *Acceptance and active support* of the institution (Section 6.3.4, p. 180) which had seemed to me to project a positive *Attitude* to the project, favouring a generally positive *Affective environment* and was, supported by the way in which one of the Faculty directors, perceived the process of *Acceptance and active support* among Faculty staff.

During an individual, private interview (Luisa, 2.9.2002), Luisa perceived that the project had not enjoyed immediate *Acceptance and active support among the Faculty staff*, during the initial and pilot stages, because it had been seen as an imposition by the Ministry and the university. In her view too, it may have been that earliest internal project co-ordinators had not sufficiently involved other staff in the internal project design process. These facets, reported by Luisa, had apparently been crucial in the development of a positive *Attitude* to the project and the creation of a wider positive *Affective Environment*.

When a new co-ordinator had been appointed, one who persistently motivated Faculty staff to get involved in project decisions, she felt that the Faculty had begun to respond more positively, even more noticeably so after the inauguration of the SAC building, in 1997. The development of a *Feeling of collaboration* (Section 6.1.3, p. 157, in relation to *Atmosphere* in the SAC itself) had, in Luisa's view, definitely favoured the success of the SAC project.

“I think that the moment we accepted the project as a Faculty project and began to work together on it, was a key aspect of its success” (1 Luisa 3 / 114).

Luisa felt she could clearly identify the moment when all the staff of the faculty accept the SAC as dating from 1997, when the new building opened:

“I believe that it became important for us at the moment when it became a project belonging to the Faculty itself, and it was no longer an external project...in 1997, when the new building was opened and it (the project) was no longer the concern of a single person, and there were more staff, more administrators involved, oh, I don't know, new co-ordinators, lecturers who were going to be counsellors, the students themselves that started this centre, began to promote the use of it and see its good points, it kind of turned into something which belonged more to the faculty” (1 Luisa 3 / 114).

Prior to that time, a small, pilot SAC had been operating in two converted classrooms, and the number of SAC staff was limited. Luisa mentions these changes as having been crucial:

“In the beginning, it was experienced as something that had been imposed [by the Ministry/Rector], right at the beginning. Afterwards it was kind of adopted as something of our own [by the Faculty]...” (1 Luisa 10 / 132).

This was when the teachers in general began to identify with the project, to accept it and to participate more fully, at the end of the external project period, when the SAC really became 100% property and responsibility of the faculty, acquiring a life of its own.

Linda, during an unstructured interview, also mentions how the level of *Acceptance and active support* of the SAC project among staff has grown over time. Having noted that in the early days of the project they were poorly informed and saw it as a threat, and that therefore the level of Acceptance and active support was not high among staff, she goes on to say:

“I think the level of general *Acceptance and active support* has increased. The authorities, I believe, always accepted it, didn't they? And the teachers



have grown to accept it little by little and have realized that it was in no way a threat to their positions...” (1 Linda 4 / 78).

An attitude of *Acceptance and active support by staff* was also mentioned by Participant 18 at the Puebla SAC event, as an important element in the survival of their SAC:

“More than anything, the *Attitude* of the teachers and students towards their organized participation, always *Focused* on the growth and the success of their objectives.”

Focus group ranking activity achieved a ranking of 4.8/5 for *Acceptance and active support by staff* as a contributory factor to sustainability, and 5/5 for growth. Their answer seemed to imply that they thought *Acceptance and active support* by their own peer group was more important than *Acceptance and active support by authorities*. In follow up discussion, however opinions were divided.

Certainly by the beginning of my research activities, in 2000, the staff working as counsellors in the SAC seemed to have developed an attitude of *Acceptance and active support* towards the innovation. In the initial questionnaires, all five counsellors agreed that the working environment in the centre was “not the same” as that in other areas/faculties. This “differentness” was perceived as something positive, as is shown by a counsellor who went on to gloss their answers with a written comment:

English Counsellor 1 (EC 1) wrote: “I find it more friendly.”

All of these perceptions serve to confirm the perception that the consistently increasing levels of *Acceptance and active support by staff* had contributed to the parallel evolution of a positive *Affective environment* and thus to the success of the project.

### **6.3.6 The evolution of *Attitude: Acceptance and active support by students* (participant perceptions)**

I first identified a sense of *Acceptance and active support by students* can be interpreted from data from the initial questionnaires. These established that over three quarters of the sample expressed opinions concerning how they *liked* working in the SAC, leading to the inference that they had accepted the innovation.

Personal interviews with students towards the end of my data collection activities were very revealing. I labelled each speaker with initials only and summarized each of the

interviews into a number of points. What they said seemed to show that there was by now considerable evidence of *Acceptance of the SAC by the students*.

- 1 SL/P 4: I am used to the SAC now.
- 1 AM/P 9: I like the way the rooms are all arranged.
- 1 LA/P 8: In a certain way, the SAC helps me to practice and in the classroom, I'm going to be able to understand the teacher better. You combine school with the SAC.
- 1 LL/P 3: I don't mind about it being obligatory.
- 1 AU/P 5: I come with a will and desire to study, not just to cover the required number of hours.
- 1 AD/P 2: I don't mind that it's compulsory because I just take it as a necessary part of my training.
- 1 AD/P 5: How good that there are places like this, because they make the whole process of learning easier.
- 1 AD/P 6: I feel very good in the SAC.

In fact not one of the students interviewed expressed negative feelings about the SAC. In a sense, this is a logical finding. For one thing, the students who like the SAC are far more likely to attend in general and more so to give up a Saturday morning to attend. It would be rash to assume that levels of *Acceptance and active support* are high among ALL students, because I lack any data regarding those who do not attend. Those students who agreed to be interviewed did seem to be highly motivated, but again, may equally have suspected my motives in interviewing them and felt it best to give positive answers. I was careful to tell each student that I was from outside the university, doing an independent study of SAC centres. On reflection, this could have produced the effect of their giving answers prompted by loyalty to their institution and teachers, rather than genuine opinions

Having acknowledged this, *Acceptance and active support by the students* was, however, also an element perceived as important to the survival of their centre by participants from other universities encountered at SAC events.

Puebla Event Participant 13 mentioned the:

“Change of vision of the students as they become integrated into the modernization and evolution not only of the language school but also the city and the economic moment through which it has been and still is going.”

San Luis Potosi Event Participant 3 gave this as a reason for the survival of the SAC:

“The total conviction of both students/users and teachers/counsellors...

The persistence of both students and counsellors.”

The final focus group ranked *Acceptance and active support by students* at 4.4 in terms of sustainability, and 5 for further growth. This perhaps implies that, while staff was totally focused on setting up the project, they were more task-oriented, whereas once the SAC was operative, they were aware that it would be vital for students to accept and exploit the SAC, too.

In sum, it would seem to be the case that *Acceptance and active support by the students* was another important factor in the achievement of project sustainability in the case study project.

### 6.3.7 Summary of the section

Summing up ideas from this section, some aspects emerge again, from what people said about the project:

- i) *Sensitivity to the socio-cultural context* is mentioned by a Faculty Director as having been important in the success of the project (Section 6.3.1, p. 176).
- ii) The same person mentioned that *Integration into existing activities* had been important in creating an appropriate *Atmosphere* in which the project might survive (Section 6.3.2, p. 178).
- iii) A SAC co-ordinator recalled how all of the universities had *Adapted the project to their local context*, and this had contributed to its success in other universities (Section 6.3.3, p. 178).
- iv) A member of the support staff felt that the project had been *Adapted to the local context* and the materials had been made into “something which is very much from here”, which had stimulated the positive feelings about the project (Section 6.3.3, p. 178).
- v) Two Faculty directors, one co-ordinator, the Focus group and, interestingly, three teachers from other universities, were quoted as having felt strongly that *Acceptance and active support by their institutions* had been important in the success of their SAC project (Section 6.3.4, p. 180).
- vi) A director, a co-ordinator, a SAC counsellor, other SAC staff and the Focus Group all felt that *Acceptance and active support by their institutions* had been even more important in the success of the project than *Acceptance and active support by their institutions* (Section 6.3.5, p. 182).

vii) A total of eight quotations from students and two teachers from other universities showed high ratings for *Acceptance and active support by their institutions* as a positive element in the success of the project (Section 6.3.6, p. 184). The Focus Group awarded this element the highest marks (5/5) in terms of the importance they had perceived it to have had for the survival of the SAC after the project.

#### **6.4 *The Affective Environment: Further insights from observation of behaviours***

At the level of deep action, I had perceived the SAC building as pervaded by an *Atmosphere* which distinguished it from other departments at the university. The building also seemed to embody and manifested the *Attitude* of the institution to the innovation. These two elements, each composed of interrelated sub-categories, as I have begun to show above, seemed to have interacted with each other and to have contributed to the general positive *Affective Environment* in which the project had evolved. Comments from various members of staff and students, as well as some views of teachers from other institutions, seem to have confirmed some of my own perceptions of what may have contributed to the duration of the case study SAC project.

In Section 6.4, I will provide evidence from the observation of students' behaviour to reconfirm some of my initial perceptions regarding some of the elements which had contributed to the flourishing of the SAC project.

##### **6.4.1 *The evolution of Atmosphere: Adaptation to local context and needs and Integration into existing activities expressed by behaviours***

Further evidence of the way in which the SAC project had been *Adapted to the local context and needs* and *Integrated into existing activities* was also evident from data collected during observation of behaviours in the SAC. For example, on several visits, I was able to observe how students would approach reception and comply with the very formal required registration procedures, just as I had been told by staff. I watched as students went to the reception window to make advance reservations for study places, or to register on arrival for their actual study period (RD Entries, 11.01.02, 11.04.02, 14.04.04).

The formality with which registration procedures were carried out by both staff and students never caused any visible reaction among the students and their unhesitant behaviour seemed to confirm my initial perception that registration procedures, although

perhaps over-formal compared with my own pre-conceived notions, had been completely *Adapted to the local context and needs* (Section 6.2.2, p. 169) to fit in with the administrative systems and norms of the context, and were not alien to the students.

“When registering for a pre-booked study session, the receptionist gives each user a personal registration/tracking slip. The student leaves this, together with her student ID, in a designated and labelled filing box, inside the study area. On the way out, the student collects the ID card again, and hands the completed slip having noted which activities the student completed during the session, back to the reception staff” (OB 1, Ll. 35-40).

When I asked reception staff about the rather strict system, they explained that it was to allow precise tracking of exactly who attended the SAC, where each named individual had been working at any given time during the day and which pieces of equipment and materials they had used. It also enabled staff to record any damage, or removal of equipment or materials from the centre without authorization, and follow up problems more effectively (RD Entry, 01.06.02).

Thus, SAC materials and equipment are apparently very carefully protected, not only by the special design features of the building (6.1, 6.2) but also through the strict registration and student tracking procedures, strictly in line with norms and conditions dictated by the *local context and needs*.

#### **6.4.2 The evolution of *Atmosphere: Promotion of independence among students expressed by behaviours***

Watching students carry out their documentation procedures independently, confirmed that, on the one hand, some aspects of “autonomy”, a key concept of the dominant discourse which has surrounded self-access theory and practice as part of its diachronic development (e.g. Holec, 1981; Dickinson 1987; Ellis and Sinclair, 1989; Sheerin, 1991), have been integrated into SAC activities. However, this concept of autonomy has itself been *Adapted to the local context*. Attendance is obligatory (Section 6.3.1, p. 176), yet autonomy is actively promoted, in those ways that the institution itself considers to be appropriate.

Articles in Palfreyman and Smith, Eds. (2003), mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.5, p. 50 and in Section 6.1.4, p. 160, give numerous examples of how principles of autonomy accepted as standard by the dominant discourse of English Language teaching have been adapted to different contexts, and this study, again, provides another example.

“Once they have gone through the registration process, students pick up their own choice of learning materials inside the centre and proceed to study quite independently, moving from area to area at will, and talking to reception staff and other students at will, though generally in hushed voices and preserving a respectful library-type atmosphere. This movement between control and freedom seems quite fluid” (OB 1, Ll. 41-45).

If we perceive the SAC as a new social context, developing and growing among the various overlapping communities of the university, the ease with which the students seem to move around in the SAC may be perceived as a reflection of their ability to adapt to the practices of this new community and use its tools effortlessly (Toohey and Norton 2003: 58-60, referring to learners becoming part of a *language community* In the case study SAC, the terms used in Toohey and Norton’s article seem very appropriate to describe the building of a *self access resource centre community*, an environment in which a language may be learned and therefore facilitate membership of the language community once sufficient language has been mastered).

Students are also responsible for personally returning all learning materials to the correct place on their departure, and this might be viewed as another way in which the institution *Promotes independence* in ways that have at the same time been *Adapted to local context and needs* (RD entry, 12.04.02). At the level of deep action, I wondered, how far the generally strict organization and control might mirror the traditional kinds of power relationship which I had previously observed to operate between staff and students, in this educational context and which had, according to Mexican colleagues, traditionally constituted an integral part of local educational traditions (RD Entry, April 02).

Returning to observation of what people did in the SAC, I also noted the following, during my first formal observation:

“A member of staff in the reception area is ringing a small hand bell. This seems to be to advise learners that a period is over. People react and move; there is general movement as students come and go. USER 1, the mature male learner, does not react at all, but continues to study quietly alone” (OB 1, Ll. 92-95).

I was sitting in the computer and video area, when the bell rang and I noticed that two people continued working in this area paying no attention at all to the bell. By far the majority of the students, however, left the centre, as soon as the bell rang. I asked four students why they hadn’t stayed longer. Three said they didn’t *have* to stay any longer,

because they had completed the number of hours required by their teacher. The fourth said she was going to continue working, because she was really enjoying what she was doing (RD Entry, 01.06.02). This could imply that some 25% of the students went to the SAC because they enjoyed it, whereas 75% went because it was compulsory. In both cases, whether attendance was by choice or by coercion, the SAC was being exploited. It equally seemed to confirm the appropriateness of the institutional decision to make SAC attendance obligatory (*Adaptation to local context and needs*) since students may not have exploited the facilities very much at all, had it not been a course requirement. Indeed, a future study might try to identify the impact of extrinsic (SAC as a course requirement) and intrinsic (genuine enjoyment of learning in the SAC) motivation on student progress with learning the language.

Emphasized as important by Berenice (Section 6.3.1, p. 176) and again in an interview with Alice, a SAC co-ordinator (02.09.02), it may have been that the strict SAC attendance requirements had had much to do with the duration of the SAC. Students have to study in the SAC for at least one hour per week, and those who do not, are not considered to have completed the course requirements and have to repeat the course in the following semester (RD Entry, notes, informal chat with reception staff, April 2002). This is, incidentally, yet another important reason why registration of students is so strictly monitored.

In practice, as the reception staff told me, students tend to leave the fulfilment of the attendance requirement till towards the end of term, so the centre tends to be highly over-subscribed towards the end of courses. Beyond the required one hour per week, any additional attendance is voluntary, and only a very small percentage of students attend more frequently. The possible effect of this practice on individual student progress with language learning, could be taken up as the subject of further research.

To summarize this sub-section, there are a number of ways in which students work “independently” in this SAC:

- i) They carry out certain registration procedures alone.
- ii) Once inside the study area, the selection of learning activities is usually in their own hands (except for cases which I had heard about from informal chats with teachers, some of whom occasionally gave homework tasks to be done in the SAC).
- iii) They are responsible for returning learning materials to their original place before leaving.

- iv) They decide when they will study (time of day, day of week, moment during the semester).

To some extent, then, users apparently did become more “autonomous”, “self-directed” and “self-motivated” through working in the SAC, whatever their motivations might be. Also, as I will illustrate below, most students appeared to adapt and work independently in the SAC environment (Section 6.4.2, p. 188), which also seemed to contribute to the generally positive *Atmosphere*.

Another reflection was that the compulsory attendance requirement ensured good attendance figures, which would justify continued funding of the centre by the university. Thus, the way in which the SAC had been *integrated* into the Faculty through the *curriculum*, seemed very loudly to echo the way in which the SAC building had been *integrated* into the Faculty *cultural activities*. The high attendance figures (resulting from obligatory attendance) would then have to ensure on-going funding through quantitative proof of impact e.g. student attendance statistics, and this would favour the survival of the project (RD Entry, informal chat with reception staff, April 2002). I will take up the issue of economic resources in greater detail in Chapter 8, this aspect began to emerge, while I was trying to identify and interpreting the interacting elements of the *Atmosphere and Attitudes* which seemed to have been working together to create a positive *Affective environment*. The aspect of ensuring funding by good attendance statistics through making the SAC a course requirement is important to mention because it clearly illustrates how at the deepest levels, aspects of the *Affective environment* were also interconnected with aspects of the *Administrative environment* in supporting the evolution of the project.

### **6.5 Within the *Affective Environment*: Training**

This section will include evidence to show how *Training* seems to have made a positive contribution to the development of the *Affective Environment* in different ways.

It has been noted in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.5, p. 50 and in Section 6.1.4, p. 160, that British Council training consultants had been carefully inducted, to ensure that they provided explanations and examples of different possible systems and strategies for implementing, administering and exploiting a SAC facility. The intention was always to demonstrate and discuss a range of options and support each university in making its own decisions, according to their own context and priorities, Grounds (2004). In this section, I will present evidence suggesting that the ways in which *Training* was implemented may



also have contributed to the development of a positive *Affective environment* in which the SAC project could flourish.

### **6.5.1 The evolution of *Training: Atmosphere and Attitude***

Linda, one of the successions of SAC co-ordinators, perceived the British Council *Training* in this light:

“I think it would have been total chaos without the help of the British Council consultants. Don’t you? Because, well we knew very well the project was funded by the Ministry and we had to comply, but it all seemed a big puzzle to us and we had no idea where to begin to put the project together and the British Council played a vital role in starting up and getting the project to work. I mean, they helped us; they didn’t do the work for us, but they gave us some guidance and showed us in which order we should try to put the pieces of the puzzle together. And I suppose this kind of help was essential because it helped us to carry out the work. We were the ones who actually did the work, but the trainers would give us ideas about how to do things...they never imposed anything. I think they gave us a clear explanation of the kinds of possibilities we had, and every university was free to take their own decisions” (1 Linda 5, 173).

During individual interviews, and also when chatting more informally, academic staff agreed that both the *Atmosphere* and *Attitude* which had developed around the project had to do with the ways in which the *Training* had given the information participants needed to “make the project their own”.

Luisa, one of the series of Faculty directors, also mentioned the *Training* received from the British Council, which, she felt, provided the basis for decisions. However, she stresses that this *Training* had not been the *only* factor in developing their project strategy:

“We think that the external training support we received was fundamental, because it provided us with a basis in terms of methodology. The British Council trained our staff at the beginning. But after that, co-operation among different universities started to evolve, and we began to share the experiences we had all had in all the different SACs. This served to enrich what we had received in terms of external training. It made the SAC staff more sensitive to the fact that there were various different paths that could be followed. In our case, we definitely

think that this helped us a great deal to follow a route, which we have tried to follow, because we see it as a good route in itself (1 Luisa 2 / 57).

The co-operation to which Luisa refers was instigated through the monthly regional workshops funded by the project for years 3 and 4 of the official project period, as part of planning for sustainability. The dual intention behind the workshops had been to provide a forum for the discussion of key issues, and to stimulate networking through the professional contacts made personally during such events. This successfully sowed the seeds for increased communication and peer support among the different universities for the future. Indeed, the annual national (and now international) SAC conference, now funded by a different university each year, continues to nourish this type of peer training through sharing experience and research results among SAC teams across the country. In sum, *Training*, both of the types offered by the British Council and that achieved through contacts and networking among peers, seem to have contributed to a positive *Affective environment* both in the Faculty and across the country, enabling the project to achieve something beyond sustainability at the case study university and in other institutions, too.

Certainly, after the national project ended in 1997, mutual support has fed the SACs for the last ten years. It may well be that on-going peer collaboration and training activities are at least as important as external specialist training in terms of achieving a dynamic state of development for a project, beyond the official project period. In Chapter 7, Section 7.3.1, p. 226, I will give further evidence of *Appropriate knowledge and skills training*.

## **6.6 Within the *Affective environment*: Documentary evidence**

Although I found in practice that the documentary data I collected did not speak to me as clearly of the *Atmosphere* and *Attitudes* which evolved during and around the project as other types of data did, there were some points worth highlighting. In this section, I will take up the aspect of *Attitude: Acceptance and active support by the institution*, and in Chapter 7, I will pinpoint some further related issues.

### **6.6.1 The evolution of *Attitude: Acceptance and active support by the institution***

Evidence from a very different type of data, a document coded as University Internal Report 1, 1996 (UIR 1/1996), mentions the annual university lottery, the proceeds of which were destined to the project that year. Such university lotteries are common in Mexico and are an important source of extra funding for projects. The fact that the university approved

that the funds should go exclusively to the project that year, marks a high level of *Acceptance and active support* of the project. Equally important is the reference to:

“Recompilation of data from SAC project by the SIPAPU (System of Planning and Approval of Projects for the University), and consultancy by staff from the Financial Promotion Department of the university” (UIR 1/96).

This shows that by that point in time, the finance department had taken the project on board and fully incorporated it into their budget.

A further piece of evidence is that by 1996, the university had also approved a volunteer programme among undergraduate students, in support of the project. All undergraduates at Mexican state universities are required to carry out a certain number of hours of volunteer work before graduating. The fact that the SAC became an option for volunteer work again shows *Acceptance and active support* of the authorities as well as the integration of the project into another type of university activity, that is to say, *Adaptation and integration to the context*.

University Internal Report 2/97 details key activities for 1997 and mentions that the university had made attendance at the SAC an obligatory part of all basic language courses (except Spanish as a foreign language) by that year. Mentioned above in relation to the SAC becoming part of institutional academic policies, this event by implication shows a high level of acceptance and active support by the authorities. The university also agreed to the participation of their SAC staff in activities related to self-access learning hosted by other universities. The institution supplied funds for staff members to travel to the University of Zacatecas, to attend a SAC consultancy session, the University San Nicolas Hidalgo of Michoacan, to participate in a conference, the University of the State of Hidalgo, to participate in an event to evaluate the impact of English Language teaching in Mexico and the contribution of the British Council to Mexican ELT, as well as a further trip to the University of the State of Coahuila, to participate in a further regional SAC conference (UIRs, 1993-1997). Each of these trips represents a financial investment by the university and again illustrates the high level of *Acceptance and active support* the SAC project enjoyed.

This type of visit is no longer mentioned in internal reports for 1998 and 1999. This is more a reflection of the fact that the scheduled British Council project period had terminated, and with it, the regular BC/Ministry of Education funded regional SAC

conferences, than a lack of interest from the authorities. It has been my experience that the university has always readily sponsored participation of its SAC staff in SAC events, up to the present day, as can be seen from the successive strategic plans written for the SAC.

## **6.7 Summary of findings Chapter 6**

In this chapter, I have shown, through numerous examples from a range of data types, that a positive *Affective Environment* seems to have lain at the core of the project and this is apparently relatable to a series of interacting phenomena which can be roughly grouped under the main “categories” of *Atmosphere*, *Attitude* and *Training*. I perceive that this positive *Affective environment* was in a state of continuous evolution during the project through the interconnected major “categories” and their respective components. However, it is first of all not always clear that each of these component elements was exclusively interconnected with only one category or concept.

It would seem to be the case that the phenomena described have been interrelated in complex ways. Some of the relationships between the types of concepts and categories which seem to be emerging are clearly *not necessarily linear, and dependencies among the interacting phenomena are not clearly definable as unidirectional or exclusive to a particular concept or category*. A richer interpretation will, I believe, accommodate the possibility that there is multi-directional interaction among concepts, categories and sub-categories. Such a perception seems to me closer to what I discovered than any attempt to force them into neat divisions could ever be. Such an exercise would at once threaten the transparency and verisimilitude of my interpretations and belie the multiplicity of thought which underlies my work.

Table 4 is an attempt to summarize what this first data interpretation chapter has depicted. It must be stressed that these categories and sub-categories are not presented as constituting either a totally exhaustive or exclusive list: they are simply those, which first emerged in my data.

**Table 4: Summary of emerging concepts and categories, Chapter 6**

Global concept (Environment)	Categories (Surface elements)	Sub-categories (Component elements)
Affective Environment	Atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitivity to socio-cultural context</li> <li>• Respect for local values</li> <li>• Adaptation to local context/needs</li> <li>• Integration into existing activities</li> <li>• Feeling of collaboration and support (across institutions)</li> <li>• Feeling of collaboration and support (within the project institution)</li> <li>• Promotion of independence</li> <li>• Encouragement of creativity</li> <li>• Work-focused environment</li> </ul>
Affective Environment	Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Institution)</li> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Faculty)</li> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Project staff)</li> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Students)</li> <li>• Adaptation to local context/needs</li> <li>• Belief in potential long-term benefits</li> <li>• Sense of ownership and responsibility</li> </ul>
Affective Environment	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate training</li> <li>• Adaptation to local context/needs</li> <li>• Facilitate creation of “Something which is very much from here”</li> </ul>

### 6.7.1 First steps towards a deeper understanding of the nature of sustainability

During the interpretation and analysis activities reported in this chapter, some interesting discoveries have emerged concerning the possible deeper nature of the “sustainability” achieved by the self-access project at this university. Some of the phenomena summarized in Table 4 will be confirmed by further examples in Chapters 7 and 8, and some new elements will be described. In Chapter 9, I will extend the description and discuss how far these phenomena may perhaps be generalizable to other fields and contexts. For the moment, I will limit myself to these comments:

- i) **The definition of “sustainability”** used to conceptualize the phenomenon and to serve as a point of departure in Chapter 3 was this: “Sustainability is a characteristic of a process or a state that can be maintained indefinitely, without harming present or future socio-economic or environmental factors”. The case study project seems to have achieved something more than a “process or state that can be maintained indefinitely”. The data, seems to point to the fact that this is because the activities related to the process of developing a SAC have not been “maintained indefinitely”, but have continued to evolve dynamically, with the political and administrative support of the Faculty. Perhaps, then, the term “sustainability” is indeed limited itself, and needs rethinking, as I argued in Chapter 3.
- ii) **Perceptions that: “effects are not straightforward, continuous functions of causes”** and “change is non-linear”, and “the universe ... is creative, emergent...evolutionary and changing, transformative and turbulent” (Morrison, 1998: 4, 14; cited in Chapter 2, p. 32 and Aramayo, PhD thesis, in process) seem to be supported by what I discovered. I could not say, in many cases, which aspect was a cause and which an effect – I could only describe *what I perceived to have co-existed in the project context*.
- iii) **With regard to the general areas of interest**, which I detailed as motivators of this research, in Chapter 2, several important insights have been reached:
  - a) People did not generally talk about concepts and categories related to “culture”, “acculturation” (of trainers), “organizational culture”, “large culture” and “culturism” (Chapter 1, p. 20-21; Chapter 2, pp. 25-8) directly, as I had, perhaps naïvely, thought they might. It was much more as a result of comparing what artefacts (the building, documents), events (history of the project, observation of what happens in the SAC today) and what people said, that I was able to relate some phenomena to these concepts.
  - b) Very important indeed is the suggestion that *the project itself underwent a process of acculturation*, as it was accepted and adapted, according to the vision of the institution, the faculty, then the SAC staff and students, and integrated into to the local context. Similarly, *the acculturation of the principles and practices underlying the initial project* may have been far more crucial than the acculturation of the trainers. External consultants and trainers had been careful not to impose a specific model of a SAC and internal project teams made their own decisions with their own authorities on how to make the something very much their own. This, too, perhaps in

some ways facilitated the acculturation of the project. It may not, then, be so important for external trainers and consultants to be *themselves* acculturated into the culture of the project, as for them to be able to provide a wide range of examples in which similar projects have been implemented in different contexts so that the *project* can become acculturated. The answer may lie in a sensitive adaptation and fusion of the knowledge and experience of others with that of the internal staff in a project context.

- c) The role of the external project leader (Chapter 2, p. 27-28) has not incidentally emerged as an element *of any note at all*. Though perhaps somewhat subduing for project managers, this is perhaps not a bad thing (see my comments on the phrase “My project”, Chapter 2, p. 27). The situation is, perhaps that, whatever the *grand plan* of external donor organizations and external project leaders, the project is not likely to be successful, unless the host authorities and staff *Accept and actively support* the innovation, “acculturating” it in the way suggested above, *Integrating it into existing activities*, showing *Sensitivity to local context* and *Respecting existing traditions and values* rather than trampling over them. Any powers of organization or communication the project leader may have, may be much less important than commitment by the institution, often illustrated by policy and finance decisions, to be detailed further in Chapter 8.
- d) In Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, p. 29, I mentioned a general interest in aspects to do with human relations and communication. At one level, members of each group of the internal project team (directors, SAC co-ordinators and SAC staff), seemed to have received the essential messages projected by their authorities. These messages, projected through their actions, the messages conveyed by the design features, inside and out, of the SAC building and especially the overall size of the financial investment, seem to have been something like this: the university would *Accept and actively support* the project, provided that there was *Sensitivity to the local context* and *Respect for local traditions and values* were respected and it was appropriately *Integrated into existing activities*. Because the project was sponsored by the Mexican ministry of education, there was, of course, some pressure to do this and I will discuss this aspect further in Chapter 8. However, the fact remains that commitment was made, communicated and, apparently replayed among the different groups of Faculty authorities and SAC project staff. Though it took longer for some of the Faculty staff and

students to accept and actively support the innovation, the fact that the authorities made and communicated the commitment in a number of different ways, may have helped to carry the project through.

- e) Another aspect which had interested me had been whether the motivations of project participants (Chapter 2, p. 31), might have contributed in any way to the positive outcomes of the project. There does seem to have been a strong element of commitment to the project, though it is not totally clear whether this was for philosophical and ideological reasons, or to do with factors related to policy and finance, at the respective levels. These issues will be revisited in Chapters 8 and 9.
- f) I had been interested to discover if the relationship developed over the years with the British Council and the university had served to strengthen the likelihood of success for the project (Chapter 2, p. 32). What had emerged was that though British Council training and guidance had been considered crucial in the early stages, collaboration with institutions involved in similar projects was an important factor in the continuation of activities. Managers of large-scale projects should perhaps not underestimate the importance of networking among the individual local institutions, which may support, sustainability as much as initial training activities.
- g) What had been the effects of training? Would these have helped the project participants to develop a new vision, see the future benefits of the project for their institution, and develop their own decision-making powers? (Chapter 2, p. 33). Certainly, orientation meetings and training workshops took place. Certainly, decisions have been made, at institutional, Faculty and SAC, regarding how to adapt the project to make it suitable for implementation in this specific context. It seems that the offering of alternatives during orientation training may have supported this process by sharing appropriate knowledge and skills. By extrapolation, the nature of the training may have contributed something to project sustainability, despite the possible ethnocentrism of essential principles and practices on which the project was based.
- iv) After the pilot stage, once the new SAC building was available, the project seems to have been embraced more completely by Faculty staff. A positive working *Atmosphere* seems to have been created, characterized by a *Work-focused environment* for staff and students, and very tangible examples of



*Adaptation of the project to the local context and needs, Respecting local values and Promoting of independence and creativity among the staff.*

- v) Together with the positive *Atmosphere*, an *Attitude* incorporating, a *Sense of ownership and responsibility* among the SAC team also seems to have developed. With the exception described, communication among the SAC project team and with the rest of the Faculty seems to have been effective and human relations good, also contributing positively to the development of the project.

### **6.7.2 Initial answers to the research questions**

With regard to the formal research questions, first of all, I have shown how data analysis and interpretation activities have begun to enhance my understanding of the deeper nature of sustainability and possible contributory factors.

Next, the ways in which I have collected, organized, interpreted and illustrated the data, have provided some new ideas on how to study sustainability, and develop our understanding of the phenomenon.

Thirdly, I have also suggested two possible aspects which might be researched in the future, one in relation to project sustainability, and one in relation to self-access learning. The first suggestion related to an analysis of the various genres of project documents and possible connections with project sustainability. The second was to study the different types of motivation which might lead students to study in the SAC (extrinsic or intrinsic) and whether this could in any way be related to or reflected by language learning results.

Fourthly, in all the above, I have begun to signal a number of factors that have made this case particularly interesting, as an example of a project which has achieved something more than project sustainability.

In Chapter 7, I will continue this detailed report on how themes related to the *Affective Environment* surrounding the case study project emerged from the data, and how I began to interrelate them as facets of a more complex phenomenon, evolving in ways comparable to the growth of a multi-faceted crystal. The more I interacted with the data, the more clearly I began to conceptualize the project as having been characterized by a process of multi-faceted evolution comparable to that of the growth of a crystal, the nucleus of which was *Affect*, or the *Affective Environment*. Clustering around this nucleus, were the *Atmosphere* and *Attitudes* and a kind of *Training*, interacting with each other, and expanding thanks to the interaction with the other phenomena or “sub-categories” exemplified above.

In Chapters 7 and 8 I will provide a substantial array of further examples to support this burgeoning perception of what made the SAC project prosper.

## Chapter 7

### **The Complex Facets of the *Affective Environment***

*In this chapter, I will continue to describe the facets of the Affective Environment which seemed to have characterized the case study project, and some of which still seem to prevail in the SAC today. I will expand on some of the categories already mentioned in Chapter 6 and also mention some further elements which emerged, adding further dimensions to the growing “clusters” of interconnected categories surrounding Atmosphere, Attitude and Training.*

*As in the previous chapter, the analysis will include information derived from various sources, including: what people at the case study university and other similar institutions told during different types of interactions, what I knew from direct experience of what had happened during the project itself, different types of documentation and what I described and observed myself, during fieldwork. I will conclude the chapter with an extended table of concepts, categories and sub-categories related to Affect, summarizing the expanded results, in relation to the global concept of Affect.*

#### **7.1 A developing view of what contributes to *Atmosphere***

In Chapter 6, I presented repeated examples from the data, which suggested to me that a generally comfortable and favourable *Atmosphere* surrounds the work and study activities carried out in the SAC today. I reached this conclusion after repeated encounters with the various types of data and their possible contributions (e.g. design features of the building, Section 6.1.1, p. 152, Section 6.2.1, p. 168, participant perceptions, Section 6.3.1, p. 176, observation of students' behaviour, Section 6.4.1, p. 187 and documentary evidence, Section 6.6.1, p. 193). These illustrated respectively ways in which the *Atmosphere* of the SAC had been enhanced by developments such as its *Integration into existing activities, Adaptation to local context and needs, A spirit of collaboration and support, Promotion of independence and creativity*, and a *Work-focused and organized*. However, remembering the importance of looking at the project *process* as well as the *products*, I will begin this section by showing how some of the participants perceived the *Mood* of participants in the early stages of the project, and how this *Mood* seems to have developed, as part of the *Atmosphere*, as the project developed.

### 7.1.1 *Mood as a facet of Atmosphere*

The *Mood* of the SAC project, seems to have undergone a process of change which can be traced from the start-up period, when consultancy visits from the British Council began, during the project development period, and also after the project ended. The beginning was not easy for everyone, but I was able to identify at least one “turning point”, which seems to have marked a distinct change in *Mood* among the teachers.

I recalled that most university Rectors were extremely responsive to the project, because of the growing demand for English and lack of teachers, as well as other factors explained in (RD Entry, 10.10.01). I have also reported how the Rector gave his immediate and enthusiastic support to the project (Chapter 6, Section 6.3.4, p. 180). I have suggested in Chapter 6, that this positive reaction, coupled with the intention to adapt the project to the context of the university, respecting local values and educational traditions and integrating it into existing activities, seems to have contributed to the evolution of a positive *Atmosphere*, within which the project might thrive.

The response was not immediately positive among the teaching staff, whose beliefs, practices and work schedules were going to be most directly affected by the innovation. Their *Mood* was, not surprisingly, affected by anxiety:

“Well. You see, I think the majority of the teaching staff at the school was poorly informed and they didn’t accept the idea of the project very well, because they saw it as a threat to their positions” (1 Linda 2 / 37).

Linda described how some teachers had believed that the university was embarking upon a plan to gradually replace English teachers by computers. This, they had believed was in order to reduce salary costs (1 Linda 3 / 40).

By the present time, it is evident to all the teachers that the SACs were never intended to replace them, but rather to provide them and their students with an extra teaching and learning resource. Nevertheless, some of the staff still desists from using the SAC with their students even today.

The questionnaires designed for teachers and SAC counsellors, administered at the beginning of this research, yielded some insights, in this respect. Only *one* classroom teacher (SQ1/ET1) volunteered to participate on the day of the administration of the questionnaires, though all were invited. The majority of volunteers were SAC counsellors. This alarmed me, but the Faculty director attributed the poor response to lack of free time, rather than interest. In retrospect, I should have followed this up more persistently, but at

the time, I was only just beginning to collect data, and was more worried about gate-keeping and collaborative principles, and certainly did not want to create any feelings of coercion. However, I did note (RD Entry, 28.11.00), that teachers did not volunteer to answer, and I wondered how far this may have been indicative of their having rejected the SAC. Equally, teachers may perhaps have feared exposure of ignorance, or criticism, for not yet using the SAC “appropriately”. I could not confirm these possibilities, but registered them, carefully.

ET1’s answers and comments seemed to constitute a disclaimer. She denied almost all knowledge of the current purposes and functions of the SAC. This struck me as odd. I distinctly remembered her having attended my training sessions, and that she had not been very receptive to the project at the beginning. Her message was perhaps less to do with the general theory of self-access learning, and more to do with how the Faculty and SAC team were currently exploiting the facility. Had she felt excluded in some way? Had the *Mood* in the Faculty not really developed as positively as some of the SAC staff seemed to have perceived? (E.g. 1 Linda 4 / 78, Chapter 6, p. 184).

Although English Teacher 1 (ET1) had never worked as one of the SAC team, and said she didn’t know what went on in the SAC, nonetheless she wrote that she went to the centre “many times a month”, to look for new teaching material, for her regular classes. This reaction implied an unexpected kind of opportunistic acceptance of the facility, which at the same time perhaps embodied statement that this teacher felt that she knew best how to exploit the SAC materials, regardless of what the Faculty might recommend.

ET1 also wrote that she perceived the *Atmosphere* in the SAC as “different” from that of other areas of the university, expanding her answer in Spanish to add: “this is how it should be”. I wondered if she might actually be saying something that more closely represented the true feelings of Faculty teachers about the SAC, and I returned to the data, to look for similar indicators in other people’s opinions, or in other types of data.

Patricia, one of the support staff, cited in Chapter 6, strongly contrasted the reactions of different groups of teachers at the beginning of the project.

“At the beginning, when I was working in the pilot centre [an adapted classroom] the Faculty teachers seemed to resist this new philosophy of self-directed learning. But not just all the teachers, it wasn’t the Mexican language teachers who resisted, it was the foreign teachers, and I noticed that they very much rejected the new philosophy” (1 Patricia 3 / 71).

This gave new pause for reflection. ET1 was certainly one of the foreign (i.e. non-Mexican) teachers, and her answers in the questionnaire had therefore perhaps been

characteristic of the reactions of this sub-group. I noted in my diary (RD Entry, 02.05.02) that this was an aspect to follow up. Why would it be that the European language teachers who rejected the new ideas, while the Mexican teachers, and also the students, were apparently much more enthusiastic?

“But on the other hand, with the Mexican teachers, well, it was something new... something marvellous, which they could exploit with students at the beginning of the project. As far as the students were concerned, it was super at the beginning. When it started, the students were very excited” (1 Patricia 4 / 77).

I wanted to follow up the issue of these conflicting viewpoints (which I also recalled from discussion in a training workshop I had led at the beginning of the project). I felt that the *Mood* projected by the foreign staff may have been potentially very destructive. And yet the project had survived.

However, I was loath to approach “foreign teachers” directly, for fear of being perceived as having singled them out for special treatment, which could be misinterpreted. I did not want give any impression of giving precedence to specific racial or national background, for example. It was for this reason only, that I left the issue pending for some time. However, in order to include this phenomenon in the discussion, I would have to follow it through, delicate though it was.

The person I decided to approach for help with interpretation has been a teacher at the Faculty for many years and has also served as director. I have known her personally for several years and she had always been involved in the SAC project as a language teacher, rather than as a member of the specialized SAC team. I knew she had participated in some of the project training sessions and events, and believed she would give me a frank opinion. “Blanca”, as I will call her, had been very enthusiastic on my data collection visits, and instead of waiting to make an appointment, I decided to phone her directly. After asking after her health etc., I explained I was going through my data again and had identified the phenomenon just described.

I asked if she could name any possible reasons for the very different responses from Mexican teachers and foreign teachers at the beginning of the SAC project, as mentioned by their colleagues in the recorded interviews.

Without a moment's hesitation, Blanca said:

"I think it was because the two groups saw the project very differently. The Mexican teachers saw the SAC as a kind of supplementary support, where students could study things which had not been covered in class, and for students who needed special attention, too.

The foreigners always said they didn't think that self-access would work in Mexico, because they perceive Mexicans as undisciplined and needing someone behind them the whole time, to make sure they work. Another thing is that I think they were simply afraid that they would lose their jobs" (Blanca / TC / 02.05.04).

The fact that foreign teachers working as part of the university team had such a marked, negative, stereotyped view of the country in which they were living and working was striking. It is a concrete example of the types of culturism or even racism operating among members of the English language profession, discussed by Holliday (2003, 2005) and mentioned in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.4, pp. 32, 34 and in Chapter 6, Section 6.1.4, p. 162. The image of "autonomy" as a neo-imperialist construct (Pennycook 1997), and an example of ways in which western countries try to condescendingly "emancipate" teaching and learning in less "enlightened" parts of the world is abhorrent. It was surely even more abhorrent to say: "It won't work, because they are Mexican," damning a new educational alternative in a different context for essentialist reasons and projecting a negative *Mood* among colleagues and students.

The fact that the project had prevailed, despite the creation of a negative *Mood* by this group of teachers, would seem to indicate that even more important factors had contributed to its success. Although Mexican staff greatly outnumber the foreign staff at the university, I do not believe this was simply a matter of numbers. For example, in Chapter 6, I have already suggested some ways in which the design and implementation of the SAC project seemed to reflect *Acceptance and active support, Adaptation to local context, Respect for institutional traditions and values* and a will to *Integrate the SAC into the university's and faculty's activities*. Furthermore, I have explained how the interpretation of "autonomy" may quite rightly have been different in this socio-cultural context. I also critiqued myself as a researcher in Chapter 6, because I should not have seen this as surprising. The local institution and the staff setting up the SAC project were certainly the best qualified of all to decide how exactly "autonomy" and "self-direction" would be best interpreted in their own cultural context. Although it is hard to say which of the factors described so far were most

decisive in achieving project sustainability, I cannot help but wonder whether it was the adaptation of SAC and autonomous learning principles to the socio-cultural setting of the university.

Further evidence of how Faculty staff was slow to take the SAC completely on board is provided by Susana, another member of the SAC support staff, who said in an interview (17.7.2000):

“...for example, some of the teachers themselves still don’t ask the students to cover the required hours in the SAC, they probably think, well if the students wants to go, let them go, but, as I said before, if the teacher doesn’t insist sometimes, the students don’t come.”

However, once the SAC was integrated into the language curriculum, and the Faculty “made the project its own”, the levels of acceptance among staff increased.

Although *Acceptance* among all Faculty teachers was not immediate, and their antagonistic *Mood* may have initially been detrimental to the *Atmosphere*, it seems that certain other factors proved to be more important to the project’s success, or that the optimism of the majority of the staff prevailed. Alba (a SAC co-ordinator, already cited) spoke enthusiastically about how *she* had felt about the project, during the early days:

“Er... At that moment (at the beginning), it seemed to me to be a really interesting project... it was a great challenge for us all...It was strange and different, and I didn’t quite understand at first...” (1 Alba 2 / 46).

The adjective “interesting”, and the animated way in which Alba spoke, as she recalled her earlier experience, may be seen as reflecting her positive *Mood*, at the beginning of the project even though “strange and different” may suggest some trepidation. A turning point certainly seems to have been when the new SAC building was opened and a new co-ordinator took over:

“Then [a new co-ordinator] took over the co-ordination of the project the new building opened and there was actually more physical space available [than in the pilot SAC – a small converted classroom] and that helped the new co-ordinator because there was actually more space to get the teachers involved and also to work much harder with the students. At the same point, attendance at the SAC was incorporated into the language curriculum, and the teachers began to accept it much more” (1 Luisa 13 / 171).



With regard to the students, I had seemed to perceive a positive *Mood* among those who nowadays use the SAC (though there had been a period of disgruntlement when a small registration fee was introduced, as Linda reminded me in an interview on 02.09.02).

Even those students who had seemed to lack direction (OBS 1, cited in Chapter 6), did not seem *unhappy* to be in the SAC. I have related how I returned to the SAC at the end of my data collection activities to talk to current students and found them to expressed very positive feelings (Chapter 6, Section 6.3.6, p. 184). The positive *Atmosphere* and *Mood*, I had felt surrounding and inside the building, noted during observation visits and expressed in informal conversations with the current SAC staff, was also projected by students.

When I returned to talk to the students, I was received as kindly as always by the Faculty Director, although I had not forewarned her about this visit. Although this may have been interpreted as having been impolite, I really needed an unplanned “snapshot” of who was in the SAC, and what they thought about their SAC, on a normal working day. Fortunately, the Director seemed to feel comfortable about this extemporary visit, but to be sure, I also double-checked with the SAC co-ordinator before going into the students’ work area. She said she thought it was an excellent idea to talk to students without any prior warning, and looked forward to sharing the results. I felt free to proceed (RD Entry, 14.02.04) though also aware that it would have been hard for her to have said anything else.

While students were working, I would approach individuals in the different sections of the SAC at random, and ask if they would mind my interrupting them briefly. In retrospect, this may also have bordered on impoliteness, and perhaps I should have waited until break periods, but the way in which students seemed to rush off quickly when the bell rang has already been noted (OB 1, 11.04.2002) and I was afraid of missing the opportunity. I explained to each of these nine students individually that I was a postgraduate student at a UK university, studying SACs in Mexico, and interested to hear their impressions of their SAC, promising them confidentiality and anonymity. I had some guiding questions ready, in case students were lost for words, and used them quite frequently. Some of the opinions recorded follow.

In answer to the question: “Why has the SAC lasted for over seven years? Suli, a 4<sup>th</sup> semester Italian language student said, “Because the students have got better results (in their exams) because of it!” (1 SL / P9). And again: “I think we can learn more rapidly here, with tutoring from a teacher as well, of course (1 LA / P8).

Augusto, a third semester Basic English student said: “I come of my own free will and because I want to study – not just to cover the required number of hours” (1 AU / P5).

I take this statement to mean two things: first, that this student feels positive about coming to the SAC in general (positive *Mood*), and second (by inference), that there may be others who do not, and demonstrate this by not attending.

Adrian, a 2nd semester French student said: “How good that there are places like this, because they make the whole process of learning easier!” (1 AD / P5) and went on to emphasize: “I like studying better in the SAC than in the classroom or in my house” (1 AD / P11). Adrian would certainly seem to project a positive *Mood* with regard to SAC. Students who go to the SAC, it seems, project a positive *Mood*, but what of those who do not attend? I could see great potential value in interviewing students who did *not* go to the SAC, but could not commit the necessary time to implement this idea. First, it would have been time-consuming to make appointments for interviews, but even more important, students may well have felt coerced to be interviewed and embarrassed or annoyed at being asked about why they had not fulfilled a curriculum requirement, by an outsider. I therefore decided to drop the idea.

To sum up this section, I have tried to highlight *Mood*, as a possible element affecting the *Atmosphere*, and by extension, the general *Affective environment* in which the SAC project developed.

- i) Although the rector, by all his actions, seems to have projected a positive mood, at all stages of the project, teachers do not seem to have accepted the project immediately; their *Mood* was anxious, and some felt their jobs might be threatened (p. 203).
- ii) The aggressive tone of a teacher’s answers to a questionnaire and the negative *Mood* they projected (Section 7.1.1, p. 204), prompted me to find out more about what other teachers’ reactions had been earlier in the project. I was able to trace how these seem to have changed, from the moment when the Faculty had taken the full responsibility for the SAC.
- iii) I discovered there had generally been a difference in reaction between Mexican and non-Mexican teachers (Section 7.1.1, p. 204-5). For possibly racist reasons, non-Mexican teachers projected a negative *Mood*, saying that Mexicans lacked the discipline needed for autonomous learning.
- iv) In some cases, the *Mood* of some teachers was still non-committal by the year 2000, though SAC attendance had been integrated into language programmes,

in 1997 (Section 7.1.1, p. 207). Nonetheless, the attendance requirement, together with the opening of the new building marked a turning point in the *Mood* of most teachers, who had gradually accepted the SAC (p. 207).

- v) The *Mood* of SAC project staff seems to have been generally positive, though not without trepidation (p. 207).
- vi) The general *Mood* of the students had been positive, and recent interviews underline this (p. 208).

### **7.1.2 *Work-focused and organized environment as a facet of Atmosphere***

The description of the physical features of the SAC in Chapter 6 attempted to convey something of the singular and rich *Atmosphere* of the SAC, and also to suggest the possible relationship of this *Atmosphere* with the *Affect* of people working and studying there. I will now slightly expand the description, by including two sketches, showing the layouts of different areas of the centre. These, I believe, may serve to further illustrate the type of environment that reigns in the SAC itself, and contributes to the *Work-focused atmosphere*, Chapter 6, Section 6.1.5, p. 164. Judging by the nature of comments made by students, the tight organization does not seem to be perceived by them as negative.

Lara, a second semester Basic English student said:

“I feel much better in the SAC than in the classroom. When I’m in the classroom, I feel under pressure because my classmates probably have a higher level than me and here I feel freer to work at my own pace” (1 LA / P5).

This was by no means the only comment of this nature from students, as has already been reported in Section 7.1.1, above.

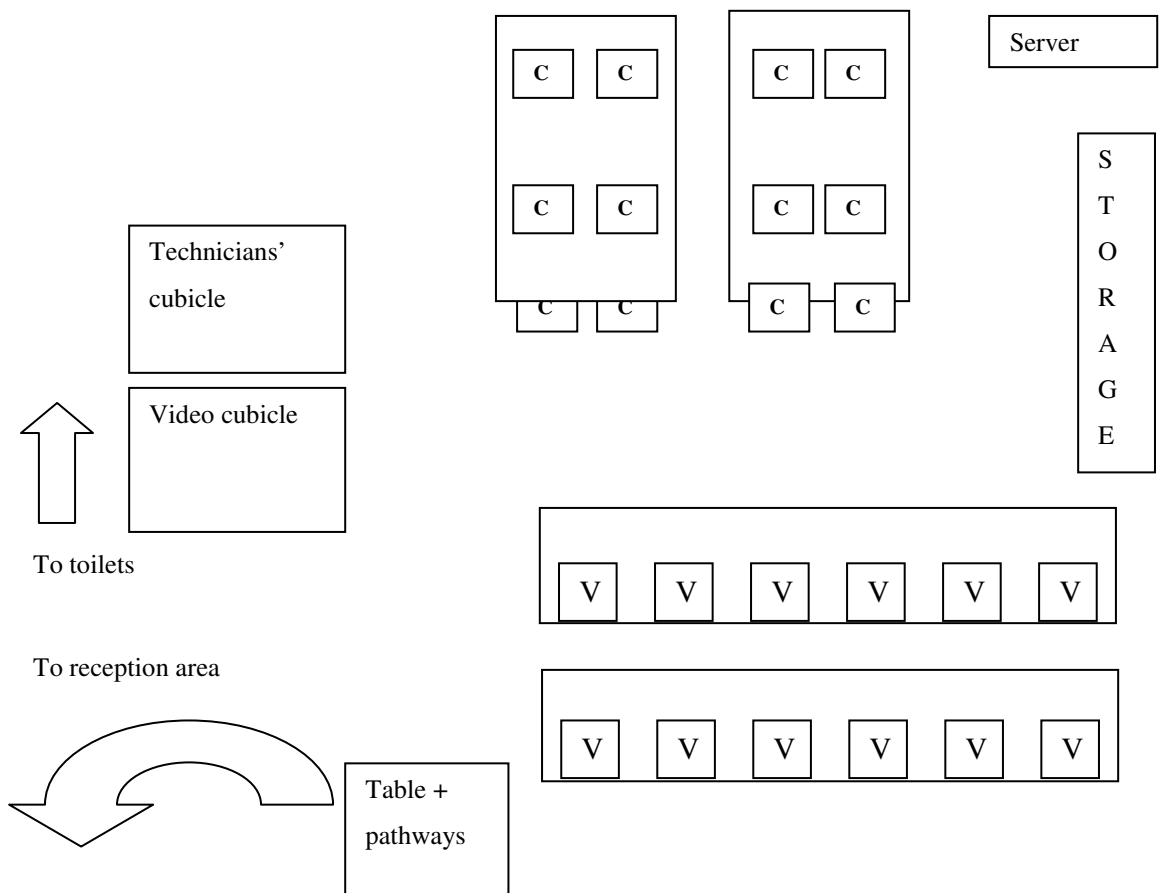
The first sketch depicts one of the student’s study areas, and the second portrays the academic staff’s work area. These are not scale drawings, but computer diagrams derived from pencil sketches, made during observation visits (e.g. OB 1, 11.04.2002; OB 2, 14.02.04). They represent the proportions of the spaces they describe approximately.

SK 1, Video and computer area, shows the layout of the spaces where students have unlimited access to the internet, CDs, DVDs, pre-installed computer software, videos and can select their own materials at will, or follow suggestions in the printed pathways for each level, which are available on open access in printed form in folders.

On entering this area, students leave their registration slip at the table on the right-hand side of the door and either proceed to work on the computers or go to the Video storage shelf on the left, to select a film and worksheet with which to work. Should there be a

technical problem, the technician's cubicle is visible to students, while at the same time, thanks to a window in the cubicle, the technician can see what is happening in the larger area at any time and respond to signals for help. The master copies of the videos are in the video cubicle, and this cubicle also doubles as a counselling space, for students who need advice while working in this area. The sections are clearly marked out by the way the furniture is arranged, and the students have easy access to video material. Should they need a CD, they would have signed this out at reception before coming in to this area of focus (OB 1, 11.04.2002).

**Sketch 1: Video and Computer Area**



There is little by nature of decoration, just a few posters of tourist attractions in other countries on the walls. The layout is geometrically simple, the function of each area needs no further elaboration, and there is nothing to distract students from studying. Whether using video or computer facilities, each student uses headphones, so they do not disturb their peers (OB 1, 11.04.2002).

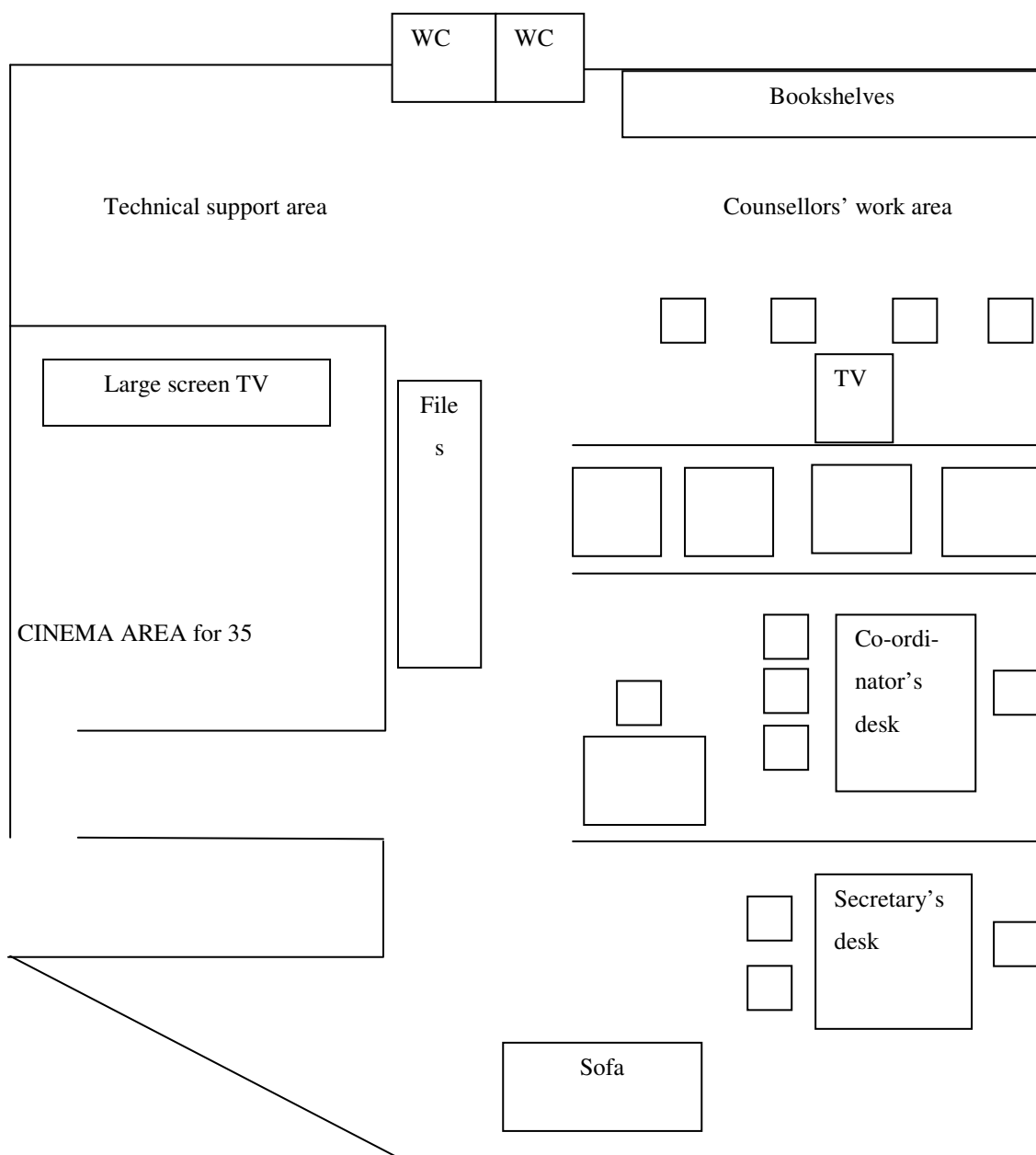
A similarly *Work-focused and organized environment* can be seen in the SAC staff working area (SK 2), described in Chapter 6, particularly the possible messages and impact

of the open planning on staff working there. The sketch shows how each section is extremely clearly demarcated and the space as a whole, seems to clearly project a *Work-focused and organized environment*, creating a comfortable *Atmosphere* in which to work.

Alice, one of the co-ordinators already quoted in Chapter 6, Section 6.1.3, commented that she really liked their working area:

“I really like our part of the SAC...you always know exactly who is around, and I guess it’s less formal in some ways. But then because you don’t want to disturb anyone else with noise or anything, I think we tend to work pretty hard while we are here” (1 Alice 10 / 104).

### Sketch 2: Academic Staff Area



The impression of a *Work-focused and organized environment* projected by the way in which the physical elements of the SAC are organized was further strengthened for me by a comment made by Lara, a student quoted above: “I feel more comfortable and more relaxed being able to study here. It’s very easy to study. It’s not difficult. [The centre] is very easy to manage and it really helps you learn” (1 LA / P3).

Augustine felt the same way: “When I’m in the classroom, there’s more participation and here it is lonelier, but I kind of focus much better” (1 AU / P8). Moreover, this may be a more generalized perception, since it was also mentioned by Participant 18 at the Puebla SAC event. PEV 18 who spoke of “organized participation” among the teachers as having contributed more than anything to the success of the SAC at her university:

“More than anything, the attitude of the teachers and students towards their organized participation, always focused on the growth and success of their objectives” (PEV 18).

If this has contributed to the survival of other SACs, it may be a key element in the sustainability of projects in general.

To sum up this section, I have included comments from students and staff and sketches, to further illustrate the work-focused environment of the SAC. This, I believe, contributes to the success and continuity of the SAC today.

In the next section, I will present some further examples of the *Feeling of collaboration and support* (first illustrated in Chapter 6, Sections 6.1.3, p. 160 and 6.1.6, p. 165) which also seem to contribute to the positive *Atmosphere* during the project and in the SAC today.

### **7.1.3 A *Feeling of collaboration and support*, as a facet of *Atmosphere***

Alba, a SAC co-ordinator previously cited on several occasions, recalled in an interview that:

“Our mother tongue was used for training and consultancy sessions, in order to include anyone who may have been interested – not only the English teaching staff” (1 Alba 7 / 256).

She went on to explain that the Faculty director had equally encouraged teachers of all foreign languages (not only English) and all support staff to take time off from other responsibilities to attend training sessions. Alba also recalled how staff would then follow up the workshops by reading the books (purchased with project funds and donated to each university) and sharing useful texts with each other.

“So, first of all we had this contact with people (trainers) who helped and supported us in some way. Another thing was reading... we were all reading books which the British Council made available for us, and information about other universities too, because some were also still beginning to implement their centres, and after that, you yourself helped us...” (1 Alba 4 / 105).

In Chapter 6, Section 6.1.3, p. 157, I quoted Alba’s describing how the SAC team works very closely together today. It seems that the evolution of a *Feeling of collaboration and support* among the SAC staff is something which can be traced back to quite early on in the project, and which continues to be a feature of the *Atmosphere* today.

Luisa, a Faculty director also cited in Chapter 6, remembers the *Collaboration and support across institutions* as a positive element:

“I believe that sharing experiences locally, nationally gave this touch or this way of doing things *à la mexicaine*, and however that was, we started to give things a national slant” (1 Luisa 7 / 82).

The expression *à la mexicaine* recalls the “*something which is very much from here...*” (1 Patricia 9 / 150) reported in Chapter 6. This should not be underestimated, since it seems again to illustrate an intention to *Accept* the innovation but to *Adapt and Integrate* it, to form an integral part of the existing constructs of the institution.

Not everyone felt *Collaboration and support* in the *Atmosphere* at all times, however. The negative reactions of some of the non-Mexican teaching staff have already been reported above, and a particular long-serving member of the support staff seemed quite disappointed at the treatment she had been given by SAC staff and co-ordinators, when I interviewed her:

“And in part, what I don’t like, as an employee, is the way in which sometimes they ask us for a lot of support, that we should support and help the students, but then when we need support ourselves from the director or co-ordinator, we don’t get it” (1 Susana 4 / 164).

On closer questioning, it transpired that there had recently been an incident involving a personal request which had not been granted, rather than a generalized complaint. However, Susana did strongly recommend better communication among the academic and support staff, in the interests of greater success for the project:

“They do need to have more meetings between the academic staff and the support staff, because they (co-ordination) hold their meetings with

teaching staff and we have our meetings for support staff, but they don't tell us what they talk about and we don't tell them either" (1 Susana 5 / 209).

The fact that Susana made this recommendation so emphatically implied that she had perceived this element to have been lacking in her own team.

On the other hand, Patricia, the other member of the support staff interviewed in depth, did not externalize any feelings of exclusion at all. Rather, she expressed her gratitude to the Faculty director:

"From the moment the SAC Project began, in the pilot SAC, the Director asked me to help her to make materials and support the teachers. In order to do this, I received training at the self-access centre in Pachuca and I went on training myself here in our SAC" (1 Patricia 1 / 30).

Although she made no complaints about her own situation, she did stress the general importance of *Collaboration and mutual support* among the internal project team, at all levels:

"For any organization which would like to set up a new SAC, it would be very important indeed for them to involve everyone, from the Director to the most junior office assistant" (1 Patricia 16 / 307).

Projecting from her own positive experience, Patricia made a generalization, which she felt might apply to any similar SAC project. Perhaps she was also indirectly acknowledging that not everyone had had the same experience that she had.

I would not wish to create an over-romanticized image of how establishing a *Feeling of collaboration and support* was achieved at the university.

"It was above all a matter of giving (teachers) incentives (to attend training sessions) ... what I mean is we gave them the best opportunities and helped them to attend the courses. We couldn't make it obligatory but we could give them incentives and motivation. Many teachers did go, and none of them became the person in charge of the TECAAL. But (names of three teachers) did go, and the ones that always go went too. So they were given a general training which didn't help them much at the time, but it did later on, when the centre was working, they got involved with it" (1 Berenice 8 / 262).

Berenice said that teachers had responded positively to the "incentives" (i.e. time off other academic responsibilities in return for attending training sessions), by attending the



courses. I have already shown, however, how some teachers, despite support from the institution, did not immediately collaborate. Collaboration increased exponentially in relation to the realization by teachers that the project did not threaten their livelihoods (1 Linda 2 / 37, Chapter 7, Section 7.1.1, p. 202). This picture seems to be authentic, showing how people react differently to innovations, with some staff accepting more quickly than others. However, *Acceptance by the institution* seems to have made it inevitable that staff and students would have little choice but to accept the changes. An element of coercion was never mentioned as such, but the threat of having to repeat a year of study for not fulfilling the attendance requirement was serious.

When I spoke to students currently studying at the SAC, they certainly seemed to perceive a *Feeling of collaboration and support* from staff: “If I need help, I ask the receptionists to call through for a teacher to come across. Generally speaking, I usually find my teacher is here in the SAC” (1 SL / P 5).

Moni also perceived something similar: “It’s like you gradually work out your own rhythm, and if you get stuck with anything, you can just ask for help” (1 MO / P5).

To sum up this section, examples from the data have been given to show the following:

- i) The Faculty tried to promote a *Feeling of collaboration and support* from the outset, by giving teachers time off to attend training sessions (7.1.3, p. 213). The fact that incentives had to be offered, may indicate some of the teachers’ reticence and negative *Mood* in the early days.
- ii) *Collaboration and support across similar institutions*, already reported as a feature of the project in Chapter 6, was again evidenced (7.1.3, p. 214). Wanting to create something *à la mexicaine*, suggests that the feeling of making the innovation “something very much from here” was an intention shared by similar institutions.
- iii) I presented a single example of a person who did not feel there had been enough collaboration, but felt this was an exceptional case (7.1.3, p. 214).
- iv) Further quotations showed how students perceived something which might be termed a *Feeling of collaboration and support* in the SAC nowadays (7.1.3, p. 215.)

These further examples may serve to show that a *Feeling of collaboration and support*, was to some measure a feature of this project, and continues to be perceived in the SAC today. This, in turn, may have contributed to a comfortable *Atmosphere* in which first the project, and today the SAC, has been able to thrive. This *Atmosphere* has formed part of a wider

positive *Affective environment*, and I would argue that it may have played an important role in the success of the innovation.

#### **7.1.4 Promotion of independence as a facet of Atmosphere**

In Section 7.1.3, p. 212, I quoted Alba, one of the SAC co-ordinators, referring to the reading of books donated by the project and the independent work by internal SAC project team while developing their SAC project. Similarly, in Chapter 6, Section 6.3.3, p. 178, I cited Patricia, one of the support staff, mentioning a visit by the SAC team to another university, where the SAC project had been somewhat ahead of their own, and stressing how staff had felt they had learned a lot from sharing their experience (1 Patricia 7 / 131).

I only found these two *direct references* to behaviour demonstrating independence or autonomy among the project staff in the data. Nonetheless, I had acquired a strong impression that the *Promotion of independence and creativity* among the team had always been significant here. I have already mentioned the existence of abundant technical resources in the SAC, showing the intention of the institution to enable teachers to be *Independent and creative* (Chapter 6). On many visits to the SAC, both before and after the project period, I had perceived autonomy and originality in the ways the team had classified and displayed materials, formatted materials of their own, organized student interviews for participative evaluation activities, for example. Reflection led me to question how far, perhaps, the essence and focus of the project itself may have had the result of self-development of staff, making them more independent, too (RD Entries, October 2006).

Unfortunately, this was an issue which lack of time prevented me from following up appropriately, but a future study might well research the possible spin-off effects of projects focusing on self-direction and autonomy for students, especially how far these may also result in increased independence and autonomy among the project staff themselves, since the nature and content of the project itself could tend to affect the staff's attitude towards and relationship with it.

The project's main aim was to enhance *student* learning, however, encouraging them to become more independent learners through the new resources and services made available in support of their classes. Had the desired results been achieved to any degree? Was this ethos palpable among students using the SAC today?

In Chapter 6, I gave numerous examples of how students took full responsibility for their activities once inside the SAC, and implemented checking out procedures

independently too. Moreover, students had apparently *Accepted* the system of appointments for counselling, and did not usually look for help, without a prior appointment. This implies that they had generally understood that they were to work autonomously, even if they were in some cases not always certain where to begin.

Four statements about their learning, made by four different students, perhaps speak more loudly than any opinion I might offer:

(1 SL / P 1) “The TECAAL has changed the way I learn. You become more independent. What I learn in class, I reinforce here.”

(1 SL / P 2) “Before I just studied in class and that was it. Now I come to the SAC and reinforce what we saw in class.”

(1 MO / P 11) “I like the system. You become more independent, you exploit your own abilities. I like the concept of the TECAAL.”

(1 AD / P 8) “You come to have more control over your own learning process. I can modulate the process as I go along. I feel more in control.”

It would be interesting to deconstruct each of these students’ conceptualizations of “independent”, “reinforce”, “control”, with them, discover what independent learning means to each, and analyse how this might resemble and/or differ from western perceptions of such terms. This could certainly be the starting point of a future research project.

The evidence mentioned in this Chapter and in Chapter 6, show that *Independence and creativity* have been to some degree promoted among the SAC staff by the institution and Faculty, from the beginning of the project. The SAC team has demonstrated *Independence and creativity* through some of the ways in which they have furthered and applied their own training, through reading, discussion and direct exchange of experience with staff from their own and other universities.

Though Faculty teachers have been more reticent, at this stage (2007), with attendance at the SAC an accepted course requirement, and fears about job status and security allayed, they are also exploiting the SAC much more systematically with their students (PC, Blanca, 27.02.07).

Another aspect which merits more thorough research would be the nature of student motivation in this context, with an analysis of how far attendance merely an enforced part of the system and how far it might be self-driven. A deeper understanding of the possible impact of types of motivation on SAC learning results would be useful for the profession.

How far was this *Promotion of independence* a feature of SAC projects at other universities? Responding to a question regarding what she had liked most about the SAC project, one teacher answered: “The possibility of developing autonomy” (PEV 10).

This aspect was specifically mentioned by only one teacher from another university, but it again begs the question of the issue of what “independence” and “autonomy” imply for Mexican university language *teachers*, and how *they* would characterize appropriate applications in their own contexts. This construct might very usefully have been further deconstructed in interviews during this study, had not the theme emerged after the main data collection activities had been completed (RD entries, September 2006). On the other hand, this study never aimed to deconstruct concepts and dominant discourse surrounding self-access, but rather to look at a project (which happened to be to create a self-access centre) and to attempt to identify factors which may have led to its success and growth.

To sum up this section,

- i) I have noted, again, that the institution seems to have *Promoted independence* among the staff team, pp. 217-218.
- ii) Two further areas for research have been suggested, stimulated by reflection on my data:
  - a) How far do projects promoting independent learning in students also promote independence among staff? p. 218.
  - b) How do students conceptualize terms such as “independent learning” and “autonomy” and how do they relate them to their own studies? p. 218.
- iii) I presented four quotations from students who feel that the SAC has made them more independent and given them more control over their learning, p. 219.
- iv) One statement made by a teacher from another university seemed to underline the importance of the possibility of developing autonomy as having been a major reason for the success of her project, p. 219.

Thus the *Promotion of independence* among project staff has emerged as another possible element leading to the success and duration of this project, though there were every few direct references. In order to study this phenomenon more effectively, it may be advisable to first find out more about what the constructs of “independence” and “autonomy” actually represent to students and teachers in this context. This would enable a more thorough investigation of whether they have been achieved by staff and students in this project, *in their own terms*. This might help to reveal how far they may have contributed to

its success and continuity. In the next section, I will look again at some of the complex factors which may have interacted with *Attitude*, and, in turn, had an impact on *Affect*, in the longer term.

## **7.2 A developing view of what contributes to *Attitude***

The elements which I have so far perceived as connected to *Atmosphere* seem to me to be characterizable as certain feelings which pervade physical spaces or are evoked while interacting with individuals and groups involved in the case study project. Though perhaps not consciously intentional, these seem to have been implied, for example, through artefacts (e.g. the socio-cultural messages created by the choice of materials and forms of the buildings) or through actions (as in providing staff with sufficient technical support to be independent and creative in their work). Stimulating such feelings and creating such an *Atmosphere* may be important in the success and continuation of project activities, though of course, there are many other factors involved.

In Section 7.2, I will reconsider some aspects of *Attitude*. Such elements seem to me to be often more closely related to intentionality and specific mental sets, though they may be just as important to a positive *Affective environment* as are those connected with *Atmosphere*.

### **7.2.1 Existence of *Internal Champions* as a facet of *Attitude***

In her book, “*Ayer, Instituto de Idiomas 1967 / Hoy, Facultad de Lenguas y Letras 2001*”, Aurora Silva reports:

“The self-access centre project began on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1994, through the signing of an agreement between the University, the British Council and the Ministry of Education, in response to the *imminent* need to learn foreign languages, especially English. This occurred when (name of faculty director) was acting as director of the school and she gave the project her full support” Silva (2001: 89 –my translation).

Silva goes on to narrate the history of the centre, and mentions several individuals specifically as champions:

“On 12<sup>th</sup> September, 1996, our Rector (name of rector), opened the mini Tecnocentro de Auto Aprendizaje en Lenguas (TECAAL), and the person in charge of it was (name of co-ordinator), who showed a great sense of responsibility and enthusiasm” Silva (2001: 90 –my translation).

Silva relates that she was herself Director of the Faculty part of the period of development of the SAC. Her own feelings about the project come across in her book and show that she *herself* was a champion of the project:

“To say “TECAAL”<sup>4</sup> means: a spirit of dedication, a union of the strength and wills of institutions and of many people; it means hard, silent and committed work; it means hours of study, analysis, unknown quantities, challenges, often difficult to meet but not impossible, as long as we begin to be aware of realities” (Silva 2001: 91 –my translation).

This was the kind of commitment that led Silva herself to design the initial bidding document for the funding of the new SAC building, as well as a further project to obtain economic resources for equipment, furniture and materials (Silva 2001: 92). She also acquired supplementary funding from the university’s board of trustees. Although she gives herself no credit at all in her book, she undoubtedly championed the project and acquired the necessary funds to enable the new SAC building to become fully functional in the early days.

The Chancellor of the university is characterized as a champion of the project by Silva:

“We would like to mention most particularly the decided and total support received from the Chancellor, despite the difficult financial situation which our university is currently experiencing” (Silva 2001: 92 –my translation).

This is reiterated in the article by Grounds in the same book, who says:

“From the first months of the agreement, The Chancellor of the university (name of chancellor) gave a great deal of support to the development of the TECAAL and encouraged the team in the Faculty to achieve their objectives. The successive faculty directors also appreciated the importance of the project, and each one in their own manner added something more to the resources. It was directly because of this that the excellent funding projects of the building and equipping of the centre were approved” (Grounds 2001: 95).

These extra funding projects demonstrate the high levels of commitment of the directors and their staff, to implement and exceed the aims envisaged by the initial funding from the Mexican ministry of education and British Council for the prototype centre. The centre may not have become what it has today, without the efforts of these internal champions, at the administrative levels of chancellor and Faculty director.

---

<sup>4</sup> Tecno centro de auto aprendizaje de lenguas, the Mexican name of the SAC.

Participants at SAC events mentioned the following, based on their own experiences of projects in their own universities. These comments seem almost to be made by internal champions, and they certainly demonstrate the perception of a *need* for internal champions, for a project to achieve success:

PEV 1: “Faith, perseverance...”

PEV 8: “The constantly motivating attitude of the teachers and directors with regard to the SAC and which they managed to transmit to students and other SAC users.”

PEV 12: “The (positive) attitude of the teaching staff, the support of the authorities, the combination of things along the way.”

PEV 18: “More than anything, the (positive) attitude of teachers and students towards their organized participation, always focused on the growth and success of their objectives.”

SLPEV 3: “The total conviction of both students/users and teachers/counsellors.”

Focus group results indicated that the participants felt the existence of internal champions had been less important for sustainability than it had been for future continuity of the project activities (3.6 out of 5 for sustainability, 4.2 for growth).

To sum up this section, it does seem to have been the case that internal champions existed during the development and implementation of the project, and that participants feel that they had an impact on the success and continuity of their projects. There is also some suggestion that such personalities may have existed at other universities, among authorities, staff and students. Their existence and activities may have enhanced a positive *Attitude* surrounding the project, thereby contributing to the wider *Affective environment* in ways which supported the success and duration of the project.

### ***7.2.2 Encouragement of constructive criticism within project team as a facet of Attitude***

Alba, a SAC co-ordinator cited above, mentioned some activities which she considered indicative that *Constructive criticism* was encouraged among the SAC team. First, she mentioned the student evaluations:

“We do a questionnaire at the end of every semester. It’s not a very big... we don’t involve that many people. Normally about 50 of the students...and those of us who are SAC staff and teachers, we do it with all of our own students, too” (1 Alba 15 / 533).

This shows that *Constructive criticism* is not only encouraged among staff, but also actively encouraged among students, who, incidentally, are also encouraged to use the “suggestions box” located in the SAC (OB 1, 11.04.2002). Alba then described how:

“We all get together, we talk together about the deficiencies, about materials that might be needed, whatever, and we discuss everything together” (1 Alba 565).

And, a little later in the interview, she actually used the term “*constructive criticism*”:

“...comradeship has been developing a lot among the teachers. They take up the cause and make commitments to each other. I think we have a lot of respect for each others’ activities, and there’s a kind of...it’s like... creativity has been very much supported. We propose things; we are all open to all kinds of *constructive criticism*, *constructive criticism* about our work” (1 Alba 13 / 625).

The fact that activities encouraging *Constructive criticism within the project team* had existed during the development of the project and indeed up to the present time was also evidenced in printed form.

Documents surviving from the project period show that self-evaluation activities were planned into the project activities, e.g. University Internal Strategic Plan Document 2, September 1996 to September 1997. Under General Objective 4, related to the fine-tuning of administrative aspects for more effective management, Specific Objective 4.2 is “To devise a reliable system of evaluation for all aspects of the centre (general services, staff, benefits reported by users, expectations of users etc.). This type of activity has been and is still mentioned in strategic plan, 2004-2006, where, under Objective 9, the activities mentioned are:

- 9.1 To design and implement further evaluation of current services of the centre.
- 9.2 To evaluate the materials, the equipment, the installations”

Although copies of strategic plans for every year of the existence of the centre were not available, it does seem that self-criticism of the work achieved by the team has been planned and implemented periodically, up to the present.

British Council Project Discussion Document 3 (1995, i.e. halfway through the official project period), was prepared as a discussion document for the fifth national self-access conference. It deals specifically with evaluation activities. This document also mentioned previous workshops on evaluation at smaller regional conferences and included an activity in which participants discussed different ways of evaluating different aspects of the SAC



project. External advisers were advocating this kind of *Constructive criticism among project teams* too, from year 2 of the project, at least.

I know that self-evaluation for students had been included in training, because I had helped to design the courses. I had personally led the workshops on collaborative peer evaluation of projects, and wondered how far this had been implemented once the project period had ended. One participant from another university at a SAC event also said that the success of their project had very much depended on this:

PEV 18: “More than anything, the attitude of the teachers and students towards their organized participation, always focused on the growth and success of their objectives.”

This idea of having focused objectives implies evaluation and internal critique regarding the achievement of these objectives, i.e. self-evaluation and *Constructive criticism*.

Although the data collected during interviews did not much evidence this activity, this element was considered important by the focus group, which ranked *Constructive criticism* among the team at 4.2/5 for sustainability, 4/5 for growth. This result may imply that, in the views of focus group members, while the project was in its initial stages, this type of internal criticism had been perceived as more important than later in the day, when systems and structures had been tried and tested and were perhaps better established.

The initial references to this aspect aroused my expectations that there would subsequently be more frequent reference in the data than there actually was. Did this perhaps mean that the activity had indeed been planned (as shown by the documents), but not always implemented? Is it something that professionals feel they should do, in theory, but in practice do not carry out, through lack of time or real belief in its value? Is it another ethnocentric western concept, which I am imposing in a context where projects are still traditionally evaluated by superiors in the institution or the ministry and the “culture” of *Constructive criticism* among project teams is not as evident as I had expected in the data because it may not be as appropriate here?

I go through the transcripts carefully again. It really was only Alba who had referred to this aspect repeatedly:

“In fact, there is now an Evaluation Department here at the university and it evaluates teachers’ performance every semester. I suppose there must also be audits, administratively speaking, and there must be other ways of evaluating, but not in the way we do it, because this department

just evaluates and keeps the results. Maybe they do statistical tables, but they don't show them to anyone else. And here at the SAC, what we do is we talk about the results together, and suggest solutions to some of the problems (1 Alba 12 / 594).

I could not establish why there had not been more evidence of *Constructive criticism* among the team as having had a positive impact on the results of the project. Perhaps people did not perceive this to have been the case, or perhaps it had not really existed, except on paper. Perhaps, by way of self-criticism, I simply had not asked the appropriate types of questions, or had been projecting ethnocentric concepts of how project teams should function onto the case study team again, as suggested above. In any case, this aspect may well merit further research.

### **7.2.3 Willingness of staff to experiment as a facet of Attitude**

One of the reception staff, Patricia, explained how she had been keen to experiment:

“So I said to myself, if they can do it, why can't I? And I was trying it out...video, laser discs, books, audio materials” (1 Patricia 2 / 52).

This quotation triggered the idea that this kind of mindset could also have contributed significantly to the success of the project. It seemed that (perhaps imported) concepts of independent learning and developing learning strategies through trial and error, had had an impact on this participant, encouraging her to experiment independently.

However, as already reported, not all the teachers had been so fast to embrace SAC principles at first, and had not been *Willing to experiment* at the early stages of the project at all, according to Patricia (support staff), Alba and Linda (co-ordinators) and Luisa (director), all quoted variously above. Some teachers only went to training because they were given incentives, as Berenice (director) informed. Non-Mexican staff had resisted the innovation, believing it to be inappropriate for the context (for apparently essentialist or racist reasons), and Patricia also later mentioned the age factor as having been a possible further characteristic among staff who had been unwilling to experiment:

“Come to think of it, these people who rejected this method or this philosophy were older people. They were not young” (1 Patricia 6 / 106).

Despite this, a certain *Willingness to experiment* among the SAC team seems to be implied by the words of Alba, quoted in Section 7.2.2, p. 223 (1 Alba 13 / 625), where she explains that people respect each others' work, make suggestions and regularly engage in constructive criticism, though the reference is not overt.

At the Puebla Event, Participants 12 and 19 mentioned something in relation to experimentation, as did Participant 2 at San Luis Potosi event:

PEV 12: “There have been innovations of materials, strategies, etc.”

PEV 19: “Innovation ... in a practical way.”

SLPEV 2: “Constant study and research...”

These quotes from SAC projects at other institutions may show that a *Willingness to experiment* has indeed been part of the general *Attitude* surrounding SAC projects, possibly contributing to the positive *Affective* environments in which they have continued to thrive.

The focus group rated *Willingness to experiment* at 3.8 for sustainability, and it was commented that, in the earlier stages of the SAC project, staff had tended to follow advice from external advisers, not experiment as such. However they graded it as 4.2 for growth, explaining that they had gradually become more *confident* about experimenting, and this had indeed helped their project to develop further, in their view.

In sum, there are very few direct references to *Willingness to experiment* among the case study participants. However, the comments from staff working on similar projects and the comments made by the focus group do seem to imply that a *Willingness to experiment* had been a characteristic of the *Attitude* surrounding the process and the project, and activities after the end of the project period. As part of the generally positive *Affective environment*, it may have helped the project to endure.

#### **7.2.4 Belief in long-term benefits**

Only one person made direct reference to this aspect, attributing the success of the SAC project at her university to: “A shared belief in the long and short-term personal benefits of a SAC” (PEV 8).

Other than this, the levels of investment in the building and facilities, already detailed in Chapter 6, had *implied* a *Belief in long-term benefits* by the institution, since such an investment is made only if some kind of recovery, whether academic, political or financial, is expected.

Having isolated PEV 8’s statement, I reflected on why this element had not emerged in data from other interviews, with authorities, staff or students and question the significance of this. Would it be facile to surmise that, since the long-term benefits of the project were so obvious to them, they had never been seriously regarded as a topic of discussion? Any answer would be hypothetical, but perhaps, again, I failed to ask the appropriate questions?

The fact that one person did see it as a major ingredient for success, suggests that it may be another area where further research might be usefully carried out.

### **7.3 A developing view of *Training*, and its possible connection with *Attitude* and *Affect***

In Chapter 5, Section 5.5.2, p. 135, I explained that it had been hard to decide whether to include *Training* as a category under the global concept of *Affect*, or *Administration*. Perhaps my own previous roles as teacher trainer, trainee, student and project manager led me to include it under *Affect* (despite a discussion with my supervisor in which it was suggested as possibly better placed under *Administration!*). I was influenced by lived and shared experience suggesting that when people receive *Appropriate knowledge and skills training*, they often project a more positive *Attitude*, and feel more confident and comfortable about innovations and their implications. It should follow a confident *Attitude* will contribute positively to the *Affective Environment* surrounding the project, and in turn, be likely to favour success.

*Training* also often includes the deconstruction and assessment of beliefs and their subsequent reconstruction (Chapter 5, Section 5.5.2, p. 135), and the effects of *Training* are usually reflected in *Affective* aspects, particularly *Mood* and *Attitude*. It may include theory and practice related to *Administration* (in this case, how to administer SACs), as well as academic principles and practices (in this case, surrounding SACs), but *Training* here would remain a super-ordinate. I conclude that since training tends to have a strong impact on how people feel about themselves, the project they are developing and the ways they administer it (just as the *Training* received by PhD students can have radical effects on their *Mood*, general *Attitude*, and the ways in which they organize/administer their work), it is very closely related to *Affect* (though it may simultaneously have an impact on *Administration*).

#### **7.3.1 *Appropriate knowledge and skills training* as a facet of *Affect***

Regular training activities were implemented during the development of this project, over a period of four years. Reference to these was made repeatedly in the tape scripts and other data. For instance, one of the SAC co-ordinators remembered:

“There were initial and on-going training and opportunities to share experience and best practice among staff” (1 Alba 3 / 105).

While one of the reception staff recalled:

“Ever since the TECAAL started, in the micro-TECAAL (the director) asked me to help her with materials design and to support the stu... the teachers. I was given training in the self-access centre in Pachuca to do that, and I went on giving myself orientation in the TECAAL” (1 Patricia 1 / 30).

A Faculty director also commented:

“[We received] a lot of material from the British Council. And not only the materials that the British Council gave us, but more important still was the advice on how to make our own materials, wasn't it? Fish and the rod to fish with, right? You gave us both: the rod and the fish” (1 Berenice 4 / 199).

Another Faculty Director felt *Training* from external advisers had been crucial:

“We believe that external support has been fundamental, because this consultancy provided us with a basis with respect to methodological aspects and the staff, how can I say this, the British Council trained the staff at the beginning” (1 Luisa 2 / 57).

If *Training* in itself had been important, Alice goes a step further and suggests that not only the *Training* itself, but also the *Trainers' knowledge of the local context* had been important:

“It is important that the external consultants were somewhat...and had some knowledge of what is happening in Mexico. Because if it were someone from abroad, they would not know, they would not be so involved in the project” (1 Alice 16 / 197).

Further concrete evidence that *Training* activities had formed an important aspect of the project was derived from project documents, such as British Council Progress Report 4/1995-1996, and British Council Progress Report 5/1996-1997, where all training activities carried out over the entire project period are detailed. The fact that the courses were given says nothing about the quality of the content, of course. But the several references to the nature of the training made in Chapter 6 seem to imply that the quality and relevance had been at least satisfactory.

Furthermore, in two chance meetings, *Training* was mentioned as having been the prime reason for the success of the SAC project and the survival of the SACs:

“Number one, we were very well trained.” CCM1 (Carla, Chance Meeting 1)

“We were trained. Everybody was trained.” CCM2 (Marta, Chance Meeting 2)

Several participants at SAC events included the element of *Training* when asked their opinion concerning the specific elements which had most contributed to the survival of their SACs:

PEV 15: “The on-going development of the staff.”

SLPEV 2: “Constant study and research, the training of the tutors and the support which has recently been received by the centre.”

SLPEV 5: “Training of the tutors in the creation of materials and the main functions of the SACs.”

SLPEV 6: “I think that the constant updating of the staff and the centre itself have been very important.”

SLPEV 13: “The most important factors have been constant and continuous training of the teachers and the counsellors as well as updating of the technology which is used at the SAC.”

Finally, the focus group ranked *Training* as equally important for sustainability and for growth, awarding a 4.4 ranking for sustainability and 4.4 ranking for growth. This is an interesting result, because it seems to imply that the staff who participated in the focus group feels that *continuous professional development* is as important to *sustain and develop* their SAC as *initial training* had been to *set it up*.

In sum, it would seem that *Training* activities have generally been perceived by the SAC staff as having been important to the success and continuation of the project, both at the case study university and at similar institutions. Their professional beliefs now include the belief that *Training* has been, and will continue to be important for their SAC, in the future.

#### **7.4 Summary of findings, Chapter 7**

In Chapter 7, I have presented more evidence to illustrate the positive *Affective environment* which apparently evolved with the SAC project.

- i) In Section 7.1.1, p. 202, I introduced a new aspect, which was hard to *describe* but actually very easy to *feel*, during the project period, and in the present-day SAC. I have called this *Mood*. Because *Mood* is not necessarily related to a conscious mental process, as I believe *Attitude* often (though not always) is, I perceived it as more closely connected with *Atmosphere*, in this case, the very comfortable, relaxed though work-focused *Atmosphere* which the participants, my PhD supervisor and I all perceive in the SAC today. I have presented several pieces of evidence, summarized on pp. 209-210, to illustrate how *Mood* might

- have been projected and perceived. I have suggested that the generally positive *Mood* may have been important in the success of the project, through its positive impact on the *Atmosphere*, and in turn, on the general *Affective environment* which developed during the project *process* and positively affected the *products*.
- ii) In Section 7.1.2, p. 209, I revisited the category of *Atmosphere*, to reconsider the possible impact that a *Work-focused and organized environment* (Chapter 6, Section 6.1.5, p. 164), may have had on the development of the project and the SAC environment today. I used sketches of the interiors (pp. 211-212) and comments from staff and students (p. 213) to evidence that this kind of environment, perhaps initially evoked and stimulated by design features, still seems to be very much part of the SAC today. This further reinforces the view that such an environment may have been an important factor contributing to the positive *Atmosphere* which evolved during the project, having had a positive effect on the general *Affective environment* and propitiated success.
  - iii) In Section 7.1.3, p. 212, I returned to the *Feeling of collaboration and support* (Chapter 6, Section 6.1.3, p. 157 and Section 6.1.6, p. 165) and tried to show how it may have been perceived to be operating (or not), among different groups at the university, at different times. In general, it seems to have grown as the project developed, and still seems to be perceivable at the SAC today.
  - iv) In Section 7.1.4, p. 216, I returned to the aspect of *Promotion of independence and creativity* among students and staff (Chapter 6, Section 6.1.4, p. 160 and Section 6.4.2, p. 188) and included two references to behaviours, which seemed to imply that *Independence* had apparently been promoted among project staff (p. 217). Four quotations from students (p. 218) then evidenced their self-perceptions of having become more independent, as a result of actively using the SAC for their language studies. Only one member of staff from a similar institution referred to this factor, however. It would be useful to find out more about the possible contributions of this aspect to the success of the project. However, in order to do so most effectively, it would first be important to understand more about ways in which staff and students in Mexico actually conceptualize the constructs of “autonomy” and “independence”. Without having done this, it would not be possible to assess confidently whether they had been achieved, in their own terms, and thus contributed positively to the *Atmosphere* in which the project had generally thriven.

In Section 7.2, I revisited some of the aspects connected to *Attitude*, namely the *Existence of internal champions*, *Encouragement of constructive criticism among the project team*, *Willingness of staff to experiment* and a generalized *Belief in the long-term benefits of the project*.

- i) In Section 7.2.1, pp. 219-221, I noted the existence of figures perceived as *Internal champions* at the project site (Rector, Faculty director, co-ordinators) and recalled the enormous investment described in Chapter 6 as further possible evidence of this element. I cited one teacher from a similar institution who mentioned the commitment of authorities, staff and students, p. 219. I had expected to find further references to this aspect, and wonder again if it is an ethnocentric concept, particularly since teamwork is often valued over individualism in academic and other contexts here, and the very term “champion” implies standing out from the crowd. The focus group rated it at only 3.6 for sustainability, though slightly higher, at 4.2 for growth and continuity. It is perhaps another area in which further research would be appropriate.
- ii) In Section 7.2.2, p. 221, I again engaged with the issue of *Encouragement of constructive criticism*, which seemed to emerge from the data, and used quotations, documental evidence and quotations of staff from similar institutions to suggest that this had been a feature of the case study and similar projects. The focus group had rated it at 4.2 for sustainability and only 4 for growth. Again I was surprised at the small number of mentions, but since criticism, whether constructive or otherwise, is not genuinely welcomed in many contexts, it may constitute another area which needs further research. First, the meaning of the term for staff working in this context should be deconstructed, before deciding whether or not it had been achieved, in their own terms.
- iii) In Section 7.2.3, p. 224, *Willingness of staff to experiment* was revisited. I narrated how Patricia’s comments, as well as quotations of comments made by staff from similar institutions, led me to consider how far this may have been a vital ingredient of success. I also mentioned that the focus group had graded this aspect as even more important for growth and continuity, than for the success of the project in itself. I had expected to find further mentions, but again question whether my conceptualization of this aspect might not also be considered ethnocentric, and recommended further study around this theme.



- iv) Section 7.2.4, p. 225, I looked again, briefly, at *Belief in long-term benefits*, as a possible feature of *Attitude* connected with *Affect*, and was surprised to have found only one direct reference to this, and this from staff from another project. I again suggested it might constitute an area for further research.
- v) In Section 7.3, p. 226, the topic of *Training*, and its possible connection with *Affect* was reviewed, beginning with an expansion of reasons why I felt that *Training* was closely linked with *Affect*.
- vi) In Section 7.3.1, p. 226, I cited six quotations from members of staff, showing their perception that *Appropriate knowledge and skills training* had contributed to the success of their project. Documental evidence, p. 228, confirmed that extensive *Training* had taken place. On page 228, I also quoted comments from two chance meetings. On page 229, I cited five members of staff involved in similar projects, who projected a similar *Attitude*: that *Appropriate knowledge and skills training* had been very important in the success of the project and continuation of the SAC. It is important to reiterate here, that the nature of the training was also highlighted in some cases: “Fish and the rod to fish with, right? You gave us both: the rod and the fish” (1 Berenice 4 / 199). This seems to imply that the project aim to provide alternative models and promote decision-making among the institutions and staff themselves (RD Entry, October 2006), though perhaps far from perfect, had to some extent found resonance at the case study university.

This has been a lengthy summary, but it has been important to show again how different processes were interacting simultaneously, during the research process. I have tried again to demonstrate how insights occurred while I was actually interacting with the data, and how these led to reflection not only on the data themselves, but on their relationship with wider issues, concerning the kinds of concepts and categories that are “identified” in research. How far do they really emerge from the data? How far are they “projected”, from our own socio-cultural backgrounds and discourses? Is any research valid unless every concept and category used to organize and arrange data has been fully deconstructed with the research participants, to ensure that there is a suitably large degree of shared conceptualization, when talking about issues and phenomena? This issue will be discussed further in Chapters 9 and 10. For the time being, Table 5 summarizes the conclusions reached in Chapters 6 and 7.

**Table 5: Summary of emerging concepts and categories, Chapters 6 and 7**

<b>Global concept (Environment)</b>	<b>Categories (Surface elements)</b>	<b>Sub-categories (Component elements)</b>
Affective Environment	Atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitivity to socio-cultural context</li> <li>• Respect for local values</li> <li>• Adaptation to local context/needs</li> <li>• Integration into existing activities</li> <li>• Feeling of collaboration and support (across institutions)</li> <li>• Feeling of collaboration and support (within the project institution)</li> <li>• Promotion of independence and creativity among staff and students</li> <li>• Work-focused environment</li> <li>• Positive mood projected by participants</li> </ul>
	Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Institution)</li> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Faculty)</li> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Project staff)</li> <li>• Acceptance and active support (Students)</li> <li>• Adaptation to local context/needs</li> <li>• Belief in potential long-term benefits</li> <li>• Sense of ownership and responsibility</li> <li>• Existence of internal champions</li> <li>• Willingness of staff to experiment</li> <li>• Encouragement of constructive criticism</li> </ul>
Affective Environment	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate training</li> <li>• Adaptation to local context/needs</li> <li>• Facilitate creation of “Something which is very much from here”</li> </ul>

In Chapter 8, I will go on to look at references to Policy, Management and Finance issues, which I have construed as interconnected around the global concept of *Administration*.

## Chapter 8

### The Emergence of the *Administrative Environment* as a Global Concept

*In this chapter, I will show how certain phenomena clustering around the global concept of Administration seemed to emerge from the data. These included a number of factors, which I perceived as facets of Policy, Management and Finance. As in the previous two chapters, I will present examples from the data to illustrate my perception that these concepts and categories may have been important in the achievement of the sustainability and continuity of the SAC project.*

*I will begin by considering Policy, and some related sub-categories; next I will explain what could be viewed as facets of Management. Finally, I will show how factors related to Finance also seemed to have been interconnected with all of these other elements, contributing to the general success of the project.*

#### **8.1 Policy as a facet of Administration**

Different types of data, including the opinions of authorities and staff, seemed to imply that a crucial factor in the survival and duration of the self-access centre had been the fact that the project itself was *Congruent with government policies*.

##### **8.1.1 Congruence with government policy as a facet of policy**

Some frank statements made by directors of Faculty, illustrate their perceptions of the importance of the SAC project to the university, because of its perceived status as representing a strong commitment with the Ministry of Education.

“So, well, that [the official agreement between the Ministry of Education, the British Council and the university] was signed, and there was a commitment and we had to get a place ready to install the [pilot SAC]...” (1 Berenice 2 / 112).

Luisa, another Faculty Director, agreed:

“Well, I do think that it [government support for the project] was crucial, so that the creation of self-access centres would be taken seriously” (1 Luisa 1 / 10).

“Many of these policies [relating to the installation of self-access centres] have come from the federal level” (1 Luisa 18 / 256).

Luisa clearly also feels that the SAC project was taken seriously because it was driven by the ministry itself, but also that it may have been seen as an *obligation* at least as much as a commitment to new policies on alternative learning modes:

“...I understand very well that there are external policies from the SEP: either you become flexible or learner-centred, or you don’t get funding. And this has led to other internal changes here. Flexible learning or learner-centeredness, or you will not receive funding” (1 Luisa 20 / 283).

Following government policy leads to the award of *Funding*, and this subsequent *Availability of initial and continuing funding* seems also to have contributed to the success of the SAC project. Three directors of the Faculty cited this as having been a crucial ingredient in the installation and continuation of the SAC. This view is also shared by Linda (SAC co-ordinator) to be quoted below (1 Linda 1 / 17). Without this institutional commitment to government policy, it is implied that the project may never have been initiated, and even less achieved success.

The view of a Faculty director from another university engaged in their own SAC project said that, in her view, their SAC had not only survived but had also

“... grown and developed because we had the support from the authorities in Mexico City [i.e. the Ministry] and in our state” (MCM2) (“Martha”, Chance Meeting 2).

The focus group at the case study university gave this sub-category the same score for both sustainability and future growth, arguing that being part of government policy is equally important both (ranking at 4 on a scale of 1 to 5, in both cases).

Training from the British Council began in 1995 at the case study university (BCPR 4), and in February 1996, the prototype resource centre (Micro-SAC, as it was known *in situ*) opened for piloting activities. There was an official opening ceremony in September 1996 (UIR 1/96), programmed to coincide with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Faculty of Languages (Silva, 2001: 90). The existence of the Micro-SAC added concrete evidence of the dynamic development of the Faculty over the years. The event was attended by directors of all Faculties, dignitaries from the Ministry of Education, the British Council and the SAC staff (Silva, *op cit*). It provided an excellent opportunity for the Chancellor to showcase his up-to-the-minute policy on foreign languages and the university’s willingness to invest in further resources to support this policy.

I will now go on to look at how some other project participants viewed the ways in which the SAC project, once taken on board as a commitment to government policy, gradually assumed a role in both institutional and Faculty *Policy*.

### **8.1.2 *Becoming interwoven with institutional policies as a facet of Policy***

First of all, the existence of a signed and sealed *bona fide* legal project agreement (SUPA 1/93) between the Department of Higher Education of the Mexican Ministry of Education, the British Council and the university, had confirmed the existence of a strong political commitment by the university. Signing such an agreement implies at least an *intention* to include the project in general university *Policy*.

The declaration of this intention through the signing of the document may perhaps be seen as the first step towards project sustainability within the general *Administrative environment* of the university. Any estimation of how far a commitment of this nature is due to conviction, and how much to obligation, can only be superficial from the outside; furthermore, it would not be appropriate to ask such questions, in this context. The views of the Faculty Directors, cited in Section 8.1.1, p. 233, are unequivocal. Berenice's view, however, is slightly different:

“I don't think it was ever perceived as an imposition. Our rector is a man whose highest aims and ambitions include all the teachers getting their MAs and doctorates. He is very interested in the academic side of things. And he always saw the SAC project as a good thing. So I don't think there was any imposition at all. I think it was more about acceptance, or rather a commitment – an enormous responsibility” (1 Berenice 6 / 232).

Different efforts to stimulate commitment from staff and students were observable, and show how the university began to *Interweave the project into the fabric of institutional policies*. Some of these seem to have been through appeal to pedagogical or other ideological convictions, and others by obligation to participate.

The legal agreement had stated that the ministry would award a very significant sum of money towards the installation of the SAC, and that the university itself would undertake to contribute a suitable physical space and install appropriate fittings and furniture. The British Council would act as external consultant for key project training activities and would share national project planning and evaluation activities with the ministry itself. Overall responsibility for the project was placed first in the hands of the Director of Higher

Education, next with the Chancellor of each individual university, and third, with the Director of the British Council, Mexico (SUPA 1/93). Thus, the roles of participating institutions were clearly indicated and the document suggested a generally high degree of investment at institutional level, trilaterally.

The strength of this political commitment and its role in assuring the success of the project was referred to in a comment from Linda, one of the series of SAC co-ordinators, already quoted:

“I now think, and I still have the impression, that we had to open the SAC at this university as quickly as possible, more than anything because of a political commitment” (1 Linda 1 / 17).

The words “had to” seem to indicate obligation. The words “political commitment”, in the context of a Mexican institution, embedded in Mexican society, is an extremely powerful phrase. When I questioned Linda further, about the *nature* of the commitment, she referred to the official agreement, and the way in which the project had been implemented in a “top-down” manner:

“And I feel that the project began from the top down, right? It was imposed as a commitment of the authorities, who were very interested in implementing the project in the best possible way, for political reasons” (1 Linda 2 / 62).

She also said that she felt this had been a major reason for the later success of the project, during the same interview.

The *Acceptance and active support* projected by many of the activities described in Chapters 6 and 7, and contributing to the gradual development of a positive *Affective environment* among staff, students and in the SAC itself, seems to have been paralleled by another process. What might perhaps be described as “humanistic” phenomena relating to *Atmosphere, Attitude and Training*, contrast strongly, and perhaps surprisingly, with what is beginning to emerge in this chapter.

First and foremost, the existence of a legal and political commitment on the part of the institution had very strong implications. The innovation had to be implemented, to honour this commitment. Thus it had to become *Interwoven into the existing policies* by the *institution*. The Faculty authorities, characterized by a strong commitment to institutional policies, exhibited an equally strong intention to stimulate *staff* to commitment to the project, and to *interweave it into Faculty policies*. Berenice’s comment, Chapter 7, Section

7.1.3, p. 215 (1 Berenice 8 / 262) makes reference to certain letters which were sent to teachers offering “incentives” to join the training sessions. The implication is that some teachers did not attend training sessions simply because they were *invited* or out of academic *interest*. The offering of incentives seems to imply two things: first, the Faculty itself was strongly committed to the project and was willing to put other activities in second place, while the project was being implemented. Second, staff attendance was encouraged in this way, because the project was inevitably going to become an integral part of teachers’ working environment. Faculty policy was supporting institutional policy, just as the university was supporting government policy. A top-down decision had been made and was cascading down the levels of the institutional hierarchy.

Another opinion from Alice, another of the SAC co-ordinators already quoted, was that once the university and the Faculty had integrated the SAC project into academic *Policy* the success of the project had been assured:

“At the beginning, the SAC was not part of the curriculum, it was optional. I don’t know, you remember six, five years ago, the SAC was optional. But afterwards the authorities decided that it should be more obligatory and it turned into part of the language syllabuses of the school. And this has helped us a lot, also when we make bids for funding from the Ministry, and we have been able to get funds from external bodies to buy new equipment because of this” (1 Alice 17 / 205).

The policy first became manifest at institutional level (through the agreement and new language policy), next at Faculty level (where incentives had been offered to staff to encourage them to participate in training sessions, and where language syllabuses had been adapted to include SAC activities), and then, among the SAC project staff themselves. Once attendance at the SAC had become a course requirement, commitment of a kind was also inevitable from the students, who would attend the SAC as part of their courses, whether by free will or by coercion. Thus *Policy* eventually affected the students, too.

Luisa, one of the Faculty directors already and frequently cited, also agreed that it had been important for the self-access centre to become integrated into the university’s foreign language *Policy*. She said the attendance requirement for students to be a positive thing:

“Yes, I definitely think it was important to make the SAC part of the language courses. And making language learning obligatory for other BA courses is important. If it were not for that, the youngsters would not study (languages) of their own accord” (1 Luisa 16 / 232).

It may be an internal reality that students tend not to study anything unless it is obligatory. However, it was important for the university, Faculty and SAC project staff to get students to attend, once the SAC project had become part of institutional *Policy*. This time, commitment was achieved by obligation. The attendance requirement would ensure that the students would use the resources. Next, the Faculty would be able to show quantitative results in terms of, for example, attendance figures (UIR 1/96/1; UIR 2/97/1; UIR 2/97/2; UIR 2/97/3; UIR 2/97/4; UIR 3/98/1; UIR 3/98/2; UIR 3/98/3; UIR 3/98/6; UIR 4/99/1; UIR 4/99/2). The same figures would then be cited in new bids for funding (e.g. USFP 1). Making SAC attendance a course requirement could well have been vital for the success and duration of the project, since it may have been at the same time a fundamental and far-reaching way of simultaneously *Interweaving the project into institutional policies*, and *Assuring immediate and on-going funding*.

It was interesting to note that in the opinion of the focus group at least, it had been more important to achieve congruence with *institutional* policies and priorities than with *government* ones (ranking of 4.5 for achievement and 5 for continuing growth). This may be a reflection of the fact that universities have conserved their right to autonomy and self-government (Chapter 5, Section 5.1.1, p. 107), so internal policy may well be perceived by teachers as prior to government policy in the achievement of the survival of a project beyond the scheduled period of project activities. It could equally show that they are more familiar with internal policies than state ones, and that their sights are focused more directly on their own department and their own students than on wider government policy issues, however.

In 8.1.1 and 8.1.2, I addressed the issues of *Congruence with government policy* and *Becoming interwoven with institutional policies* and their possible connection with the success and continuity of the project. In the next section, I will go on to show how a *Real need* for the SAC had been perceived in the university community, independently of new *Policies*. This element, working together with the development and implementation of these *Policies*, may also have contributed to the favourable results at the case study university and other universities which participated in the national SAC project.

I attempted to validate these interpretations through consultation with staff from similar university resource centres from different parts of Mexico. I was able to gather these opinions at two major annual SAC conferences, already frequently referred to in



Chapters 6 and 7. No fewer than seven people mentioned *Congruence with current institutional policies and priorities* as having been important to the success of their SACs:

PEV 3: “The support of the authorities through their policies [was important to the success of the SAC].”

PEV 5: “The support of the university authorities, who have always shown interest in the SAC because learning English is a priority.”

PEV 12: “The support of the authorities.”

SLPEV 2: “The support which has been received by the centre (from the university).”

SLPEV 3: “The implementation of the (new obligatory syllabus for English language), since English became a required subject as did (study in the) self-access centre.”

SLPEV 12: “Support/from the university, because our SAC is well-equipped.”

Thus we can see how the government, the institution, the Faculty, the co-ordination and finally the teachers themselves, all believed that the fact that the SAC became part of institutional policies and priorities had been a key factor in the success of the SACs. Evidence shows that this was certainly true of perceptions at the case-study university, and underwritten by perceptions of staff from at least seven other universities.

During semi-structured individual student interviews carried out in February 2004, issues related to academic *Policy* again emerged. The very first point made by the student whom I refer to as Lara, was this:

“Well, I didn’t come when I was in Course 1, because they didn’t ask me to” (1 Lara / P 1) (Coding: First interview with Laura, Point 1).

What Lara went on to say was that she now attended the SAC regularly because it was a course requirement – in other words, an obligation.

A second student confirmed this view:

“When I was in Course Two, they told us we had to come (to the SAC)” (1 Lana / P 2).

And so, Lana told me, she continued to attend...

A third student also said that:

“Some students only come because it is a requirement, in order to be able to take the final exam” (1 Augusto / P 10).

And a fourth told me that:

“The SAC is obligatory for all students of French” (1 Adrian / P 1).

Not only did the university make attendance at the SAC an integral part of all language syllabuses, but the Faculty of languages also seriously enforced the requirement. This was done by not allowing students to sit their final exams, unless they had fulfilled the SAC attendance requirement. Thus, a certain level of attendance at the SAC was assured and with it, the likelihood of the centre being able to survive into the future was increased.

During the focus group discussions, with members of the case study staff described in Chapter 5 and referred to in Chapters 6 and 7, I had asked participants to rank the categories I had identified according to a scale of 1-5, where “5” meant extremely important to survival of the project and “1” meant not important at all. An overall ranking of 4.5 out of a possible 5 points was awarded to the category: “*Congruence with government policy*” as a contributory factor for sustainability. If the project were to be more than sustainable, however, “*Congruence with current internal institutional policies and priorities*” received a full 5 points, one of very few categories that did.

In sum, data derived from documents, staff and students from the case study university and also from staff from other universities, all seemed to imply that *Becoming interwoven with institutional policies* had been important in the achievement of sustainability and even more so, in the attainment of a state of continuing dynamic growth.

### **8.1.3 *The existence of a real need as a facet of Policy***

A project can be the result of a good idea, a response to the *Existence of a real need* (in this case, a generalized demand for more extensive English language learning facilities) and perhaps, a fruitful combination of both. Perhaps the national SAC project, and, in turn, the case study project, had been the result of both.

I will first cite the opinions of some of the staff who have worked at the case study SAC. Next I will quote the students themselves, and finally I will present the opinions of seven members of SAC staff from other universities, all of whom I met at conferences related to SAC activities, over five years after the end of the project period.

Alba (a case study SAC co-ordinator) states categorically that the SAC endured because: “This project was seen to respond to an *urgent local need*” (1 Alba 2 / 56).

Linda, another case study SAC co-ordinator already cited, also felt that the SAC was responding to a *real need*:

“Curiously, English classes are not included in the curricula at any of the other Faculties, and yet in order to graduate, the students do have to meet a

foreign language requirement. So because most of the BA courses don't include foreign language classes, they have no option but to come to our Faculty and take a few courses to demonstrate that they have the minimum level required. So let's say that in this sense, the SAC is perhaps responding to a *real need* at the university (1 Linda 5 / 410).

Luisa, a case study Faculty director, shared this view:

“Well, my perception of self-access centres is that they came into being because of the need the country had to give an impulse to language learning, especially English. This became clear at the moment when the SEP (Mexican Ministry of Education) began to support these projects, because *they saw a need* which was much greater than the existing capacity of the universities to meet the demand” (1 Luisa 2 / 16).

The SACs were implemented, sustained and have gone on to develop further,

“Because *the need existed and continues to exist* at this moment in time at all of the state universities, the anxiousness to urge students to study a second language. And the self-access centres tried to meet this need” (1 Luisa 3 / 23).

Susana, one of the support staff already quoted, had perceived the SAC as addressing a *Real need*, too:

“I especially like the approach itself...it helps some students who are, well who find it harder to devote their time to improving their languages, because they can't keep up with the rest of the students in class. The SAC helps them because they can study at their own pace, and catch up, as it were” (1 Susana 3 / 157).

Among the students interviewed at the case study SAC in February 2004, most seemed to perceive that the SAC was addressing a *Real need* for language learning resources. Though their views regarding the precise *nature* of that need varied, they concurred in seeing that the fact that it addressed and satisfied a real need as a reason for its having endured:

“Well, it's as if there isn't the pressure you get in a group, like going at your own pace is much better” (1 MO / P 6).

Perhaps the point here is that the student has perceived a *need* for different kinds of learning opportunities, since not everyone responds well to classroom teaching in larger groups. This opinion was echoed by Lara:

“I feel more confident, calmer about studying here (in the SAC). It’s very easy to study. It’s not so difficult. It’s easy to manage and it helps you to learn a great deal” (1 LR / P 3).

Again the *need* is implied – there is a *need* for a less stressful way of learning than that provided in a standard classroom environment. Lana felt similarly:

“I feel better in the SAC than I do in the classroom. When I’m in the classroom, I feel under pressure because my classmates are probably at a higher level than I am and here I feel freer to work at my own rhythm” (1 LN / P 5).

Again, the student perceives that she herself has a *need* for an alternative to classroom learning. Augusto felt very much the same:

“There are things I can’t grasp in class and I come to the SAC and read and I understand it better” (1 AU / P 1).

Again, the student feels a personal *need* to study outside the classroom and finds the SAC enhances learning. Augusto’s use of the word “necessary” in the next comment again relates to the *need* he perceives:

“The SAC has lasted because it’s a complement to the classroom and because it’s *necessary*” (1 AU / P 9).

The last student interviewed felt a *need* for the materials the SAC could offer:

“I have access to all the learning resources I need, and it would be very difficult for me ever to be able to have these at home” (1 AD / P 3).

The institution, Faculty and project staff may have perceived a *need* before the SAC opened, and now that it is open, at least some of the students also see it as *responding to real needs*.

In the focus group, it was generally considered more important that a project should respond to a real *need*, if the project were to attain more than just sustainability and to go on to achieve further growth and development. The score achieved for the *Existence of a real need* for the innovation was 4.6 on a scale of 1 to 5 for sustainability, and 4.8 for continuing development and growth.

Staff from other universities seemed to see this aspect in a similar light. In response to the question: “In your personal opinion, what are the elements which have most contributed to the fact that your SAC has endured as a learning resource till the present time?”, seven people out of 33 interviewed at self-access conferences in different cities mentioned the *Existence of a real need*, as a contributory factor to the success of their SAC:

- PEV 4: “The need for support for language classes at the language centre”
- PEV 9: “The real need of university users or students to learn another language”
- PEV 12: “Apart from this, the SAC has responded to a real need, which has not lost currency”
- PEV 15: “The need to offer extra support to language courses”
- PEV 17: “The fact that there is a real need and therefore a real practical use”
- SLPEV 3: “The implementation of the new English programme, since English became a required subject, as did the use of the SAC”
- SLPEV 12: “The need at our university and at our language school”

These comments of SAC staff from eight different universities strongly imply that the SAC projects all over the country have been successful because they responded to a *real need*.

It is clear that staff with different levels of responsibility at the case study university and the students themselves perceive the SAC as fulfilling a real need. Even though the SAC may have been set up following first government and then university policies, if the staff had not come to support the project and if the students had failed to attend, the project could not be regarded as having been successful. The comments cited show a growing awareness among the student population of their own individual needs, as well as of the benefits offered by the centre. This “internal validity” within the SAC project itself seems to have favoured sustainability and the continued success of the centre, at other universities, too. I conclude that the fact that *a real need for the innovation* existed, was interconnected with policy issues and, at the same time, seems to have been a determining factor, in its overall success.

#### **8.1.4 Collaboration with institutions engaged in similar projects as a facet of Policy**

Berenice specifically remembered examples of support from the SAC co-ordinator of the University of Guanajuato, who had helped by providing reading materials, and from the team at the Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo, who had offered a tour of the centre and demonstration of the systems and procedures of their SAC (1 Berenice 1 / 154).

Luisa states her belief in the importance of having *Collaborated with other institutions* as part of *Policy* succinctly:

“I believe that sharing experiences locally, nationally, gave this touch or this way of doing things *à la mexicaine*, and however that was, we started to give things a national slant” (1 Luisa 7 / 82).

Patricia was quoted in Chapter 6, Section 6.3.3, p. 175, recalling the usefulness of their visits to Pachuca (1 Patricia 7 / 131). Alba had felt that she had learnt most of all about SAC work in British Council Regional workshops attended by several universities, and other subsequent SAC events, which had been organized by universities, after the end of the project period.

“Going to regional workshops helped me a lot. Our own experience too has been driving our work, right? And I’ve probably learned more by going to SAC conferences than anything else” (1 Alba / 4 / 131).

British Council Project Reports (BCPRs) for 1993-94, 1995, 1995-1996 and 1996-1997, all reported on national and regional SAC conferences, which had provided a forum for SAC staff from different universities to meet, present progress reports and share experience and ideas. There had been many of these: two national events in 1994, two national events in 1995, ten regional events in 1996 and a further ten in 1997. From 1998 to the present day there has been one annual national event, hosted by a different university each year, and one biennial forum, traditionally hosted by the Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla.

The focus group considered this sub-category of some importance to sustainability, awarding 3.4 points for importance to sustainability and 4 points on a scale of 1 to 5 to the achievement of growth and development. This may suggest that the longer an innovation endures, the more important it may become to share experience with sister organizations, in the interests of dynamic development.

In sum, in this section, I have tried to show how within the general *Administrative environment* in which the SAC project evolved a number of elements seem to have been interacting. These cannot be perceived as entirely *separate* from the *Affective Environment*, since the ways in which a project is administered can also have an impact on the emotions of the people involved, and vice versa.

- i) In Section 8.1.1, pp. 233-234, I showed how phenomena related to *Government policy*, had, according to references from participants and other types of data, played an important role in the success of the project, both at the case study and at other universities.
- ii) In Section 8.1.2, p. 235, I showed how the project’s *Becoming interwoven with institutional policies*, had emerged as another factor which had apparently

contributed to the success and duration of the SAC project. These also seemed to have emerged at other universities engaged in similar projects.

- iii) In Section 8.1.3, p. 240, another facet clustering around *Policy*, and apparently having contributed to the success of the project seems to have been the *Existence of a real need* which was addressed by the project. This seems to have interacted with the project's *Congruence with government policy*, and its gradual *Becoming interwoven with institutional policies* to contribute to success.
- iv) Additionally, in Section 8.1.4, p. 243, I tried to show how opportunities for staff to engage in *Collaboration with institutions engaged in similar projects*, funded by their university up to the present time, seem also to have been interconnected with other elements of *Policy* and supported the on-going success and continuation of the project.

## **8.2 Management as a facet of Administration**

Creating an effective *Administrative environment* for the SAC project seems to have been more complex than the mere formulation of *Policy*. *Management* and a range of phenomena which appear to be interconnected with this seem to have interacted in interesting ways with *Policy*. This section will describe how phenomena related to *Management* and *Administration* seemed to emerge from the data.

### **8.2.1 Shared aims and vision and wide participation as a facet of Management**

Alba, a much-quoted SAC co-ordinator, talked about her perceptions of the importance of having received training and consultancy sessions in her mother tongue. In this way, all lecturers and administrative staff from the Faculty of Modern Languages, regardless of their subject or knowledge of English, could be included in project activities:

“The mother tongue was used for training and consultancy sessions, in order to include all who were interested – not only English teaching staff” (1 Alba 7 / 256).

This could be interpreted as evidence of thoughtful *Management* and a major step towards ensuring that the entire Faculty would come to understand the aims and vision of the project, whether by choice, or otherwise, as discussed above.

Berenice remembered how careful she had been to share aims and encourage participation on a wide scale, and how she had personally insisted on the use of Spanish as the language of training, in the interests of inclusion of all staff:

“But when we had consultancy on self-access I would invite all the teachers and logically, we used the mother tongue. That was how it had to be” (1 Berenice 10 / 310).

However, these statements seem to contrast with Linda’s perception. She felt that project aims had not been sufficiently shared at first and that this had led to poor participation, and a difficult start:

“Well, you see, I think the majority of the teaching staff at the school was poorly informed and they didn’t accept the idea of the project very well, as they saw it as a threat to their positions” (1 Linda 2 / 37).

The perception of the project as a possible threat to teachers’ livelihoods has already been mentioned in Chapter 6, but it is worth reiterating that once they had perceived the project as something belonging to their Faculty, they had generally become more willing to participate. Going back to the data, Luisa said that at first, levels of acceptance had not been high, perhaps more due to lack of information than a downright rejection of the ethos or implications of the project:

“However, at the beginning it was all rather centralized, almost like a personal private project, and the co-ordinator worked very hard indeed, she has always really supported project, all the way through, but somehow we didn’t get much information so people didn’t get involved, and I think that is also partly why people at the Faculty had their reservations at the beginning” (1 Luisa 11 / 145).

Once the pilot SAC had opened, a new phase had begun, a new style of co-ordinator tried to extend information more widely. Once the project was no longer seen as a threat, the Faculty had gradually accepted it and the project had been better able to thrive, Chapter 6, Section 6.3.5, p. 182 (1 Linda 4 / 78).

A considerable amount of documentation exists, to illustrate the existence of clear, *Shared aims and vision and wide participation* among different participants at the university. On the other hand, it is hard to judge how widely such documents were actually *read* by the Faculty staff.

First of all, the SEP – University Project Agreement, BCPA 1/93, lays down the terms of participation at institutional level. Although this may not have been read by the staff in general, a series of internal university strategic plans (UISPs) for the SAC also exist, and state the developing aims of the SAC project, from year to year. These documents, for example, UISP 1 (Strategic Plan September 1995-September 1996), UISP 2 (Strategic Plan



September 1996-September 1997) and UISP 3 (Strategic Plan January 1998-July 1998), were prepared by the respective co-ordinators, with input from Faculty director, SAC co-ordinator, academic and support staff (Alice, 2.9.2002). They were used as public documents, to be shared by the whole project team. Aims, strategies, accountability and deadlines for all activities for each respective year were clearly stated in these documents, which were reviewed during monthly staff meetings, to evaluate progress, according to what SAC co-ordinators had told me in various chats regarding project documents.

A further document, USFP 1, University to SEP Funding Proposal (July 2000), was drawn up by the Faculty Director together with the SAC co-ordinator and staff, and had been used to bid for further public funding for the SAC in its later stages of development.

British Council project documents, project reports and reports of conferences, as well as documents written to inform British Council and SEP authorities, also state project aims and objectives and provide appropriate information for institutional authorities. These were also shared widely with directors and co-ordinators and other project staff in participating institutions by fax and during discussion at workshops (e.g. BCPR 1, report on project activities 1993-1994; BCPR 2, report on project activities 1993-1994; BCPR 3, report on project activities 1995; BCPR 4, report on project activities 1995-1996; BCPR 5, report on project activities 1996-1997; BCRE 1, report on Northern Region Conference, November 1996; BCRE 2, report on Central Region Conference, November 1996; BCRE 3, report on Western Region Conference, January 1997; UIR 1/96, University Internal Report 1, activities 1996; UIR 2/97, University Internal Report 2, activities 1997; UIR 2a/97, University Internal Report 2a, personal account, history of SAC, written by Faculty Director 1997; UIR 3/98, University Internal Report 3, activities 1998; UIR 4/99, University Internal Report 4, activities 1999, among others).

*Shared aims and vision* seem to have existed among the authorities and the SAC project team, though it is not so clear how far this was true of Faculty teachers. The issue of “giving information”, which the authorities and project team believe they have done, is not the same as “receiving and assimilating information”, in the same way as “teaching the present tense” is not the same as “learning the present tense”. In order to be able to answer this question more fully, I would have to begin a new survey with the teachers, who had not been eager to become involved at the beginning of the research.

In the focus group, this sub-category was scored equally high for both sustainability and for growth and development, scoring 4.6 out of a possible 5 points on both counts.

Beyond the case study university, seven collaborators at SAC events also mentioned points which seemed to be related to *Shared aims and vision* as having been important in the success of their projects:

Puebla Event, Participant 1 (PEV 1) mentioned:

“Faith, perseverance, breaking paradigms in teaching and learning (among the participating staff).”

The concept of “faith” is a particularly interesting one here, because it certainly evokes a group with a shared vision with connotations word, perhaps implying something akin to religious faith, which whether questioning or accepting, can undoubtedly be passionate. A degree of passion may actually be needed to keep a project going. In this case, "faith" implied the existence of a *Shared vision and belief in the aims*, while perseverance refers to the shared hard work of the team in pursuit of the goals.

PEV 6 stated:

“Organization, communication, believing in the project, the acceptance of criticism from outsiders had been major elements which had contributed to the survival of the SAC to the present day.”

“Organization” and “communication” again may imply a sharing of aims and work, while “believing in the project” implies that there had been a shared vision among the project team.

PEV 7 said that two key elements in the success of their project had been:

“Collaboration and participation of teachers and directors. A clear goal and objectives which were achieved.”

Collaboration and participation together imply “sharing work with others”, and the “clear goal and objectives” might be related back to *Shared vision*.

PEV 17 mentioned:

“Communication among the whole team, that takes part in the use of the SAC.”

And PEV 18 also stressed participation:

“More than anything, the attitude of the teachers and students towards their organized participation, always focused on the growth and the success of their objectives.”

Again, there is an emphasis on the sharing of information through communication, i.e. *Sharing aims, vision and encouraging wide participation*. These seem to be generally perceived as having been important ingredients in the survival of the SAC project.

### 8.2.2 *A less centralized management system as a facet of Management*

Clustering around the global concept of *Management*, elements related to the creation of *Shared aims and vision and wide participation* seem to be emerging as having contributed to the success and duration of the project. These might be considered as “psychological” aspects of *Management*.

Luisa’s statement regarding a change in staff and strategy and how it led to greater involvement, quoted above, would yet again seem to illustrate the importance of sharing responsibility to gain the support of fellow staff members for any innovation.

Further than this, I found no other direct reference in interviews. However, the annual strategic plans for the SAC (see above) perhaps spoke for themselves. For each task, a specific person or group was/were made accountable, and practical responsibilities were shared across the team, from the moment these plans began to be used (September 1995, with the appointment of a new SAC co-ordinator at the university). The delegation of responsibilities seems to show that although the new *Policies* had come from above in the hierarchy, the management system favoured after the inauguration of the pilot SAC in 1995, had been one of decentralizing responsibility. This had perhaps been interconnected with the establishment of a *Shared vision and aims and wider participation*, which seems to have been evolving simultaneously. It does not seem possible to identify a cause-effect relationship between these two phenomena, which seem to be interconnected as positive facets of *Management*, but more of a mutually enhancing interaction, which may have contributed to the success and future development of the project.

The focus group scored a *Less centralized management system* at 4 out of the possible 5 for the achievement of sustainability and 4.2 for the achievement of further growth and development, on the scale from 1 to 5. The participants perceived it as more important for future growth than for the completion of a project, but considerably less important than, for example, the project’s *Becoming interwoven into the university’s policies*. This may indicate a tendency to view *Policy* as more important than *Management style* among this project team. They also seem to have viewed having *Shared aims and vision and wide participation* as having been more important than a *Less centralized management system*. Management systems did not emerge as major factor in the achievement of sustainability among chance meetings and other interactions with staff from other universities. This may imply that *psychological* and *humanistic* elements, together with *policy* issues, have been more important in the success of the project than the *management systems* which were implemented.

### 8.2.3 *Planning for self-sufficiency as a facet of Management*

When recalling the teachers' initial reluctance to accept the SAC at the case study university (1 Linda 2 / 37), Linda also mentioned that the students had to pay a quota to attend: "... they (the students) had to, it meant paying, even if the quota was very low, but it did mean making a financial contribution."

Thus, the situation was ethically complex because, on the one hand, language curricula had been modified to include SAC attendance as a course requirement, while on the other hand, the university required a registration fee from students to use the new facilities. The attendance fee, according to Linda, was part of the university authorities' plan to make the SAC economically self-sufficient in the medium to long term. In the extract (1 Linda 4 / 78), the attendance fee is mentioned again:

"... and now, as I see it, it is a bit more the student community who is a bit more against it, but only in the sense that they see it as an obligation or because it implies a financial outlay, because a lot of them do take great advantage of it and some of them really have a high regard for the SAC, don't they?" (1 Linda 4 / 78).

So, although students did/do not like paying the fee, becoming an income-generator for the university, may have contributed to the success of the SAC. Linda uses the words "self-sufficient", in the next extract:

"I'm not sure of the original reasons [why SAC attendance was made a course requirement], but I think it was also something to do with the fact that the project had to become self-sufficient, and to achieve that, fees paid a very important role" (1 Linda 6 / 131).

This view of the SAC as a generator of funds was echoed by Alice:

"... [The SAC] is, in a certain way a business, I don't know if that is the right word, but it had to be self-supporting. By making languages obligatory for undergraduates and by making the students pay a fee to use the SAC, the project can become self-financing and the university provides it and we continue to function" (1 Alice 3 / 46).

It was very interesting to note that only two participants brought this topic up during interviews, and also that the focus group did not number *Self sufficiency* as by any means among the most important categories for sustainability, awarding a ranking position of 3.8 out of 5 for self-sufficiency and 4.2 for growth and further development. In both cases, the score seems low, and I wonder how much this might have reflected the long tradition of

centralized funding for state university activities. The spirit of free-enterprise which some state universities are now beginning to adopt is still a relatively recent phenomenon in academic institutions in this context (RD Entry, December 2006).

#### **8.2.4 *Adaptability and multipliability as a facet of Management***

Although documents amply illustrate that the project had been multiplied, there was no direct reference to this phenomena during interviews with authorities, SAC project staff and students, interviews at self-access events or chance meetings. However, I learned during general chats while visiting the university that the SAC project had been multiplied at the case-study university and I also interviewed a new SAC project co-ordinator from another campus.

In 2004, the Faculty put in a bid for funds from the Ministry of Education and from the university itself to finance three new language learning resource centres at different campuses of the university (UISP 4). Two of these have already been installed at sixth form colleges attached to the university, and one is located at another campus, in San Juan del Rio. I met some of the trainee staff from these centres by chance during a visit to the case study SAC. Evelina, one of the new project co-ordinators said during a structured interview:

“The authorities [at the sixth form college] have given us a lot of support. They are very willing to help us and, well, they are really part of the project” (1 Evelina 1 / 13).

Evelina expanded on what she perceived to have been the reasons for the levels of support from her authorities:

“There is a lot of support. People understand the advantages of offering further opportunities for practising English. People appreciate what the future needs of the students are going to be” (1 Evelina 2 / 19).

She went on to say that:

“The language department working group is very happy that the SAC is going to be installed” (1 Evelina 2 / 54).

In Evelina’s view at least, it was going to be possible to multiply the original project, because of the active support of the authorities. At the same time, one of series of co-ordinators at the case-study SAC, mentioned in an informal conversation, that the original project team had received “recognition and appreciation because of their willingness to train new teams and help the project to multiply” (RD Entry, 02.09.02).

Training for new centre staff was carried out directly by the staff of the case study SAC, and the centres were modelled entirely on this centre. At the same time, more specific local considerations are being taken into consideration at each new site, and the original model has been adapted, where appropriate, according to specific needs and staff availability (RD Entry, 02.09.02).

The focus group viewed *Adaptability and Multipliability* as having been vital for the continuing development and growth of their own SAC, awarding 5 out of 5. For sustainability, the ranking was lower, at 4.2. The only other sub-categories awarded a straight 5 were *Becoming interwoven with institutional policies* (awarded 5 for growth beyond the project period), *Initial and on-going funding* (awarded 5 for sustainability and 5 for continuing growth) and *Acceptance by staff and students* (both awarded a 5 for continuing growth beyond the project period).

This aspect of *Multipliability* would seem to have been crucial to the continuing development of the SAC, in the eyes of project participants, according to the results of the focus group, even though it had not been mentioned during interviews.

### **8.2.5 *Effective planning and evaluation activities as a facet of Management***

The clear, *Shared vision of goals* which had emerged as a feature of the project in Section 8.2.1, p. 245, may then have interconnected with *Planning* and worked together with the other elements described, to achieve success.

Evidence that effective *Planning* activities had characterised the case study project is to be found mainly in documentation and in my own observation notes; it is not mentioned overtly in other types of data.

Both University Internal Report 1/1996 and University/SEP Funding Proposal 1/2000 include documentation of plans and strategies to maintain the SAC, one during the project period, the second, long after the end of the official project period (1993-1997). The existence of the latter would seem to imply that strategic *Planning* had become an integral part of regular activities among centre staff.

I was also able to retrieve University Internal Strategic Plans for 1995-1996, 1996-1997, and first semester of 1998, all of these retrieved from the original project files and subsequently, for the year 2000.

Strategic *Planning* had formed part of the training in the *Administration* of SACs, given by British Council consultants. Each university had been required to send copies of

their plans to the British Council project co-ordinator on an annual basis, from 1993 to 1997 (BCPD 4/95; BCPR 4/95-96; BCPR 5/96-97). From what internal SAC staff told me, strategic *Planning* had also continued after the end of the project period, but due to changes of administration (a series of five different co-ordinators from 1993 to the present), some documents had been lost (RD Entry, 14.02.04).

Nonetheless, the co-ordinator willingly gave me a copy of the strategic plan for 2004-2006, including the mission statement, values, vision, SWOT analysis, situational analysis, objectives, activities, accountability and deadlines. Job descriptions and profiles were also included. I deduced from this that *Planning* and documentation have continued to take place indefinitely. During the same visit, the co-ordinator chatted about how the Faculty Director, SAC team and support staff tend to work a lot together (1 Alba 1 / 431), cited Chapter 6, Section 6.1.3, p. 157, and contributed to the *Planning* and later evaluation of their work.

The national project co-ordinator produced British Council Project Discussion Documents 1 (1994), 2 (1995), 3 (1995) and 4 (1997) to document progress made with the SAC project at each university and to suggest future action from the participating institutions. BCPD 1/94, written in 1994, was aimed at British Council authorities and suggests on-going training for SAC staff might still be appropriate, after the conclusion of the official project period (it had originally been conceived as a two-year project, to run from September 1993 to September 1995). The document also recommends the setting up of a Diploma course for SAC managers, a possible BA in the Management of self-access resource centres “to create a new generation of technology-wise English Language Teaching professionals”, or at the very least, the creation of modules on self-access learning, for inclusion in existing BA programmes.

A second trilateral agreement among institutions had been signed to cover the year September 1995 to September 1996, and later a final contract was made for September 1996 to September 1997, as explained above. Both contracts included further consultancy from the British Council and more regional conferences, to be funded by SEP and the universities and organized and implemented by the British Council. Although a Diploma in SAC management was not set up, by 1997 scholarships had been provided for eight existing SAC co-ordinators to enrol on a distance MA course in educational technology at a reputable UK university, to increase their levels of expertise. A further 14 candidates acquired funding from their own universities and were able to participate on the same course.

There are several interesting points to note about document, BCPD 1/94. First of all, it is a clear statement of interest in a continuation of the relationship with the Mexican Ministry of Education and the universities, by the British Council. Whatever the politics behind this may have been, the fact that the author (the external project co-ordinator) was suggesting concrete follow up activities a year ahead of the final date of an existing agreement may be important. It seems to show that she had a vision of the future, and was planning ahead, fostering future collaboration in the hope of building on the work achieved by the initial project. This kind of forward *Planning*, together with the training given to SAC teams in strategic *Planning*, already mentioned above, may have had a positive effect on the development of strategy *Planning* among the SAC teams. However, experienced Faculty Directors such as Berenice, Luisa and Blanca had already been involved in strategic *Planning* in their posts for years, and are likely to have exercised an even stronger influence than the external project team (RD Entries November 2006). However, forward *Planning* may have had something to do with sustainability at a national level, and by extrapolation, contributed to the sustainability and dynamic growth of all centres, including the case study SAC.

BCPD 2 was used as a discussion document at the fifth national SAC conference in Mexico City, May 1995. It details the proposal made to the SEP (based on BCPD 1), and asks conference participants from the universities to discuss their perceived training needs (topics and formats) for the continuation of input from British Council consultants. It also asks for suggestions regarding preferred dates for workshops at individual universities, venues for six regional conferences, a further national conference, and suggestions regarding the continuation of the project newsletter (a quarterly publication edited and produced by the external project co-ordinator with contributions from project participants all over Mexico).

BCPD 3, written as a second discussion document for the same event as BCPD 2, invites discussion of “evaluation as an integral, on-going part of the project rather than a summative exercise”. It mentions previous discussions at regional conferences on this subject and asks for a definition of what project participants themselves feel should be evaluated, by whom, when and how. Other discussion topics include types of evaluation and possible methods, as well as *Planning* and implementation. Discussion groups are asked to report on current evaluation activities at their SACs and, if there are none yet, to discuss practical ways of implementing them.



This shows, again, that long before the scheduled end of the project period, British Council project co-ordinator and consultants were stimulating discussion activities with university staff, suggesting the inclusion of evaluation activities in the regular, day-to-day work of the project, and feeding the results of the evaluation into future *Planning*.

Project *Planning* is likely to be more effective if based on on-going evaluation of project activities (Burke 1999: 93). It may be that the type of activity stimulated by this document, also directly contributed to more effective *Planning* and therefore to the durability of the project at the case study centre and, perhaps, at other universities.

BCPD 4 was written in June 1997 by the British Council Project Co-ordinator, in response to an official request from the SEP for guidance in the drawing up of possible criteria for accreditation of a SAC, for the award of the distinction of “Centre of Excellence”. The existence of this document again demonstrates that evaluation activities (already seen to have been part of the day-to-day activities in the case study SAC since 1995), continued to be planned at all levels of the organizations involved.

British Council Progress Report 1 (BCPR 1/94), covers the period from September 1993 to September 1994. It reports that the case study university was awarded special funding in May 1994, mentions the region to which it belongs, the name of the British Council regional training manager. It also details participation in national and regional training events, local consultancy sessions and administrative visits from the project co-ordinator. Referring specifically to the case study university, by September 1994: “A new building is to be built, to house the SAC, but construction will not begin until the beginning of 1995” (BCPR 1/94).

In fact, the building programme took longer to implement, and, as has been reported, the new building was not ready to open till 1997. This is not the point here, however. Much more important to note is that at this point, according to the report, needs had been analyzed and a co-ordinator had been appointed to lead the case study SAC project. Even at this early stage, it can be seen that plans were in place, though it will also be recalled that forward *Planning* had been perceived as over-centralized at the early stages of the project (1 Luisa 13 / 171, cited on p. 207).

However, in relation to forward *planning*, even by September 1994, the university authorities had a clear vision of where the project was going, according to the perception of the external co-ordinator:

“Other activities to be carried out while the building is in progress are: presentation of the project to staff and students of the Language School, Needs Analysis, and Induction courses for teachers and students of the language school” (BCPR 1/94).

All the national project universities were encouraged to plan ahead in this way, and certainly, this advice was taken at the case study university. BCPR 3/95 reports on national project activities up to and including May 1995 and confirms that universities were by then collaborating on a regional basis. Referring to the case study university’s region, “Regional conferences, exchange of materials and documentation, evaluation instruments, questionnaires” BCPR 3 1995 are cited as *Collaborative activities*, and, with regard to *Planning*, dates had already been set for such activities for the following year. These included formal courses on already agreed topics, monthly meetings with training managers, visits by the project co-ordinator once per semester, a regional and a national conference. The national project, again, seems to have provided a model of forward *Planning*, which may have helped to stimulate careful forward *Planning* at all universities, including the case study university.

BCPR 6/96, dated December 1996, reports on activities during the first term of the final academic year of the project. The case study university is not mentioned specifically, but there are some interesting points to note. First of all, strategic *Planning* on the part of the universities is specifically mentioned:

“Each university was asked to submit its annual strategic plan by 30<sup>th</sup> September 1996 at latest.”

Existing documents show that the case study university faxed a copy of their strategic plan for the year September 1995 to September 1996 to the national co-ordinator on February 12<sup>th</sup> 1996. The plan for September 1996 to September 1997 was faxed on October 24<sup>th</sup> 1996, according to dates on faxes. This means that strategic *Planning* had been well integrated into project activities at the case study university by this time.

It is worth noting that the focus group ranking activity concluded that while effective *Planning* activities were perceived as very important for sustainability (a ranking of 4.4 out of 5); they were considered even more important for future growth, since they were awarded a final ranking of 4.6. My initial surprise that this category did not achieve a 5 on both counts, probably again reflects my own experience as a project manager, which is prior to that as a qualitative researcher! Here, the danger of ethnocentrism may again be

rearing its head. However, the ranking results might have had something to do with the fact that most members of the focus group members were operational staff, who, though often consulted, is not always directly responsible for strategic *Planning* and may not perceive it to be as important as their own operational work in the SAC.

To sum up this section, I have tried to show how different facets of *Management* seem to have worked together and contributed to the success of the SAC project, both at national and local levels.

- i) Section 8.2.1, p. 245, described how *Shared aims and vision and wide participation* may have played a part in the success of the project.
- ii) In Section 8.2.2, p. 249, the data seemed to suggest that a *Less centralized management system*, which had allowed the SAC project team to work closely together at the operational level, with Faculty support, had also played its part.
- iii) In Section 8.2.3, p. 250, I showed how some data may imply that *Planning for self-sufficiency* may also have been important to the success of the project, as a further interacting ingredient in the *Management* melange.
- iv) The characteristic of *Adaptability and multipliability*, which also seems to have been important for the success and the continuation of the SAC project, was illustrated in Section 8.2.4, p. 251.
- v) Finally, the possible importance of forward *Planning and on-going self-evaluation* activities among external and internal project staff seemed to emerge as another probable contributory factor (Section 8.2.5, p. 252).

This cluster of interacting forces related to *Management* issues may have interacted with elements related to *Policy*, and then together contributed to the favourable *Administrative environment*, which allowed the project to achieve sustainability and a state of continuous, on-going development during and beyond the project period.

### **8.3 Finance**

During the case study, a third facet of what I have called *Administration*, seemed to emerge and also to be characterized by its interconnectivity with other phenomena related to *Policy* and *Management*, namely: *Finance*.

#### **8.3.1 Securing initial and on-going government funding as a facet of Finance**

Luisa was categorical in her view of the importance that *Government funding* had had in the initiation of the national SAC project:

“Well, my perception of the self-access centres is that they came into being because of the country’s need to give an impulse to language learning, especially English. This became clear the moment that the SEP began to support these projects financially, because they saw a need which was much greater than the existing capacity the universities had to meet the demand” (1 Luisa 2 / 16).

Without *Government funding* at the outset, then, it may never have been possible for the universities to set up their own self-access resource centres.

The existence of a legal document signed by representatives of the university and the government (SUPA: SEP/University Project Agreement), served to confirm the importance of the project in the government’s view.

The building project has already been signalled as apparent evidence of a number of interconnecting phenomena, for example, the *Acceptance and active support* the project received from the university (e.g. Chapter 6, Section 6.2.1, p. 168). Once the building had opened, it also seems to have had a growing impact on improving levels of *Acceptance and active support* on the part of the Faculty staff (Chapter 6, Section 6.3.5, p. 182). The positive *Mood* surrounding the building was commented on in Chapter 7, Section 7.1.1, p. 202, and the fact that it had been achieved at all was also connected with the *Existence of internal champions*, Chapter 7, Section 7.2.1, p. 219). In this chapter, the documents related to preparations for the construction of the building have also been cited as examples of forward *Planning* (Chapter 8, Section 8.2.5, p. 252).

The building project proposal suggested bidding for funding from two major government sources: one responsible for the funding and construction of buildings at academic institutions, and the other for multimedia and general office equipment, furniture, books, teaching materials and stationery. As has also been related, both bids were fully supported by the Chancellor – the government awarded the funds. As a result, a huge injection of *Government funding* was approved in 1996 (University Internal Report, UIR 2a/97; Silva 2001: 92-93).

A further document, University/SEP Funding proposal 1/2000 (SFP/1/2000), a bid for further funds in the year 2000, shows again how *Government funding* continued well after the end of the project period. Perhaps it was precisely because the university demonstrated its *Acceptance and active support* for the project, and demonstrated how it had become *Interwoven with institutional policies* (through the reform of foreign language curricula, for

example), government authorities may have “rewarded” the university by providing further funding. The SAC itself gradually began to take on a perceptibly more important role in securing funding not only for itself, but also for the Faculty, according to Alice. In her view, because the university had adhered to government policy in developing and implementing the SAC project, the SAC had gradually become a channel for acquiring funds not only to sustain itself, but also to support other Faculty activities:

“As I was explaining just now, the SAC is also a way in which we are managing to get equipment for the Faculty. So from a financial point of view, it really is the SAC which has brought us... 80% or 90% of what we have been able to buy for the faculty also comes in, via the SAC” (1 Alice 17 / 205).

It would appear that, over time, the role of the SAC has been so important in securing funding, that the Faculty needs are now seen as a component part of the SAC needs, and presented as such on bidding documents, rather than vice versa. There seems to have been both a clear vision and strategy, which has led to the integration of the SAC (physically, and through curriculum reform) into the Faculty and University to such an extent, that they have become mutually supportive, and this has obviously favoured sustainability and further growth.

This view can be supported by reference to Silva’s (2001) account. She explains that the new building was also intended to house facilities for the MA in Applied Linguistics, the MA in Literature and Letters, extra classroom space and a computing laboratory for academic and research staff on the second floor.

This implies that there had been a forward-thinking, integrated institutional development plan. All these services would co-exist in the resource centre. All were high status academic services, and future bids for funding might be made *either* under the auspices of the SAC, or one of the other areas, according to ways in which government language policies might develop in the future.

*Initial and on-going government funding* was one of the very few aspects which the focus group ranked at 5 for sustainability and 5 for continuing growth. They attributed the success of the project much more to this aspect than to anything else at all, except for the SAC project’s *Becoming interwoven in institutional policies* and its *Multipliable* nature.

In brief, although the Ministry had “volunteered” the initial funding for the SAC project, it was the Faculty and the SAC team who seem to have devised ways together of

ensuring *On-going government funding*. This continuing injection of funds seems, in their perception, to have played a very significant role in the sustainability and continuity of project activities.

### **8.3.2 *Securing initial and on-going internal funding as a facet of Finance***

The idea of *Including self-sufficiency as a project goal*, to ensure the future survival of the SAC has been mentioned in Section 8.2.3, p. 250, as a possible facet of *Management*, and therefore of the *Administrative environment*. It is obviously also related to *Securing initial and on-going internal funding* and therefore related to *Finance*.

Alice said that she felt:

“The SAC is, in a certain way, a business, I don’t know if that is the right word, but it had to be self-supporting. By making attendance obligatory and at the same time requiring a SAC registration fee from each student, the project can be self-financing and the university supports it and we, we continue to function” (1 Alice 6 / 43).

The initial donation from the university lottery and the board of patrons (Silva 2001) provided an initial injection of internal funds. Registration fees for students were one way of ensuring a regular flow of economic resources, but Alice did not consider that internal funding alone could ensure the survival of the project. In her opinion, the only real problems the SAC team had experienced over the years had been related to economic resources:

“The kinds of problems that we have had, have always been more to do with receiving economic resources. That is one of the big problems. Just at this moment, we are beginning to receive the new material which was projected since last year, and we are only just receiving the resources...” (1 Alice 7 / 52).

This is a reference to a complex situation in state universities. As Alice explained:

“First of all, in order to bid for a government grant, a Faculty has first to get the approval of the university selection committee. The university decides exactly which projects will be sent in to the respective government funding authorities. If the grant is awarded, the ministry pays the university, of course. Only after the university has carried out its own audit and budget exercises, do the funds get distributed to the individual Faculties (1 Alice 8 / 56).

This seems to be a complex area, since resources from different sources apparently may become intertwined and /or redistributed according to the results of the university's own financial operations.

According to the focus group ranking activity, strangely enough, this category was only awarded 3.5 for sustainability and even less, 3, for dynamic durability. In the perception of the SAC staff and Faculty directors, there are more important factors in the sustainability and survival of a project than *internal* funding. Perhaps this is because they know that more significant amounts are always obtained from external sources.

The existence of funding (whether external or internal) was also perceived as having been important in the survival of SACs all over Mexico, according to several opinions:

PEV 7: "Financial support from different institutions was an important reason."

PEV 17: "And, of course, access to funds, which has helped the SAC to go on."

SLPEV 12: "[Our SAC has been a success because of] financial support, because our SAC is well equipped."

SLPEV 13: "The most important factors have been constant and continuous training of the teachers and counsellors, as well as updating of technology which is used at the SAC."

Evidently, staff working on similar projects all over the country also considers funding to have been a key factor in the success and continuity of their projects, especially perhaps because of the implications of funding for staff training and the updating of equipment.

At the case study university, and at similar institutions, there have been initial injections of project funds, and also consistent efforts to procure funds, over the years. The data gives the impression that staff perceives *external* funding as having been more important than *internal* funding, both in terms of the start up, and the continuation of the projects. The fact that the case study SAC became at least partly *self-sufficient*, also seems to have contributed to its continuing survival.

In sum, in the two sub-sections of Section 8.3, I have presented evidence from the data evidencing that funding issues are perceived as having been important to the success and continuation of the project. The data seemed to show that people engaged in the project had felt that *government funding* had had a greater impact than *internal funding*. Moreover, a lot of creative thinking seems to have been devoted to finding ways in which the future of the project might be ensured by combining it with other existing academic activities, in

order to create more alternatives for seeking funding. Table 6 summarizes the conclusions of this chapter.

**Table 6: Emerging characteristics of the *Administrative environment***

<b>Global concept (Environment)</b>	<b>Categories (Interconnected phenomena)</b>	<b>Sub-categories (Interconnected component phenomena)</b>
Administrative environment	Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congruence with government policy</li> <li>• Becoming interwoven with institutional policies</li> <li>• The existence of a real need for the project</li> <li>• Collaboration with institutions engaged in similar projects</li> </ul>
Administrative environment	Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared aims/vision and wide participation</li> <li>• Less centralized management system</li> <li>• Self-sufficiency included as a project goal</li> <li>• Multipliability</li> <li>• Planning and evaluation</li> </ul>
Administrative environment	Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing initial and on-going government funding</li> <li>• Securing initial and on-going internal funding</li> </ul>



## Chapter 9

### **Conclusions and Implications: The Deeper Nature of Project Sustainability**

*In this chapter, I will briefly recall the original motivations for the research and then summarize the results that it has yielded, in relation to these motivations. I will then explain in what ways the study has contributed to a deeper understanding of the nature of sustainability. I will go on to propose a new term for what it is that successful projects achieve and I will end the chapter with a suggestion for a new way of conceptualizing some of the factors which can contribute to the success of English language teaching and other development projects. This, I hope, will serve to inform the profession and perhaps, in some measure, support the improvement of the results of future projects.*

#### **9.1 Closing the circle: The end re-evokes the beginning**

The overarching reason for this piece of research was a wish to deconstruct the concept of project sustainability and to reconstruct it in a more comprehensive, useful and helpful way for project managers in English language teaching and other development areas.

I aimed to do this by comparing the existing views of experts in different fields, with the new insights I hoped to derive through interacting with a wide range of data types, collected in the single bounded setting of a successful self-access centre project. I planned to use broadly qualitative research principles, guided by principles derived from postmodernist heuristic thought and ethnography and hoped to be able to discover new information to inform the profession and to contribute to the development of research methodologies appropriate to the study of this phenomena.

##### **9.1.1 Original interests in studying project sustainability**

In Chapter 2, I explained my own motivations and interests in carrying out the research, and reviewed what some current views hold to be important in the implementation of projects.

These included four broad areas of interest:

*i) Cultural issues*

Concepts related to “culture”, “acculturation”, “organisational culture”, “large culture”, “small culture” or “culturism” (Chapter 1, p. 20; Chapter 2, p. 25), interested me. Achieving a more comprehensive perception of the complex nature of surface and deep-cultural phenomena operating within, across and between all the kinds of institutions engaged in projects, was another area that fascinated me (Chapter 2, p. 32).

*ii) Management issues*

I had wanted to find out more about all the processes and behaviours surrounding project planning and implementation, in general (Chapter 2, p. 27). Planning models interested me too, and I hoped to find whether the linear model, initially applied during the case study project, might have affected the outcomes (Chapter 2, p. 28). Would the study help me to understand whether it was in fact best to “marry” both an evolutionary, emergent, phenomenologic approach and a planned-strategy approach to project planning, implementation and evaluation? (Chapter 2, p. 34). Management styles and successful methodologies for planning and implementing projects constituted a general area of interest (Chapter 2, p. 29).

*iii) Human relations and communication*

A deeper understanding of human relations and communication, would, I thought, also be helpful (Chapter 2, p. 28). The interactions among the different types of motivations and attitudes of participants were another area of interest (Chapter 2, p. 31). In particular, I wanted to find out whether the relationship between the British Council and the case study university had really become a lasting, mutually beneficial relationship, supporting the sustainability of the project (Chapter 2, p. 32). Human reactions to the project and project decisions were all part of this area (Chapter 2, p. 33), including staff reactions to more work, without necessarily any tangible reward (Chapter 2, p. 36). Then, again a deeper understanding of the roles of training and the subsequent assumption of decision-making powers and accountability (Chapter 2, p. 33), could, I thought, also be put to practical use.

*iv) Policy*

I was also motivated to find out more concerning how the political importance of projects might impinge upon their outcomes (Chapter 2, p. 36).

Obviously, these were too many areas for a single research project, and I gradually reduced the scope to four research questions, which I again repeat, for the sake of convenience:

1. What is the deeper nature of project sustainability?
2. How should sustainability be studied to develop our understanding of the phenomenon?
3. What factors have made this case especially interesting?
4. How far can insights from this study inform the profession and contribute to the development of further research principles and practices?

This shifted the focus very much *away* from driving forces behind my own and other people's existing preconceptions, and led me to *focus directly* on the bounded context and those phenomena which emerged naturally through the data. In short, the study became less researcher driven, and more a learning process, through which I progressively learned to allow the data to speak for itself and to interpret what it said *in its own terms*, and *through the eyes of the project participants*, as far as possible.

As all other aspects of the study, the achievement of this stance in relation to the data has been part of a developing process, as has been made evident from my descriptions of how I dealt with the data at different stages. There is much I would change, if I were to embark on this study today, and I will detail some of these aspects in Chapter 10.

The major results of the study are certainly rather different from my original idea of the creation of a kind of "Index for sustainability", after Booth and Black-Hawkins (2001), perhaps to be included in MA courses or specialized training courses for project managers, as initially proposed.

The interpretations of data from this research do seem to concur with some of the existing perceptions concerning sustainability. For example, it shows that the success of the case study ELT project certainly had much to do with processes and behaviours (Bowers 1987; Flavell 1994; McKay and Treffgarne 2000; Rüdiger 2000). These also seem to have been more important than specific planning models or clearly specific, definable management systems or styles (Handy 1993; Storti 2001; Fullen 1994; Morrison 1998, cited in Chapter 2).

With regard to the wider motivations and interests which had stimulated the study, as far as management is concerned, it was not really possible to discern whether the linear model, used at the beginning of the project had really made any contribution at all to the overall success of the project. Certainly, some documents existed, proving that strategic

planning activities and on-going monitoring and evaluation of the SAC team's work suggested in the British Council training seminars endures, at least in part, but as far as I could see, these are not necessarily related to a specific planning model.

The attitudes of different participant groups (as represented in the diagram presented in Chapter 2, p. 31) certainly do seem to have been important and there do also seem to have been surface and deep-cultural phenomena, operating within and across the project institutions (Robinson 2000). Numerous examples from the data show how a strong and enduring relationship, based partly on a combination of *Shared aims and vision* and a *spirit of collaboration* (e.g. Section 8.2.1, p. 245, Section 8.2.2, p. 249 and Sections 6.1.3, p. 157, 6.1.6, p. 165 and 7.1.3, p. 208), seems to have developed among the members of the SAC team, during the course of the project. This also seems to have been the case among colleagues from other institutions (e.g. Section 7.1.3, p. 212).

Issues related to the two elements of *Policy* and *Finance* seemed to have been extremely important to the success of the project, and indeed, much more so than I had expected when planning the research. The fact that the SAC project was *Congruent with government policies* (Section 8.1.1, p. 233), and received significant *Initial and on-going government funding* (Section 8.3.1, p. 257), may have been immediate reasons for the very strong commitment of the university, reasons first transmitted to the Faculty authorities, and then from the Faculty to the SAC project staff and teachers. The strength of this initial commitment to government policy may have had a very significant impact on the *Affective* and *Administrative environments*, and then have interacted with other observable phenomena to achieve the final positive project results. In the same way, the procurement of both *Initial and on-going funding* seems also to have interacted with a developing and expanding sense of commitment at all levels. Together, the role of the SAC in the Faculty grew to become increasingly important, not only because it became interwoven with institutional foreign language policies (Section 8.1.2, p. 235), but also because it developed into a source of funding for other Faculty projects.

It is evident that some insights into the wide-reaching areas of interest, which had initially motivated me to embark on this study, have been achieved through the research.

### **9.1.2 So – what is the deeper nature of sustainability?**

I am now able to describe the deeper nature of sustainability, according to the data, as the product of a fascinating complex of interconnected and mutually enhancing elements.

These are much more intricately constructed and connected than the more “objective” lists of concepts and categories I had derived from reading around the topic, and created myself, as steps in organizing and interpreting the data.

In Chapter 3, I presented and discussed existing views concerning the *conditions* and *criteria* necessary for project sustainability, according to major development organizations as well as English language teaching project experts (Chapter 3, p. 36), and summarized them at the end of the Chapter. For the sake of convenience, I reiterate the list here, without intending to imply any specific order of importance:

- i) The provision of training in knowledge and skills to further independence among receivers and enable them to lead the activities in the future
- ii) The provision of training and psychological support in the changing of perceptions (including a belief in the feasibility of change)
- iii) Accessibility of sufficient and continuing funding and other resources to enable future self-sufficiency
- iv) Appropriate and sufficient administrative support to carry through project activities
- v) Management which enables the meeting of present needs, without jeopardizing possible future needs
- vi) Respect for social, economic and environmental needs
- vii) Reaching targets for the present and setting of targets for the future
- viii) Wide participation and sharing of information, purpose, decision-making
- ix) Appropriate promotion and diffusion

Some of these phenomena, or variations of them, do indeed seem to have contributed to the positive results of the case study project (Chapters 6, 7 and 8). However, as mentioned above, I would like to suggest that it is more useful to view these as *interdependent and interconnected elements*, not necessarily describable as *discrete* aspects of the project development process.

For example, evidence emerged that some appropriate *Knowledge and skills training* (including the presentation of various SAC models which could perhaps be adapted to the local context), had been given by the British Council (Section 6.5.1, p. 191 and Section 7.3.1, p. 226). However, the project staff themselves had then built upon this initial training by external consultants, by organizing *Independent study* amongst themselves, as well as further *Collaboration with staff from similar institutions* (Section 7.1.3, p. 212).

Particularly worth noting here, is the fact that at least three of the SAC co-ordinators from the case study SAC project (Linda, Alba and Alice), *had never attended a single British Council initial training seminar*. They had, however, read texts recommended by their director and colleagues independently and had learned about SAC principles and practices through discussion and collaboration with other SAC project staff in their own and other institutions, both through project events and independently.

With regard to *Collaboration with other institutions engaged in similar projects*, a series of regular regional and national seminars had certainly been organized and financed by project funds, during the project period. Nonetheless, the continuation of these activities by the universities, after the conclusion of the project period, seems to have been equally or even more important in the subsequent survival and growth of the SACs, after the end of the project period.

At various institutions, it seemed that respective projects and their staff had gradually taken on a life and pro-activity of their own, which then enabled the respective teams to nourish each other's projects, through further interaction and exchange of ideas and practices (Section 8.1.4, p. 243). Again, this mutual support and nourishment across project teams with closely related national and educational cultures and backgrounds seems to have been at least as important in the achievement of sustainability and further development, as the original training from external consultants. The value of the external co-ordination may have been as much in the *facilitating of contact and creation of networks*, as much as in the training itself.

Funding, too, seems to have been a very dominant factor in the success of the case study project. Procured initially, and repeatedly, from the government, as the SAC became interwoven with existing university and Faculty policies and activities, over the years, the SAC has become an important generator of income for the university from the registration fees charged to students as well as external funding sources. Furthermore, the role that the SAC has assumed as a bidder for government funds has now grown to such an extent that it has actually been able to procure funds for the Faculty itself, to support other departmental activities (Section 8.3.1, p. 257 and Section 8.3.2, p. 260). Thus, roles have been very much reversed from the early days of the project, when the SAC was perhaps seen as just one more of the Faculty's numerous academic projects. In a financial sense, the SAC has acquired a life and identity of its own within the university and Faculty.

I was not able to identify, as originally suspected, any specific management styles or systems, exemplified by the training or practical work of external or internal project coordinators, which seemed to have made a major contribution to the success of the project. Certain aspects of *Management* (*Establishing shared aims and vision*, effective *Planning and evaluation activities*, a *Less centralized management system*, for example) did, however, seem to have been important. Each of these seems to have interacted with other elements co-existing in the generally favourable *Administrative environment*, including *Policy* and *Finance* issues, and worked together towards the success of the project.

A key tenet for development projects in general is that existing social, economic and environmental factors should be respected and left unharmed by innovations. In Chapter 3, Section 3.5, p. 42, I suggested that parallels could be drawn with these areas, with regard to English language teaching projects. Providing appropriate psychological and professional orientation and training of all staff to be involved in the new project might be parallel to showing respect for “social needs”. Procuring initial and continuing sources of funding might be considered as demonstrating respect for “economic” aspects, and protection of the values and traditions of local educational/institutional contexts might be considered to be “environmental” factors.

I have given numerous examples in the data chapters, which seem to suggest that there was intense and interconnected activity in *all* of these areas, during the case study project. I even went as far as to adopt the term “environment” and came to see the case study project as a complex “environment” in itself (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) in which the innovation was able to develop and thrive without essentially harming the existing environment. Embedded in the global environment of the university the *Affective* and *Administrative environments*, which evolved during and after the project, seem to have interacted and complemented each other in very positive ways, such that the project was sustained, and enabled to achieve an enormous and unpredicted reach beyond the confines of the main campus. It is worth stressing again that it seems to be more useful and informative to consider the interacting environments and their components not as discrete phenomena, but rather as interconnected facets of a more complex whole, often interrelated in deep and unexpected ways.

Reaching targets for the present and setting of targets for the future may be conceived as subsumed under the *Forward planning* activities (Section 8.2.5, p. 252) observed at the case study site. A fairly *Wide participation and collaboration*, also seems to have been a characteristic of *Management*, within the general *Administrative environment* of the project.

*Appropriate promotion and diffusion* were not aspects for which I found substantial data. Certainly, there had been *insufficient* internal promotion of the project for the first year or so, and staff had felt that a change of project co-ordinator had improved communication with the rest of the Faculty staff (Chapter 6, Section 6.3.4, p. 180). This lack of promotion and diffusion in the early stages does not, however, seem to have seriously impaired the outcomes of the project in the medium to long term. This again implies that there may have been other interrelated factors, which carried the project along.

Those elements which had been discussed in the literature review, which did seem to emerge in some guise from the new data, took on a new and much more profound dimension, because of the exciting and dynamic new ways in which I perceived them, in the evolution of the case study project. Each factor now seemed to have been closely *interconnected* and engaged in complex interactions with other facets, sometimes of the *Affective environment*, sometimes with the *Administrative environment*, and sometimes with *both*, simultaneously, in ways which I had never perceived, before the research. I have already explained in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, how certain phenomena seemed to cluster around two global themes: *Affect* and *Administration*, and it was the ways in which the clusters seemed to visibly and continually grow into larger complex forms, which made this case especially interesting.

### **9.1.3 What factors have made this case especially interesting?**

Clearly, extensive interaction and dialoguing with the data showed that the phenomena which seemed to have contributed to the sustainability and growth of the case study project did not seem to fall automatically into immediately obvious and convenient lists. Using reflexivity, I did create some initial tables, by way of summary, which I have presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. These lists cannot tell the whole story, however.

I have already mentioned how I began to perceive certain global or perhaps super-ordinate themes or concepts, which I have labelled the *Affective Environment* and *administrative environment*. These were not, nevertheless, seen as existing at the top of a hierarchy, but rather at the heart of something less linearly describable than a hierarchy. Nor were they seen as separate, isolated entities, but as *interconnected* with each other and their composite themes or categories. The data seems to suggest that the integral elements of the overlapping and complementary *Affective* and *Administrative environments* seem to



have been in a constant and evolving state of interaction with each other. The result of this complex has been a successful, enduring and dynamic project.

Other factors, which might be described as *categories*, which had been closely related to the healthy development of either or both the *Affective* and *Administrative environments*, also seemed to have emerged from the data. Surrounding each of these, yet other categories, or perhaps *sub-categories* seemed to emerge, each related to the respective concepts. These were not necessarily exclusively bound to a single concept, but sometimes linked to more than one simultaneously.

It was fascinating to see that I could not, in many cases, define precise relationships of cause and effect, and simply say *x* was achieved because of *y*, therefore, if project managers and staff do *y*, the result will be *x*. (This, incidentally, also created a conceptual problem, because concepts, categories and sub-categories are usually presented in terms of super-ordinates and sub-ordinates, and I was not convinced that this was the most accurate way to describe what had emerged here.)

First, I questioned whether this inability to identify cause and effect or super-ordinates and sub-ordinates might have been due to something as simple as the distance in time, between the events and processes of the project and the implementation of the current research. Clearly, this would have strained the memories of the participants and the researcher alike, had they attempted to reconstruct a detailed chronological sequence of actions and events. This did not really amount to a satisfactory justification, however. It seemed that there had been, and continued to be, much more complex interconnections and interactions operating among the respective elements of the whole, and this simply could not be accounted for by something as simplistic as relationships of cause and effect.

To give one concrete example of this, a generally positive *Affective Environment* seems to have evolved within and surrounding the project and its products. This was perceivable from evidence located in different data sets, pertaining to authorities, Faculty directors, SAC project co-ordinators, teams and students. (The reticence of a small number of non-Mexican faculty staff has been sufficiently illustrated and commented on in Chapters 6 and 7, and will not be further discussed here.)

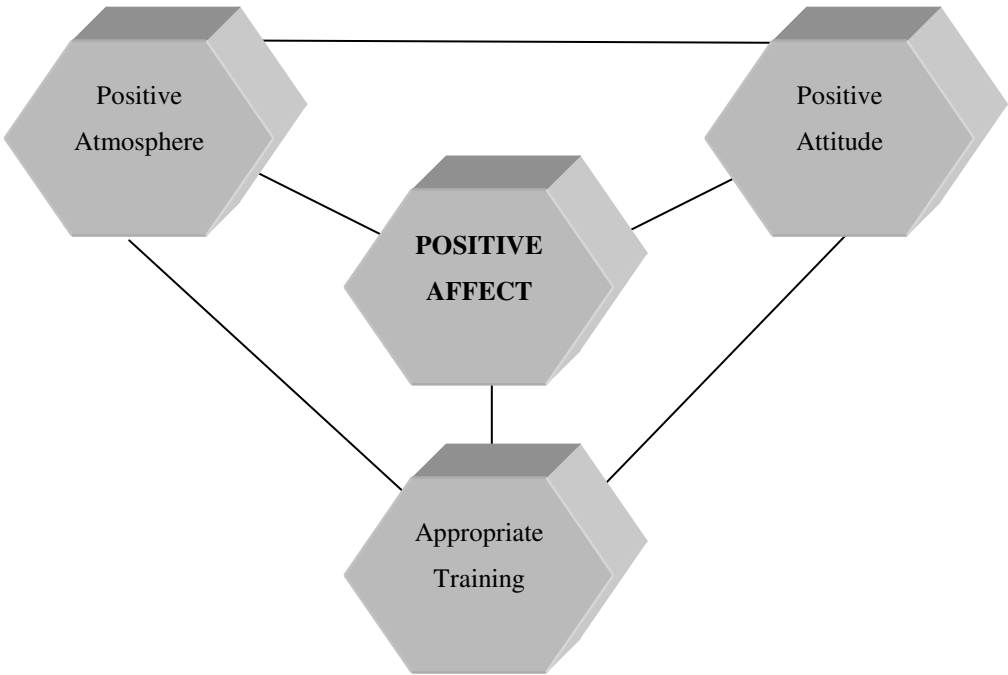
This generally positive *Affective environment*, seems to have emerged *during* the process of project implementation, and also to *endure* today. It may be traceable to a number of factors, some of which I labelled a stimulating *Atmosphere*, a positive *Attitude*, and *Appropriate knowledge and skills training*. All of these seem to have been features

which had interacted together, to enable the development of the positive *Affective environment* surrounding the SAC project, and many still seem to be clearly manifest in the SAC building and the activities which are carried out there today. The question was, had the *Atmosphere, Attitude* and effective *Training* created the positive *Affective environment*, or was it the positive *Affective environment* (stimulated by the on-going constructive actions and contributions of the government, authorities, staff and students), which had facilitated the development of the stimulating *Atmosphere, positive Attitude* and effective *Training*? Or had they perhaps evolved simultaneously and in a complementary manner?

Figure 5, below, is the first of a series of graphic representations, in which I have attempted to show how *interconnectivity* seemed to be a more satisfactory way of describing the emerging patterns and relationships existing among the different facets of the project, than cause and effect. It is a very simple attempt to represent the “clusters” of phenomena, which seemed to become observable, as I interpreted and cross-referenced the data.

Having reached this conceptualization, I realized that a “crystal” was perhaps an even better image than a “cluster”, since it allows an extra dimension and a crystal is also characterized by the repetition of certain component parts, in ever different combinations or patterns, as part of the evolution of an all-encompassing whole.

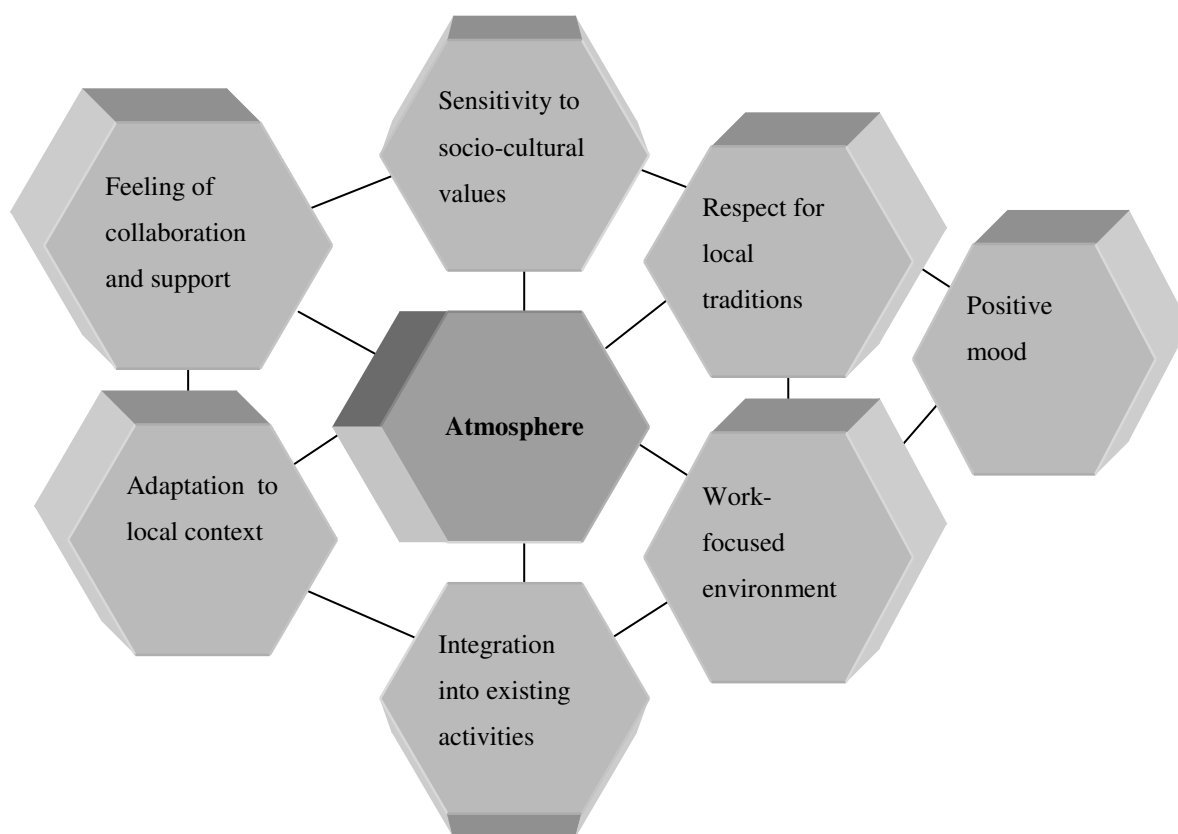
**Figure 5: The nucleus of the evolving *Affective environment* “crystal”**



Interconnectivity also seems to have been operating among a number of other elements, whether *characterizing*, or *characterized by*, the existence of the comfortable *Atmosphere*

surrounding the project. Again, it was difficult to ascertain whether the *Atmosphere* had gradually formed as a result of specific phenomena (such as the mix of *Sensitivity to socio-cultural values*, *Respect for local traditions*, *Feeling of collaboration and support*, positive *Mood*, *Work-focused environment*, *Adaptation to local context*, *Integration into existing activities* and *Promotion of independence*), or whether the stimulating and comfortable *Atmosphere* had been prior, and in some way “attracted” or facilitated the emergence of the other phenomena. Figure 6 attempts to show this graphically, though again, somewhat imperfectly.

**Figure 6: The nucleus of the evolving *Atmosphere* “crystal”.**

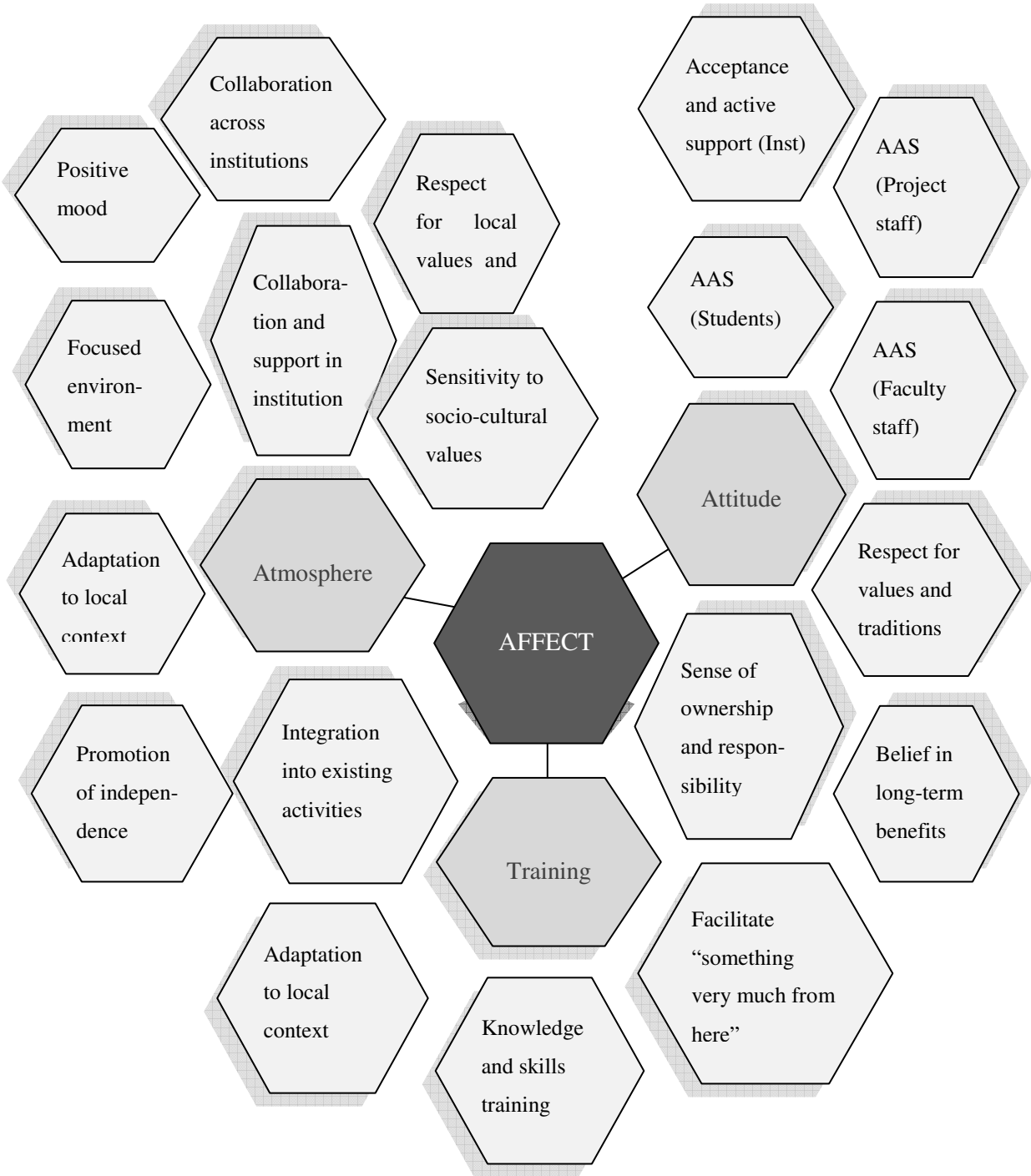


Figures 7 and 8 are an attempt to further clarify the overall perception of the interconnectivity of the elements which contributed to the sustainability and continuing dynamic growth of the case study SAC project. Here all the elements are represented as co-existing characteristics or processes in the project context. If perceived in three dimensions, the diagrams would, perhaps, be even more illustrative.

I continue to exploit the image of *Affect* as a nucleus around which, *Attitude*, *Atmosphere* and *Training* have collected, each attracting or facilitating the growth of

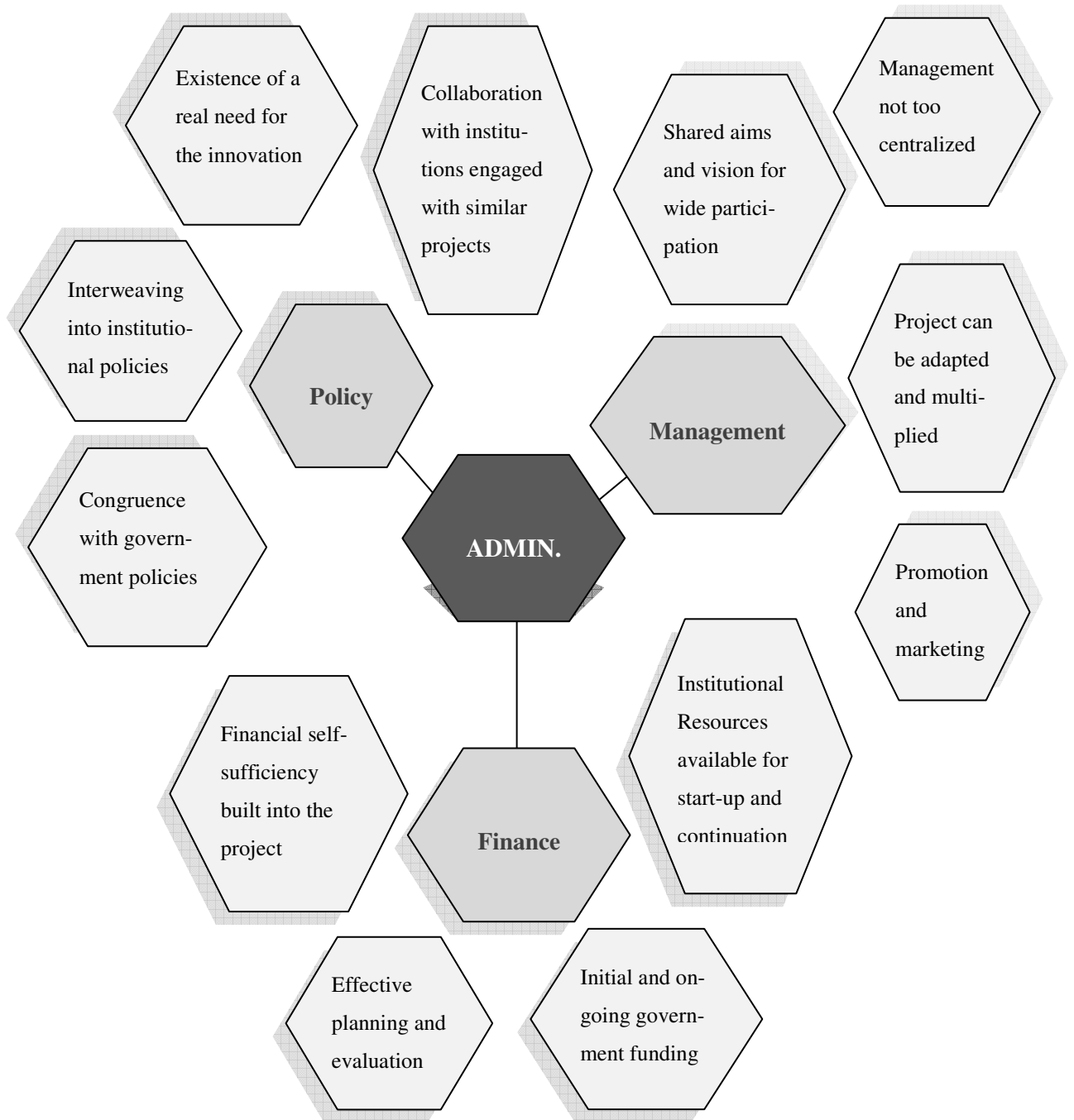
“clusters” of sub-categories (remembering that some sub-categories may be related to more than one category). Thus, a complex image emerges, comparable to a three-dimensional crystal, and composed of interconnected and co-existing phenomena. These would seem to be individually and jointly engaged in an on-going and continual state of evolution. The image of the crystal bears obvious comparison with Richardson’s use of the image and concept of *crystallization*, referred to in Chapter 4, Section 4.7, p. 104, above, as a possible way of achieving a kind of *validity* relevant to qualitative research.

**Figure 7: The crystal forms: emerging concepts, categories, sub-categories, Chapter 6**



Similarly, interconnectivity of phenomena surrounding the *Administrative environment* seems to have emerged as a process in motion, developing during the project, and continuing to evolve today.

**Figure 8: Interconnectivity in the *administrative environment***



Throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I have been careful to avoid suggesting whether any of the concepts, categories and sub-categories surrounding each nucleus might be *more important*, or *prior*, and have begun to problematize the conventional terminology of concepts, categories and sub-categories as unsatisfactory and non-explanatory in this case. In general, the data seems to suggest that the concepts, categories and sub-categories are very much interconnected and that they mutually complement each other, in a state of organic growth or evolution.

It is this *evolutive model of organic growth*, comparable to the growth of a multifaceted crystal, which now seems to me to best represent what I perceive to have happened during the implementation of the case study project and which remains an on-going process today. Perhaps a new terminology is needed to describe this, and I would suggest that “nuclear concepts” and “interconnected categories” may be more satisfactory. Super-ordinates and sub-ordinates simply do not seem to be appropriate terms for what I am attempting to describe.

The historical signing of the agreement between the Mexican Ministry of Education, The British Council and the Mexican University may well have lent a certain inevitability to the *de facto* implementation of the SAC project in some way, because of strong and interacting political and financial commitments and dependencies. On the other hand, the signing of a document could not in itself have assured the *nature* of the implementation process, or that the project would become more than sustainable. Much less could the signing of a document have enabled the project to acquire a life of its own, in some of the ways it seems to have done, evolving dynamically and achieving an impact far beyond the original project plan, including its multiplication in different parts of the city and state.

*Interconnectivity*, operating among a complex array of interrelated and overlapping phenomena (concepts, categories and sub-category), seems to have contributed to the achievement of much more than sustainability in the case study project. The image of a crystal, growing as related phenomena cluster around its core, forming patterns composed not of random, but of repeatedly reoccurring elements, seems to represent more faithfully what really happens as successful projects develop, grow and extend their reach and impact into the future.

## **9.2 Is “sustainability” an appropriate term for what successful projects achieve?**

The working definition of sustainability, set up in Chapter 3, Section 3.6, p. 64, was this:

“Sustainability is a characteristic of a process or a state that can be maintained indefinitely, without harming present or future socio-economic or environmental factors.”

The term, as defined, is not a sufficiently comprehensive term to describe the evolutionary state achieved by the case study project. Because of this, I would like to propose the coining of a new and embracing term, better able to denote what successful educational development projects achieve for their participants and institutions.

I suggest *Dynamic durability* as a possible alternative, because it suggests a more creative and proactive future than “sustainability”, according to existing definitions. *Dynamic* denotes a state of perpetual movement, while *Durability* suggests the solidness of the hardest of crystals, the diamond. The definition I would suggest for *Dynamic durability*, would be:

“A property comprising the ability to both endure and, simultaneously, to evolve, thus enabling the activities initiated by a project to both survive and develop to meet unpredictable, but inevitable, new needs arising in the future”.

Sustainability can only be desirable if it encompasses this capacity to evolve, a fascinating feature, clearly demonstrated by the case study project. The property of *Dynamic durability* was, as I perceive, achieved through the complex constellation of states, processes and activities, described in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. Ways of perceiving some of the phenomena which variously interact in the evolution of *Dynamic durability* have been represented graphically, in 9.1.2.

If *Dynamic durability* were to be accepted as the final aim of development projects, existing perceptions and ways of thinking about the deeper nature of projects may need to change. A new kind of awareness, appropriate to the ontologies and epistemologies of the world in which we live today, at the same time adverse to the imposition of ethnocentric innovations and project implementation methodologies will need to be developed among project managers and staff. Such awareness will, of course, include the development of an understanding of the complex interconnectivity of phenomena which work together in the evolution of a project. It will also foster the planning in of strategies which could enhance not just project sustainability, but promote adaptability, creativity collaboration and continuous development among the staff, in the interests of the *Dynamic durability* of the project. The new ways of looking at projects derived from this study will certainly enrich and improve my own approach to projects in the future, and I hope it may be of use to others, too.

### **9.3 How far can insights derived from this study inform the profession and contribute towards the design of future ELT/development projects?**

At the case study university, the SAC project showed a remarkable versatility in the ways in which it was adapted to the local context, accepted and integrated into existing activities,



*Becoming interwoven with institutional policies*, at different levels. “It became something very much from here.” This aspect should not be underestimated. When planning and implementing future projects, I will consider the facets of the “Project Crystal” much more deeply and carefully, and work with participants in making all aspects of the innovation their own. This first of all implies establishing a more profound, shared and locally relevant conceptualization of the purposes and benefits of the project. It then requires the development of more context-sensitive planning, implementation and evaluation strategies, rather than the imposition of innovations and methodologies developed in alien contexts, according to foreign academic traditions and values.

My overarching suggestion would be that English language teaching and other development project managers might think again about how to perceive what really happens during the development of a successful project. The image of crystallization, which allows for the evolution and interconnectivity of categories in the project environment, and the repetition of certain shapes or facets in more than one fragment of the crystal, implies that a new kind of project planning and implementation can be developed. In common with more progressivist approaches to project planning and implementation, e.g. Process guided planning and Contingency theory (Morrison 1998), Problem-solving approaches (Mead 2000), a new set of theory and practices might be developed. “Crystallization Theory”, as it might be denominated, would reject linear planning models based on cause and effect as belonging to a modernistic and rationalistic world view, not commensurate with postmodernist epistemologies. It would be conceived as a modified form of chaos theory, allowing the random emergence of phenomena, which may then be attracted to each other in crystal-like formations, which may embody a combination of new and repeated elements. What may be most important of all is the identification of more such interconnected phenomena, which can contribute to the evolution of *Dynamically durable* project results, and the continuing development of process approaches to project management, which will both acknowledge and exploit such properties.

My research is necessarily inconclusive, because it is largely based on a single case. Some of the perceptions and experiences were also shared by project staff engaged in parallel projects at other universities, as I have reported in the respective sections of Chapters 6, 7 and 8. This may indeed mean that some of the phenomena observed would indeed be generalizable to other English language teaching and development projects.

However, the value of the study perhaps lies *less* in the potential generalizability of specific phenomena described, than in the *concrete proposal* for a new way of perceiving the factors which may contribute to successful projects: the perception of a project as a multifaceted, ever-evolving “crystal”, in which the different facets are interconnected and combined in different patterns, resulting in a continual state of dynamic durability.

When I initiated this study, I believed that an understanding of the socio-cultural aspects by external consultants and trainers was likely to prove to be the most important ingredient for project sustainability. What has gradually emerged from the data, as part of the research process, was that, although this is indeed one factor, there are many other, interconnected phenomena, which may be of equal or greater importance. Furthermore, most of these phenomena are not in any way *controllable* by external consultants or trainers, but evolve within the internal context of the project. Certainly it is important for external consultants and trainers to understand the real needs and the socio-cultural context in which the project is to be implemented, but it is probably more important for the *project* to undergo a process of *acculturation* than for the *external project adviser* to do so. External advisers can successfully present alternatives and help internal staff to see new ways of attending the real needs of their own context. The fact remains that it is the host institution and the internal staff (perhaps also through *Collaboration with their peers in other institutions*), who know the *Administrative* and *Affective environments* well enough to create and foster the conditions for *Dynamic durability*, as the project becomes their own.

The research process has led me to the conclusion that the first step of a development project which involves the collaboration of more than one institution should begin with a rigorous analysis and deconstruction of the concepts underlying both the *project aims* and proposed *methodology for implementation*. This would lead to a deeper understanding of how such concepts might be interpreted and best put into practice appropriately in each respective context and avoid short or long-term harm to the *Affective* and *Administrative environments* in which the project is to develop. This, of course, includes all the inhabitants of these environments. Most important of all, is perhaps the stimulation of honest discussion and collaborative planning, in relation to what is truly appropriate for the specific context of the project. The “Project Crystal” model could serve as a focus of discussion, since project teams could use it to consider together how to take into account the many facets of any project in a more conscious and constructive way, in the interests of achieving *Dynamic durability*.

This research project has been useful in discovering what some of the components of the successful project may be. However, my methodology has been brought in from the dominant discourse of Qualitative Research, not yet widely shared among Mexican researchers. The topic – sustainability in development projects – has also been imported from those privileged nations who can indulge in leading such projects as external consultants, in the interests of creating a positive image for their countries on the world stage. It would perhaps be informative to implement a similar case study in a Mexican SAC in the near future, beginning with a series of activities favouring the establishment of a shared conceptualization of both the areas to be studied and the appropriate research methodology. This would then be complemented by more systematic discussion of possible interpretations with those who live and work in the context after key phases of data interpretation. In this way, the insights of this study could be used to inform further research and contribute to more effective project management in the future.

### **9.3.1 Relationships with other contexts**

The ideas and discussion arising from this research may be equally relevant to innovative projects in English language teaching and other kinds of development projects in general. This is because, although the study has used a self-access language learning resource centre as the setting, it has not focused specifically on the aims and functions of this type of centre as such, but on the project which led to its existence.

It has been said that anthropologists do not study *villages*, they study *in* villages. In the same way, I have not studied a SAC, but have studied *in* a SAC, in order to acquire insights into the planning and implementation of the SAC *as a project*, more than as a new kind of learning resource. Indeed, the degree to which the centre has proven to be effective and productive as a learning resource (as opposed to being *perceived* as effective by staff and students) is actually an issue which goes beyond the immediate interests of this study.

My results could provide useful information for practising project managers, as well as a point of departure for the further study of project sustainability or *Dynamic durability*, which might compare the elements which seem to have contributed favourably to this project with those characteristic of other cases. In Chapter 3, in my survey and discussion of the nature of sustainability as an attribute of different types of project, derived from other people's work, I referred to projects implemented by a number of different types of organization, as well as English as a Foreign Language projects. Specifically, I mentioned

the Save the Children Fund, UNESCO; the Royds housing estate development project, Robinson, Hewitt and Harris (2000); the Brundtland Commission (1998); a project to provide potable water in Africa, Davey (1998); a National Science Foundation project in the USA, Lawrence and Keiser (2002), and other work in English as a Foreign Language, e.g. Samuelson and Harrity (1998); Robinson, Hewitt and Harris (2000); Morrow (1998).

My aim in doing this was to emphasize, from the outset, the view that project development is very much an area of interdisciplinary study and importance. It is my hope that this study will contribute not only to a more interdisciplinary approach to work in areas related to Applied Linguistics and the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language, but also to the understanding of specialists in other fields.

### **9.3.2 Context-specific findings**

There are certain aspects of the SAC project, which could be considered context-specific. First of all, under the global concept of *Administrative environment*, the interconnected category *Congruence with government policy* was certainly important in this context. The fact that the project arose from a major new government policy regarding the teaching of English as a Foreign Language at state universities gave the project national as well as local status. I would not want to suggest that all projects *must* arise from government policy, in order for *Dynamic durability* to be attained. It was shown in Chapter 8 that having *Become interwoven with institutional policy* had been more important to the success of the project, in some people's eyes.

In the same way, under the global category of *Administrative environment*, the interconnected categories of *Finance* and *Initial and on-going government funding*, the large injection of *Government funding* available at the different stages of the project and in the future, had certainly contributed to the *Dynamic durability* of the project. Not all projects are *government* funded, but both initial and on-going funding will certainly be essential for the survival of any innovation, regardless of the source of the funding.

With these two important exceptions, the remaining concepts and interconnected categories may well emerge in the context of any project, in any field. In this sense I believe that my study has arrived at some context-specific, but a much greater number of more widely generalizable findings.

In this chapter, I have recalled the initial motivations of the study and shown how some of my research questions have been partially answered. I have explained and

graphically illustrated ways in which the study has led to a deeper understanding of the nature of project sustainability, and how this understanding led me to propose a new term. I have also suggested how the results of the study can inform professionals involved in project development, and pointed out context specific aspects. In Chapter 10, I will summarize how this study may be able to contribute to the development of research methodologies in general, and to research into projects, more specifically.

## Chapter 10

### The Development of Methodologies for Research into Projects

*In this chapter, I will first summarize why the epistemologies behind the methodology of this study are particularly appropriate for research into the nature of English language teaching projects and developments in general, despite the difficulties sometimes inherent in putting the theory into practice in research activities in the field. I will go on to suggest that modified ethnography of the type designed for this study, and qualitative research principles and practices, are particularly relevant for investigations in the area of critical applied linguistics in general, and in the study of bi or multi-nationally led projects in particular. I will point out the weaknesses in the methodology of this research and make suggestions to inform future researchers, throughout the chapter. I will end by summarizing the main points of the chapter.*

#### 10.1 The relevance of postmodern epistemologies

This study, as explained at length in Chapter 4, is rooted in key principles derived from post modern epistemologies. First, there must be a commitment to a plurality of perspectives, meanings, methods and values and a search for an appreciation of ironic meanings, ambiguities and alternative interpretations. A critical stance in relation to Big Stories, such as the grand theories of science, and the pervading myths of specific religions, nations, cultures, and professions, which purport to explain the way things are, is another characteristic. A central premise is also the acknowledgment that, because there is indeed a plurality of perspectives and ways of knowing, there must also be multiple truths (Hlynka and Yeaman 1992). Truth and reality are recognized as situated social constructs.

These epistemologies seem to have been particularly appropriate as a basis for developing a research methodology for the investigation of an English language teaching project, led by members of foreign cultures, who were likely to have multiple perceptions of knowledge, truth and the needs of their contexts. The implication of embracing such epistemologies is that choices made in developing and implementing a research methodology become more appropriately based on emergent knowledge and truths, than on preconceptions concerning “best practice in methodology” (sometimes dubbed “methodolatry”) absolutes and binary oppositions. This allows greater flexibility in

selecting alternative data collection techniques, in response to what existing data may imply. It implies the development of activities, stimulated by emergent findings, as part of the research process. It also requires particular rigour in recording and documenting choices and justifications.

Methodological choices of the types made while implementing this study, described in detail in Chapter 5, have been made in direct relation to realizations that certain activities could access multiple perspectives and realities concerning the phenomenon being investigated. The philosophical principles, on which this research was based, would be transferable to other English language teaching and development project contexts, though many of the *practices* implemented could be improved, as will now be discussed.

### **10.1.1 Other issues affecting methodological choices in this type of research**

The case study project was designed to implement a major innovation in English language teaching and learning in Mexico. It was initially led by external (not all foreign) consultants, employed by a foreign organization and the Mexican ministry of education. The educational innovations brought with the project were to be accepted and assimilated in a different national and educational context from that in which the staff training methodology, educational content of the project and the project implementation methodology itself had been developed. The SAC project would therefore inevitably have been seen from a plurality of perspectives, at every stage in the process, according to the backgrounds, purposes and roles of the various interested parties. This had obvious implications for the philosophy and design of the research methodology.

Critical applied linguistics encourages the deconstruction of cultural, political and social issues around foreign language learning and teaching. It particularly promotes a greater awareness of the plurality of contexts and realities in which our profession operates. It encourages the problematization of the myths of our own profession (for example, the idea that self-access centres should be noisy, bustling places with lots of oral communicative activity going on through the medium of a foreign language!). This emphasis of cultural, sociological and political dimensions in the study and practice of language teaching issues (Pennycook 1997), implies that researchers, teacher trainer-developers and language teachers need to be aware of the possibility of multiple perspectives and multiple truths in the implementation of their professional activities. Equally, they need to be able to detect intentionality, ulterior motives stemming from

linguistic imperialism (Cangarajah 1999), ethnocentrism (Palfreyman and Smith 2003; Holliday 2005) and political indoctrination by western hegemonies, which can be hidden behind the mask of what may at first sight appear to be altruistic training and development projects. From the point of view of the researcher, major epistemological questions, such as “How do I know the context and what is my relationship with myself as an enquirer and what I know of the context?” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 99), are particularly relevant to professionals carrying out research in their own field. There are certain advantages to insider research, of the type carried out in this study, because pre-understandings and personal experience can be used as a point of departure, then modified as new insights emerge during the research process (Scott and Usher 1999: 28). However, it is crucial for the researcher to be aware of how past and present roles may *negatively* affect her reactions and responses, when interacting with and interpreting the context, participants and data. Because fore-understanding, and a predetermined stance, before we set out on a research encounter, can seriously skew the interpretation of any data (Lye 1996), the researcher should engage in a constant process of self-searching, self-dialogue and self-discovery, as I have tried to do, not always successfully, in this study. This openness of disposition can and probably should be transferred to the study of any social phenomenon, and is particularly relevant to studies within the field of critical applied linguistics.

The hermeneutic circle predetermines, nonetheless, that people can only know what they are *prepared* to know, in the particular *terms* that they are prepared to know it (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2, p. 77), and it is therefore neither automatic nor easy to implement these activities consistently. Although the researcher may grasp in theory that multiple truths exist, she may not immediately distinguish them when working in the field.

During the research process, as I studied the work of experts, talked to participants, collected, reduced, arranged and interpreted data, I genuinely attempted to continually re-evaluate my own perceptions of reality and beliefs, while remaining alert and sensitive to those I seemed to encounter among the participants in the research context. Nonetheless, I sometimes found myself imposing my own interpretations after the data collection event. Then, I would try to counteract this, by going back to the participants to check if their interpretations agreed with mine. Ostensibly, this would seem to be good practice. In reality, participants so rarely disagreed with the interpretations I offered, that it led me to realize that I should have developed other, more subtle strategies to check interpreted meanings. Questions such as “What do you think this means?” would be preferable to “Do



you think this means that staff accepted the innovation?” Closed questions tend to elicit automatic and closed answers, whereas open-ended questions stimulate reflexivity.

This is a typical example of the kinds of awareness which seem obvious in retrospect, but develop naturally and exponentially, as part of the research process. This is precisely why it would seem to be extremely important for professionals to undergo this kind of research experience.

## **10.2 Limitations of the research methodology of this study**

I have previously described this research as a modified, reflexive ethnography, which aimed to study: “the nature of a specific social phenomenon, through a range of data types, involving the interpretation of the meanings and functions, and participant observation” (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994: 248).

According to my professed research philosophy, I intended to put a number of steps into practice, as part of a developing research methodology, based on creative reflexivity (Section 4.3.3, p. 84). These steps included, first of all, approaching concepts, ideas and objects as texts, in order to interpret their possible meanings. This, in turn, next implied deconstructing the texts, in order to allow meanings to emerge and to question those meanings assiduously. It also meant identifying omissions – concepts, ideas and objects which did *not* occur in the data, whether due to the design of the data collection activity, deliberate withholding by informants or other causes. In practice, some of the planned activities were rather limited in their execution.

For example, as part of the process, I had made a serious commitment to deconstruct and interpret major philosophies and the research methodologies they suggested, before and during the research activities. During the data collection, analysis and interpretation, I attempted to approach what people said, and artefacts such as the SAC building and facilities and the documents related to the project as texts, keeping an open mind, as far as possible. I tried to allow meanings to emerge from the data, then to question those inferred meanings, checking my interpretations with participants, where feasible and possible.

This approach yielded some extremely interesting insights, particularly in interpreting the possible multiple meanings projected by the building and facilities (Chapter 6), the Faculty directors, SAC co-ordinators and documentation (Chapters 6, 7 and 8). It is also an approach, which would be transferable to similar studies in the future. I would also strongly recommend future researchers to look for the deeper meanings implied by *artefacts*

surrounding a project, which can be as eloquent or even more articulate than the people involved, who may have inhibitions, private agendas and axes to grind.

However, there was a certain lack of rigour in some aspects of this study, as I will explain in the following sections, where I discuss some limitations of the research methodology implemented.

### **10.2.1 Limitations: the importance of what did *not* happen**

Although some of the practices and procedures implied by the professed research philosophy and methodology were implemented as intended, insufficient attention was sometimes paid to what did *not* happen and what was *not* said, or what did *not* occur, as data was collected and interpreted.

For example, the fact that Faculty teachers did *not* want to take part in the initial questionnaires, or indeed show *any* interest at all in the research, should have been followed up. Although I collected ample data from university authorities, SAC project co-ordinators and students, there was a gap in the description. References to what the majority of Faculty teachers' views and reactions are based almost exclusively on *other people's perceptions of these*, not on what they themselves revealed through their own comments and opinions. In my defence, there were practical constraints, such as time available, cost and logistics of travel to the university, since it is situated three hours away from home, by bus. I was also loath to pressure people to participate against their will. However, any future study of this type should bear this omission in mind and ideally include representatives of all major groups who were directly affected by the innovation in some way.

### **10.2.2 Limitations: towards a better beginning**

I would implement two major activities, if I were to begin the study again, with the benefit of hindsight. These activities, if carried out at the initial stages, would strengthen final claims and conclusions by laying a much stronger foundation on which to construct the whole conceptual and methodological process.

First of all, I would begin by spending time with participants to establish a shared and more accurate conceptualization of the *intended* and *actual* purposes, characteristics and benefits that they considered the SAC project had intended to provide. A more precise description of what *self-access learning* meant for those who working on the project, and a vision of how they themselves had construed the type of centre they needed at the outset,

would perhaps constitute a stronger basis for the study. This would allow participants and researcher alike to make clearer judgements concerning whether the project objectives had in fact been achieved *in their own terms*, and also with regard to the factors which had contributed to the sustainability and *Dynamic durability* of the SAC project, according to *their own perceptions*.

The recommendation behind this reflection is that trainers and researchers should not fall into the trap of assuming that the understanding and interpretation the ideas presented and discussed in training sessions, by trainers who may have preconceived notions about their subject, will correspond exactly with trainers believe they have projected. The acceptance of the innovation *in an adapted form* may have been of greater importance to the on-going success of the project, than either the value and relevance of the imported concepts and practices on which the project was based, or the quality of the training received from external consultants. As various types of data seemed to suggest, it may have been precisely the adaptations which rendered the innovation undamaging to the existing *Affective* and *Administrative* environments, and contributed significantly to its future survival.

Once more certain that there was a shared concept of exactly what the project had aimed to do in this particular context, I would then go on to the second step. This would be to elicit *suggestions regarding appropriate ways to investigate* the factors which seemed to have made the project successful in this context, *from the volunteer participants themselves*.

These two activities could lay the foundation for a less researcher driven, and much more participant and context-sensitive study. Though generalizability of any conclusions may be reduced, this would certainly contribute to the creation of a thicker description of the particular case and satisfy the principles of qualitative research more thoroughly. In defence of the strategy followed, I did try to involve SAC staff in the process from the earliest stages (Chapter 5), by sharing the results of questionnaires, and by checking interpretations when possible with participants. However, practical constraints often prevented me from discussing each stage of the process with the participants, with the degree of detail that I would like to have achieved.

### **10.2.3 Limitations: towards a better middle and ending...**

The idea of arranging a focus group to round up the data collection activities served a number of important purposes, and was a good idea in principle, which would be transferable as a procedure for future studies. Despite some shortcomings (already

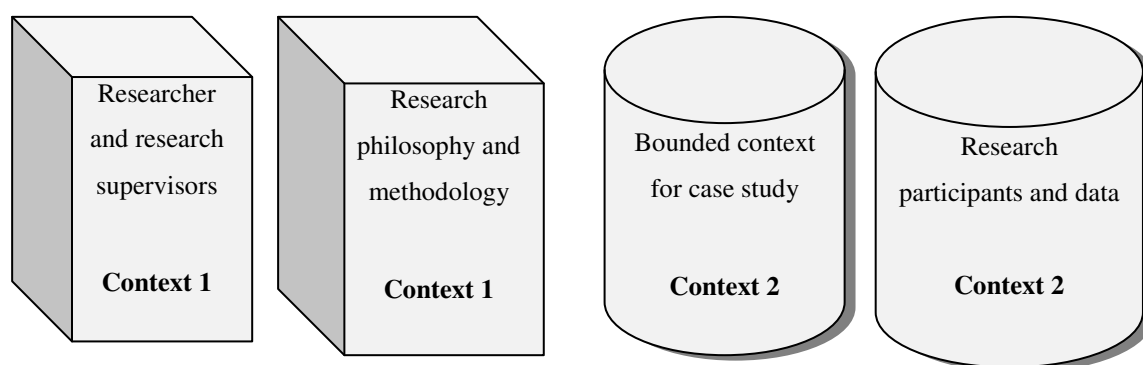
described in Chapter 5), the focus group activity provided an opportunity for a number of the research participants to discuss what the data had suggested to the researcher. Their reactions to my descriptions of the interconnected categories which seemed to have contributed to the sustainability and continuing growth and development of their SAC project, were important as judgements elicited *from the participants themselves, in their own terms* and in relation to *their own contexts*. This activity thus helped to verify some of my own interpretations. The more context-sensitive the planning and implementation of research strategies can be, and the more the informants can be involved in the process of interpreting emergent meaning, the more relevant, reliable and valid the conclusions will be *in their own terms and context*, in the end. Furthermore, in search of a degree of generalizability, I also collected data from colleagues engaged in similar projects at other institutions, and found considerable overlap with certain categories, which had emerged from the case study data. However, further follow up of these interactions would have allowed stronger claims to generalizability.

### 10.3 Transferability of the research methodology of this study

There are certain anomalies surrounding this kind of research project, which should not be overlooked. I will begin by extending the criticism of ethnocentrism, already discussed in relation to the *content* of the project researched (self-access centres) to the *methodology* of the research.

#### 10.3.1 Square pegs and round holes: a note on the possible ethnocentrism of research methodologies

The overall methodology of the research project was as much guilty of being imported from a foreign context, as was the original content of the project to be researched.



I questioned myself regarding the degree to which ethnocentrism had been a potentially negative feature of the methodology of this study, and how far it might be possible to avoid it in future research. In Section 10.2.2, p. 288, I suggested wider involvement of the research participants in decisions regarding how to collect data. I would also recommend, in retrospect, that future researchers might prepare themselves better, by looking more closely at how this type of phenomenon has previously been researched by investigators proceeding from, and working *within the context* in which the research will take place. This could further contribute to the development of a more appropriate research methodology, from the outset. This could then encourage further discussion among researchers of this level on the international stage and encourage creativity in the development of progressivist research methodologies.

Despite these considerations, some other aspects of the methodology proved to be both informative and developmental for the researcher, and could, perhaps, be transferable to future studies.

### **10.3.2 The transferable process of on-going experimentation and creative reflection**

Based on broadly ethnographic and qualitative principles and practices, the methodology of this study included a great deal of experimentation and creative reflection. For example, in Chapter 5, I described in detail how I had first planned to collect a range of different data types, then to analyze it all together. I had believed this would facilitate cross-referencing, a wider vision of the data as separate yet interrelating sets, and the help me to perceive the ways in which they might interrelate. In the event, this plan was quite quickly adapted, first because some data-collection activities did not yield as much useful information as expected. This realization first led to reflection on the reasons for this and then stimulated experimentation with new kinds of data collection activities. Concretely, then, a data collection activity might be planned and implemented, for example, the unstructured interviews (Section 5.3.3, p. 122). I would then arrange and begin to assess the quality and relevance of the data it yielded, and if the “crop” were poor, I would consider a more effective alternative.

This is the kind of reflective and self-evaluative cycle recommended by Evans, 2002: 19, as appropriate to reflective practice in educational research, and the cycle would certainly be transferable to other research contexts. This kind of flexibility enables a

developmental process, in which the researcher's relationship with the data and the quality of the data is progressively enriched. The research experience has proven to me that an environment of constant reflexive and self-critical dialogue, suggested by Holliday (2002: 18) is essential for the development of a qualitative study.

### **10.3.3 The transferable process of striving for transparency**

Transparency is a simple concept, but it is not necessarily easy to achieve in a research report, without including excess detail (of which this report has certainly been guilty). When transparency is achieved, however, it increases the reliability and trustworthiness of a qualitative study, which because of its underlying philosophy, can never claim access to absolute, universal or anything other than partial truths (Butler 2002; Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 15).

The achievement of transparency requires descriptions of the motivations of the study, the ideological and professional contextualization of the researcher, the intended and progressively developing focus of the investigation, the steps in the development of the research philosophy and methodology and the successes and learning points experienced along the way. It requires critical analysis of each step of the research and self-questioning of the interpretations suggested by the researcher. All of this, together with a detailed account of how she has collected, reduced, interpreted, cross-referenced and re-checked interpretations of data from a number of different sources, may help to make her opinions and interpretations more veracious and credible. Nonetheless, it is impossible to fully outweigh the fact that the researchers' interpretations will be based on "interpretative frames" created by "the combination of all our beliefs and practices" (Scott and Usher 1999: 26).

Initially, I had felt that the process of "triangulation" (Janesick 1994: 214-215) and later "crystallization" (Richardson 1994) could help to overcome this. In retrospect, this was a naïve conclusion, since all the different types of data were to be interpreted mainly by the same researcher, who would always be subject to the same conceptual limitations, whatever the *type* of data she were analyzing. Stake's suggestion of employing "...multiple perceptions to clarify a meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation..." (Stake 1994: 241) may offer an alternative, and in Section 10.2.2, p. 288, I discussed the possibility of systematically checking interpretations of meanings emerging from the data with informants, at every stage. I attempted to achieve triangulation by

collecting a wide range of data types and interpreting and cross-referencing them largely alone. This process could undoubtedly have been enriched by involving project participants more systematically in the interpretation *process*, rather than by waiting to ask their opinions towards the end. This is what I would recommend for future research of this nature, though such a practice would probably imply using a *smaller* number of *data types*, to allow a *greater* amount of time for discussion with *people*.

#### **10.4 The search for validity**

I was initially motivated to experiment with such a wide range of data collection activities (twelve in total), first to provide multiple perceptions of how interpretations were reached and for a number of other reasons, related to validity and generalizability.

##### **10.4.1 Possible justifications for implementing the process of “triangulation”**

From the literature on achieving validity in qualitative research, it seemed that if the researcher could discover certain “fixed points” or “objects” that could be “triangulated”, or might “crystallize” across the data sets (Janesick 1994: 214-215; Richardson 1994: 522), this would enhance the *validity* of the interpretations. On the other hand, it seemed that a wide range of data collection activities would, in theory, also contribute to the *creation of a richer description* of the nature of the reality or realities discernible in case study context. These multiple sources of perceptions should, also in theory, help to explain and account for any contradictions, which might arise among the different data sets.

The initial research plan had included several participant groups, large numbers of individual informants, and numerous interviews with each person. The number of groups and the frequency of extended interviews were gradually reduced, as the methodology evolved. Experiments with other types of data (descriptions of the SAC building and facilities, documents, chance meetings, for example) also began to yield information on phenomena which might have been interconnected with the sustainability and *Dynamic durability* of the project, and seemed, in some cases, more informative than interviews. Experimentation was certainly a feature of my methodology, and this is valid within the framework of critical and creative reflection proposed by qualitative research.

However, too many data sets may create the risk of superficiality in dealing with the individual sets, because of the drive to compare and match results across sets, thus putting

the validity of the study into doubt. This is something to be guarded against, in the development of future studies of this nature.

#### **10.4.2 Achieving internal validity**

In Chapter 4, Section 4.7.2, p. 103, *internal validity* was defined as the nature of a study, which does, in fact, research what it sets out to research. This definition should be extended to include that such a study should also follow the philosophical principles it purports to have embraced and implement a methodology, which is congruent with those principles. The philosophical principles underlying this research project have been explained in detail in Chapter 4, and briefly summarized at the beginning of this chapter. The developing methodology, based on the principles explained, was described in Chapter 5, and the results revealed in Chapters 6 and 7 and 8. Although there have been some shortcomings in the applications of both theory and practice, I have tried to describe, and sometimes to justify these in an honest and transparent manner, which has added to the internal validity of the study in its own right. The thesis reports on the development and implementation of the study, and simultaneously on the development of the understanding of the researcher in relation to the theory and practice of progressivist qualitative research. This second aspect may mean that the report will be of interest to future PhD students, who may identify with some of the struggles and experiences reported. The struggle to be transparent, and achieve internal validity, is one which is transferable to future studies, though future researchers may be more succinct than I in trying to achieve this aim.

#### **10.4.3 Achieving external validity**

Although I have reservations concerning the use of the term *validity*, as a possibly anachronistic term belonging to positivistic and experimentalist research traditions, there are certain aspects of this study which will, I hope, allow it to stand the test of critical, external scrutiny.

First of all, I have carefully traced the refinement of the initial motivations and interests underlying the study into four research questions, which took place as part of the research process. In this, the study was guided by the principles of qualitative research, amply discussed in earlier sections of the report.

In Chapter 4, I described the process of developing a research philosophy, and have subsequently highlighted some of the ways in which this was applied in developing a



methodology. I have also given examples of some inconsistencies between theory and practice.

In Chapter 5, I described the steps in the design of the methodology for the research, as well as techniques used for data-collection, storage, reduction and interpretation. In Chapters 6, 7, and 8, I reported on the many ways in which insights relating to the deeper nature of project sustainability emerged in the form of interconnected concepts and categories related to the *Affective* and *Administrative* environments within which the project evolved. Chapter 9 summarizes findings in relation to how the interconnected elements seemed to interrelate and interact to the advantage of the sustainability and *Dynamic durability* of the case study project, and also explains why this new way of looking at the phenomenon could be useful to the profession. This final chapter attempts to highlight key features of the methodology, and to make concrete suggestions to support the development of a methodology for future studies.

I have tried to be sufficiently objective to bear questioning in relation to the research design, data collection techniques and findings, and to avoid the temptation to make generalization from this case to all similar cases. During the research, I tried to allow each step of the data collection process to inform the next, and to plan justifiable ways to proceed. Some subjectivity issues are not possible to resolve, because they are simply intrinsic to this kind of qualitative research, as already discussed.

In Chapter 4, Section 4.7.2, p. 103, I stated my intention to try to achieve ironic and neo-pragmatic validity, considered by some to be more commensurate with the aims and nature of qualitative research. By collecting and interpreting the various views of the “realities” of the project and the reasons for its survival from different people and different types of data, looking specifically for any contradictions that seemed to emerge, the study partially achieved this goal. I explained weaknesses in not having paid sufficient attention to what had not happened in Section 10.2.1, p. 288. Although some contradictions have been discussed, perhaps I should have looked more closely at such contradictions.

With regard to neo-pragmatic validity, I explained how my roles and relationships relationship with the case study institution and staff had developed and changed over the years, including during the period of the SAC project. I explained that this made it important to question my own interpretations rigorously, bearing in mind that the particular role(s) I was playing, when certain pieces of data were collected, might influence what I saw and how I interpreted it. In the same way, participants’ perceptions of their own roles

and any bearing these might have had on their interpretations of the “realities” of the self-access centre and the factors contributing to its survival, also required the same questioning approach. Although understanding different facets of myself (Section 4.5.1, p. 94), certainly helped me understand about the different facets of individual participants, there was a tendency to take what people said at face value, when sometimes it would have been appropriate to probe further, and to involve participants more systematically in the process of interpretation. This was, to some extent, counterbalanced by the fact that I did not only collect information from people, but built my vision of the project from 12 different data sources, which together corroborated many of the findings. Future studies in this area, however should probably aim to probe more deeply, and question more consistently, to achieve richer results.

If the achievement of validity is seen as a process, then it should develop together with the research process, as I suggested in Chapter 4. The meticulous detail of this report has been part of a pursuit of a new kind of validity, appropriate for progressivist qualitative research, labelled by some as “verisimilitude”, which “seeks to examine critically, instead, a text’s verisimilitude or ability to reproduce (simulate) and map the real” (Lincoln and Denzin 1994: 579).

## **10.5 Something old, something new: transferable data collection activities**

Much of the methodology implemented in this study was derived from what has already become standard practice for qualitative research, for example the decisions to follow Holliday’s (2002: 38) criteria for the selection of a setting for a case, to choose types of data which would be accessible (opportunistically), analysable, in a practical sense and generative of themes or concepts, in an interpretative sense (Chapter 5).

### **10.5.1 New combinations of old practices**

Many of the data collection procedures and techniques implemented in this study were not new, such as, the use of questionnaires to involve staff in the research and collect staff and student perceptions regarding the self-access centre, the recording and transcription of unstructured and structured interviews with staff and authorities, the observation of behaviours inside the SAC, the photographs, sketches and descriptions of the SAC building and the semi-structured interviews, with students working in the SAC.

More important was the sequence of activities, which developed naturally as part of the reflexive and creative process of experimentation with a technique, analysis of the results, reflection on how to extend the results and the selection of a new activity. Also, the sequence, combination and ways of cross-referencing, and therefore the deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings, were original to this study. In this sense, all such studies are original, because: “it is precisely the individual qualities of the human inquiry that are valued as indispensable to meaning construction” (Greene 1994: 539).

The collection of documents, dating back as far as the very beginning of the national and local SAC project was facilitated by my previous status of national co-ordinator, having kept much on file, and having stayed in touch with people who could help me to retrieve other documents. The documents were useful, because they constituted more objective evidence that key events and situations had occurred, e.g. the official commitment, proof of initial and on-going funding, the content of training sessions, regional events, strategic planning and evaluation activities. In this way, they very much complemented and confirmed accounts given by participants and suggested by the distinctive features of the building and the facilities. A future study could go much more deeply into the content and meanings of such a bank of documents, looking at language, genre, discourse features, frequency of communication overt and covert message, channel, etc.

### **10.5.2 Necessity and new inventions**

Chance meetings are not a particularly innovative source of data either, but the way in which they were exploited in this study had several practical advantages. Because of the demands of a full-time job and several other professional activities, the time available for study and data collection never seemed enough to meet my own standards.

However, since official visits and conference speaking are a normal part of my work, and some of the colleagues who participated on the national SAC project inevitably attend such conferences, this was an excellent option for collecting data from collaborators from other universities and later comparing their perceptions concerning their own SAC projects with my results. Had I done this systematically from the very beginning of the study, it may have been possible to make much stronger claims regarding possibly generalizable features of project sustainability and *Dynamic durability*. This is another example of creative reflexivity in relation to data collection, and future studies of this type would do well to make more systematic use of the technique.

Focus groups are not new to qualitative research, either. The decision to conclude the data collection activities with a focus group stemmed from a number of concerns. Closing the circle by including as many of the participants as possible in a shared activity echoed the beginning, when we had first met together, discussed the aims of the research and how the results might be useful for everyone. It provided one way of checking whether participants shared my interpretations of key factors in the sustainability and *Dynamic durability* of their SAC project. I have already mentioned the shortcomings of the conceptualization and implementation of the activity above.

I would strongly recommend that future studies of this nature should consider the possibility of using focus groups as a more regular activity, in order to involve participants more directly and frequently and as peers in the interpretation of data *from their own perspectives*. The results would depend to some extent on the nature of the group dynamics, but if an atmosphere of confidence and trust existed or could be developed, regular focus groups would enrich the entire interpretation process. Of course, one would still need to question participants' interpretations in the light of the roles they were acting out during the focus group itself, and the possible effects of exposing their views to their colleagues. However, a comparison of what participants seemed to be saying in private interviews with what the same individuals said during focus groups would be of interest in itself, and could strengthen the final interpretations of the report.

## **10.6 How should sustainability be studied in order to develop our understanding of this phenomenon?**

This chapter has highlighted and discussed key aspects of the research methodology used in this study, pinpointing strengths and weaknesses, and making suggestions regarding ways in which insights might inform the development of research methodologies for future studies of this nature.

This final section will summarize put together and add to these suggestions, by way of conclusion.

1. Postmodern epistemologies seem to be particularly appropriate as the philosophical basis of research into project *sustainability and dynamic durability*. This is due to their acknowledgement of the pluralities of perspectives and multiple truths, which are necessarily inherent in contexts where professional groups from a particular

culture and context are employed to assist members of a group from different cultures and contexts to implement an innovation.

2. A modified ethnographic approach, based on principles and practices derived from qualitative research allows the possibility of developing a methodology as part of the research process, and allowing each activity to inform decisions in relation to choices in relation to the next step. This provides solid but flexible methodological underpinning allowing reflexive questioning and creativity and innovation in techniques and procedures as part of the process. This approach seems to be in harmony with the type of mindset appropriate for the study of projects in general, since they are themselves to do with a developmental process involving innovation. It is particularly appropriate for the study of *sustainability and dynamic durability*, which apparently results from such a complex constellation of interconnecting phenomena, that considerable flexibility is needed in order to collect the range and depth of data necessary to begin to understand its complexity.

In future studies of project sustainability, it would be advisable to begin by finding out more about the concepts and content of the project as conceptualized by the receiving institution, how this affected their objectives, and how far these objectives had been achieved in their own context. These aspects may be much more important in creating the conditions for sustainability and *Dynamic durability* than the concepts, aims and objectives of funding bodies or external consultants. The process and outcomes of projects should be studied in their own terms and context, rather than in those of outsiders, no matter how closely involved those outsiders may have been in the development of the original project.

Although the methodological basis chosen for this study may have suffered from a degree of ethnocentrism, the promotion of collaboration, trust and mutual support among those who had participated in the SAC project and who also volunteered to participate in this research (sometimes analysing certain the data for their own purposes) meant that the researcher became gradually more sensitive to their perspectives and able to differentiate among the multiplicity of roles in which all of us had functioned at different moments during the SAC project and during the research process, to interpret meanings in terms of these and to avoid overindulgence in subjectivity. This kind of approach is particularly appropriate for the study of long-term innovations, since one of the characteristics of these is precisely the changing roles of the participants, as the project matures. It is particularly

relevant to the study of sustainability and *Dynamic durability*, since appropriate changes in roles at appropriate moments may actually contribute to these.

The types of transparency, validity, veracity and verisimilitude the study has attempted to strive towards are, both according to theory and in the light of the current research experience, particularly relevant to qualitative research. More specifically, they can accommodate the possibility of the multiple perspectives, relative truths and changing realities of the kind which are commonly encountered in contexts created in the teaching English as a foreign language environments, and, indeed, in the environment of any innovative project. Because of the range of factors which seem to intervene in the sustainability and *Dynamic durability* of projects, more flexible and interpretable concepts of validity such of these seem appropriate.

Because of the complex nature of project sustainability and *Dynamic durability*, it would seem to be important to use a range of data collection activities, which may, on some occasions, corroborate interpretations and on others, yield different types of information. Polyphonous data which can “speak for themselves”, and be interpreted from the perspectives of research informants as well as from that of the researcher, can be very valuable. However, it is important not to sacrifice the depth of analysis in the interests of multiplicity of data types.

The study of the artefacts of this project (the new building, facilities and documents), added depth to this study, and further experimentation with this type of data, could enrich the quality of data in future studies of project sustainability and *Dynamic durability*.

Project sustainability and *Dynamic durability* should be studied with due regard to accepted norms for research ethics, and, in the spirit of critical applied linguistics, should be implemented with an especially acute awareness of possible political and personal agendas of all concerned in promoting and implementing the project. The researcher herself may not be exempt from such an agenda, particularly if she has been personally and professionally involved in the project, and this underlines the need for contextualised and participative interpretation of the data through collaboration with informants.

### **Concluding remarks**

The research methodology implemented in this study would, generally speaking, be transferable to further study of the sustainability and *Dynamic durability* of English language teaching projects in the future, and for the study of other phenomena related to

projects in this and other areas, since the principles and practices are readily adaptable to other fields and contexts.

This study has been a rich and endless learning process. I sincerely hope that this report will contribute something to the development of professional knowledge concerning the deeper nature of sustainability and *Dynamic durability* in projects. I also hope to have contributed something to the development of research methodologies which are appropriate for the investigation of processes and products related to English language teaching and other types of development projects. There is much I would change, if I were to embark on this same study again – but this is perhaps a positive outcome, since it demonstrates that learning has taken place, as part of the research process.

As for the person who set out on this voyage of discovery, I am certainly wiser today, since I have been made aware of my state of ignorance and unawareness of so many aspects when I took my first steps as a researcher. I may not be much wiser now, from a cosmic perspective, since truth and reality are chimera, and knowledge is an ever-shifting phenomenon. But there is no doubt that through realizing how poor we are in our ability to fully perceive, describe and account for phenomena, we become richer in our understanding and appreciation of the possibilities of plurality and multiplicity, and that may be enough...

**Appendix 1: Initial conceptualization of necessary conditions and categories for the achievement of project sustainability on the basis of literature survey and experience**

<b>Categories for sustainability</b>	<b>Conditions</b>	<b>Sample Activities</b>
Knowledge and skills training (Robinson et al, 2000: 249, citing SCF, 1994; Davey, 1998).	Training should cover all types of project activities, professional, administrative, management and finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and on-going consultancy in: change management, project planning, implementation, administration and evaluation, professional issues and practices to allow reflective changes in perception, use of appropriate technologies to support and publicise the innovation</li> </ul>
Abundant and accessible resources, self-sufficiency built in as a project goal (Robinson, Hewitt and Harris 2000: 295). Economic viability (Fullen 2001: 28)	Resourcing must provide appropriate materials, equipment and staffing at the right moments in the project development cycle and staff should learn how to procure funds for continuation after project period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training in making bids for funding, requesting purchases, descriptions of posts, profiles, staff selection</li> </ul>
Congruence with current institutional/organizational policies and priorities (UNESCO Heute 3, 1997).	Aims must demonstrate that the project will enhance existing services/products and be of benefit to the institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training in creation of initial project documents</li> <li>• Training in the interpretation of existing policies and priorities and their relationship with the project</li> <li>• Training in accommodating project to existing administrative structures and systems</li> </ul>



**Appendix 1 (contd.)**

<b>Categories for sustainability</b>	<b>Conditions</b>	<b>Sample Activities</b>
Collaborative approach at all stages (Robinson et al. 2000).	Initial and regular meetings to negotiate shared conceptualization of aims, strategies and tactics;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calendar of regular meetings</li> <li>• Extemporaneous meetings when necessary</li> <li>• Access to project planning documents, minutes, action points, project reports through circulars, shared folders etc.</li> </ul>
Clear, shared aims and vision and wide participation (Kay and Treffgarne 1998: 100).	Aims must demonstrate consciousness of appropriate types of environmental (or institutional) protection, social development (or training) and economic development (or training for future financing and administration) for the context of the project as well as helping project participants to set targets for the future, beyond project schedule.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear roles and responsibilities for all participants</li> <li>• Regular and systematic data collection to allow evaluation of individual and team progress towards goals</li> <li>• Rewards for positive results</li> <li>• Regular meetings to review progress and confirm aims and vision</li> </ul>
A sense of ownership and responsibility, (Rogakos <i>et al.</i> 1998).	Project consultants should train project participants for professional independence and economic self-sufficiency from the outset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement above activities</li> <li>• Encourage creative thinking, self-regulation and self-steering</li> </ul>
Communication	There must be appropriate media for promoting the successes of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage circulation of minutes and action points from meetings among all participants</li> <li>• Create webpage, mailing list, chat page</li> <li>• Reward production of articles for print and web publications, presentations at conferences etc.</li> </ul>

**Appendix 1 (contd.)**

<b>Categories for sustainability</b>	<b>Conditions</b>	<b>Sample Activities</b>
Careful planning of project stages (Flavell 1994: 11).	Project documents should indicate development stages (e.g. Identification, Preparation, Appraisal, Implementation and Evaluation), but should also be easy to modify if appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donor/receiver authorities and staff sharing in creation and amendment of documents through regular appraisal and evaluation activities</li> </ul>
Respect for existing educational (and other) values and traditions (Holliday 1994, 1999, 2005, etc.).	Project principles and practices should fit in with or logically develop existing values and traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular meetings among institutions and staff to discuss needs for innovation and best ways to supply that need</li> </ul>
Leadership at all levels, (Fullen 2001: 137).	There should be leadership at all levels of participating institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project training activities should also include advice on leadership techniques and strategies for staff with different roles</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2: Student questionnaire, Version 1

Cuestionario para los Usuarios del TECAAL

Año 2000

Querido Usuario del TECAAL:

Estamos interesados en obtener información más detallada sobre el funcionamiento del TECAAL en tu universidad, para así tomar las mejores decisiones acerca de su desarrollo.

Sobre todo, queremos saber cómo te sientes trabajando en el TECAAL – si realmente sientes que el TECAAL te ha ayudado en tus estudios de la lengua inglesa. Asimismo, nos interesa saber si encuentras una organización o un trato diferente en el TECAAL que en otros ambientes de trabajo de la Universidad.

El tiempo que dediques a contestar estas preguntas será muy agradecido. Si prefieres, puedes contestarlo de forma anónima.

Gracias por tu entrega y buena suerte con tus estudios.

---

### Sección A: Inscripción y Orientación

- |   | SI                       | NO                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Al ingresar al Centro de Autoacceso (TECAAL) recibí una explicación de los objetivos del TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_

- 
- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2. La explicación de la organización del TECAAL me llamó la atención. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_

- |  | <b>SI</b>                | <b>NO</b>                |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 3. Al ingresar al TECAAL recibí suficiente capacitación sobre cómo aprovechar el equipo. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_

---

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. Al ingresar al TECAAL recibí un curso de orientación útil y motivante. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_

---

- |  |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 5. El curso me enseñó cosas novedosas. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_

---

- |  |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 6. Fue fácil inscribirme en el TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_

---

### **Sección B: El TECAAL en la Universidad**

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 7. Considero que el trabajo que llevo a cabo en el TECAAL sí sirve como apoyo a mis estudios en otra(s) materia(s). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_

---

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 8. El ambiente de trabajo en el TECAAL es semejante al de cualquier Facultad. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_

---

- |                                    | <b>SI</b>                | <b>NO</b>                |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 9. Me gusta trabajar en el TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- |  |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 10. Hay cosas que no me gustan en el TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Sección C: Mis estudios en el TECAAL**

- |  |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 11. Asisto al TECAAL y también asisto a clases de inglés | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|

- |  |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 12. Sólo estudio el inglés en el TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 13. Prefiero estudiar con un maestro en el salón. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- |  |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 14. Prefiero estudiar sólo en el TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- |  |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 15. Prefiero estudiar con mis compañeros de estudio en el<br>TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- |  |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 16. Utilizo las guías de estudio que están en el TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- |  | <b>SI</b>                | <b>NO</b>                |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 17. Acudo a los asesores para asesoría sobre mis estudios. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 18. No me gusta el sistema de aprendizaje en el TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 19. No me gusta el sistema de evaluación que se utiliza en el TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 20. Me gustaría cambiar el sistema de trabajo del TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- |  |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 21. Los materiales y el equipo del TECAAL me gustan. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 22. Me gusta más aprender el inglés, ahora que puedo estudiar en el TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- |  |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 23. Sugiero los siguientes cambios para mejorar el TECAAL: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Sección D: Los Materiales en el TECAAL**

**SI      NO**

24. Encuentro con facilidad los materiales que necesito en el TECAAL.

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

25. Siento que todos los tipos de materiales me ayudan.

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

26. Siente que muchos de los materiales son irrelevantes.

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

27. Siento que deben comprar más materiales/equipo.

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

28. Las fallas del TECAAL consisten en lo siguiente:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Sección E: Conclusiones**

**SI**

**NO**

29. Es algo muy diferente para la Universidad.

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

30. He aprendido de trabajar mejor desde que utilizo

el TECAAL.

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

31. Yo recomiendo el TECAAL a mis compañeros y conocidos

Explica: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

32. He estado estudiando en el TECAAL por \_\_\_\_\_ años y/o \_\_\_\_\_ meses.

33. Asisto al TECAAL en promedio \_\_\_\_\_ horas por semana.



### Appendix 3: Questionnaire for SAC students, Version 2 (amended)

Querido usuario del TECAAL:

Estamos interesados en obtener información más detallada sobre el funcionamiento del TECAAL para así tomar las mejores decisiones acerca de su desarrollo.

Si puedes contestar estas 20 preguntas te lo agradeceremos mucho. Se puede contestar de forma anónima, si así prefieres.

Gracias por tu entrega y buena suerte con tus estudios. Personal del TECAAL.

#### Sección A: Orientación inicial

- |  | SI                       | NO                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Al ingresar al Centro de Autoacceso (TECAAL) recibí una explicación adecuada de los objetivos del TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. La organización del TECAAL se me hace atractiva.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Al ingresar al TECAAL recibí suficiente capacitación sobre cómo aprovechar el equipo.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. El curso de orientación me enseñó cosas novedosas.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Comentarios: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Sección B: El TECAAL en la Universidad

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 5. Los estudios que llevo a cabo en el TECAAL apoyan a mis estudios en otra(s) materia(s).            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. El ambiente de trabajo en el TECAAL me parece como el de cualquier departamento de la universidad. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- |                                    | <b>SI</b>                | <b>NO</b>                |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 7. Me gusta trabajar en el TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Comentarios: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Sección C: Mis estudios en el TECAAL**

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 8. Estudio inglés en el TECAAL y también asisto a clases de inglés                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Sólo estudio el inglés en el TECAAL.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Prefiero estudiar con un maestro en el salón.                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Prefiero estudiar el inglés únicamente en el TECAAL.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Utilizo las guías de estudio que están en el TECAAL.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Acudo a los asesores para asesoría sobre mis estudios.                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Me siento más motivada a aprender el inglés, ahora que puedo estudiar en el TECAAL. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Sugiero los siguientes cambios para mejorar el TECAAL:                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Sección D: Los Materiales en el TECAAL**

	<b>SI</b>	<b>NO</b>
16. Encuentro con facilidad los materiales que necesito en el TECAAL.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Todos los tipos de materiales me ayudan.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Los materiales que hacen falta en el TECAAL son:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comentarios: _____		
_____		
_____		

**Sección E: Otros aspectos**

19. El TECAAL ofrece un sistema de aprendizaje novedoso.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Avanzo más rápido con el aprendizaje del inglés desde que acudo al TECAAL.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. El trato que recibo de los asesores del TECAAL es diferente al que recibo de los profesores de inglés en los cursos presenciales.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comentarios: _____		
_____		
_____		

**Información personal:**

He estudiado en el TECAAL por \_\_\_\_\_ años y/o \_\_\_\_\_ meses.

Asisto al TECAAL en promedio \_\_\_\_\_ horas por semana.

**OPTATIVO**

Nombre y nivel: \_\_\_\_\_.

Me gustaría una entrevista para comentar más detalladamente sobre mis experiencias en el TECAAL. Mi número de teléfono es: \_\_\_\_\_.

Appendix 4 Sample coding of student questionnaires

Abbreviations used in the table:	Abbreviations used in scoring	Gloss of Student experience in SAC	Gloss of student language levels	Gloss of hours per week attendance at SAC
<p><b>U</b> = User e.g. U1 means “User 1”</p> <p><b>Q</b> = Question</p> <p><b>Y</b> = Affirmative answer (Yes)</p> <p><b>N</b> = Negative answer (No)</p> <p><b>X</b> = No answer given at all.</p> <p><b>?</b> = Answer not clear to interpreter</p>	<p><b>Total Y</b> = Total affirmative answers</p> <p><b>Total N</b> = Total negative answers</p> <p><b>Total X</b> = Total left unanswered</p> <p><b>Total ?</b> = Total where meaning unclear</p>	<p>New: 15</p> <p>6 months: 4</p> <p>1 year: 15</p> <p>2 years: 3</p> <p>3 years: 6</p>	<p>Beginners: 0</p> <p>Intermediate: 37</p> <p>Advanced: 6</p>	<p>1 hour per week: 8</p> <p>2 hours per week: 8</p> <p>3 hours per week: 9</p> <p>4 hours per week: 1</p> <p>5 hours per week: 2</p>

Appendix 4 (contd.)

Question number ⇨	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q 9	Q 10	Q 11	Q 12	Q 13	Q 14	Q 15	Q 16	Q 17	Q 18	Q 19	Q 20	Q 21	Q 22	Q 23	Q 24	Q 25	
Student level and number ↓																										
ADV 2																										
U 1	Y	Y	?	Y	Y	Y	Y	?	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	OP	N	Y	
U 2	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	?	N	Y	N	OP	Y	Y	
Etc.																										
TOTALS																										

<b>Total Y</b>	52	45	30	43	36	48	40	15	44	39	54	17	27	11	18	19	7	26	19	15	33	33	31
<b>Total N</b>	1	8	22	11	14	5	10	28	3	9	1	31	17	35	27	25	37	13	12	24	11	10	12
<b>Total X</b>	1	1	0	0	4	1	4	6	7	6	7	8	9	8	9	10	10	14	20	15	10	11	11
<b>Total</b>	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54

Appendix 4 (contd.)

Abbreviations used in the table:	Abbreviations used in scoring	Gloss of Student experience in SAC	Gloss of student language levels	Gloss of hours per week attendance at SAC
<p><b>U</b> = User e.g. U1 means “User 1”</p> <p><b>Q</b> = Question</p> <p><b>Y</b> = Affirmative answer (Yes)</p> <p><b>N</b> = Negative answer (No)</p> <p><b>X</b> = No answer given at all.</p> <p><b>?</b> = Answer not clear to interpreter</p>	<p><b>Total Y</b> = Total affirmative answers</p> <p><b>Total N</b> = Total negative answers</p> <p><b>Total X</b> = Total left unanswered</p> <p><b>Total ?</b> = Total where meaning unclear</p>	<p>New: 15</p> <p>6 months: 4</p> <p>1 year: 15</p> <p>2 years: 3</p> <p>3 years: 6</p>	<p>Beginners: 0</p> <p>Intermediate: 37</p> <p>Advanced: 6</p>	<p>1 hour per week: 8</p> <p>2 hours per week: 8</p> <p>3 hours per week: 9</p> <p>4 hours per week: 1</p> <p>5 hours per week: 2</p>

Appendix 4 (contd.)

Question number ⇨	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q 9	Q 10	Q 11	Q 12	Q 13	Q 14	Q 15	Q 16	Q 17	Q 18	Q 19	Q 20	Q 21	Q 22	Q 23	Q 24	Q 25	
Student level and number ↓																										
ADV 2																										
U 1	Y	Y	?	Y	Y	Y	Y	?	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	OP	N	Y	
U 2	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	?	N	Y	N	OP	Y	Y	
Etc.																										
TOTALS																										

<b>Total Y</b>	52	45	30	43	36	48	40	15	44	39	54	17	27	11	18	19	7	26	19	15	33	33	31	
<b>Total N</b>	1	8	22	11	14	5	10	28	3	9	1	31	17	35	27	25	37	13	12	24	11	10	12	
<b>Total X</b>	1	1	0	0	4	1	4	6	7	6	7	8	9	8	9	10	10	14	20	15	10	11	11	
<b>Total</b>	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54

**Appendix 5: Catalogue of data types and manners of collection**

<b>Data type</b>	<b>Data collection technique</b>	<b>Number of samples/respondents</b>	<b>Date</b>
1. SAC learners opinions	Printed questionnaires (Closed questions with spaces for explanation)	54	September-November 2000
2. Teacher/counsellors' opinions	Printed questionnaires (Closed questions with spaces for explanation)	10	September-November 2000
3. Descriptions: physical installations	Field notes on exteriors and interiors ten reduction into two extended descriptions Sketches Digital photographs	2  13	March 2002 - April 2004 March 2002 1 June 2002



**Appendix 5: (contd.)**

<b>Data type</b>	<b>Data collection technique</b>	<b>Number of samples/respondents</b>	<b>Date</b>
4. Description: People's behaviour in the SAC	Observation visits and notes	5	January 2002 11 April 2002 1 June 2002 18 July 2002 19 February 2004

Appendix 5: (contd.)

Data type	Data collection technique	Number of samples/respondents	Date
5. SAC staff accounts	Recordings/transcripts of unstructured interviews	3	3 April 2000
	“Alba” (Former SAC co-ordinator)	1	17 July 2000
	“Patricia”, SAC receptionist SAC 17.7.00	1	17 July 2000
	“Susana”, ex receptionist SAC 17.7.00	1	
	Recordings/transcripts of structured interviews	3	2 September 2002
	“Alice”, current SAC co-ordinator		2 September 2002
	“Evelina”, co-ordinator of new SAC, about to be	1	2 September 2002
	opened “Linda”, now SAC tutor (formally SAC co-	1	
	ordinator 2	1	

Appendix 5: (contd.)

Data type	Data collection technique	Number of samples/respondents	Date
6. University authorities' accounts	Recordings/notes of unstructured interview	1	27 October 2002
	"Berenice", ex-director of the Faculty of Languages		
	Recordings/notes of structured interview "Luisa", current Director Faculty of Languages	1	3 September 2002
	Publication by the Universidad Autónoma de Queretaro press: <i>Ayer instituto de idiomas. Hoy Facultad de lenguas y letras</i>  Book narrating the history of the Faculty of Languages and the SAC by ex-director	1	1st edition 2002

Appendix 5: (contd.)

Data type	Data collection technique	Number of samples/respondents	Date
7. Project documents from BC and university files	<p>Word counts, language of communication, discourse analysis</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Original trilateral agreement document 1993</li> <li>2. 25 letters/faxes 1994</li> <li>3. 8 letters/faxes 1995</li> <li>4. 19 letters/faxes 1996</li> <li>5. 18 letters/faxes 1997</li> <li>6. 5 letters/faxes from 1998 (after end of project)</li> <li>7. Strategic plan 1995-1996</li> <li>8. Strategic plan 1996-1997</li> <li>9. Strategic plan 1998</li> <li>10. BC annual progress report 1993-1994</li> <li>11. BC progress report 1994-1995</li> <li>12. Progress report 1996</li> </ol>	89	Collected during the course of 2002

Appendix 5: (contd.)

Data type	Data collection technique	Number of samples/respondents	Date
8. Opinions of director, faculty and co-ordinator SAC from another university	Notes taken immediately after conversations during chance meetings at an event for universities	2	18 July 2002
9. Opinions of colleagues working at SACs at other universities	<p>Introspective notes taken after opportunistic conversations with colleagues during national SAC conferences after project period</p> <p>1. National SAC Forum Puebla</p> <p>2. National SAC Conference San Luis Potosí</p>	<p>20</p> <p>13</p>	<p>29-30 August 2003</p> <p>11-13 September 2003</p>

**Appendix 5: (contd.)**

<b>Data type</b>	<b>Data collection technique</b>	<b>Number of samples/respondents</b>	<b>Date</b>
10. Opinions of colleagues at the case study SAC	Focus group Ranking tables Notes and tables of ranking activities	5	17-19 February 2004
11. Opinions of learners in the SAC	Notes of replies to open-ended questions during one-to-one interviews	6	19 February 2004
12. Opinion of Faculty director	Notes on replies to questions specifically regarding initial rejection of SAC project by non-Mexican teachers.	1	25 April 2007

**Appendix 6: Emergent concept and category count (sample)**

<b>Category no.</b>	<b>Category label</b>	<b>Data source</b>	<b>Direct or inferred references</b>	<b>No. of data types</b>
1	Congruence with current institutional/organizational policies and priorities	Unstructured interviews, structured interviews, questionnaires, documents, Physical description – level of investment in the new building, SAC Events accounts, interviews with students	22	7
2	Clear, shared aims and vision and wide participation	Unstructured interviews, structured interviews, documents, Physical description, SAC events accounts	23	5
3	Appropriate knowledge and skills training	Unstructured interview, structured interview, documents, chance meetings, Physical description, SAC events accounts	18	6

Appendix 6 (contd.)

Category no.	Category label	Data source	Direct or inferred references	No. of data types
4	Abundant and accessible resources	Unstructured interview, structured interview, documents, Physical description, SAC events accounts	12	5
5	Appropriate promotion and marketing	Unstructured interview, structured interview	6	2
6	A sense of ownership and responsibility	Unstructured interview, structured interview, Physical description, SAC events accounts	9	4
7	Adaptation to local context	Unstructured interview, structured interview, documents, observation of behaviour, physical description;	9	5
8	In line with government policy	Unstructured interview, structured interview, documents, chance meeting	9	4



**Appendix 6 (contd.)**

<b>Category no.</b>	<b>Category label</b>	<b>Data source</b>	<b>Direct or inferred references</b>	<b>No. of data types</b>
9	Initial and on-going government funding available	Unstructured interview, structured interview, documents, physical description	9	4
10	Existence of internal champions	SAC events accounts	7	1
11	Encouragement of constructive criticism within project team	Unstructured interview, documents	4	2
12	Willingness of staff to experiment	Unstructured interview, documents, SAC event account, student interview	5	4
13	Internal validity – existence of a tangible need for the innovation	Unstructured interview, structured interview, SAC events accounts, student interviews	21	4

Appendix 6 (contd.)

Category no.	Category label	Data source	Direct or inferred references	No. of data types
14	Project responsibilities shared – management not too centralised	SAC events accounts	3	1
15	Acceptance by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institution</li> <li>• Staff</li> <li>• Students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institution</li> </ul> Unstructured interview, structured interview, documents, physical description, SAC events accounts, building	26	4
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff</li> </ul> Unstructured interview, structured interview, questionnaires, documents, SAC events accounts	13	5
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> </ul> Structured interview, questionnaires (students); Observation; SAC events accounts, student interviews	21	5

**Appendix 6 (contd.)**

<b>Category no.</b>	<b>Category label</b>	<b>Data source</b>	<b>Direct or inferred references</b>	<b>No. of data types</b>
16	Self-sufficiency built in as a project goal	Unstructured interview, structured interview, documents	7	2
17	The project can be adapted/multiplied for other related contexts	Documents	2	1
18	Respect for local institutional values	Unstructured interview, document, Physical description;	4	3
19	Effective planning activities	Documents, Observation;	10	2
20	Collaboration with institutions with similar projects	Structured interview, documents	6	2

**Appendix 7: Collation of interconnected categories and where they emerged**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>Data source</b>
Atmosphere	1. Positive mood	1 Alba 2/46; 1 SL/P3, 1 SL/P 6; 1 SL/P9; 1 LA/P5; 1 LA/P8; 1 AU/P5; 1 AD/P5; 1 Ad/P11.
Atmosphere	2. Focused and organized environment	PEV 18; 1 LA/P3; 1 AU/P8.
Atmosphere	3. Feeling of collaboration and support	PEV 7; 1 MO/P5.
Atmosphere	4. Promotion of independence	Observation, L 49; PEV 10; 1 SL/P1; 1 SL/P2; 1 MO/P6; 1 MO/P 12; 1 AD/P8.
Atmosphere	5. Adaptation to local context	1 Alba 5 /131; 1 Patricia 7/131; 1 Patricia 9/150; 1 Berenice 12/325; 1 Luisa 8/90; Internal rules and regulations 1/99; Observation of behaviour; Physical description.
Atmosphere	6. Respect for local institutional values	1 Berenice 12/325; 1 Berenice 13/349; IRR; Physical description.
Attitude	1. A sense of ownership and responsibility	1 Luisa 7 /92; 1 Luisa 8/ 90.  1 Luisa 10/ 132; Physical description (Mexican building); PEV 1; PEV 7; SLPEV 3; SLPEV 12.
Attitude	2. Existence of internal champions	PEV 1; PEV 8; PEV 12; PEV 18; SLPEV 3.

Appendix 7 (contd.)

Category	Subcategory	Data source
Attitude	3. Encouragement of constructive criticism within project team	1 Alba 9/ 315; 1 Alba 10/565; UISP; BCPD 3/1995.
Attitude	4. Willingness of staff to experiment	1 Patricia 2/52; 1 Patricia 4/77; UIR; PEV 12; PEV 19.
Attitude	5. Acceptance by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institution</li> <li>• Staff</li> <li>• Students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institution</li> </ul> <p>1 Berenice 2/112; 1 Berenice 3/184; 1 Berenice 5/229; 1 Luisa 17/249; 1 Luisa 19/273; 1 Linda 4/78; 1 Alice 2/13; 1 Alice 17/205; CM 1 CM 2; Physical description; PEV 3; PEV 5; SLPEV 13.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff</li> </ul> <p>1 Luisa 9/114; 1 Luisa 10/132; 1 Luisa 11/143; 1 Linda 4/78; Initial questionnaires (SAC staff); PEV 7; PEV 12; PEV 18.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> </ul> <p>1 Alice 5/39; Observation notes; PEV 13; SLPEV 3; 1 SL/P 1; 1 SL/P 4; 1 SL/P 6; 1 AM/P9; 1 AM/P12; 1 L/P8; 1 LL/P3; 1 AU/P5; 1 AD/P2; 1 AD/P4; 1 AD/P5; 1 AD/P6; 1 AD/P8.</p>
Attitude	6. Respect for local institutional values	1 Berenice 12/325; 1 Berenice 13/349; IRR; Physical description.

Appendix 7 (contd.)

Category	Subcategory	Data source
Attitude	7. Awareness of long-term benefits	PEV 8.
Training	1. Appropriate knowledge and skills training	1 Alba 4/105; 1 Patricia 1/30; 1 Berenice 4/199; 1 Berenice 8/262; 1 Luisa 5/57; 1 Linda 7/177; 1 Alice 16/197; British Council Project Report 4, 95-96; British Council Project Report 5/6, 96-97; Chance meeting Coyito, Chance meeting Gloria; PEV 15; SLPEV 2; SLPEV 5; SLPEV 6; SLPEV 13.
Training	2. Adaptation to local context	1 Alba 5 /131; 1 Patricia 7/131; 1 Patricia 9/150; 1 Berenice 12/325; 1 Luisa 8/90; Internal rules and regulations 1/99; Observation of behaviour; Physical description.
Training	3. Quality of work in the SAC	PEV 3.
Policy	1. Congruence with current institutional/organizational policies and priorities	1 Luisa 3/23; 1 Luisa 16/232; 1 Luisa 19/273 (dynamic sustainability); 1 Linda 1/17; 1 Alice 4/38; 1 Alice 17/205; Initial questionnaires 4; University External Report 1/97 (dynamic sustainability); SEP University Project Agreement 1/93; Physical description – level of investment in the new building; PEV 3; PEV 5; PEV 12; SLPEV 2; SLPEV 3; SLPEV 12; SLPEV 13; 1 L/P1; 1 LL/P2; 1 AU/P10; 1 AD/P1.

**Appendix 7 (contd.)**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>Data source</b>
Policy	2. In line with government policy	1 Berenice 2/112; 1 Luisa 1/10; 1 Luisa 18/256; 1 Luisa 20/283; 1 Linda 1/17; 1 Alice 17/205; University SEP Funding Proposal 1/00 (dynamic sustainability); SEP University Project Agreement; Chance meeting Gloria.
Policy	3. Internal validity – existence of a tangible need for the innovation	1 Alba 3/56; 1 Luisa 3/23; PEV 4; PEV 9; PEV 12; PEV 15; PEV 17; SLPEV 3; SLPEV 12; 1 SL/P 9; 1 AM/P6; 1 L/P2; 1 L/P3; 1 L/P4; 1 LL/P5; 1 LL/P9; 1 LL/P10; 1 AU/P1; 1 AU/P8; 1 AU/P9; 1 AD/P3.
Policy	4. Collaboration with institutions with similar projects	1 Luisa 7/82; 1 Luisa 8/90; BCPR 1/93-94; BCPR 3/1995; BCPR 4/95-96; BCPR 5-6/96-97.
Management	1. Clear, shared aims and vision and wide participation	Alba 8/256; 1 Patricia 2/52; 1 Berenice 10/310; 1 Luisa 10/ 132; 1 Linda 2/37; SEP – University Project agreement; University internal strategic plans; British Council Project Document 2/95; British Council Project Document 3/95; British Council Project Report 1/93-94; British Council Project Report 4/95-96; British Council Reports of Conferences 1-3 96-97; Physical description; PEV 1; PEV 6; PEV 7; PEV 8; PEV 17; PEV 18.
Management	2. Appropriate promotion and marketing	Literature; 1 Linda 2/37; 1 Luisa 9/114; 1 Luisa 11/ 143.

Appendix 7 (contd.)

Category	Subcategory	Data source
Management	3. Project responsibilities shared – management not too centralised	SLPEV 9; PEV 17; PEV 7.
Management	4. Self-sufficiency built in as a project goal	1 Linda 2/37; 1 Linda 4/78; 1 Linda 6/131; 1 Alice 6/43; 1 Alice 15/185; UIR; UER 1/97.
Management	5. The project can be adapted/multiplied for other related contexts	Plans for Prepa norte, Prepa Sur and San Juan del Rio campuses; Hospital general.
Management	6. Effective planning activities	UIR; USFP 1/00; UISP 1 /95-96; BCPD 1; BCPD 2/1995; BCPD 3/1995; BCPE 1/3-94; BCPR 3/1995; BCPR 5-6/ 96-97; observation.
Management	7. Project responsibilities shared – management not too centralised	SLPEV 9; PEV 17; PEV 7.
Finance	1. Abundant and accessible resources	1 Luisa 1/10; 1 Alice 6/43; 1 Alice 7/52 (dynamic sustainability); 1 Alice 12/ 135; 1 Alice 17/205; University SEP Funding Proposal 1/00 (dynamic sustainability); Physical description; PEV 7; PEV 17; SLPEV 12; SLPEV 13.
Finance	2. Initial and on-going government funding available	1 Luisa 2/16; 1 Alice 17/205; UIRs; USFP 1/00; SUPA 1/93; CM 2; Physical description.



## Bibliography

- Abercrombie, N., S. Hill and B. S. Turner** (1984). *Dictionary of Sociology*. London: Penguin Books.
- Adame, H., P. Grounds and C. Lethaby** (2003). *Activate!* Monterrey, Mexico: Ediciones Castillo.
- Ainscough, V.** (1994). Sustainable methodologies: a call for more sensitivity to relevance in ELT Projects. *The Teacher Trainer*, 8/2: 16-19.
- Alderson, J. C. and A. Beretta** (1992). *Evaluating Second Language Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Altheide D. L. and J. M. Johnson** (1994). Criteria for assessing interpretative validity in qualitative research. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications: 485-499.
- Aston, G.** (1993). The learner's contribution to the self-access centre. *ELT Journal* 47/3: 219-217.
- Atkinson P. and M. Hammersley** (1994). Ethnography and participant observation. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*, California: Sage Publications: 248-261.
- Bardi, M., G. Chefneux, D. Comanetchi and T. Magureanu** (eds.) (1999). *Innovation in Teaching English for Specific Purposes in Romania – A Study of Impact*. Bucharest: The British Council/Cavallotti Publishing House.
- Barnett, L. and G. Jordan** (1991). Self-access facilities: what are they for? *ELT Journal* 45/4: 305-312.
- Barthes, R.** (1967). The death of the author. *Aspen* 5 + 6/3 (n. p.). USA: UBU Foundation [online].  
Available from: <http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/threeEssays.html#barthes>  
[Accessed 20 June, 2007].
- Becker, H. S.** (1996). The epistemology of qualitative research. In R. Jessor, A. Colby, and R. Schweder (eds.): *Essays on Ethnography and Human Development*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 53-71.
- Belcher, D. and A. Hirvela** (2005). Writing the qualitative dissertation: what motivates and sustains commitment to a fuzzy genre? *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 4:187-205.

- Belsey, C.** (2002). *Poststructuralism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Benson, P.** (2001). *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Benson, P.** and **P. Voller** (eds.). (1997). *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.
- Berger, P.** and **T. Luckmann** (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality*. London: Penguin Books.
- Berliner, D. C.** (2002). Educational research: the hardest science of all. *Educational Researcher*, 31/8: 18-20.
- Block, D.** (1998). Exploring interpretations of questionnaire items. *System* 26: 403-425.
- Bolinger, D.** (1980). *Language: The Loaded Weapon*. Longman: London and New York.
- Booth, T.** and **K. Black-Hawkins** (2001). Developing learning and participation in countries of the south: the role of an index for inclusion. UNESCO.
- Bowers, R.** (1999). Communicative management. *ELT Management*, IATEFL SIG Newsletter, 27.
- Brause, R. S.** (2000). *Writing your Doctoral Dissertation: Invisible Rules for Success*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Britzman, D. P.** (1997). The tangles of implication. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 10/1: 31-37.
- Brown, J. D.** (1988). *Understanding Research in Second Language Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, R.** (2000). Cultural continuity and ELT teacher training. *ELT Journal* 54/3: 227-234.
- Brumfit, C.** (2001). *Individual Freedom in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bunton, D.** (2005). The structure of PhD conclusion chapters. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4: 207-224.
- Burke, R.** (1999). *Project Management*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Burke Johnson, R.** and **A. J. Onwuegbuzie** (2004). Mixed methods research: a research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33/7: 14-26.
- Butler, C.** (2002). *Postmodernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cangarajah, A. S.** (1999). *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Canagarajah, A. S.** (2005). Rhetoricizing reflexivity. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 4/4: 309-315.
- Carey, J. and M. Dabor** (1995). Management education: an approach to improved English language teaching. *ELT Journal*, 49/1: 37-43.
- Caring for the Earth – A Strategy for Sustainable Living* (1991). Gland, Switzerland: IUCN/UNEP/WWF.
- Carvalho, D.** (1993). *Self-access: Appropriate Material*. London: British Council.
- Cawthorne, P.** (2001). Identity, values and method: taking interview research seriously in political economy. *Qualitative Research* 1/1: 65-90.
- Chambers, R.** (2006). Critical reflections of a development nomad. In Uma Kothari (ed.): *A Radical History of Development Studies*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Chenail, R. J.** (1995). Presenting qualitative data. *The Qualitative Report*, 2/3 (n. p.) December [online].  
Available from: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/OR/OR2-3/presenting.html>  
[Accessed 30 April, 2006].
- Cisneros, C. A.** (2000). Qualitative Social Research in Mexico. *Qualitative Social Research*, 1/1 (n. p.) [online].  
Available from: <http://qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-001/-00cisneros-e.htm>  
[Accessed 3 May, 2003].
- Clyne, M.** (1994). *Inter-cultural Communication at Work*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clemente, M. de los Á. and D. Kissinger** (1994). *El Proyecto de Autoacceso en Oaxaca*. Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Juárez de Oaxaca.
- Coleman, H.** (1992). Moving the goalposts. In Alderson, J. C. and Beretta, A. (eds.): *Evaluating Second Language Education*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 222-249.
- Crossan, F.** (1992). Research philosophy: towards an understanding. *Nurse Researcher*, 11/1: 46-55.
- Crystal, D.** (1997). *English as a Global Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 78-112.
- Davey, E.** (1998). Building sustainability with communities. *Conference Proceedings of the Royal Society of South Africa – Working Conference Implications of the New Water Policy: Problems and Solutions*.

Available from: <http://web.uct.ac.za/org/rssa/conferen/pre10.htm>

[Accessed 29 December, 2002].

- Delgado, F. J.** (1999). *México y Cuba... tan cerca, tan lejos: un acercamiento comparativo al sistema educativo de ambos países*, unpublished MA paper, Mexico: Universidad del Centro de México.
- Denzin, N. K.** and **Y. S. Lincoln** (eds.). (1994). *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K.** (2001). The reflexive interview and a performative social science. *Qualitative Research*, 1/1: 23-46.
- Department for Education and Skills Website.** (2003). *Sustainable Development Action Plan for Education and Skills*. Sustainability development report [online]. Available from: <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/report/06.htm> [Accessed 18 February, 2007].
- Dickinson, L.** (1987). *Self-Instruction in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Duffy, G.** (1987). Understanding? In S. C. Shapiro (ed.). *The Encyclopaedia of Artificial Intelligence*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Eisenhart, M.** (2001). Educational ethnography past, present and future: ideas to think with. *Educational Researcher*, 30/8: 16-27.
- Ellis, G.,** and **B. Sinclair** (1989). *Learning to Learn English: A Course in Learner Training, Teacher's Book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Enciclopedia Hispánica** (1990). Vol. 10. Mexico: Encyclopaedia Britannica Publishers Inc.
- Erickson, F.** and **K. Gutierrez** (2002). Culture, rigor, and science in educational research. *Educational Researcher* 31/8: 21-24.
- Etherington, K.** (2004). *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Ourselves in Research*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Evans, L.** (2002). *Reflective Practice in Educational Research*. London and New York: Continuum Publishers.
- Fabela, M. A.** (2000). *The Self-access Centre Project at the State University of Nuevo Leon, Mexico*, unpublished paper, Monterrey, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León.

- Fischer, F.** (1998). Beyond empiricism: policy enquiry in postpositive perspective. *Political Studies Journal*, 26/1: 129-146.
- Flavell, R. H.** (1993). The impact of HIEE's courses. *Language Teacher Education*, 31/15: 32.
- Flavell, R.** (1994). ELT policy and its impact: a case study. *Review of ELT*, 4/1: 103-122.
- Frank, W.** (2002). Why study people's stories? The dialogical ethics of narrative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1/1, Article 6 (n. p.) [online].  
Available from: <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/>  
[Accessed 30 December, 2002].
- Freire, P.** (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Fuentes Mares, J.** (1985). *Biografía de una nación*. Mexico: Editorial Jus.
- Fullen, M.** (1999). *Change Forces: The Sequel*. London and Philadelphia: Falmer Press.
- Fullen, M.** (2001). *Leading in a Culture of Change*. San Francisco CA: Jossey Bass.
- Gao, X.** (2003). Changes in Chinese students' learner strategy use after arrival in the UK: a qualitative inquiry. In Palfreyman, D. and R. C. Smith (eds.). *Learner Autonomy Across Cultures*. London: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.: 41-57.
- Gardener, D. and L. Miller** (1999). *Establishing Self-access: From Theory to Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Germaine, K.** (1995). Achieving positive effects in managing evaluation. Paper presented at the second PRODESS colloquium, The British Council, Manchester.
- Germaine, K.** (1995). Some relationships between management, evaluation and development. In Rea-Dickins, P. and A. F. Lwaitama (eds.): Evaluation for development in English language teaching. *Review of ELT*, 3/3, Basingstoke: MacMillan MEP.
- Geuss, R.** (1981). *The Ideal of Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gimenez, J. C.** (2001). Ethnographic observations in cross-cultural business negotiations between non-native speakers of English: an exploratory study. *English for Specific Purposes*, 20: 169-193 [online].  
Available from: [www.elsevier.com/locate/esp](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/esp)  
[Accessed 29 December, 2002].
- Glaser, B. G.** (2002). Conceptualization: on theory and theorizing using grounded theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1/2 Article 3 (n. p.) [online].

Available from: <http://www.alberta.ca/~ijqm/>

[Accessed 29 December, 2002].

- Glaser, B. G. and A. L. Strauss** (1979). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. 10<sup>th</sup> edition, Hawthorne, New York: Aldine.
- Greene, J. C.** (1994). Qualitative programme evaluation. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*, California: Sage Publications.
- Grounds, P. E.** (1981). *A Global Approach to Language Acquisition*, unpublished MA dissertation, University of Kent at Canterbury.
- Grounds, P. E.** (1995). The Mexican national self-access project, British Council, Mexican Ministry of Education, Mexican state universities. Internal project document: British Council Mexico.
- Grounds, P. E.** (2000). The British Council Mexico. Introduction to the Self-access Centres webpage: [www.britishcouncil.org.mx/sacportal](http://www.britishcouncil.org.mx/sacportal)
- Grounds, P., H. Adame and C. Lethaby** (1999). *Orbit 1 – 3*. Monterrey, Mexico: Ediciones Castillo.
- Grounds, P. E.** (2001). *EXAVER: Exámenes de inglés verdaderamente excelentes*. Presentation on the standardised exams development project of The University of Veracruz, Mexico, the BC Mexico and UCLES, UK; live video-conference, Jalapa, Mexico.
- Grounds, P. E.** (2004). *Ten Years of Collaboration in ELT: Accounts from Mexico*, CD. Chapter 18. Mexico: British Council.
- Grounds, P. E. and M. Lengelin** (2003). *Innovation or Just Another Change? That is the Question*. Paper presented at the Best of British ELT conference, British Council, Mexico City.
- Grounds, P. E.** (2003). *Los secretos del éxito: el proyecto de centros de autoacceso de México*. Presentation. National forum for self-access centre staff, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. Mexico.
- Grounds, P. E.** (2007). *The Cuban Self-access Centres Project*. Unpublished report on participative evaluation. Mexico: British Council.
- Guillermin, M. and L. Gillam** (2004). Ethics, reflexivity and ethically important moments in research. *Qualitative Enquiry* 10/2: 26-265.
- Guirdham, M.** (1999). *Communicating across Cultures*. London: Macmillan Business.
- Hadfield, J. and C. Hadfield** (2005). What is English. *ELT Journal*, 59/3: 250-254.

- Hamilton, D.** (1994). Traditions, preferences and postures in applied qualitative research. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications: 393-412.
- Handy, C.** (1993). *Understanding Organisations*. London: Penguin.
- Hargreaves, A., L. Earl, S. Moore, and S. Manning** (2001). *Learning to Change: Teaching Beyond Subjects and Standards*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Harvey, D.** (1990). *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Conditions of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heath, A. W.** (1997). The proposal in qualitative research. In *The Qualitative Report* 3/1 (n. p.) [online]. Available from: <http://www.nova.edu.ssss/OR/OR3-1/heath.html> [Accessed 29 January, 2007].
- Henry, J. and D. Walker** (1991). *Managing Innovation*. London: The Open University/Sage Publications.
- Hlynka, D. and R. J. Yeaman** (1992). *Postmodern Educational Technology*. ERIC Digest No. EDO-IR-92-5. Syracuse NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources.
- Hodder, I.** (1994). The interpretation of documents and material culture. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications: 393-412.
- Holec, H.** (1981). *Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Holliday, A.** (1992). Intercompetence: sources of conflict between local and expatriate staff. *System*, 20 /2: 223-234.
- Holliday, A. R.** (1994). *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*. Cambridge: C.U.P.
- Holliday, A. R.** (1996). Developing a sociological imagination: expanding ethnography in international English language education. *Applied Linguistics*, 17/2: 234-255.
- Holliday, A. R.** (1999). Small cultures. *Applied Linguistics*, 20/2: 237-264.
- Holliday, A. R.** (2003). Social autonomy: addressing the dangers of culturism in TESOL. In Palfreyman, D. and R. C. Smith (eds.): *Learner Autonomy Across Cultures*. London: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.
- Holliday, A. R.** (2004). Issues of validity in progressive paradigms of qualitative research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38/4: 731-734.
- Holliday, A. R., M. Hyde and J. Kullman** (2004). *Intercultural Communication*. London: Routledge.

- Holliday, A. R.** (2005). How is it possible to write? *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 4/4: 304-309.
- Holliday, A. R.** (2005). *The Struggle to Teach English as an International Language*. Oxford: O. U. P.
- Honarbin-Holliday, M.** (2005). *Art Education, Identity and Gender at Tehran and al Zahra Universities*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Art and Design, Canterbury Christ Church University.
- Howarth, P.** (1998). Managing language centres. *ELT News & Views*, 5/1: 26.
- Hunter, T.** (2001). Appraisal and Development for Long Term Consultants on ELT Project. *The Teacher Trainer*, 15/1: 14-20.
- Illich, I.** (1971). *Deschooling society*. London: Calder and Boyars.
- Janesick, V. J.** (1994). The dance of qualitative research design: metaphor, methodolatry and meaning. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*, California: Sage Publications: 209-219.
- Johanssen, A. M.** (1992). A postmodern experiment in cultural representation. *Human Organization*, 51/1: 71-81.
- Johnson, P.** and **J. Duberley** (2000). *Understanding Management Research*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Jones, F. L.** (2001). Diversity and commonality in national identities: an exploratory analysis of cross-national patterns. *Journal of Sociology*, 37/1: 45-63.
- Jones, F. R.** (1998). Self-instruction and success: a learner-profile study. *Applied Linguistics*, 19/3: 378-406.
- Jones, J. F.** (1995). Self-access and culture: retreating from autonomy. *ELT Journal*, 49/3: 228-34.
- Kainan, A.** (2002). Analyzing teachers' stories. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1/3. Article 4 (n. p.) [online].  
Available from: <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm>  
[Accessed 30 December, 2002].
- Kell, J.** and **C. Newton** (1997). Roles of pathways in self-access centres. *ELT Journal*, 51/1: 48-53.
- Kennedy, C.** (1999). Evaluation of the management of change in ELT projects. *Applied Linguistics*, 9/4: 31-342. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kennedy, C.** (1999). *Innovation and Best Practice*. Harlow: Longman.



- Kincheloe, J. L. and P. L. McLaren** (1994). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*, California: Sage Publications: 138-157.
- Klage, M.** (2001). *Structuralism and Poststructuralism* [online].  
Available from:  
<http://www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/1997derridaA.html>  
[Accessed 12 December, 2005].
- Kleine, M.** (1990). Beyond triangulation. *JAC*, 10/1 [online].  
Available from: <http://jac.gsu.edu/jac/10/Articles/9>  
[Accessed 25 May, 2003].
- Krause, E.** (1997). *La Presidencia Imperial*, Mexico: Tusquets.
- Krupat, A.** (1996). *The Turn to the Native: Studies in Criticism & Culture*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Kyung Rim Shin** (2002). Using hermeneutic phenomenology to elicit a sense of body at mid-life. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1/2, Article 4 (n. p.) [online].  
Available from: <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm>  
[Accessed 1 January, 2003].
- Kvale, S.** (1996). *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: Sage publications.
- Larkin, M.** (2002). *What is IPA?* [online].  
Available from: <http://www.nli.northampton.ac.uk/ass/behav/ipa/ipa.htm>  
[Accessed 30 December, 2002].
- Laurillard, D.** (1993). *Rethinking University Education*. London: Routledge.
- Lavastida, A.** (2001). *El Autoaprendizaje guiado desde el aula*. Guadalajara, Mexico: Editorial del Gobierno del Estado.
- Lawrenz, F. and N. Keiser** (eds.). (2002). *Sustainability: Increasing the Likelihood of a Long-Term Impact by the ATE Program: a Guide for Improving Sustainability* [online]. Advanced Technological Education Program Website.  
Available from:  
[http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/ate/Issues\\_for\\_Consideration\\_Sustainability.pdf](http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/ate/Issues_for_Consideration_Sustainability.pdf)  
[Accessed 30 December, 2002].
- Lee, A.** (1992). Poststructuralism and educational research: some categories and issues. *Issues in Educational Research*, 2/1: 1-12 [online].

Available from: <http://education.curtin.edu.au/iier/iier2/lee.html>

[Accessed 15 April, 2007].

- Lemke, J. L.** (1998). Analysing verbal data: principles, methods and problems. In Tobin, K. and B. Fraser (eds.): *International Handbook of Science Education*, Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Lewis, M. and F. McCook** (2002). Cultures of teaching: voices from Vietnam. *ELT Journal* 56/2: 146-153.
- Lewis, I. and P. Munn** (1987). *So You Want to Do Research?* Publication 96. The Scottish Council for Research in Education.
- Lincoln, Y. S. and N. K. Denzin** (1994). The fifth moment. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*, California: Sage Publications: 575-286.
- Lye, J.** (1996). *Some Principles of Phenomenological Hermeneutics* [online]. Available from: [www.brocku.ca/english/courses/4F70/ph.html](http://www.brocku.ca/english/courses/4F70/ph.html) [Accessed 30 April, 2004].
- Lynch, B. K.** (1996). *Language Program Evaluation: Theory and Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Machuca, V. M.** (1995). *Reporte de la evaluación de los cursos "Cambridge Overseas Teachers of English (COTE) y de los Centros de Autoacceso para el Aprendizaje del Idioma Inglés (CAA)*. Independent unpublished report on evaluation, Mexican Ministry of Education (SEP).
- Mallery, J. C., R. Hurwitz and G. Duffy** (1987). Hermeneutics: from textual explication to computer understanding? In: S. C. Shapiro (ed.). *The Encyclopaedia of Artificial Intelligence*. New York: Wiley & Sons.
- Manning, P. K., and B. Cullum-Swan** (1994). Narrative, content and semiotic analysis. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*, California: Sage Publications Inc.
- Markee, N.** (1994). Curricular innovation: issues and problems. *Applied Language Learning*, 5/2: 1-30.
- Markee, N.** (1997). *Managing Curricular Innovation*. Cambridge: C. U. P.
- Martyn, E. and Chan Nim Yin** (1992). Self-access action research: a progress report. *Hong Kong Papers in Linguistics and Language Teaching*, 15: 59-69.

- Martyn, E. and P. Voller** (1993). Teachers' attitudes to self-access learning. *Hong Kong Papers in Linguistics and Language Teaching*, 16: 103-111.
- May, S.** (2001). *Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language*. Harlow: Pearson Educational Ltd.
- McCall, J.** (1992). *Self-access: Setting up a Centre*. London: British Council.
- Morrow, K.** (1998). Sustaining impact: the Mexican advanced professionalization project. In McKay and Treffgarne (eds.): *Evaluating Impact*. London: DFID (pp. 187-193).
- Mead, R.** (2000). *Cases and Projects in International Management*. Oxford: Blackwell Business.
- Mercado Martinez, F. J.** (2002). Investigación cualitativa en América latina: perspectivas críticas en salud. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1/1 Article 4 (n. p.) [online].  
Available from: <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/>  
[Accessed 31 December, 2002].
- Miller, L. and P. Rogerson-Revell** (1993). Self-access systems. *ELT Journal*, 47/3: 228-233.
- Morrison, K.** (1998). *Management Theories for Educational Change*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.
- Morse, J. M., M. Barrett, M. Mayan, K. Olson, and J. Spiers** (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1/2, Article 2 (n. p.) [online].  
Available from: <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm>  
[Accessed 30 December, 2002].
- Munn, P. and E. Drever** (1990). *Using Questionnaires in Small-scale Research*. Publication 104. The Scottish Council for Research in Education.
- Nunan, D.** (1988). *The Learner-Centred Curriculum: a Study in Second Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D.** (1992). *Research Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Dell, F.** (1992). Helping teachers to use a self-access centre to its full potential. *ELT Journal*, 46/2: 153-159.
- O'Malley, J. M. and A. U. Chamot** (1990). *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Palfreyman, D. and R. C. Smith** (eds.). (2003). *Learner Autonomy Across Cultures*. London: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.
- Pandit, N. R.** (1996). The creation of theory: a recent application of the grounded theory method. *The Qualitative Report*, 2/4 (n. p.) [online].  
Available from: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/OR/OR2-4/pandit.html>  
[Accessed 29 April, 2007].
- Pennycook, A.** (1997). Cultural alternatives and autonomy. In Benson, P. and P. Voller (eds.): *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. London: Longman: 35-53.
- Pennycook, A.** (2001). *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction*. Malway N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Pickering, G.** (1999). The learning organisation: an idea whose time has come. *ELT Management*, IATEFL SIG Newsletter, No. 27.
- Punch, M.** (1994). Politics and ethics in qualitative research. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*. California: Sage Publications: 83-97.
- Quinn Patton, M.** (1987). *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*. London: Sage publications.
- Reason, P.** (1994). Three approaches to participative inquiry. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*. California: Sage Publications: 324-339.
- Rhodes, C.** (1996). Researching organisational change and learning: a narrative approach. *The Qualitative Report*, 2/4 (n. p.) [online].  
Available from: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/OR/Or2-4/rhodes.html>  
[Accessed 9 February, 2003].
- Richards, J. C.** (1998). *Beyond Training*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richardson, L.** (1994). Writing: a method of inquiry. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*. California: Sage Publications: 516-529.
- Robbins, H. and M. Finley** (1996). *Why Teams Don't Work*. London: Orion Publishing Group.
- Robinson, D., T. Hewitt and J. Harris** (2000). *Managing Development: Understanding Inter-Organizational Relationships*. London: Sage Publications in association with The Open University.

- Rogakos, D., V. Koulaidis and V. Hatzinikita** (1998). *Sustainability in Curriculum Development: the Case of the VAEST Project*. Namur, Belgium: Facultés Universitaires Notre Dame de la Paix, Prelude, Manifestations Rhodes [online]. Available from: <http://www.fundp.ac.be/prelude-manifestations-rhodes> [Accessed 29 December, 2002].
- Rogers, C.** (1983). *Freedom to Learn for the 80s*. New York: Merrill.
- Rogers, L.** (1999). *Sexing the Brain*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- Rossner, R. and R. Bolitho** (1990). *Currents of Change in English Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rubdy, R.** (2005). A multi-thrust approach to fostering a research culture. *ELT Journal*, 59/4: 277-286.
- Rüdiger, J.** (2000). The soap bubble fairies – a cautionary tale for visiting trainers abroad. *The Teacher Trainer*, 14/1: 8-10.
- Ryan, G. W. and B. H. Russell** (2003). *Techniques to Identify Themes in Qualitative Data* [online]. Available from: [www.analytictech.com/mb870/ryan-bernard\\_techniques\\_to\\_identify\\_themes\\_in.htm](http://www.analytictech.com/mb870/ryan-bernard_techniques_to_identify_themes_in.htm) [Accessed 9 February, 2003].
- Samuelson, J. and S. Harrity** (1998). A consideration of project assessment: topicality vs. sustainability. In McKay and Treffgarne (eds.): *Evaluating Impact*, DFID: 165-172.
- Scholes, B.** *Collective Responses to Educational Change: the Case of Veracruz University, Mexico*. Unpublished PhD thesis, in progress, College of St Mark and St John, Plymouth, England.
- Scott, D and R. Usher** (1999). *Researching Education*. London: Continuum.
- Seaton, I.** (1997). Linguistic non-imperialism. *ELT Journal*, 51/4: 38-382.
- Sheerin, S.** (1989). *Self-access*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sheerin, S.** (1991). State of the art: self-access. *Language Teaching*, 24/3: 143-157.
- Silva, A. Y.** (2002). *Ayer, Instituto de Idiomas. Hoy Facultad de Lenguas y Letras*. Queretaro, Mexico: Ediciones UAQ, University of Queretaro Press.
- Silverman, D.** (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage Publications.
- Sinclair, B.** (1999). Survey review: recent publications on autonomy in language learning. *ELT Journal*, 53/4: 309-329.

- Sinclair, B., I. McGrath, and T. Lamb** (2000). *Learner Autonomy, Teacher Autonomy: Future Directions*. Harlow: Longman, in association with The British Council.
- Smith, R. D.** (1998). Social structures and chaos theory. *Sociological Research Outline*, 3/1 (n. p.) [online].  
Available from: [www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/1/11.html](http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/1/11.html)  
[Accessed 26 November, 2006].
- Snow, C. P.** (1998). *The Two Cultures*. Cambridge: Canto, Cambridge University Press.
- Stephenson, H.** (1994). Management and participation in ELT projects. *ELT Journal*, 48/3: 225-232.
- Storti, C.** (2001). *The Art of Crossing Cultures*. London: Nicholas Breasley Publishing, London, in association with Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, Maine, USA.
- Strauss, A. and J. Corbin** (1994). Grounded theory methodology. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*. California: Sage Publications Inc.
- Sturtridge, G.** (1992). *Self-access: Preparation and Training*. London: British Council.
- Sustainable Development Website.** (2001). *The Government's Approach – Delivering Sustainable Development Together*. London: UK government [online].  
Available from:  
<http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/report/06.htm>  
[Accessed 18 February, 2007].
- Sustainable Development Website.** (2006). *Changing Behaviour through Policy Making* [online].  
Available from: <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/what/index.htm>  
[Accessed 18 February, 2007].
- Tannen, D.** (1986). *That's Not What I Meant!* New York: William Morrow, Ballantine.
- Tannen, D.** (1998). *Talking from 9 to 5*. London: Virago Press.
- Tayeb, M.** (2001). Conducting research across cultures: overcoming drawbacks and obstacles. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 1/1: 9-08.
- Thompson, G.** (1996). Voices in the text: discourse perspectives on language reports. *Applied Linguistics*, 17/ 4: 501-530.
- Tillman, L. C.** (2002). Culturally sensitive research approaches: an African-American perspective. *Educational Researcher*: 31/9: 3-12.

- Tollefson, J. W.** (1995). *Power and Inequality in Language Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Treffgarne, C. B. W.** (1997). *Report of a Monitoring Visit to the Mexican Advanced Professionalization Programme*. London: ODA.
- Treffgarne, C. B. W.** (1997b). *Report on a Visit to Participate in the Evaluation of the Impact of the Professionalization of English Teaching in Mexico*. London: ODA.
- Tribble, C.** (2000). Designing evaluation into educational change process. *ELT Journal*, 54/4: 319-327.
- Turner, R.** (2002). *Phenomenology* [online].  
Available from: <http://www.connect.net/ron/phenom.html>  
[Accessed 29 December, 2002].
- UNESCO** (1997). Für ein verbessertes (sozial-) wissenschaftliches Verständnis von Nachhaltigkeit, *UNESCO heute*, No. 44, Edition I-II, Spring/Summer 1997, German UNESCO Commission [online].  
Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/MOST/heute3.htm>  
[Accessed 29 December, 2002].
- UNESCO** (2003). UNESCO, 166<sup>th</sup> session, Executive Board: Promoting quality education for peace, human rights and democracy; education for sustainable development; curricula, educational tools and teacher training, 166 EX/INF. 6, Paris, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2003.
- Vidich, A. J. and S. M. Lyman** (1994). Qualitative Methods: their history in sociology and anthropology. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.): *A Handbook of Qualitative Research*, California: Sage Publications: 23-59.
- Waite, S.** (1994). Low-resourced self-access with EAP in the developing world: the great enabler? *ELT Journal*, 48/3: 233-242.
- Wallace, M. J.** (1998). *Action Research for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Waters, A. and M. L. C. Vilches** (2001). Implementing ELT Innovations: a needs analysis framework. *ELT Journal*, 55/2: 133-141.
- Widdowson, H. G.** (1993). Innovation in teacher development. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 13: 260-275.
- Williams, M. and R. L. Burden** (1997). *Psychology for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Wilson, B. G.** (1997). The postmodern paradigm. In Dills, C. R. and A. A. Romiszowski (eds.): *Instructional Development Paradigms*, Englewood Cliffs: Educational Technology Publications [online].  
Available from: <http://www.cudenver.edu/~bwilson>  
[Accessed 27 April, 2003].
- Wilson, R.** (2000). Teacher development: an opportunity for cross-cultural co-operation. *ELT Journal* 54/1: 65-71.
- Woolcot, H. H.** (1994). *Transforming Qualitative Data*. Thousand Oaks. London. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- World Commission on Environment and Development** (1987). *Our Common Future*. The Brundtland Report. Oxford: WCED.